

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Pacific Loon

Number: 1

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

Habitat: Open water.

Date and time: Monday, July 02, 2001, 5:40 p.m. - 6:10 p.m.

Name and address: Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: Mike Dooley

Others before or after you: The bird was discovered by Mike Dooley, and was later seen by Tom Kent, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, and many others.

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.

During my observation, the bird was seen diving for extended periods, and was then observed preening leisurely. The bird was immediately identifiable as a loon by its generally dark upperparts, white underparts, dagger-like bill, and diving behavior. There were no other birds present for size comparison. The head was rounded, with a very slight angled forehead, much less angled than a Common Loon. The bill was gray, relatively straight and slender in comparison to the bill of a Common Loon, and held horizontally. The outer one-third of the lower mandible was very slightly angled to the tip. The eye was dark.

The bird appeared to be in the process of molt, giving the head and neck an interesting appearance. The forehead and lores were charcoal black. This color extended through the eye and to a small round spot behind the eye. The chin was white. A narrow gray "chinstrap" was present below the chin across the front of the neck. The crown, nape, and hindneck were very light gray. The front of the neck was off-white, darker than the chin but lighter than the hindneck. A faint gray vertical line, darker than both the front and hind neck, extended down the sides of the neck in a straight line. The lower one-fourth of the hindneck, the back, and the uppersides of the wings and tail were dark chocolate brown, with a small amount of white mottling visible on the scapulars and tertials. The breast, belly, and undertail were white.

Similar species eliminated: Common Loon has a larger, thicker bill, a different pattern on the sides of the neck, and lacks the chinstrap. Red-throated Loon has a different facial and neck pattern and also lacks the chinstrap.

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

Viewing conditions: Distance 50 yards, partly sunny with diffuse sunlight from behind, viewed with 20x-60x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen several Pacific Loons in Iowa and Washington, but none in this plumage. Very familiar with Common Loons and somewhat experienced with Red-throated Loon.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Sibley guide consulted after writing field notes.

How long before field notes made: During observation.

How long before this form completed: Two hours.