



Vol 12, No 6
May-June 1984

Howard

A Chapter of the
Maryland Ornithological Society

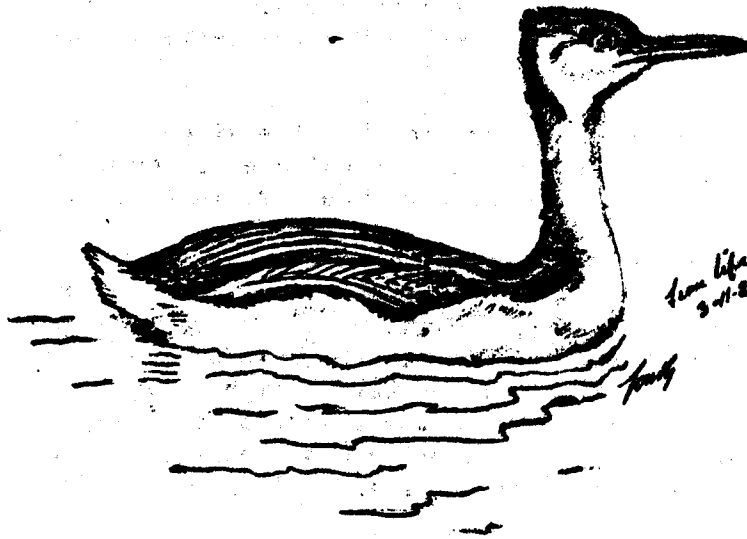


RED-NECKED GREBE ON WILDE LAKE IN COLUMBIA - Jon K. Boone

In the middle of Wilde Lake my father and I saw a Red-necked Grebe. It was seen at 4:30 in the afternoon of March 10, 1984, a cold, clear, windy day. The grebe was a large, graceful, fast-moving bird which dove energetically and often. My father first saw it with his 8-power binoculars. It was about 200 yards away. Even from that distance its dark crown and long bill were apparent. When I focused my spotting scope at 15 power (finally at 60 power), other field marks characteristic of this species in its winter plumage emerged over the course of the half hour we observed the bird.

In addition to the dark crown and large bill, there was a very visible whitish cheek patch along with a nearly white breast. The long throat was light gray. The back of the neck was dark gray, but at the base of the neck I could see tufts of chestnut-red feathers. The bird's broad back was dark gray with hints of white. Its flanks and tail were whitish. This grebe's head was large for its neck and its bill, with a yellow lower mandible, seemed even longer than the head. The overall size could be compared when an adult male Bufflehead swan alongside. The grebe was one-third larger. Just before diving the grebe pulled back its long neck and then lunged forward in one quick motion. This head and neck-cocking behavior always preceded the dive. I urged my father to drive home fast so I could call Marty Cheston who lives near the lake. He did and I did and Marty almost burned her casserole for the potluck dinner when she scooted over for a look.

Editor's Note: Prior to 1984 there was only one record of a Red-necked Grebe in Howard County: March 29, 1962 by John Weske on Triadelphia Reservoir. No photographs were taken and no detailed description is available. Steve Whitcomb reported a Red-necked Grebe on Lake Kittamaquidi February 24, 1984. We are still waiting to receive his description to determine whether the Boone's sighting is the same bird or possibly a different one. Photographs were taken of the Wilde Lake bird on Sunday, March 11, 1984. Jon E. Boone made a pencil sketch from life which is reproduced below. Mark Wallace sighted a bird of this species at Brighton Dam on Triadelphia Reservoir several times during the first week of April. On April 7 Harvey Mudd reported two Red-necked Grebes from the same location.



There are vultures in Howard County, and many of them are birds. Vultures are large avifauna with small, featherless heads. As scavengers their zest for carrion renders great ecological service. Using elevators provided by warm pockets of rising air, vulture flocks often form a "kettle," swirling about in ascending circles using their keen eyesight to spot a meal from on high, conserving much energy in the process. They are consummate aeronauts sensitive to every nuance of wind, heat, and pressure. They get from here to there as efficiently as any creature alive. Their abilities to harness the energies of the atmosphere with their specialized anatomy is both an engineering wonder and an aesthetic delight.

There are two vulture species in our area. The Turkey Vulture is abundant, but, for the discerning eye, the Black Vulture is quite common, too. I believe its population is growing. These two species may at first blush look much alike; however, they are relatively easy to distinguish, even from a distance.

