

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/20/00

Clark's Grebe

12 Nov 1995

Pleasant Creek L., Linn Co., IA

\*C. Edwards, \*T. Kent, \*J. Fuller

IBL 66:17, 95; Edwards 1996

Record Number: 95-35

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave, North Liberty 52317 [\*3/24/96]

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:17

Records Committee: IBL 66:95

Edwards, C. 1996. Clark's Grebe at Pleasant Creek. IBL 66:138.

VOTE: 7 A-D

95-35

but its small size and white wing linings eliminated this possibility. The Eurasian Curlew, though the right size, has white wing linings and white rump, which eliminated it. The clinching field mark was the ascending killdeer-like "curlee" call that was heard repeatedly as this bird was in the air. The above features combined with the call confirmed my suspicion that this was a Long-billed Curlew.

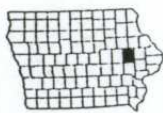
Upon returning home, I made several phone calls to report my finding. Unfortunately by the time I arrived home it was dark and anyone interested in searching for the bird would have to wait until the next day. Though several people looked for the bird, it was not relocated. Long-billed Curlews once nested on the prairies of northwestern Iowa but disappeared in the late 1800s. This is only the fourth record of this species in Iowa since 1960, all from western Iowa.

407 Court, Ida Grove, IA 51445

### CLARK'S GREBE AT PLEASANT CREEK

CHRIS EDWARDS

When I arrived at Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area in Linn County on the morning of 12 November 1995, Alan Martin of Cedar Rapids was searching for a large grebe which he had observed minutes earlier. We quickly relocated the bird and, during the next hour, we identified it as an adult Clark's Grebe based primarily on bill coloration and facial pattern.



The bird had a very long, slender neck and in overall size was approximately the same length as a nearby male White-winged Scoter. The bright orange-yellow bill was long, thin, and straight. The forehead, crown, nape, and hindneck were black, with the black of the crown extending down the side of the face to the top edge of the eye. The eyes were reddish and surrounded by white except for the top edge. The lores were bright white with a thin dark line underneath between the bill and the eye (see Fig. 1). The back was dark gray with some white flecking, and the sides were light gray with much white mottling. The throat, breast, and belly were white. The uppersides of the wings were dark gray with white wing stripes.

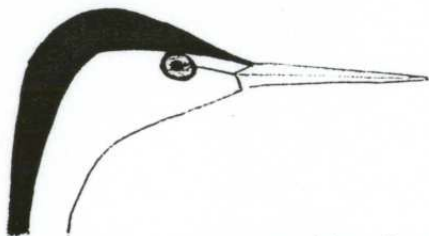


Fig. 1. Clark's Grebe, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area, 12 November 1995. Drawing by Chris Edwards.

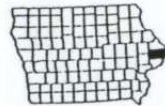
I observed the bird for several hours as it alternated periods of resting with active swimming and diving. It was seen by many other birders and was last reported on 14 November. There are five other Iowa records for Clark's Grebe since 1983, including three in May and one each in October and November (Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 65:86, 1995).

85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

### SABINE'S GULL AT CLINTON

PETER C. PETERSEN

On 22 October 1995, Dennis Carter, Mary Lou, and I were birding at Lock and Dam 13 on the north edge of Clinton. The lock access is from Illinois, and the lock lies about 1 mile from the Iowa shoreline and about 1.5 miles from the Illinois shoreline. In mid-morning, we observed a small gull flying over the channel just upstream from the lock. It was much smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls which were common in the area. It displayed the classic "W" pattern with the six outer primaries and their coverts black, the remaining primaries and the secondaries white to the carpal joint, and most of the secondary coverts grayish-brown. The tail was notched white with a black subterminal band. The head was whitish with a brownish smudge behind the eye and on top of the head; the bill appeared entirely black. Its flight was very light for a gull. The closest observation was from about 80 m, and the bird was in flight for the entire observation. The sky was clear, and the sun behind us. After about two minutes, the bird flew behind a barge coming into the locks toward the Iowa shore and was not seen again. This is the first report of this species from Clinton County.

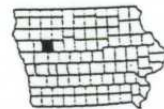


235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803

### LITTLE GULL IN SAC COUNTY

PETER ERNZEN

On the morning of 21 April 1996 I was driving by the southeastern corner of Black Hawk Lake in Sac County when I noticed a small flock of Bonaparte's Gulls. As has been my habit for the last three years, I stopped to look them over for anything unusual. Almost immediately, a small, hooded gull caught my attention. The following observations were made over a 23-minute period from an estimated 30-100 feet.



