

Pacific Loon  
16 Nov 1895  
Sabula, Jackson Co., IA  
Giddings, Eldridge, C. Hart Merriam  
Giddings 1896, Savage 1996, etc.P-0574

Record Number: 93-AA  
Classification: A-S

PHOTOGRAPHS

Bob Sheets, Maquoketa, 1998, 3 prints of specimen, 1 of label

REFERENCES

- Giddings, J. 1896. *Urinator arcticus* in Jackson Co. Iowa Ornithologist 2:73.  
Savage, D.L. 1896. [no title]. Iowa Ornithologist 2:85.  
Anderson 1907  
Hersey, F.S. 1917. The status of the Black-throated Loon (*Gavia arctica*) as a North American bird. Auk 34:283-290.  
Bent 1919  
DuMont, P.A. 1933. The Iowa specimen of Pacific Loon reexamined. Wilson Bull. 45:89-90.  
DuMont 1933

LETTER

Ronald E. Goetz to Thomas H. Kent, 1 Apr 1988

VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, This specimen was examined by two experienced ornithologists (Merriam, Du Mont) and Du Mont recorded some description and measurements as well as verifying the date in Giddings journals. Goetz indicates that Common and Red-throated loons are eliminated (presumably by the measurements). Although Arctic Loon is still a theoretical possibility, the measurements and likelihood in the Midwest make it reasonable in my mind to exclude that species. A-D rather than A-S because the specimen is not known to exist at this date. I am giving this record the benefit of the doubt that it was taken in Iowa by presuming that "while swimming in the Mississippi river, a little bit from shore opposite the town of Subula" means opposite in the north-south direction rather than on the opposite side of the river. /thk

RE-VOTE (by mail with photos of specimen, Feb 1998): 7 A-S

A-S, A well documented specimen.

A-S, The head and bill shape, pattern of black and white on face and neck, and chin strap show rather nicely. The original label and trail of evidence in the literature make me sure that this is an authentic specimen. Perhaps we need a personal check by a records committee member to comply with our criteria for A-S.

A-S, Relatively minor concerns dealt with by THK in note. Upper and lower mandible are symmetrical--not the case in Red-throated. A mount may not necessarily reflect real life in posture.

Changes in the Iowa list since the last edition that resulted from changes in the A.O.U. Check-list (except for wording of Family names) are given below.

Changes in English names (both based on splits):

- Marbled Murrelet becomes Long-billed Murrelet (*Brachyramphus perdix*)
- Solitary Vireo becomes Blue-headed Vireo (separated from Cassin's and Plumbeous)

Changes in scientific names

- American Golden-Plover changes from *Pluvialis dominicus* back to *P. dominica*
- Marbled Murrelet becomes Long-billed Murrelet (*Brachyramphus perdix*)
- Burrowing Owl genus changed from *Speotyto* back to *Athene*
- Olive-sided Flycatcher changed from *Contopus borealis* to *C. cooperi*
- Cliff Swallow genus changed from *Hirundo* to *Petrochelidon*
- Chickadee genus changed from *Parus* to *Poecile*
- Titmouse genus changed from *Parus* to *Baeolophus*

Changes in position of orders and families:

- American Vultures moved to follow Storks
- Shrikes, Vireos, and Crows and Jays moved (in that order) to follow Flycatchers
- Starlings moved to follow Mockingbirds and Thrashers
- Cardinals, Saltators, and Allies moved to follow Emberizids (sparrows)

Changes in status of orders and families:

- New World Quail split into new family — Odontophoridae
- Kinglets split into new family — Regulidae
- Old World Warblers and Gnatcatchers elevated to family (Sylviinae to Sylviidae)
- Thrushes elevated to family (Turdinae to Turdidae)
- Wood-Warblers elevated to family (Parulinae to Parulidae)
- Tanagers elevated to family (Thraupinae to Thraupidae)
- Emberizids elevated to family (Emberizinae to Emberizidae)
- Cardinals, Saltators, and Allies elevated to family (Cardinalinae to Cardinalidae)
- Blackbirds elevated to family (Icterinae to Icteridae)

