

Red-throated Loon

22 Apr 1995

Little Wall L., Hamilton Co., IA

*M & *B Proescholdt, *Widner, *Paulin, *Kent

IBL 65:70; 66:95

Record Number: 95-03

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Mark Proescholdt (22 Apr), Box 65, Liscomb 50148 [*8/14/95]

Beth Proescholdt (22 Apr), Box 65, Liscomb 50148

RRW (Russ Widner, 22 Apr)

John Paulin (23 Apr), 3506 Coy St., Ames 50014 [8/14/95]

Thomas H. Kent (24 Apr), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:70

Records Committee: IBL 66:95

Proescholdt, M. 1996. Red-throated Loon at Little Wall Lake.
Iowa Bird Life 66:64-65

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Well seen at close range; presence of 3 birds (Paulin)
not convincingly documented.

of these reports may have involved the same bird, there were undoubtedly more Reddish Egrets farther north and inland than was ever noted before.

The interesting question is why? The 1993 records all occurred from late July to mid-September and were predominantly immature birds. These dates would indicate a post-breeding dispersal that is common among waders. The United States breeding population of Reddish Egrets was estimated at about 2,000 pairs (Ehrlich et al. 1988). I could not find any recent population estimates but with the increased protection of breeding colonies, this species is most likely more common today. The Midwest flooding may have played a part in the rash of records. While the flooding could have provided more habitat for Reddish Egrets to reach the Midwest, the 1993 dispersal was noted along the East Coast prior to Midwest flooding. With the continued protection of this species and its breeding colonies, it will be interesting to see if the Reddish Egret continues to be a vagrant to the Midwest.

Thanks to Ken Brock, Philip Chu, Ricky Davis, Lynea Hinchman, David B. Johnson, Charles Keller, and Tom Kent who all provided records or helpful comments in the preparation of this note.

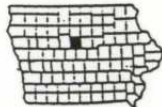
LITERATURE CITED

- DeSante, D., and P. Pyle, 1986 *Distributional Checklist of North American Birds*. Artemisia Press, Lee Vining, California.
- Ehrlich, Paul R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook*. Simon and Schuster, New York, New York.
- Howell, S. N. G., and S. Webb. 1995. *A Guide to The Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*, Oxford University Press.

RED-THROATED LOON AT LITTLE WALL LAKE

MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 22 April 1995, Beth Proescholdt, Russ Widner, and I found a small loon in basic plumage at Little Wall Lake in Hamilton County. The loon was on the east side of the lake with lots of ducks. We moved closer and ended up getting very good looks at it.



The loon was light gray and white in color. It had a very thin, delicate bill, and the lower mandible was curved up slightly. The loon sometimes held the bill horizontally, but often held it upturned. It had a red eye and a thin neck which was very white on the front. The gray coloration on the back of the head was lighter in color than the dark gray back. At close range, I could see that the white area in front of the eye and the eye itself were not enclosed in the dark coloration of the head. We saw white speckling on the dark gray back. The front of the neck was white, noticeably changing to gray on the side of the neck but there was not an extremely sharp division on the neck like a Pacific Loon has. The back of its head was gray and its flanks were white colored along the water line.

The bird was floating on the surface with its head resting on its back and then swimming and diving. We watched it for approximately two hours in the afternoon and studied it through binoculars and two spotting scopes for quite some time from as close as 25 yards away. The last time we saw this loon, it popped up right beside us briefly about 20 feet away as Russ was trying to photograph it. This loon remained in the area and was seen by others on 23 and 24 April.

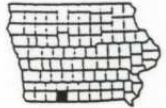
Little Wall Lake is a wonderful place to view migrating ducks, geese, grebes, and loons, especially in the spring. This is the first Red-throated Loon record for Little Wall Lake and Hamilton County. This is approximately the 15th state record for Red-throated Loon in Iowa and the 12th sighting since 1984. Of the 12 Red-throated Loon sightings since 1984, three were seen in April, one in May, seven in November, and one in December.

Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50145

RUFF IN RINGGOLD COUNTY

JIM SINCLAIR

On 22 April 1995 at 9 a.m. Rick Trieff and I were in Ringgold County heading west on Hwy 2. Just west of Mt. Ayr, as we approached the Walnut Creek bottoms, Rick and I both noticed numerous shorebirds in flight over the bottomlands. This area appeared to have been recently flooded, and the fields were still quite damp. As our car came to a stop, I commented on the large number of Pectoral Sandpipers foraging in the soybean stubble on the north side of the road. As I surveyed the scene, a bird appeared at the near edge of the soybean field no more than 40 feet from the car. Raising my binoculars and focusing on the bird, I exclaimed to Rick that I was sure that I had never seen this shorebird before.



My first impression was of a short-tailed, chunky, almost dowdy looking shorebird which was approximately one third larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers with which it was associating. The mantle was a medium sandy-brown color with prominent pale feather edgings. The face and head were pale while the bill was dark and slightly longer than the head with a noticeable droop along the distal third. The throat was off white, and the belly and flanks were light brown with some irregular darker mottling on the flanks. As the bird moved into the bean stubble, the most prominent physical feature became evident. The legs and feet, which appeared proportionately long and sturdy, were an incandescent orange! The bird was clearly a Ruff in basic plumage.

Rick and I observed the bird under ideal viewing conditions as it foraged towards the north through the bean stubble. At approximately 150-200 feet, the bird became increasingly difficult to see, except for the legs and feet which acted as a beacon for attention. At one point I could not make out the body of the bird but could easily see the apparently disembodied legs and feet as they moved purposefully through the soybean stubble. As the bird moved farther into the field, this effect became evident through the binoculars and eventually through the scope. After ten minutes, the bird was lost from view as it and the Pectoral Sandpipers moved further from the road.

Identifying a new species is always problematical, and shorebirds can be notorious in this regard. Add to this the fact that the Ruff is unusual in several ways including more than one key identification point, and you have the potential of an identification nightmare. Most birders are aware of the spectacular and highly variable nature of the male Ruff's alternate plumage. However, the basic plumage can be almost as variable as the alternate plumage, ranging from predominantly white with dark wings through every shade of brown or gray possible. Not only is the plumage variable but the bill and legs may be dark, light, yellow, greenish, orange, or pink! Size is usually a dependable feature for identification purposes. However, the Ruff shows sexual dimorphism with the male being one fourth larger than the female. Besides the above features, the Ruff's range is a matter of question. Although formerly considered a

What species? Red-throated Loon How many? 1Location? Little Wall Lake - (Hamilton County)Type of habitat? Small lake with trees along edgesWhen? date(s): April 22, 1995 time: 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. very approximatelyWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Russ Widnerothers before or after you: none before, reported by someone after us on birdline

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.

I first saw this from across the lake and we went to the east side to get closer. This was a small loon that was light grayish and whitish in color. We got very close and had very good looks. This

small loon had very thin mandibles on its bill. The lower mandible^{of the bill} was curved up slightly. The loon held the bill horizontally some but often held the bill upright.

It had a red eye, a thin neck, a very white neck on the front of the neck, and a very thin and delicate bill. The back of the head was paler than the back.

At close range the white area in front of the eye and the eye itself were not enclosed in the dark color of the head, we saw white markings on the dark gray back - white specklings. It had a noticeable change from white to gray on its neck but this was not extremely sharp division on the neck like a Pacific Loon has. It had gray on the back of its head. It had whitish coloration at flanks along water line.

It was floating on surface with its head on its back resting and then swimming and diving. Later we saw a loon take off and fly away as a jet ski roared by. Last we saw this loon ^{from} was from 20 feet away as it was diving and Russ was trying to get its picture.

