

Clark's Grebe

1 Oct 1987

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*Steve Dinsmore

IBL 58:17, 75

Record Number: 87-19

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Steve Dinsmore

LETTER

Don Roberson to Thomas Kent, 31 March 1988

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 58:17

Records Committee: IBL 58:75

VOTE: 4-III, 2-IV, 1-ambiguous "VII" (with no comment)

IV, Three marks separate this species from Western: bill color, flank color, and extent of white on face. This description only noted a pale, not black, bill. One would expect that good viewing conditions at 150 yards with a 20-45X scope would produce a glimpse of the yellow-orange bill of a Clark's. A bill that is not black could be either species. Second, the flank color was described as light gray. J. Dinsmore suggests (IBL 56:104) that this tends to indicated Clark's but is not diagnostic. The National Geographic guide shows Western with lighter flanks also. J. Dinsmore's article goes on to state that during the fall, Western's can have "some white feathers in front of and around the eye." Thus, on all three main points, this record could be of a Western Grebe.

III, Of the three field marks, the flank color is most subjective and unreliable, especially from 150 yards from the Saylorville Dam. The bill color is said by some (Peterjohn) to be most reliable, but was not seen well (and I think it is a difficult mark to judge). The white above the eye is most reliable in breeding season and least so in fall. A sketch should have been made of the white area--"clearly extended over the eye" is not clear. Nevertheless, I would give this a III because of the white over the eye being so clear at 150 yards.

IV, I have no doubt that this bird had one mark for Clark's Grebe. If it could be seen that the white of the face touched the base of the upper mandible from this distance, why couldn't the bill color be described better than that it "appeared" to be pale. I think that bill color should be fully described along with the color on the face. The paler flanks could be a very subjective field mark, especially at this distance and with nothing to compare it to.

III, If indeed we don't need bill color to confirm this ID, then the lighter flanks and white on face extending above the eye would indicate this to be a Clark's Grebe.

III, white lores diagnostic.

REVOTE: 2-III, 4-IV, 1-no vote

IV, I'll change my vote to be conservative on acceptance of this species. We will be better off if all of our records are beyond doubt. Maybe we should review those that we accepted before.

IV, Bill color is very important in identification of this species and should have considerable weight as a deciding factor in helping to positively ID this bird. This documentation did not (and still does not) convince me that this was not a Western Grebe.

IV, As I understand our comments, the only mark that does ID a Clark's from a Western is bill color and this was not clearly described. The other two marks (face pattern and flanks) can overlap with both species.

III, white lores diagnostic.

no vote, If I voted the ambiguous VII that was error. Let me know.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Clark's Grebe

How Many? 1

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.-above dam

Habitat? resting on large reservoir

Date? 1 Oct 1987

Time? 2:35-3:05 p.m.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50010

Others who saw bird: none

Description of bird: The slim body, long, slender neck, long, thin bill, and black and white coloration identified the bird as a Western/Clark's Grebe. The back, back of the neck, and crown were blackish. The flanks were light gray. The breast, front of the neck, throat, and face were white. The white color on the face clearly extended well above the eye. This white color also touched the base of the upper mandible. The bill color wasn't seen well, but it appeared to be pale (not black). I concluded that the bird was a Clark's Grebe on the basis of the paler flanks and the amount of white on the face.

Similar species and how eliminated: Western Grebe eliminated on the basis of this bird's paler flanks and white color on the face extending well above the eye. I saw numerous Western Grebes at Saylorville this fall, and none of them had nearly as much white on the face as the bird I saw on 1 Oct.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good. Estimated viewing distance was about 150 yards. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen Clark's Grebes on two other occasions in Iowa; 12 Oct 1985 at Big Creek and 30 May 1986 at Hendrickson Marsh.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? none made

How long before this form was completed? 7 hours