### Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

Most of the world's Wilson's Phalarope population stages at a few saline lakes in western North America before migrating to the altiplano of the Andes (Jehl 1988). San Diego County is thus off the species' main migration route, but the birds are locally common from mid June through September on brackish lagoons, inland lakes, and above all the salt works at the south end of San Diego Bay. Yet otherwise they avoid San Diego and Mission bays almost totally. Spring migrants are uncommon. Occasional wintering in the salt works ceased in the mid 1980s.

*Photo by Anthony Mercieca*

**Migration:** Wilson's Phalarope is noted for its early fall migration, begun by adult females, which can depart the breeding range as soon as they lay their eggs, leaving the tasks of incubation and brood rearing to the males. Arrival in the third week of June is typical; even 15 in breeding plumage at Batiquitos Lagoon (J6/J7) 9 June 1979 (E. Copper) were likely early "fall" migrants. In the salt works, on the basis of weekly surveys through 1993, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found a sharp peak in July, with a high count of 370. At San Elijo Lagoon (L7), however, on the basis of monthly surveys 1973–83, King et al. (1987) found a peak in August, with a high count of 360 on 5 August 1979. The differences may be related to different habitat use by adults, which arrive earlier, and juveniles, which arrive later. Inland, Wilson's Phalarope is uncommon in fall, frequenting small lakes or mudflats at the upper ends of large reservoirs. From 1997 to 2002 our maximum inland counts were of six at Tule Lake (T27) 21 June 2000 (J. K. Wilson), 12 at O'Neill Lake (E6) 28 June 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg), and 11 at the upper end of Lake Morena (S22) 2 July 2000 (R. and S. L. Breisch). The only fall record from the Anza–Borrego Desert is of one at a gravel pit along Highway S2 near the Imperial County line (Q29) 19 August 1975 (M. Getty).

In spring the species' numbers are far smaller. Although Guy McCaskie noted up to 300 in the salt works 5 May 1962, on their weekly counts in spring 1993 Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) observed an average of fewer than 10 Wilson's Phalaropes, in April only. Away from the salt works, during the atlas period, our only spring record of more than a single bird was of 20 at Agua Hedionda Lagoon (I6) 30 April 2000 (J. Ciarletta). In spring Wilson's Phalarope is rare inland, recorded just at Ramona (K15; one on 30 April 2003, M. B. Stowe) and at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25; three from 15 to 25 April 1987 and on 29 April 1990, A. G. Morley). The interval 21 March–22 May reported for spring migration by Unitt (1984) still stands. Records of apparently summering birds are of seven in the salt works 27 May 1979 (M. U. Evans) and single individuals at San Elijo Lagoon 2 June 1974 and 7 June 1981 (King et al. 1987).

**Winter:** From at least 1960 to 1985 small numbers of Wilson's Phalaropes wintered occasionally in the salt works; the species was recorded on 8 of 24 San Diego Christmas bird counts 1960–83. The high count was of eight from 19 January to 1 March 1963 (AFN 17:358, 1963), and the most recent winter record was of two from 14 to 23 February 1985 (G. McCaskie, AB 39:210, 1985).

**Conservation:** Whatever change to the salt works terminated phalaropes' wintering there, it affected the Red-necked and Wilson's simultaneously. At the beginning of the 21st century, Wilson's Phalarope seems less numerous as a migrant than in the 1960s and 1970s. Part of the change may be due to local habitat changes, as few muddy ponds remain in the coastal lowland. The restoration of tidal flow at Batiquitos and San Elijo lagoons rendered these sites less attractive to Wilson's Phalaropes.