NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

A New Niche for the Rock Dove in Upstate New York: Twenty to 40 years ago, feral Rock Doves *(Columba livia)* occupied two principal niches in east-central New York: an urban niche and a rural niche. The city birds fed on human handouts in parks and at bird feeders, and used horizontal ledges on buildings for nesting; while rural birds frequented barns and silos for roosting and nesting, and fed on spilled grains about farms and fields. Both populations fed, where available, on grains spilled at urban and rural rail yards.

Approximately 20-30 years ago a new man-made niche became available as a result of the interstate highway construction program and other highway refurbishing programs. These programs introduced new bridge designs based on large I-beam construction. These new designs provided ledges for this ledge-seeking species. Today, it is a common sight along such Capital District highways as Interstate 87, 90 etc. and other places where new bridges have been built to see Rock Doves perched on bridge ledges, or on immediately adjacent powerlines, bridge railings, etc.

One of the most notable local examples of successful adaptation by this species to this type of structure exists at the Route 9 crossing of the Mohawk River at Crescent at the border of Albany and Saratoga Counties. The current bridge spans one-quarter mile of river and was built in the past five to ten years, replacing an older structure of quite different design. It is a four-lane, dual-span structure with two shore-based piers and four piers in the water spanned by I-beams standing four or five feet tall. It serves as home for a gathering of *1500-2000* Rock Doves!

In the winter, these birds are frequently seen clustered as a compact dark spot on the river ice to the east of the bridge enjoying the warmth of the sun; or otherwise occupying the compartmented ledges atop the huge I-beam supports between piers. The ledges are approximately eight to twelve inches deep and have dividers every five feet that create a compartmented effect. The ledges have about two feet of head space. The dividers that create the compartments prevent direct walking access along the ledge, or a view of the adjacent compartments. These ledges are protected from rain and snow by the overhang of the guard rail. There are approximately 265 such compartments on each outer I-beam, or 530 compartments on the outer east and west beams. The two spans are separated by about 10-12 feet and each of the two inner faces of these spans has the same approximately 265 compartments.

On the outer east face of the bridge, these compartments show considerable evidence of use by Rock Doves. Droppings are abundant and many compartments have a nest, with a few compartments having two nests. Most of the birds occupy the outer east and west faces of the spans, while the inner faces between

spans have fewer birds. A very few birds occupy the I-beam and cross-member ledges under the bridge, however, the outer east face which gets the warmth of the winter sun appears most popular.

While records of exact counts of Rock Doves at this site have not been kept, casual observation indicates that this flock continues to grow. It numbered about 1000 two years ago and about 500 three or four years ago.

Robert P. Yunick, 1527 Myron St., Schenectady, New York 12309

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

23 April 1982

To the Editors:

Charlcie Delehanty's "Photographs of New York State Rarities: 29. Western Grebe" (*Kingbird* 28: 208-209, 1978) presents my photograph of a bird present at Tupper Lake, St. Lawrence County, in the summer of 1978. Within the Western Grebe population are both dark- and light-phased individuals, and preliminary studies indicate these birds may represent two sibling species (K. Kaufman. 1979. *Continental Birdlife* 1: 85-89).

In a communication dated 12 April 1982 R. S. Heil of Peabody, Mass., commented on the appearance of my photograph of the Tupper Lake Western Grebe: "I was surprised that the bird appeared to be of the light phase. The lores are clearly white, there seems to be plenty of white feathering above the eye . . . do you recognize it as a light-phased bird?"

Examining a series of color transparencies of the grebe, I find that it is in fact a dark-phased bird. In the photograph printed in the *Kingbird,* the bird was swimming directly into early morning sunlight and the black feathering of the lores and surrounding the eyes exhibits a sunlit sheen. Reproduced in black-and-white, this tonal quality was lost, and the face appears largely white. That a light-phased Western Grebe might occur in New York State would be most surprising, for this population is found in the far west, while dark-phased birds range west to Manitoba and Minnesota.

I am indebted to Mr. Heil's inquiry, which prompted this clarification of New York's only fully documented Western Grebe.

Sincerely,
Thomas H. Davis

9446-85 Road, Woodhaven, New York 11421