

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Pacific Loon

LOCATION: S & G Quarry, south edge of Iowa City (Johnson County)

HABITAT: Sandpit

DATE & TIME: 4 July 2001 (5:45-6:20 PM), Also 3 and 5 July

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

OTHERS: With me on 4 July were Mike Dooley, Bill Scheibl, and Karole Fuller. On 5 July, Jane Fuller. There were MOB after the bird was discovered by Mike Dooley on 18 June.

DESCRIPTION: On 4 July we found the loon swimming and diving intermittently on the northwest corner of the sandpit. This appeared to be a relatively small loon, although there was nothing to compare size. The bird generally had a light head and neck which contrasted with a dark back and sides. The head was generally rounded in outline, and the forehead was also somewhat rounded. The small dagger like gray bill was held horizontal. Although the head was generally light, there were some faint thin vertical lines at the base of the neck, and there was a very faint vertical line on the side of the neck where the dark of the hindneck separates the light color of the foreneck on basic plumaged birds. There was also some very faint horizontal streaking on the foreneck beneath a rather prominent chinstrap. At times the hindneck appeared to be faintly silvery, but nowhere as colorful as in an alternate plumaged bird. The outline of the hindneck was almost perfectly rounded. There was a smudge on the generally light head which extended from behind and in front of the eye up to the crown and down to the bill. The most anterior portion of the smudge was a brownish color, while the rest was gray. There also was a dark extension from the back area onto the sides of the base of the neck. The eye was dark. The breast was light. The back and sides were quite homogeneous in their dark gray color. The bird was actively feeding most of the time on 4 July, but more liesurely floating during the other observations. No vocalization was heard. This was probably a nonbreeding adult, with some features of both alternate and basic plumage.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Common Loon would have had a larger size, head, and bill, would lack a chinstrap, and would not show any kind of vertical line the length of the side of the neck. The head is flatter on top with less rounding, and the forehead is rather straight from crown to bill. Red-throated Loon has a thinner head, flatter forehead, and normally holds its bill angling upward from the horizontal.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was a sunny late afternoon on 4 July, and I was looking northeast with a KOWA TSN4 telescope at distances judged to be 250-400 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen alternate plumaged birds in Washington and Alaska, and basic plumaged birds in Iowa on several occasions.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were dictated in the car on the drive home, and this form was typed on 6 July. I looked at National Geographic and Sibley guides the evening of the observation.