





















**Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) at Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, PA,
14 February 2009**

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 prefixed PORC1 through PORC5 and are referenced 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 *Aechmorrhous* 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.

Geoff Malosh | Editor, *Pennsylvania Birds*

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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 than 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 Ornithological Records Committee
 613 Howard Ave.
 West Chester, PA 19380
 nickpulcinella@comcast.net

SPECIES (common and scientific name) Western Grebe (Aechmophorus occidentalis)
 Subspecies, if known _____

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS 1 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 if 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) Canodequinet Creek at Rt. 114.

OBSERVER REPORTING:

Name Pamela D. Fisher

Address 761 Willow Lane

City Gap

State PA.

ZIP 17527

e-mail (optional) goldengale-60@yahoo.com

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 Abowing 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, 24-25F, NW @ 15-25 mph. The sun ~~would~~ was behind and to our right.

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT USED Bushnell 10x50 binoculars, ~~Hawa spotting scope~~ Maxine had her spotting 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 to this individual): It was larger than the Hooded Mergansers which were also present, smaller than the Canada Geese. The bill was yellowish, the eye was red. The top of the head and neck were dark all the way down to the back and wings. The eye was in the dark part. The bottom of the head and neck was white. The few time's it flapped it's wings, I noticed white patches.

(Please use an additional page if necessary.)

BEHAVIOR (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing) It fed a little bit sometimes immersing itself completely underwater, sometimes it just stuck its face in the water. The rest of the time was spent preening.

VOCALIZATIONS None

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IF ANY:

Photograph _____ Video recording _____ Audio recording _____ Drawing _____

Photographer/recorder/illustrator:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

ZIP _____

e-mail (optional) _____

phone (optional) _____

Please include a copy of the photograph or recording with your report, and accompany it with a complete written documentation if the identification is obvious to you. If you made a drawing, please include it.

IF THIS IS A DEAD BIRD:

General condition _____

If collected (by permit), location of specimen if known _____

SEPARATION FROM SIMILAR SPECIES (how you eliminated others)

It was larger than a Horned Grebe, a little smaller than a Loon. The neck and bill were more slender and snakier than a Loon. It was also larger & shape than a Red-necked Grebe. The coloration, and pattern, is not correct for Merganser species. Clark's Grebe has white cheeks, brighter yellow bill, and the eye is surrounded by white.

DISCUSSION - Anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

This bird was discovered about a week ago, and was in the presence of a Red-necked Grebe when first seen. It has been photographed by several people.

(Please use an additional page if necessary)

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND/OR SIMILAR SPECIES

I have never seen a Western Grebe before, I am however familiar with Horned and Red-necked Grebes, Common Loons, Red-throated Loons, and Mergansers. I have seen a winter plumage Eared Grebe once.

ARE YOU POSITIVE OF YOUR IDENTIFICATION? (why or why not)

Yes. This bird did not look familiar to me. Plus, there were others there who confirmed this bird. It has been seen and recorded by many top notch birders.

REFERENCES CONSULTED:

During observation

After observation

Sibley's Field Guide to Birds of North America, Eastern Region
National Audubon, Book of North American Birds by Reader's Digest.

DATE OF THIS REPORT: 21 February, 2009

SIGNATURE OF OBSERVER

Pamela D. Fisher

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	✓							
B. Coulter	✓							
C. Butt K. Freyberger	✓							
J. Heller	✓							
G. Malosh	✓							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

2/24/09