

Species (Common and Scientific Name): **Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis***

Subspecies, if known

Number of individuals Sex(es) **One**

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): **Adult nonbreeding plumage**

Date and Time of Observation **November 30, 2011 3:00 PM**

Location (City, Borough, Township) **Pine Grove Township**

Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road) **Sweet Arrow Lake County Park**

Observer Reporting:

Name **Barbara Ritzheimer**

Address State Zip **5 Locust Street Pine Grove, PA 17963**

E-mail (Optional) **barbritz@gmail.com**

Phone (Optional)

Other Observers (Only Those Who Saw and Identified the Bird with You):

Habitat (E.g. Mowed Field, Woodland Edge, Any other details) **Lake**

Distance to Bird (Specify feet, yards, etc.) **approximately 200 yards**

Viewing Conditions (sky, weather, position of sun relative to you) **overcast**

Optical Equipment Used **binoculars and birding scope**

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):

The first thing that struck me was the contrast of the very white neck and the black stripe on the back of the head. The neck was long and very erect and was very white from the chin to the chest. There was a large black stripe running along the back of the head from the beak to the back of the bird. The black on the top of the head went down just past the eye. The rest of the bird was grayish black. The beak also stood out. It was very long and thin with a yellowish color. The bird was about the same size as a loon or cormorant.

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

The bird appeared to be feeding. I watched it for about 15 minutes and it spent the entire time in repeatedly diving. It would surface and then dive again. It disappeared completely below the water before resurfacing a short while later not too far from where it had gone under the surface. It must have flown away while I was looking through the ID Guide because once I looked up, it was no longer there. The bird was too far away for me to get a picture with my little digital camera.

I could not get any pictures since the bird was too far away and I only had a small digital camera

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

It was definitely not any kind of duck. It sat too far out of the water to be a loon and the neck was much too long. The long white neck was distinctive.

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

I was on my way back to my car after walking along the lake and just glanced over the lake one more time. I saw a light colored bird swimming and thought it might be a loon except the neck was too long and it was sitting too far out of the water. Then I thought maybe it was the domestic goose that I had seen earlier in the year hanging around with the Canada Geese. But then I saw it dive and decided to take a closer look. Once I got it in my binoculars I could tell it was not a goose or loon. I got my scope and took a good look at this bird. I had Richard Crossley's new ID Guide with me and opened it to the pages on loons and grebes. As soon as I saw the pictures of the Western Grebe, I knew what I was looking at. It matched the pictures perfectly. I bumped into a birder that lives at the lake and asked her to keep an eye out to see if she could find the bird but I have not heard anything from her so I assume the bird did not return. I was unable to return to the lake for a few days. When I did go back last week, there was no sign of this bird.

Previous experience with this and/or similar species

I have seen Pied-billed Grebes, Horned Grebes and Red-necked Grebes so I am familiar with grebe behavior, shape and plumage. This bird acted like a grebe but was not any of these. I have also seen Common, Yellow-billed, and Red-throated Loons and this bird was not a loon.

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

The bird looked exactly like the photos in the Crossley ID Guide which I had with me. It behaved like a grebe. It sat very erect and higher out of the water than a loon. The coloring and posture of this bird were quite distinctive.

References Consulted:

During Observation **The Crossley ID Guide**

After Observation **National Geographic Bird Guide, allaboutbirds.org, various photos on the Internet**

Date of this Report: **December 12, 2011**