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Howard

A Chapter of the
Maryland Ornithological Society



FIRST RECORDED RED PHALAROPE IN HOWARD COUNTY STAYS AT LEAST A WEEK - Martha Chestem

Marjorie Mountjoy and I were near Burtonsville on Wednesday morning, October 6, 1982, when Jo Solem called to say that the Pardoes had received word in a roundabout way that a phalarope (either Northern or Red) had been spotted on Lake Kittamaqundi earlier that morning. We did not visit the site until 2:30 p.m.

We started walking along the shore working north from the Columbia Inn. Since our only clue was that a man staying at the inn had seen the bird, I figured maybe he was walking about the grounds near the lake shore in proximity to the hotel so that seemed a good spot to begin the search. There was nothing out there fitting the description of a phalarope--only an occasional bouncing white paper cup or tufts of white feathers. Could the spotter have seen one of these objects so situated that it appeared to be a bird? We walked slowly onward gazing out over the algae-covered lake studying more paper cups, white beer cans, and feathers. Suddenly, Marjorie said, "What was that?" "What? What?" I asked, looking back toward her. A bird had flown by and landed in the lake about 20 feet in front of us. We saw the bird for a short period of time, probably about 40 seconds and then it flew over to the other shore. We simply could never locate the bird again (the only time during its stay that it was that elusive). There was no doubt at all that it was a phalarope and not a Wilson's. I thought it would most likely be a Northern but, of course, could not be positive with brief a look.

Marjorie had the first good clue we had that day for she had heard it call as it flew by. When she got home she listened to her recording based on Peterson's field guide. Judging from the recording of the Northern Phalarope's call, she concluded that the bird she had heard could not have been a Northern. Unfortunately, Peterson's record does not contain the Red Phalarope's call.

Nancy and Peter Richardson, who live near Lake Kittamaqundi, may have been the first to see the phalarope. Sunday, October 3, they were leisurely walking along the lake on a beautiful sunny day. Nancy had the binoculars and spotted a bird. She is not an experienced birder but enjoys taking her binoculars and looking at the ducks, swans, geese and the Great Blue Heron often seen there. When she did not recognize the black and white bird she was watching, she gave the binoculars to Peter. He did not know what it was either and they thought about calling me (I was in Cape May that day), but they had to get ready for a trip to Vermont so did no more about the bird--not realizing that it was a rarity for Howard County. Actually, there were two birds on that Sunday, but they had a good look at only one of them which was small, mostly white with some black markings. The birder staying at the Columbia Inn who called Craig Tufts at the National Wildlife Federation about the sighting (on Oct. 6) was Steve Echols who lives in Virginia. Because he has been out of the country on business we have not been able to contact him regarding the precise time and nature of his sighting although we understand he also mentioned two birds. Two were never definitely noted after that date. Also on October 6, Dr. Lowell Adams of the Urban Wildlife Research Center, and a University of Maryland student intern, Steve Holt, were conducting a systematic survey of the lake when they observed a single phalarope feeding and swimming on the lake at 10:30 a.m.

By Thursday word had spread of our rarity. Jo Solem and I arrived early and located the bird on the north end of the lake which was where it could be seen during its stay in Columbia. By noon it had been seen also by David Holmes, Clark Jeschke, Rosamond Munro, Floyd Murdoch, Wally Sumner and Mark Wallace. After consulting numerous field guides and

