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#### Observer:

Geoff Malosh

450 Amherst Ave.

Moon Township, PA 15108-2654

412.735.3128

## pomarine@earthlink.net

#### Facts:

Temperature: 40 F

Wind: unknown

Sky: overcast

Time: 3:30 PM to 4:45 PM

Optics: Leica Ultravid 10x42 binoculars, KOWA TSN-824 82mm spotting scope

Camera: Canon 50D Digital SLR, 500mm f/4L IS with 1.4x teleconverter

Photos or audio recordings: 5 photos submitted, taken from a distance of about 80-100 yards,

attached to this message

Accompanying observers: Mike Fialkovich + many

Documentation date: 15 February 2008

Submission date: 15 February 2008

#### Photos:

- PORC1\_Grebe\_Western\_MchnbgPA\_20090214\_50D1\_7466S.jpg
- PORC2\_Grebe\_Western\_MchnbgPA\_20090214\_50D1\_7456S.jpg
- PORC3\_Grebe\_Western\_MchnbgPA\_20090214\_50D1\_7448S.jpg
- PORC4\_Grebe\_Western\_MchnbgPA\_20090214\_50D1\_7440S.jpg
- PORC5\_Grebe\_Western\_MchnbgPA\_20090214\_50D1\_7413S.jpg

All photos are 100% crops from the original frame; that is to say, they are cropped from the original camera file but not further reduced, so a picture at 1200x800 pixels represents the actual 1200x800 pixels from the camera without further compression or expansion. Photos are preferenced as such below.

#### Observation:

A "male and female" Western Grebe was reported on Conodiguinet Creek along Willow Mill Road north of central Mechanicsburg on the morning of 14 February by Barry Horton. Within the hour Ramsay Koury confirmed the presence of a Western Grebe and a Red-necked Grebe, and the chase was on. About 4 hours later, Mike Fialkovich and I arrived on the scene to find several birders in attendance with the target bird in sight. We proceeded to watch and photograph the grebe from a distance between 200 and 500 feet for the next hour. By the time we left, we were the only birders present. When we arrived the bird was alert but not diving, and occasionally preening. For the last 20 minutes, the bird rested with its head tucked against its body, with head facing forward by folding the neck onto itself against the body (see attached photo PORC4). Only once in these last 20 minutes did it raise its head and then for only 30 seconds. Other birders reported that one wing appeared to be injured but I saw no evidence of it in my 75 minutes with the bird.

### **Description:**

The bird was a very large, long-necked grebe, strikingly white and black from a distance. Upon closer inspection, it showed a very long, thin, dull yellow bill, as long as the head was deep. The neck was very long and thin, much longer proportionally than any loon or grebe regular in Pennsylvania, or any duck for that matter. The crown was black above the eye, and the area surrounding the eye (including the lores) was dark but not so much as the crown. The eye itself was a dark red. The dark area around the eye extended down the side of the face to about the imaginary line formed by extending backwards from the tip of the bill and through the gape to the back of the neck. The black of the crown extended down the back of the neck to the mantle; the rest of the neck, chin, cheeks below the line of the bill, and breast were bright clean white. The mantle was a medium gray lighter than the crown and the back of the neck. Below and behind the mantle, the remainder of the bird above the waterline appeared to be a more mottled gray and white, with the gray color about the same shade as the mantle. I never witnessed the bird stretching its wings or in flight.

The subject bird was associating closely with a Red-necked Grebe (visible in 4 of 5 attached photos), providing a striking juxtaposition of its size compared to this largest of the regular Pennsylvania grebes. The long neck gave it a towering appearance over the Red-necked, though judging the body length (excluding neck) and bulk alone, the target bird was only slightly larger than the Red-necked.