The bird was small, an estimated 20 percent smaller than Bonaparte's Gull, with a light gray mantle, rounded wings, stocky appearance. The undersides of the wings were a dark gray/black in color with a white trailing edge to the wings. The contrast between the light gray top and dark underwing was prominent.

The head appeared to be smaller than that of a Bonaparte's Gull and possessed a hood with no eye ring. The bill was black, and the feet were dark red. The bird sometimes hovered over the water and moved its feet giving the appearance of running in place. Occasionally in this position the bird dipped its bill into the water.

The other five black-hooded gulls seen in Iowa were eliminated for a variety of reasons. Franklin's and Laughing gulls are larger and darker mantled with a prominent eye ring. Sabine's Gull has a bicolored bill, forked tail, and a different wing pattern. Bonaparte's Gull is slightly darker mantled and larger, with more angular looking wings and a white leading edge to the wings. The Black-headed Gull looks like a bigger version of the Bonaparte's Gull with a dark brown hood and red bill.

After I returned home, I made several phone calls and returned in the late afternoon to search for the bird again. Though I was unable to relocate the bird, Jim Fuller

DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR IOWA BIRD SIGHTINGS

Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty, IA 52317

95-35

What Species? Clark's Grebe

How many? 1

Location? Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area, Linn Co.

Type of Habitat? Lake

When? November 12, 1995, 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. - 1:15 p.m., 1:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Who? Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317.

Others with you: Alan Martin, Pete Wickham, John Daniel, Tom Kent, Dick Tetrault, Dale Fye, Helen Fye.

Others before or after you:

**Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.**

Bill bright orange-yellow, long, thin, and straight. Black forehead, crown, nape, and hindneck, extending down on the side of the head to the top edge of the eye. Lores bright white, with a thin dark line underneath the lores between the bill and the eye. Eye reddish (discernible only at close range), surrounded by white except for the top edge. Back dark gray with some white flecking. Sides light gray with much white mottling. Throat, breast, and belly white. Upperside of wings dark gray with white wing stripe. In size, approximately the same length as nearby male White-winged Scoter, with very long, slender neck.

The bird alternated periods of active swimming and diving with resting. It was observed eating a small fish; preening; stretching its wings; and resting with its bill tucked under one wing. It was not seen in flight. During rapid swimming its head and neck bobbed slightly up and down. No vocalizations were heard.

**Similar species; how eliminated:** Western Grebe has a dull greenish yellow bill; black or gray lores; black or gray surrounding the eye; and a more uniformly dark back and flanks.

**Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification?** No.

**Viewing conditions:** Mostly cloudy; variably 75 - 500 yards away; viewed with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x - 45x telescope.

**Previous experience with species and similar ones:** No previous experience with Clark's Grebe; some experience with Western Grebe.

**References and persons consulted before writing description:** Advanced Birding (Kaufman), National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America

**How long before field notes made?** Immediately

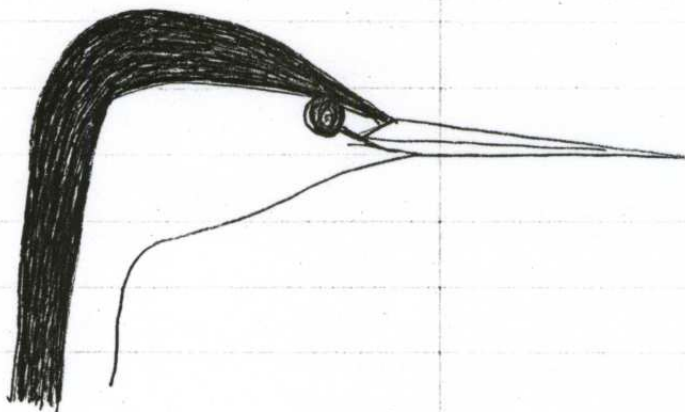
**How long before this form completed?** One hour.

Also see attached sketch of bird.

95-35

CHRIS EDWARDS  
85 WHITMAN AVE.  
NORTH LIBERTY, IA 52317

SKETCH OF CLARK'S GREBE  
OBSERVED AT PLEASANT CREEK, LINN CO.  
NOVEMBER 12, 1995



95-35

CHRIS EDWARDS

85 WHITMAN AVE.

NORTH LIBERTY, IA 52317

SKETCH OF CLARK'S GREBE  
OBSERVED AT PLEASANT CREEK, LINN CO.  
NOVEMBER 12, 1995



95-35

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

**Species:** Clark's Grebe; **Number:** 1

**Location:** Pleasant Creek L.

**Date:** 12 November 1995; **Time:** 2:15 to 3:40 p.m.

**Name and address:** Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

**Others before/with/after:** found by Chris Edwards and Allen Martin; present with me were Edwards, Pete Wickham, John Daniel, Dick Tetrault, Dale Fye, and Helen Fye.