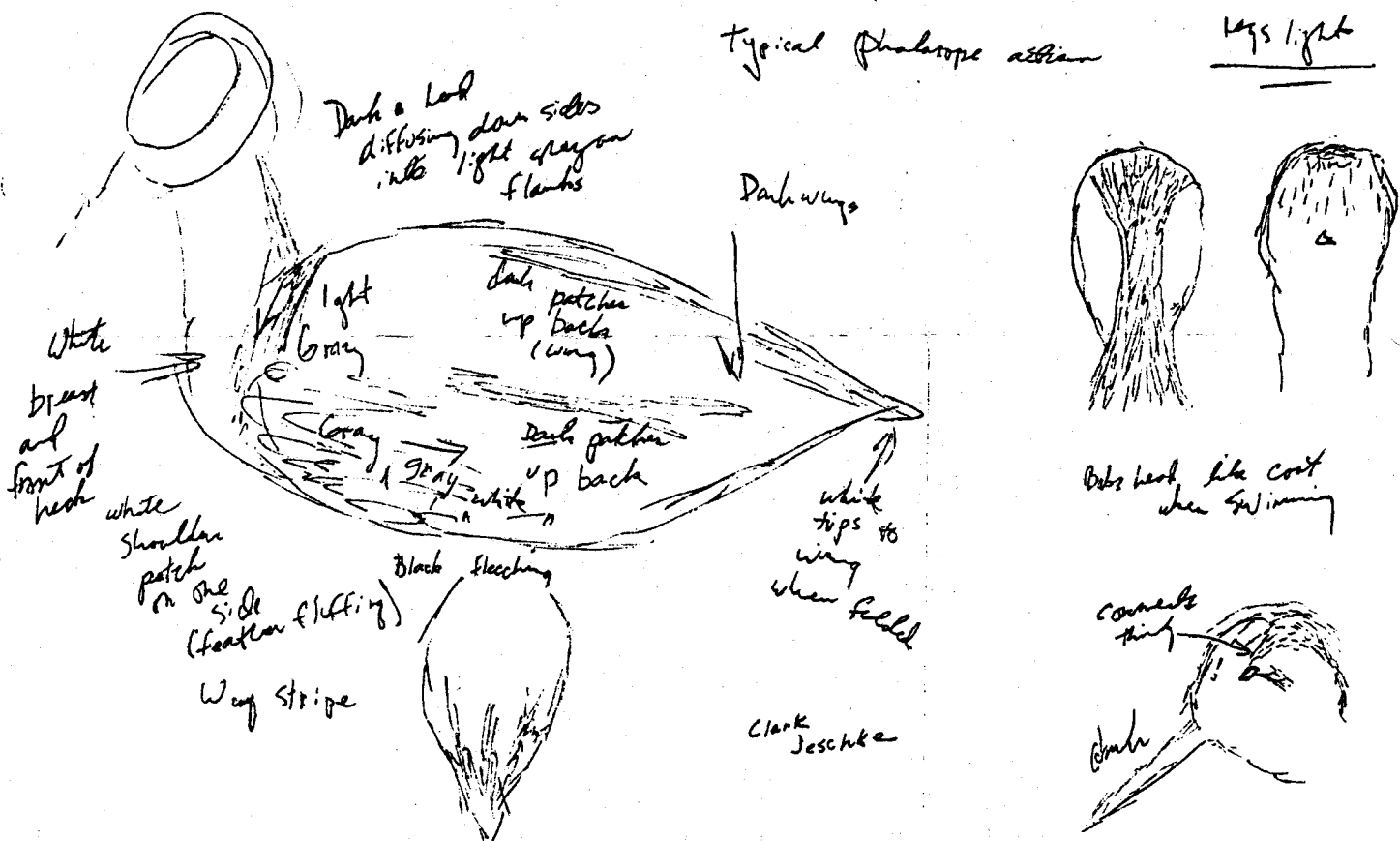


PHALAROPE (continued)

manuals, it was determined that the bird was a Red Phalarope.

I saw the Red Phalarope several times every day from that first Wednesday afternoon until 5:10 p.m. Tuesday, October 12. I looked morning and afternoon on the rainy Wednesday, October 13 and again the next day, but I had to conclude the bird had left. I watched the phalarope for about 20 minutes that last afternoon and it was staying in the open water instead of feeding on insects along the edges of the algae as had been its habit during almost all of the time during its stay. Perhaps it was getting ready for the final takeoff at that moment. I did know there would be a "last time" but when that time arrived, I felt quite sad--like losing an old friend. That bird had gone on so many life lists during that week, had been photographed from every angle, every distance in good and not-so-good lighting conditions, and had even aroused some nonbirders to become interested, that it was no longer just another migrant, but a very special bird.