• Unlike any other large bird in Howard County, the Turkey Vulture glides and soars with its wings held in a subtle "V" shape above its body. The technical name for this pattern is the dihedral. Think of the Turkey Vulture's initials--T.V. Reminds one of a television set with "rabbit-ear" antennae. They form a "V" shape like the dihedral of the Turkey Vulture's wings. The "TV" flight shape is the best field mark from afar. This vulture does not often flap its wings; instead, it rocks gently, defying gravity seemingly without effort.

• The Turkey Vulture has relatively long wings and tail giving it a somewhat streamlined appearance. The underside of the wings has a two-toned look with a black mantle and light gray primary and secondary feathers. The tail is clearly noticeable and extends far beyond the bird's rather darkish feet.

• At close range both vultures have "bald" heads. But the Turkey Vulture has a distinct red head, complete with wrinkles and pits--truly one of the most unforgettable faces in nature. The Black Vulture's head is light gray and, for me, is less compelling.

• By contrast, the Black Vulture is a stocky bird with relatively short, blunt wings; however, its most revealing characteristic is its very short tail. From a distance, this bird often appears tailless--all wings and long neck.

• The Black Vulture has conspicuous white patches on the underside of the wing near the tips. If there are any doubts about tail length, these white patches will decide the issue conclusively. Look for them routinely.

• The Black Vulture flaps its wings much more often than the Turkey Vulture. Its heavy, ponderous wingbeats make the bird appear awkward, but then it begins to glide with all the grace of a master aviator. Watch for the pattern: heavy flap, flap, then glide.

• Unlike its cousin, the Black Vulture carries its wings at the horizontal, not in an upswept dihedral. If your bird looks like a vulture rising up in a far valley and it does not have the TV look, chances are good the bird is a Black Vulture.

North-central Pennsylvania is about the northernmost limit of the Black Vulture's range; however, the Turkey Vulture breeds in southern Canada. Both birds are permanent residents in our region. The Black Vulture is even more gregarious than its relative. It is unusual to see a solitary Black Vulture. On the other hand, T.V.s often are seen alone. They are reputed to have better eyesight than their cousins, and their soaring style seems better suited to the vagaries of climate found in more northern zones. Black Vultures often follow them to get seconds on a meal. Two good places to see Black Vultures: Triadelphia Reservoir and Lily Pons (in Frederick County).



TURKEY VULTURE

- * Relatively long wings and tail
- * Wings held in upright "V" while soaring
- * Two-toned appearance on underside of wing
- * Unfeathered red head
- * Often has a rocking motion while in flight

BLACK VULTURE

- * Very short, stocky tail
- * "Blocky" appearance
- * Relatively long neck
- * White patches at underside of wing tips
- * Wings held at horizontal while soaring
- * Often flaps wings with heavy strokes, then glides



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS PRESENTED DURING 1983-1984

Each year the Howard County Bird Club presents slide shows and demonstrations to numerous groups in the county. Our members also make use of specimens for their own study. The following groups and individuals were involved in educational activities between April 20, 1983 and April 20, 1984.

Individuals making one or more presentations included the following: Marty Oosteren, Chuck Dupree, Donna Cookson, Jane Geuder, Mary Lou McGoldrick, Joanne Moreney, and Jo Solem. Eileen Olegg, James Hill and Frank Griffin and Max Casper borrowed specimens for personal study.

Programs were presented to the Howard Co. Rec. & Parks Seniors meeting at First Lutheran Church, 4-H Camp for Howard Countians at Deep Creek Lake, Brownie Troop #224, Glenelg Country Summer School Nature Study, Talbott Springs Elementary School's third & fourth grades, St. John's Elementary School, Girl Scout Troop #1100, St. Peter's Episcopal Church's kindergarten & nursery, Mrs. Bruner's second grade at Hammond Elementary, Mr. Franciamone's classes at Owen Brown Middle School, Glenelg Country School Blue Heron Club, Senior Citizens at Harmony Hall, biology classes at Centennial High School, Trail Blazers Nature Club at West Friendship Elementary School, Team 3 at Phelps Luck Elementary School, Sandy Spring Friends' House, Cub Scout Pack #692, Rec. & Parks program of birds & wildflowers, and the Branch & Twig Garden Club. In addition, specimens were displayed at two seed sales, the library birding workshop, 8 bird club meetings, Recreation Expo, and the Howard County Fair. Presentations were made to over 1100 people. In addition several thousand saw exhibits during one or more of the special events. If you would like to borrow slides, specimens, or nests for personal study or in order to present a program, contact Jo Solem, 725-5037.

