

Nesting Brown Creepers Found in Williams County

by Jeff Grabmeier

Peterjohn and Rice (1991) recorded only four confirmed nestings of brown creepers in the state between 1982 and 1987. Given their rarity as breeding birds in Ohio, I was pleased to confirm nesting of a pair of brown creepers in May 1999 at Lake La Su An Wildlife Area in Williams County. The breeding creepers are especially significant for northwest Ohio; none of the confirmed nestings in the Atlas project took place in this area, and only three possible attempts were recorded in this quadrant of the state.

I first suspected creepers nesting at Lake La Su An in 1998, when I observed a pair between June 20 and June 22. I found them in a shallow swamp of dead trees on the west side of Lake La Su An. Because the trees were leafless and had few limbs, the birds were easy to observe. The two often fed together on the same tree, calling frequently, the male occasionally singing a full song. Every few minutes, one bird would chase the other around the swamp. Ehrlich et al. (1988) list chases as part of the courtship ritual for the species. Peterjohn and Rice (1991) state that all nests with eggs in Ohio have been found in May, so if this pair had indeed been breeding, they may have been getting a late start or making a second nesting attempt. Unfortunately, I was unable to check for the creepers any more that summer.

This year, I first noticed a pair on May 15 in the same swamp where I found them last year. On both May 15, and 16, I observed two adults carrying food behind the loose peeling bark of one of the dead trees—evidence confirming nesting. Ehrlich et al. (1988) state that brown creeper nests are usually found behind loose bark, and between 3 and 50 feet high. This nest was 20 to 25 feet above the water. Because of the nest's height and position in the swamp, I was unable to get closer looks or see any fledglings inside.

I was next able to visit the site a week later on May 23. I heard creepers in the woods surrounding the swamp, but saw no more than two at a time, though there could well have been more. I also observed one or more creepers in the same vicinity on May 30, June 13, and July 10. I also heard creeper calls on all of these dates and a full song on May 30. However, I saw no indication of a renesting attempt on any of these dates.

Evidence suggests that brown creepers are slowly expanding their range southward into Ohio (Peterjohn and Rice, 1991). The nesting attempts at Lake La Su An are certainly consistent with that trend, and point to the hope that these birds may become more frequent breeders in the state.

REFERENCES

- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook*. Simon & Schuster/Fireside.
- Peterjohn, B. G., and D. L. Rice. 1991. *The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas*. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.



Western Grebe, East Fork SP, Clermont Co., 27 January 1999. Photo by Frank Renfrow.

A Western Grebe at East Fork State Park

by Hank Armstrong

On 20 January 1999, I was to attend a meeting at East Fork State Park with Charlie Clark, the park manager. Realizing I was early, I drove down to the swimming beach to check out the lake for waterfowl that might have arrived during the night. There was a large group of ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls on the beach, and others flying out over the 2100-acre lake. On the water were several species of waterfowl and two species of grebes. Nothing too exciting, I thought, and drove over to the western edge of the large parking lot to check a cove at the foot of the hill. There I quickly discovered a large raft of horned and pied-billed grebes feeding. In plain view among them was a much larger grebe. I was sure it was either a Clark's or a western grebe. The bird was about 75 yards away, and with the morning light behind me and through my spotting scope I was able to pick up the color of the bill, which appeared greenish-yellow. After seeing the bird's black cap came just below the level of the eye, I felt sure it was a western grebe. This species is an extremely rare vagrant to Ohio, even more so away from Lake Erie.

I have seen both species in breeding plumage in the western states, but never in winter plumage. In winter, ID is more challenging, because the facial patterns tend not to be so dark and well-defined as in the breeding season. A call to our bird club hotline quickly brought out several members to help confirm the sighting. I live just twenty minutes from the lake, and went home for lunch. When I returned in early afternoon, bringing along two articles by Kim Eckert from *Birding* magazine, there were over a dozen members of the club gathered at the water's edge. In one article Eckert states "An out-of-range *Aechmophorus* grebe probably should be identified only if the bill color is clearly seen and unambiguous and if it is noted in combination with other field marks, especially the facial pattern." Our grebe's facial pattern was typical for western grebe: the black cap completely surrounded the eye area, and the lores were dark gray, not white as in Clark's grebe. The edge of the cap extended fairly straight along the head, whereas Clark's describes more of an S-curve. The bill color, seen