When dealing with records of rarities "snap" identifications are never in order. One takes photographs, observes the markings and behavior carefully, takes copious notes, and calls in skilled birders. Sketches of the bird can be highly useful. One need not worry about an artistic rendering. In order to indicate the type of sketches that are an excellent aid to identification, some of those made by Clark Jeschke are reproduced below.



(GRANT'S FOLLY - continued from page 4)

The next evening the area was bereft of bluebirds. Undoubtedly, they went to deeper woods. I had hoped to see the immature young of the first nesting; however, these did not appear in the territory again when the young of the second brood hatched.

The field is now awash with the brilliance of goldfinch, mullein and thistle. Alice Grant's garden is in full splendor.

Alice, tell Cliff to apply for his building permit. There will be more nesting boxes needed in downtown Columbia next year!

Note: The nestlings of the first brood were banded by Mary Janetatos on June 10, 1982. She was assisted by Marty Chestem, Marjorie Mountjoy, Nancy Richardson and Elise Seay. Photographs which Marjorie took of the banding were on display at the library workshop.

C A L E N D A R

PROGRAMS - 7:45 p.m. Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Drive, Columbia, MD. Note: Meeting is cancelled if schools are officially closed because of inclement weather or other emergencies.

- Jan. 13 - "Encounter with Swans in Maryland, Alaska and Japan" - Dr. William Sladen. Originally scheduled for the November meeting, you receive a second chance.
- Feb. 10 - "Archaeology of Howard County" - Lee Preston. Find out who was on the scene before the colonists. What evidence of their way of life did they leave?

FIELD TRIPS - Field trips leave from the Grempler Realty Building parking lot (across from the Flier building) on Little Patuxent Parkway in Columbia unless otherwise indicated. Eva Sunell, 995-0029, heads this committee. Severe weather conditions may result in trip cancellation at the leader's discretion. If in doubt, call. Carpooling continues with riders sharing gas and toll costs. Please make an effort to arrive on time. Dress for field work with stout, reasonably waterproof footwear. Trips do not always follow marked paths.

Jan. 16 - LAKE ELKHORN WALK & FEEDER TRIP. Leaders: Martha & Donald Waugh, 730-8841. Sun. 1:00 p.m. Park on Broken Land Parkway near the Elkhorn Dam. Meet at the crossover bridge on the bike path below the dam.

Jan. 23 - THUNDER HILL BIKE PATH WALK & FEEDER TRIP. Leader: Joe Lutz, 964-3628. Sun. Meet at Grempler Realty at 1:00 p.m.

Jan. 30 - ROCKBURN PARK HABITAT WALK. Leaders: Chuck Dupree, 796-1086 & Bill Eckert. Sun. Co-sponsored with Howard Co. Rec. & Parks. Meet at Grempler Realty parking lot at 12:30 p.m. or at the building at Rockburn Park at 1:00 p.m.

Feb. 5 - TRIADELPHIA ROAD AREA FEEDER TRIP & NATURE WALK. Leaders: David & Elaine Pardoe, 531-6452. Sat. Meet at Grempler Realty at 1:00 p.m.

Feb. 12 - ANNUAL MEMBERS' POTLUCK AND SLIDE SHOW. 6:30 p.m. at Nan & Fred Rhinelander's. Sat. Reservations are necessary. Telephone name and number in your party along with food choice to Coordinator, Monica Botsai, 465-5758, by Feb. 4. If children in a family are enrolled as junior members of the chapter, they are welcome. Photographers should plan to bring up to 10 minutes worth of slides for the program (Red Phalarope slides especially welcome). The Rhinelanders live on Folly Quarter Road about 1/2 mile west of the Franciscan Friars. Their road is marked with "The Herbiary" signs. Continue to the stone house at the end of the lane. Call Nan at 531-2427 if more specific directions are wanted.

