

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/20/00

Pacific Loon

26 Oct 1995

Twelve Mile L., Union Co., IA

*T. Kent, *J. Fuller

IBL 66:17, 95

Record Number: 95-30

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52240

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:17

Records Committee: IBL 66:95

VOTE: 7 A-D

95-30

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Pacific Loon; **Number:** 1

Location: Twelve Mile Lake, Union Co., IA

Date: 26 October 1995; **Time:** 7:25 to 7:40 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: with Jim Fuller

Habitat and circumstances: Artificial lake, fairly deep water, typical of southern Iowa lakes.

Description of bird: I was scoping the lake as it was just getting light enough to see well when I found a loon. My immediate reaction was that it was a relatively small loon and had a short, uniform, straight bill that was held horizontally. The bird appeared about twice the size of nearby coots. No Common Loons were present for direct comparison. The underparts and side of the neck and face were pure white and the upper parts were dark. The division between the black and white of the neck formed a nearly straight vertical line when the neck was extended. The white of the face was below the eye and extended back into the auricular area. The bill appeared dark gray and tapered gradually to a point. It was not thick and bulbous like we saw latter in the morning on Common Loons. The top of the head and the neck were dark gray-brown, perhaps darker on the forehead. The back and wings were also dark, but there were some small light flecks on the wing. Using Jim's zoom eyepiece, I could make out a very thin chin strap which was located near the bend of the neck. The bird swam, preened, and dove a bit. Eventually, it flew directly at us, then down the lake and back over us again, and finally we saw it gain altitude and fly off to the west. We noted the white underwing coverts, as well as typical loon shape and flight.

Voice: Jim heard it call as it flew over, but I did not have my hearing aids on.

Similar species: We based our identification on size, small uniform bill, lack of white around and in front of the eye, sharp separation of light and dark on the neck, and fine chin strap. The bird was too bulky for a Red-throated Loon and did not have a very thin, upward pointing bill. We were more concerned about excluding Common Loon. The Common Loons we saw later at Rathbun Reservoir had white around the eye, more irregular and less distinct separation of light and dark on the neck, and much more massive bills with bulbous thickening near the tip.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Light: Side to slightly back lighting in early morning on clear day; **Distance:** 100-150 yards on water (guess), closer in flight; **Optics:** 20x and 20-60 zoom scopes.

Previous experience: I have seen several in Iowa and many on coasts and on breeding grounds.

References before/after viewing: We looked at National Geographic Guide, Advanced Birding, and Seabirds while viewing.

Time of notes: while viewing; **Final typing:** one day.

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DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: PACIFIC LOON (Basic Plumage)

LOCATION: Twelve Mile Lake off main boat ramp (Union County)

DATE & TIME: 26 October, 1995 (7:30-45 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA., 52240

OTHERS: With me was Tom Kent

DESCRIPTION: It was very early in the morning, the sun had not even risen quite yet, when Tom Kent found what he thought was a Pacific Loon, while scoping the lake. We watched the bird for the next fifteen minutes, until it got up, circled the lake twice, and disappeared to the south. There was no other large waterfowl to compare to, but this bird seemed like a "small" loon, generally smaller than a Common Loon. It seemed to have a relatively small bill as well. The most noticeable feature was a thin, but prominent chin strap. This basic-plumaged loon was dark gray above with white underparts. In every area where the light and dark met, it was a crisp transition. On the neck, the foreneck was white, and the hindneck was dark, and this was in a more or less straight line, lacking any patterning. The dark on top of the head extended on the side of the face and just enclosed the dark eye. There was an easily seen dark chin strap. The bill seemed small and thin, was a light gray color, and was straight and dagger-shaped. The back and the neck appeared to be about the same shade of gray, and the back had a small amount of light flecking. When the bird flew, the underparts were a snow white, and the forepart of the underwing was light.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Common Loon has larger bill, patterned dark and white on the side of the neck, white around the eye, and lacks a chinstrap. Red-throated Loon has a smaller and upturned bill, white around the eye, more back flecking, and lacks a chin strap.

OPTICS & CONDITIONS: I was looking mostly north before the sun rose on a clear day, and later the sun was just over the horizon in the southeast. I was using a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60 X zoom lens) and viewing was at distances of about a hundred yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen three other basic-plumaged Pacific Loons in Iowa, and numerous alternate-plumaged birds in Alaska.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were prepared in the car immediately after the sighting, and this form was typed on 28 October. The National Geographic Field Guide and Kauffman's "Advanced Birding" were viewed during the sighting.