

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

EARED GREBE

Podiceps nigricollis

Family: PODICIPEDIDAE
B009

Order: PODICIPEDIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common winter resident in many aquatic habitats throughout California. From September or October to April or May, it is abundant on salt ponds, common to fairly common on estuarine waters, and uncommon to fairly common in marine subtidal habitats, and on lakes and quiet riverine backwaters of lowlands and foothills throughout state. Very rare in Great Basin at this season. Especially abundant August to October at Mono Lake, and November to May at the Salton Sea. Breeds commonly in marshy lakes in northeastern California and abundantly at Tule Lake. Nests locally, and irregularly, in small numbers in the eastern Sierra Nevada, southern mountains, in lowland lakes throughout state, and in marshy estuarine habitats of southern California. Fairly common in Sierra Nevada and southern mountain lakes, and at Salton Sea, even where not breeding. During migration, fairly common in marine pelagic waters (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Primarily eats aquatic and land insects, including larvae; also feeds on crustaceans, mollusks, other invertebrates, small fishes, and amphibians (Palmer 1962). Dives and captures food underwater and on bottom, and also takes land insects from water surface.

Cover: To escape danger, usually dives and emerges at a distance, then swims away in sight. Also, can take flight easily from water. Rests on water, does not come ashore.

Reproduction: Floating nest-platforms are built in emergent vegetation, anchored to submerged pond weeds or algal mats in marshes bordering open water of lakes (most often), ponds, marshes, estuaries, and quiet backwaters of rivers. In nesting colonies at Eagle Lake, Lassen Co., Gould (1974) found no nests in less than 41 cm (16 in) of water; nests may be in water up to 1.8 m (6 ft) deep (Cogswell 1977).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: For breeding, requires emergent vegetation, submergent vegetation, or algal mats, in lacustrine, quiet riverine, or estuarine waters.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity, except most migration is nocturnal.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: A major southward migration passes east of Cascades and Sierra Nevada in the fall, with stopovers at Mono Lake August to October; and a major wintering ground at Salton Sea. Breeding populations, concentrated in northeastern

California, largely move to the coast for the winter, but many individuals linger. Most individuals return to breeding grounds in April and May (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Palmer 1962).

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Territory, used for courtship, copulation, and nesting, consisted of a 0.6 m (2 ft) radius around the nest platform in British Columbia (McAllister 1958).

Reproduction: Courtship begins in spring migration, and continues on the breeding grounds from late March to May. Eggs laid mostly April to May (June to July in northeastern California). Monogamous, and typically nests in dense colonies of up to 5200 (Palmer 1962), but sometimes nests solitarily. Clutch size usually 3-4 eggs, rarely 1-6. Average size of 293 clutches in British Columbia was 3.48 eggs (McAllister 1958). Replacement clutches are common, but eared grebes primarily are single-brooded. Incubation lasts 20.5-21.5 days. Precocial young are tended by both parents. Breeding continues into September. Ages at independence and first flight are unknown, but probably breeds first at 1 yr.

Niche: Studies at Eagle Lake, Lassen Co. (Gould 1974, Lederer 1976) emphasized that nesting success may be reduced markedly by nearby lakeshore development. Also detrimental are excessive shoreline grazing, which removes nesting cover in shallow water; the use of pesticides on the local watershed; and excessive disturbance by boaters and fishermen. Deserts nest easily if harrassed by predators (gulls) when colony starting. Low water levels may prevent breeding. Other species of grebes are usually excluded from nesting colonies, but coots, gulls, and terns sometimes nest in eared grebe colonies. Scattered pairs of eared grebes sometimes nest in colonies of gulls or western and Clark's grebes.

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