Last year a pair of Barn Swallows nested on the porch outside of Fran Nahrgang's kitchen door. Some of her observations follow. Similar notes from our readers are most welcome.

NESTING BARN SWALLOWS - Frances W. Nahrgang

Nest was built of straw, mud, dried grasses and lined with feathers (whether from this pair or another species I could not tell). Both contributed to construction. Building site was a rafter plate beneath roof of porch just outside the kitchen door. Two nests were under construction at the same time, one rafter apart, but one was abandoned after beginning and the other completed by mid-May. (Could they have been confused about the two sites for a while or do they usually start two nests?) The nest was not visible from the patio or yard; the birds had to swoop under the roof overhang and then up to the nest on the rafter plate.

May 26 - Pair has been taking turns sitting on nest. At 7:30 p.m. there was a thunderstorm and she(?) remained on the nest while he(?) sat beside her on the outside. She usually faces toward kitchen door (and light) while he turns his tail in that direction.

May 28 - Other swallows have been swooping under porch roof; pair has been busy chasing them away.

May 29 - Rainy today; they stay on the nest for shorter periods. (Is food harder to find in the rain?)

May 30 - 5:30 p.m. - 1(?) egg (hard to see into nest). Ed. Note: most likely 2 eggs.

May 31 - 3 eggs

June 2 - 8:50 a.m. While the pair was off the nest, I climbed up and counted 5 eggs.

June 11 - 8:20 p.m. Checked nest. She seems edgy but nothing hatched yet.

June 15 - Some hatching but can't tell how many as she attacks when I get near nest.

June 19 - Another storm but I counted 5 young in the nest.

June 28 - Can see colors now on feathers. Much activity: preening, wing-stretching, pushing others in nest, hanging over nest edge. Don't see how they can all stay inside the nest as they are quite large now.

July 2 - Very hot and muggy. Young are climbing out of nest and sitting on rafters. Panting with mouths wide open.

July 6 - 4:50 p.m. Some young are flying but can't get a count as they "hunker down" in the nest. Still do not have long forked tails. Much "talking" among young, also when parents show up to feed. Seems as though two have not tried to fly yet. (All through nesting three young have remained together in the front part of the nest while the other two stayed in the back. This made it difficult to count as front three tended to hide others.) At 6:45 p.m. all five back in the nest being fed by parents.

July 7 - ALL flying in and out of nest and ledge. Flying to telephone lines on opposite side of house. All slept back in or near nest.

July 8 - 8:30 a.m. No young. No adults. Stayed away all day. At 8:20 p.m. three were back in nest. Parents still feeding this late in evening.

July 16 - 10:35 p.m. Hot, humid for days. First night no birds on ledge or in nest. I would guess all swallows left the vicinity by early August.

C A L E N D A R

PROGRAM - 7:45 p.m. Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Drive, Columbia, MD.
Note: Meeting is canceled if schools officially close because of inclement weather or for other emergencies.

May 10 - "Butterfly Gardening" - Robert T. Mitchell. The author of Butterflies and Moths (A Golden Guide) will describe how to make your yard attractive to butterflies with slides from his own garden. Mr. Mitchell, who has a degree in applied entomology from Ohio State University, retired as a biologist from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

FIELD TRIPS - Field trips leave from Grempler Realty parking lot (across from the Flier Building on Little Patuxent Parkway in Columbia) unless otherwise indicated. Linda Harsy, 489-5131, heads the Field Trip Committee. Leader may cancel under severe weather conditions. If you have questions, call. Carpooling continues with riders sharing gas and toll costs. Dress for field work with stout, reasonably water-proof footwear and layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. No pets.

May 11 - **WOODCOCK WALK.** Leader: Al Geis, 531-2400. See the courtship flight of the woodcock and do some birding in the Middle Patuxent Valley. Meet at the small parking lot on Trotter Rd. (.8 mile south of Rt. 108 on east side) at 7:00 p.m. No children under 10. Wear dark long-sleeved shirts or jackets and long pants. Trip is canceled in case of rain.