Feb. 19 - MYSTERY TRIP TO EASTERN SHORE. Leader: Joe Lutz, 964-3628. All day. Search Sat. for waterfowl and winter residents. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Grempler Realty, return by 6:00 p.m. Bring lunch and beverage. Dress warmly. Be prepared to carpool. A wildlife refuge will likely be included.

Feb. 27 - FEEDER TRIP & WALK, VANTAGE POINT ROAD AREA, COLUMBIA. Leader: Eva Sunell, Sun. 995-0029. Jeanne Nicholson's feeder and a walk in the floodplain. Meet at Grempler Realty at 1:00 p.m.

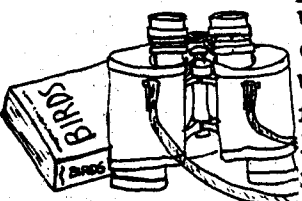
Mar. 6 - FEEDER TRIP, WEST SIDE OF COLUMBIA. Leader: Eva Sunell, 995-0029. Meet Sun. at Grempler Realty at 1:00 p.m.

Note: Feeder trips offer an excellent for the beginner to see birds close at hand as well as to compare methods of feeding and styles of feeders. These trips are generally non-strenuous; some include light refreshment.

Jan. 20 - BOARD MEETING. A meeting of all elected officers and appointed heads of committees will be held at 7:30 p.m. at Maud Banks', 6666 DOWDALE PL., Columbia. For directions, call 596-4131.

Reminder: Send your 1982 Howard County bird lists to David Holmes, 5643-A Harpers Farm Rd., Columbia, MD 21044, by January 15, 1983.

DEADLINE FOR MARCH-APRIL NEWSLETTER IS FEBRUARY 15, 1983. All submissions welcome. Send to Jo Solem, 10617 Grae Loch Rd., Laurel, MD 20707. Tel. 725-5037. Drawings in this issue are the work of Grazina McClure unless otherwise noted.



GRANT'S FOLLY, Part III - Jon E. Boone, cover illustration by the author
(This is the final segment of Jon's account of Eastern Bluebirds nesting on the
grounds of the Howard County Central Library in Columbia.)

Naturally, I inferred the birds had fledged earlier that morning, since bluebirds typically do depart the box before noon. However, when I opened the box, I was astonished to see four very solid, very healthy young bluebirds still within. When I saw the adult female and beat a hasty retreat. Obviously, one bird had already moved out.

I returned several more times that afternoon to observe from a distance. Two young birds scrambled to the hole, waited long minutes, then flew 30 feet midway into the nearest oak. They did it on their own, looking as if they were two large bumble bees.

At 5:00 p.m., I saw both adult birds on the box. Apparently, there was still at least one young bird remaining to coax out and away. Finally, at 8:00 p.m., I opened the box and found an empty nest. There was a continuous patter of bluebird notes high in the trees above. I looked around for any signs of trouble and found none. The plaintive calls decreased in frequency and volume. Night was settling in around Columbia and the city was lighting up to celebrate its fifteenth birthday that evening. Many thousands of people passed by, their automobile exhausts threatening the charm of the moment. I moved out onto the field hoping to glimpse the bluebirds, now fully reunited. But the poor light made such a sighting impossible. I returned home that evening with the sense of regretful satisfaction which comes with the knowledge that five bluebird young fledged successfully, with many dangers yet ahead of them.

A few days later, I removed the empty nest, inspected it for parasites (found none), then gave it to the children's section of the library. I'll continue to check Grant's Folly, for there probably will be another brood. It is still early in the summer.

