

# General Field Notes

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## Eared Grebe Collected at Wrightsville Beach, N.C.

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The first recorded observation of an Eared Grebe (*Podiceps caspicus*) in North Carolina was at Wrightsville Beach on 13 December 1964 (*Chat*, 30:25-26). This bird was photographed but not collected. A bird seen by Micou Brown and Philip Warren on 31 December 1967 at Pea Island on the North Carolina "outer banks" (*Chat*, 32:45) was the second North Carolina record. On 25 April 1971 an Eared Grebe was seen by J.F. Parnell and others while conducting a spring bird count near Southport (*Chat*, 35:74-81). These three observations of single birds are the only published records for North Carolina prior to 4 March 1972. On this date Parnell and Soots discovered an Eared Grebe in the Inland Waterway adjacent to Wrightsville Beach. On 7 March 1972 the bird was collected. The skin is now number B282 in the collection of the Biology Department of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. The bird was a male in the process of molting to the breeding plumage. The neck was essentially dark and the long tawny feathers that form the "ear" were obvious but not well developed. This is the expected plumage, as Palmer (*Handbook of North American Birds*, 1962, p.80) indicates that the molt begins in February and is completed in March or early April. On 28 March 1972 Carter discovered two Eared Grebes in Banks Channel at Wrightsville Beach about 1 mile from the site where the grebe was collected. On 29 March three Eared Grebes were seen there by Frances Needham (pers. com.), and on 30 March four were located there by Kitty Kosh and Dot Earle (pers. com.). A single bird was present until 10 April 1972 (pers. com., Frances Needham). The Eared Grebes were generally in the company of Horned Grebes (*P. auritus*) and Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*) and were quite easy to approach. Photographs of three of the grebes were secured by Parnell. All were in the process of molting to the breeding plumage and were easily separable from the nearby Horned Grebes.

This western grebe has been increasing in the eastern United States for several years. In 1966 Paul Buckley (*Audubon Field Notes*, 22:536-542) reviewed the status of the

Eared Grebe in the eastern Great Lakes and along the Atlantic Coast. He found about 30 pre-1957 sight records and about 130 records between 1957 and 1966. Since 1966 scattered records in the regional reports of *Audubon Field Notes* (now *American Birds*) indicate that this trend of increased numbers of Eared Grebes along the Atlantic Coast in winter and early spring has continued. The recent North Carolina observations fit into this pattern and suggest that this species may be expected along our coast more regularly in future winters.

## **Horned Grebes in Mutual Display During Northward Migration**

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The morning of 7 April 1973 the ocean off Kill Devil Hills, N.C., was perfectly calm. There were no breakers, and the surface was so flat and smooth that it reflected the sky. I scanned the water with a 30X Balscope, and as far as I could see up and down the shore and eastward toward the horizon the ocean was dotted with Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*), mostly single birds in some stage of acquiring the nuptial tufts at the sides of the crown. Although the birds dived, bathed, preened, and rested, they were moving northward in an unhurried procession. As the birds that were at first directly in front of my position atop a sand dune moved out of sight to the north, more grebes steadily moved into view from the south. The birds generally ignored each other and remained spaced well apart, but two Horned Grebes were seen standing upright on the water face to face. Apparently in complete breeding plumage, they maintained this posture for at least a full minute, giving my wife ample opportunity to see the display. Neither Palmer (*Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 1, 1962) nor Bent (*Life Histories of North American Diving Birds*, 1919) mentions the occurrence of mutual displays among Horned Grebes during spring migration. Palmer (*Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 1, 1962, p. 76-77) says there is a slight suggestion from a few birds collected in Ontario that the male arrives on the breeding ground in advance of the female. My observation suggests that some birds seek mates during northward migration.

## **Third Sight Record of Great Cormorant from North Carolina**

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10 April 1973

While driving eastward on the bridge across Croatan Sound between Manns Harbor, N.C., and Roanoke Island on the afternoon of 6 April 1973, we saw 100 or more Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) flying, fishing, and resting near the bridge. Two cormorants that seemed larger than the others approached from the north in flight, and Jack Potter noted a white belly on one of the birds. As the pair flew over the bridge directly in front of the car, Eloise Potter was able to see the light throat, cinnamon breast, and white belly of an immature Great Cormorant (*P. carbo*). We stopped at the end of the bridge, consulted our field guides (primarily *Birds of North America* by Robbins et al.), and agreed that we had seen an immature Great Cormorant well enough to be confident of its identity. The accompanying cormorant had dark underparts and is presumed to have been a Double-crested because we saw no white on the chin, belly, or thighs; however, the other bird may have been a subadult Great