

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Red-throated Loon

19 Apr 1996

s. of Sioux Center, Sioux Co., IA

*John Van Dyk

IBL 66:100; 67 81, Van Dyk 1997

Record Number: 96-09

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

John Van Dyk, 736 East 1st Street, Sioux Center 51250 [4/6/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:100

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

Van Dyk, J. 1997. Red-throated Loon in northwestern Iowa. IBL 67:97.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, A well-described basic-plumaged bird.

A-D, Good analysis but a description of the contrast of grays between the head and back would have added evidence.

A-D, Head/eye features well-described.

bird was probably a juvenile. Because of the slightly paler nape and underparts, I concluded the bird was an intermediate phase. The bird was likely a Pomarine Jaeger for two reasons: the large size and the large-billed appearance.

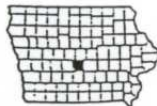
Using differences in plumage, I tried to determine the total number of birds present. At Saylorville, there were at least three birds; the possible dark subadult and two intermediate phase juveniles. There was also the dark phase juvenile present at Red Rock from 16-30 November. That makes a minimum of four birds between the two areas. There may have been more as it is not known if the intermediate phase juveniles seen at both reservoirs were in fact the same individuals. However, the possible dark subadult seen at Saylorville moved to Red Rock Reservoir later in November. These records represent the second and third reports of Pomarine Jaeger in Iowa. The only other record is of two juveniles from 28 September-2 October 1988 at Saylorville Reservoir (S. J. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 59: 20-21, 1989).

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RUFF IN POLK COUNTY

BERY ENGBRETSSEN

We tend to view our agricultural monocultures of corn and soybeans as not particularly good birding habitat, but on 10 May 1996 I stopped briefly to view some shorebirds near the road in a wet, last year's beanfield between Grimes and West Des Moines in Polk County. In the mixed flock, one bird immediately stood out because of what appeared to be a rather smallish head on a plump body. It was clearly larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers and somewhat larger than the Lesser Yellowlegs nearby. The bill was black, a bit longer than the head with the slightest downward curve. All of the back and tertial feathers were light tipped with dark and then lighter brown bands away from the tips. The tertials were long, obscuring the tail and seemed to blow about loosely in the breeze. The underparts were mostly white except for some scattered dark bars. The legs were pale yellow. I was somewhat puzzled by this rather nondescript shorebird until it obligingly stretched its wings above its head revealing white underwings and a U-shaped patch of white around the base of the tail. At this point I knew I was observing a Reeve (or was it a Ruff?).



As noted previously (Sinclair, *Iowa Bird Life* 66:65-66, 1996), this species is highly variable, even in basic plumage. After reviewing field guides, I finally concluded this was actually the male of the species (Ruff), but noted that upon review the Records Committee could not agree as to its sex. It probably must remain *Philomachus pugnax*, sex unrecorded. This once again confirms the highly variable nature of this species.

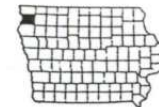
This is the eighth record of this species to be confirmed in Iowa. I suspect that a fair number may pass through our area undetected, since this bird was quite plain, in a mixed flock, and not in a highly birded area--a soybean field.

12825 NW 127th Court, Des Moines, IA 50325

RED-THROATED LOON IN NORTHWESTERN IOWA

JOHN VAN DYK

In the early afternoon of 19 April 1996, I discovered a Red-throated Loon in a large gravel pit five miles south of Sioux Center in Sioux County. The gravel pits, located just east of Highway 75 and north of Highway 10, form relatively large bodies of water and are good places for migrant waterfowl.



As I approached the quarry from the west, I noted from a distance that a variety of birds was present: about 45 Double-crested Cormorants, several Pied-billed Grebes, some Lesser Scaups and Gadwalls, a small flock of Franklin's Gulls, and six American Avocets along the shore. I scanned the water with my binoculars, and noted the loon some distance away from the cormorants. As soon as I saw the bird, I recognized it as a Red-throated Loon: a slender loon smaller than the cormorants, with grayish upturned bill and its head tilted upwards, as if it were scanning the sky. Every few minutes or so the bird would dive and come up some distance away. I parked my car at the edge of the gravel road alongside the lake, and used my Zoom Baiscope through the lowered car window. The sky was overcast, and the water calm. The light was excellent. The loon at times would emerge only 30 yards from my car, allowing me an excellent view. I observed it for about 40 minutes.

