

Phalaropus tricolor

Wilson's Phalarope

Linking Communities

The Wilson's Phalarope is the largest and most terrestrial of the three phalarope species in North America. The long migration of the Wilson's Phalarope makes it an important candidate for the Linking Communities Project as it stages at many areas along the way. Here in Saskatchewan it utilizes many wetlands especially the Chaplin, Reed, and Old Wives Lakes, as the shallow wet areas make for good nesting grounds and provide ample food resources.



Identification

A slender shorebird with a small head and a thin pointed bill the Wilson's Phalarope has grey-brown upperparts with some red-brown streaks. The females are larger with a brighter plumage than the males. The breeding female displays a rust coloured neck and chest, a grey cap, white throat and eyebrow, and a dark mask that runs from the bill, across the eye and down the sides of the neck. The non-breeding females and the males are pale grey above and white below, with a dark mask and a lighter rusty wash on the neck and chest.



Habitat

Each year the Wilson's Phalarope makes a long migration from the western coast of South America to breed in the wetlands across the prairies and Rocky Mountains of the northern United States and Canada. It tends to favour shallow prairie wetlands bordered by grassy edges. During migration, it can be found in shallow ponds, flooded fields, and mudflats. Its wintering grounds are large, shallow ponds and saline lakes.

Feeding

Of the three species of Phalarope, the Wilson's Phalarope forage more often on shallow water along the shoreline, but it can also be seen feeding by spinning on the water, typical of Phalaropes. This spinning churns up the muddy bottom and creates an upwelling of food. Its main food includes flies, beetles, and brine shrimp.

Nesting

Unlike many other bird species it is the female phalarope that courts the males and defends territory. Wilson's Phalarope nest in tall dense vegetation on the ground. The nest consists of a scrape on the ground lined with grass. Both male and females begin construction of the nest but it is the male that completes it. The female lays four buff coloured eggs speckled with brown which are then incubated by the male while the female pretends to sit on a false nest. The eggs hatch within 18-27 days and the precocial chicks can swim, walk, and feed within the hour.

