

Pied-billed Grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

Part bird, part submarine, the Pied-billed Grebe is common across much of North America. These small brown birds have unusually thick bills that turn silver and black in summer. These expert divers inhabit sluggish rivers, freshwater marshes, lakes, and estuaries. They use their chunky bills to kill and eat large crustaceans along with a great variety of fish, amphibians, insects, and other invertebrates. Rarely seen in flight and often hidden amid vegetation, Pied-billed Grebes announce their presence with loud, far-reaching calls.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Pied-billed Grebes are small, chunky swimming birds. They have compact bodies and slender necks, with relatively large, blocky heads and short, thick bills. They have virtually no tail.

Color Pattern

These are brown birds, slightly darker above and more tawny-brown on the underparts. During spring and summer, the crown and nape are dark and the throat is black. While breeding, the bill is whitish with a black band ("pied"), but otherwise is yellow-brown. Juveniles have striped faces

Behavior

Pied-billed Grebes can adjust their buoyancy and often use this ability to float with just the upper half of the head above the water. They catch small fish and invertebrates by diving or simply slowly submerging. They build floating nests of cattails, grasses, and other vegetation

Habitat

Look for Pied-billed Grebes on small, quiet ponds and marshes where thick vegetation grows out of the water. In winter they occurs on larger water bodies, occasionally in large groups.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 11.8 - 15 inches
- Wingspan - 17.7 - 24.4 inches
- Weight - 8.9 - 20.4 ounces

