

Yellow-billed Loon
18 Apr 1999
Clear L., Cerro Gordo Co., IA
*Jan L. Walter
IBL 69:91, 70:144

Record Number: 99-04
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jan L. Walter, 934 13th SE, Mason City 50401 [8/17/99]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 69:91
Records Committee: IBL 70:144

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, This is an anticipated species at a highly unusual date. "Birds in Iowa" reports 15 records from the Central US, all in fall and winter. Regardless, the observer describes all the important field marks such as size in comparison to Common Loons, bill shape and color, auricular patch, etc. My only concern about the documentation is that while the observer took notes right after the observation, the documentation itself may have been influenced by the reference books.

A-D, A well-described first state record. The yellow culmen and brown auricular patch are important diagnostic marks.

A-D, Well seen, described, and differentiated bird at relatively close range, with Common Loons nearby for comparison. First state record--too bad no photos were taken.

A-D, A complete description, but it's unclear exactly what parts of the description were actually made at the time of the observation. Corroborating documentations from the other observers would be good to have in the record. Long overdue, Yellow-billed Loon is distinctive when seen this well.

A-D, Bill color and face pattern convincing for immature or basic Yellow-billed Loon. Culmen specifically described as yellow.

A-D, Nice document.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

99-04

What species? Yellow-billed Loon How many? 1

Location? North side of Clear Lake, Clear Lake, Iowa

Type of Habitat? Large open lake, no reeds or rushes in this area

When? date(s): April 18, 1999 time: about 6 PM to about 6:40 PM

Who? your name and address: Jan L. Walter 934 13th SE, Mason City, Ia 56401

Others with you: Curt Nelson Mason City

Others before or after you: Carolyn Fischer, Mason City, April 21. I was with Carolyn.

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. Clearly larger than the 2 alternate plumage Common Loons it was between (sideview) Bill: pale yellow with straight yellow culmen that that never looked black or dark in any light condition or angle. Bill slightly upturned and thicker at the base compared to nearby Common Loons. Crown: Brown, sharply peaked front and back. Face: very pale with tannish rather than grayish coloration. Brown circular patch in the auricular area. Pale coloration extended around this patch and forward across the face and up and around the small dark eye, in a noticeable band. Chin, throat, foreneck, side neck and breast the same pale color. Forehead, crown, nape and hindneck brown. Back and wings: Darker brown with paler feather edges. Underparts not seen. Bird was in basic plumage and with 6 alternate plumage Common Loons. They drifted or swam slowly from west to east in a row, with the Yellow-billed between 2 Commons and the other 4 Commons slightly behind. Followed them along the lakeshore to another place where they were about 100 yards from the shore. At this time, the sun was shining brightly. None did much diving.

Similar species; how eliminated: Color, plumage, and bill shape eliminated Cormorants. Size eliminated Red-throated and Pacific Loons. Basic and immature plumage Common Loon eliminated by straight, yellow culmen, very pale tannish face, brown auricular patch, overall pale appearance of head and neck, and brown, not black, body.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No
If yes, explain:

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

Sky: variably cloudy with periods of clear bright sun. We were facing south, light came from right (west)

Distance: closest about 100 yards (guess)

Optical Equipment: KOWA TSN4 scope with 40x lens

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Saw 1 in Nov. 1988 which was rejected because of poorly written documentation. See Common Loons in alternate or basic plumage every year. Thoroughly study those in basic plumage. Also study video tapes

References and persons consulted before writing description: Advanced Birding-Kaufman; National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds; Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding; Sea birds-A Guide to Identification-Peter Harrison

How long before field notes made? Right after this form completed? My copy to keep 4 days. This one to send in 1 week

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).