

**RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION**  
**Records of Vermont Birds**

The following form has been prepared to encourage full documentation, when requested, of rare or unseasonal birds in the state of Vermont. These reports are put into a permanent file and should be as detailed as possible. New reports are reviewed annually by the Vermont Bird Records Committee, which evaluates records for their acceptability to future researchers and for inclusion in the state bird list.

**SPECIES:** Eared Grebe

**NUMBER OBSERVED:** one

**OBSERVER MAKING REPORT:** Maeve Kim

**OTHER OBSERVERS:** none

**LOCATION:** (place, township, county) - Charlotte Town Beach (Chittenden County)

**DATE:** 1/29/2012

**TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION:** I got out of my car at 3:16 PM. After walking across the road from the parking lot, I saw two grebes within a few yards of the shoreline. One was a Horned Grebe, but the other looked "off" or "not right". I got my binoculars on it and continued watching as it repeatedly dove and came to the surface and then dove again. I concentrated on this one bird for ten or twelve minutes, finding it each time it came up and looking at it through my scope at least four times. However, because it dove so often and for such long periods, I probably actually had the bird in my binoculars or scope only two or three minutes in all.

**DISTANCES FROM BIRD:** When I first saw the bird, it was only about three yards from shore. When I lost it, it was more than a football field from me.

**WEATHER:** Temperature had been in the high twenties but was dropping by the time I got to Charlotte. Sky was overcast all day, with little wind.

**OPTICAL EQUIPMENT:** (make, power, etc.) Swift Audubon 8.5x44; Bausch and Lomb scope (magnification 15x to 45x)

**OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR FORMS:** I first saw Eared Grebes in 2001 in Montana. Since then, I've watched them in Oregon, Arizona and California – but always in breeding plumage.

**OTHER DOCUMENTATION:** none

**BIRD'S BEHAVIOR** - The bird was repeatedly diving, starting close to the shore in relatively shallow water and moving out into deeper water.

**DESCRIPTION:**

**Relative size and shape** – My initial impression was that the bird looked weird for a Horned Grebe, and I thought for an instant of a Pied-Billed Grebe. I think it was smaller or more “chunky” than the Horned Grebe that was near it for a few seconds, but I’m not sure.

**Head** – What held my attention was the fact that the bird’s eye was completely surrounded by black. The black dipped down to cover most of the cheek. There wasn’t a really clean line between the black upper cheek and white lower cheek.

**Feet and Bill** – I never saw the bird’s feet. The bill was pale and thin; I think the bill wasn’t as long as the bird’s head was wide.

**Upper back, lower back and rump** – Each time the bird came up and I relocated it, I was so intent on getting a close look at the head, neck and eye that I didn’t really focus on these other areas.

**Wings** – There was dark gray, light gray and white on the bird’s sides, but I didn’t really study this area.

**Breast, neck** – The front of the bird’s neck was gray; the back of the neck (seen when the bird was swimming directly away from me) had a narrow strip of black. The breast was mostly white or pale gray.

**Tail** (shape, length, markings): I never noticed a tail.

**IMPORTANT: WHAT SIMILAR SPECIES WERE ELIMINATED WHEN MAKING THIS IDENTIFICATION AND HOW WAS THIS BIRD DIFFERENT?**

I threw out my first guess (Pied-Billed Grebe) immediately because the overall shape of the body was wrong, as well as the head shape and head pattern.

I was pretty sure that the amount of black on the bird’s cheek ruled out Horned Grebe, but when I got home I looked at a few more guide books and photos on the web to see if Horned Grebes in any plumage might have that facial pattern.

Another birder (David Gusakov) came along after I’d lost the grebe and said he’d been sitting in his car alongside the road a little north of the parking area (just after Hills Point Rd.). He said he might have had a quick look at a Ruddy Duck several minutes earlier but had lost the bird. He said he’d seen a small diving bird with a dark top of the head and some white on the cheek, but he didn’t think it had a blue bill. After hearing David’s report, I wondered for a second or two if I could have been watching a Ruddy Duck, but the shape of the bird and the shape and color of the bill were all wrong. (I’m much more familiar with Ruddy Ducks than Eared Grebes.) It seems to me that a more logical explanation is that David had seen the same grebe I’d been watching.

This report was written from notes taken immediately after I lost the bird, plus additional info from bird guides and pictures on the web after I got home.

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Bird seen on 1/29/2013 – Report sent 2/4/201