May 13 - **SPRING MIGRANT WALK.** Leader: Mike Leumas, 730-1075. 1/2 day to Daniels section of Patapsco State Park along wide flat path, 1-2 miles. Meet at Grempler at 7:30 a.m. Height of migration along with nesting species along the river.

May 19-20 **NASSAWANGO CREEK CANOE TRIP.** Leaders: David & Elaine Fardoe, 531-6452. Week-
end or Saturday only. Will put in at 10:00 a.m. at the point that Red House Rd. crosses Nassawango Creek. Bring own canoe or rent (details from leader). Camping available at Shad Landing State Park. Trip will go rain or shine. Reservations are necessary by Thursday evening, May 17. Outstanding natural area protected by Nature Conservancy for which we helped to raise funds.

May 20 - **SPRING HABITAT WALK AT CYPRESSMEADE PARK** - Co-sponsored with How. Co. Rec. & Sun. Parks. Leaders: Chuck Dupree, 796-1086, & Bill Eckert. Meet at Grempler at 12:30 p.m. or at the park at 1:00 p.m.

May 27 - **NEW JERSEY PINE BARRENS.** Leader: Anneke Davis. Call Linda 489-5131 to learn details and make reservations which are a must. Trip will leave Grempler at 6:30 a.m.; return to be decided at time reservations are made. Emphasis will be on plants and the ecology of these unique barrens.

July 22 - **SUMMER HABITAT WALK AT CYPRESSMEADE PARK.** See May 20th entry above. Same Sun. leaders and meeting times.

BOARD MEETING - 7:30 p.m. at David Fardoe's, 13128 Williamfield Drive, Ellicott City; May 24 call 531-6452 for directions. All elected officers and appointed committee Thur. heads should attend.

Dear Fellow Members,

At the end of my term as President of the Chapter, I want to thank all of you for the support you have given me over the last two years. I am especially grateful to all the committee chairmen, special events coordinators, and officers who have worked long and hard to keep the Chapter visible and viable. Through the efforts of these volunteers, our Chapter has continued to grow and has presented new activities; county residents are also much more aware of our work. I wish I could thank all of you by name, but that would require another newsletter.

I wish Dave well and know he will continue to receive the help I received. I hope his term is as personally rewarding and as pleasurable as mine has been.

Jane Farrell

VOLUNTEER EXHIBIT SITTERS NEEDED FOR MALL SHOW

Individuals who are willing to watch the bird specimens, talk to interested people, and pass out literature are needed for Recreation Expo at the Columbia Mall on Saturday, June 9. An hour or two of your time between 10:00 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. would be most appreciated. Call Eileen Clegg, 730-4362.

Like to chat with people but don't feel able to answer specific questions? Eileen will be happy to team you with more experienced birders.

Volunteers are also always welcome at the headquarters of the North American Bluebird Society south of Burtonsville. Call Mary Janetatos, 384-2798, for information.

POTLUCK HAS LEFTOVERS

Monika Botsai, who did such a fine job coordinating the annual potluck, notes that a few items were left at the Florence Bain Senior Center: 1 ladle, 2 sharp knives, and 1 oval silver-plated plate. If you are missing any of those items do call her at 469-5758 to claim your item(s).

RECENT DONATIONS TO NATURAL HISTORY LIBRARY - Maud Banks

Rosamond Munro has donated the National Wildlife magazine from 1967-1983, The Living Wilderness 1972-1981, International Wildlife 1980-1983, and Nature Conservancy News 1982-83. Frances Ehlers gave the library the 1983 issues of The Living Bird Quarterly. These periodicals contain a wealth of information and are available to members. Call me at 596-4131 (evenings) if you are interested in borrowing these or other items we have. Donations are always welcome.

~~BANDED CANADA GOOSE SIGHTINGS REQUESTED~~

An intensive study of Canada Geese in the Atlantic Flyway is being initiated for better winter management. Wildlife agencies from New York to South Carolina are cooperating in the banding of 30,000 geese over the next three years. The birds will be marked with a 3-inch wide yellow neck collar which will contain a black number and letter code printed vertically.

Persons observing marked geese should report sightings to Dr. Richard Malecki, New York Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, Fernow Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. Please include the following data: color of neck band, complete code sequence (i.e., A 1 2 0), name, address and phone number of observer, calendar date and time of observation, location of sighting (as specific as possible), size of flock (estimate), and habitat birds were in (cut corn field, wheat field, lake, pond, etc.) Observation forms are available if this is a project in which you are interested. Call Jo Solem, 725-5037 for a copy.