Epilogue: Alice Grant is too much the lady to say I told you so. Besides, her garden around the library complements the bluebirds rather well. It is now July 25 and there are four new young bluebirds in the second nest. Four immature bluebirds, two male and two female, fly close by, while the adult birds feed with great caution. Bluebird alarm calls fill the air whenever the Red-shouldered Hawk puts in an appearance. The new bluebird nestlings are nearly four days old and, as in the first brood, one of them hatched many hours after its siblings did. I'm looking forward to the next few days because I expect the immature birds to help in the feeding process. Already the immature young help sound alarm notes and have scolded a woodchuck who wandered too close to the new nest.

Addendum: On Sunday, August 7, the 18-day old nestlings left the second nest. The first fledged around noon. Two and one-half hours later, just before a thunderstorm, the other three popped out, one by one, all within seven minutes. They flew upward at a 45 degree angle into an oak tree 60 feet from the box. Their target was the parent male, which had been warbling stridently to encourage their departure. During this time the parent female occupied herself by driving away a squirrel which had wandered too close to the nest.

Throughout the day, both parents stayed with the young in the oak tree. The fledglings tested their wings with short flights from branch to branch. The parent birds continued to feed and to sound appropriate alarm notes, while the young maintained an incessant patter of "tew" calls. Late in the day a flock of crows descended upon the tree silencing the young. But the parents attacked the flock repeatedly eventually causing the crows to leave. In fact, the adult bluebirds defended the oak tree fiercely rousting grackles, a hummingbird--and even me when I approached too closely.

(concluded on page 2)

WEEKEND BIRDING WORKSHOP AT THE LIBRARY SUCCESSFUL - Ma Chestem, Ch.

The Howard County Bird Club's first weekend workshop was held at the Howard County Central Library in Columbia October 23-24, 1982. The meeting room proved to be ideal for our needs--large, well-equipped and centrally located. The focus during this workshop was directed toward interested but inexperienced members and friends.

The displays were headed by three members who took complete charge of their areas: Jan Randle (books), Marjorie Mountjoy (mounted specimens), and Eileen Clegg (seed and feeders). Jan was ably assisted by her husband, Don (the club owes both a big "thank you" for their continued work with the book store) while Maud Banks was there to fill in when needed. Marjorie set up the bird specimen display (more than we had ever shown at one time before) and recruited nine able helpers: Burton Alexander, Lois Carleton, Jonathan Glanz, Melanie Heacock, Alice Kretz, Terry Kretz, Brigitte Lund, Linda McDaniel, and Elise Seay. Eileen found members to assist her who themselves feed birds and like to share their experiences with others: Brenda Bell, John Clegg, Frances Ehlers, Grazina McClure, Nan Rhineland, Eva Sunell, Roy and Karen Trudel.

Individual programs and lectures were given at intervals during the day. Mike McClure discussed the important subject of binoculars and telescopes. Jo Solem and Marty Chestem debated the advantages and disadvantages of various field guides to help people choose their first one. Bob Solem shared his considerable knowledge of nature photography. Mary Janetatos talked about her favorite subject--bluebirds. And Chuck Dupree was our able guide for the Maryland marsh and water bird slides which constitute one of the club programs.

Sunday David Holmes spoke on bird identification incorporating audience participation. The technique worked well especially with the younger members of the audience. Alice Grant played an important role in the original landscaping of the library grounds for wildlife and, of course, was the best possible guide to lead tours of the plantings. Coffee and cookies were served during the workshop plus a special "birthday cookie" on Saturday to help President Jane Farrell celebrate. Thelma Feldman and Peggy Wozniak made coffee and served guests.

The success of this workshop calls for a follow-up; we are working toward that so watch for an announcement concerning a spring event. Again thanks to all who took part whether as a guest, as part of the staff, or as one of those extra but willing helpers not mentioned above who pitched in to move tables, pack boxes, arrange chairs, load bird specimens, and perform other necessary tasks.

BIRD BEAT - Grazina McClure

During the last week of October many people noticed White-throated Sparrows and juncos coming to their feeders and large flocks of robins and Cedar Waxwings eating dogwood berries.

