

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2020-02-19 23:56:08
Observer's Name	David DeReamus
E-mail	becard@rcn.com
Phone	4847889280
Observer's Address	3339 Allen Street Easton PA 18045 United States
Names of additional observers	Bernard Morris
Species (Common Name)	Clark's Grebe
Species (Scientific Name)	Aechmophorus clarkii
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Winter adult
Observation Date and Time	11-02-1987 10:00 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Not yet (please do, eBird is great!)
County	Somerset
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Lake Somerset
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Southeastern portion of lake.
GPS coordinates of sighting	N40.022487, W79.063940
Habitat	Lake
Distance to bird	About 100 yards.
Viewing conditions	Clear view with the sun at our backs.
Optical equipment used	Swift 15-60x scope.
Description	Rather than retype everything here, I have scanned and attached a copy of the original letter and sketch sent to Frank & Barb Haas back in (I believe) 1988. I don't think it ever "officially" went through PORC as this was right around the time of the committee's inception.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

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Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

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Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

Hi all. Since I'm retired now, I've taken occasions to begin entering many of my old records into eBird. That's when I found the attached copy of my report that I wrote to Frank and Barb Haas back in (I believe) 1988. Obviously, the address and phone number at the top of the first page is outdated. Please note that Paul Schwalbe and his wife saw the same bird from the boat ramp on the other side of the lake and identified it as a Clark's/Western Grebe but were too far away to narrow it down to the exact species. Bernie took some photos of it, which I never saw. He told me that they didn't help prove the identification one way or the other between Clark's and Western. Remember that this was the "film camera" days with very limited ability to blow up the photos with any quality like today's monstrous megapixels can provide. He now lives in Albuquerque and I don't know his current Email address. I realize that it's doubtful this record will be accepted but thought it was worth submitting the documentation rather than leaving it to die in my filing cabinet as it has for the last 32 years. I guessed on the time but know that it was definitely in the late morning since the sun was at our backs while on the eastern shore of the lake. Thanks for your time. It was great working with the team.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

Yes

After

National Geographic "Field Guide to the Birds of North America"

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Drawing

Upload images, audio, video or drawings

Dave DeKamus
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Bath, PA 18014
(215) 759-8772

To: P.O.R.C.

Dear Frank and Barb,

It has recently come to my attention that there is major confusion about "the Grebe" seen on Lake Somerset in early November of 1987. In order to clear up (or add to) the confusion, here is my eyewitness account of the bird.

Bernie Morris and I arrived at Lake Somerset on the morning of 11/2/87. We were looking for a reported Clark's Grebe which would be not only a great state bird for me, but also a lifer. We stopped at the dam breast in order to scope the lake. Near the middle of the lake, with some loons, was a striking black-and-white bird. Our distance from it, however, was too far to note any details. After talking it over, we decided to head for the eastern shore of the lake. This would get us closer and also put the sun at our backs. We went up Route 281 to about where we thought the bird was located. We parked at a farmhouse and carefully bulled our way through the thorn bushes that grew among the conifers along the lakeshore. We finally reached the lake's edge and found the bird to be right out in front of us. My estimation was that it was about 100 yards offshore. It was diving among a few Common Loons which we immediately noticed to be only a bit larger than the bird. Using my Swift 15-60x Scope, we were able to note the following:

The bird had a swan-like neck, pure white in front and on the sides with a very thin black trailing edge down the back of the neck. The bill was very long, bright yellowish in color throughout, and extremely pointed at the tip caused by a thinning of the lower mandible. It had the "stabbing" appearance of an Anhinga's bill. We were convinced at this point that it could only be either a Western or Clark's Grebe.

For at least the next 20 minutes, we studied the head pattern, discovering the following: The cheeks were snow white. The black cap on the head extended down the back of the neck into a thin line. It also narrowed towards the forehead and met near the top of the bill. The top of the red eye just barely met the bottom edge of the dark forehead. There was no white visibly separating the eye from the black although the entire eye was

definitely in the white part of the face. Our confusion came from the fact that very few guides showed the two recently split species and the ones that did (National Geographic, etc.), did not depict exactly what we were seeing. The dark phase, or Western, was shown as having the black going below the eye; but this was not the case. The light phase, or Clark's, was shown as having the white going over the eye or entirely surrounding it. While this was close to our bird's pattern, it was not entirely agreeable. There was very minimal flecking between the eye and the bill; but this was only visible at a higher power. The back and sides of the bird were studied. The top of the back was darker than the flanks, but no conclusions could be made. At this point, we were both convinced that we were observing either a Clark's Grebe or one of the rare Western/Clark's intergrades!

I had seen the Western Grebe in California and remembered the eye being completely enveloped in black. Reexamining a slide of this CA bird confirmed this. Since seeing the PA bird, I have also seen numerous Western and Clark's Grebes in Colorado. Both of these species were seen on the same reservoir, so their different head patterns could be easily studied. Of the birds I saw, the Western's all had the black surrounding the eye and the Clark's all were surrounded by white. The bill colors were also different as noted in the National Geographic Guide. The PA bird's bill color was hard to pin down due to the changing hues as it turned in the bright sun. It was not a brilliant yellow-orange nor was it a dull yellow-green. It appeared to be, as mentioned before, a bright yellowish color. Bernie took a few pictures with a 400 mm lens, but the bird was too far away to discern any field marks.

I have since heard reports of other birders finding a Horned and/or Red-Necked Grebe while looking for "the" bird. These may very well be true, also; but the bird we saw could, in no way, have been either of these. It's close proximity to the Common Loons would have made a Horned

Grebe diminutive in comparison. Our bird was somewhat smaller, but close to, the loons' size. In addition, the head was held much higher than the loons'. This bird also had a clean white pair of cheeks, throat, and neck. There were no dusky or grayish parts on this bird as in those of a Red-Necked Grebe. The bill was not blunted or dingy-colored at all, and the red eye color also ruled out any possibility of this being a Red-Necked.

I spoke on the telephone with Paul Schwalbe about this. He said that he and his wife both saw the bird from the boat dock, located on the western side of the lake. He told me that their only question about the bird was that they weren't close enough to determine whether it was a Western or a Clark's Grebe! They had ruled out all other grebes.

Your January-March 1989 issue asked for records on the Western Grebe, but nothing about the Clark's. I am interested in knowing any or all information on this bird since it affects both my state and life lists. Does anyone know who originally reported it as a Clark's Grebe?

Please let me know what you've heard.

Good birding,

Dave DeRemus

P.S. Also enclosed is a rough sketch of the bird.

