

## GENERAL NOTES

**Western Grebe in Massachusetts.**—While we were walking on the south, or Newburyport, shore of the Merrimack River, at its mouth, December 16, 1936, a large bird came rapidly up the river on the incoming tide, apparently in midstream and perhaps a quarter of a mile away. As soon as we got a fair view of it through binoculars and telescope, it became evident that the bird was a Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*). We had it under observation for some time, though it soon got too far away for detailed study. The neck was long and slender and pure white except for the black of the nape, and the white covered the throat and the sides of the head, leaving the crown black. The head had a squarish appearance at the occiput as viewed from the front and from behind. The bill was yellow or yellowish. Two or three times a large black foot showed briefly behind, extended like a tail. We had seen Mr. Joseph A. Hagar, State Ornithologist of Massachusetts, on the farther, Salisbury, shore of the river, and we drove round there at once over the bridge. The bird was found not far from the head of the Salisbury breakwater, and Mr. Hagar launched a canoe he had brought to Salisbury Beach for collecting purposes and set out in an endeavor to collect the bird. He was, however, unsuccessful in the attempt, though he saw it as close as thirty-five yards and obtained a single shot at it. It finally disappeared somewhere in the large expanse of the harbor after a chase of more than an hour.

Although the bird was not collected, all three of us, including Mr. Hagar, who noted all the diagnostic marks that we saw, except the feet, are convinced that we identified it absolutely as a Western Grebe. None of us had ever seen the species in life, but the size, shape, and markings of our bird seemed to us unmistakable evidence of its identity. The bird was clearly a grebe, and we are all thoroughly familiar with Holboell's Grebe, the only other American species approaching the Western Grebe in size.

*Aechmophorus occidentalis* has been taken but once on the Atlantic Coast. The record of a female taken in South Carolina in June, 1936, and presented to the Charleston Museum was published in 'The Auk' for October, 1936, page 438. There are, however, several reports of individuals seen further north on this coast, reports that we feel may properly be cited as rather definite records. Two of these have already been published. One is given by Ludlow Griscom in his 'Birds of the New York City Region' (p. 384, 1923), where he includes this species in his Hypothetical List with the statement: "Messrs. Rogers, Hix, and Fleischer report a most satisfactory identification of a bird of this species at Long Beach [Long Island], May 21, 1916. It was just outside the surf, and all conditions of observation were exceptionally favorable. They were all well acquainted with the Holboell's Grebe in life, and Mr. Rogers had had field experience with the Great Crested Grebe of Europe. The great size, long, swan-like neck and black and white coloration were all observed at leisure. . . . There seems to be no reason to doubt the identification of a field ornithologist of such wide and lengthy experience as Mr. Rogers, and the occurrence is worthy of serious consideration." The other published sight record is that of the bird seen May 30, 1922, at Ipswich, Massachusetts, by S. Gilbert Emilio and recorded in the 'Bulletin' of the Essex County Ornithological Club (pp. 59-62, 1922). Mr. Emilio had never before seen a Western Grebe, but his observation of the bird convinced him of its identity, and we learn that later after meeting with the species

in the West he has not the remotest doubt about it. Mr. Emilio's reputation as a careful and competent field ornithologist is such that we believe his record is entirely trustworthy.

Two more recent sight records we are permitted to quote from the advance proofs of 'Birds of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts,' by Aaron C. Bagg and Samuel A. Eliot, Jr., soon to be published: "On December 15, 1934, Mr. Albert Dietrich of Feeding Hills was looking for waterfowl along the Agawam shore of the [Connecticut] River. Arriving at the south-end bridge to Springfield, he flushed a number of American Mergansers and Green-winged Teal from a small area of open water at the mouth of the Westfield River, but a large Grebe, not at all afraid, remained there, and was studied with a 10x glass, in good light, 'at a distance of not more than 35 yards.' 'A diving bird, very much "all neck" or like a small swan in shape' was Mr. Dietrich's first impression. Mr. William M. Remington of Springfield, being sent for, brought Reed's and Peterson's 'Field Guides' to the spot and made the identification at once: the bird was not more than 60 yards from him, it was shaped nothing like a Loon, and was too large, and not properly colored, for a Holboell's Grebe. 'Its large size and very long, swan-like neck, which looked as if it had once been snow-white, till a brushfull of black paint had been passed down its back, and also its yellow bill, placed it definitely,' he writes. . . . He telephoned Miss Fannie A. Stebbins in West Springfield, and she later studied the bird independently and writes confirming all the above diagnostic features, except that to her the bill did not look definitely yellow. 'It was very long, slender, sharp, and dark near the base and at the tip but a light horn-color between. The-bird reminded me of a Horned (rather than Holboell's) Grebe, but Mergansers were at hand for size-comparison. A little white showed above the water-line near the tail. I watched the bird catch and swallow several fish. There is no other species it could possibly have been.' In the afternoon, alas, it had disappeared.

