

Eared Grebe

Rejected 0 vote For, 7 votes Against

This record was discussed at the meeting. The similarity of Eared Grebe to the more likely Horned Grebe and the lack of corroborating evidence supporting the rare find led the Committee to reject this record. The written evaluation also did not do a sufficient in separating the bird in question from confounding species. Thus, the Committee felt it prudent to be conservative in the voting in this case.

Committee Member Comments:

CM1: There is not enough information in the report as written to eliminate Horned Grebe. The field marks described (golden feathers radiating away from the eye, black in appearance overall) could be applied to Horned Grebe, given that the bird was swimming away from the observer, which prevented him seeing the color of the foreneck. In addition, the lack of details about the head and bill structure further prevents me from distinguishing the bird from Horned Grebe.

CM2: This is a difficult record to evaluate. I know the observer and trust his identification skills. And my personal bias is against records without physical evidence. In this case though, the distinction between Eared and Horned Grebes is too close to make given the level of detail included. The observer made no mention of the differences in head and bill shape which are good distinguishing features. No mention of optics used and the bird was reasonably distant and moving away. There also must have been some molt occurring given the white patch visible on the breast. My determination is that this is not sufficient documentation to differentiate between a Horned Grebe which would be exceedingly more expected and similar in appearance, especially with molt.

CM3: Rejected without commentary.

CM4: Although the birder who submitted the Eared Grebe report has birding experience in WV, documents his sightings in eBird, and is in the top 60 birders in WV that use eBird, there must be concrete evidence regarding bird sightings for the West Virginia Bird Records Committee in order for records to be accepted. This observation fails to meet the criteria for suitable documentation. The observer articulated his familiarity with the species in question from observations in the western USA, and was fortunate to see the bird in question in full breeding plumage at Cheat Lake. While the birder reported noting golden feathers radiating from the birds eye, he notes that the bird was swimming away from him at the time, so a complete visual of the bird body was not possible. No notation was made to indicate the observation was viewed

via a spotting scope. Many observations of waterfowl need to be made with a spotting scope, and the fact that one was probably not used does not help the observation.

While this observer is familiar with Cheat Lake birding and stated he knows the difference between Horned Grebe and Eared Grebes, and apparently the Eared Grebe was documented well with photos on 11/05/2010 to 12/04/2010 by many other birders, this particular record is not supported with enough documentation for me to be able to vote in favor of it. Only one individual was present, and no physical evidence, such as a photo, was provided.

I vote against including this observation into the official record.

CM5: I vote against the Cheat Lake, WV sighting of the Eared Grebe record. The EAGR was only seen by one person and no physical evidence presented. The written evidence provides a description of an EAGR. The observer had previous experience and his report differentiated from other grebes. However, the reports lacks requirements of the By Laws Section V, Article E of physical evidence nor has documentation of three observers. Therefore, this report does not meet the standards set by the by-laws for inclusion on the official State List and shall remain on the Review List. Kudos to the observer for recognizing that the EAGR is on the state review list and submitting the observation.

CM6: Not nearly enough compelling evidence. Halfway across the lake and headed away?

CM7: The description of the bird supports an Eared Grebe, but the similarity between the Horned Grebe and Eared Grebe with the lack of a photo still gives me pause. The “radiating” golden feathers around the eye are the only mark to identify it as an Eared Grebe instead of a Horned Grebe and it was seen by only one person and with no physical evidence. I normally want to have at least two identifying field marks to support species identification and the report does not meet the minimum standards for species identification in the Bylaws. Thus, I vote against the record, although I would actually prefer to vote "Hypothetical" but that was not an option presented to us.