Changes of position of species within families:

- swans moved to follow geese and order reversed: Mute, Trumpeter, Tundra
- Brant moved to follow Canada Goose (rather than precede it)
- Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, and American Wigeon moved to follow Wood Duck
- Green-winged Teal moved to follow Garganey
- Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, and Northern Shoveler moved to follow Mallard
- King Eider moved to precede Common Eider (rather than follow it)
- Oldsquaw move to follow scoters (rather than precede them)
- Black Scoter moved to follow White-winged (rather than precede Surf)
- Bufflehead moved to precede goldeneyes (rather than follow)
- Gyr Falcon moved ahead of Peregrine Falcon
- Sharp-tailed Grouse moved ahead of Greater Prairie-Chicken
- Sabine's Gull moved ahead of Black-legged Kittiwake
- Loggerhead Shrike moved ahead of Northern Shrike
- Yellow-throated Vireo moved ahead of Blue-headed (formerly Solitary) Vireo

- Black-throated Green Warbler moved ahead of Townsend's Warbler
- Spotted Towhee moved ahead of Eastern Towhee
- Order of Zonotrichia sparrows reversed (Harris's, White-crowned, Golden-crowned)
- Common Grackle moved ahead of Great-tailed Grackle

Changes in the Iowa list that are the result of new information and Records

Committee decisions are summarized as follows:

- Species added (all Accidental): Neotropical Cormorant, Eurasian Collared-Dove, White-winged Dove, Sprague's Pipit
- Casual to Regular: Red-throated Loon, Pacific Loon, White-faced Ibis, Laughing Gull, Sabine's Gull
- Regular to Casual: Burrowing Owl, Bohemian Waxwing
- Accidental to Casual: Little Gull, Black-headed Gull, Mew Gull, Lazuli Bunting
- Casual to Accidental: Rock Wren
- Probable Nesting to Nesting: Red-necked Grebe
- Specimen, new species: Eurasian Collared-Dove
- Photograph to Specimen: Pacific Loon, Varied Thrush
- Photograph, new species: Neotropical Cormorant, White-winged Dove
- Documentation to Photograph: Ferruginous Hawk, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Pinyon Jay
- Documentation, new species: Sprague's Pipit

The numbers given in the 1996 Edition for photographed and documented species should have been 71 and 18 (not 72 and 19).



Pacific Loon, 16 November 1895, Sabula, Jackson County.  
Specimen rediscovered and photographed by Bob Sheets.

