

Red-throated Loon

Record Number: 89-12

27 Apr 1989

Classification: A-D

Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA

*Bray,*L&B Padelford,*Lund,*Myers

also 29 April; IBL 59:79, 61:84, Myers 1989

DOCUMENTATIONS

Bob Myers, 29 Apr

Tanya E. Bray, 27 Apr [? error, found by Myers]

Babs Padelford/Loren Padelford, 29 Apr

Marc Lund, 30 Apr

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:79

Records Committee: IBL 61:84

Myers, R. K. 1989. Red-throated Loons at Lake Manawa. IBL 59:117.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D. Well described by multiple observers. Question: was the throat red or reddish (Bray, Padelfords): "dirty" (Dinsmore), or not determinable (Myers)? Nice analysis by Myers.

A-D. Good set of documentations which support each other.

A-D. Excellent descriptions of two adult Red-throated Loons. I think the 27 Apr date is incorrect--Myers found the birds on 29 Apr.

A-D. Consistent descriptions of small loon with upturned lower mandible, throat patch on one bird, and face and back pattern consistent with bird in partial molt to alternate plumage.

A-D. Red throat patch eliminates all others. Bill and posture right for Red-throated along with size and shape of bird. Good analysis by various observers.

A-D. Excellent descriptions by Bray and Myers, with red throat patch seen by Bray on one bird.

SENT TO: Tanya E. Bray, 9708 Grover, Omaha, NE 68124; Babs and Loren Padelford, 1405 Little John Rd., Bellevue, NE 68005; Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50010; Bob Myers, RR2 Box 153, Perry, IA 50220.

COMMENT

There were few extreme weather fronts this summer, and they probably had minimal effect on nesting birds. The dry conditions led to the opening of some of the annual set-aside and Conservation Reserve land for haying and grazing. Since these areas total 1.4 and 1.8 million acres respectively, there is vast potential for nesting by species such as meadowlarks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Sedge Wrens. Reports of those species seldom show up in these pages but my own belief is that they have prospered in recent years.

Among the migrants, there were few late spring and no early fall warblers reported. For the past several years, I couldn't tell which direction the shore-birds were headed. This year there was generally a mid-to-late June period with no sightings and then an earlier-than-usual start to the fall migration in late June and early July, as evidenced by several record early dates. Again the lack of water here and to our west may have concentrated birds in a few places where several birders could find them, especially Union Slough.

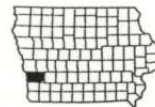
My thanks to the dedicated group of reporters. Your reports were generally clear, precise, and timely, which made my job easier.

NOTES

RED-THROATED LOONS AT LAKE MANAWA

ROBERT K. MYERS

April 29, 1989 found me making my usual birding trip around southwest Iowa. At noon I stopped at Lake Manawa State Park, Pottawattamie County, for lunch and to check out the lake. I immediately noticed two small loons sleeping with their heads in their back feathers as they floated in the north end of the lake. Occasionally one would raise its head, look around, and go back to sleep. They seemed small, about 1.5 times the length of American Coots swimming about the same distance away. Common Loons should have looked larger. Both loons had brownish backs, and no white flecking could be seen. One did seem slightly darker. Both were whitish on the front of the neck and sides of the head. The darker bird appeared to have a dark patch on the front of the neck about half-way down from the head. I could not make out the color of the patch. Both loons had thin, pointed, somewhat shorter bills. Their heads were also more rounded than Common Loons (no knob above the eye was apparent). I was sure that these had to be Pacific or Red-throated Loons and the marks that swayed my decision were the angle of the bill and the birds' posture. The bills were definitely bent upwards—this was noticeable even when the head was horizontal. The loons frequently tilted their heads back, greatly accentuating the upward effect of the bill. This effect was similar to that displayed by other Red-throated Loons I have seen.



I then made my way to a pay phone to notify some Omaha birders and Ross Silcock. I understand that a few others did get to see one or both birds during the next several days.

I was concerned about the lack of white flecking on the backs of these mostly basic-plumaged birds, but T. S. Robert's key in *A Manual for the Identification of the Birds of Minnesota and Neighboring States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1932) gives a description of Red-throated Loon in first nuptial plumage that is acquired by a partial prenuptial molt in late winter. This plumage is much like the adult, but with less noticeable throat patches and mostly plain backs.

RR 2, Box 153, Perry, Iowa 50220

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*)

April 27, 1989

4:15 - 4:45 p.m.

