

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Red-throated Loon

7 Nov 1992

Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

*Porter,*M.Proes.,*Kent,*Cummins,*Fuller

IBL 63:16, 69, Fuller 1993

Record Number: 92-41

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Diane Porter (7 Nov), 908 E. Briggs, Fairfield, IA 52556
(6/30/93)

Mark Proescholdt (7 Nov), Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148

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

Ray Cummins (7 Nov), 609 S. Main St., Centerville, IA 52544

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

REFERENCE

Field Reports: IBL 63:16

Record Committee: IBL 63:69

Fuller, J. 1993. Three loon species at Red Rock Reservoir. IBL
63:102-103.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Good details provided for a Red-throated Loon.

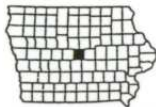
- Robbins, M. B., and D. A. Easterla. 1992. *Birds of Missouri*. Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia, MO. 399 pp.
- Robbins, S. D. 1991. *Wisconsin birdlife*. Univ. Wisconsin Press, Madison. 702 pp.
- South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. 1991. *The birds of South Dakota*, 2nd ed. Aberdeen, SD. 411 pp.
- Van Dyk, J. 1983. Vermilion Flycatcher in north-west Iowa. *Iowa Bird Life* 53:58-59.

810 North B. St., Indianola, IA

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD IN STORY COUNTY

MATTHEW PATTERSON

On 17 March 1992, I was walking through a pasture/woods complex just south of Ames hoping to identify some early spring migrants. I came across a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds moving and foraging ahead of me. Being the first Eastern Bluebirds of the season for me, I stopped for a look.



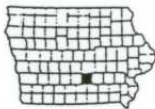
To my surprise, my eyes fell on one solid blue bird with white underparts within the larger group. Knowing immediately that I was looking at a Mountain Bluebird, I began to make note of its behavior and field marks. The bird was perched 4 to 5 feet above the ground. It allowed a close approach of 15 feet while it repeatedly dropped to the ground to feed. Its blue color was lighter and more brilliant than its eastern relative. The breast was a paler blue that faded to a white belly. This bird's legs stood more erect and its body more horizontal than the Eastern Bluebirds. I watched the bird for 20 minutes and then left to get a camera. I returned a few hours later and on the next day, but was unable to relocate the bird. This is the seventh accepted record of Mountain Bluebirds in Iowa and the first for Story County. The mid-March date, about the time that migrant Eastern Bluebirds start to arrive in Iowa, fits the pattern of several of the previous Mountain Bluebird records from Iowa (see Steffens and Johnson, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:119-120, 1961).

Department of Animal Ecology, Iowa State Univ., Ames, IA 50011

THREE LOON SPECIES AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

JIM FULLER

During the I.O.U. field trip to Red Rock Reservoir on 7 November 1992, a Red-throated Loon was discovered near the marina boat ramp of the West Wallashuck Recreation Area in Marion County. Almost immediately after setting up my scope early the next morning, I found what I identified as the Red-throated Loon only about 200 yards to the east. There were also a number of Common Loons in the area, sometimes with one or more in the same scope field. Pam and Reid Allen arrived shortly after I found the bird, and as Reid was watching it in his scope, he exclaimed that another loon had flown in and landed very close to the Red-throated Loon, and it was not a Common Loon. It was a Pacific Loon. By this time the birds were 300 yards off and drifting farther



away, but we obtained good looks of these two birds together, as well as with Common Loons.

The Red-throated Loon was smaller than the nearby Common Loons, estimated 75 percent of their size. The neck was also noticeably thinner. The throat and front of the neck were white, and there was a definite difference between that white and the gray of the back of the neck and top of the head. The demarcation was pretty much straight up-and-down, as compared to the patterned (white indented) side of the neck of the Common Loon. In addition, the dark portion of the head and neck of the Common Loon was a darker gray than the Red-throated. The bill of the Red-throated was noticeably thinner than that of the Common Loon, and it appeared to be tilted up. When the Red-throated was closest, some white speckling could be seen on the back.