**Habitat and circumstances:** artificial, deep-water lake

**Description of bird:** Chris had the bird in his scope when I got there. It was a large grebe, longer than a scaup, much longer than a Ruddy Duck, but shorter and less bulky than a White-winged Scoter. Immediately obvious was the bright yellow-orange bill. This remained obvious during the entire viewing period. The bird opened its mouth several times, as if yawning, and clearly revealed that both upper and lower mandibles were orange-yellow throughout without a hint of dark or green color. Also obvious was the whiteness of the flanks, with over 50% white splotchy appearance. The back was light gray not black. The top of the head and a narrow streak down the back of the neck were black. The eye was hard for me to see. There was a thin white streak in the loreal area that could be seen from a great distance. It extended from the upper base of the bill upward and backward toward the eye. It took me a long time to see the eye as well as I wanted to in spite of others saying that they could see it clearly. With Fye's zoom eyepiece, I finally got a very good look. The eye was in the white area of the face and appeared to just touch the black cap. The white streak was in front of the eye with a thin black streak below, which extended from the eye toward the bill. The area behind the eye was entirely white. The back cap appeared small and did not appear to reach the bill when viewed head on. The bird swam, slept, and dove. Occasionally it lowered and stretched its neck just above the surface of the water as if displaying.

**Voice:** not heard

**Similar species:** Of the three field marks that separate Clark's from Western Grebe, bill color is apparently the most reliable. The yellow-orange color of this bird's bill was as distinctive as I have ever seen on a Clark's Grebe. The face pattern is more variable, but this bird had white lores and eye surrounded by white, which puts it out of the spectrum of Western Grebe. The white sides are less reliable, but were very impressive on this bird.

**Any one have reservations?:** no

**Light:** cloudy; **Distance:** 150 to 300 yards (guess); **Optics:** 20x and zoom scopes.

**Previous experience:** I have seen and photographed Clark's Grebes in California and Colorado. I was able to study a Western Grebe earlier in the fall and note the darker yellow-green bill, black encompassing the eye, and dark sides.

**References before/after viewing:** We looked at Advanced Birding and National Geographic Guide while viewing. I looked at my photos of Clark's and Western grebes after typing the above.

**Time of notes:** during observation; **Final typing:** 20 hours.

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DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Clark's Grebe

LOCATION: Pleasant Creek Recreation Area (Linn County)

DATE & TIME: 13 November (7:20-7:45 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, 52240

OTHERS: Reported on 12 November by Chris Edwards and Allen Martin. There at the same time was Jim Scheib. Others were Tom Kent, E. & E. Armstrong.

DESCRIPTION: The bird was with a flock of Lesser Scaup. It was noticeably larger (longer) with a longer neck than the nearby Scaup. It was generally black and white. The side of the head, sides and front the of neck, and the front of the breast were white, while the cap and hindneck were black. The back was gray, and noticeably lighter than the black of the neck and cap. On the side of the face, the white completely enclosed the eye, and extended in front of the eye to the bill (white lores). The eye appeared dark, and I could not determine a red color. The flanks appeared quite light. The black on the side of the neck was quite thin, and when viewed directly from the rear, the black strip on the hindneck spread out to form a "T" at the top of the back of the head. The bill was a bright yellow-orange, dagger like, and its length appeared to be about the same as the width of the head. The bird was not diving any of the time, rather just drifting, sometimes with its head tucked in. No voice was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The evening after this sighting, I read Kim Eckert's articles on identification of Western and Clark's Grebes in "Birding", October, 1993, and February, 1995. He listed ten features differentiating the two species. Of the ten, three (Territorial Call, Chicks, and Flight feathers) could not be observed. Of the additional seven, my observations and field notes had described five, all of which favored Clark's Grebe. Bill color is called by Eckert the single most reliable field mark (Bright appearing and yellow-orange in Clark's and dull appearing and yellow-green in Western). Other field marks were the white entirely enclosing the eye, the white lores, the small amount of black on the side of the neck, and the light flanks

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was early morning, and I was looking mostly to the northwest. The day was clear and the rising sun was pretty much to my back. I was using a KOWA-TSN4 telescope (20-60 X zoom lens), mostly at 20-25 X. The distance was from 80-150 yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this species on the west coast several times.

FIELD NOTES and REFERENCES: I made field notes in the car as I watched the bird. This form was typed on 20 November. I looked at National Geographic and "Advanced Birding" while viewing the bird, and later read ID articles in "Birding" by Kim Eckert.