

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Red-necked Grebe (juvenile/first winter)

Location: Jester Park, Saylorville Lake, Polk Co., Iowa

Habitat: Open water

Date: October 28, 1990

Time: 12:45 p.m. to 1:05 p.m.

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: None at the time

Description of bird: This bird was identified as a grebe because of the way it sat higher in the water and had a flatter head than a loon, its long, thin neck, and the way it held its head flat and straight. The bill was about the same length as the head, straight, and yellow. A dark gray cap, which began at the bill and obstructed the eye, contrasted with the white in the cheek area. The gray extended down the back of the neck to a dark gray body. The white cheek had a little bit of fine, darker streaking across it. One heavier streak which angled down from just below the eye toward the back of the neck more notable than others - no doubt some residual juvenal feathering. The white on the cheek extended a bit higher than the eyeline. The cheek patch included the chin and throat, but the foreneck was streaked with rust with more rust showing towards the breast. During the time of observation, the grebe was compared in size to several birds near it. It was larger than American Coot, Ring-necked Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, and Bonaparte's Gull and was smaller than Common Loon. Because of the light streaking observed in the cheek area, particularly the heavier one, this was probably a bird of the year molting into first winter plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Loons were eliminated on the basis of thin neck and posture. Cormorants were eliminated because of straight posture, lack of throat patch, and basic plumage configurations. The bird was obviously larger than a Pied-billed Grebe which would, in addition to the yellow bill, eliminate all but Western Grebe. Western Grebe would have looked much larger than the various waterfowl nearby and would not have shown any rust color on the neck.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? NA

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): The sun was to my right. There was no glare from the water, but heat waves interfered with observations as the bird moved further away. Initial sighting at about 30x showed good detail. I guessed the distance at 500 yards, but that is really a shot in the dark as it was hard to judge the distance across the water. Observation was through a B&L scope at 30x-45x.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen several Red-necked Grebes in alternate plumage. Comparisons were made with Pied-billed and Horned grebes at time of observation.

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References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic Society's Birds of North America was consulted during observation. Harrison's Seabirds was consulted regarding juvenile/first winter plumages.

How long before field notes made? Description dictated during observation How long before this form completed? Documentation completed upon return home