

Red-necked or Northern Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

The Red-necked Phalarope is an abundant migrant in the south San Diego Bay salt works, a common migrant on the ocean offshore, and common in fall on northern San Diego County's lagoons. At other times and places it is uncommon to rare. The Red-necked Phalarope's formerly regular wintering in the salt works, like that of Wilson's Phalarope, ceased in the mid 1980s.

Migration: The salt works are by far the Red-necked Phalarope's principal site in San Diego County. In their weekly surveys of the salt works 1993–94, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found numbers peaking at about 12,000 on 18 August 1993. Even their minimum August count reached 4300. In their monthly surveys of San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 1973–83, King et al. (1987) found an average of 250 in September and October and a maximum of 1400 on 4 September 1977. Only during fall migration is the Red-necked Phalarope regular on inland lakes, with up to seven at Lake Hodges (K11) 18 September 1982 (K. L. Weaver) and 10 at Lake Henshaw (G17) 17 September 1978 (P. Unitt). The species occurs in fall primarily from mid July (exceptionally 24 June, 1988, two at the northeast corner of the salt works, Macdonald et al. 1990) to October. The single Red-necked Phalarope reported during the winter atlas season, in the San Diego River flood-control channel (R8) 7 December 1997 (B. C. Moore), was evidently a late fall straggler.

In spring the Red-necked Phalarope is much less common. In May 1993, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found an average of about 700 and maximum of about 1500 in the salt works. Though spring migrants are often common on the ocean as well, away from the salt works they are rare even at other coastal wetlands. From 1997 to 2001 there was no spring report of more than eight, and at San Elijo Lagoon King et al. (1987) recorded a May aver-



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

age of only 0.4. Our only Red-necked Phalarope inland during the atlas period, at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25) 3 May 1997 (H. L. Young, M. B. Mosher), was one of just three recorded in the Anza–Borrego Desert, the others being at the same locality 14 April 1992 and at Lower Willows (D23) 7 May 1988 (A. G. Morley). Spring dates range from 5 April (1998, eight at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon, N7, D. K. Adams) and 7 April (1998, one at La Jolla Shores, P7, SDNHM 50293) to 23 May (1926, two off Point Loma, S7, SDNHM 10794–5).

Winter: From at least 1953 to 1985 the Red-necked Phalarope wintered fairly regularly in the salt works. It was recorded on 21 of the 31 San Diego Christmas bird counts 1953–83 with up 230 on 23 December 1967. Since 1985, however, wintering Red-necked Phalaropes have been found there only once, with six on 16 December 1995.

Conservation: The building of the salt works created hypersaline ponds with abundant brine shrimp, ideal staging stops for the Red-necked and Wilson's Phalaropes. But why the Red-necked Phalarope's wintering on the salt works came to an abrupt end is unknown.