Lake Manawa: Pottawattamie County

Description: Small loon. The upper manible was straight; the lower manible was curved upward. The head was light smudgy gray mixed with white; definitely lighter than the back. Crown almost flat, smooth, with little crest. The barely perceptible crest is at the back of the head not over eye as in common loon. Hind neck gray; lighter than the back. Front of neck is also smudgy gray and white. Two squarish patches, one just under chin and one lower on neck were definitely red when seen in good light.

White belly and flanks. Back was muddy dark gray. Underwing inner linings white and primaries and secondaries dark (pattern similar to Swainson's Hawk).

Behavior: The bird dived repeatedly; staying under water for long periods of time. When swimming, he appeared to twist his head, looking sideways, or over his shoulder very often. I did not see the bill held up-tilted, at least not as exaggerated as in the field guides.

This bird was not in any plumage shown in the field guides. I believe it was closer to being in alternate plumage than in basic as the back was quite plain; the white of the cheek had begun to be replaced with gray, and the beginnings of the red throat patch were visible.

Similar Species: Pacific Loon; eliminated by red color of throat patch and shape of bill. This bird's bill was more like that of a Eared Grebe; that is, very slender and not as loon-like as that of Pacific Loon. Pacific Loon's bill looks like a small Common Loon. Common Loon: eliminated by size of bird, shape of bill, and red throated patch.

Light and Equipment:

First viewed from the east with the bird backlit, the bill and general shape of the bird was quite clear. At this time the loon was within one hundred feet (estimated). I moved to the west, and viewed the bird with the sun behind me. From this vantage, the red color on the throat was quite clear.

7 x 26 binoculars
25 x Bushnell Scope

References used: National Geographic Field Guide

Others who saw bird: Bob Meyers saw two birds; Dave Starr also saw two. Babs & Loren Padelford, B. J. Rose, Doug Rose, Roger Rose saw one loon which from his description was not the same one I saw. m. ob.

Submitted by:

Lanya E. Bray
9708 Grover
Omaha, NE 68124

Babs & Loren Padelford
1405 Little John Rd.
Bellevue, NE 68005

Documentation of Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*)

Location: Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., Iowa

Date: April 29, 1989

Description of birds: There were two Red-throated Loons present. They were larger than Lesser Scaup which were present for direct comparison. No other loons present. The bill of both birds was long, thin, dark and slightly upturned at the tip. The length of the bill was approximately equal to the length of the head. The side of head from bill to behind ear and down the side of neck was white to light gray. The eye was clearly surrounded by the light color. The top of head and back of neck to back was uniformly gray but contrasted with much darker gray back. The effect was a two-toned neck with light gray fore neck and darker gray hind neck. Throat was white to light-gray in color.

Both birds held their neck straight and extended and head was tilted slightly upward. One of the birds had a partial throat patch that appeared to be a dark reddish-black color. Feet were black and webbed. The linings of the wings were white.

Elimination of other species: The two-toned neck and slightly upturned bill eliminates the Pacific Loon and the comparatively dainty head and thin bill eliminates the Common Loon which has a much more massive head and bill.

Time of Sighting: 7:15 to 7:30 p.m.

Light Conditions: Partly cloudy. Viewed birds to the east from west shore of lake with light to our backs.

Distance from Birds: Approximately 75 to 100 yards at closest range to nearly the middle of the lake.

Equipment used: Bushnell Spacemaster 25x spotting scope, Nikon 8 x 25 binoculars, Bushnell 6 x 25 binoculars.

Field Guides Consulted: National Geographic, 2nd edition.

Other observers: Tanya Bray, Dave Starr, Jerry Toll, Mark Lund, B.J., Roger and Doug Rose.

This documentation is being written on 5/7/89 from notes taken in the field at time of sighting.

On Saturday two birds were present, but some observers only saw one bird. On Sunday apparently only the bird without the throat patch was seen. As far as we know they were not seen after Sunday, 4/30.

Babe Padelford

Lou Padelford

This form is intended as a convenience for documenting unusual observations. While use of this form is encouraged, it may be used flexibly and need not be used at all. Attach additional sheets as necessary. Attach copies of sketches, field notes, etc. If possible, please include 2 copies of all photos. Use back for more space. Please print or type.

