

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

**Species:** PACIFIC LOON.

**Number:** 1.

**Location:** S&G Materials sandpit, immediately south of Iowa City, Johnson County.

**Date and time:** 18 June to 5 July. Always late afternoon to early evening.

**Name and address:** Mike Dooley, 1811 B Ave., Apt. 2, Cedar Rapids IA 52402-5464.

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**Habitat:** Commercial sandpit, like small lake. Adjacent to Iowa River. Always abundant diving ducks in season and has hosted Common Loons four times, including one that summered.

**Viewing conditions:** Variable lighting conditions, all quite favorable. Best included sun behind me, bird no more than 75 yards distant, 45x scope, several occasions. Bird was often at close range, not much bothered by human presence.

**Appearance:**

General first impression was of a loon with all-white neck and head excepting a brownish-black forehead and lores, and with brownish-black unmarked uppers, which is to say a very peculiar-looking loon. Closer examination revealed:

HEAD -- Side of head and crown white. Forehead and lores brownish-black, the darkest coloration of entire bird, very close to a pure black. Brownish-black post-ocular mark extended back from eye itself, giving effect of a very thick eyeline. No dark coloration above eye. Rear of head showed a continuation of the very faint gray of the hindneck, with a definite though faint line of demarcation between this and face coloration. Crown profile occasionally showed slight bump at forehead as is commonly associated with Common's profile, but not as exaggerated--not a mark I'm strictly confident about separating from Common, however. Often forehead and crown profile was more swept back from bill, without showing any sort of bump. Bill was slate-gray and generally straight, held horizontally, with a very slight upward angle visible at the forward third of the lower mandible--a mark that I misread on an earlier viewing as being of a Common. I cannot state confidently that this was a slimmer bill than a Common's. Overall I would not consider myself competent on

a reading of this loon's bill as being distinct from a Common's bill, due to lack of experience with Pacific or with extended, minute examination of winter Common bills.

**NECK** -- Hindneck was uniformly a very faint, light gray which extended up into rear of head; foreneck was generally white, and a definite though faint line of demarcation between foreneck and hindneck coloration was visible, especially when neck was extended. This line of demarcation ran vertically straight down side of neck with no interruption. There was no suggestion of faded collar markings as associated with the winter Common. At mid-to-lower foreneck there was a faint gray smudge, lighter still than the hindneck coloration. A thin, solid, unbroken brownish-black line ran horizontally directly under the throat, from one side of neck to the other--the chin strap mark. At the base of the neck, mainly on hindneck and side, and merging into the uppers, was a dark, squarish patch suggestive of a thick, heavy collar. This mark did not extend onto foreneck.

**UPPERS** -- Generally brownish-black and unmarked. Close examination showed some tan coloration in wings.

**Behavior** -- Only one extended period of diving noted, this for perhaps fifteen minutes. Otherwise stayed above water and was slow-moving; very frequently bathed and preened. Vocalized three times on one occasion, once on a later occasion, always the same short yodel of perhaps 3-4 syllables, somewhat muffled.

**Similar species eliminated:** Common Loon due mainly to plumage differences at neck. Yellow-billed for lack of yellow bill and for consistent horizontal aspect to bill. Red-throated for lack of fine enough bill that likely even I could see difference. No consideration made of Arctic. This loon's chin strap mark was its most compelling and potentially diagnostic mark.

**Previous experience with this species and similar ones:** 12-15 winter Common Loons. No other loon species.

**References and persons consulted before writing description:** NGS, Sibley, and Kauffman general field guides; Kauffman *Advanced Birding*, Harrison *Seabirds*. Birders Tom Kent and Chris Caster on site, 1 July; Chris Edwards on site, 2 July; Jim Fuller on site 4 July.

**Others with you:** Various Tom Kent, Chris Edwards, Jim Fuller, Chris Caster and several others.

**Others before or after you:** None before. Several viewers after 2 July.

**Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification?** No.

**How long before field notes made:** None made. Dialogued with Chris Edwards point-by-point as he made his field notes while we both observed. Also discussions with other viewers on site.

**How long before this form completed:** 2-5 July after four viewings.