Similar species and how eliminated: A Basic-Plumaged Pacific Loon has no white or pale area above or in front of the eye. It also has a sharp vertical division between dark and light on its neck. A Common Loon is bulkier and bigger and has a large thick bill whose mandibles are straight.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain: :

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

Good viewing. Light at side, behind us, and looking into sun at times. First seen - 250 yards estimated across lake. ^{we} kept getting closer and closer to 25 yards. Last popped up 20 feet away. 22x Scope, 8x30 Binocs.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen basic-plumaged Red-thr. loons in Iowa, Maine, and Pacific Loons in Iowa and Oregon.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Kenn Kaufman's Advanced Birding and Natl. Geographic Birds of N. America.

How long before field notes made? 7:30 p.m. on this form completed? May 27, 1995April 22, 1995

What species? Red-throated Loon How many? 1Location? Little Wall Lake, Hamilton CountyType of habitat? a lakeWhen? date(s): April 22, 1995 time: 2:00 to 3:30 approx.Who? your name and address: Beth Proescholdt, Lisaomb, Iowaothers with you: Mark Proescholdt, Russ Widner

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Mark first sighted this bird far across the lake + thought it either a Pacific or Red-throated Loon. We drove around the lake + were much closer - close enough to see it was not a Common Loon in basic plumage. We walked closer, finally within 40'-50', + at the very last 20' for a moment as it surfaced from a dive. It was only at such close range that we could tell positively that it was a Red-throated Loon, although its lighter color was visible at a greater distance. Its head, nape, back of neck + back were a light gray. At close range we saw the eye was not enclosed with gray + white showed over eye + between eye + bill. It did not have a sharp dividing line between white + gray on neck. The lower mandible was thicker + curving slightly upward, with a thinner upper mandible, giving it the classic upturned look of Red-throated vs. Pacific Loon. It was smaller than a Common Loon. After its latest sighting as it surfaced 20' away, it dived + we could not relocate it. A great close look at a Red-throated Loon.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Pacific + Common Loon - see above

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain: _____

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

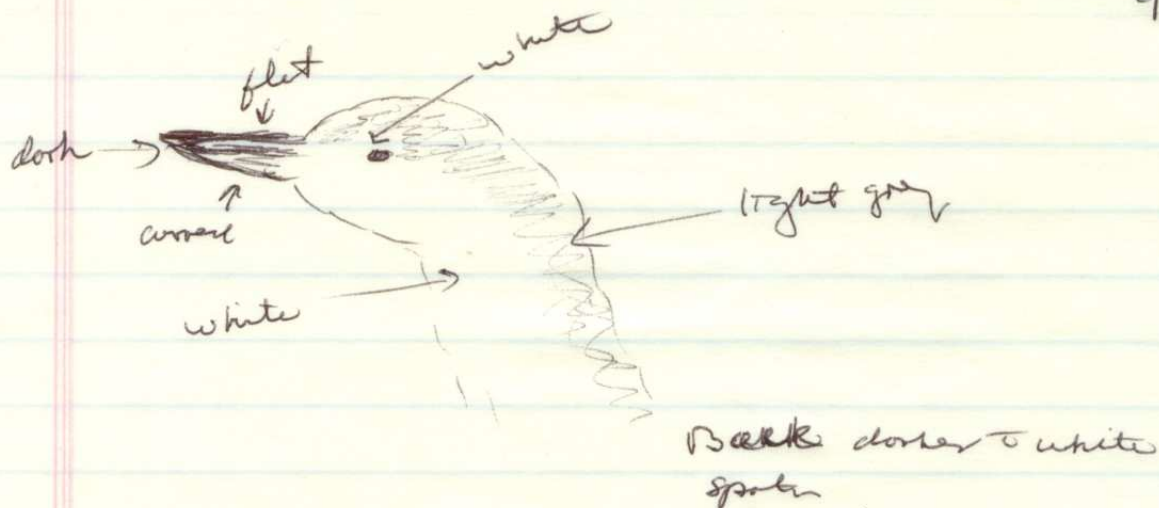
good light, sun at good angle, 40'-50' + finally 20', 8x30 Nikon binocs, 22w Spacemaster scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen all three loons, (plus a Yellow-billed)

