

Pacific Loon  
11 Dec 1948  
Des Moines waterworks, Polk Co., IA  
A. Berkowitz, W. Brown, others  
to 12 Dec; Berkowitz 1949

Record Number: 93-AF  
Classification: A-D

REFERENCE

Berkowitz, A.C. 1949. Pacific Loon and other water birds at  
Des Moines impounding reservoir. IBL 19:19.  
Brown 1971

LETTER

Ronald E. Goetz, Comments on Iowa Loon Records, 28 March 1988  
VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, A bird in alternate plumage was the size of a drake  
Mallard with gray top of head and neck, black throat, and  
vertical stripes on the side of the neck. The bird was seen by  
the most experienced and respected birders in Des Moines, and the  
description is quite detailed. Goetz points out that the lack of  
molt to basic plumage is unusual for a bird in December. /thk

Berkowitz, A. C. 1949. Pacific Loon and other water birds at Des Moines Impounding Reservoir. IBL 19:19.

**Pacific Loon and other Water Birds at Des Moines Impounding Reservoir.**—Des Moines and other Polk County birders have had many interesting experiences in the past few years at the new Des Moines Waterworks Impounding Reservoir, located in the southwest corner of Polk County. Among the many interesting species which it has been my pleasure to see, have been White Pelican, Horned Grebe, Hutchins's Goose, Old-squaw and Buffle-head, as well as large flocks of all the common ducks and many of the less common species.

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On one of my frequent visits to this interesting spot, on the afternoon of December 11, 1948, accompanied by Woodward H. Brown and two Boy Scouts, we saw a Pacific Loon (*Gavia arctica pacifica*), a most unusual sight. This loon was observed at close range, in good light, with a 20-power Argus scope. We immediately recognized the bird as a loon, and believed that it was of a species new to us. When first seen it was very near to some Mallards, and its size was similar to a Mallard drake. We were quickly attracted by the light ashy-gray color of the top of the head and back of the neck, which gradually shaded into black on the face and throat. Also, we noted that the back markings of black and white are quite different from those of our common Loon. On the Pacific Loon the white markings are larger and more prominent and are limited to patches on the wing and back rather than all over the back. All under parts showed pure white when the bird raised up and flapped its wings. It was a wonderful swimmer and diver, but we did not see it fly.

We returned the following day and saw the loon again in even better light and at closer range. At this nearer view we could distinguish the patches on the side of the neck showing vertical black and white stripes in a patch separating the gray area of the back of the neck, from the black of the front of the neck. Our observation was confirmed by Helen Peasley, Jack Musgrove and Bruce Stiles, who also visited the reservoir December 12. All of us noted something odd on the side of the bird's face. We did not know what this was, but it was thought it might be a leech.—ALBERT C. BERKOWITZ, Des Moines, Iowa.

Arctic Loon Gavia arctica (Linnaeus)

Accidental

Brown. 1971  
p 389

Its status, according to Grant (1963), was: "Rare, extension of range, winter visitor." Recent observations include one summer and one fall date: 9 December, 1948, Glendale Cemetery, Des Moines (now a specimen in the Iowa State Department of History and Archives) (Musgrove, 1949a); 11 and 12 December, 1948, Des Moines Impounding Reservoir (Berkowitz, 1949); winter of 1951-1952, Scott Co. Baily, 1954); 6-11 June, 1964, Des Moines Impounding Reservoir (ACB); 22 October, 1965, Des Moines Impounding Reservoir (WHB).

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Goetz 1988

93-AF

Comments on Iowa Loon Records

I. Pacific/Arctic Loons

1. Specimen UI 10175. As indicated in previous correspondence, this specimen is a juvenile Red-throated Loon.

2. 15 (or 16) Nov 1895. Mississippi R. near Sabula, Clinton Co. J.Giddings, W.Eldridge, C.Hart Merriam. (Giddings 1986; Anderson 1907; Hersey 1917; DuMont 1933; DuMont 1934).

I am not certain yet that the measurements given eliminate *arctica* completely. However, the bird was at least not a Common or Red-throated Loon. Apparently the plumage characters which can support separation of *pacifica* from *arctica* were unknown until very recently and in any case were not described here. This was a young bird, since feathers of upperparts were margined with grayish. I may be able to say more about this bird after I do some research on measurements. Any chance that the specimen still exists?

