



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Secretary
Press Service



Release - Immediate

February 12, 1924.

GREBES NOT SERIOUSLY
DESTRUCTIVE TO FISH

Grebes have long been numbered among the birds suspected of endangering the supply of certain fishes valued as human food. The charges against these birds, however, have been made without foundation in fact, according to the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. To arrive at this conclusion required careful study of the food habits of these birds, both by field observation and by microscopic examination in the laboratory of the contents of nearly 400 grebe stomachs, collected in various parts of North America. This was made possible during an extensive investigation that has been undertaken of the economic relations of fish-eating birds in general.

The results of the findings, so far as the grebes are concerned, are now published in a new bulletin of the department, prepared by Dr. Alexander Wetmore, of the Biological Survey, under the title, "Food and Economic Relations of North American Grebes." This constitutes the latest addition to the valuable series of reports intended to deal with the economic value of all groups of birds of the United States. Since 1887 formal reports have been issued on the relations to agriculture of more than 200 species of birds, besides shorter accounts of as many others.

In the new bulletin the food habits of six species of grebes are described in detail. It is found that some of these peculiar birds feed on fishes, but on the whole the kinds of fishes eaten are of little or no value to man. Crawfishes and other crustaceans are common food for grebes, and the pied-billed grebe especially is beneficial in localities where crawfishes are destructive to crops. Predacious water beetles and bugs constitute a large part of the food of several species of grebes, which also act as scavengers among the masses of miscellaneous insects found floating on the water. It is a fact of interest that all species of grebes are found to have the peculiar habit of eating quantities of their own feathers though no definite reason for this is at present known.

Before 1903 many thousands of grebes were killed for the sake of their beautiful breast feathers, but when the market for grebe skins was closed this slaughter practically ceased. With increased protection during recent years the birds have regained something of their former abundance. They are not now considered game and are protected by Federal law at all seasons.

The purpose of the new publication, Department Bulletin 1195, is to inform sportsmen, legislative committees, and others interested in the protection of birds as to the economic status of the various species of grebes. The bulletin may be obtained, while the supply lasts, by applying to the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington, D.C.