The loon was noticeably smaller than the nearby Double-crested Cormorants. Its upturned bill was distinctive, even from a distance. The slender profile gave the bird a snakelike appearance. Whenever it emerged, its head was slanted upwards. The back was gray flecked with many white spots. The back of the neck and head were gray. The face was white. The reddish eye was located at the juncture of the white face and the gray crown. A light spot in front of the eye gave the eye a distinctly separated appearance. The bird's flanks, just above the waterline, were mottled light and dark.

After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me and flying low over my car. It circled the lakes as it gained altitude, and at first I thought it might land again. But then it headed to the northwest. I followed the bird in my binoculars as long as I could. As it disappeared from sight, I could not help but mumble: Happy landings! Thanks for stopping by!

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RED KNOTS AT UNION SLOUGH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

MATTHEW C. KENNE

I arrived at the little bridge one mile north of the headquarters of Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County, at about 9:00 a.m. on 25 August 1996. The sheetwater and mudflats there had been the best location for migratory shorebirds on the refuge for several weeks. Almost immediately, I noticed two large, pale shorebirds with approximately 200 other mixed species 100-150 yards away.



DOCUMENTATIONRed-Throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*)

Location: In the afternoon of Friday, April 19, 1996, I discovered a Red-throated Loon in a large gravel pit/quarry five miles south of Sioux Center, Sioux County, Iowa. The gravel pits, located just east of Highway 75 and north of Highway 10, form relatively large bodies of water. The area, originated by a sand and gravel company, is now private property, with several expensive homes built along its shores. It's a good place for birds: Common Loons are quite regular, occasionally an Osprey is found here, and most of the migrant waterfowl stop over at one time or another.

The Situation: About 1:30 p.m. on April 19 I approached the quarry from the west, and noted from a distance that a variety of birds were present: about 45 Double-crested Cormorants, several Pied-billed Grebes, some Lesser Scaups and Gadwalls, a small flock of Franklin's Gulls, and six American Avocets along the shore. I scanned the water with my 9x25 binoculars, and noted the Loon some distance away from the Cormorants. As soon as I spotted the bird I recognized it as the Red-throated Loon: a slender loon smaller than the Cormorants, with upturned bill and its head tilted upwards, as if it were scanning the sky. Every few minutes or so the bird would dive and come up some distance away. I parked my car at the edge of the gravel road alongside the lake, and used my Zoom Balscope through the lowered car window. The sky was overcast, and the water calm. The light was excellent. The Loon at times would emerge only 30 yards from my car, allowing me an excellent view. I jotted down notes as I observed the bird for about 40 minutes.

Description: The bird was noticeably smaller than the Double-crested Cormorants nearby. Its upturned grayish bill was distinctive, even from a distance. The slender profile gave the bird a snakelike appearance. Whenever emerged, the bird's head was slanted upwards. The back was gray flecked with many white spots. The back of the neck and the head was gray. The face was white. The reddish eye was located at the juncture of the white face and the gray crown. In front of the eye was a light spot, giving the eye a distinctly separated appearance. The gray of the neck was clearly at the back of the neck. Towards the lower part of the neck the gray extended further into the white of the front of the neck. The flanks of the bird, just above the waterline, were mottled light and dark.

Behavior: The bird behaved in typical Loon fashion -- it would dive and emerge some considerable distance away. It remained aloof of the cormorants and ducks on the water.

Departure: After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me and flying low over my car. I got out quickly to focus my binoculars. The Loon circled the lakes as it gained altitude, and at first I thought it might come down again. But then it headed into a northwesterly direction, and disappeared. I followed the bird in my binoculars as long as I could.

Previous experience: I am very familiar with the Red-throated Loon, as I see it almost every year along the west coast on my regular trips to California, Washington, and British Columbia. Last year, for example, I saw some 40 Red-throated Loons off the British Columbia coast. Besides the Red-throated, I also see the Common and Pacific Loon every year. I have seen the Yellow-billed Loon only once (at Tsawwassen in B.C. in 1989). I will be in B.C. again next week, and expect to see the three species of loon.

Exclusions: The small size, upturned bill, slender build, and white-spotted back distinguished this bird from the other Loons. The grayish bill and loon profile eliminated any possible confusion with a Grebe (e.g., Western or Clark's Grebe).

Conclusion: I judge this observation to be 100% accurate.

John Van Dyk

736 East 1st Street
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April 19, 1996