

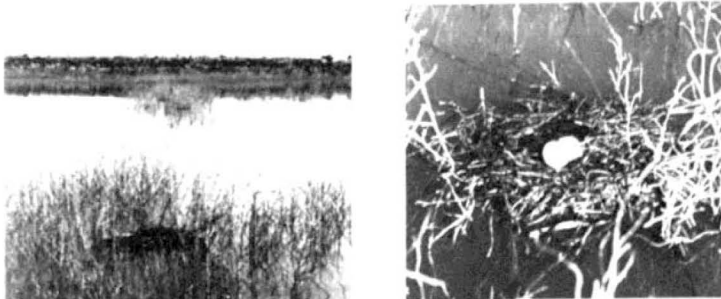
FIRST EARED GREBE NESTS FOR OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN S. SHACKFORD

Several times in the spring and summer of recent years, I have observed Eared Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*) singly or in pairs on the Boise City sewage ponds in central Cimarron County at the west end of the Oklahoma Panhandle. Though I searched arduously for a nest, I was never able to locate one.

On 18 June 1987, John E. Skeen, my son Nick and I made a routine check of the ponds. Not surprisingly, we found five Eared Grebes and a Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) swimming about on the northwest lagoon. Toward the center of the pond, we presently saw one of the Eared Grebes approach a fairly large floating nest. As we watched, it hopped on the nest, pulled a small amount of debris over two whitish eggs with its bill, then swam off. We scanned the pond carefully and discovered, also near the middle, two other grebe nests. One was about 60 feet (20m) south of the first, the other about 20 feet (7m) to the north of nest number one. An additional platform on the pond may have been used for resting, but might also have been part of yet another nest.

After a short time, an Eared Grebe made an additional visit to one of the nests, but unfortunately, we could not subsequently recall which nest. During the next 20 or 30 minutes, no grebe returned to any nest. However, when I later waded out to take photographs (below), the three eggs in the northernmost nest were also partially covered. The last two nests found each held three eggs. All were identical to those in the first nest.



EARED GREBE NESTS

Left photo is a south to north view of the three nests found by John S. Shackford at the Boise City sewage ponds. A close-up of the two eggs in the nest visited by one grebe is shown at right. Both photos were made 18 June 1987 by Shackford.

This pond had been dry during the previous several years. The preceding summer, I found dense stands of a tall, weedy forb known as firebush (*Kochia scoparia*), growing on its fertile bed. It was in the sparse remnants of the tops of these, which projected above the meter-deep water, that the nests had been built. We estimated that the pond, which lay north to south, measured approximately 100 by 150 yards.

According to A. C. Bent (Life histories of North American diving birds, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. 107, p. 28, 1919), Eared Grebes "are always in evidence about their nesting colonies and are not nearly as shy as the pied-billed grebes. The pied-billed grebe nests in small scattered colonies . . . Moreover the nests of the eared grebe are almost always in open situations, whereas the nests of the other two species [horned and pied-billed] are usually more or less concealed in some kind of vegetation. The nests of the eared grebe are also smaller and less elaborately built than these of the pied-billed or the horned grebes." Even though our three nests were all similar in construction and all built close together in the open, characteristic of Eared Grebes' nests, we could vouch with certainty only for the center one, where we saw an adult grebe pulling vegetation over the eggs.

Unfortunately, the pond was not checked later to ascertain whether or not any nest produced young. The openness of the 1987 nests leads me to suspect that few, if any, of the grebes seen here in the past actually nested, for I believe their nests would have been easily detected.

Some questions pertaining to the behavior and color of the young Eared Grebes described from Kingfisher County in an earlier paper (Ratzlaff, A., Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 19:9-11, 1986), prompted a review by the newly established Oklahoma Bird Records Committee. It was the considered judgment of the committee, as well as several independent authorities on grebe biology, that the validity of the record was questionable enough that it should not be accepted. Photos of adults, nests, and eggs described herein have been seen, approved, and filed by the committee. They therefore constitute the first documented occurrence of breeding for Oklahoma. This migratory species has, however, nested in the Panhandle of Texas (see Seyffert note that follows).

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EARED GREBES

A pair of Eared Grebes at the Boise City sewage ponds. Note the unturned bill of the farthest bird. Photo taken by John S. Shackford on 18 June 1987.