

International Phalaropes Meeting Summary

June 19-20, 2019
Mono Lake, California

An international group of researchers, managers, and conservationists gathered during June 2019 at Mono Lake, California, to share ideas and expertise on the conservation of salt lake dependent shorebirds, with a focus on Phalaropes—tiny shorebirds that form flocks of thousands at North American salt lakes, before migrating to South America where they rely on salt lakes (Wilson's Phalarope) and pelagic habitats (Red-necked & Red Phalaropes)



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Attendees

The meeting was hosted by Ryan Carle of Oikonos and Margaret Rubega of the University of Connecticut. 30 attendees came from 15 different agencies and NGOs and 5 countries (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and the U.S.).

- **Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge**
- **University of Connecticut**
- **W. Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network**
- **Mono Lake Committee**
- **U.S. Forest Service**
- **California State Parks**
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **Point Blue Conservation Science**
- **Argentina Natura Internacional**
- **Aves Argentina**
- **Corbidi**
- **Los Angeles Dept. Water & Power**
- **Audubon (Saline Lakes & East Sierra)**
- **Parques Nacionales de Argentina**
- **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources**

Accomplishments

Creating lasting connections

The greatest accomplishment of the meeting was bringing together this international group with diverse experiences and perspectives, and a common interest in conserving salt lakes and their shorebirds—connections that will be invaluable for future collaboration.



Margaret Rubega and Marcela Castellino talking at Mono Lake



Wilson's Phalarope female in breeding plumage. Marie Read photo.

Sharing current work

At the start of the meeting, attendees were invited to briefly share their current work or background on phalarope research and management—resulting in a rapid round-up of what we currently know (and don't know) about phalaropes.

Accomplishments

Identifying threats, data gaps & paths forward

With the background and expertise in the room, we were able to efficiently identify the major threats to phalaropes and their habitats worldwide. A major issue is lack of data on the status of phalaropes—collecting data on population and trends throughout their range was identified as a pressing need. Declining water levels at salt lakes on phalaropes' migratory routes is also a key threat.



*Red-necked Phalarope. Andrew Cannizzorro Photo/
Creative Commons*

Kindling the Mono Lake- Laguna Mar Chiquita Sister Lake Relationship

With four attendees from Argentina, the meeting was a great opportunity to share the current status of Laguna Mar Chiquita, Argentina, one of the most important South American sites for Wilson's Phalaropes. Efforts are currently underway to create a national park at Mar Chiquita, and we discussed ways to leverage support from North American groups for this cause.



Argentinian attendees (left to right) Flavio Moschione, Hernán Casañas, Lucila Castro, and Marcela Castellino

Proposals

Phalarope working group

The meeting culminated in the creation of a new **Phalarope Working Group**—a critical first step identified in the 2010 Wilson's Phalarope Conservation Plan. All attendees supported continuing to work together in a network for conservation with a focus on Wilson's, Red-necked, and Red Phalaropes.

Objective: Maintain a sustainable working group that meets in-person every 1-2 years and communicates regularly.

Needs: Funding for coordination and for another meeting, possibly to be held at Laguna Mar Chiquita, Argentina in the second half of 2020.



Bartshé Miller of the Mono Lake Committee scanning for phalaropes at Mono Lake

Update of Wilson's Phalarope Conservation Plan

In 2010, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network created a Conservation Plan for Wilson's Phalaropes, that is now in need of updating—much has changed in our understanding of threats and conservation priorities. An important first step for coordinated phalarope conservation is to gather and summarize existing data on phalaropes, and updating the Conservation Plan is the best avenue for doing this.

Objective: Gather and summarize all existing data on Wilson's Phalaropes and their habitat, and update the Conservation Plan.

Needs: Salary for research, coordination, and writing of the Plan.

Proposals

Tracking studies

There is a need for studies of phalarope movements within and between habitats, and to understand how long individual birds stay at major sites. We propose to install MOTUS tracking technology (a network of towers that automatically detects any animal tagged with a tiny radio tag) to study these questions. MOTUS Towers are needed in the Western U.S. and South America.

Objective: Tag Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes to determine habitat connectivity and residence time using MOTUS towers at Mono Lake, Great Salt Lake, Laguna Mar Chiquita and other key sites.

Needs: Funding for tagging field work, coordination, data management, and MOTUS tower purchase, installation, and maintenance.



Ryan Carle and Verónica López of Oikonos searching for phalaropes at the Salar de Atacama, Chile

Coordinated censuses

To understand global population trends of Wilson's' and Red-necked Phalaropes, coordinated censuses are needed at North American staging sites and non-breeding sites in South America. South American counts should be coordinated by adding phalaropes to the annual coordinated flamingo count which already takes place.

Objective: Determine overall population estimate and trends of Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes at key sites through 3-5 years of coordinated censuses in North and South America.

Needs: Funding for South America coordinator/data manager, regional count coordinators/staff, and North America count coordination & staff.

Conclusions

There is broad interest in phalaropes and salt lake shorebirds and a sense that we urgently need to know more about their status and threats. Phalaropes are a banner species that can be used to focus attention on salt lake ecosystems in North and South America that support many other waterbirds, as well as human communities. We left the meeting with a sense of momentum and enthusiasm for partnerships and collaboration on important work in the near future.



Wilson's Phalaropes at Mono Lake. Marie Read photo.

Funding and Sponsorship

This meeting was made possible by generous funding from



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