

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

now without the tints of early morning light, clearly revealed the duller greenish-yellow of western grebe, not the orange-yellow of Clark's. The back and flanks were blackish-gray, as were the wings. Our bird was in late basic plumage.

With so many birders around, something else good was bound to turn up. First was an oldsquaw. The 50+ horned grebes and 40+ pied-billed grebes on the lake were themselves very unusual for this time of year. The sightings were posted on the internet that day, and more birders visited the lake the next day, among them Vic Fazio, who while watching the grebe heard a call which he recognized as a little gull's. Soon we found a first-year little gull feeding with several Bonaparte's gulls. Both the grebe and the gull were firsts for the area, and the gull was a lifer for me. During the grebe's unprecedented ten-week stay, several hundred tri-state birders came to have a look at this rarity, and the gull was an extra treat.

At times all three species of grebe and the little gull were in a single field of vision through my scope; now, that is something to experience! The following week a Harris's sparrow was discovered just over the state line in Indiana not more than forty miles from the lake. What a way to start the year's birding!

During the next few weeks the western grebe was never seen in flight. Most of the time it fed in the company of several horned and pied-billed grebes. As the weeks passed, the grebe did a lot of preening, and began to spend more time away from the cove, feeding further out in the lake. After the other grebes had all left the lake, the western grebe was seen resting and diving for food in the company of a common loon. They favored a new area near the saddle dam, a construction of large rocks further to the west. As the weeks turned into months, the bird became more elusive. The boating traffic increased from virtually none to constant activity throughout the day. Still, no one ever saw the bird take flight. The only time it was heard calling was when Frank Renfrow was observing it from the road above the saddle dam on 22 March.

One of the most interesting observations I made during the first week or so was the interaction between the gulls and the grebes. Each morning shortly after daylight, the gulls began to congregate in the cove where the majority of the grebes chose to feed. They coursed back and forth until a grebe surfaced, then descended on it to try to steal its catch. The little gull was often seen resting on the water among the grebes, where it was quite adept at picking morsels from the surface. On occasion it hovered overhead before diving on a grebe, and at other times it landed on the lake and picked peacefully at the surface for food. When during their feeding episodes all the gulls cried out, the little gull could be heard calling a soft "kek-kek." Its call was not loud or strong, and among hungry ring-billeds it was tough to pick it out with my old ears!

The little gull was last seen on February 6th, and the most accommodating western grebe was last sighted on 21 April 1999.

REFERENCES

- Eckert, K. 1993. Identification of Western and Clark's Grebes. *Birding* 25: 304-310.
Eckert, K. 1995. Western and Clark's Grebes. *Birding* 27: 54-55.

Recent Actions of the Ohio Bird Records Committee

The eleven-member Ohio Bird Records Committee (OBRC) exists to increase knowledge of Ohio's birdlife by validating bird records, maintaining for the public archives of bird occurrences, and establishing the official state list of bird species. Like *The Ohio Cardinal*, it relies vitally upon the voluntary participation of the birding public in submitting records. Jim McCormac, the OBRC's Secretary, furnished us with the following information on actions taken by the OBRC during his tenure.

ACCEPTED RECORDS: Documentation received for the following species was judged sufficient to verify the record by at least nine members of the Committee:

Western Grebe—Clermont County, Jan 1999	Black-headed Gull—Cuyahoga County, Mar 1998
Northern Gannet—Lake County, Dec 1998	Black-headed Gull—Ashtabula County, Mar 1998
Magnificent Frigatebird—Ottawa County, Oct 1998	Mew Gull—Lake County, Jan 1998
White Ibis I—Wyandot County, July 1998	California Gull—Lorain County, Dec 1997
White Ibis II—Wyandot County, July 1998	Ross's Gull—Ashtabula County, Dec 1997
Glossy Ibis—Erie County, Jun 1997	Ross's Gull—Lake County, Nov 1998
Glossy Ibis—Brown County, Oct 1997	Rufous Hummingbird—Lake County, Jun 1997
Glossy Ibis—Lake County, Oct 1998	Rufous Hummingbird—Lake County, Nov 1998
Ross's Goose—Wyandot County, Nov 1998	Say's Phoebe—Knox County, Dec 1997
Ross's Goose—Ashtabula County, Nov 1998	Western Kingbird—Wyandot County, Jun 1998
Eurasian Wigeon—Ottawa County, Apr 1998	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher—Ottawa County, May 1998
Eurasian Wigeon—Erie County, Apr 1998	Common Raven—Lake County, Mar 1998
Eurasian Wigeon—Wayne County, Apr 1998	Bewick's Wren—Pike County, Apr 1998
King Eider—Lake County, Mar 1998	Northern Wheatear—Marion County, Nov 1998
Long-tailed Jaeger—Lucas County, May 1997	Swainson's Warbler—Ottawa County, Apr 1998
Long-tailed Jaeger—Lake County, Sep 1998	Le Conte's Sparrow—Lorain County, Oct 1997

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED: Documentation in hand for the following species received fewer than six votes to accept; such votes, it is important to note, do not reflect upon the sighting itself, but on the adequacy of the documentation to validate it for the permanent record.

Northern Gannet—Lorain County, Nov 1998	Parasitic Jaeger—Lake County, Jan 1997
Tufted Duck—Wayne County, Mar 1998	Black-headed Gull—Lake County, Jan 1997
Ferruginous Hawk—Darke County, Dec 1997	California Gull—Ashtabula County, Nov 1998
Gyr Falcon—Lake County, Feb 1997	California Gull—Lorain County, Nov 1998
Yellow Rail—Lake County, Sep 1998	California Gull—Lorain County, Nov 1998
Northern Lapwing—Ashtabula County, Mar 1997	Least Tern—Lucas County, Jun 1998
Spotted Redshank—Hamilton County, Aug 1996	Townsend's Solitaire—Wyandot County, Feb 1997
American Oystercatcher—Lake County, Sep 1996	Virginia's Warbler—Cuyahoga County, May 1997

RECORDS IN RECIRCULATION: Three records are currently being recirculated, the first two by virtue of having received from 6 to 8 votes to accept, and the third by request of a Committee member. A fourth report, having completed recirculation without a final decision, will be considered at the next annual meeting in Mar 2000.

Common Raven—Trumbull County, Apr 1999	Glaucous-winged Gull—Cuyahoga County, Jan 1989
MacGillivray's Warbler—Stark County, Jan 1999	Gyr Falcon—Lucas County, Apr 1998