The Pacific Loon appeared to be about the same size as the Red-throated, lacked a patterned neck, but had a very definite demarcation (even more so than the Red-throated) between the white of the foreneck and the dark of the hindneck. The color of the top of the head and face, back of the neck, and back/wings was a gray-brown, compared to the almost black of the Common Loon. The white of the chin, foreneck, and breast was much less extensive than on the Common Loons. The dark area of the face included the eye, and dropped straight down the neck to the bend of the wing. The Pacific Loon also had a smaller bill than the Common Loons, but it was straight, compared to the upturned bill of the Red-throated.

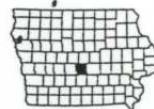
The next day, 9 November, Tom Kent relocated all the loons at the same site and observed a faint chin strap on the Pacific Loon when that bird was as close as 100 yards. To be able to see and compare three species of loons together, two of which are casual in Iowa, is most unusual.

6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

A GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL IN POLK COUNTY IN SPRING

JIM SINCLAIR

At 11:30 a.m. on 7 March 1992, from the parking lot of Sandpiper Beach at Saylorville Lake in Polk County I noticed a flock of approximately 60 gulls loafing on a sand spit just beyond the beach. Amongst the Ring-billed and Herring gulls was one gull which stood out because of its large size. I approached from the northeast to within 200 yards at which point the gull in question took wing. The bird proceeded up the lake shore passing me at approximately 100 yards at eye level. This allowed me a good look under excellent viewing conditions with 10 x 42 binoculars.



The gull was very large, dwarfing even the Herring Gulls with which it had been standing. The bill, which was all black and massive, was a prominent enough feature as to draw immediate attention. The head and neck were pale and without noticeable pattern. On the other hand, the back and upper wing were a strongly contrasting black and white pattern. As the bird proceeded upstream, dark secondary stripes were visible along with a pale rump and a dark tail band. The above features indicated to me that the bird was a first-year Great Black-backed Gull.

92-41

92-41

Diane Porter
908 East Briggs
Fairfield, IA 52556
(515) 472-7256

Documentation of Sighting

Red-throated Loon at Red Rock Reservoir, Iowa

Date of Report
12/1/92

Sighting Date: 11/7/92
Species: Red-throated Loon
Scientific Name: Gavia stellata
Number Seen: 1
Place: Red Rock Reservoir
City:
County: Marion
State: IA
Nation: USA
Habitat: Lake
Record Number: 2552

When I first picked this bird out of a large flock of mallards, it looked all white. The bird looked pure white when facing left and light grey when facing right. It was just very slightly larger than the mallards and sometimes looked the same size as the mallards. I knew it was a loon by its neck, which was longer and more slender than a duck's but shorter and thicker than a Western Grebe's; by its body shape, which tapered off down to water line at the rear end and was more slender than a goose's; by its long thin pointed bill; and by its profile in flight, in which the long outstretched neck drooped slightly, so that the head and neck were slightly lower than the top of the back. While on the lake, it sometimes seemed to start to sink, riding lower and lower in the water until the body was almost submerged. When it dived, the loon first jumped up off the water and then slid under gracefully.

I recognized it as a Red-throated Loon by the following observations. The bill was more slender than the Common Loons I had just been studying ten minutes earlier at the Marina. The lower mandible seemed to slant upward slightly, and the bird swam with its head and bill pointing slightly up. It maintained this posture for the whole time, about 15 minutes. It was light grey on the back, not dark like a Common Loon. (I was surprised how light it looked.) Pacific loon would have had a straighter bill, held more level.

Other observations about the bird: The boundary between the light grey dorsal and white ventral parts of the neck and head was a smooth curve. The contrast between the light and dark areas was not strong. The large white area on the lower part of the cheek was slightly less brightly white than the breast, but much lighter than the back or back of head.

Later a Red-throated Loon was spotted at the Marina, and I went and had another look, much closer this time, with numerous Common Loons for comparison. The Red-throated Loon was much paler overall, sometimes appearing almost white. It was smaller and slenderer than the Commons. In particular, the more slender aspect of head, neck and bill were apparent, as well as an upward slant and tilt of the bill.

Distance: First viewing, a very long way off, so that only with my Kowa scope could I make out any detail. Second viewing, maybe 200 yards, but I'm not good at estimating distance.

Equipment: Leica 10X40 binoculars, Kowa scope.

Light: Not the best. It was snowing lightly. The sky was cloudy, the light white and diffuse.

