

This is all I have had to do with owls for the last five or six days.

PIED-BILLED GREBE NOTES.

BY IRA N. GABRIELSON.

Ever since the time, when as a small boy, I first discovered that the mass of decaying vegetation found floating in the swamps was the nest of the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) this species has been of great interest to me. In the course of observations from year to year a few facts of interest have been noted that I do not recall seeing in print.

The species nests here (Northwestern Iowa*) around the edge of the lakes and ponds in the rushes and in the cat-tail swamps. The nest is built of decaying vegetation and is usually floating, slightly anchored to the surrounding reeds. The eggs, when left, are completely covered with the nest material and occasionally a few green reeds. The statement is often seen that the bird covers the eggs in this manner, but I do not remember of seeing any explanation as to how this was accomplished. After watching many times one was discovered in the act. She stood or rather sat on the edge of the nest and used the beak to root the nest material over the eggs. In this manner she worked entirely around the eggs until they were hidden from view. The beak was then used, much as a robin uses hers in ironing the nest, to spread the material around. She then seized one or two reeds, broke them off with a quick sidewise jerk of the head, laid them across the nest, and sliding into the water swam away.

It is commonly known that many birds will feign injury to entice an intruder away from the nest or young, but to me, at least, it was a great surprise to know that the Pied-billed Grebe would occasionally resort to this artifice. Only two instances of this have come to my notice, and both of these occurred on the same day, June 26, 1913. In com-

* This includes notes made in a Nebraska swamp just across the Missouri River from Sioux City, Iowa, as well as those in Iowa.

pany with Mr. Howard Graham the writer was poling a boat thru the rushes of an old swamp for the purpose of locating Yellow-headed Blackbird nests on which we wished to make some observations. Suddenly a great commotion was heard just ahead of the boat, and I stepped to the prow to see what it was. The boat was almost onto a nest of this species and the old bird was near it, apparently helpless. One wing hung limp and she frantically kicked and splashed about without making any forward progress. All of the time she uttered a curious grating note unlike anything I ever heard from a grebe. For an experiment we swung the boat around and followed her. She kept up these actions, but swam slowly away until a point some twenty-five yards from the nest was reached, when she dived into the reeds and was seen no more. Shortly after this experience, progress became so slow in the boat that we abandoned it and started to wade. After traveling about half an hour, I came to another grebe nest in which the eggs were just hatching. Both parents were present and commenced the same performance. As I took a step forward they worked slowly away, splashing violently and creating a great disturbance. The same peculiar call was noted as in the other case. After moving a few steps I stopped and remained standing quietly near the nest. The grebes, on seeing me stop, disappeared and I supposed they had given up the attempt to lead me away. Suddenly one popped into view almost within reach of my hand and worked slowly away as before. This one had proceeded about ten yards when the other one came into view near me and started away. The pair kept up this alternate performance for fully five minutes before they finally ceased. On seeing that I was not to be duped by their actions, they remained quietly on the water about ten yards away until I started again. One of them followed me for some distance before finally disappearing.

The parents seem to be more devoted to the young than many of the other marsh nesting birds. The young crawl from the nest as soon as they hatch and the parent leads them away, always keeping between them and a possible

enemy. On being approached she directs them to the nearest cover, generally a patch of reeds, and as soon as it is reached they all disappear except the parent. A careful watch kept on the edge of the patch will usually reveal her swimming slowly back and forth with only the eyes and bill above water. It is almost impossible to find the young once they have entered the weeds, as they are adept at hiding and remaining motionless.

In August after the young are feathered out and almost fully grown, the grebes in one swamp or pond sometimes assemble in one flock and feed together. The largest number I ever noted was on August 19, 1913, in the same swamp in which the notes of June 26 were made. This flock numbered, as near as could be counted, two hundred. I watched them for some time and saw them eating numbers of the small frogs which swarmed about the water's edge and on the mud flats. Occasionally two would seize the same frog and attempt to swallow it. This would cause a tug of war, in which several others sometimes joined, and often neither of the original contestants finally secured the prize.

Marshalltown, Iowa.

THE ROLL OF THE LOG-COCK OR PILEATED WOODPECKER.

BY ERNEST W. VICKERS.

For several years I enjoyed the rolling call of a Pileated Woodpecker, which from the peculiar resonance of sounding-board carried to an almost incredible distance. The scene was located a mile and a quarter from my home, and impossible as it may appear I have heard the roll when in the house with doors and windows closed; this of course when atmospheric conditions were favorable. Out of doors the sound doubtless carried two miles.

This sounding-board of the Log-cock was the big hollow arm of a great tulip-tree or white-wood (*Liriodendron tulipi-*



Gabrielson, Ira Noel. 1914. "Pied-Billed Grebe Notes." *The Wilson bulletin* 26(1), 13-15.

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