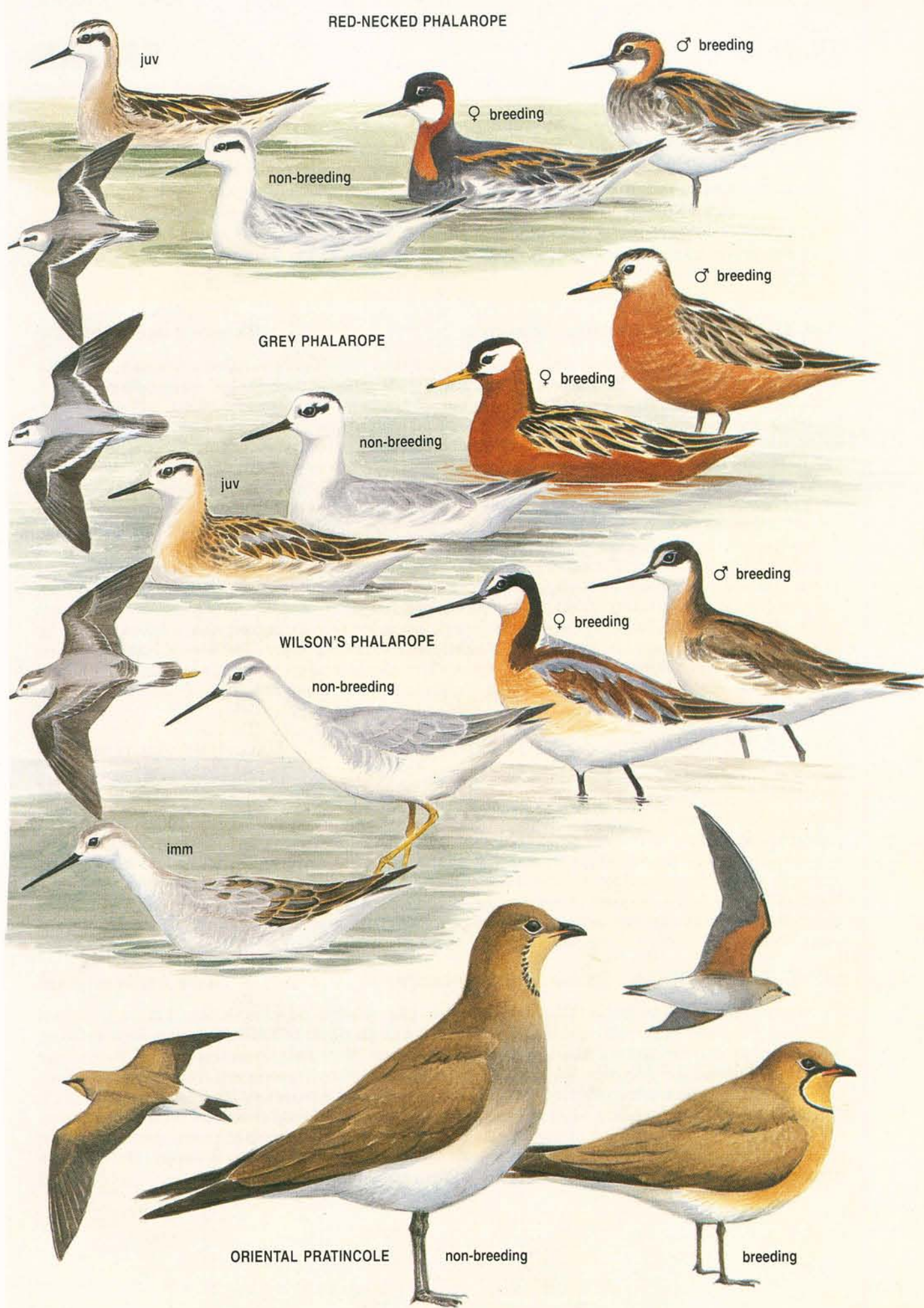


A large diverse group of birds of estuaries, coasts, riverbeds and farmland. Most are long-legged and feed in or near shallow water. Bill shape is varied; short and stubby in those (e.g. dotterels) that peck from the surface, but longer in those that feed in shallow water (e.g. stilts), or probe deeply (e.g. godwits). Flight strong and direct. Often form flocks while roosting or flying, but disperse to feed. Many species seen in NZ breed in the Arctic and arrive in September, with remnants of breeding plumage, and depart in March, often in breeding plumage. Most subadults and a few adults spend the southern winter here.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE *Phalaropus tricolor*

Rare American vagrant

22 cm; ♂ 50 g, ♀ 65 g. Unusual slim and graceful wader. Feeds by swimming jerkily or in circles pecking at the water surface, or by wading, or running actively with waddling gait on dry land with short yellow legs. Long needle-like black bill, no wingbar, and white rump distinguish from other phalaropes. Non-breeding adult resembles small very short-legged Marsh Sandpiper, with very pale grey head and upperparts, darker on wings and back; white eyebrow and underparts. Breeding adult unmistakable: silver-grey and chestnut head, neck and upperparts on female; male duller and lacks grey areas. **Habitat:** Breeds N America. Migrates to wetlands of S America. Rare vagrant to NZ estuaries and lakes. [Sp 227]



PHALAROPES

3 species, all of which are rare visitors to New Zealand.

A small anomalous family of medium to small waders with reversed breeding roles, in which the females are larger and brighter than the males and confine their breeding activities to courtship, mating and laying eggs. Gregarious when not breeding. All are expert swimmers, even in shallow water, with dense plumage on the breast and belly that traps air and makes them float high and buoyantly. Two of the three have a circumpolar breeding range and spend the autumn and winter at sea; they have the salt gland highly developed. The third species, the Wilson's Phalarope,

Phalaropodidae

prefers freshwater wetlands and has normal salt glands.

All phalaropes are slim, having a small head on a slender neck and a sharp, straight bill. Their legs are laterally compressed, and their toes are lobed like those of grebes and coots. They spin, or pirouette, while swimming, stirring plankton or other invertebrates up from below – a technique used more on terrestrial lagoons rather than at sea. They also dab the bill into the water and wade in algal mats and, darting this way and that, feed on flies gathered there. New Zealand records are mainly at coastal lagoons, lakes and estuaries.

227. WILSON'S PHALAROPE

Phalaropus tricolor

Plate 51

Size: 22 cm; male 50 g, female 65 g
Distribution: Breed on the prairie marshes of central North America and migrate to wetlands in southern South America, particularly Argentina. Unlike the other two phalaropes, they do not go to sea but prefer wetlands of the interior. They are a rare vagrant to Australasia, including a single bird at the Manawatu Estuary (September 1983) and two birds at Lake Ellesmere (November

1983–April 1984).
Behaviour: Wilson's Phalaropes swim as actively as the other species, including spinning, but tend to feed like other waders, by walking and running in shallow water or on dry land, often with the neck extended.

Reading: Moore, J.L. & Moore, M. 1984. *Notornis* 31: 330–333. Sagar, P.M. & Harrison, K.C. 1984. *Notornis* 31: 333–334.