Other observers: First viewing - Mark Proescholdt, Ann Barker, Ann Johnson, Matt Keene, and others. Everyone seemed satisfied that it was a Red-throated Loon, but the distance was greater than anyone would have liked. Second viewing - Jim Sinclair, Tim Schantz, Harold White, Hank Zalatel.

My previous experience with this species: When I lived in Santa Barbara, California, I often watched Common and Red-throated Loons from the piers along the coast at close range.

What species? Red-throated Loon How many? 1Location? Red Rock Reservoir - Roberts Creek area - (Marion Co.)Type of habitat? Large water areaWhen? date(s): NOV. 7, 1992 time: 11:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. approximately
4:30 p.m. to 4:32 p.m. approximatelyWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148Beth Proescholdt, David Youngblut, Tom Klein
others with you: Ann Johnson, Ann Barker, Babs + Loron Padelford, Matt Kenne, Diane Porter,others before or after you: Tim Schantz, Tom Kent, Francis Moore, Armstrongs, Ray Cummins,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.
many others at marina

Diane Porter first spotted this out with a large flock of Mallards on the main body of water. Before long we had six scopes on it.

At first it was in with the Mallards and was only a little longer than the Mallards. It looked light in color. Later, it was by itself and in front of the Mallards. It had a thin neck and head, held its bill upright sometimes, and had a light grayish color on the top of its head. This small loon had a very thin small bill and a white throat, neck, and front. I had some good looks at the thin, tiny bill at the end of viewing. There was no sharp contrast on the ^{side of the} neck between light and dark colors like a Pacific Loon would show. Its back was not darkly colored like Common Loons seen that day but was lighter in color. It flew off toward the marina and was later seen by many all afternoon and at a closer range. I saw it briefly in late afternoon at the marina.

Similar species and how eliminated:

The bill size and small size of the loon helps eliminate a Common Loon. A Pacific Loon would have a sharp contrast on the side of the neck between light and ^{dark} colors.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

Looking south toward the light on a cloudy day but had good viewing, distances estimated at 350-300 yards away, 8X30 Binocs, 22x scope, KOWA scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen once in Iowa before, along Oregon Coast, along Maine Coast

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Nat'l. Geog. guide, K. Kaufman's Advanced Birding, Robbins' guide, Peterson's guideHow long before field notes made? 9:30 p.m. that night this form completed? NOV. 22, 1992

77-59

92-41

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Red-throated Loon; Number: 1

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Date: 7 November 1992 (also 9 Nov); Time: 12:05 to 12:15 and 2:20 to 2:30 p.m. (also 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. on 9 Nov)

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

Others before/with/after: first noted by Diane Porter and seen by many on IOU field trip.

Habitat and circumstances: large reservoir on Des Moines River.

Description of bird: A small loon was swimming next to Common Loons. It was about two-thirds as long as a common and had a much smaller body. (On the 9th it looked about the size of a Red-breasted Merganser, but was not in the same field of view for direct comparison.) The head was about one-half the bulk of a common. The small thin bill was always held pointing up at an angle. The bill was dark gray. Over all the upperparts were dark to medium gray and the underparts were white. The line of demarcation was above the eye, down the middle of the neck, and at the water line below the wings. The gray of the top of the head and neck appeared slightly lighter than the back/wings, which may have been do to light white flecking on the wings.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The very small size (compared to Common and Pacific loons), upward pointing bill, and overall lightness made this bird very easy to pick out.

Any one have reservations?: no.

Light: overcast; Distance: 100 yards to 1/4 mile (est); Optics: 10x binocular, 20x scope.

Previous experience: have seen in Iowa and on coasts.

References before/after viewing: looked at NG Guide.

Time of notes: after first viewing; Final typing: 3 days.

Final typing: 3 days
Address: 609 S. Main St.
Iowa City, IA 52246
Signature: Thomas H. Kent
Date: 11-13-92

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

92-~~4~~
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Species: Red-throated Loon (winter) Number: 1

Location: Red Rock Reservoir

Observer: Ray Cummins 609 s. Main st. Centerville, IA. 52544

Others before/with/after: Many others

Date: 11/07/92 Time Bird Seen: 1:00pm to 1:30pm

Habitant & circumstances: Located off the marina point at Red Rock by attendees of the IOU field trip.

