

HOLBOELL'S GREBE NESTING IN
SOUTHERN ONTARIO

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DURING most summers since 1930 Holboell's Grebes (*Colymbus griseigena holbölli*) have been seen at various localities near the western end of Lake Ontario, and in 1943 they were found nesting in the region. The A.O.U. Check-List (1931) defines the breeding range of Holboell's Grebe as: "Northeastern Siberia, northwestern Alaska, and northern Canada south to northern Washington, North Dakota, and southwestern Minnesota." Forbush (1925:5) was more specific about localities in northern Canada, mentioning northern Mackenzie, Ungava (northern Quebec), and Hudson Strait, and he added southwestern New Brunswick to the regions mentioned in the Check-List. Since these publications were issued, Holboell's Grebes have been reported nesting at Fish Lake, near Madison, Wisconsin (Jones, 1938: 666). Baillie and Harrington (1936:5) described the summer status of Holboell's Grebe in Ontario as follows: "This species is a rare summer resident of extreme western Ontario, west of Lake Superior. Actually it has been found breeding only at Whitefish Lake, some fifty miles west of Port Arthur." These authors also mentioned summer occurrences at James Bay, and eggs from the Lake-of-the-Woods (possibly the Ontario shore).

Summer occurrences on western Lake Ontario. Holboell's Grebes have been observed by G. W. North in the vicinity of Burlington during the summers of 1931 to 1933, inclusive; and the summers of 1938 to 1944, inclusive (that is, during 10 of the 14 summers between 1931 and 1944). The numbers observed varied from 6 to 48 in May and June, with smaller numbers in July; and 2 to 4 in August (during the years 1939 to 1944). On July 1, 1934, two were observed on Lake Ontario near Sunnyside Beach, Toronto, by J. M. Speirs. G. W. North counted 46 Holboell's Grebes between Burlington and Lorne Park (the majority at Lorne Park), on July 12, 1942, and 48 at Burlington on June 18, 1944. (Lorne Park is 14 miles from Toronto and 18 miles from Burlington—see Figure 1.)

*Nesting at Burlington in 1943.*¹ On June 9, 1943, a pair of Holboell's Grebes was seen on Lake Ontario at Burlington. They were taking an active interest in a floating mass of vegetation which was attached loosely to a small, partly submerged willow. One of the pair poked with its bill in the floating nest, while the other sat up in the water, puffed out its horns and uttered its loonlike call. On June 11 the pair was seen

¹ The following observers contributed data on these nests: Jack Campbell, William Cudmore, Barbara and N. J. Hearn, Carol Proctor, and Doris Huestis Speirs.

at the same spot. Copulation occurred, and the male was observed carrying sticks to the nest. On June 12 the grebes added sticks and water weeds to this nest, and started to build a second nest about 100 feet from the first, in a submerged crotch of a small willow. On June 13 courtship activities were observed at Nest 2. Nest 1 was still intact. On June 23 one of the pair was sitting on Nest 2, poking underneath itself at intervals as if turning an egg or eggs, while the other grebe swam near-by. Nest 1 had disappeared. On June 26 there was one egg in Nest 2, and on July 4 a grebe was observed sitting on the nest. The egg was still present on July 11, but had disappeared by July 18. The grebes were not seen at this nest again.

Nest-building was observed at a third nest on June 23: it contained at least one egg on July 18, which was still there on July 25. Nest 4, containing one egg, was found on July 10. Nest 5 (containing two eggs, which were still in the nest on August 2), Nest 6 (containing three eggs), and Nest 7 (which was empty), were all found on July 18.

Of the seven nests found at Burlington in 1943, three were built in submerged crotches in willows, four (of which at least two were attached to willows) were floating.

So far as we know, no young hatched from any of the eggs. This was probably due in part to storms on Lake Ontario. There were heavy storms on June 17, and on August 4, 1943. After the storm on August 4, none of the nests could be found. Since the nests were situated

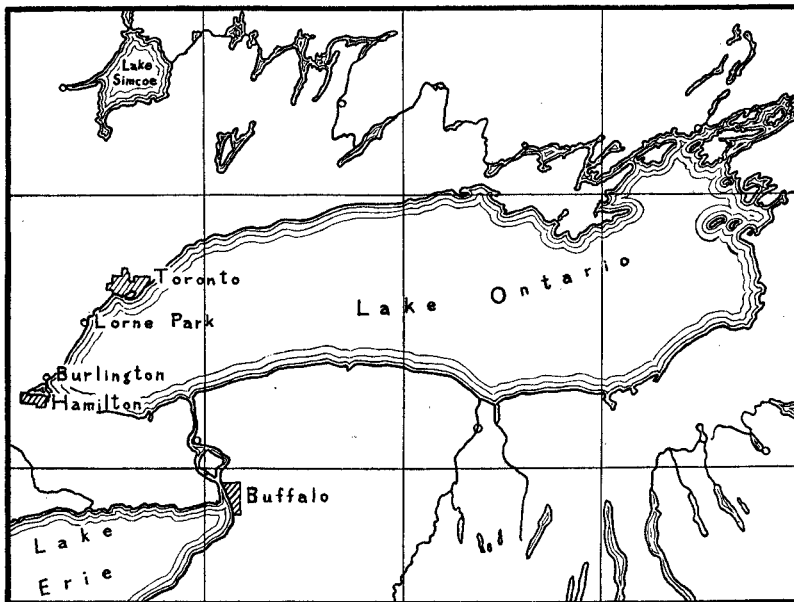


Figure 1

within a few yards of a beach where small boats could be rented, human interference was probably another factor. After the storm of August 4, new nests were built on the sites of Nests 4 and 5, but these also were unsuccessful.

Nesting success in 1944. In 1944, two pairs of Holboell's Grebes nested at Burlington. The first nest of Pair 1, found on June 11 when it contained one egg, was destroyed in a storm on June 18. A second nest was built by June 24 and contained three eggs on July 3, four eggs by July 7. On July 30 there were two eggs in the nest, and two young were seen with the adults. An adult was incubating the one egg that remained on August 5, but on August 6, following a storm during the night, the nest was gone. Two young were seen with the adults on August 6 and several times thereafter until September 18, when they were about seven weeks old.

The first nest of Pair 2 was destroyed in a storm August 2. Another nest had been built on a different site by August 10 and contained three eggs by August 27. An adult was observed on the nest on a number of occasions between August 13 and September 17, and on September 18 one young about one day old was seen.

The second nests of both pairs were built on wooden floats especially made for the grebes by William Hall, of Burlington.

No nests were discovered at Lorne Park, but 14 adult grebes were seen there on August 29, and a flock of adults with one young about seven weeks old on September 18.

SUMMARY

Holboell's Grebes (*Colymbus grisegena holbölli*) have been seen in numbers up to 48 in the region between Hamilton and Toronto, on Lake Ontario, during 11 of the 14 summers from 1931 to 1944 inclusive.

During the summer of 1943, at least seven nests were built by Holboell's Grebes at Burlington. Four contained eggs, but none was successful—due, apparently, to storms and to human interference.

During the summer of 1944 two pairs of grebes nested at Burlington. One pair raised at least two young from four eggs; the other, at least one young from three eggs. One young (about seven weeks old on September 18) was observed at Lorne Park.

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