

The first record of Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* for Tanzania

On the morning of 25 June 2014, Meredith Sylvia and I were conducting fieldwork in the Serengeti National Park for the Lion Project. We drove south from Moru Kopjes, tracking the pride that was supposed to be there.

I picked out a small bird on a shallow pool and instantly thought it could well be a phalarope. I drove around to the far side to get closer, and more favourable light. It was quite untidy looking, but it was no doubt a Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* (Fig. 1). I knew the species was supposed to be rare in Tanzania but, after a look in the field guide (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996) it appeared that this might be the first country record. This bird was lost both in space and time. Not only had it missed its usual wintering quarters at sea off the western and southwestern coasts of Africa (Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. 1983), it wasn't winter anymore, in late June it was supposed to be in the Arctic. There are a few records from the Red Sea (Cramp & Simmons *op. cit.*).



Figure 1. Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Serengeti, Tanzania, 25 June 2014 (photo: D. Rosengren).

To ensure that this sighting was recorded properly, I started wading out towards the bird with my camera. It was a large pool and I had to wade quite far out before coming into reasonable distance to take photos. The very alkaline water was only ankle deep, but the bottom clay was extremely slippery, and I struggled to stay upright. The phalarope kindly let me photograph it and I happily returned to the car, very excited.

This record, with photographs (clearly showing the distinctive yellow-based bill), was submitted to the East African Rarities Committee and accepted as the first record for Tanzania. This species is not listed for Uganda (Carswell *et al.* 2005). There are only five records listed for Kenya (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), two in February, one in March,

one in April and one in September, but some of these are questionable (D.A. Turner, pers. comm.). Ash & Atkins (2009) document a single record for Ethiopia in January 1973. This record from the Serengeti appears to be the first East African record for June when all adults can be expected to still be on their breeding grounds in the High Arctic. It is noteworthy that Dowsett *et al.* (2008) and Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett (2006) do not list this species for Zambia and Malawi respectively, nor is it listed by Vande weghe & Vande weghe (2011) for Rwanda. The bird is called the Red Phalarope in North America (in recognition of its breeding plumage) and that name has been adopted by del Hoyo & Collar (2014) as its first choice.

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