

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Unusual Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Red-necked Grebe

Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County, IA

Habitat: Open deep water

Date: 22 November 1993

Time: 16:30 to 16:40

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

Other Observers: Found by Bery Engebretsen on 21 November, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong on 22 November

Description of bird: The bird had been discovered the previous day so I was looking specifically for a bird intermediate in size between the Horned and Western, both of which were present in this location. As the light was beginning to fade, I saw a shape among a number of mergansers which looked promising. With the scope at about 40X for as long as the light held, I observed a bird similar in size to Hooded Mergansers and smaller than Common Mergansers. The bird held its long neck and head very erect. The head appeared almost over-sized for the rest of the bird. The size was accentuated by a large, straight, dagger-like bill. The head was somewhat flat on top. Color was difficult to ascertain in the fading light and at this distance, but the general color was gray. The top of the head, nape, and back were darker than the rest of the body. The neck and face were dingy gray but a lighter cheek patch was evident. I could not see any light line angling up behind the eye, leading me to believe this was probably a first-winter bird.

Similar species and how eliminated: The long, thin neck eliminated ducks and loons and convinced me that the shape of the bird was most certainly a grebe. Western/Clark's shows white rather than gray on the chin, neck, and breast and is larger. Horned Grebes are smaller and also are white on the underparts. Pied-billed could be eliminated by the size and shape of the bill alone. Although fall Eared Grebes are fairly gray, the size equaling Hooded Mergansers and the large bill allowed me to eliminate that species.

Viewing conditions (light, distance, optics): Optics consisted of spotting scope with 15X60 zoom eyepiece. Sky was overcast and beginning to get dark which did not create optimum viewing conditions. The bird was observed at approximately 1000 yards.

Previous experience: Fall plumage bird observed at this location a few years ago.

References consulted during observation: NGS Guide

References consulted before completing documentation: NGS Guide, Peterson's Field Guide

Field notes made: On return home

Documentation completed: Same day