

Pacific Loon

3 Nov 1996

Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

*A. Johnson, *Kent, *J. Fuller, *Edwards

IBL 67:19, 81

Record Number: 96-42

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ann Johnson (3 Nov), 532 120th Ave., Norwalk 50211

Thomas H. Kent (7 Nov), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller (7 Nov), 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City 52240

Chris Edwards (18 Nov), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:19

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, I noticed an interesting phenomenon in reviewing the three Pacific Loon reports [96-40 to 96-42]. Some observers describe the head and nape darker than the back while others describe it as lighter. Is this a function of various lighting and not a valid indicator of species?

A-D, Presumably the same bird was described by 4 observers over a two-week period, and it was reported by others at this location.

A-D, Seen Nov 3, 7, 18--assumption same bird safe?

**DOCUMENTATION FORM
UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS IN IOWA**

Species: Pacific Loon

Location: Whitebreast Boat Ramp, Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Habitat: Open lake

Date: 3 November 1996 **Time:** 1:30 pm **Length of observation:** 10 minutes

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211

Other Observers: none

Background: I was scanning the lake for waterfowl and had seen a Common Loon a few minutes earlier. This bird had been actively feeding and I missed it on some earlier passes. It finally caught my eye because of its clear-cut black-and-white neck pattern and smaller bill.

Viewing conditions (light, distance, optics): Sun behind; 300 yards through zoom scope

Description of bird: This bird was obviously a loon based on the horizontal body structure and thick neck. It appeared to be on the small size compared to other loons in the area although they were never seen in direct comparison. The neck had a sharp dividing line between black and gray/white. The bill was dark and fairly small, much more dagger-like than the Common Loons. The body was speckled and the head appeared darker than the body. A slight chinstrap was observed through the scope.

Similar species/discussion: The apparent size differential, bill size and clean line to the neck eliminated Common and Yellow-billed Loon. Red-throated is approximately the same size but the bill appears upturned because of the angular shape of the lower edge. Red-throated also has a head lighter than the body. A chinstrap would not be seen in any other species. Grebes were eliminated by thickness of the neck and general jizz.

Previous experience: Have observed this bird nearly annually in Iowa for the past several years.

References consulted: National Geographic Guide

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

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

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Date: 7 November 1996; **Time:** 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. (approx.)

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

Others before/with/after: Jim Fuller with me; reported previously by others.

Habitat and circumstances: large, open reservoir

Description of bird: A small slim loon. Not seen directly with Common Loon of which there were several in the area.

Bill short, dark, relatively thin, straight, and pointed. Head and neck much slimmer than on Common Loons. The bird was dark above, white below. The white of the face extended nearly up to the eye and behind the eye and posterior sides of neck (more white on front than back of neck). The top of head, nape, and posterior neck were gray – in some light angles the neck appeared quite light colored, always a bit lighter than the back. The gray of the neck forms a straight line down the sides of the neck. The size and shape of the bird, along with the face and neck pattern and relatively small bill made it easy to pick out at a distance. Bill held horizontal, not upturned. At one point, I thought I could see a small chin strap, but later I could not confirm it. The bird was likely too far away to evaluate this field mark. In spite of the distance, I first was able to pick this bird out using my binocular.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The size, shape, small thin bill, and pattern of white on the neck and face distinguished this bird from a Common Loon. The size and head posture were different from Red-throated Loon.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: Sunny with sun angle mostly behind at 45 degrees; **Distance:** Estimated at 0.5 miles based on scale on map of reservoir and estimate that bird was 40% of the way across; **Optics:** 10x binocular and 20-60 zoom scope.

Previous experience: I have seen several Pacific Loons in Iowa and have studied all three Iowa loons at this location before.

References before/after viewing: We looked at National Geographic Guide while viewing the bird.

Time of notes: 6 hrs. **Final typing:** 11 days

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Pacific Loon (Basic)

LOCATION: Red Rock Reservoir (Marion Co.)

DATE & TIME: 7 November, 1996 (10:30-11:00 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, Iowa,
52240

OTHERS: Discovered by Ann Johnson. With me was Tom Kent

DESCRIPTION: While scanning the Red Rock Reservoir from the marina area, Tom picked out a loon that looked different than the Common Loons. Although the bird was never close enough to a Common Loon for direct size comparison, it appeared to be smaller with a smaller straight bill. The white of the front of the neck and the gray of the hindneck met on the sides in a well defined line, and there were no indentations of the gray on the sides of the neck. The gray on the crown also seemed to enclose the eye. The head was rounded, with a sloping, rather than steep, forehead. The neck seemed to be thicker directly behind the throat. One of the most noticeable features was the light gray, almost silver character of the back of the neck and crown, and the neck was lighter than the darker gray of the back. The bill was straight and a gray color, and it was always in a pretty much horizontal position. No chin strap could be seen. It was not seen in flight.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Separated from Common Loon by size and bill size, head shape, dark of crown enclosing eye, and paler hindneck than back. Red-throated Loon has white around eye, white barring on back and sides, and characteristically tips head so that bill points up.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: Seen at distances varying from 500 yards to 1000 yards. It was late morning of a clear, relatively mild and calm day. Viewing was best and the bird was closest while looking southwest. It drifted by over a half an hour and first viewing was south, and last viewing was west.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen five previous birds in Iowa, and have seen them in both basic and alternate plumage while in the west and northwest.

REFERENCES & FIELD GUIDE: National Geographic field guide was looked at during time of viewing. Field notes were made that evening, and this form was typed on 11 November.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What Species? Pacific Loon**How many?** 1**Location?** Lake Red Rock, Marion Co.**Type of Habitat?** Open water**When?** November 18, 1996, 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.**Who?** Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317**Others with you:****Others 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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.**

The bird was swimming and diving with four Common Loons, providing a direct comparison. Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ size of Common Loons, with a much smaller straight black bill, held horizontally. Forehead, crown, nape, hindneck, back, and wings uniformly dark grayish-black, lighter in color than the black head and neck of Common Loons. Throat, breast, and belly white. On the face, the black extended straight back from the bill towards the nape, and then down the side of the neck in a sharp, straight, vertical line. No "chinstrap" was discernible. Upperside of wings entirely black. Underside of wings dark with white patch near front edge. A small amount of white showed on the sides, above the waterline.

Similar species; how eliminated: Common Loon is larger, with a much larger bill, blacker head and neck, different facial and neck pattern. Red-throated Loon has smaller, generally upturned bill, white around eye, lighter crown and hindneck compared to back, and less well-defined division between gray and white on side of neck.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No.

Viewing conditions: Mostly cloudy; viewed 300 yards away with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x-45x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No experience with Pacific Loon; very familiar with Common Loon.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Advanced Birding, National Geographic Field Guide.

How long before field notes made? During observation.

How long before this form completed? Four hours.