

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
2469 Hammertown Road
Narvon, PA 17555

September 23, 1997

Dick Byers
3570 Clawson Drive
Murrysville, PA 15668

Dear Dick,

Thank you for submitting documentation on the Western Grebe you saw at Beaver Run Reservoir on 17 December 1995 to P.O.R.C. The record circulated the committee for two rounds. After careful review and much discussion, we regret that we are unable to accept this record. There was concern among the committee regarding the description of the bill color. The bill was described only as "yellowish" not pale yellow or yellowish-green as is expected in this species (Eckert 1993). There was also some concern among the committee as to the lack of documentation in separating this species from the similar Clark's Grebe (*A. clarkii*).

This of course, does not mean the bird was not a Western Grebe, merely, that the record is not beyond reasonable doubt for acceptance.

We hope that this does not discourage you from submitting documentation on any rare birds you find in the future. Please be encouraged to send as much detail as possible.

Sincerely,

Nick Pulcinella
Chairman

Record # 010-01-1995

Reference: Eckert, K. 1993. Identification of Western and Clark's Grebes. *Birding* 25:304-310

010-01-1995

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

SUPPORTING DETAILS: UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES/HIGH NUMBERS

CBC Name Bushy Run S.P. PA Date 12/19/95 Compiler DICK BYERS

Observer writing this account & date DICK BYERS 12/18/95

SPECIES WESTERN GREBE NUMBER, AGE, SEX 1 Adult

Distance from bird(s) 40 YARDS Relative size of bird larger than mallard duck.
to 200 YARDS. See additional comments.

HEAD & NECK (Describe forehead, crown, auricular, malar region, median line, etc.)

FOREHEAD & CROWN JET BLACK. AURICULAR & MALAR REGION SNOW WHITE.
BLACK OF THE CROWN WENT THROUGH THE EYE TO UPPER MANDIBLE.

EYE & LORES (Describe supercilium, ring, stripe, color, etc.) Supercilium & lores were
jet black. No white above the eye.

UPPER & LOWER MANDIBLES About the length of the head, light colored, but not

LEGS & FEET NOT SEEN REAL BRIGHT IN FULL SUN.

UPPERPARTS (Describe nape, back, rump, upper tail coverts, etc.)

Entire back & sides jet black. A narrow black stripe ran from the back of the
head all the way down the back of the neck making a sharp demarcation line with

UNDERPARTS (Describe throat, belly, side, flanks, crissum, etc.) the white on the front
and side of the neck. Front of neck gleaming white in full sun.

Throat white. Side and flanks black. Just a little white mottling on the posterior

RECTRICES (Describe inner, middle, outer tail feathers, color pattern, shape, etc.)

Tail black. (END AT THE WATER LINE.)

We never saw this bird in the air.

WING (Describe color, length, shape, linings, bars, coverts, leading & trailing edges, etc.)

Never seen in flight. Wings dark in resting position.

VOCALIZATION NONE

BEHAVIOR DOVE FREQUENTLY. SWAM WITH THE HEAD & NECK UP & CURVED,

RATHER SWAN LIKE. IT NEVER HELD ITS NECK BACK OVER THE BODY

LIKE DUCKS OR THE RED-NECKED GREBE.

Date of observation 12/17/95 Time 10 AM. Weather SUNNY Sky CLEAR

Duration of observation 1 hour Bird - Sun orientation SUN TO OUR BACKS.