#### Discussion:

The only two possibilities are the two *Aechmorphous* grebes of western North America: Western Grebe and Clark's Grebe, two species that were formerly lumped into one. Clark's Grebe can be eliminated by the combination of the dullness of the yellow bill and the extent of dusky coloration surrounding the eye and lores. Though neither of these characters together can truly prove an individual as one or the other, the combination of both in favor of Western Grebe confirm the identification as such. The Sibley Guide makes a point of showing that the black line along the back of the neck is more slender in Clark's than Western. I have often found exceptions to this in my experience and have a hard time relying on it to determine the species of intermediate birds. For what it is worth anyway, the Cumberland grebe did show a thicker black line along the back of

the neck also consistent with Western (photo PORC5), and in combination with other features already mentioned, this helps confirm the bird as a good Western.

## Prior experience:

I have seen many hundreds of both Western and Clark's Grebes in the western United States. This was my first record of either species in Pennsylvania.

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 $\underline{pomarine@earthlink.net} \ | \ \underline{http://home.earthlink.net/\sim} pomarine/index.html$ 

# Western Grebe (Aechmophorus occidentalis)

# Conodoquinet Creek along RT. 114 near Hustons Mill, Cumberland County, PA 14 February, 2009

This is a bird that many birders (including me) were waiting for; one that stayed in one place and seen by many birders. Upon arriving at the site late in the afternoon, a small group of birders were watching it as it rested on the creek. Apparently, the crowds moved on as the day progressed.

The grebe spent the entire time near a bend in the creek with a Red-necked Grebe. I saw it alert and swimming (mainly to keep its place in the stream current), preening and a few times it extended a leg and shook it, then tucked it back under the water. It also settled down and went to sleep. During observation I saw it from the side, back and head on; views through the scope were good.

### DESCRIPTION

- An obvious grebe based on the thin build, long bill, long thin neck and slim body. The bird was large, noticeably larger that the Red-necked Grebe it was associating with, and had a longer thinner neck compared to the Red-necked Grebe.
- Forehead, crown, nape and entire back of the neck, black. The black on the rear of the neck
  was a thin stripe running the entire length of the neck. The chin, throat, and front of the neck
  were white, as well as the breast.
- The black on the crown surrounded the eye and extended to the lores and the base of the bill.
- The bill was thin, long and sharp (dagger-like) and yellow.
- The wings and mantle were black. Flanks and sides mottled dark brown and white.
- The bird exhibited the typical sleeping posture with the neck bent in an "S" shape with the bill tucked into the front of the folded neck.

Several digiscoped photographs are included with this description.

Submitted by:

Mike Fialkovich, 805 Beulah Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

mpfial@verizon.net

#### PA RARE BIRD REPORT FORM

Western grebe

1 individual

Non-breeding adult

February 14, 2009 The bird was found by Barry Horton on Saturday morning. Ramsay Koury was the first to confirm the identification. Other observers around noon were Dick Collier, Dale Bicksler, Deuane Hoffman, Carolyn Blatchley, Chuck Chalfant, Frank and Barb Haas, Dave Wilton and several others before I left at 1:30 pm.

Location: Conodoguinet Creek, Willow Mill Park Road, Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County.

The bird was on the creek swimming with a red-necked grebe

The closest I saw the bird was about 100 yards. The bird was within 50 feet of Ramsay Koury and Dale Bicksler when they both took photos. Dale's have already been sent to Nick Pulcinella..

Sky was partly cloudy. The bird was partly in the shade of riparian vegetation.

I viewed the bird with binoculars, and my own 20-power telescope. I also viewed the bird with on 30-power scopes that were set up.

The bird was about 25% larger than the Red-necked grebe. The long white neck was in contrast to the dingy color of the RNGR. The only confusing species would be Clark's grebe. No white in the face was noted. In the better scopes the eye was always in gray which transitioned from the black head and white throat. This can be clearly seen in Dale's pictures. The bird was alternately swimming or sleeping. I never saw it eating and I read that the bird had an injured wing.

I first saw WEGR in Colorado, 1982, also in Oregon, Arizona and California in subsequent years.