"On Feb. 29, 1936, Mr. Willard D. Leshure of Longmeadow climbed a snowbank in the northwest corner of that town (or southwest corner of Springfield) to see what waterfowl there might be in an open 'lead' in the River close under the steep shore. Several Mergansers, a White-winged Scoter, and—nearest of all, just the other side of the railroad tracks—a Western Grebe! The eleven o'clock sun was behind the observer, the bird not more than 50 yards obliquely below him, and he knew at first glance what it must be. . . . He noted the great size, light-colored bill, pure white and solid black coloration, and even the rudimentary 'horns,' consciously eliminating both Holboell's Grebe and Red-throated Loon. Apprised by him, Miss Alice M. Bowen went in the afternoon and saw the bird, recognizing it beyond any possible doubt from experience in California. . . . Mr. Dietrich's discovery, followed by positive identification by two thoroughly competent bird-students, and Mr. Leshure's immediate recognition of another winter stray, corroborated by Miss Bowen's Western experience, seem to us to constitute unquestionable records, and we venture to number the Western Grebe among our certainties."

So much for the Connecticut Valley. It seems to us that our Newburyport-Salisbury Western Grebe was so positively identified as to warrant publication of the record for whatever a sight record may be worth. We feel, moreover, that the cumulative evidence of the occurrence of the species in Massachusetts and New York in the last twenty years should now entitle it to be regarded as at least an accidental visitor to this region. While museum specimens are certainly desirable in such cases, there is much to be said in favor of an extension of confidence in the trustworthiness of sight records to cover thoroughly observed occurrences, especially

of such birds as grebes and loons, which are notoriously hard to collect in our winter waters.—FRANCIS H. ALLEN, *West Roxbury, Mass.*; WINSOR M. TYLER, M.D., *112 Pinckney St., Boston, Mass.*

POSTSCRIPT.—After the foregoing note was written, further events occurred at Newburyport and elsewhere on our coast which make a postscript necessary. On March 27, 1937, again at the mouth of the Merrimack but outside of the south jetty, two Western Grebes were seen by Carl W. Buchheister, Laurence B. Fletcher, and Mr. and Mrs. S. Morris Pell. None of the observers had known the species in life, but after consulting books and examining specimens at the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy they felt sure of the identification. They notified S. Gilbert Emilio, of the Peabody Museum, Salem, who visited the place the next day with Ernest S. Dodge and found the two birds there, identifying them fully as Western Grebes from previous experience and knowledge. Here they were seen the same day, too, by Garrett Eddy, a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, who had known the species in the West and who fully identified them. Mr. Buchheister also notified me of the occurrence, and on March 30 I visited the spot with George B. Long and Seymour H. Stone. When we arrived, one of the grebes was feeding near the breakwater. It was recognized at once as *Aechmophorus occidentalis*, and we watched it for some time as it swam about and dived. At one time it submerged without diving. After an interval in which we had been out of sight of the water, it was found that there were two Western Grebes off the beach, one farther south than the other, probably having just come in from farther out or else up from farther down the beach. The breakwater bird soon joined the newcomer, and the two remained together, only a foot or two apart most of the time, for the fifteen minutes or so that we watched them. Practically all that time they were engaged in what appeared to be courtship, arching their necks and going through the motions of preening, often throwing the head back to the base of the rudimentary tail. Now and then one would dive and swim under the other, coming up on the other side. The swan-like curving of the neck was very noticeable in this performance. Later in the day the pair was found again at the same place by Dr. and Mrs. Richard Tousey, who have kindly sent me notes of their observations. They watched the birds for half an hour, using a 25-power telescope as well as binoculars. They could at times even see the red of the eye. They saw only one of the pair behaving in a way to suggest courtship. This bird "pulled his neck way back and then stretched it suddenly out forward, suggesting the similar action of the American Golden-eye." This was repeated frequently.

