

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

NEW YORK'S FIRST WESTERN GREBE REVISITED

A Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) first discovered on Tupper Lake, St. Lawrence County on July 2, 1978 remained through early October of that year (Delehanty 1978), was observed and photographed by many birders, and was eventually accepted by NYSARC as the first documented record for New York (NYSARC 1979). After the American Ornithologist's Union (1985) split Western Grebe into the nominate dark form and the pale Clark's Grebe (*A. clarkia*), some confusion arose regarding the identity of the Tupper Lake grebe. The primary source of this confusion was a black-and-white photograph in *The Kingbird* (Delehanty 1978) that did not reproduce well and appeared to show a grebe with substantial white around the eye and a very pale bill. To some birders, this photo suggested that New York's first Western Grebe was in fact a Clark's.

Had it been feasible for *The Kingbird* to print a high-quality color reproduction of the original photograph, it is unlikely that anybody would have thought that this bird might be a Clark's Grebe. In the original color photo, the dark cap clearly surrounds the eye, the lores are dark, the bill is dusky olive-yellow, and the flanks are dark with very little white. This combination of traits indicates Western Grebe, and nothing visible in the color photo suggests Clark's. The photo is reproduced here in color (Figure A, p. 48).

As of 2003, the most recent year for which NYSARC has published their findings, 8 Western Grebe records have been accepted for New York, with several more reports pending review; there are no accepted records of Clark's Grebe for New York. These 8 records have come from widely scattered locations throughout the state during at least 10 months of the year, suggesting that Western Grebe might show up on any body of water and at any time. The Tupper Lake grebe is the only accepted New York record from summer, however; all others have been seen between November and May.

Few eastern *Aechmophorus* grebe reports predating the 1985 split included sufficient details to distinguish the two species, but for nearly two decades after the split all well documented sightings along the east coast proved to be of Westerns. This changed in late 2002 when a Clark's Grebe was photographed on the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia (Iliff 2003), and another Clark's was documented in coastal Maine in 2005 (Perkins 2005). Although undocumented in New York, birders should consider the possibility that any *Aechmophorus* grebe that turns up may be a Clark's, and recognize that the existence of hybrids and birds showing intermediate plumage complicates identification. Observers are strongly encouraged to study carefully any presumed Western or Clark's Grebe found in New York, paying close attention to all traits that distinguish these species, as reliance on a single characteristic such as bill color can lead to an incorrect identification. As always, anyone encountering either of these species is encouraged to document the observation, preferably with photographs, and submit a report to NYSARC.

LITERATURE CITED

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A COMMON RAVEN ON LONG ISLAND

On 13 August 2006, I was walking a trail on the Frick Estate (Nassau County Fine Arts Museum) when I began hearing a series of vocalizations that sounded like a Common Raven. I was surprised to say the least. Over the last 30 years I have often observed and listened to ravens out west and in the mountains from New York to Maine. I realize that it is quite rare for one to show up on Long Island at any time. The vocalizations appeared to be coming from a massive tower and series of platforms adjoining the property. Unfortunately the bird was not visible at this time. From about 12:00 to 16:00 EDT, I remained in the area, birding, running and reading. The vocalizations continued intermittently, especially when other large birds passed over the tower (two separate Turkey Vultures and a Red-tailed Hawk.) There was a pretty strong cold front passing, with NW winds. I saw no crows in the area and I heard none. At no time did this bird utter any crow-like utterances. All the varied vocalizations were those I associate with ravens.

Finally, from 16:00-17:00 the bird began appearing. I saw it perching on the top tower platform from time to time, once sidling up to a recently fledged Osprey that had landed, allowing a nice size comparison. The raven appeared to be the same size as the "stubby" fledgling. I also witnessed over 10 brief flights with the bird making a brief circle and returning to the top or second platform where it was often out of sight. I did look for and note the wedge-shaped tail in flight and the heavy bill when the bird perched. Although this sighting is unusual, I do note that this tower is the closest thing to a cliff in the area, is clearly visible from the Connecticut shore, and is close to the Roslyn viaduct, a prominent bridge (now under reconstruction.) If I were an adventuresome raven that crossed the Long Island Sound on NW winds, this is probably where I'd wind up. I reported the sighting to Anthony J. Lauro, of the New York Rare

Bird Alert. On subsequent visits (about eight over the next three months) I saw and heard nothing of this bird. However, on 27 November 2006, about 16:00 EST I again heard a Common Raven on the tower and watched it perched and in flight over about 15 minutes, after which time I lost track of it and didn't hear or see it over the next hour. I had no subsequent sightings on three more visits through the end of 2006.

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A SEDGE WREN AT DEMOCRAT POINT, SUFFOLK COUNTY, LONG ISLAND

While birding at Democrat Point, Suffolk County on 1 October 2006, I had an interesting ID challenge. Past the jetty, in some small tufts of beach grass, I flushed a wren, which immediately flew into the next tuft and disappeared. This charade went on for fifteen minutes before the bird flew and landed on the sand for a full minute. It was very light below, had a prominent eyeline, and was *continuously bobbing up and down*. It then flew back into the tufts of beach grass where it positively refused to be viewed again. The weather was spitting rain and the horizon looked extremely threatening. In fact I was soaked by the time I got back to my car.

Parked next to me was Bob Paxton whom I had not seen in decades. I told him about the wren and we agreed that it warranted returning and looking for it. It was raining heavily so we both left and said we would return when the weather improved. I returned about 13:30 EDT. I showed Bob the tufts of grass where I had seen the bird, and sure enough something scurried into the next tuft. As in my earlier encounter, the bird would not flush unless you literally stepped on the actual blades of grass in which it was hiding. After much trouble, we finally were able to briefly view it on the ground and determined that it was definitely a Sedge Wren—not the spectacular Rock Wren I was hoping for, but a great bird nonetheless.

At the request of Region 10 Editor Shai Mitra, who noted that Sedge Wrens have been documented on Long Island very rarely in recent decades, both Bob and I assembled field notes documenting the bird's appearance. Bob Paxton noted, "This bird had the general shape and size of a House Wren, or was a little smaller, but this bird bobbed when it was excited. Bill slender. General coloration slightly darker than House Wren but not as dark as Winter Wren. Paler on the breast. Whitish line over the eye. Crown with fine streaks lengthwise. Also coarser streaking at the top of the back. Flanks buff. We ruled out Marsh Wren by the streaked crown and the buff sides, House Wren by the crown and back streaks, and Winter Wren by the slightly longer tail and absence of barred flanks. It was much too small and dark for a Rock Wren and lacked

that species' patterned tail. The bird did not make any call notes and was still there when we left."

My immediate impression was of a wren, close in size to a House Wren, but rather different from that familiar species. The bird was very light below especially near the throat, with very prominent buffy flanks, which contrasted with the rest of the light underparts. It showed a prominent buffy supercilium and a lightly streaked crown. Its barred primaries and tail were quite visible. As noted above, this bird was extremely secretive and mouse-like. At times, it seemed to be running, not hopping. When out in the open, it continuously bobbed its entire body up and down. I am intimately familiar with Marsh Wren. This bird not only differed from Marsh Wren in terms of its streaked crown and other features, but it presented a different jizz overall. I have seen Sedge Wrens twice before, both in October, in Sands Point, Nassau County.

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