

2002-93

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

Each table cell will automatically enlarge as you type!

CFO-RC FILE X:

RESULTS:

Species:(Common Name) **Yellow-billed Loon**(Scientific Name) *Gavia adamsii*

Date(s) of occurrence: 11/5/02

Number of birds seen: 1

Sex: ?

Plumage: Juvenile

Exact location: North "pool" of Boyd Lake. (Lake divided into multiple pools by very low water.) The bird was first observed near the N.E. corner of this "pool", later swimming into the middle.

County: Larimer

Nearest town: Loveland

Elevation: ~4960 feet

Length of observation: About 45 minutes

Time(s) of observation: Approx. 4:00 - 4:45 p.m.

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Alan Bell

Other Observers who independently saw the bird(s): Nick Komar, Chris Wood, Tony Leukering, M.O.B.

Light Conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s); position: The setting sun was behind my back as I viewed the bird from the western shore of the lake.

Optical equipment used: Kowa TSN 823, 50X W.A. eyepiece, Nikon Coolpix 995

Distance from bird(s) (estimated unless otherwise noted): Bird swam around between about 1/4 and 1/2 mile away.

Was bird(s) photographed? yes

If so, have you submitted photos? Yes (4 submitted via email)

Who took the photographs? Bill Schmoker

Describe the general and specific habitat in which the bird(s) occurred: The bird was in a Front Range water storage reservoir, at very low water conditions due to drought.

Describe the bird's behavior (flying, feeding, habits, behaviors used in identifying the Species or in supporting the identification): The bird was diving frequently for about 2/3 of the observation time. The remaining time was spent swimming around on the surface, preening, and stretching.

Describe the bird in detail. This is the most important part of this report. Include the overall size and shape and how you placed the bird in the general group that you did. Give complete details of plumage, including head, throat, undersides, nape, back, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird(s). Describe other important details, such as color and shape of bill, legs, eye, (etc.) that were important in making the identification. (Fill out this portion even if photographs are submitted; you may attach additional sheets, drawings, field sketches or copy field notes): The bird was clearly a loon, based on the unique combination of large size, dagger-like bill, light barring on the dark back, and overall profile of head, neck, and back, as well as the diving habit of these birds. In comparison with nearby Western Grebes, Common Mergansers, and California Gulls this bird looked monstrous. As seen in the photos, this loon had a proportionately very long light whitish-yellow colored bill. The only dark part of the bill was the back part of the topmost part of the bill. The face of the bird was also extremely light colored, making the eye stand out as the only substantially dark feature on the head or neck. Overall the face and back of the neck were very light, almost faintly yellowish gray. The head of the bird appeared very flat on top, with a steeply sloping forehead meeting the bill at a sharp angle. The bird habitually held its bill quite above horizontal, giving it the appearance of always looking "up" as it swam around. Lighter colored rings surrounded the eye, matching the throat, front of the neck, and breast which were also almost white. The back of the bird was darker than any other feature, appearing dark gray. There was prominent white barring cutting across most of the back.

Describe bird's call or song: Not heard.

Discuss similar species and how you eliminated them: The overall body plan, bill and head shape, and barring on the back ruled out other families of long-billed diving birds like grebes or cormorants. Among loons, an extremely pale bill and face coupled with the large size, very long bill, pronounced "flat" head, and pronounced steep forehead suggest Yellow-billed. Red-throated and Pacific Loons have much smaller, darker appearing bills, rounder heads, and are much smaller bodied. Common Loons also may appear flat headed and have steep foreheads, but among the many Commons I've seen I've never seen the flat head and steep forehead so pronounced. In my experience the bills of Common Loons don't appear this large. I'm accustomed to seeing a lighter spur breaking into the dark back half of the neck on fall Common Loons, which this bird lacked. I've also never seen a Common Loon look this pale about the face, neck, and bill, although leucism or partial albinism should be ruled out. I believe that the dark back with pronounced barring diminishes this possibility, as does the dark posterior of the top of the bill.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? This is a life bird for me. I've seen lots of Common Loons, including about 15 in Colorado this fall.

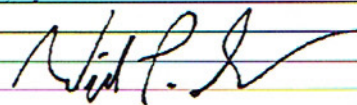
List books, guides, recordings or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation): After the observation I consulted The Sibley Guide to Birds and Seabirds (An Identification Guide) by Peter Harrison

This report is from photos and notes made during and after observation.

Date of written report: 11/5/02

Reporting observer: William P. Schmoker

Signature:



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