

Pacific Loon

5 Nov 1987

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

\*Steve Dinsmore, \*Mark Proescholdt

IBL 58:17, 75

Record Number: 87-18

Classification: NA

## DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore, 5 Nov

Mark Proescholdt, 7 Nov

## LETTER

Don Roberson to Thomas Kent, 31 March 1988

Ronald E. Goetz to Thomas H. Kent, 1 April 1988

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 58:17

Records Committee: IBL 58:75

## VOTE: 6-III, 1-IV

III, The features that seem to "clinch" this ID are the marks noted by Dinsmore as follows: Light gray head and neck contrasting with dark rest of bird; smooth rounded forehead; short bill; and dark streaks on neck suggestive of breeding pattern. However, the bird described by Proescholdt sounds like a different individual as he noted a dark back of head and neck (instead of light gray) and dark grayish throat (throat color not mentioned by Dinsmore). Proescholdt also emphasized the upturned appearance of bill, at least during his first observation. How do we really know some of these are not just small Common Loons?

III, Neither observer saw white spots on back. Bill described as straight or not upturned--would be better to describe the straightness of upper and lower mandibles. Steve saw head and neck as lighter, Mark as dark. I would like to know more about the appearance of small Common Loons.

IV, I am not convinced that this was not a small sized Common Loon within the overlap of the size of the Pacific Loon. Dinsmore does not give any idea as to how close the bird approached him. I do not know of that would help in his defense of this record but it could not hurt. Proescholdt's documentation did not do much to corroborate Dinsmore. The bird could be a Pacific Loon but I cannot make that judgement from what was written.

III, Dinsmore's description of head and neck and the unmarked back seem to favor the Pacific Loon ID.

III, Analysis by SD probably correct. Plumage description strongly indicative of Pacific Loon. Bill description also fits Pacific Loon.

III, Sounds like Pacific Loon, all right, but all observers should research loon identification. So much reliance on size (with no birds to compare it to) and shape! And "upturned" used both for a bend of the bill and for the way the bird holds its head! Perhaps in the distance the color pattern of eyes and flanks not seen? However, pale head and back of neck, blackish plain back, and straight bill and rounded forehead sound like Pacific Loon.

## REVOTE: 5-III, 1-IV, 1 no vote

III, still feel this is acceptable documentation by Dinsmore,

not sure that Proescholdt bird may have been different bird. III, This record seems as good as those we have accepted in the past.

IV, I have reviewed both documentations numerous times and am still not convinced that this was not a small Common Loon. Maybe a better look and better documentations would have convinced me.

REVOTE: 1-III, 2-IV, 2-V, 2-VI

IV, Re-reading Dinsmore documentation suggests that ID was made as Pacific on basis of eliminating Red-throated. Goetz and Roberson suggest that this is not quite so easy, e.g. back pattern, darkness on throat, posture, etc. This all makes documentations probably right, but not conclusive, therefore a IV vote is appropriate.

VI, Accept outside reviewers' comments.

V, In reviewing both documentations and comments from Ron Goetz and Don Roberson one more time I come to the same general conclusion on this bird. I cannot be sure of the identity of this bird. This brings up an interesting problem on loons. Some of our earlier reviews of small basic plumage loons might need another look.

VI, Thoughts of Roberson and Goetz very interesting.

IV, I yield to the experts. Perhaps Proescholdt is better description of Red-thr Loon, but since neither suggest this sp., best left as IV.

V, I'm confused.

# CALIFORNIA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

87-18

of Western Field Ornithologists

Thomas Kent  
211 Richards St.  
Iowa City IA 52240

Don Roberson  
CBRC Secretary  
282 Grove Acre Ave.  
Pacific Grove, CA 93950  
31 Mar 83

Dear Tom,

Thanks for your letter of 22 March and all the material on the Iowa Records Committee. It will be of great help in preparing for the ABA workshop. Several have now suggested some type of intracommittee organization or interchange, which might be of value to all by exchanging information on bird i.d. and on committee procedures. We'll explore this more at Duluth. I think everyone will have the chance to attend that workshop, since there is no competition and it is only given once. I would be happy to talk about computers, also, if you can attend; I keep all my data via a simple word-processing program on my old KayPro. The Texas Committee has set up a record-keeping system very similar to mine. But a data retrieval system would have advantages, if it worked well. Alas, since my KayPro does not interface with either Apple or IBM, I doubt I could use any updated programs.

