

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*



Folk Name: Black-necked Grebe

Status: Winter Visitor

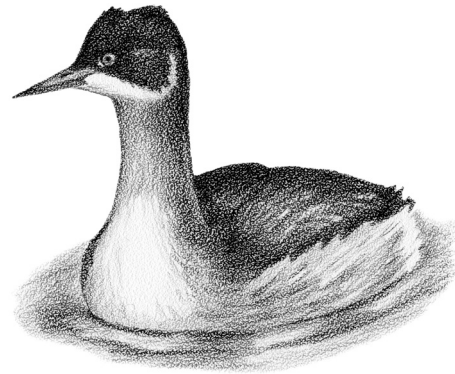
Abundance: Very Rare

Habitat: Lakes

The Horned Grebe and Eared Grebe are quite similar in appearance. The Eared Grebe is slightly (a half-inch) smaller, but the two species are often misidentified. The Eared Grebe has a relatively longer, thinner bill that is slightly angled upward and has a more peaked crown that is closer to the eye. In winter plumage, it has a dusky throat and a dark cheek, unlike the Horned Grebe. In breeding plumage, the Eared Grebe does not have yellow-golden “tufts” or “horns” poking up as the Horned Grebe does, rather it has golden “ears” that show behind the eye.

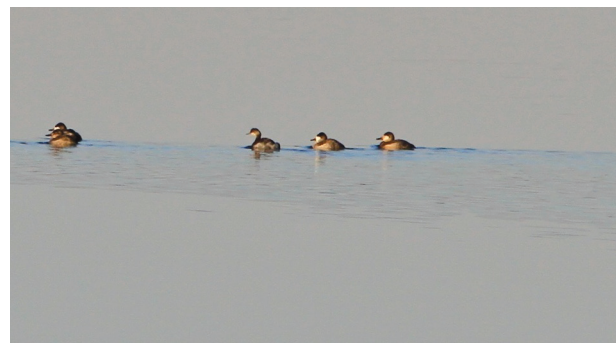
The first Eared Grebe officially documented in South Carolina was found in Charleston on January 13, 1959. Milby Burton collected this bird as a specimen for the Charleston Museum. It was a female in winter plumage with a stomach full of tiny fish and shrimp. The first Eared Grebe ever documented in North Carolina was found and photographed on December 13, 1964, at Wrightsville Beach. This bird was designated a “rare straggler” and was believed to be only the fifth of its kind ever found along the east coast of the United States. A paper published two decades later showed sightings had increased to a total of 4 in South Carolina and 30 in North Carolina. The study characterized the occurrence of the Eared Grebe in the southeastern states as: “normally appearing in November, occasionally in September or October, reaching its greatest numbers between December and early March, and then abruptly vanishing in late March.” Today, Eared Grebes are found each winter along the east coast and in the Carolinas, and they have become irregular winter visitors to inland lakes.

The first report of an Eared Grebe found in the Central Carolinas is of two birds David Wright discovered on Lake Norman in Iredell County on December 1, 1995. Two days later he found one on the lake in Mecklenburg County while he was out birding from his boat. Two weeks later, he found two in the same area while he was participating in the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count on December 20, 1997. When the count was published, the count editor noted that “excellent details” had been provided. Additional Eared Grebes were recorded on Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count surveys conducted in December of 1996, 1997, and 2002. One of these birds was found in Lincoln County. Weather permitting, count participants intentionally



search the lake by boat for these and other “open water” birds, each year.

There are five additional reports of Eared Grebe in this region. One was found in breeding plumage at Lake Don T. Howell in Cabarrus County on April 13, 1997. This is our latest date on file. Two Eared Grebes were found at Ebenezer Park on Lake Wylie near Rock Hill on March 25, 2000. Another Eared Grebe was found on Lake Norman on February 12, 2010. It was regularly seen in the same general area as a Red-necked Grebe and a flock of Horned Grebes reported that year. On November 28, 2013, Chris Talkington and Jeff Lemons photographed an Eared Grebe on Lake Don T. Howell. This is our earliest date on file. The bird was cavorting with several Long-tailed Ducks and a small flock of Ruddy Ducks. Talkington observed the Eared Grebe repeatedly dive and pop up behind the Ruddy Ducks and nip them on their tails. Our most recent record was a bird reported on Lake Bowen near Spartanburg by Roger Smith on March 10, 2014.



Eared Grebe (middle, left) in company with Ruddy Ducks. (Chris Talkington)