

## Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*



**Folk Name:** Didipper, Water-Witch

**Status:** Migrant, Winter Resident

**Abundance:** Uncommon to Fairly Common (Lake Norman)

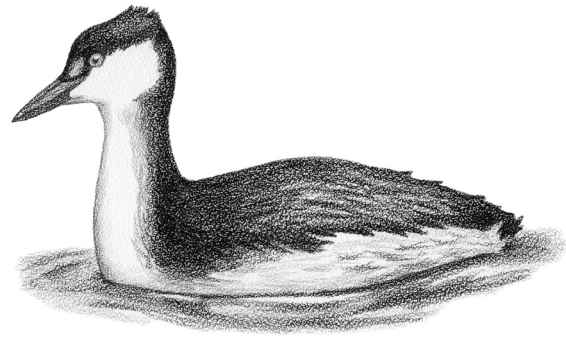
**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds (rarely)

The Horned Grebe is about the same size as the Pied-billed Grebe, but it has a distinctly different appearance. It has an obvious peak on the back of its head, and in winter plumage it has a white cheek, throat, and neck, with a black head, nape, and back. It is the second most common species of grebe that is found in the Carolina Piedmont, but it is generally only found on larger bodies of water. Most arrive in this region in November and are gone by the second week of April. It is often a target species for Christmas Bird Counts in the region.

There are several examples of early accounts of Horned Grebe in the Central Carolinas. Leverett Loomis “secured” a specimen in Chester County on March 4, 1880, and later remarked that this was the only one he had ever seen in the area. About 30 years later, T.G. Pearson provided the first report of a Horned Grebe in Mecklenburg County. He found one on the Catawba River on November 1, 1908, just four years after the construction of the Lake Wylie Dam. Pearson had made several visits to Charlotte during that decade to work with the Mecklenburg Branch of the state Audubon Society.

On Christmas Day in 1947, Rhett Chamberlain shot and collected a Horned Grebe in Charlotte. Upon further examination, he found that the bird had a 3-½-inch-long bass in its crop. Flo Cobey was surprised to find a Horned Grebe on the Charlotte Christmas Bird Count on December 27, 1975. The bird was out of place, having settled on Creech’s Pond, a small shallow pond on a farm in northern York County.

Today, Horned Grebes are regularly found each winter on large bodies of water throughout the region. Our earliest arrival date is of a bird photographed by Dwayne Martin on Lake Hickory on August 7, 2015. The bird was



in breeding plumage and the diagnostic rufous neck and yellowish horn tufts were easily observed. David Wright found an alternate-plumaged bird still lingering on Lake Norman on May 19, 1996. Our latest departure date is a bird Dwayne Martin found lingering on Lake Jones on June 7, 2017.

Flocks in the region occasionally exceed more than 100 birds. Dick Brown reported more than 100 Horned Grebes on Lake Norman on February 4, 1978. David Wright noted a flock of about 180 birds on the lake during the winter of 1989–1990 and counted 186 there on March 9, 2014.



*Horned Grebes on Lake Norman in early November. (Jeff Lemons)*