So far as I can learn, this was the last time the two Western Grebes were seen together, but a single one was seen April 4 (Emilio and Dodge), April 8 (Emilio and Elmer P. Foye), April 16 (Miss Ruth Batchelder, about four miles south of the former location), and May 10 (Emilio and Ralph Lawson, at Nahant about forty miles by water to the south). There was some evidence to indicate that three of the grebes were present on some occasions, but apparently the third was not positively identified. It may be, therefore, that the pair seen courting departed together and that the single bird seen afterward was a third, unmated individual.

It would be interesting to know where the apparently mated pair of Western Grebes went at last. Whether they would be impelled to return to their normal summer home or would seek a favorable place for nesting nearer by are matters for conjecture. Probably nothing but memory of the route they came by could guide them back to the Northwest. No inherited knowledge of a migration route would avail, of course. Conceivably they might follow an hereditary impulse to migrate

northeast and might end their journey in Nova Scotia. On the other hand, as they were evidently going through the early stages of the reproductive cycle, it seems at least possible that they might seek and find some New England pond or lake in which to complete it. Among the many records of stragglers of southern and western species in New England there are comparatively few in which both male and female were together, and often in these cases one or both of the pair have been collected, eliminating all chance of a breeding record. However, the Yellow-crowned Night Heron has bred in Massachusetts, far from its normal range; a nest of the Lark Sparrow with four eggs is recorded from Connecticut (Howes, in 'Oölogist,' September 15, 1912, cited by Forbush); and Forbush cites records of the New England nesting of the Blue Grosbeak, Kentucky Warbler, and Tufted Titmouse. In the light of this evidence of the breeding of other wanderers speculation as to the possibilities in the case of this pair of Western Grebes becomes especially interesting. May I suggest that the possibility, however remote, of obtaining breeding records ought, perhaps, to outweigh the desire to secure specimens in the minds of collectors who run across pairs of birds outside of their normal ranges?

But whatever the outcome of this particular affair, we who saw the courtship of the Western Grebe at Newburyport may congratulate ourselves on having witnessed something that may, perhaps, never before have occurred on the Atlantic Ocean!—FRANCIS H. ALLEN, *West Roxbury, Massachusetts.*

**South American Pied-billed Grebe in the Canal Zone.**—During several months' residence in 1927 on Barro Colorado Island, Canal Zone, I learned that a form of the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) is resident there. On March 8, April 14, and 20, I saw individuals in a lagoon-like arm of Gatun Lake on the south side of the island and on June 3, one near Frijoles on the adjacent mainland. In a third locality, a lagoon on the west side of Barro Colorado Island, I collected an adult male on August 5 and saw another on August 16. The bird proved to be in breeding condition (testes 18 mm. in length) and is of the South American form, *Podilymbus podiceps antarcticus* (Lesson), not hitherto recorded from the Panama region. In his check-list of the birds of Panama (Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 78: 291, 1935), Ludlow Griscom records only specimens of *Podilymbus p. podiceps* (from Almirante, Veraguas, and Canal Zone). None of these, he tells me, is a breeding or even summer specimen. The Barro Colorado bird agrees with South American specimens in having a long bill, very dark breast and belly and nearly black crown, nape, and back of neck. It measures: wing 135 mm., culmen 25, bill from posterior end of nostril 19.5; weight 420 grams.

Alexander Wetmore (Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., no. 133, p. 49, 1926) first pointed out the distinctive characters of the South American Pied-billed Grebe and at almost the same time Frank M. Chapman (Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., 55: 181, 1926) developed the same point and extended the range of this form to Cali and Fomeque (near Bogotá), Colombia. The addition of the Canal Zone is only a slight extension of the known range of *antarcticus* but it does raise the question of how far into Central America this form may prove to range.—JOSSELYN VAN TYNE, *University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

**The Gannets of Funk Island.**—When, in 1935, Wynne-Edwards published his paper on 'The Newfoundland Gannet colony: with recent information on the other North American gannetries' (Ibis, 1935, pp. 584-594), the existence of four occupied American colonies was known to him. All were in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, namely, on (1) Bonaventure Island, (2) Bird Rocks, (3) Gull-cliff Bay on Anticosti