Description: A slightly smaller and lighter colored loon than the many Common Loons present. The neck was thinner and generally held more upright than the commons. The bill was shorter, thinner, and lighter colored than the commons present. The throat and bill were held upward at a 45 degree angle. The face was white just behind the bill, but changed to a whitish gray around the eye to the nape and further down the sides of the neck. The sides of the neck were not clearly separated from the back of the neck as in a Pacific Loon. The wings were all black during flight. The bird was easy to pick out from the commons.

Description of voice: N/H.

Similarly appearing species: See above.

Distance (how measured): 200 to 300yds Estimated.

Optical equipment: 20X x 60X Kowa spotting scope.

Light: Good light

Previous experience with species: none

Anyone have reservations?: No.

Books and references:

Time of field notes: 3 days Final typing: 5 days.

Signature: Raymond L. Cummins Address: 609 S. Main St.

Date: 11-12-92 Centerville, Ia. 52544

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

I chose to document these two birds together, because I viewed them together.

SPECIES: Red-throated Loon and Pacific Loon.

LOCATION: Marina boat ramp at West Wallaschuck Recreation Area of the Red Rock Reservoir (Marion County).

DATE: 8 November, 1992 (8:15-45 AM).

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

OTHER OBSERVERS: Present at the same time were Pam and Reid Allen. MOB reported seeing one or both of these birds at this location.

BACKGROUND: A Red-throated Loon had been reportedly sighted from this location on the IOU fall field trip the previous day. However, no Pacific Loon had been reported. Almost immediately after setting up my scope early the morning of the 8th, I found what I identified as the Red-throated Loon only about 200 yards east. There were also a number of Common Loons in the area, sometimes with one or more in the same scope field. Pam and Reid Allen arrived just about the time I found this bird, and as Reid was watching it in his scope, he exclaimed that another loon had flown in and landed very close to the Red-throated, and it was not a Common Loon. By this time, the birds were 300 yards east and drifting farther away, but good looks at these two birds together, as well as with Common Loons were obtained.

DESCRIPTION: The Red-throated loon was definitely smaller than the Common Loons nearby, estimated seventy-five percent the size. The neck was also notably thinner in the Red-throated. The throat was white, and there was a definite difference between that white and the gray of the back of the neck and top of the head. The demarcation was pretty much straight up-and-down, as compared to the patterned side of the neck of the Common Loon, which also had a darker gray to black than the Red-throated. The bill of the Red-throated was much thinner than that of the Common, and it appeared to be tilted up much of the time. When the Red-throated was closest, it appeared to have some white speckling on the gray back. The Pacific Loon appeared to be about the same size as the Red-throated, lacked a patterned neck, but had a very definite (even more so than the Red-throated) demarcation between the white of the foreneck, and the dark of the hindneck. The Pacific Loon also had a smaller bill than the Common Loon, but it was straight, compared to the

Red-throated. No chin strap could be seen at the distance I observed the Pacific Loon.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Comparisons of all three loons have been made in the description.

VIEWING CONDITIONS and OPTICS: Viewing was toward the east, early in the morning of an overcast day. No precipitation fell, but the wind was strong from the northwest, with white caps on the lake. A KOWA TSN-4 telescope with 20-60X zoom eyepiece was used, usually set at 20-40X, and distances were 200-400 Yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: Both species had been seen three times previously in Iowa, and numerous times on the west coast.

FIELD NOTES and REFERENCES: Field notes were written in the car after the sightings, and this form was typed from those notes four days later on November 12th. References consulted were the National Geographic Field Guide, and Advanced Birding by Kaufmann.

BACKGROUND: A Red-throated Loon had been reportedly sighted from this location on the 10th fall field trip the previous day. However, no Pacific Loon had been reported. Almost immediately after setting up my scope early the morning of the 8th, I found what I identified as the Red-throated Loon only about 300 yards east. There were also a number of Common Loons in the area, sometimes with one or more in the same scope field. Pat and Reid Allen arrived just about the time I found this bird, and as Reid was watching it in his scope, he explained that another loon had flown in and landed very close to the Red-throated, and it was not a Common Loon. By this time, the birds were 300 yards east and drifting further away, but good looks at these two birds together, as well as with Common Loons were obtained.

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