

1-82-2 A

SUPPORTING DETAILS: UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES AND/OR SPECIES IN HIGH NUMBERS

CBC name Denver, Colorado CBC date 19 December 1981 Compiler Hawkins/Reddall

Observer writing this account and date Mark Holmgren 21 December 1981

Yellow-billed Loon

SPECIES Gavia adamsii

NUMBER, AGE, SEX 1, imm?, ? larger

Distance from bird(s) 150-400 m. Relative size of bird of 20% smaller than the smaller
2 Arctic Loons also present

HEAD & NECK (Describe forehead, crown, auricular, malar region, median line, etc.)
See other side

EYE & LORES (Describe supercilium, ring, stripe, color, etc.) eye dark; pale feathering around eye

UPPER & LOWER MANDIBLES um: proximal $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ of culmen blackish, distal $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ yellow
lm: grayish-yellow (BA). Slight overhang of um over lm.

LEGS & FEET Not seen

UPPERPARTS (Describe nape, back, rump, upper tail coverts, etc.) See other side

UNDERPARTS (Describe throat, belly, side, flanks, crissum, etc.) See other side

RETRICES (Describe inner, middle, outertail feathers, color pattern, shape, etc.)
Seemed grayish-brown although not seen in spread position

WING (Describe color, length, shape, linings, bars, coverts, leading and trailing edges, etc.) Under wing: Pale base to inner 1^o feathers, gray otherwise. Upper wing not seen in spread position.

VOCALIZATION None given

BEHAVIOR 2 dives timed at 48 seconds and 1 minute. Dives preceded by elaborate forward and upward extension of head, then slow submergence of body from the horizontal position.

Date of observation 19 Dec. '81 Time JR 9:30 am MH, BA 12:30 - 4:00 pm Weather 50°s F, no wispy cover clouds high

Duration of observation approx. 3 hrs Bird - Sun orientation behind observers

Exact location Chatfield Reservoir, east side, between sailboat launch and Plum Creek lot
Bob Andrews, Jack Reddall, Peter

Habitat large reservoir Other observers Payton, Hugh Kingery, other CBC'ers
20x wide angle eyepiece on Bushnell
Optical equipment Spacemaster scope, other scopes up to 60x also used

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Distinguished from other species -- see other side

AN ACCOMPANYING SKETCH OR PHOTOGRAPH CAN BE AN EXCELLENT FURTHER DOCUMENTATION

HEAD AND NECK

Bill approx. the length of head from base of bill to back of head. Critical bill colors described below.

Crown, auricular area, dorsal stripe along entire length of neck brownish-gray, darkest on the lower neck and in this region some of the darkness extended ventrally to the upper chest almost forming a complete band. A similar, but much duller suffusion of brownish-gray extended from the upper neck ventrally under the chin.

Posture Head and bill usually held 10-15% above the horizontal.

Shape Forecrown very peaked, top of head flat, rear crown somewhat less peaked, more rounded.

Bill shape straight, culmen tip overhanging lower mandible (i.e., upper mandible slightly longer and slightly decurved). Gonys seemed to lack sharp distal angle. Rather it was gradually and gently curved upwards.

Throat and breast very white, except where grayish-brown suffusions penetrated.

Face below and just above eye mixed white and brown. The transition from dark dorsal to white ventral poorly defined throughout length of head and neck.

UPPERPARTS

Back grayish-brown with parallel rows of large, rectangular, white spots. These spots were largest at the highest point of the back. When the bird was diving, the side of the rump appeared whitish.

UNDERPARTS

Chest That part that was above H₂O was white. The rest of the underparts were not seen.

Distinguished from Grebes

Neck shorter, head larger than Western Grebe

Body much larger than Red-necked Grebe

Distinguished from Arctic Loon

Size 20% larger than smaller of two Arctic Loons seen simultaneously.

Bill Color, Size Culmen yellow distally, dark proximally. Culmen all dark on Arctic. Longer drooping tip on Yellow-billed Loon. This character might not be diagnostic.

Head shape High forehead peak; long, flat crown; long-headed.

Plumage color and pattern Yellow-billed much paler generally. Delineation between dark dorsal and pale ventral poorly defined in Yellow-bill, well-defined and abrupt in Arctic. No dark feathering at eye level in Yellow-bill, substantial dark feathering in Arctic with no white above eye.

Neck fatter-looking in Yellow-billed Loon.

