

Sighting record of Eared Grebes from Soonchali, Assam, India



On 16 January 2022, while bird watching at the Brahmaputra sandbars near Soonchali, Guwahati (26.21575° N, 91.81931° E), two grebe-like birds were spotted in the water body. Initially, they were misidentified as Great Crested Grebes, which are usually found in large numbers in this area. Both birds were seen resting with their necks on their backs for an extended period of time. Once the birds began to move in the late evening, they were examined with binoculars and photographed. It then became



Pair of Eared Grebes (a and b) swimming in the river.

Table 1. Details of the sighting records of Eared Grebes in Assam during 1990–2022.

	Date	Location	Sighted By	No. of Individuals
1	06.i.1991	Deepor Beel, Kamrup	Anwaruddin Choudhury	2
2	21.xii.2002	Dibru Saikhowa National Park	Graeme Spinks	2
3	05.xi.2009	Silghat, Tezpur	Anders Osterby	2
4	09.xii.2012	Dibru Saikhowa National Park	Garima Bhatia	<i>Not mentioned</i>
5	14.i.2014	Dibru Saikhowa National Park	Imon Abedin	8
6	14.i.2014	Dibru Saikhowa National Park	Rahul Kumar	2
7	18.i.2015	Nameri National Park	Bikash Kalita	<i>Not mentioned</i>
8	24.i.2015	Dibru Saikhowa National Park	Jayanta Manna	1
9	17.xi.2015	Maguri Beel	Rishikesh Gogoi	<i>Not mentioned</i>
10	18.xi.2015	Maguri Beel	Porag Phukan	<i>Not mentioned</i>
11	30.xi.2015	Deepor Beel, Kamrup	Pritam Baruah	1
12	27.xii.2016	Sadiya River Crossing, Tinsukia	André Weiss	1
13	07.xii.2019	Maguri Beel	Amarjyoti Saikia	<i>Not mentioned</i>

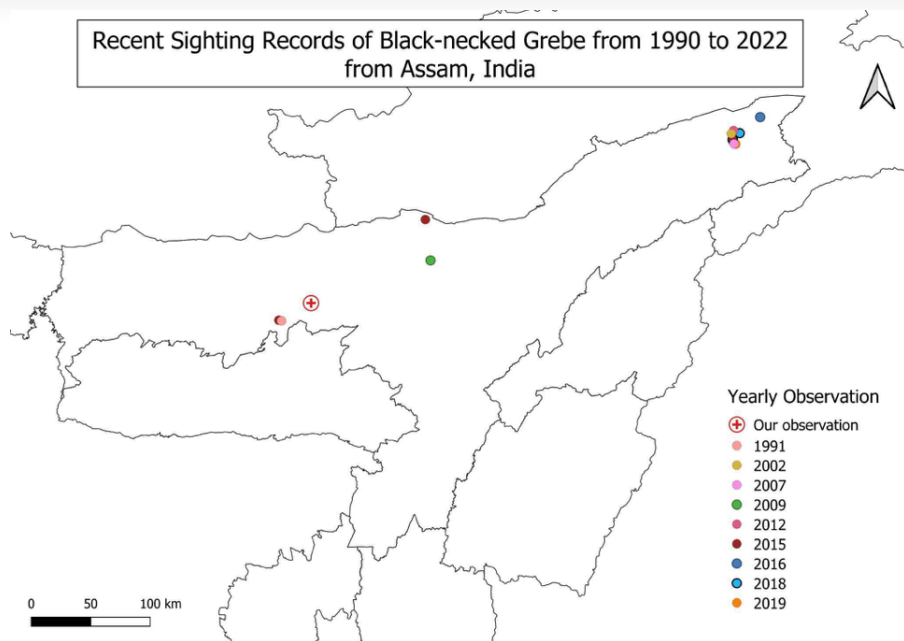
evident that it was a pair of Eared Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* (also called as Black-necked Grebes) in non-breeding plumage. The pair was spotted again on 17 January 2022 at the same spot. The birds did not exhibit fishing activity and were either seen at rest or moving slowly in the water on both days.

Grebes are aquatic species of duck-like birds found predominantly in freshwater ecosystems (Winkler et al. 2020). Despite their phenetic resemblance to loons and coots, they are cladistically related to flamingos. Eared Grebes are one of the nine species from the *Podiceps* genus of grebes. In breeding plumage, adults

have a black head and upperparts, with golden ear tufts and a black erectile crest (Grimmett et al. 2016). Wintering birds have dark upperparts and a whitish-grey neck to belly (Cullen et al. 2020).

This species is a rare winter visitor to western India, the lower Himalayan ranges, Nepal, and certain parts of northeastern India (Grimmett et al. 2016). It breeds in the high altitude lakes of Ladakh (Tak et al. 2009).

In Assam, this species has no records from well-documented places such as Kaziranga National Park (Barua & Sharma 1999) or Manas



Choudhury, A. (2006). *Birds of Manas National Park. India:* Gibbon Books and Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, Guwahati, 56pp.

Choudhury, A. (2007). *Birds of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. India.* Gibbon Books and Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, Guwahati, 84pp.

Cullen, S.A., J.R. Jehl Jr. & G.L. Nuechterlein (2020). Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.eargre.01>.

Sighting records of Eared Grebe in Assam from 1990 to 2022.

National Park (Choudhury 2006). The majority of recent records for this species are from Dibru Saikhowa National Park (Table 1). According to Choudhury (2007), this species is an infrequent visitor to the park. The majority of the sightings were of single individuals or pairs. However, one observer observed eight birds from Dibru Saikhowa National Park (Abedin 2018). This species may not be as uncommon as it is thought to be in Assam during the winters. It might have been misidentified due to its resemblance to other grebes in non-breeding plumage.

Ebird (2022). Species map (Eared Grebe). <https://ebird.org/map/eargre?neg=true&env.minX=&env.minY=&env.maxX=&env.maxY=&zh=false&gp=false&ev=Z&excludeEx=&mr=1-12&bmo=1&emo=12&yr=all&byr=1900&eyr=2022> Electronic version accessed on 16 July 2022.

Grimmett, R., C. Inskipp & T. Inskipp (2016). *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives.* Bloomsbury Publishing, India, 448pp.

Tak, P.C., D.K. Sharma, M.L. Thakur & U. Saikia (2009). Birds of Ladakh and Analysis of their Status. *Records of the Zoological Survey of India* 109(2): 27-53.

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Abedin, I. (2018). Ebird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/india/checklist/S46371239>. Electronic version accessed on 16 July 2022.

Barua, M. & P. Sharma (1999). Birds of Kaziranga National Park, India. *Forktail* 15: 47-60.

Choudhury, A. (1992). Additions to the birds of Assam: Black-necked Grebe. *Journal of The Bombay Natural History Society* 89:245-246

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