

Red-throated Loon

16 Nov 1988

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*S. Dinsmore, *M. Proescholdt, *Armstrong

IBL 59:9, 76

Record Number: 88-08

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore

Mark Proescholdt

Eugene/Eloise Armstrong

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:9

Records Committee: IBL 59:76

VOTE: 6-A-D, 1-abstain

A-D. The gray spot on the neck and lack of obvious spotting suggest to me that this is an immature bird.

A-D. These descriptions are not complete, but I can't tell how much of the incompleteness is due to the distance and viewing conditions. I would like to know more about the face pattern (eye, lores, where white areas were), head shape, and neck. The observers rely alot on size and bill. The contrast between head/neck and back may be the best mark.

A-D. Documentations adequately describe Red-throated Loon and rule out other loons.

A-D. My only concern is 'small dark spot' under chin noted by Proescholdt. Raises poss. of Pacific Loon's chin strap. However other features, especially neck-back contrast convincing for RT Loon, although I would like to have seen a more critical elimination of Pacific Loon.

SENT TO: Steve Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50010; Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, IA; Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, Booneville, IA

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Red-throated Loon

How Many? 1

Location? off Jester Park area of Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.

Habitat? swimming and diving on large reservoir

Date? 16 Nov 1988

Time? 1:46-3:43 p.m.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50010

Others who saw bird: Mark Proescholdt, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong

Description of bird: I was scanning the north end of the lake when I noticed what appeared to be a small loon with a small bill and upright head posture. I commented to Mark Proescholdt, with whom I was birding, that it sure looked like a Red-throated Loon. We approached the bird and soon identified it as a Red-throated Loon.

The bird was a very small loon, and seemed to be not much bigger than a Mallard. The bird was slimmer and longer-necked than a Common Loon I saw later that day. The bird had a very distinctive head posture, like that of a cormorant, with the head tilted upward at an angle of 15-20 degrees. The bill was slender, almost needle-like, and very short, perhaps only 2-3 inches long. The bill was pale, not dark. The bill seemed to be curved upward as a result of the angled lower mandible. The head and neck were light gray, except for a white throat. The breast and underparts were also white. The upperparts were charcoal gray and contrasted with the lighter head and neck. I could not see any lighter speckling on the back or wings.

Similar species and how eliminated: The body shape, posture, and black-and-white coloration identified the bird as a loon. Although some Common Loons may be quite small, I think this bird was too small for even a very small Common Loon. Otherwise, the slender, upturned bill, the head posture, the contrast between the back and the neck, and the gray neck and white throat eliminated Pacific and Common loons.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were very good with the sun directly behind us. Estimated viewing distance was 300 yards. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen three other Red-throated Loons in Iowa, as well as hundreds in Massachusetts.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? made with bird under observation

How long before this form was completed? written 4 hours after sighting

What species? Red-throated Loon How many? 1Location? Saylorville Reservoir - at Jester Co. ParkType of habitat? wide area of the Des Moines RiverWhen? date(s): Nov. 16, 1988 time: 2:10 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.
et scWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, Iowaothers with you: Steve Dinsmore, Eugene and Eloise Armstrongothers 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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Steve spotted this loon from some distance away. When we got closer, I saw a very small loon that was disappearing behind the waves on this very windy day. The loon was all alone, had a slim neck, and was a slim, tiny loon. The loon was very light gray on top of its head and neck which contrasted with a darker back. I didn't see any markings on its back. It had a gray spot under its throat, a white neck, and white under its chin. It preened some right at first. It had a very thin, almost needle-like thin, bill upturned at a 45° angle or so. It was a very light grayish bill. I think the mandibles of the bill itself turned upwards and were different sizes, but I'm not positive. The loon disappeared two times for about 20 minutes each time and then re-appeared in the same area again. I don't know where it went or if it was just barely above the water and waves and partially submerged. Once on a head-on look I could see the neck was thinner than the head. The head had a bulgy look compared to the neck.

Similar species and how eliminated:

The Pacific Loon has a slender straight bill that is not tilted upward, the Red-throated Loon is slimmer than Pacific and has a distinctly thin bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

Sun was at our sides at first and then directly behind us for good viewing and visibility. 200 yards - closest
 $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ mile
 $\frac{1}{2}$ mile - longest point away - (Steve's first sight)

8X30 Binocs, 22X scope, 45X scope
 Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen a few Pacific Loons in Churchill and Iowa, one Red-throated Loon in Churchill.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Natl. Geog. guide, Robbins' guide, Peterson guide, The Western Bird Watcher

How long before field notes made? Right away - some this form completed? Nov. 20, 1988(8:15 p.m. - that night - more)

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

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species Red-throated loonLocation Kaylorville LakeHabitat LakeDate(s) Nov. 16, 1988 Time 3:30 PM to 3:45 PMName and Address Eugene and Eloise ArmstrongOther observers Mark Proescholdt and Steve Denismore

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 behavior and voice.

Light grey over top of head and neck. Darker grey over mantle and back. White throat and belly. Small, strongly upturned bill and head. Told from cormorants from smaller size and bill.

Similar species and how eliminated: much smaller bill and all over size smaller than a common loon.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Good light - bright sky behind us. 500 yds estimated 20 power Bushnell scope and 20-40 power scope (Steve's).

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids 1984 - Also seen in Mexico

References and persons consulted before writing description: Steve & Marks and Robbins and National Geog. Books.

How long before field notes made? immediate. How long before this form

completed? 1 week