

# Summary of the Proposed final Management Plan for the **HORNED GREBE (Western Population)**

This is a summary of the information provided in the proposed final management plan for the Horned Grebe, Western population. Horned Grebe, Western population was listed as a species of Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act* in 2017.

The management plan is a plan that sets the goals and objectives for maintaining a sustainable population level for Horned Grebe, Western population. This summary is based on the information in the full English version of the Horned Grebe, Western population management plan. The original English copy of the management plan has been provided to you for reference.

## **Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) Assessment and Species Status Information (Pages 1-3)**

These pages provide the COSEWIC assessment table, which is also included here. It describes why COSEWIC has assessed the Horned Grebe, Western population as a species of Special Concern, where it occurs in Canada, and the history of the species status over the years.

This section also provides information on the status of the species throughout Canada, how it is protected in the Provinces and Territories, and the status given to the bird by other conservation programs such as NatureServe. NatureServe has assessed the status of Horned Grebe, Western population in Nunavut as SUB, SUM for the species as a whole (includes both populations). S = territorial level, U = unrankable, B = breeding, M = migrant.



A pair of Horned Grebes © iStock.com/pum\_eva

**Date of Assessment:** April 2009

**Common Name (population):** Horned Grebe – Western population

**Scientific Name:** *Podiceps auritus*

**COSEWIC Status:** Special Concern

**Reason for Designation:** Approximately 92% of the North American breeding range of this species is in Canada and is occupied by this population. It has experienced both long-term and short-term declines and there is no evidence to suggest that this trend will be reversed in the near future. Threats include degradation of wetland breeding habitat, droughts, increasing populations of nest predators (mostly in the Prairies), and oil spills on their wintering grounds in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

**Canadian Occurrence:** Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario

**COSEWIC Status History:** Designated Special Concern in April 2009. Assessment based on a new status report.



## Species Information (Pages 3-16)

This section of the proposed management plan for Horned Grebe, Western Population provides some information such as what they look like, where they live and what they need to survive.

- Horned Grebe is a small waterbird weighing between 300-570g.
- When they are breeding they have a patch of bright yellow feathers which extend into tufts behind the eye.
- It has red eyes and its neck and flanks are chestnut-red with a black back.
- Males and females are similar in colouration.
- In the winter, the Horned Grebe has a black back and white belly with white cheeks and a black crown.
- Horned Grebe has a Holarctic distribution in that it is found in both North America and Eurasia and is represented by a different subspecies in each hemisphere.
- The Western population of the Horned Grebe is estimated at between 200,000 and 500,000 individuals and breeds south of the treeline from Alaska through the Northwest Territories, and from eastern British Columbia to the northern United States and east to the Ontario border.
- Approximately 92% of the Horned Grebe, Western population's breeding range is in Canada.
- The highest breeding densities occur in the Prairies, but a significant portion of the Horned Grebe's breeding range is also located in the boreal forest of western Canada and Alaska.
- They breed in small numbers in northern Manitoba up to the border with Nunavut, which suggests breeding in the southernmost portions of Nunavut is possible.

- Nesting may also occur on Charlton and Danby islands in James Bay.
- Breeding Bird Surveys show a decline in Canada since 1970.
- The Horned Grebe, Western population, winters across a vast area at various densities.
- Christmas Bird Count trends at the continental scale suggest an increase in the population, however the trend masks that populations in different areas are fluctuating at different rates (e.g. the number increasing in Alaska, while decreasing in British Columbia).
- During migration, Horned Grebes stop on large lakes, rivers and wetlands.
- Breeding usually occurs in small, shallow perennial wetlands containing at least 40% open water with beds of emergent vegetation.
- Horned Grebe are territorial and solitary nesters.
- Horned Grebe feed mainly on aquatic and some airborne arthropods, with chicks that are semi-precocial (can leave the nest hours after hatching, but adults feed and carry them)



This is **Figure 1.** from the proposed final Management Plan. It shows the distribution of the Horned Grebe in North America.

## Threats (Pages 16-28)

This section of the proposed management plan describes the things that might cause Horned Grebe populations to drop.

Threats to Horned Grebe can affect habitat, but can also affect individuals, nests and eggs.

The main threats in the breeding region for migratory Horned Grebe, Western population are:

- **Annual and perennial non-timber crops** – Conversion of grassland to cropland and wetland drainage.
- **Agricultural and forestry effluents (fertilizers and pesticides)** – affecting the invertebrate prey of Horned Grebe, and can be a direct threat to Horned Grebe.
- **Changes to precipitation** – climate change affecting temperature and precipitation leading to higher transpiration of water, reducing the amount of shallow wetlands.

Hunting in the northern part of the range is likely not a threat to Horned Grebe.

## Management Objectives (Pages 28-29)

The management objectives for the Short-eared Owl in Canada are:

- To maintain, over the next 30 years (2021-2051), population levels at or above the average population levels of the past 30 years (1987-2017).
- To maintain the population's current distribution in Canada.

## Broad Strategies and Conservation Measures (Pages 29-34)

- A number of actions have already been completed or are underway in an effort to meet the management objectives, including: a recovery strategy and action plan for the Horned Grebe (Magdalen Islands population), major monitoring surveys (Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Count, Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, British Columbia Coastal Waterbird Survey), banding in Yellowknife, the Prairie Marsh Monitoring Program (2008-2012), reports, action plans and management plans, the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture, disease monitoring, and the creation of wetland policies and guidance.

The broad strategies of the management plan are:

- Habitat conservation and stewardship
- Population monitoring and surveys
- Research

There are a number of conservation measures identified in the management plan ranging from high to low priority. The high priority conservation measures include:

- Empower private landowners to conserve and restore seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands.
- Support the adoption, implementation and enforcement of best-management practices and wetland conservation policies.
- Develop and adopt breeding habitat guidelines.

- Establish a long-term monitoring program of wetland bird species to track abundance and habitat use throughout the Horned Grebe's range.
- Conduct research to understand connectivity between breeding, molting, staging and wintering grounds.

## Measuring Progress (Page 34)

Performance indicators are used to measure progress towards the two management objectives.

- *Indicator for a population level that is equal or above the average population level of the past 30 years:* the population trend and abundance index of Horned Grebes from the Christmas Bird Count, Breeding Bird Surveys, Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and other surveys.
- *Indicator for maintaining the current distribution in Canada:* Distribution measures using a combination of available data sources (eBird, provincial atlases and wetland species surveys).