

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Pacific Loon

8 Nov 1992

Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

\*Fuller, \*Kent

IBL 63:16, 69, Fuller 1993

Record Number: 92-42

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller (8 Nov), 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240

(6/30/93)

Thomas H. Kent (9 Nov), 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 63:16

Records 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 Pacific Loon.

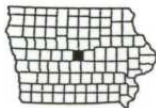
- Robbins, M. B., and D. A. Easterla. 1992. *Birds of Missouri*. Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia, MO. 399 pp.
- Robbins, S. D. 1991. *Wisconsin birdlife*. Univ. Wisconsin Press, Madison. 702 pp.
- South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. 1991. *The birds of South Dakota*, 2nd ed. Aberdeen, SD. 411 pp.
- Van 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.



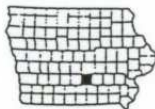
To my surprise, my eyes fell on one solid blue bird with white underparts within the larger group. Knowing immediately that I was looking at a Mountain Bluebird, I began to make note of its behavior and field marks. The bird was perched 4 to 5 feet above the ground. It allowed a close approach of 15 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).

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## 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.

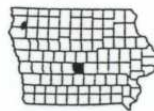
The next day, 9 November, Tom Kent relocated all the loons at the same site and observed a faint chin strap on the Pacific Loon when that bird was as close as 100 yards. To be able to see and compare three species of loons together, two of which are casual in Iowa, is most unusual.

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.

92-42

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.

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## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Pacific Loon; Number: 1

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., Iowa

Date: 9 November 1992; Time: 9:30 to 10:10 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: Jim Fuller and others saw the bird on the 8th.

Habitat and circumstances: large reservoir on Des Moines River.

Description of bird: It took me two hours to find the bird among the 35 Common and 1 Red-throated loons that were concentrated on the area of the reservoir opposite the West Wallashuck boat marina. I first detected it on the far side of the reservoir because it was smaller than the nearby Common Loons and was gray-brown on the head and neck compared to the black of the Common Loons. I could also see that the bill was shorter and thinner. Eventually the bird worked its way to the near side within about 100 yards and occasionally swam next to commons. However, it usually stayed by itself, while the commons tended to line up in a row. At closer range, the shorter thinner bill was confirmed, and I estimated the body to be 15% less bulky than commons. The color of the top of the head and face, back of neck, and back/wings was a gray-brown, compared to the black of the Common Loon. The white of the chin, foreneck, and breast was much less extensive than on the Common Loons. The black of the face included the eye and dropped straight down the neck to the bend of the wing, where it expanded anteriorly and became darker black. There were no white indentations on the neck or cheek or neck strap. When the bird faced me, I perceived a very thin line on the upper neck at the base of the throat area. The back/wings may have been slightly darker than the head/neck and there was some faint white flecking. I did not see the bird next to the Red-throated Loon that was present in the area, but the Red-throated was very small with upturned bill and much more white on the face extending above the eye.

Voice: Not heard.

Similar species: See above.

Any one have reservations?: I only talked with Jim Fuller, who told me about the bird.

Light: Overcast; Distance: 100 yards to 1/4 mile (est); Optics: 20x scope.

Previous experience: Have seen fall birds in Iowa and California.

References before/after viewing: Looked at National Geographic Guide while viewing and Master Guide after getting home.

Time of notes: At end of viewing. Final typing: 1 day.