I enclose the Bylaws you asked for.

It was fun reading through the comments on records 87-18 through 26. Even without seeing the documentation, I have formed opinions about the loon and esp. the claimed Clark's Grebe, since I see them daily here in Monterey. A "pale" bill is not a good description of Clark's Grebe; indeed it fits Western better. Clark's has a bright yellow-orange bill in all plumages - indeed the Californians I know consider it the single best field mark. I am sure our Committee would not accept any such record without a good description of the exact bill color. Flank color is basically useless, in my opinion, given over to how the feathers are preened and arranged. A significant percentage of Western Grebes have white lores, particularly a white loreal spot. This is not noted in most of the literature. It has yet to be worked out just what plumage this is; it may be first-winter plumage or some such, as it is most prevalent in fall/winter. In any event, however commented "white lores diagnostic" is plain wrong (I hope that wasn't you!). I also don't like the loon much - sounds (simply reading comments, and not seeing the original description) more like a Red-throated (?). Any dark on the throat rules out Pacific Loon. Incidentally, members of the CBRC are often willing to review documentation from outside California as consultants if questions arise about birds with which we are familiar. We often go to Britain to get comments on stints or Tufted Ducks, and to LSU for comments on female/imm. hummingbirds, for example.

In any event, I'm glad to hear those two birds will be recirculated. Thank goodness we don't have to deal with jaegers here (as all species are regular); they sound rather hope-less!

Again, thanks for all your help,

Cheers,



18. (1987-18). 5 & 7 Nov 1987. Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co. S.Dinsmore\*, M.Proescholdt\*, B.Proescholdt, B.Engebretsen.

This bird is almost certainly not a Pacific Loon, and both descriptions sound much more like a juvenile Red-throated to me. First, the back patterning on a juvenile Red-throated can only be seen at very close range, so it is not surprising to me that Dinsmore thought the back was unmarked (he does not say how far away the bird was in his description). On the other hand, Pacific Loons in molt out of Basic should probably show some of the conspicuous large white squares on the scapulars (these linger longer than any remnant of the throat pattern, according to the evidence available to me). Second, the head as described is perfect for juvenile Red-throated Loon, including the gray "throat patch", contrast between head and back, and lack of any darker patterning within the head. Once again, this description fails to be consistent with adult Pacific Loon, which should always have at least blackish lores and forehead, not mentioned here.

Finally, the posture while actively fishing as described by Proescholdt is very suggestive of Red-throated. I am not bothered by the later disappearance of this posture: See The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds Western Region, photo 171, for an example of the resting posture, and of a bill which looks neither dramatically thin nor upturned.

Is there enough evidence to accept the bird as a Red-throated? Probably not, given the confusion over the bird's identity and the lack of really specific description of the head pattern, back pattern, or bill shape. I think this should probably be thought of as one that got away.

From Ronald E. Goetz,  
Webster Groves, MO  
4-1-88

He is a member of IL + MO Records Committee + is working on an article on loon id for Birding.

Species? Pacific Loon

How Many? 1

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.-off Jester Park

Habitat? swimming on large reservoir

Date? 5 Nov 1987

Time? approx. 11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

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

Others who saw bird: Mark and Beth Proescholdt, Liscomb

Description of bird: The bird was swimming alone and, except for several Bonaparte's Gulls feeding nearby, there were no other birds for size comparisons. The bird did seem smaller than several Common Loons I had seen earlier. The most striking feature of the bird was the strong contrast between the head and the rest of the bird. The head and neck were light gray in color, except for some slightly darker streaks on the side of the neck. These streaks were probably remnants of the streaks the bird had in breeding plumage. The rest of the bird, including the back, wings, tail, and flanks, was very dark, almost black. The head was held tilted slightly upward. The forehead was very smooth and rounded, not steep like a Common Loon. The bill was short, stout, and dark colored. The bill did not appear nearly as long and thin as the bill of a Red-throated Loon. The lack of a sharp line of contrast between the throat and the back of the neck puzzled me at first. Field guides only show winter and summer plumages for Pacific and Red-throated loons. I was sure the bird was not a Red-throated Loon because the bird did not have a small enough head, the bill was the wrong shape and size, and because the bird had a plain, unmarked back. I therefore concluded that the bird was a Pacific Loon that was molting from summer to winter plumage. Mark and Beth Proescholdt saw what was probably the same bird on the 7th and initially thought the bird was a Red-throated Loon. In retrospect, however, they agreed with me that the bird they had seen was probably a Pacific Loon.

