

Yellow-billed Loon  
13 Nov 1988  
Clear L., Cerro Gordo Co., IA  
\*Walter  
IBL 59:9, 77

Record Number: 88-10  
Classification: NA

## DOCUMENTATION

Jan L. Walter

## REFERENCE

Field Reports: IBL 59:9  
Records Committee: IBL 59:77

VOTE: 1-A-D, 6 NA

NA. Description was very suggestive, but not quite detailed enough to fully evaluate.

NA. Against 1) Bill described as yellow, but culmen color not mentioned, should be light. 2) Back described as a dark brown buffy color indicating the distinction between crown, head, and back is not great. 3) Bill shape of Common and Yellow-billed Loons overlap. 4) Common Loon seen in same place next day. 5) Rare west coast winter resident which is not regular in the midwest.

A-D. Good description of winter-plumaged Yellow-billed Loon by all observers. Bill color and shape, shape of forehead, brown (rather than gray) color of head and neck, and lighter barring on back and wings adequately eliminate Common Loon. No mention of light auricular patch indicative of Yellow-billed, but other features consistent with this species.

NA. Description fits immature or winter plumage loon. The two best field marks for Yellow-billed Loon in this plumage are not adequately described: pale distal 1/2 of culmen and auricular patch. Other features that would have contributed would be a wide eye ring and paleness in postauricular region. Other marks that would be difficult if not impossible to judge in the field are described by Binford and Remsen (Western Birds 5:111-126, 1974). The description of the face and neck are more suggestive of Common Loon than Yellow-billed.

NA. I have qualms about voting for acceptance on this species new to the state list since it is casual in the midwest. Description highly suggests Yellow-billed Loon, I think the records committee should see the pattern of vagrancy of this species in the midwest. we should discuss and revote this record.

NA. Not conclusive enough for a first record, smudge behind eye not mentioned. Three doc's from the three observers would have been nice. Did anyone else try to find it?

NA. My concerns with this center around description obviously influenced by literature (although not quoted from NGS guide, which is only source cited prior to writing documentation), and that key features seen only "once"--"double peak" on crown, and back coloration. Key with bill is not bill color, but culmen color--never clearly confirmed as being yellow. C. Loon can have a pale bill, but culmen always dark. Elimination of C. Loon under "Similar species" sounds good, but I have doubts about the quality of the observation upon which this elimination is based.

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union  
Yellow-billed Loon

Printed: 08/04/93

13 Nov 1988 RC No. 88-10 (cont)

SEND TO: Jan L. Walter, 934 13th St. SE, Mason City, IA 50401.

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

88-10

What species? Yellow-billed Loon How many? 1

Location? West end of Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo Co. Ia off Harbor Inn parking lot

Type of Habitat? Sheltered, shallow end of Large Lake

When? date(s): 13 Nov. 1988 time: 4:15 PM to 4:45 PM (est)

Who? your name and address: Jan L. Walter, 934-13<sup>th</sup> St. S.E., Mason City, Ia. 50401

Others with you: Jim Walter, Curt Nelson

Others before or after you: None

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. Larger than nearby Ring-billed Gulls. Shape - that of a Loon. It was in immature or winter plumage. Bill - "Large and massive looking, slightly up-tilted, dull yellow color." At one time or other, bird was seen from all angles. Every time bill was seen, it looked yellow. Upper edge straight. Lower edge thick at base, curving upward to a point at the tip. Head paler than back, tilted up slightly. Crown appeared "flat on top, peaked front and back" once when straight side view was seen. Crown and nape "medium brown in a narrow band with a wide patch of lighter brown across nape, about the center." Face and side of neck appeared "mottled with light brown" with mottling extending above eye area and well back onto sides of thick neck. Throat dingy white, blending into mottling on side of neck. Back and folded wings "dark brown buff colored broken, crosswise barring" seen once. Behavior: Actively feeding, repeatedly diving and swimming under water. Twice I saw it come up with a fish in its bill, then eat the fish. After that, it spent most of the time swimming or floating on the surface.

Similar species; how eliminated: Large bill, thicker at the base, and pointed, not hooked at the tip eliminated immature Double-crested Cormorant. Larger size, bill shape and absence of white crescent from white chin to behind eye eliminated winter plumage Red-necked Grebe. Larger size and bill size, shape, and color eliminated winter plumage Pacific and Red-throated Loons. Heavy yellow bill, head paler than back, narrow area of crown and nape color, and brown appearance eliminated Common Loon

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
Sunlight from behind and to the right of observers  
200-300 yards (guess)  
8x40 binoculars and 20X Spotting Scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None with this species. Double-crested Cormorants are common fall migrants here. Have seen many winter plumage Common Loons including some earlier this fall and 1 in the same location the following day.

References and persons consulted before writing description:  
Field Guide to the Birds of North America: National Geographic Society

How long before field notes made? 10 minutes this form completed? 3 days

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