References and persons consulted before writing description: all field guides as we watched

How long before field notes made? immediately this form completed? May 28

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A loon loon, with a smaller head & stork like bill, held with the bill angled up. The tip of the upper mandible was flat, & the lower mandible curved. White in front of & under the eye. Head & neck light gray on the back shading gradually to white on the front. Both feathers were darker gray with white "speckles". From 3-4:30 PM in bright sunlight on common distance from 500 yds to 50 yds sleeping, floating, diving, & eventually flying north, apparently disturbed by Ski doo & motor boats, but may duck, cook, & grebe (1 red necked) remained on the lake.

a breeding plumaged red necked grebe was seen at about 200 yds.

Sat 4/22/95 to Mark & Beth

PLW
4/22/95

Red-throated Loon
Little Wall Lake
(Hamilton Co.)
April 22, 1995
(MP)

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

95-03

What species? RED-THROATED LOON, *Gavia stellata* How many? 3Location? LITTLE WALL LAKE, 2 MI. SOUTH OF JEWELL, IOWAType of habitat? OPEN WATER OF THE LAKE, WEST AND EAST SIDES OF THE LAKEWhen? date(s): 4-23-95 time: 3:30 pm to 5:00 pmWho? your name and address: JOHN PAULIN, 3506 COY ST., AMES, IA 50014others with you: CARYN HURD, CHRIS PAULIN, ANDY HURD, STACY SMITHSON, DAWN SCHWEBACHothers 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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

The first bird was observed about 25 yards from shore on the highway 69 side of the lake. What immediately drew my attention was the apparent white and gray striping of the neck (back of the neck), the silver-gray head and the red eyes. The overall body color appeared much lighter (again gray) than common loons, though the overall body form was the same. This particular bird was swimming and feeding in towards shore with a mixed group of coots and lesser scaup.

The other two birds were seen in the far eastern side of the lake. These, apparently a pair as they were swimming together, were likewise seen amongst coots and lesser scaup. I made the decision that these were the same species as the bird I'd seen only a half hour before based on the same characters ^{noted above.}

Similar species and how eliminated: Common loon - much darker (black) body and head
Larger Grebes (Red-necked) - neck much thicker and not held erect, smoother curve to head

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

The sky was clear and the sun behind me so it gave excellent viewing conditions. Distance was gauged simply by estimation (not measured). No viewing equipment was available, but the nearness of the birds made positive id. easy.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Bird watching for 12 years, Bird Study and Ornithology classes at ISU.

References and persons consulted before writing description: JAMES J. DINSMOREHow long before field notes made? None Made this form completed? 2 days

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

95-03

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Red-throated Loon; **Number:** 1 basic

Location: Little Wall L., Hamilton Co., IA

Date: 24 April 1995; **Time:** 2:20 to 3:00 p.m. (not continuous)

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

Others before/with/after: found by Mark Proescholdt

Habitat and circumstances: glacial lake

Description of bird: Within a minute of arriving at the south end of the lake, I spotted a small loon in the middle of the lake. It was basically white below and dark above. The white included the underparts, foreneck, and sides of face including the eye. The top of the head was darker than the pale gray back of the head and nape. The back was darker. There was a black and white barring effect at the juncture of the wing and flanks. The bill was dark, thin, curved upward on the lower mandible, and held slightly above horizontal. There were no other birds within the same field of view with the telescope for size comparison, but I judged this bird to be longer and thinner than a scaup. The small bill was unlike other loons.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: The bird was too small and white for a cormorant. The size, especially the bill, was smaller than other larger loons. The much paler nape and white around the eye argue against Pacific Loon. This bird did not present any reservations for me.

Any one have reservations?: no.

Light: mostly cloudy; **Distance:** 200-300 yards; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope.

Previous experience: have seen many, a few in Iowa.

References before/after viewing: looked at NG Guide while viewing.

Time of notes: while viewing; **Final typing:** 2 days