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Pied-billed Grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

Order PODICIPEDIFORMES - Family PODICIPEDIDAE

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A small diving bird with a chicken-like bill, the Pied-billed Grebe is common on lakes and ponds across North America. It is rarely seen flying and prefers to sink out of sight when danger threatens.

Cool Facts

- The Pied-billed Grebe is rarely seen in flight. It prefers to escape predators by diving, and it migrates at night. However, it can fly, and stray individuals have reached Hawaii and Europe.
- Although it swims like a duck, the Pied-billed Grebe does not have webbed feet. Instead of having a webbing connecting all the toes, each toe has lobes extending out on the sides that provide extra surface area for paddling.
- The downy chicks can leave the nest soon after hatching, but they do not swim well at first and do not spend much time in the water in the first week. They sleep on the back of a parent, held close beneath its wings. By the age of four weeks, the young grebes are spending day and night on the water. For the first ten days their response to danger is to climb onto a parent's back. After that, when danger threatens, they dive under water.

Description

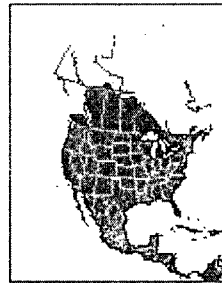
- Size: 30-38 cm (12-15 in)
- Wingspan: 45-62 cm (18-24 in)
- Weight: 253-568 g (8.93-20.05 ounces)
- Small waterbird.
- Brown head and body, with tufted, whitish rump.
- Small head and bill.

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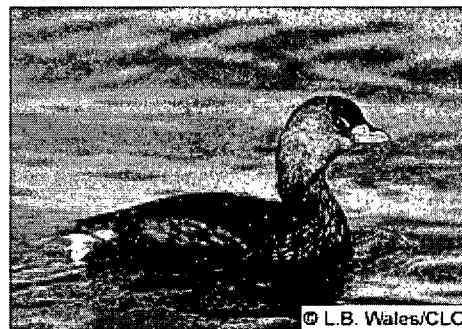

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Pied-billed Grebe, adult, breeding plumage
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Pied-billed Grebe, adult, non-

- Bill short, but thick.
- Bill pale, with black ring around it in summer.
- Black throat in summer.

breeding plumage

- Crown to back dark brown.
- Face and neck light gray.
- Chest mixed white and light brownish yellow, with irregular black spots.
- Belly white, with some black spots.
- Flanks white to pale brownish yellow.
- Undertail white.
- Tail dark brown.
- Legs and feet black.

Breeding adult (Alternate Plumage): Bill ivory-white to bluish gray, with thick black band around middle. Throat black. Eyes reddish brown. Eying bluish white.

Nonbreeding adult (Basic Plumage): Bill brownish flesh, sometimes with faint band. Throat white, shading to grayish on sides of neck and head. Sides of neck, throat, and upper breast reddish brown. Eying brownish to bluish white.

Sex Differences

Sexes look alike.

Immature

Juvenile similar to winter adult, but face with dark and pale stripes.

Similar Species

- **Other grebes** lack black band on bill, have thinner bills, and have white wing patches.
- **Ducks** have flatter bills and do not sit so low in the water.

Sound

Song a loud "kuk-kuk-kuk, kaow, kaow, kaow, kaow, kaowk, kaowk, kawk."

[»listen to songs of this species](#)

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Range**Summer Range****Range Map**

Breeds from southern Northwest Territories and central and southern Canada southward across the United States into Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

Winter Range

Winters in central and southern United States southward to Central America, wherever open water can be found. Also in Caribbean and South America.

Habitat

Breeds on seasonal or permanent ponds with dense stands of emergent vegetation, bays and sloughs. Uses most types of wetlands in winter.

Food

Fish, crustaceans (especially crayfish), and aquatic insects.

Behavior**Foraging**

Dives underwater for food, in open water and among aquatic vegetation.

Reproduction**Nest Type**

An open bowl in a platform of floating vegetation.

Egg Description

Bluish white.

Clutch Size

3-10 eggs.

Condition at Hatching

Downy and active; can leave nest within one day, but usually stay on nest platform.

Conservation Status

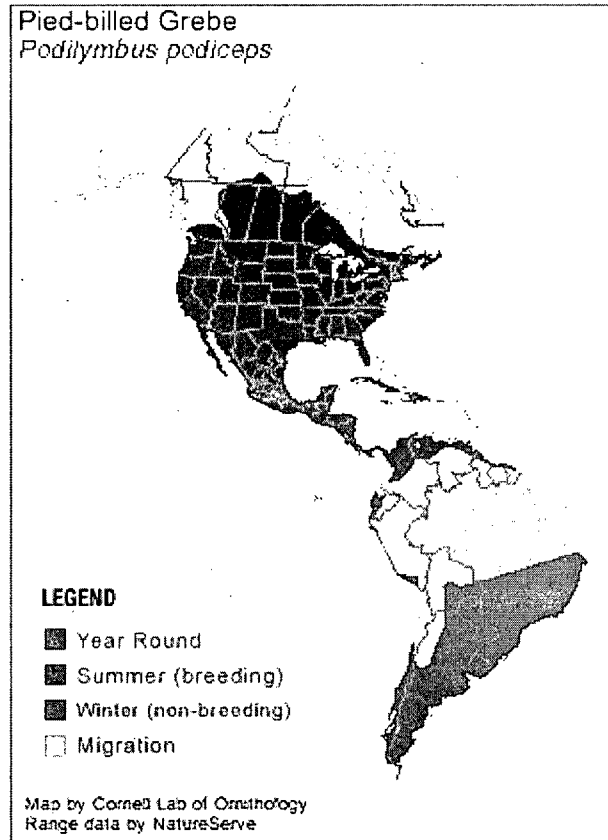
Common. Breeding populations declining in some areas, especially at edge of range.

Other Names

Grèbe à bec bigarré (French)
Zambullidor piquigrueso, Macá picopinto (Spanish)

Sources used to construct this page:

Muller, M. J., and R. W. Storer. 1999. Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 410 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.



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