

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Red-necked grebe (Adult, almost in breeding plumage)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, RR#6, Iowa City, 52240

LOCATION: Pleasant Creek Lake State Park, Linn County

DATE(S): April 1, 1991 5:43PM to 6:22 PM (Off and on)

OTHER OBSERVERS: Keith Carris, Cedar Rapids

BACKGROUND: Keith Carris reported a red-necked grebe at this location to the Iowa Birdline. The observation was the morning of April 1. After work that day I drove to Pleasant Creek arriving late in the day. It was a sunny day, and the large number of waterfowl was found in the middle of the lake, and on that portion of the lake where the dam is located. I went to the parking lot at the west side of the lake, and thus was able to look toward the east with the sun at my back. In a short time I found a bird in the midst of the other waterfowl that had a very obvious white cheek area, and it was larger than the ruddy ducks in the vicinity. I scoped this bird off and on for about 45 minutes, until the sun went down. The bird only paddled around, sometimes with its head tucked under the wing, but it was never seen to dive, although the horned grebes on the lake were continually feeding. Optical equipment used was a KOWA TSN4 telescope (20-60 X) zoom lens with car window mount. Distance was about 125-200 yards.

DESCRIPTION: The general size was compared to that of other waterfowl which were nearby. It was noticeably larger than the ruddy ducks, American coots, bufflehead. It was also larger, but not by as much than the lesser scaup, and ring necked ducks. The only duck that was of comparable size was the shoveler. It was a generally dark bird, especially on the back, with the most obvious field marks being a sharply defined white face patch, which was widest toward the neck, and tapered to a point at the bill, and a rusty redness on the front and sides of the neck. This redness was not as spectacular as some birds I have seen on the nesting area in Minnesota. It appeared that the bird had almost finished the change from basic plumage, but it was not quite complete. The neck was rather long and thin, and was dark on the back, as well as on the top of the head. The bill was long and dagger like, and was a yellow-orange color. The flanks of the swimming bird were gray and contrasted with the darker back. The head was pointed behind the eye, and seemed to be somewhat flat on top of the head, as compared to the relatively rounded heads of the other waterfowl in the area.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The red neck and white face patch eliminate any of the other larger or smaller grebes. The ruddy duck has a white face patch (of different shape) but has a much rounder head and very different shaped ducklike bill, and is smaller in general size.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have often spent a week fishing in Minnesota in June on lakes that had breeding red-necked grebes, and observed them closely from a boat. I also saw one in breeding plumage 5/6/~~91~~₆₉ on this same lake, in nearly the same spot on the lake.

REFERENCES and FIELD NOTES: Notes were made immediately, and no field guide was consulted until later that evening. The field notes were written up that evening, and were typed on March 29.