

Eared Grebes nesting in the Valley of Mexico

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THE EARED GREBE (*PODICEPS nigricollis*) nests regularly in Mexico in the state of Baja California Norte (A. O. U. 1983) and has also been found breeding, at least sporadically, in the states of Chihuahua, Nayarit, Jalisco and Puebla (Dickerman 1969; Williams 1982). Although we recorded the species in flocks of a dozen or more birds on Laguna del Carmen (state of Tlaxcala) in November, to date there are no published records of its occurrence in the Valley of Mexico (nor even in the state of Mexico).

Eared Grebes were first recorded in the Distrito Federal on December 2, 1983, when we observed four birds on the Canal Cuemanco in the Xochimilco District (19° 17' N, 99° 06' W). All four were seen regularly until March 6, 1984, and two of them, having assumed breeding plumage during February and March, were noted until the beginning of July 1984. Not surprisingly, they made no attempt to breed at this site since the Canal Cuemanco has little or no emergent vegetation which could serve as breeding habitat and it is used regularly by the navy and by rowing clubs.

On August 2, what we presumed was the same pair was discovered on a small nameless lake one kilometer north of the original site and we suspected that the birds were nesting in a dense bed of aquatic vegetation, mainly *Typha* sp. and *Cyperus bourgaei*. This was confirmed on August 28 when we observed three downy young being transported on the back of one of the adults and being fed by the other. At least two of these young birds reached adult size be-

fore we lost track of them after an influx of at least seven other individuals on September 20.

A second nest was located on October 1, 1984, and an adult in post-breeding molt was observed apparently incubating eggs until October 8, when the nest was abandoned. These nests constitute the first breeding records for the Valley of Mexico, the most southerly breeding in North America and an extension of the known range of the species by about 170 kilometers—the nearest known breeding site is Laguna Alchichica in the state of Puebla (19° 27' N, 97° 22' W).

Late summer and fall breeding is apparently rare in this species in Europe (Cramp and Simmons 1977), but is common among aquatic species in the Valley of Mexico, almost certainly because of the much higher water levels in August and September after the summer rains. On the same lake, which had a surface area of about 25–30 hectares in August 1984 (compared to about ten hectares the previous April) and a maximum depth of about two and one-half meters, downy young of Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) and Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) were observed during November 1984. Indeed, during both 1983 and 1984 the peak breeding activity of these species and the American Coot (*Fulica americana*) occurred during the period from late August to mid-October. Among the resident aquatic species, only the Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) preserved a normal breeding season in those years with downy young being observed from April to August.

As water levels rose during the years

1985 and 1986, the population of Eared Grebes in the Valley of Mexico increased rapidly. In 1986 as many as twelve nests were found at a second site a few kilometers east of the Canal Cuemanco. Several other aquatic and waterside species not previously recorded as breeding in the area were found with nests in Xochimilco in 1986, among them Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*), Redhead (*Aythya americana*) and American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). However, a sharp drop in water levels occurred during the winter of 1986–87 and as far as is known, neither Eared Grebes nor any of the three species mentioned above nested successfully in 1987.

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