3. 26 Nov 1899. Mississippi R. near Sabula, Clinton Co. H.J.Giddings. (Anderson 1907).

Almost no detail.

4. Dec 1902. Polk Co. Lester P. Fagan. (DuMont 1931).

No details provided to make judgement from.

5. 8 Dec 1948. Glendale Cemetary, Des Moines, Polk Co. Jack Musgrove. (Musgrove 1949).

Does the State Historical Museum still have this specimen? He says the bird was in immature plumage, but this is not consistent with his description. He states that the back is black with no spotting except on the wings and scapulars. Immature loons of all species except Red-throated have conspicuous wide gray margins to the feathers of the entire upperparts. Hence this bird must be an adult Common or Pacific (or conceivably Arctic) Loon. He also says that there was a distinct brownish-gray band across the throat. Does he mean across the base of the throat (in which case adult Pacific is far less likely than adult Common) or across the top of the throat (i.e., a chinstrap, in which case the bird was a Pacific)? Since size is not described, I would recommend treating the record as hypothetical unless the specimen can be located.

6. 11-12 Dec 1948. Des Moines Res., Polk Co. Berkowitz, Musgrove, Peasley, Stiles. (Berkowitz 1949).

Clearly a diagnostically described Pacific/Arctic Loon, yet it seems quite exceptional that it was in full Definitive Alternate plumage so late. I have data from only three specimens of fall adult Pacific: The Missouri specimen, taken 23 Oct, was in almost complete Definitive Alternate, but shows white feathers molting into the auricular region, the chin, and the throat; one of the Field Museum specimens, taken 16 Nov, was in Definitive Basic except that it showed remnants of the black throat patch and a few of the white squares left on the mantle; and another specimen taken 20 Dec was in Definitive Basic except that it still had a few of the scapular squares (less than the 16 Nov specimen). In addition, I have

descriptions of three Missouri and Illinois sight records from Nov of adults, all of which were apparently entirely in Definitive Basic. In general, the retention of some Alternate scapular feathers into winter (in addition to the always retained Alternate wing coverts) is not exceptional (see Palmer, Handbook of North American Birds, Volume 1), but I found no indication that full Definitive Alternate was ever retained so late. I suppose, however, that with so many observers there is no chance of error?

7. Winter 1951-2. Mississippi R., Scott Co. A.W.Housman. (Baily 1954).

Any chance that the specimen still exists? (Davenport Museum?). No information given to allow judgement.

8. 6-11 (or 20) Jun 1964. Des Moines Res., Polk Co. A.Berkowitz, W.H.Brown. (Brown 1964, Audubon Field Notes 1964).

No details.

9. 22 Oct 1965. Des Moines Res., Polk Co. W.H.Brown. (Brown 1971).

No details.

10. 11 Nov 1970. Des Moines Res., Polk Co. W.H.Brown. (AB 1971).

No details.

11. 6 May--3 Jun 1972. Des Moines Res.-Moffitt L., Polk Co. D.Mooney, W.H.Brown. (Iowa Bird Life 42:37 & 69).

No details.

12. (1981-02) 28-29 Apr 1981. Amana L., Iowa Co. C.Bendorf\*, M.Newlon\*, T.Kent\*, Shires. (Bendorf, 1981).

Fine details of a Definitive Alternate Pacific/Arctic Loon. Bendorf mentions black sides and back of bird (presumably he would have noticed white sides and flank patch), and Kent describes the back of head and neck as light fluffy gray. These points favor Pacific Loon so heavily as to essentially preclude any thought of Arctic Loon.

13. (1985-13) 13 Oct 85. Saylorville Res., Polk Co. B.Engebretsen\*. (IBL 56:44).

Not much detail for a fall bird. Identification seemingly based only on bill shape and size, but no Common Loons seen in juxtaposition?

14. (1986-07) 1 Nov 86. Saylorville Res., Polk Co. S.Dinsmore\*. (Dinsmore 1987).

Reported as Winter Adult. There are some points that I do not care for here. First, the back is described as medium gray, slightly lighter than a Common Loon. This makes it certain that the bird was not an adult Pacific, which have very dark backs. It does not even sound good for juvenile Pacific, which are still at least as dark as juvenile Common. Second, the crown and nape are described as light gray, lighter than the back. Adults in basic plumage usually have napes slightly paler than back,