

1999 - 4

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPT 7-0

YELLOW-BILLED LOON
Gavia adamsii

lcc 1/20/00 wpl

Location: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo; Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: December 5, 1999 - January 17, 2000 (and still present)

Setting:

I found this bird on the morning of December 5, 1999. Other birders to arrive and see it were Brandon Percival, Randy Yuan, Jim and Rosie Watts, Dave Johnson and Dave Silverman. The bird has been present at Pueblo Reservoir ever since and has been seen by scores of birders. On the 5th I observed the bird in the north fisherman's area. It moved to around the point at the boat ramp at the west side of the reservoir. Randy Yuan and I observed the bird from as close as 75 meters as it rounded the point. The sun was from our back and the conditions were perfect (sunny). I observed it with my Kowa TSN-4 20-60x scope. This loon dove with a sinking action, just immersing rather than taking an active dive.

Description:

The bird was a juvenile. It was quite large -- about 24 inches long. Directly compared to the Common Loon (on other occasions) it was slightly longer and thicker-necked. Its posture was different, holding the head upright and the bill just slightly upturned as it swam. It had a large, blocky, double-peaked head shape. The neck was long and thick. It had a slightly larger, stouter, up-turned bill than Common Loon. The bill had a nearly straight culmen and a tipped-up lower mandible (strongly angled gonys). The bill color was pale yellow with a dusky, darker basal upper ridge on the upper mandible. The tip (distal half) of the bill was straw yellow. The bird was small-eyed -- with the small dark eye in the middle of its pale whitish face.

Overall the bird was a lighter, sandier-colored loon than the darker, blacker Common Loons. It was sandy brown on the back, and lighter gray on the head and neck. The crown and nape were pale tannish gray (paler than on Common Loon). There was a smudgy, dark auricular patch; indistinct dark lower neck band; thin, barely discernible darker "chin strap". The foreparts and fore-neck were white. The back was light brown with rows of pale edged scapulars. The sides were light gray.

Similar Species:

The Common Loon is darker, smaller and with a smaller head and shorter, thinner neck. The bill is gray, not yellow, and is smaller, more dagger-like with a curved culmen, and is held horizontally, not up. The Red-throated Loon is much smaller, with small, darker thin bill. It has a lighter, not darker, area behind the eye and shows indistinct light specks on the back. The Pacific Loon is smaller, has a straight, horizontally-held bill, a darker crown, and a distinct blackish border between the dark rear- and light fore-neck. This bird was distinctively different, as described above, in direct comparison with Common Loons.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Common and Pacific Loons in Colorado and on the West coast. I have seen Red-throated Loons in Colorado in 1992 and 1994 and in March 1992 in the Seattle, Washington area. I have seen Yellow-billed Loon almost annually at Pueblo Reservoir.

This report was prepared from notes made after observation.

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