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Birds of the Great Plains: Family Phalaropodidae (Phalaropes)

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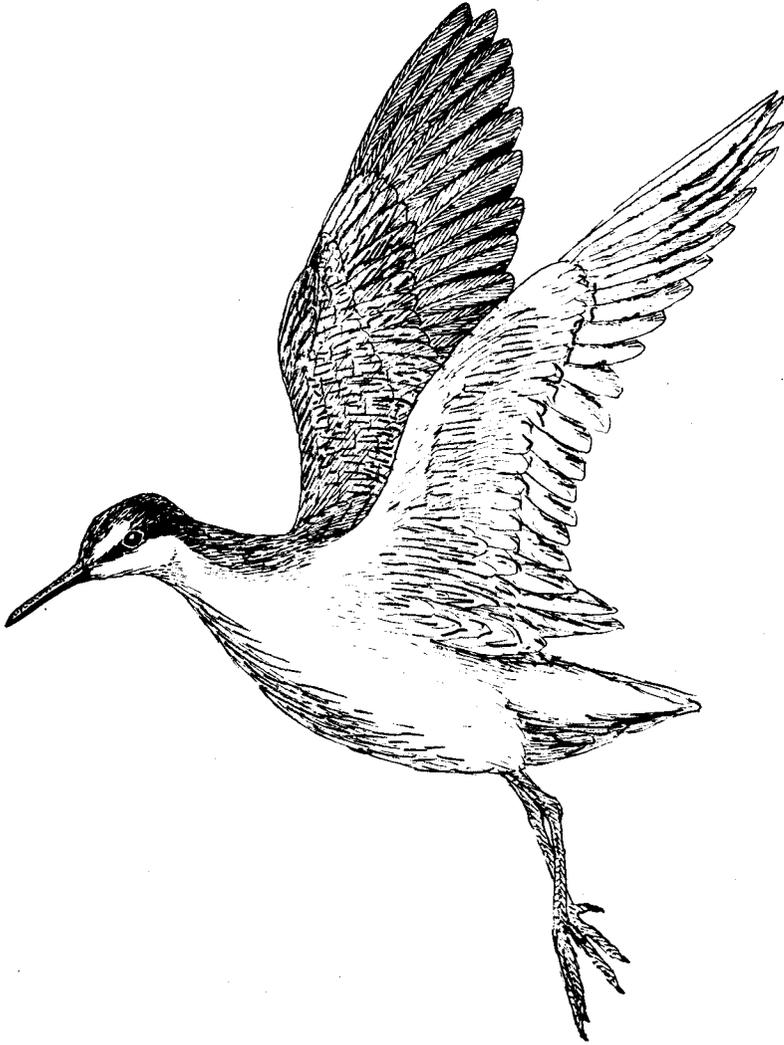
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FAMILY PHALAROPOD-
IDAE (PHALAROPES)



Wilson Phalarope

Wilson Phalarope *Steganopus tricolor*

Breeding Status: A summer resident in suitable habitats over most of the region, fairly common over most of North Dakota, western Minnesota, the lowland areas of South Dakota, and the Nebraska Sandhills. It is rare and local in northwestern Iowa, local in eastern Colorado, and local in central and western Kansas, with specific breeding records for Barton and Meade counties, and summer records for Finney, Kearny, and Seward counties. There are no breeding records from farther south than Kansas.

Breeding Habitat: The presence of wet meadows apparently is the major habitat criterion for this species, which is found near fresh to highly saline water and is associated with watery environments ranging from ditches or river edges to seasonal, semipermanent, or permanent ponds and lakes.

Nest Location: Nests are well hidden in wet meadows and sometimes also occur in grassy swales or on hummocky areas of shallow marshy habitats. The nests are scrapes in the ground, lined with dead grass built up into a cup about 2 inches thick. When placed over water they may be built up to a level about 6 inches above the water.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: Normally 4 eggs, occasionally 3. The eggs are buffy with a varying amount of darker spotting. The incubation period is 16–22 days, probably averaging about 20 days. Incubation is normally by the male, but there is no proof that females produce more than one clutch.

Time of Breeding: Egg dates in North Dakota range from May 26 to July 8, and dependent young have been seen from June 7 to July 17. Kansas egg dates are for May and June.

Breeding Biology: Although female phalaropes are appreciably larger and more brightly colored than males, recent studies have cast doubt on the idea that they are regularly polyandrous. Pair bonds apparently are formed after the birds arrive on the breeding areas, during a period of behavior that is intensely aggressive but little indicative of typical territoriality. The female probably makes the nest scrape after the pair is formed, but the male adds the nest lining. Eggs are laid about 48 hours apart, and presumably the female plays no further role in parental care. The male incubates, and he leads his brood from the nest to foraging areas only a few hours after they hatch. The fledging period has not been reported, but in the closely related northern phalarope it is less than 3 weeks.

Suggested Reading: Höhn 1967; Kangarise, 1979.

