

IDENTIFICATION

Learn to recognize the differences between Western and Clark's grebes.

W e s t e r n g r e b e

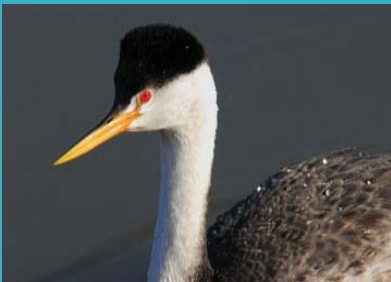
- black on head below eye
- bill is yellow green
- two-note call



Western grebe © Paul Higgins

C l a r k ' s g r e b e

- black on head above eye
- bill is yellow orange
- one-note call



Clark's grebe © Jerry Ting

Western and Clark's grebes winter mainly near the Pacific coast and migrate to inland waters for breeding in the summer. In Idaho, they prefer large rivers, reservoirs, and lakes that include shallow water areas with emergent vegetation.

They feed on small fishes, aquatic insects, and invertebrates by diving and chasing their prey.

While at their breeding areas, the grebes do not fly. Because their feet are positioned far back on their body, they have great difficulty standing up on land.

HELP PROTECT NESTING GREBES

Grebe nesting coincides with the busy boating and fishing season. Please:

- 1 AVOID NESTING AREAS**
Stay 300 feet away from colonies and avoid prolonged presence near the colonies.
- 2 WATCH YOUR WAKE**
When moving near colonies, go slowly and quietly to avoid swamping nests and minimize disturbance.
- 3 TAKE A SCENIC DETOUR**
Motor, sail, or paddle *around* flocks and colonies instead of *through* them.
- 4 AVOID BOAT STRIKES**
Watch for grebes in open water, especially between May and September, to avoid killing collisions.
- 5 RESPECT BUOYS AND LIMITS**
Obey buoy markers and posted speed limits for the safety of all.
- 6 PACK OUT YOUR TRASH**
Adults and young can become tangled in fishing line, and other plastic trash, and drown.
- 7 EDUCATE OTHERS**
With everyone's help, we can ensure the survival of these beautiful waterbirds.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects grebes. It is illegal to hunt, harass, kill, or disturb grebes and/or their eggs.



Idaho Fish and Game adheres to all applicable state and federal laws and regulations related to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, gender, disability or veteran's status. If you feel you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility of Idaho Fish and Game, or if you desire further information, please write to: Idaho Department of Fish and Game, P.O. Box 25, Boise, ID 83707 OR U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Assistance, Mailstop: MBSP-4020, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203, Telephone: (703) 358-2156. This publication will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Department of Fish and Game for assistance.

WESTERN & CLARK'S GREBES



Western grebe © Paul Higgins

Sharing our lakes with these unique waterbirds.

A publication of the Conservation Sciences Program



You're just visiting, but for these birds the water is home.

Putting on a Show



Western grebes perform Rushing Ceremony © Brian Currie

Grebes return to inland lakes to choose a mate for the breeding season and to raise young. Mate selection consists of two complex rituals: the Rushing Ceremony (where both partners "run" across the surface of the water) and the Weed Ceremony (a pair dances together, holding vegetation in their bills).

Display Done; Mate Won

Once the birds have formed pair bonds, the male finds a nest site and both birds build up the nest with floating vegetation. After copulation the female lays 1-6 eggs and both parents incubate and defend the nest, alternating nest-sitting duties with feeding.

If they have to leave the nest unattended for any reason, they cover the eggs with wet plant material to prevent them from overheating, which can kill the embryos. undefended nests are at great risk: predators will break open and eat the eggs.



Western grebe on nest at Coeur d'Alene WMA © Donald L. Burrell

Raising the Family



Clark's grebe with chick © Katherine Smith

The chicks hatch in 24 days and immediately climb onto their parent's back, where they will ride for 2-4 weeks because the water is too cool for them, and can cause hypothermia if they fall in for more than a few moments. Both parents feed and protect the chicks

for 6-8 weeks or until the young have fledged (grown flight feathers). The parents may split up, each taking one or two chicks once the chicks are old enough to swim and dive on their own.

Grebes at Risk

Western and Clark's grebes are Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Idaho. At their breeding lakes they face high mortality, where the biggest losses occur among the eggs and chicks.



© Dan Anderson

The largest causes of mortality, unfortunately, are all of human origins: pesticides, habitat destruction, and direct disturbance.



© Dan Anderson

Human Impacts

Pesticides

Like many birds, grebes have been historically impacted by DDT and DDD spraying. Although these particular pesticides have been banned in the U.S., they still persist on the landscape. Other pesticides that are still in use also pose a serious threat.

Habitat Destruction

Grebes need large bodies of fresh water to nest on – lakes, marshes, and sloughs. The west has lost over 50% of its historic wetlands, and those that remain often are not suitable for nesting. The main habitat issues for grebes in Idaho are water quality and water level fluctuations. High nutrient loads and dramatic fluctuations in water levels, which can flood nests, make it difficult for grebes to successfully nest and raise young.

Direct Disturbance

The grebes that attempt to nest in the suitable habitat that remains are having difficulty. Lakes are popular places and people often don't realize they are disturbing grebes and affecting their ability to reproduce.

Boat wakes swamp nests, drowning eggs. Any approach by humans to the colony will cause adults to escape, abandoning nests to overheating and predators. In open water, adults carry their young on their back, but may be forced to dive to escape water craft. As a result, they dump their chicks into the water, where they will struggle, become chilled, and may drown.

Jet ski disturbance © Katherine Smith



Nesting on the water can be tough.