93-111



Pacific Loon  
Sabula, Jackson Co., IA  
16 Nov 1895 H. J. Giddings

93-AA



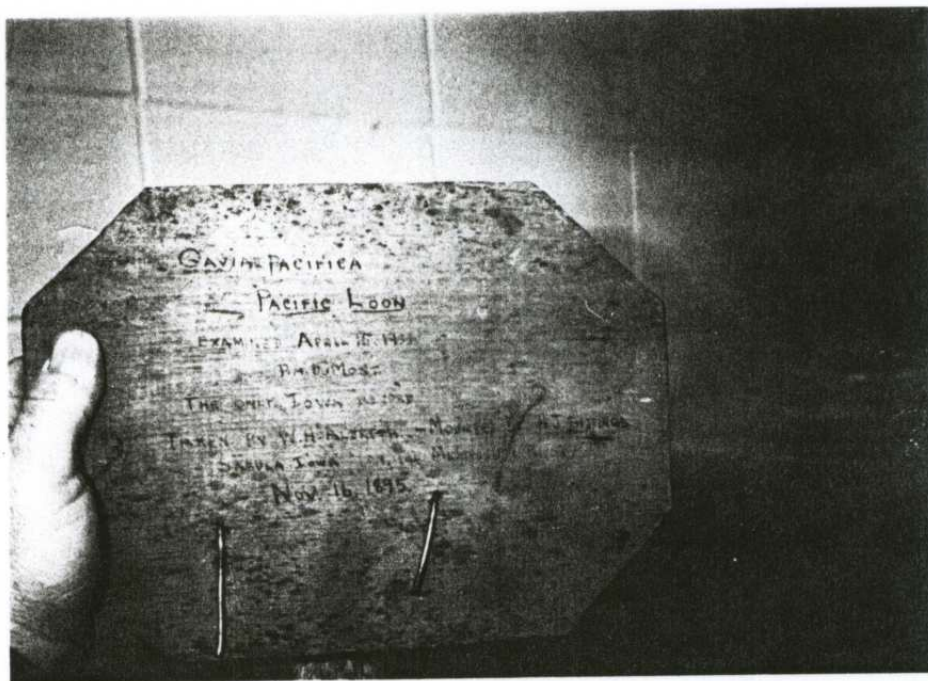
1-26-98

SPECIMEN  
LOCATED IN JACKSON  
COUNTY MUSEUM -  
MARQUETTE

THANKS FOR LOON  
INFO. HOPE THESE PHOTOS  
HELP.

*Bob Sheets*

BOB SHEETS WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST  
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Giddings, J. 1896. *Urinator arcticus* in Jackson Co. Iowa Ornithologist 2:73

*Urinator arcticus* in Jackson Co.

J. GIDDINGS, SABULA, IOWA.

On November 15, 1895, a male Black-throated Loon was shot while swimming in the Mississippi river, a little way from the shore opposite the town of Sabula by Mr. W. Eldridge, who presented me with a specimen. Being doubtful of the identification of it,

I sent the specimen to Dr. C. Hart Merriam, chief of division of ornithology at Washington and he identified it as above.

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I believe this to be a very rare species in our state, especially half way across it as this specimen was.

[This is the first time this species has been reported from Iowa.—Ed.]

Savage, D. L. 1896. (no title). Iowa Ornithologist 2:85

The notice of the taking of a Black-throated Loon near Sabula, Iowa, as given in the April IOWA ORNITHOLOGIST, read, by J. Giddings, but should read H. J. Giddings. One initial was omitted thus crediting the note to the wrong person, there being a J. Giddings at Sabula.

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I must also modify my supplementary note on this species, as a specimen taken by Paul Bartsch at Burlington, Iowa, was reported in the proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Sciences, 1895.

7. (9). *Gavia arctica* (Linn.). Black-throated Loon.

The Black-throated Loon is a northern species which very casually visits Iowa. Two specimens have been taken in Jackson county. J. Giddings reports (Iowa Orn., ii, 4, 1896, 73): "Nov. 15, 1895, a male Black-throated Loon was shot while swimming in the Mississippi River a little way from the shore opposite Sabula, by Mr. W. Eldridge. Identified by Dr. C. Hart Merriam." H. J. Giddings reports (West. Orn., v, 3, 1900, 60): "On Nov. 26, 1899, an immature male was shot on the Mississippi River at this place [Sabula] and sent to me for mounting." A specimen in the University Museum, No. 10175, in juvenile plumage, was taken at Burlington; recorded by Prof. C. C. Nutting (Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1894, 44).

2

3

1

Anderson 1907 pp 151-152

Hersey, F. S. 1917.  
The status of the  
Black-throated Loon  
(*Gavia arctica*) as a  
North American bird.  
Auk 34: 283-290.

(222)

Iowa: Dr. R. M. Anderson records (Proc. Davenport Acad. Sci., Vol. XI) three specimens of this loon from Iowa. One was, at that time, in the collection of the State University at Iowa City (No. 10175). Regarding this bird Prof. Dayton Stoner writes, "I am sorry to report that I am unable to find any specimen of *Gavia arctica* in our collections." The two remaining records are of birds reported by Mr. H. J. Giddings. One of these is said to have been identified by Dr. C. Hart Merriam and is still in Mr. Giddings' possession. Dr. Merriam has written us that he does not now recall this bird but a memorandum he has, which was made in connection with the examination of this specimen, states that all United States records are *pacifica*. Mr. Giddings states in a recent letter that the bill of this bird measures 2.15 inches from which it seems evident that it is a Pacific Loon.