Exact location BEAVER RUN RESERVOIR WESTMORELAND CO. PA

Habitat OPEN WATER Other observers JIM PEMBERTON SPOTTING SCOPE

Optical equipment 0.5 X 44 BINOCES. 20X BUSHNELL SPACEMASTER

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON SEPARATE SHEET

AN ACCOMPANYING SKETCH OR PHOTOGRAPH CAN BE MOST HELPFUL

NECK A LITTLE LONGER
than what I've
drawn



← BACK OF HEAD & NECK,

Dick Byers
3570 Clawson Drive
Murrysville, PA 15668
12/19/95
(412) 327-6189

Additional Comments: **Western Grebe** - Bushy Run S.P. CBC 12/17/95

I first saw this bird about 40-50 yards above it from a sloping hillside over looking the Beaver Run Reservoir through some small trees. I was using 8.5 X 44 binoculars. All I could see at first was the body. The head and neck were obstructed by the trees. There were two mallards 10-15 yards to the right of the grebe making me think I was looking at a third mallard because the body size was about the same. Then the head and that conspicuous white neck came into view, easily making the bird look larger than the mallards. I have photographed Western Grebes in California at close range, so my immediate gut reaction was Western Grebe because of the size and black & white color. We had just seen several horned grebes and this bird, appearing larger than the mallards, certainly eliminated another horned grebe. The bird was facing me at the time, so I was looking down on the bill which was long, narrow, and yellowish. Unfortunately, the bird saw me setting up the scope and dove. I ran down the slope and set up the scope on the beach. The bird surfaced about 75 yards away swimming north. Subsequent observations were made beyond 75 yards. We were south of the bird with the sun behind us and a little to our left, so we had excellent lighting. The bird was conspicuously all black and white. The white areas stood out like a sore thumb. Later on, when we were at right angles to the light striking the bird we still saw only clean black and white markings, no grays.

It was hard to judge bill length at the greater distance, but when the head was broadside to us, the bill was at least as long as the head. I could not tell if it was tapered or upturned. References I consulted later reported a size difference between male and female Western Grebes including bill length with the male having the larger bill. I suspect this was a female.

The only bird we could have confused it with is the red-necked grebe. I wasn't certain at the time if the winter plumage of the red-necked grebe was similar, so I went back to the car for the field guide while my partner Jim kept track of the bird. While I was gone Jim saw several Canada geese land near the grebe for another size comparison. Jim had never seen either red-necked or western grebes before, but he was impressed with the size of this grebe with Canada geese in the background. His comment was the grebe didn't look much smaller than the geese. A red-necked grebe beside a Canada goose certainly wouldn't impress anyone with it's size.

The Peterson field guide showed the red-neck grebe's neck to

be uniform gray, not black and white, but field guides rarely show all plumages, so on my return home I checked many other sources for similar winter plumages of the red-necked grebe and found none to compare with the conspicuous white/black pattern, particularly the sharp demarcation line between black and white on the neck. Every reference mentioned the mouse gray ear patch and other gray areas on the neck and sides. This bird had no gray areas anywhere. The side of the face was always white with no trace of the crescent reported for red-necked grebes. The best plumage illustrations of the red-necked grebe occur in the Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa on page 110, plate 10. None of those plumages even come close to what we saw.

We were never close enough to see the red eye. Nor did we ever see the wing markings because he never flew or flapped his wings on the water. He was actively fishing most of the time. When swimming on the surface, the movement was always swanlike with the neck up and curved, never laid back like a duck.

It would have been nice to see the red eye and wings, but we feel the black/white plumage, size comparisons and swimming behavior pretty much rule out the red-necked grebe.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 2 of 2

Species: Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

Date of Sighting: 17 December 1995 to 17 December 1995

Location: BEAVER RUN RESERVOIR

County: WESTMORELAND

Observer(s): Dick Byers

Date of Submission: 1996

Submitted by: Dick Byers

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas						X		
N. Pulcinella						X		
E. Kwater						X		
R. Ickes						X		
G. McWilliams			X					
P. Schwalbe							X	
S. Feldstein						X		
TOTALS			1			5	1	
DECISION						X		

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

F. Haas

Date:

2/22/97

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

Date of Sighting: 17 December 1995 to 17 December 1995

Location: BEAVER RUN RESERVOIR

County: WESTMORELAND

Observer(s): Dick Byers

Date of Submission: 1996

Submitted by: Dick Byers

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas						X		
N. Pulcinella			X					
E. Kwater						X		
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams			X					
P. Schwalbe							X	
S. Feldstein			X					
TOTALS			4			2	1	
DECISION						X		

Comments: Send for second round.

Signature (Secretary):

F. Haas

Date:

5-1-96