



Wilson's Phalarope - Prairie Wetland Harbinger of Spring

Phalaropes are shorebirds; Wilson's Phalaropes (*Phalaropus tricolor*) are common and widespread as they migrate across Kansas and the plains each spring. These birds breed in the northwestern states including the northern prairie (they have been recorded as a breeding species in Kansas in Barton, Dickinson, Edwards, Grant, Lincoln, and Stafford counties).

Watch for them in rivers, ponds, lakes, and marshes. You can often pick them out because of their unusual feeding behavior: they swim rapidly in circles, generating their own little whirlpools, apparently trying to dislodge invertebrates from the mud and silt.

Another unique aspect of phalarope biology is the gender role-reversal. The female phalarope is the larger

and more brightly colored of the sexes, and it is she who initiates courtship. The male phalarope incubates the eggs and cares for the fledglings, an arrangement unusual in bird circles.

The female Wilson's Phalarope shown here is one that I photographed on May 19, 2006 at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County.

You can learn more about these delightful birds at this link:

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/wilsons-phalarope>

~ Roy Beckemeyer

Roy Beckemeyer, a retired aeronautical engineer who has studied natural Kansas as an avocation for years, , with special emphasis on prairie plants, birds, and insects (focusing on dragonflies, damselflies, robber flies, and Paleozoic insect fossils), is also a practicing poet whose first book, "Music I Once Could Dance To" (Coal City Press, 2014), was a 2015 Kansas Notable Book. He and wife Pat, married 55 years, live in Wichita.