In a recent letter Dr. Anderson says, "I have no doubt personally that either *Gavia arctica* or *Gavia pacifica* occurs occasionally as stragglers or accidentally in Iowa. From what I have learned in the last few years, however, I am inclined to think the bird would be *pacifica*."

*Gavia arctica pacifica* (Lawrence). Pacific Loon

Accidental. This species was listed by Anderson (1907) under the name *Gavia arctica* (Linn.), Black-throated Loon. He included the following records: "Two specimens have been taken in Jackson County. J. Giddings reports (Iowa Orn., ii, 4, 1896, 73): 'Nov. 15, 1895, a male Black-throated Loon was shot while swimming in the Mississippi River a little way from the shore opposite Sabula, by Mr. W. Eldridge. Identified by Dr. C. Hart Merriam.' H. J. Giddings reports (West. Orn., v. 3, 1900, 60): 'On Nov. 26, 1899, an immature male was shot on the Mississippi River at this place [Sabula] and sent to me for mounting.' A specimen in the University Museum, No. 10175, in juvenal plumage, was taken at Burlington; recorded by Prof. C. C. Nutting (Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1894, 44)."

Subsequently, F. Seymour Hersey, while engaged in a critical review of all North American records of the Black-throated Loon, recorded (Auk, XXXIV, pp. 283-290) that his correspondence in connection with his investigation revealed that the specimen in the University of Iowa Museum could not be found. H. J. Giddings wrote him that the specimen secured November 16, 1895, was still in his possession and that the exposed culmen measured 2.15 inches, from which Hersey concluded it must be a Pacific Loon.

This mounted specimen was examined by the writer (Wilson Bull., XLV, pp. 89-90) on April 15, 1933, and found to be, unquestionably, referable to *Gavia arctica*. All North American records of this species south of Alaska are now referred to the subspecies *pacifica*. Measurements in millimeters of this male in winter plumage are: wing, 303.5; tail, 57.9; tarsus, 68.5; exposed culmen, 51.3; height of culmen at base, 13.7; height of culmen at nostril, 12.2; culmen from nostril, 38.8. It was shot by W. H. Eldredge on November 16, 1895, while it was swimming in the Mississippi River in front of the town of Sabula, Jackson County. This statement is slightly different than the one quoted by Anderson. However, these data have been recently verified by Giddings through reference to his journals. There are no other definite Iowa records.

1933  
DuMont ~~1934~~  
pp 16-17



Bent, A. C.: Life Histories of North American Diving Birds. Bull 107  
US Nat Museum, Washington, 1919.

p 72

*Casual records.*—Guadaloupe Island (one found dead in 1875), Arizona (Fort Verde), New Mexico (near Clayton), Iowa (near Sabula), and New York (Long Island, April 29). The Long Island and Iowa birds have been erroneously recorded as *arctica*.

DuMont, P. A. 1933. The Iowa specimen of Pacific Loon reexamined.  
Wilson Bull 45:89-90.

**The Iowa Specimen of Pacific Loon Re-examined.**—On November 16, 1895, an immature male Pacific Loon (*Gavia arctica pacifica*) was shot by W. H. Eldredge of Sabula. This bird was swimming in the Mississippi River in front of the town of Sabula, Jackson County, Iowa. The specimen was given to Harold J. Giddings, who mounted it, and since that time (except for a few months when it was forwarded to the Biological Survey, Washington, D. C., for examination) it has remained in Mr. Giddings' collection at his farm home, three miles north-west of Sabula.

