

NOTES

Florida Field Naturalist 29(4):127-128, 2001.

FIRST VERIFIABLE RECORD OF THE RED-NECKED GREBE IN FLORIDA

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On 13 December 2000, while scouting Santa Rosa Sound from South Shoreline Park in Gulf Breeze, Santa Rosa County, Florida for the Pensacola Christmas Bird Count, I spotted an unusual-looking grebe. The bird was preening 100 to 130 meters from the beach. At the time a fresh east wind was blowing and the water was choppy causing the bird to bob up and down. The sky was overcast but there was sufficient light as it was about 1015 CST. Upon getting the bird in my 22× telescope, I suspected it was a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*). Eared Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*) had been in the area since September, and Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*) were in the vicinity of the bird under observation, allowing easy identification as the Horned Grebes have distinct white cheeks and throats by this time of year.

The bird had a dusky dark back and sides to the waterline, as well as a dark crown and cheeks. A whitish area extended from the base of the bill rearwards to the back of the face arching upward and framing the face with a whitish L-shape, contrasting with the crown, cheeks and the back of the neck. The front of the neck and breast was dark, but not as dark as the back. The bill was long and heavy and about the same length as the head. It was dull yellow. A Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) occasionally swam within a few yards of the bird allowing good size comparison, and I noted the grebe was a few inches smaller. A Horned Grebe that surfaced close to the bird was noticeably smaller. I concluded that the bird in question was a first winter Red-necked Grebe, confirmed by consulting the National Geographic Society *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

I returned home and called Ed and Lois Case who located the grebe in the same general vicinity about three hours later. Lois Case photographed the bird (to Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee). The next morning a dozen birders were also able to see the grebe in the same general location where it lingered until 19 December and was seen by over fifty observers.

In the United States the Red-necked Grebe breeds from west and central Alaska, north and central Canada, south to central Washington, northern Montana, northeastern North Dakota, and southern Minnesota. It winters from its southern breeding grounds south to southern California, the northern Gulf Coast, and Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Stevenson and Anderson (1994) considered it casual, primarily in winter, based on about forty reports since Howell, and the reliability of some of the observers, though there were no specimens or photographs. Robertson and Woolfenden (1992) accorded it unverified straggler status based on a lack of direct evidence, though they acknowledged the probability that it is a rare, irregular winter visitor.

Duncan and Duncan (2000) cite four prior reports of Red-necked Grebe from the northwest Florida panhandle. Of the two spring sightings from March (1979) and April (1967), the April bird remained in the area six days. In each December report (1973 and 1981) the grebe was seen only one day. All sightings of Red-necked Grebes in northwest Florida have been in bays, bayous, or the sound. Lois Case's photograph provided the first tangible evidence of the Red-necked Grebe's occurrence in Florida. The record (01-437) was accepted by the FOSRC in July 2001.

On 28 January 2001, I discovered another Red-necked Grebe in Pensacola Bay while scanning the water for a Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) that had been present the

previous day in front of my home in Gulf Breeze. This individual in juvenal plumage lingered until 16 February and was seen by over forty observers. It had attained first winter plumage by the time of its last sighting. This sighting (01-442) was also accepted by the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee in July 2001.

LITERATURE CITED

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