Chuck Berthoud Hershey, PA February 15, 2009

# PENNSYLVANIA RARE BIRD REPORT FORM

This form is presented as a convenience and guide. It can be used if desired, but is not necessary for submitting a report. Species requiring documentation are those on the Review List or not on the Official List of Birds of Pennsylvania. Send documentation to:

Nick Pulcinella, Secretary
Pennsylvania Omithological Records Committee
613 Howard Ave.
West Chester, PA 19380
nickpulcinella@comcast.net

(Please use an additional page if necessary.)

SPECIES (common and scientific name) Western Grebe (Aechmophorus occidenta Subspecies, if known
NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS / SEX(ES) Unknown
AGE(S) AND PLUMAGE(S) (e.g. immature; adult in breeding plumage; year for gulls; basic or alternate if you prefer those terms; state of molt if applicable): I do not know it it was an immature or adult. It was in winter plumage
DATE OF OBSERVATION 20 February 2009 TIME 1030 am - 1045 am
LOCATION (city, borough, township) Hogestown, Pennsylvania
EXACT SITE (e.g. name of park, lake, road) Conodoquinet Creek at Rt. 114.
OBSERVER REPORTING: Name Pamela D. Frisher Address 761 Willow Lane State DD 710 17537
e-mail (optional) goldengle - 600 phone (optional) phone (optional)
OTHER OBSERVERS (only those who saw and identified the bird with you): Maxine Montgomery
HABITAT (e.g. mowed field, woodland edge, any other details) Freshwater Creek Alowing through rural/suburban habitat.
DISTANCE TO BIRD 50 - 150 yards
VIEWING CONDITIONS (sky, weather, position of sun relative to you) Mix of sun and clouds, 24-25 f, NW 0 15-25 mph. The sun world was behind and to our light.
OPTICAL EQUIPMENT USED Bushnell 10x50 binocidars, Howa spotting segre scope along also, but I do not know the Particulars on it.  DESCRIPTION (Include as much detail as you observed – size relative to other species present; "jizz" = e.g. posture, body shape, and proportions; colors and patterns of plumage; bill, eye, and leg characteristics; other features relevant
which were also present, smaller than the Canada Geese. The bill was yellowish, the eye was sed. The top of the dead and neckwere
part. The bottom of the head and neck was white. The few tine's it flapped it's wings, I noticed white patches.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IF ANY:  Photograph	VOCALIZATIONS_	Pone
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JATE DE THIS REPORT: OF A SOLUTION AND A SOLUTION A	presence  presence  presence  presence  presence  presence  presence  presence	der and snakier than a boon. The neck and bill were der and snakier than a boon. It was also larger the necked Grebe. The st coloration, and pattern, and far Merganser apecies. Clark's Grebe has white whill, and the eye is surrounded by white.  Inything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it: This discovered about a week ago, and was in the of a Red-necked Grebe when first seen. It has to graphed by several people.  Gittional page if necessary)  RIENCE WITH THIS AND/OR SIMILAR SPECIES I have never seen a

Record No: 010-01-2009

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

# Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Western Grebe Aechmophorus occidentalis

Date of Sighting: 14 February 2009 to 21 February 2009

County: CUMBERLAND Location: MECHANICSBURG Observer(s): Barry Horton m.obs

Date of Submission: 2009

Submitted by: Dale Bicksler, Chuck Berthoud, Pam Fisher, Geoff Malosh, Mike Fialkovich, Eric Witmer, Bob Moul, Dave

DeReamus

Written Description: Yes	Photo: Yes		Specimen: No				Recording: No		
Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain	
R. Wiltraut									
A. Guarente	/								
T. Johnson	1.								
B. Coulter									
C. P. H. K. FRyberger	/								
J. Heller	V								
G. Malosh	/								
TOTALS	7								
DECISION	X		1						

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary)

MMM

Date: 9/24/04