This specimen was examined by the writer on April 15, 1933, and its identity as *Gavia a. pacifica* was satisfactorily corroborated. This loon is in winter plumage with the throat and entire underparts white, somewhat discolored due, no doubt, to the many years it has stood as an *objet d'art* in the "sitting room" of the Giddings' home. Each dark feather on the back of the bird is faintly margined with grayish, an entirely different pattern than the spotted-backed appearance of *Gavia stellata*.

Measurements of the specimen, in inches, recently taken by the writer are: wing, 11.95; tail, 2.28; tarsus, 2.70; exposed culmen, 2.02; depth of culmen at base, .54; depth of culmen at nostril, .48; culmen from nostril, 1.53. The distance

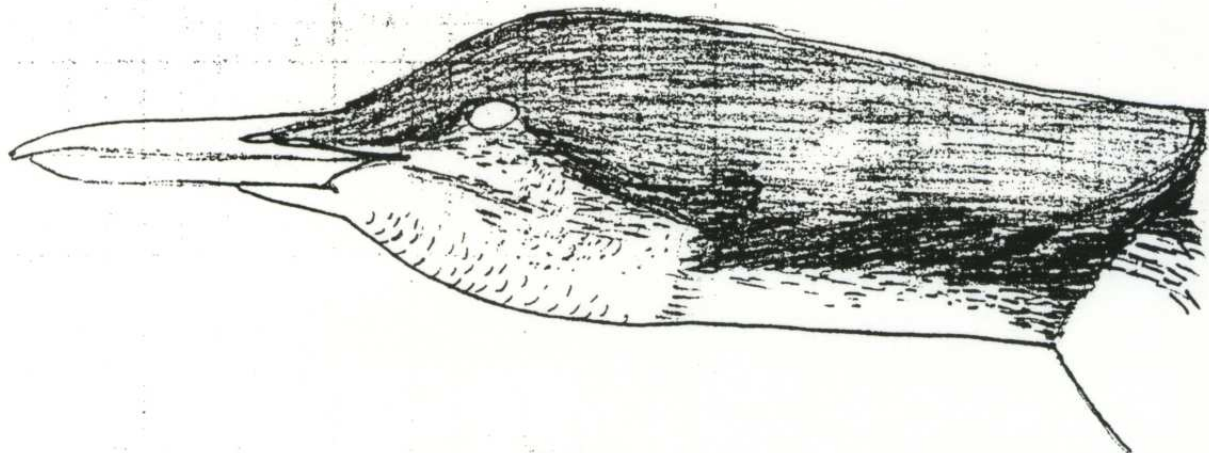
from the base of the culmen to the anterior point of the loreal feathers is less than from the latter point to the anterior extremity of the nostril. The culmen is slightly convex and definitely does not have the concave line at the nostril, as found in *G. stellata*. The length of the tarsus is less than the inner toe with claw.

R. M. Anderson (*Birds of Iowa*, pp. 151-152, 1907) includes the account of the capture of this bird published by Giddings in the *Iowa Ornithologist*, II, p. 73, 1896. Anderson stated that the bird was taken by Mr. W. Eldredge, while it was swimming in the Mississippi River a little way from the shore opposite Sabula, on November 15, 1895. The slightly different details of its capture as I have stated them above were contained in a letter received from Mr. Giddings on October 11, 1932, and recently verified at the time of examining the specimen.

F. Seymour Hersey has shown (*Auk*, pp. 283-290, 1917) that all records of *Gavia arctica* from the United States and Canada actually refer to *G. a. pacifica* or to some other species of loon, the range of the Siberian bird being restricted to the west coast of Alaska, with a straggling record at Victoria, British Columbia. Based upon Hersey's study, no doubt, the A. O. U. Check-List, 4th Edition, stated the wintering range of *G. a. pacifica* as, "mainly on the Pacific coast of North America from southeastern Alaska and British Columbia to southern Lower California. Accidental in Arizona, New Mexico, New Hampshire, and New York (Long Island)." It should now be amended to include this single Iowa occurrence.—PHILIP A. DuMONT, *Museum of Natural History, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa*.

FMNH 156015  
13 Sep 1929 ♀  
Pt. Barrow, AK  
Juvenile

Note: relative lack of contrast between forehead and crown; dusky feather tips on chin, streaking on side neck and across base of foreneck, cutting off abruptly in a "choker." "Chinstrap" reminiscent of a 4-day mustache. Blackish at side neck mottled with brownish



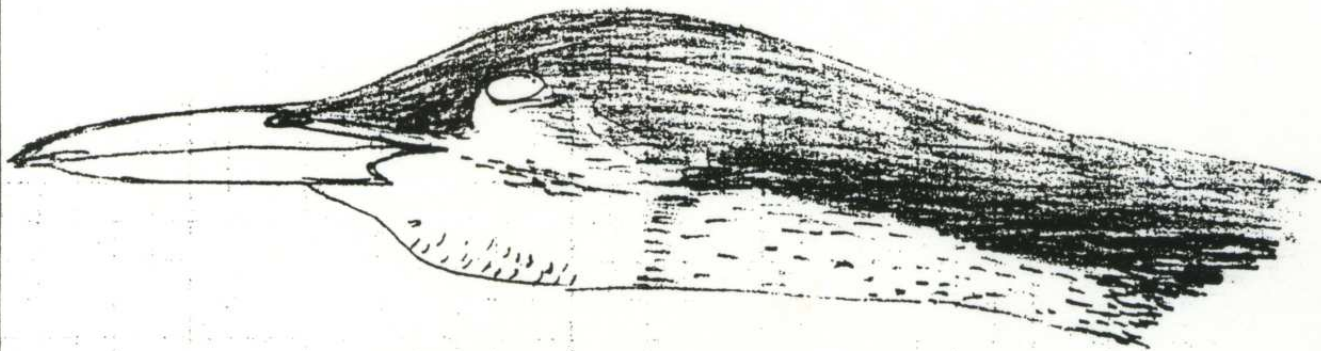
ANSP 37638  
16 Sep 1927  
Pt. Barrow, AK  
Juvenile

Notes: Largely as above, but more brownish, less black in side neck, some spotting (not drawn well) in center of fore neck, and somewhat more darkish area in lores. Head folded over back in specimen so difficult to draw.

Some feathers in lower scapulars with white lateral edges:



Vent band narrow, barely joined in middle.





93-AA

909 S. Gore Ave.  
Webster Groves, MO 63119

, 1 April 1988

Thomas H. Kent  
211 Richards Street  
Iowa City, IA 52240

Dear Tom:

Thank you very much for the mass of material on loons. It must have taken some time to put together, and I am very grateful. I have enclosed my comments on the records, at least on those for which some description was provided.

For the Pacific/Arctic records, my comments will show some differences with prior judgments. First, the 8 Dec 1948 specimen seems to me to warrant rejection because of a contradiction in the description (called an immature, while the description can only pertain to an adult), and otherwise not enough detail. Has an attempt been made to locate this specimen? Second, I think that 81-02 can safely be called a Pacific rather than Pacific/Arctic. Third, I was not pleased with the descriptions of 86-07, 86-08, 86-09 and 86-19: my judgement is that the evidence does not indicate that more than one individual Pacific (or, realistically, Pacific/Arctic) was there, and the documentation for the first sighting in particular is not acceptable. For each of these sightings, there are some confusing and/or contradictory points, and reliance on the first edition of the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America may have caused some further inaccuracies (see below). Finally, I feel quite confident that 87-18 was not a Pacific Loon (most likely a juvenile Red-throated).

I don't think there are any surprises in my analyses of the Red-throated Loon records.

