

Pied-billed Grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

Pied-billed Grebes prefer to nest in large marshes, particularly those exceeding 10 acres in size where open water is interspersed among emergent vegetation. While the presence of breeding grebes is regularly announced by the male's distinctive territorial calls, incubating adults or those protecting small young can be quite furtive. Family groups are regularly observed only when the young are nearly full grown and learning to catch food for themselves under the watchful supervision of their parents and always close to protective cover.

Although Pied-billed Grebes are widespread migrants through Ohio, their preference for large marshes causes them to be locally distributed summer residents. During the Atlas Project, they were recorded in only 25 priority blocks and 20 additional locations. Of these 45 records, 14 were classified as "possible" nesting birds, single individuals observed briefly during June or July. These individuals may have been migrants or nonbreeders. In most locations where Pied-billeds summered, nesting was eventually confirmed by observing adults with small young or discovering nests with eggs.

Breeding grebes are most numerous in the marshes bordering western Lake Erie and Sandusky Bay where they were recorded from 15 locations. Since most marshes supported multiple pairs of nesting Pied-billeds, western Lake Erie easily supports the largest breeding population in Ohio. However, the size of this population has never been precisely estimated.

Pied-billed Grebes are rather opportunistic nesters elsewhere in Ohio. They are most plentiful during "wet years" when wetlands are most readily available, but can become almost completely absent during "dry years". During the atlas years the Glaciated Plateau hosted scattered pairs in the northeastern counties south to Columbiana, Wayne, and Knox counties. In the Till Plain region, Pied-billeds were very locally distributed south to Butler, Warren, and Pickaway counties. They were largely absent from the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, except for a territorial grebe at Baker Swamp in Jackson County and a breeding pair at an unnamed marsh in northeastern Ross County. With the exception of Big Island Wildlife Area in Marion County which annually hosted 5–10 pairs of nesting grebes, most inland locations were occupied by nesting grebes for only one or two years during the Atlas Project.

Their Ohio breeding range has undergone only minor changes during this century. Originally unrecorded for southwestern Ohio, Pied-billeds nested near Dayton in 1955 (Mathena et al. 1984) and near Cincinnati (no date given- Kemsies and Randle 1953). Breeding Pied-billeds have always been widespread in the western Lake Erie marshes (Campbell 1940, Hicks 1935), locally distributed in the northeastern and glaciated central counties (Hicks 1935), and accidental on the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau with records from only Pike and Tuscarawas counties prior to the Atlas (Henninger 1902, Hicks 1937). The size of this nesting population has noticeably declined during this century. This decline was most apparent in the northeastern counties where Pied-billeds were formerly locally common summer residents prior to 1940 (Williams 1950). Along western Lake

Erie, their numbers have been gradually declining since the 1940s (Campbell 1968).