Similar species and how eliminated: The slimmer, shorter bill, rounded head, and sharp contrast between the neck and the back eliminates Common and Yellow-billed loons. The shorter, straight bill and unmarked back eliminates Red-throated Loon.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good with a clear sky and the sun behind me. Optical equipment used was a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I saw three Pacific Loons at Saylorville last fall

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

How long before field notes were made? none written

How long before this form was completed? 2 days

What species? Pacific Loon How many? 1Location? Saylorville - Jester Co. ParkType of habitat? Des Moines River ReservoirWhen? date(s): NOV. 7, 1987 time: 8:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m.  
9:15 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, Iowaothers with you: Beth Proescholdt; Dennis Thompson, Bery Englebretson  
(in p.m.) (in m. a bit)others before or after you: probably Steve Dinsmore 2 days earlier

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.

A small loon flew and landed in front of us as close as 60 yards away. It was between breeding and winter plumage with a dark-grayish throat all the way down to a white breast above the water line. It had a thin neck and head like a Cormorant, a dark back and head and back of neck, white undersides when it preened, a dark slender bill, and the head and slender bill were turned upward. No white spotting on the back was observed. It flew once. It held its neck stretched upright most of the time in the morning. It was diving quite often and ate a fish once. It was very different from a Common Loon in size, shape, and appearance. We thought it was a Red-throated Loon due to its thin head and neck - (a "snaky neck"), its long straight neck, and especially its upturned bill look. In the afternoon we went back and saw it again. This time this small loon with the dark-grayish throat showed its neck not straight upright like before but curved like a Common Loon's neck and its bill was mainly horizontal and not upright - only occasionally was the bill upturned. The bill itself appeared to be a slender straight bill that was upturned slightly from being horizontal as the head tilted upward. The upturned bill was not at a pronounced 20° angle as  
(over)

Similar species and how eliminated:

Common Loons are bulkier with a larger head and neck and larger in size. They shouldn't have a dark-grayish throat any time, they have a larger bill.

Red-throated Loons are discussed in observation part.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes

If yes, explain: we still have a few reservations about it ourselves. I'm not sure what Denny and Bery are thinking about it now. I've mentioned our thoughts on it to them.

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

Light rain from 8:00-9:00 a.m. and then stopped. Cloudy all morning. Cloudy in p.m. too but brighter. Distances from 60 yards - 250 yards in a.m. - (estimated) and 120-200 yards in p.m. Had good looks when it was closest in p.m. 8X30 Binocs. 22X Scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: seen many Common Loons in both plumages.

Have seen breeding Plumage Pacific and Red-thr. Loons but no winter plumage ones.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Many → Nat'l. Geog., Peterson's guides, Robbins' guide, Seabirds, Audubon Master Guide, Steve Dinsmore, Rough Guide

How long before field notes made? while viewing and this form completed? NOV. 28, 1987

that night

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

one book states. We thought it was a Red-throated Loon still but we had doubts. When we got home, we checked other books — Seabirds by P. Harrison, Audubon Master Guide, Pough book, R.T. Peterson's old field guide. (None of the books have any comment about differences in appearances in an extended-neck-look that we saw in the morning such as Red-throated vs. Pacific Loons.) We talked with Steve Dinsmore some and discussed it more ourselves and studied our guides and reference books some more. We feel that it is a Pacific Loon due to the bill being a slender straight bill. The bill was upturned when the head was upturned slightly and not at a great pronounced angle as Red-throated Loons should be. Some illustrations in some of the guides show an upturned bill look for both Pacific and Common Loons similar to some degree as to what we observed. The bill itself did not appear to be curved upward but appeared to be straight and was <sup>turned</sup> upward when the head was turned upward.