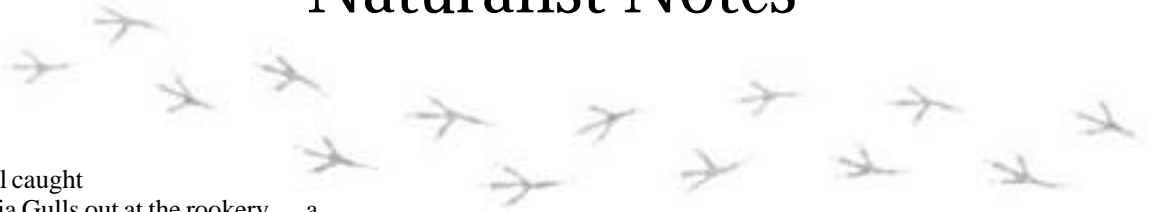




Naturalist Notes



July: a Ring-billed Gull caught cavorting with the California Gulls out at the rookery ... a third Willow Flycatcher nest is found on Rush Creek ... in the night sky it looks like the constellation of Scorpio has two hearts as Mars creeps towards its red rival Antares ... a Redhead, Willet, Western Kingbird, Cinnamon Teals, and Black-necked Stilts spotted out at DeChambeau Ponds ... the young of many bird species have hatched and are spotted being particularly cute down at the end of the boardwalk at County Park.

August: the natural disasters begin ... after weeks of smoke from Yosemite wildfires and dreams of clear skies and rain, it came ... the rain started and it just didn't stop, causing multiple mud and rockslides on Highway 120 on the way up to Tioga Pass ... and a few days and many thunderbolts later a wildfire started in the Jeffrey Pine forest behind the Mono Craters and burnt its way past the historic Mono Mills site and out towards the lake, with billowing clouds during the day and a hot red line of glowing flames and embers at dusk ... a White Pelican spotted at Navy Beach ... and a Golden Eagle seen catching a California Gull in midair out by Black Point.

September: a Greater White-fronted Goose seen out at DeChambeau Ponds ... an immature Ferruginous Hawk spotted out at the County Ponds ... clear skies for the equinox ... over at County Park a Northern Harrier, Prairie Falcon, Common Yellowthroat, a flock of 50 Pinyon Jays, ten Wilson's Phalaropes still around, a Virginia Rail, and a multitude of Least and Western Sandpipers seen from the boardwalk.

October: a male Red Crossbill singing from the top of a lodgepole pine near Sagehen Summit ... a shooting star family is born ... and then a new variety of bean is located in the Mono Basin ... both omens of many cute immature *Homo sapiens* sightings in the future ❖

COMMON NAME: EARED GREBE

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Class: Aves
 Order: Podicipediformes
 Family: Podicipedidae
 Genus: Podiceps
 Species: nigricollis

THE EARED GREBE

Mono Lake is a stopover for approximately 1.6 million Eared Grebes on their migration from Canada to the Salton Sea and the Gulf of California. From September through November Eared Grebes can be spotted in astounding numbers on Mono Lake. Here are some fun facts about this fascinating bird.

- Eared Grebes are diving waterbirds, so they both swim and fly but do not walk on land. They dive and swim gracefully underwater using their feet like propellers to move through the water as they forage.
- Their diet (while at Mono Lake) of approximately 90% brine shrimp provides the energy they need to molt worn feathers, grow new ones, and fatten in preparation for the next leg of their migration.
- They feast on brine shrimp by using their relatively large tongues to squeeze out the salty water. During their stay at Mono Lake they rarely leave the lake, obtaining fresh water entirely from the bodies of the shrimp.
- Some become so fat they cannot fly, and have to diet back into shape before departing for wintering areas.
- Eared Grebes generally migrate in large flocks at night and have been tracked on radar flying at 60 miles per hour.
- Eared Grebes don't have a notable real ear; rather, their breeding plumage makes them look as though they have a large golden ear.
- The locals in Lee Vining used to call the Eared Grebes "helldivers." And it is said that if you pick up an Eared Grebe stranded on land you must keep it away from your face—they instinctively peck at your eyes in self defense!

Eared Grebe identification for fall at Mono Lake

- Length: 12½ inches (32cm)
- Dark gray to black body with white and light gray on neck
- Throat is variably dusky, cheek dark, and whitish plumage on chin extends up as a crescent behind eye
- Head triangular, with a peak towards the center of the head
- Black bill, red eye
- White secondaries show as a patch on trailing edge of wing
- Feet set far back on body and trail awkwardly behind body in flight
- Sexes similar