

were therefore present at Harike from 1st to 14th February 2001.

Previous records

Mew Gull has been recorded previously at Harike (Kazmierczak & Singh 1998), probably by Per Undeland, who recorded most of the rarities at Harike (Krys Kazmierczak, *in litt.*, 2001) but further details are necessary. Alström (1994) recorded this species near Delhi and Paul Holt *et al.* recorded a first winter bird at Morjim, Goa on 14th December 1996 (Holt 2000). There are also five records from Pakistan, two from Nepal, one more from near Delhi and another from Bhutan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Inskipp 1988; Kazmierczak 2000; Robson 1993).

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Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India

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During a birdwatching trip to Harike Lake, Punjab (India), from 6th to 10th February 2001, I spent many hours studying the grebes near the Sikh gurdwara (temple) at the west end of the lake. There were several Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* present but some birds were noticeably different from this species and so I took notes of all such birds. It wasn't until later and after comparing notes with Werner Suter and Mark Beaman, who were also visiting at that time that I realised I had seen at least one and probably two Horned Grebes *P. auritus*.

A small grebe was seen on 10th February 2001, south of the gurdwara, at a range of about 20m through a Kowa ED TS613 telescope at 30x magnification. The bird dived after a few minutes and was not relocated immediately until later, when presumably the same bird, was spotted at a distance of c. 400m, to the east of the gurdwara.

Description

The overall impression was of a small, smartly two-toned dark-grey and white grebe, with none of the dusky or buff appearance of Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, it was also longer necked.

The eye was orange-red and this along with small size points to Black-necked or Horned Grebe. This bird had a very clear white spot on the lores. Another feature was the pattern around the eye, the black cap extending only to the middle of the eye and there was a rather straight line running straight back from the eye. The ear coverts were white and

the lores pale. The hood was also well defined and contrasting with the white ear coverts.

The throat, breast and flanks were all white. The cap, nape, scapulars, wings and tail were all a very dark-grey. This contrast created the clear two-tone effect.

The bill was pale with a clear dark upper edge to the upper mandible.

When it dived there was a white zigzag on the wing—too fast to see if this was more than just the secondary panel—but the zigzag suggests a possible white leading edge.

The shape of the head was not clearly the triangular shape, supposedly typical of Horned Grebe but also did not show the high forehead of Black-necked Grebe.

Discussion

This bird had a very clear white spot on the lores, which is diagnostic for Horned Grebe (Jonsson 1993; Beaman & Madge 1998; Mullarney *et al.* 1999). Another diagnostic feature was the pattern around the eye, which exactly fits the illustrations in the three works just cited. The black cap extended only to the middle of the eye and there was a rather straight line running straight back from the eye; the ear coverts were white and the lores were pale. The overall result is that the eye was only surrounded by extensive black above a line extending directly above the eye, with no black below eye level or directly to the front of the eye, where there was the pale loreal spot, i.e. black surrounding about 110 degrees of

the eye. On Black-necked Grebe the black cap extends well below the rear of the eye and so the black around the eye is extensive above, behind and in front of the eye (about 250 degrees). On Black-necked Grebe the ear coverts are blackish and the lores are black and the white has a clear hook back of white on the nape.

The hood was also well defined and contrasting with the white ear coverts, which on Black-necked is more blended or diffuse, the bird described had the black hood contrasting with the white ear coverts.

The bill was pale with a clear dark upper edge to the upper mandible, a feature not shown by Black-necked Grebe.

The shape of the head was not clearly the triangular shape, typical of Horned but was neither the high forehead shown by Black-necked. However whilst watching Black-necked Grebes in Denmark in the following (late) summer I saw that the head shape of Black-necked Grebe can be confusingly flattened when it has been diving. I therefore conclude that head shape cannot be completely relied on with quick views.

I have previous experience of Horned Grebe in summer plumage in Scotland and I am familiar with Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage from Britain, Denmark and Nepal. I am also quite familiar with Little Grebe, a common bird throughout India and western Europe. Although the eastern race of the Little Grebe *T. r. capensis* has white secondaries, and therefore a very different wing pattern in flight, which is poorly illustrated in the literature, from the European race-this bird was not a confusion species because of the lack of a red eye and overall plumage differences. Generally this bird is more brown above and less white below, and so confusion is possible only with a superficial view.

The bird is therefore clearly a Horned Grebe based on three key diagnostic features, the ruby eye, longish neck (compared to Black-necked Grebe), pale lores, the hood pattern and the dark upper-side to the bill.

Two separate and independent bird groups also recorded the Horned Grebe, south of the gurdwara at Harike. Werner Suter from Switzerland, in a group comprising Susanne Ruppen, Günther Helm, Wolf-Rainer Ilenburg, Werner Müller, Hermann Reinhardt and Chista Glauser, recorded at least one, probably up to three Horned Grebes on 1st February 2001 and five on 3rd February 2001 (Werner Suter: email dated 29th December 2001). Mark Beaman from Britain, leading a Birdquest tour, recorded four Horned Grebes on 13th and 14th February 2001 (Mark Beaman: email dated 2nd January 2002). One might therefore conclude that at least 1-5 Horned Grebes were present in the area from 1st to 14th February 2001.

Description from Werner Suter

'On 1st February 2001, at Harike Dam, we walked from the temple on the dam road towards the little tower (from where we crossed through the reed bed to the canal and bridge with the tea house). Before coming to the tower, we scanned the waterbirds on the lake repeatedly, and found three Black-necked Grebes, somewhat scattered and busily

diving, at a distance of c. 300m (using Svarovski and other telescopes, up to 60x). One of the tour members, Susanne Ruppen, drew our attention to a grebe that looked slightly different, and asked whether Horned Grebe was a possibility. Since this bird and the Black-necked Grebes were constantly diving, it took some time until we had established his identity beyond doubt (it was less restless after some time), but we were not sure whether the numbers (1 Horned, 3 Black-necked) were in fact higher since further away, there might have been more grebes. Anyway, as I was quite familiar with Horned Grebe in winter plumage (it is a regular though uncommon winter visitor to Swiss waters, but I have done field work on over-wintering water-birds in Switzerland for many years, and have thus seen it from time to time in Switzerland, and elsewhere), it was clear quite soon that it was a Horned Grebe (we were aware of the rarity of the species in India).

'Two days later, on 3rd February, we were back at the same place. Again, there were a number of grebes busily diving, and we saw that there were more than just one Horned Grebe-in fact, most of the small, scattered group were Horned Grebes. After about 20 minutes of scanning and after the birds had paused for a short moment, we had now counted 5 Horned Grebes and only 1 Black-necked. As two days before, we were not sure whether there were more grebes scattered across the large numbers of ducks and coots stretching away into [the] distance. However, this time, the nearest grebes were slightly closer, about 250m away, and to be seen in very good light. However, to take pictures, the birds were still too distant (but a good sight in the 30x wide-angle lens of my Svarovski AT80 telescope).

'Size and shape: Marginally larger, perhaps somewhat longer body, looking less 'stubby' (and Little Grebe-like), slightly thicker-set, particularly at the neck, than black-necked, clearly flatter head with highest point at the back end (not above the eye), bill slightly stronger and not upturned.

'Head pattern: sharp demarcation between black cap and white side of the head, going through the eye and slightly upwards behind the eye (giving the impression of a grebe with a 'flat' black cap contrasting strongly with very white ear-coverts).

'Bill: On 3rd February, in good light, we were able to discern the whitish bill tip in at least 2-3 of the birds.'

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