1. SPECIES Red-throated Loon
 2. NUMBER SEEN & AGE (e.g. 2 adults & 3 imm.) 1 adult
 3. DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SAW (describe plumage, color of eyes, beak, legs, etc., field marks, size, wing bars, eye stripe or ring, etc.) Plumage: winter

Bird appeared generally all gray and white, with back darker. The throat was white with a small area that looked "dirty". The eyes were dark, as was the bill.

Several times the bird swam close enough to shore that I could see its field marks clearly with my 8x40 binoculars.

At one point, the bird opened its bill, which further identified its shape. The bird seemed small for a loon; I would guess about 24". The bird did not fly while I watched it, so I can give no further description.

4. VOICE (describe song and delivery - in flight, perched, etc.) Silent

5. BEHAVIOR (what it did, how it acted) bird swam, dove, preened, & rested on water (bird sat on water for extended periods w/o diving).

6. HABITAT BIRD USED WATER

7. DESCRIBE FIELD MARKS USED TO SEPARATE FROM SIMILAR SPECIES & NAME THE SPECIES ELIMINATED

The bill was too slender for either Common Loon or Yellow-billed Loon. The bill was upturned and not shaped like the Pacific Loon.

8. HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THIS SPECIES PREVIOUSLY? IF SO, HOW OFTEN? NO

9. EXACT LOCATION OF THE SIGHTING LAKE MANAWA, - COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA.

10. DATE & TIME OF SIGHTING 4/30/89 9:30 am 11. DURATION OF SIGHTING 45 minutes

12. LIGHT CONDITIONS Sunny 13. OPTICS USED 25x spotting scope

14. APPROX. DISTANCE FROM BIRD 50 YDS. 15. OTHER OBSERVERS -

16. PHOTOGRAPHED? NO BY WHOM? -

17. FIELD GUIDES USED Petersen/Eastern & National Geographic

check applicable: THIS REPORT PREPARED ___ with bird in view; ___ from notes made with bird in view; from notes made later; ___ if later, how much later; IDENTIFICATION MADE: with bird in view; ___ min/hrs/days ___ later. one hour

YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS Marc Lund 905 Bellevue Blvd. South

SIGNATURE Marc Lund

Thank you very much for your cooperation in submitting this report. Your contribution to Nebraska ornithology in so doing is appreciated.

Please return to: ~~N.O.U. RECORDS COMMITTEE, 736 S. Third, ALBION, NE 68620~~
Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, Iowa
50010

What species? Red-throated Loon How many? 2Location? Lake Manawa State ParkType of habitat? LakeWhen? date(s): 29 April 1989 time: 12 Noon to 2:00pm (off + on)Who? your name and address: Bob Myers, RR2 Box 153, Perry, Iowa 50220others with you: noneothers before or after you: ???

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

The two small loons were sleeping with their heads buried in their back feathers as they floated in the north end of the lake. Occasionally each would raise its head, look around, then go back to sleep. They seemed small as they were only $1\frac{1}{2}x$ the length of American Coots swimming about the same distance away. I thought common loons should have looked larger. Both loons had brown backs (mud brown) and no white flecks could be seen. One did seem slightly darker. Both were whitish on front of neck and sides of head. Whitish sides could be seen at water line. The darker bird appeared to have a dark patch on front of neck about half-way down from the head. I could not make out color of patch. Both loons had thin, pointed, somewhat shorter bills. Their heads were also more rounded than common loons (no knob above the eye was apparent). I was sure these had to be Pacifics or Red-throateds and the one mark that swayed my decision was the angle of the bill and the posture of the birds. The bills were definitely bent upwards - this was noticeable even when the heads ~~was~~ horizontal. The loons frequently tilted their heads back and this greatly accentuated the up-ward tilt effect of the bill. This was similar posture to that displayed by other red-throated loons I've seen.

Similar species and how eliminated: I was concerned by the lack of white fleckings on the backs of basic plumage birds (at least mostly so) but Roberts Birds of Minnesota key gives a description of red-throateds in first nuptial plumage which is acquired by a partial prenuptial molt in late winter. This plumage is much like adult with less noticeable throat patch (as in one bird) and has mostly plain back.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Good viewing - Partly cloudy - I viewed from both sides of the bay they were in. Distance was probably 150-200 yd. (just eye-ball est.) - used scope at 20 to 60x

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen this species twice before in Iowa.References and persons consulted before writing description: I looked at Nat. Geo. Guide while I was there and Roberts Birds of Minnesota laterHow long before field notes made? on the spot this form completed? May 2