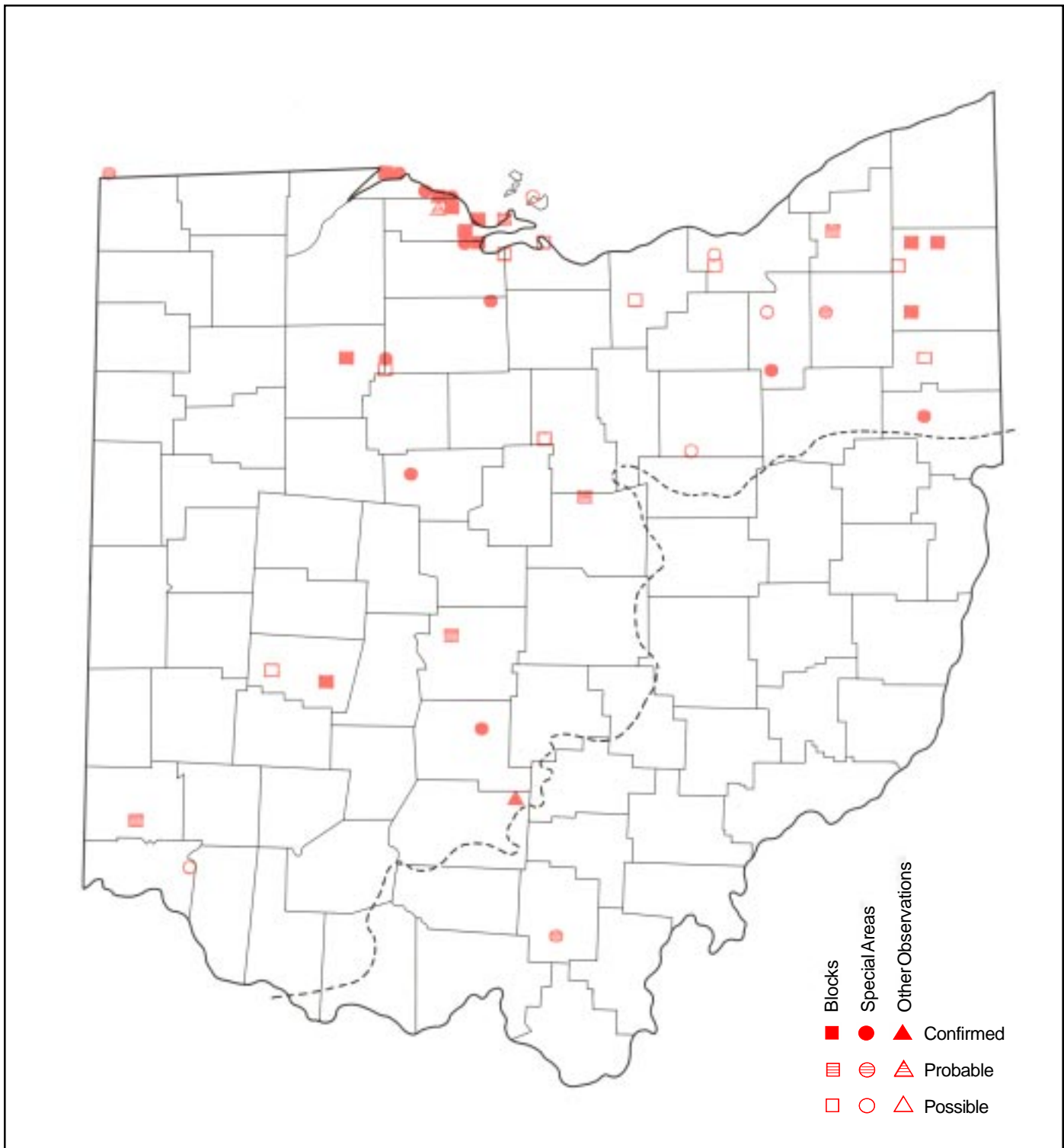
While nesting grebes are almost exclusively restricted to large marshes today, they formerly occupied other habitats. Campbell (1940) found breeding pairs on small ponds in Lucas County. In northeastern Ohio, Williams (1950) recorded nesting pairs in buttonbush swamps and the marshy edges of ponds and



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lakes.

Their nests are normally floating structures placed in marsh vegetation or anchored to logs, dead trees, and isolated marshy islets. These nests are occasionally placed in open water, but most are located in marsh vegetation less than 50 feet from open water and more than 30 feet from shore. Water depths at nest sites vary from a few inches to greater than three feet (Peck and James 1983). In Ohio, nest construction can begin during the first half of April since recently hatched young have been observed as early as May 18 (Peterjohn 1989a). However, most clutches are not initiated until the second half of April. After an incubation period of approximately 23 days (Palmer 1962), most newly hatched young appear between May 30 and June 10. These young grebes may become independent by mid-July. Unsuccessful adults and pairs attempting to raise second broods may incubate clutches into the second half of July. Young grebes from these late clutches normally fledge by the first week of September, although a partially grown young grebe "with primaries just sprouting" was discovered at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area on November 1, 1972 (Kleen and Bush 1973).



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	9	9.5	36.0	—
Till Plain	271	8	3.0	32.0	—
Ill. Till Plain	46	—	—	—	—
Glaciated Plateau	140	8	5.7	32.0	—
Unglaciated Plateau	212	—	—	—	—

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	25	3.3%
Confirmed	11	44.4%
Probable	5	20.0%
Possible	9	36.0%