

Red-necked Grebe Visits Champaign County Shopping Mall

As a compiler-coordinator for the Champaign County Spring Bird Count, I had been busy rounding up the troops and assigning them to their territories. Now it was 4:30 a.m. on 6 May 1995 and time to see what the day would bring. I had carefully plotted my usual route to cover all those bits and pieces of the county which no one else finds exciting enough to check. No bird-filled forest preserves for my partner and me, but rather, the Champaign city parks, the Parkland College campus, the Urbana sludge ponds, and the various detention basins. This route is not exactly a self-sacrifice. It covers a wide variety of habitat, yields a good species total for the count, and often something unique.

We dutifully tramped around Kaufman Lake, noting a dearth of warblers. We trudged to the water treatment plant at Parkland College, where we tallied the county's only gulls of the day. Then we stood overlooking the Marketplace Mall retention basin in Champaign. This is a large, deep pond, probably originally a gravel pit. It is surrounded by a chain link fence and is well below the level of the road, providing a good overview. Adjacent to the basin is the area's largest shopping center.

My companion was Malcolm Sargent, a botanist and a good birder. His sharp eyes spotted something I didn't. As I struggled to set up my scope, he said, "There is a big grebe out there with lots of red on its neck. What could it be?"

Of course it dove before I got a look. It is amazing how long a grebe can stay under when you are eagerly waiting for it to surface. A Pied-billed Grebe appeared, but Sargent assured me that it was not the right bird. Suddenly, there it was, a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps*

grisegena) in beautiful breeding plumage.

This was a life bird for Sargent and one that I have not seen often, but there was no mistaking its identity. The large size, stout, sharp bill, dark back and hind neck, shiny black cap, and above all, the rusty, red fore-neck sharply demarcated from the white throat and cheeks were clear field marks. The grebe fished industriously during the half hour we spent watching it.

Bohlen (1989) listed this grebe as an occasional migrant with most spring records occurring in March and April. This individual was a new record for Champaign County and stayed for several days, allowing more experienced birders to enjoy seeing it and to confirm our sighting.



Female Anhinga, McKee Marsh, DuPage County, first northern Illinois record. 24 April 1995. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H.D. 1989. *The Birds of Illinois*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, IN.

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First Northern Illinois Anhinga

My plan for 22 April 1995 was to sample the progress of migration at several sites in Kane and DuPage Counties. Late morning brought me to

McKee Marsh, DuPage County, where an Osprey was soaring overhead. I was enjoying a Great Blue Heron sitting on a snag, when next to it landed a bird I had first seen 30 years ago in the Florida Everglades and not since, certainly not in northern Illinois.

It was a female Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*). I noted the small head; pointed, elongated bill; the black body except for the distinctive buffish-white snake-like neck, buffish-white breast, and silver-streaked back; and the long tail. It was as unmistakable as it was incredible.