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NOTES ON BIRD SIGHTINGS IN NEBRASKA

House Finches. This species has been appearing at my backyard feeders, 10 to 30 feet from our window, for several years, increasing in number each year. They came nearly every day in 1996 except during a period that I associate with post-breeding molt. Numbers varied from one to a maximum of 17 at one time, with 11 counted for the 1996 Christmas Bird Count. We commonly use 7-8 power binoculars to look for a rare Purple Finch. House Finches are noticeably smaller than House Sparrows and slightly larger than American Goldfinches, and feed with both species.

Males have varied in color from bright deep-orange to dark red, almost purple. Their coloring (not shade so much as amount and intensity) varies with the season, being most dull in the fall, brightening during December, and reaching full breeding

plumage by mid-spring. The crown is brown on top and varying shades of red on the sides. The auriculars and part of the nape form a brown triangle on the side of the head, while the throat, neck, and lower portion of nape are a reddish shade. The breast and rump also are the same peculiar shade of red, and the sides and abdomen have brown striping. The wings are brownish to gray with two light wing bars, and the tail is the same color as the wings, and appears longish for this small, slender bird.

Females are overall brown tending to gray, with heavy striping on the breast, sides, and abdomen. The triangular area on the side of the head is very slightly darker than the rest of the head, with the overall side view of the head having a plain appearance compared to a Purple Finch.

--- Raymond C. Korpi, 1106 Bea Circle, Bellevue, NE 68005

Red-necked Grebe. On 21 December 1995, Ross Silcock and I were birding from the south end of the dam of Lake McConaughy in Keith County. At 3:22 p.m. CST I noticed a lone grebe about 300 m distant. Initially I thought the bird was an Eared Grebe, but it was soon apparent that it was too large. It often swam alone, but on two occasions it joined small rafts of Western Grebes. Compared to a Western Grebe, this bird had a darker head and foreneck, a thicker bill with less yellow color, a shorter neck, and a shorter body, which rode higher on the water. Based on these features, I recognized the bird as a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) in basic plumage. The following is a more detailed description. The bill was equal to the length of the head and appeared mostly dark with some pale color at the base of the lower mandible. The forehead, crown, back of neck, and upperparts were black. The chin and throat were white, and the white color extended back across the cheek, forming a conspicuous pale "crescent." The foreneck was light gray, darker than the throat. There was also some lighter-gray color visible on the flanks. Unfortunately, the bird continued to swim directly away from us. At 3:50 p.m., I lost sight of it near the center of the lake, and it could not be relocated over the next two days.

According to Ross Silcock (pers. comm.), there are 23 additional records of Red-necked Grebes in Nebraska, but only 6 are acceptably documented. Other acceptable records are from April (1), June (1), October (2), and November (2). The 17 undocumented records follow a similar pattern with reports from March (1), April (2), May (3), June (1), September (2), October (4), and November (2), plus 2 with no date. Despite the scarcity of records, this species should occur at least occasionally during peak-migration periods from mid-April to mid-May, and from late October to freeze-up. I thank Ross Silcock for summarizing previous records of this species in Nebraska.

----Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014

Whimbrel. In the spring of 1995, I observed two Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*) in Nebraska. On 27 April 1995, Jeanne Fair, Yvonne Bernal, and I were conducting a shorebird survey at Griess WPA in Fillmore County. At 12:20 p.m. I noticed a large, long-billed shorebird, which I immediately recognized as a Whimbrel. We studied it for about 10 minutes before it suddenly took flight to the north. The bird towered above nearby Killdeer. The bill was dark, nearly twice the length of the head, and decurved. The head was strongly patterned: pale central crown stripe, white eyeline, and a dark line through each eye. The remainder of the head, neck, and underparts were pale with

darker-brown mottling, except that the lower belly was mostly unmarked. The mantle was also mottled dark brown. The wings were darker than the mantle when the bird was perched. In flight, the wings and wing linings were dark, and the tail was light brown with narrow, dark barring. The bird flushed once and gave the flight call typical for this species: a series of loud, whistled notes, all on one pitch. At about 12:35 p.m., we relocated the bird on a wetland 2 mi. north of Griess WPA, and I took two distant photos of it. It was gone the next day.

At 6:55 a.m. on 18 May 1995, I observed another Whimbrel at the Sandy Beach area of Lake McConaughy in Keith County. As I drove up to the beach, all of the birds suddenly took flight. I immediately heard a long series of loud, whistled notes, which I recognized as those of a Whimbrel. The bird was flying west along the lake shore with a small flock of Black-bellied Plovers. Compared to the plovers, this bird was at least twice as large, with a long neck, a long, decurved bill, and longer legs. I could see that the head was patterned with light and dark stripes, but the situation precluded a better look at the precise pattern. The bird was almost uniformly dark brown, except that the primaries were slightly darker. The underparts were also brown, slightly paler than the upperparts. I watched the bird until 7:03 a.m. as it gradually flew west along the north shore of the lake and disappeared out of sight with the plovers.

Whimbrels are rare migrants in Nebraska. There are about 28 records for the state, all but 4 in spring. The bulk of the spring records fall between 10 and 25 May. I thank Joel Jorgensen and Ross Silcock for summarizing previous records of this species in Nebraska.

---- Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014