

The Pied-billed Grebe is an uncommon breeder and frequent spring and fall migrant in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

The Pied-billed Grebe is not abundant in New York State. It is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and is State-listed Threatened. It is a Species of High Concern in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Draft Waterbird Conservation Plan 2006-2010 for the Mid-Atlantic/New England Maritime Region, which includes the lower Hudson Valley. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data reflect a decrease in the distribution in the Hudson River Valley in the past 20 years.



Ideal Pied-billed Grebe habitat includes marshes and ponds with emergent plants.

Identification

This small waterbird has a stocky body with a short, somewhat "chicken-like" bill, which has a black ring during the breeding season. The adult breeding plumage is brown overall with a black throat. Juveniles have black-and-white striping around the head. More often heard than seen, this secretive and solitary bird has a loud, far-reaching, whinnying call. The Pied-billed Grebe migrates at night, lands on the water at or before dawn, and prefers to escape danger by crash-diving or by sinking underwater.

Habitat

Pied-billed Grebes can be found on freshwater ponds and marshes with dense stands of emergent vegetation, streams, lakes, rivers, as well as saltwater bays and estuaries in migration and winter. They frequent beaver ponds and human impoundments. Ideal habitat includes freshwater marshes and ponds larger than 12.5 acres.

Food

This species feeds on a variety of aquatic invertebrates, including dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, beetles, and bugs, as well as frogs and tadpoles, small fish, and crayfish. It collects most food underwater during foraging dives in open water, among rooted aquatic plants, emergent vegetation close to shore, or beneath mats of floating vegetation.

Nesting

Both sexes work to build a large, floating nest-platform of rotting and green plant material and mud in fairly shallow water. They also share in incubation and care of the young. Their territory is usually associated with dense stands of emergent or floating vegetation for nest construction and anchorage, and open water for foraging.

Threats

Ongoing alteration and loss of wetlands through draining, dredging, filling, pollution, invasive species, and siltation from runoff and erosion. This has left many marshes too small and, if not part of a larger marsh complex, unsuitable for grebes and other marshbirds. In addition, grebes are sometimes mistaken for ducks by hunters and are accidentally shot.

Management Recommendations

Because Pied-billed Grebes will readily colonize wetland impoundments managed primarily for waterfowl, there is great opportunity for wetlands managers to make minor alterations to existing management to improve nesting and foraging habitat for grebes.

- Preserve or restore relatively large wetlands (greater than 12.5 acres) with a mixture of dense, robust emergents, submergent vegetation, and open water.
- Periodically reverse vegetative succession and open up extensive stands of emergent vegetation while maintaining suitable habitats nearby to serve as alternate nesting areas during wetland manipulation.
- Avoid complete drying during wetland drawdowns to prevent die-offs of dragonflies and fish.
- Exclude large, motorized boats from marshes with nesting grebes to avoid flooding and capsizing nests by wave action.
- Improve water level control at managed wetlands.
- Reduce the spread of invasive exotic species, and control invasive species where they occur at sites occupied by grebes and other rare marsh birds.



This account is derived mostly from Muller and Storer 1999 and NYNHP 2008.

For additional information, see the following references:

Gibbs, J. P., and S. M. Melvin 1992. Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps*. Pages 31–49 in *Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern in the Northeast* (K. J. Schneider and D. M. Pence, eds.). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Newton Corner, MA.

Illinois Birds species profile: <http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/chf/pub/ifwis/birds/pied-billed-grebe.html>

Muller, Martin J. and Robert W. Storer. 1999. Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the *Birds of North America Online*: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/410>