On 11/7 Helen Clark saw a Brown Creeper and on 11/28 a Brown Thrasher in her yard. On 11/4 the Pardoes had 3 Rusty Blackbirds feeding on the ground with a large flock of robins. On the same day they saw an immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Since 10/30 they have seen Purple Finches sporadically. They saw two B.Creepers on 11/6, a female Y.-b. Sapsucker on 11/22, and a flock of bluebirds on 11/23. The Marois regularly see a Red-shouldered Hawk in their back area. On 11/7 the Randles saw a Y.b. Sapsucker and on 12/12 a robin. The Botsais have a large flock of goldfinches coming to their feeder. On 11/16 they had a Red-bellied Woodpecker inspecting dried sunflower stalks in their garden (Downies have been coming to the stalks all fall). On 12/5 they saw 2 robins.

The Rouses have been watching Wilde Lake and have observed the following: 4 Canvasback on 11/13, 3 Ruddy Ducks on 11/15, a Ring-necked Duck on 11/29 and 19 Canada Geese on 12/7. The Webbs saw 3 male pheasants the first week of December. They have often seen kestrels and Red-tailed Hawks near their home close to Centennial Park. The McClures had a banded House Finch on 10/26 and again 11/3-5.

Since 11/20 the Grants have had a R.-sh. Hawk perching regularly in their backyard. They also reported a Magnolia Warbler on 11/24 which stayed for a week. They have had a Winter Wren since 11/24. During the last week of November, Ken Tracey had an immature White-crowned Sparrow with only one leg at his feeders which stayed for three weeks.

Even after several columns I still have to call people for sightings, so--if you are interested in this type of article, please call me with your sightings at 531-2780.

WHICH SEED FOR WHICH BIRDS?

BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER - high oil and calorie content, more popular with most feeder species than striped sunflower seeds. Northern Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee, House and Purple Finches, American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak, Blue Jay, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Tufted Titmouse and various species of woodpeckers.

WHITE PROSO MILLET - a small seed containing starch, fat, and protein. Northern Junco, various species of native sparrows, Brown-headed Cowbird and other blackbirds, Mourning Dove and Rufous-sided Towhee.

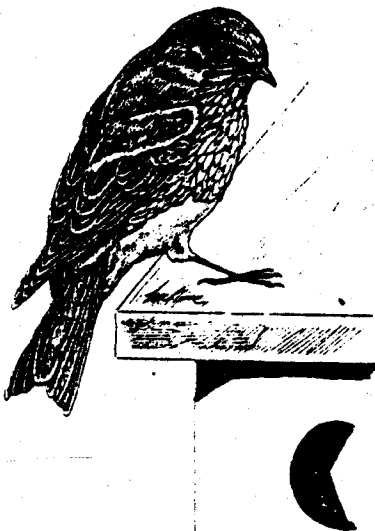
NIGER THISTLE SEED - a tiny seed; a luxury item, but it is sometimes the means of attract Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls as well as the more common finches.

HULLED SUNFLOWER CHIPS - same high food value as whole sunflower but without the mess and waste. Attracts all whole sunflower eaters; smaller finches prefer seeds without hulls.

BLUEBIRD PROJECT PLANNED FOR HOWARD COUNTY PARKS - - BIRD CLUB IS CO-SPONSOR

Bill Eckert of Howard County Recreation and Parks has announced that 1983 will see the beginning of a bluebird project in several Howard County parks. The project will be co-sponsored by the Howard County Bird Club and the North American Bluebird Society. Monitors will be needed to keep records for each box, remove House Sparrow nests, etc. If you have an interest in being a monitor, contact Bill at 465-6882 between 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday by January 14, 1983. An orientation session will be scheduled after that date.

Howard County Chapter MOS
10617 Grae Loch Rd.
Laurel, MD 20707



**NOTE: THIS NEWSLETTER
CONTAINS WINTER SEED SALE
ORDER BLANK**