

General Field Notes

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NOTICE

Publication of any unusual sightings of birds in the Field Notes or Briefs for the Files does not imply that these reports have been accepted into the official Checklist of Birds records for either North or South Carolina. Decisions regarding the official Checklists are made by the respective State Records Committees and will be reported upon periodically in THE CHAT.

Western Grebe at Cape Hatteras, N.C.

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Paul Lehman and several other officers of the American Birding Association were birding at the large tidal pond at Cape Hatteras point, N.C., on 8 November 1993. They observed a Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) at leisure, and Shawneen Finnegan and Ken Hollinga obtained photographs.

The bird was seen on both 9 and 10 November by other birders, and I observed it on 11 November with Russ Tyndall. We saw the bird from 150 to 300 yards for at least 20 minutes.

The bird was quite obvious to the naked eye, with its foot-long white neck with a narrow black line along the back of the neck immediately apparent. The upperparts were black and sharply contrasting with the white of the lower parts of the head and neck. The head had black feathers that extended downward to include the feathers that surrounded the bright red eye; a black tuft on the top of the head was quite noticeable. The long bill, about the length of the head, was slightly upturned and was a greenish-yellow or straw yellow in color. The bird's back was hardly longer than the length of the neck, which was held erect or with a slight swan-like curve. The back was black but shaded to a mottled blackish color toward the rump.

At one point, we watched a Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) swim adjacent to the Western Grebe. The Pied-billed Grebe appeared to be about

50–60% of the body length of the Western Grebe, and its neck was probably less than half as tall as that of the Western Grebe.

The Western Grebe remained on the pond until mid-December, and it was seen by dozens of birders. It disappeared for several weeks, but was re-discovered on the adjacent ocean on 29 December by Steve Dinsmore.

There are several previous sight records of “Western Grebe”, essentially all of which were observed before the taxon was split into two species—the Western Grebe and the Clark’s Grebe (*Aechmophorus clarkii*). The North Carolina Bird Records Committee has accepted only one of these records, the Western species. Clark’s Grebe is essentially unreported in the eastern United States. The Western Grebe has black coloration of the face that includes the feathers surrounding the eyes, and it has a greenish-yellow bill; the Clark’s Grebe has less black on the face such that the eye is surrounded by white feathers, and the bill is a bright orange-yellow color.

This is the first record of Western Grebe that has been documented by photographs in North Carolina. Because the species currently is listed on the Provisional List, the written descriptions from Paul Lehman and the author, and photographs taken by Shawneen Fennegan, will be reviewed by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee.

Spring Migration of Seabirds off Central North Carolina: 22 May 1992, with Notes on two Skua (*Catharacta*) Taxa

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The concentration of pelagic seabirds and other marine biota along frontal eddies of the western edge of the Gulf Stream in the northern summer is a well-documented phenomenon (Haney and McGillivray 1985, Haney 1986a-c) and is well-known to sports fishermen in the Southern Atlantic Bight. Less material has been published, however, on the concentration of migrants along this front in the northern spring. The timing of the spring migration varies over the three-week period extending from the second week in May through about the first week in June at these latitudes, with significant but lesser movement of terns, jaegers, skuas, shearwaters, and storm-petrels on either side of this period. An excursion of 22 May 1992 yielded a diversity and density of species that advances our assessment of spring bird migration off North Carolina.

This accounting of an OBServ Tour aboard the *Country Girl* out of Manteo includes commentary on a large aggregation of Arctic and Roseate Terns (*Sterna paradisaea* and *S. dougallii*) for North Carolina, as well as notes on a skua of the Great Skua complex (*Catharacta skua/antarctica*) observed. Inasmuch as relatively few public pelagic excursions have been chartered off North Carolina’s Outer Banks in the spring, this information may be useful to students of seabirds planning spring excursions in the future.