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

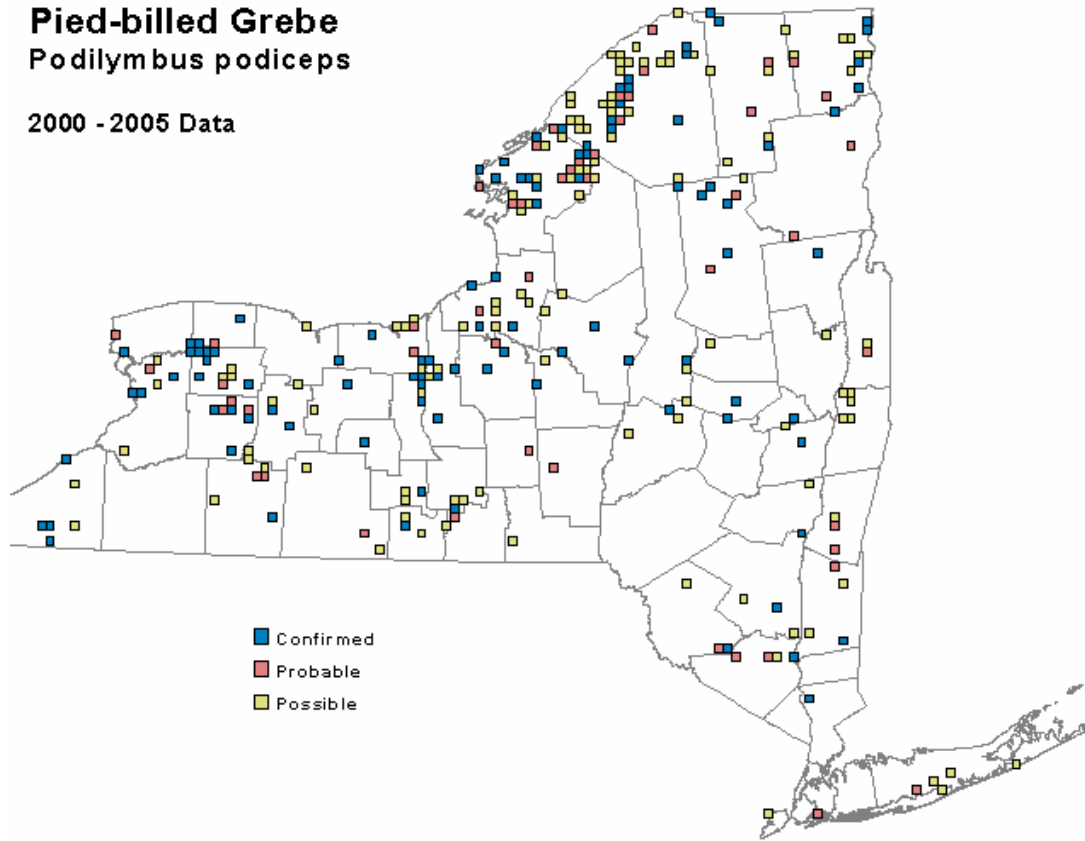
New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP). 2008. Online Conservation Guide for *Podilymbus podiceps* Available from: <http://www.acris.nynhp.org/guide.php?id=6723>. Accessed April 23, 2008.

Seyler, D. A. 2003. Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) densities in a Western New York wetland impoundment. *Kingbird* 53:195-202.

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Pied-billed Grebe
Podilymbus podiceps

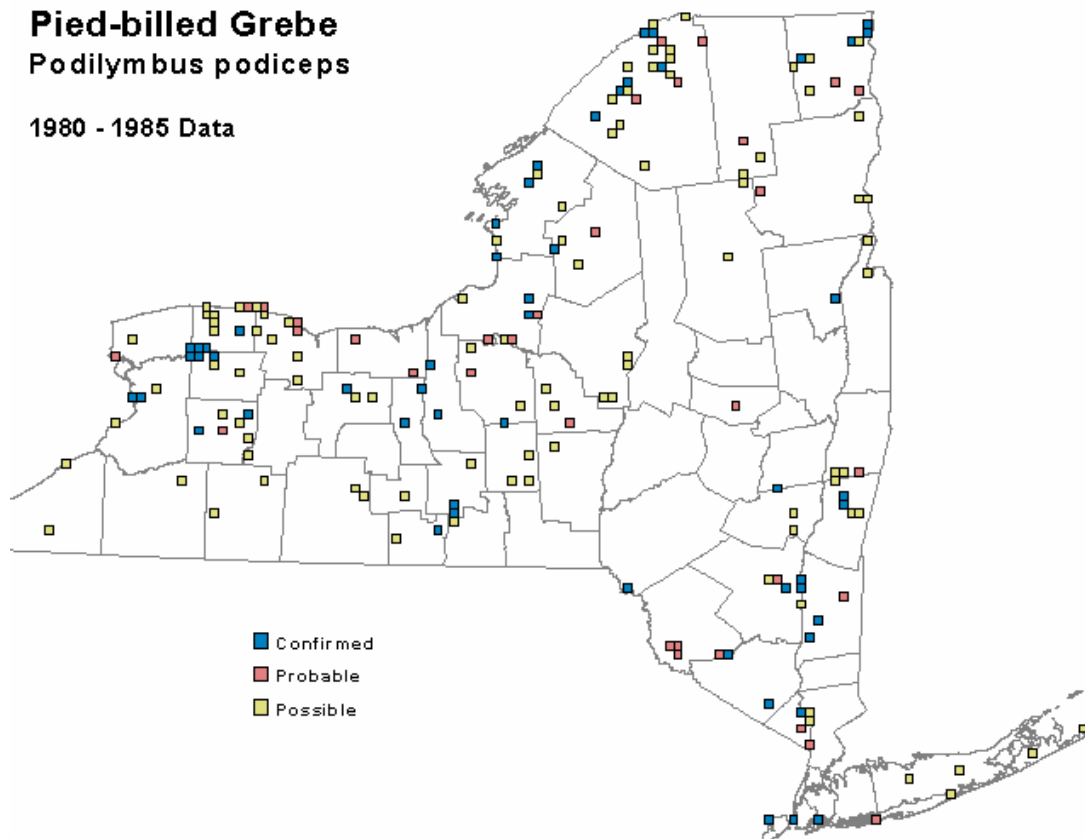
2000 - 2005 Data



- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible

Pied-billed Grebe
Podilymbus podiceps

1980 - 1985 Data



- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible