

Yellow-billed Loon

2 Dec 1999

Little Wall L., Hamilton Co., IA

*J. Fuller, *T. Kent, R. Allen (photos)

P-0628, IBL 70, 144, Healy/Zaletel 2000

Record Number: 99-30

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller, 2 Dec

Thomas H. Kent, 2 Dec, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Mark Proescholdt, 4 Dec [not reviewed]

Chris Edwards, 4 Dec [not reviewed]

Jim Dinsmore, 14, 17 Dec [not reviewed]

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 21 Dec [not reviewed]

PHOTOGRAPHS

Reid I. Allen, 2 Dec, P-0628

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 70:91

Records Committee: IBL 70:144

Healy, K., and H. Zaletel. 2000. Yellow-billed Loon in Hamilton and Story counties. Iowa Bird Life 70:108-110.

VOTE: 6 A-P, 1 A-D

A-P, A well described and pictured bird, which would be the second state record, both in 1999. Interesting that there were juvenile YB Loons in Colorado, Idaho, and Oklahoma at the same time.

A-P, Good job on Mr. Healy's part.



Yellow-billed Loon, Little Wall L., IA, 2 December 1999, Reid Allen photo

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Yellow-billed Loon P-0628
Little Wall L., Hamilton Co.
2 Dec 1999 Reid I. Allen 99.34

99-30

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Yellow-billed Loon; **Number:** 1 juvenile

Location: Little Wall Lake, Hamilton Co., IA

Date: 2 December 1999; **Time:** 7:45 to 9:00 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: Found by Kevin Healy on 2 Dec. Jim Fuller and Dick Tetrault with me. Reid and Pam Allen, Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, and Mike Overton arrived while we were there, plus other local birders that I did not know.

Habitat and circumstances: Natural lake in glaciated area. All open water.

Description of bird: I spotted the loon at the north end from the west side parking lot. We drove to the north end and then to the northeast side, getting closer and closer to the loon. It was a large loon with thick neck and large bill. The bill was straight along the culmen and curved upward along the lower mandible. The bill was a uniform gray or ivory or yellowish gray with a black line on the culmen in the proximal half. This black line ended sharply at mid-bill. The head had a prominent bulge on the forehead, flat top, and squared off back of the head. The eye was small and dark (appeared smaller than Common Loon, but no Commons present for comparison). The top of the head was dark, nearly black. The throat, foreneck and belly were white. The face and sides of neck were mottled gray brown. There were no sharp indentations of white on the sides of the neck, although the dark sides of the neck projected more anteriorly at mid-neck. There was much less white showing on the neck and none on the face compared to what would be found on a Common Loon. There was a round dark mark behind and below the eye; it had fuzzy edges and was not black. The back of the bird was traversed by sharp white wavy lines. The bird was in sight most of the time, but occasionally dove.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The size and thick bill exclude Red-throated and Pacific loons. The features that favor Yellow-billed over Common loon include the bill shape, dark line to mid culmen, small eye, auricular patch, and the pattern of the foreneck and face (little extension of white and mottled color). The back pattern (wavy white lines rather than fuzzy white lines with dark bars) and paleness of the auricular patch indicate a juvenile.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: overcast morning light, becoming lighter; **Distance:** 50 to 200 yards (estimate); **Optics:** 10x binocular and various scopes. Reid Allen and I took photos.

Previous experience: I have seen adults in Alaska.

References before/after viewing: We looked at Kaufman's Advanced Birding and National Geographic Field Guide while viewing.

Time of notes: about 10 minutes after we left; **Final typing:** 1 day.

99-30

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Yellow-billed Loon (Juvenile)

LOCATION: Little Wall Lake (Hamilton County)

DATE & TIME: 2 December, 1999 (7:45-9:00 AM)

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

OTHERS: Discovered by Kevin Healy. With me were Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault. Also there were Eugene and Eloise Armstrong and Pam and Reid Allen. Many observers the next two days.

DESCRIPTION: General features were a large loon, with thick neck, large bill and rather light head and neck. Specifically, the head and neck were a light brown color interspersed with white. The top of the crown and back of the neck were much darker. The top of the head showed a flatness which ended in front with an actual rounded bump above the eye and a very steep slope (not quite vertical) to the forehead), and an angle at the back of the crown. The throat and foreneck were white as was the front of the breast. The bill was a grayish-yellow color, with a very yellow area toward the tip. The culmen was straight and almost horizontal. However, the bird held its head so that the bill appeared to be tipped up from the horizontal, partly because of the very convex border to the lower mandible. There was a darkness on the bill along the culmen for about half the distance between the base and the tip, which ended abruptly leaving the tip half of the culmen entirely light. The eye seemed small. There was a dark spot of brown behind and below the eye, which was somewhat oval shaped (oval was longest vertically). On the neck, there was only one whitish extension from the foreneck onto the side of the neck, and this was about halfway through its length. The back and wings were darker than the brown of the head and neck, and a grayish-brown color, and there was a crisp light scalloping to the feathers of the scapulars which created rows. The tail was dark. There was also a light gray area just above the waterline. The bird was not seen in flight, nor was any vocalization heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Common Loon does not show any yellow on its bill, has a more rounded culmen, which is dark on its ridge throughout the entire length. It holds its head level rather than uptilted. It lacks the spot behind the eye. It lacks a bump in the crown outline above the eye. The dark areas on the head and neck are darker, and normally show two white indentations onto the side of the neck

VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was early morning on a mostly overcast day. Excellent views were obtained of all details. All of the viewing was toward the west and northwest, using a KOWA TSN4 (30 X lens). At times the bird was as close as 150 feet and ranged to as far as 350 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: One basic-plumaged bird was seen in Illinois on the Rock River about 15 years ago, and I have seen a number of alternate-plumaged birds in Alaska.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: References looked at during and after the viewing were the National Geographic guide, and Kauffman's Advanced Birding. Field notes were written in car immediately after sighting, and this form was typed on 4 December.

What species? Yellow-Billed loon How many? 1Location? Little wall lake - (Hamilton Co.)Type of habitat? Small lake environmentWhen? date(s): Dec. 4, 1999 ^{app.} time: 10:45 a.m. to 1:40 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Chris Edwards, Paul Hertzgel, Kay Niyo, Eric Haley,
othersothers before or after you: Jim Fuller, Tom Kent, Jim Dinsmore, Armstrongs, Allens,
others

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 loon looked large at times. It had a pale neck and light-colored head instead of an all dark ~~head~~ head. Two pronounced bumps on its head were observed sometimes. It had a white throat and vivid checkered markings on its back. It had a big bill. There was a patch or blotch of darkness behind its eye on the head. There was almost a rectangle of white around and above its eye. The lower mandible was not straight at the tip but angled up toward the upper mandible.

The culmen on the top of the ~~bill~~ upper mandible of the bill was dark over $\frac{1}{2}$ of its length and then it was pale or whitish in color to the tip. The tip of the bill looked whitish or pale on both mandibles.

The loon worked its way around the lake. The loon rode the water for quite a while at first and at the last. In the middle time it dove quite a bit, and I saw it eating small little fish two or three times at least.

Similar species and how eliminated:

The pale culmen is diagnostic for the Yellow-Billed loon. In the common loon the culmen is dark to the tip. Pacific and Red-throateds are much smaller with distinctive plumage differences.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain: :

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

Cloudy all day with a bit of sun very briefly once. Good viewing.

Distances estimated \rightarrow 60 yards, 200 yards, 50 yards, 400 yards, 80 yards.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen breeding adult once in Alaska. I'm familiar with other 8X30 Binocs, 22X Scope
3 loon species in Iowa.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

used Kenn Kaufman's Advanced Birding.How long before field notes made? 9:15 p.m. this form completed? Jan. 12, 2000on Dec. 4th

99-30

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Yellow-billed Loon

Number: 1 (juvenile)

Location: Little Wall Lake, Hamilton County.

Habitat: Open water.

Date and time: December 4, 1999, 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Name and address: Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: Eric Haley, Mark Proescholdt, Beth Proescholdt.

Others before or after you: many observers.

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.

This large, pale brownish-gray loon was seen actively feeding and diving. There were no other birds present for a size comparison, but the bird seemed to be approximately the same size as a Common Loon. The bill was usually held tilted slightly upwards. The head was squarish, with a steep forehead leading to a pronounced peak at the front of the crown, and a smaller peak at the rear of the crown. The long bill had a straight culmen (upper ridge of upper mandible) and a slightly angled lower mandible; the inner one-half to two-thirds of the bill was light gray with a black culmen; the outer one-third of the bill, including the culmen, was entirely pale yellow.

The head and neck were paler than those of a Common Loon. The crown, nape, and hindneck were blackish. The face was off-white or very light brown, with a darker brown, roughly circular auricular patch behind and slightly below the eye. A second brown patch was located below the auricular patch near the bend of the throat. The dark eye was completely surrounded by the whitish-colored area. There was a thin, dark horizontal line running backwards from the base of the bill across the face. The throat, foreneck, and upper breast were white. The sides of the neck were light brownish, with one or two white triangular indentations running from the front towards the rear. The dark back ranged from light gray in the front to blackish in the rear, and was covered with white scalloping.

Similar species eliminated: The pale yellow outer culmen and the dark auricular patch on the pale head and neck eliminate Common Loon, as well as the smaller loons.

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

Viewing conditions: Estimated 100 yards, overcast, viewed with 20x-60x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No previous experience with this species; have seen many Common Loons.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic field guide, Kaufman's *Advanced Birding*.

How long before field notes made: during observation.

How long before this form completed: 5 hours.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species Yellow-billed Loon **How many?** one

Location? Hallett's Quarry, north of Ames

Type of habitat? gravel pit

When? date(s): 14, 17 Dec 1999 **Time:** about 10:30 a.m. each day

Who? Jim Dinsmore

Others with you no one

Others before or after you Hank Zaletel, et al.

Describe the bird(s) Large loon with large bill.

Following features noted:

Bill quite heavy with upper surface fairly straight and lower surface upcurved.

Head showed much light color below, behind, and to some extent above the eye. Distinct dark auricular spot behind eye

Noted two "bumps" on head, toward front and back

Speckled pattern to back

Similar species and how eliminated: Bird too large and bill too heavy for either Red-throated or Pacific loon. Very large bill and head, "bumps on head, and shape of bill all indicated that this was a Yellow-billed rather than Common loon.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? not that I know of

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: Watched through 20 power scope at about 150 yards

Previous experience none

References & persons consulted before writing description:

Looked at National Geographic guide and Advanced Birding guided

How long before field notes made? Notes taken in field while viewing bird

99-30

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Yellow-billed Loon

Number: 1 immature

Location: Hallett's Quarry, north of Ames, Story Co., Iowa

Habitat: large quarry pond

Date: 21 December 1999

Time: 7:33-7:46 a.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 1/2 West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521

Others who saw bird(s): m.ob.

Description of bird(s): I arrived at Hallett's Quarry at approximately 7 a.m. on 21 December. With the cold overnight temperature (-16 degrees) and calm conditions, I expected to find the quarries mostly frozen and the loon restricted to a small piece of open water. However, when I arrived I found the entire south quarry and much of the north quarry obscured by heavy fog. What little I could see of the quarries was frozen. By 7:15 a.m., the fog began to disappear, and by 7:30 a.m. most of the north quarry was visible and appeared to be frozen solid. To see the area better, I decided to look from the shoulder of Highway 69. I was waiting for the fog to clear from the far west end of the north quarry when a large bird suddenly appeared on the ice in the middle of the north quarry. A glance at the bird through binoculars revealed it was a loon. I have no idea where it came from, but it appeared healthy and was very alert. I studied the bird for about 15 minutes and when I left the bird was still sitting on the ice. The large size, long neck, and long bill identified the bird as a loon. The bill was long, thick, and pale-colored. The head and bill were held upturned like a cormorant. The head appeared large and "blocky" with distinct bumps on the forehead and rear of the crown. The head was very pale except for a dark auricular patch. The body was a dark brown/gray-brown color with prominent pale feather edges, giving the bird a barred appearance on the mantle. On the basis of the head pattern and paler feather edges, I aged the bird as an immature (first fall plumage).

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of bill color, head pattern, and head posture eliminates other loons, especially Common Loon.

Previous experience with species: I have seen one other Yellow-billed Loon, in first-alternate plumage, in western Nebraska. I am very familiar with the three other loon species (Red-throated, Common, and Pacific) that have occurred in Iowa.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good with clear skies and moderate fog. Estimated viewing distance was 100-150m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes written? none written

How long before this form completed? written 22 December 1999