It has been some time since Rosamond Munro has written any "birdy" limericks. She recently submitted several, one of which is reproduced below.

Turnstone

A turnstone turned over a clock
Which caused great alarm to the flock;
They thought it a crime
To waste all that time
When it might have been spent on a rock.

Those people on the Rare Bird Alert were advised recently of the arrival of Caspian Terns on Lake Elkhorn. Jim Orgain reported them after observing four on April 18. He saw five on 4/19 and two on 4/20. Jon K. Boone saw the species over the lake several times on 4/19 observing as many as a dozen birds.

Did anyone obtain pictures of one or more of the birds? Photographic documentation is necessary to remove the species from the hypothetical category. Please call Jo Solem 725-5027 if you photographed the tern(s). Thanks once again to Ben Newkirk who has so capably taken care of the calling for the Rare Bird Alert.

MISCELLANEOUS BIRD NOTES - Dove, Grebe, Woodpecker

During a warm spell in February, Eva Sunell watched a Mourning Dove carrying nesting material. Despite the cold and unpleasant weather that March brought, the doves went forward with their nesting for on March 29 Eva noted a fledgling in her yard being fed by an adult.....During a sleet and ice storm in late December a Horned Grebe landed in Connie Bookstie's yard on Old Columbia Road in Ellicott City. Because these birds cannot take off from land, it was stranded. Marty Chester picked it up and took it to Eva Sunell who kept it for a day to be sure it wasn't injured and then released it on open water on the reservoir off Brownbridge Road on December 30.....In early April Ben Newkirk watched a Red-bellied Woodpecker on a nest container made of cased wire. Although many of us have seen woodpeckers hammering at nest with their bill, this bird repeatedly extended its tongue across the nest and then back into its mouth.

BOOKSTORE - Jan Randle

The bookstore has one Hylaricus feeder available for \$35.00. This is a metal, "squirrel-proof" feeder which can be adjusted to feed different sizes of birds. Call me at 531-6296 regarding this item or any others or see me at any club event. Check to be sure you have the guides you need before leaving on a vacation.

New Arrivals:

Wilds - Finding Birds in the National Capital Area

Johnsgard - The Hummingbirds of North America

Peterson - Field Guide to Butterflies (coloring bk)

Teale - North with the Spring, Journey Into Summer,

Autumn Across America, Wandering Through Winter, & Walk Through the Year

French - A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago

Harris - Birds of the Galapagos

Harrison, F. - Seabirds, An Identification Guide

Goode - Where to Watch Birds in Europe

Golden Guides: Cacti; Non-flowering Plants; Weeds;

Sky Observer Guide; Evolution

Klots - 1001 Questions Answered About Insects

Price - The Iris Book

Stone - Bird Studies at Old Cape May, Vol. I & II

Heinzel & Woodcock - Gallins Handguide to the Birds of Britain & Europe

Brooks - Speaking for Nature

Davis - A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico & C.A.

Craighead - Hawks, Owls & Wildlife

Peterson - Birds Over America

Watts - Winter Tree Finder & Master Tree Finder

Also Available:

Arnett - Guide to Insects

Emerson - The Common Spiders of U.S.

Golden Guides: Families of Birds;

Butterflies & Moths; Herbs &

Spices; Pond Life; Orchids;

Insects; Birds; Flowers;

Reptiles & Amphibians

Golden Field Guides: Seashells of

N.A.; Trees of N.A.; Skyguide;

Birds of N.A.; Amphibians of

N.A.; Reptiles of N. America

PLUS: Stamp stickers, Note Paper,

Palace Pouches, T-shirts, sweat shirts

SPRING ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DATES. Please send records of spring arrival and departure dates (March 1 - May 31) to Jo Solem, 10617 Graveloch Rd., Laurel, MD 20707 by June 15, 1984 so that they can be forwarded for use in Maryland Birdlife.

The cover drawing
is by Grazina
McClure.

Howard County Chapter MOS
10617 Graeloch Road
Laurel, MD 20707



Handbook - Wildlife Management
Eggs & Birds
Feeding for Wildlife
Wild Birds of the Birds of Mexico & C.A.