

## Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*



**Folk Name:** Acitli (Spanish)

**Status:** Winter Visitor

**Abundance:** Accidental

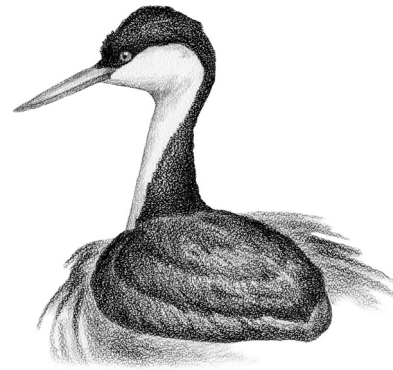
**Habitat:** Lakes

The Western Grebe is a rarity anywhere in the Carolinas—especially inland. In 1985, taxonomists split it from the Clark's Grebe, a similar-looking grebe also from the western United States, but one that, to date, has never been officially counted in the Carolinas. The two can be very hard to differentiate. The Western Grebe was first officially added to the North Carolina state bird list in 1994, and there are currently fewer than 20 published reports for the entire state. There are fewer than six reports of Western Grebe in South Carolina.

The Western Grebe is our largest grebe and, at 25 inches, is almost twice the size of the Horned Grebe, which is regularly found on our large lakes in winter. There are two records of Western Grebe visiting the Central Carolinas. Judy Walker, Steve Tracy, and Pam Whistler were thrilled to discover one near the Lake Norman dam while conducting the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count on December 17, 2006. They immediately reported their find to other birders out that day, and Walker provided these details on the “unusual bird” report form that the trio later submitted.

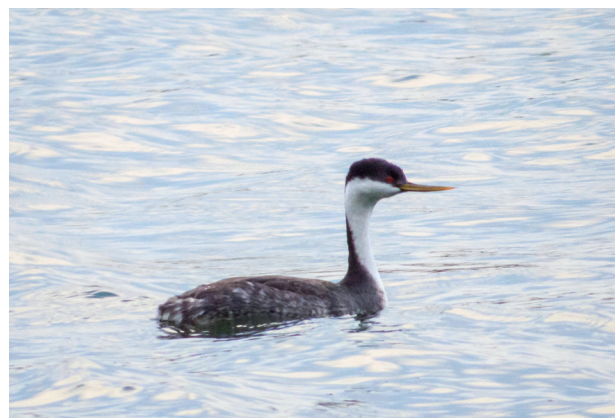
The large black and white grebe was first seen in the presence of a Ring-billed Gull and a Horned Grebe. The bird was substantially larger than both the Horned Grebe and gull. The bird had a long thin, graceful neck, white on the throat and sides of the neck and black on the back of the neck. The back of the bird was black. The flanks when diving and while swimming appeared to have a fair amount of white giving them a more grayish appearance. It was difficult to determine exactly where the eye was in relationship to the black of the face. It appeared there was a fair amount of white around the eye but that changed with the position of the lighting. The same was true with the color of the bill, although it appeared yellow more often than not.

This bird remained on the lake for almost three months and was last reported around March 13, 2007. During its stay, it was relocated and photographed by numerous observers. This sighting is believed to be the



15th record for the state of North Carolina and the 4th record of a Western Grebe inland in the state. A review of photographs, video recordings, and additional written details indicated this grebe had a greenish-yellow bill and not the orange-yellow bill indicative of the closely related Clark's Grebe.

Almost a decade after this bird was found, a second Western Grebe showed up just 5 miles away from the location of the first bird. On April 10, 2016, Taylor Piephoff followed up on a report of a Western Grebe on Lake Norman and found it off Brawley School Road in Iredell County. The bird was later seen and photographed along the Iredell–Mecklenburg county line, just north of the Lake Norman Yacht Club. This unusual visitor remained in that general area for at least three weeks to the delight of many observers.



Western Grebe on Lake Norman, Iredell County. (Lee Weber)