As for the identification of Pacific Loons, some information can be gathered from the enclosed comments. I have also enclosed a poor copy of a sketch I made of the heads of two fresh juvenile Pacific Loon specimens, which may help. Although I do not wish to go into too much detail here, Arctic Loons can be best separated from Pacific by the flank patterning: the former species apparently always has the white coming up high on the sides at the rear end of the bird (above the thigh) (reminiscent of a Violet-Green Swallow), and often shows white along the entire waterline when the birds are riding high on the water. This pattern is apparently never shown by the Pacific Loon. (See paintings in Harrison, Seabirds, 1985 (revised edition), and photos in Harrison, A Field Guide to Seabirds of the World, 1987).

An article on loon identification is going to appear in Birding shortly, and I will otherwise supply you with a copy of my manuscript when it is completed. In the meantime, I would urge observers to be very careful in studying the back pattern; pattern of light and dark around the eye and near the base of the upper mandible; the coloration of the lower flanks; the bill coloration; and especially the patterning of the side and front of the neck for any unusual loon they encounter. Much of this detail is visible only at close range, but it is extremely valuable in identification of loons. Also, loons are most often seen at a distance only, and it is important to keep in mind that many of the relevant features shown in the field guides can disappear under these circumstances. Thus the apparent absence of certain markings (e.g., the spotting on the back of a Red-throated Loon) means rather little unless the bird is relatively close.



The question of small Common Loons is an interesting one. I have found no specimens or references showing actual overlap in the measurements of the bills of Common and Pacific Loons, but there is considerable variation in Common Loons, and these differences are sometimes great enough to be appreciable in the field if two birds from either extreme are in close proximity. Juvenile Pacific are relatively easy to separate from Common Loon once one knows the right field marks, but identification of basic adult Pacifics is quite tricky, since it is based largely on the absence of several characters of Common Loons (Pacifics have no white indentation into the side neck, no spotting on the back, no whitish above the eye), combined with the presence of a few characters which are very difficult to see (the chinstrap and the white spotting on wing coverts). Although experienced observers can identify Pacifics at great distances based only on silhouette and apparent size (with quite near 100% accuracy), I feel that Pacific Loon remains a rare enough bird in the midwest that I would not sanction identifications based entirely on these subjective features. In most situations observers should still be able to obtain enough plumage detail to support their identification.

Finally, I have to say something about the unfortunate "Arctic Loon" illustrations in the first edition of the NGS Guide, since observers apparently picked up some erroneous ideas from these paintings (arguably the most egregious error in the book). First, the "winter" bird is not in any way a basic plumaged adult: if anything, it is just another juvenile. Second, even assuming that both the "winter" and the "immature" drawings are of juveniles, they are still full of errors: the bills are far too dark; the plumage overall is much too pale, especially the forehead and loreal area; and the dark stripe along the side of the neck never extends to the eye (let alone widening above the eye, as shown). The shape of the heads and bills also misses the mark in my opinion. Fortunately, these paintings have been almost completely corrected in the new edition (1987). The "winter" bird is now a legitimate basic plumaged adult (although the spotting in the wing coverts isn't completely accurate), and the "immature" shows the correct patterning for a late fall juvenile: the nape of this bird could have been paler, and most juveniles do show more of a chinstrap than the illustration (fortunately), but I otherwise have no complaint with the painting. Notice that the bill colors of both birds have been corrected.

Some of the 1986 sightings contain details which in my opinion almost had to come from the first edition NGS Guide: dark bills, side neck stripes going to the eye (or even the base of the bill), etc. Of course we all tend to see only what we look for, but such details do not strengthen the case for these sightings.

By the way, you should notice some other improvements in the loon illustrations in the second edition: the winter Common is now a very good basic adult (instead of a bad juvenile); the "immature" Red-throated is greatly improved; and the "immature" Yellow-billed has been improved (but still does not show the right head patterning; it was formerly closer to a basic adult).

Well, that will do it for now. Let me know if you have any other questions or comments regarding these records, and thanks again for all the information.

Sincerely,



Ronald E. Goetz



## 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