Distinguished from Common Loon

Bill color Culmen yellow distally, dark proximally. Culmen all dark on Common Loon.

Head shape Forehead more vertically sloped forming slightly more peaked forecrown than Common.

Head posture almost always at 10-15° above the horizontal.

Plumage Overall paler. Brownish auricular spot.

NOTE: Binford and Remsen (197) discuss several other potentially useful characters in detail. These include the anterior extent of the chin feathering (to the posterior edge of the nostril in the Yellow-billed, posterior to that point in the Common), the angle of the gonys (upturned in the Yellow-billed, gradually recurved in the Common), and various subtleties of bill and tomium shape were not visible. Roberson (Rare Birds of the West Coast, 1980) noted that some of these characters were less critical than Binford and Remsen suggested. These two articles were the only two references of value which were consulted as we compiled our observations on this bird.

1981

December 19

Chatfield Reservoir, Jefferson/Douglas Co., Colorado: 1, in non-breeding, winter plumage; probably adult; sex?

TIME: 10:45 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. - MST

12 Noon to 4:00 P.M. - MST

WEATHER: Mostly cloudy with no sun until late afternoon; Wind, dead calm most of day. Temperature, 40°-54°F.

HABITAT: Large, fresh water, man-made reservoir on high plains adjacent to the foot hills of the Rocky Mountains (South Platte River drainage).

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: 10X50 Bushnell Binoculars; 15X-60X Zoom Telescope (B/L).

OTHER OBSERVERS: Robert Andrews, Marc Halmgren

DISTANCE FROM BIRD: 75 to 1500 yards, 90 minutes at 100-200 yards

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: An obvious loon; large heavy-bodied bird riding low in water; stout, long-pointed bill.

HEAD AND NECK: Head, grayish-brown from forehead through crown; occiput and down back of neck; suffused, dark, rounded auricular spot (not prominent or obvious, but present). Extremely high forehead with crown somewhat flattened then tapering off and rounded at the occiput (not "squared" or "double-crested"). Neck, very thick and commented on several times by the other observers. Sides of neck, grayish-brown with very dark, almost black areas at base near the waterline as the bird rested upon the surface.

1981

of the water. Foreneck and chin, white. It was not possible to make out the extended chin feathering which characteristically extends to a point below the nostril in adamsii mainly because of distance (this is probably much easier to see in breeding plumaged birds).

EYES AND LORES: Eye, dark. Face, whitish, with the white extending well in front of, above and behind the eye (surrounds the eye) making it appear much more "white faced" than the Common Loon (G. immer) and giving prominence to the dark eye.

UPPER AND LOWER MANDIBLES: Bill color, whitish to pale yellowish becoming tinged with gray near the base. Distal half of the bill, quite yellow which at a distance of 300 to 500 yards or more became quite prominent, appearing to having been dipped in yellow dye. The culmen was dark from the base only about halfway down to the end (distal) which could have accounted for its appearance at a distance of having been "dipped in a yellow dye;" when the loon was at its closest point to the observers (about 100 to 150 yards) in the afternoon, the culmen was easily observed as the bird moved its head back and forth, clearly exposing the dark culmen extending only halfway from base to distal. Bill shape, stout, long and tapering to

1981

a dagger-like point. The upper mandible was quite flattened (straight) with only a very slight decurvature at the distal as compared to the decurvature of the entire culmen in most immes. We had an immes in sight in another part of the reservoir for a period of time that we were watching adamsii for comparison, but the two birds never came near each other for direct comparison. The so-called "up-turned" feature of the lower mandible was not at all readily apparent to any of the observers. (at least it was not as nearly as prominent as depicted in many of the field guides), and, in fact, did not appear more "up-turned" than in the Common Loon. However, we all noticed that adamsii always carried its head up-tilted from the horizontal, not unlike a Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), which gave somewhat of ^{an} illusion of having the lower mandible "up-turned."

LEGS AND FEET: Not observed.

UPPER PARTS: Back, grayish-brown marked with faint banded rows of large, square white spots. These bands of white spots while not as well-pronounced as in a breeding plumaged bird, were never-the-less, easy to discern even in this winter plumaged birds.

1981

UNDERPARTS: Throat, belly, white. Sides and flanks grayish white to white.

RETRICES: Not observed.

WINGS: The wing primaries were black and folded over tail. The bird never flew or raised up on the water to flap its wings. However, the dark grayish-brown wings were slightly extended each time the bird dived for food.

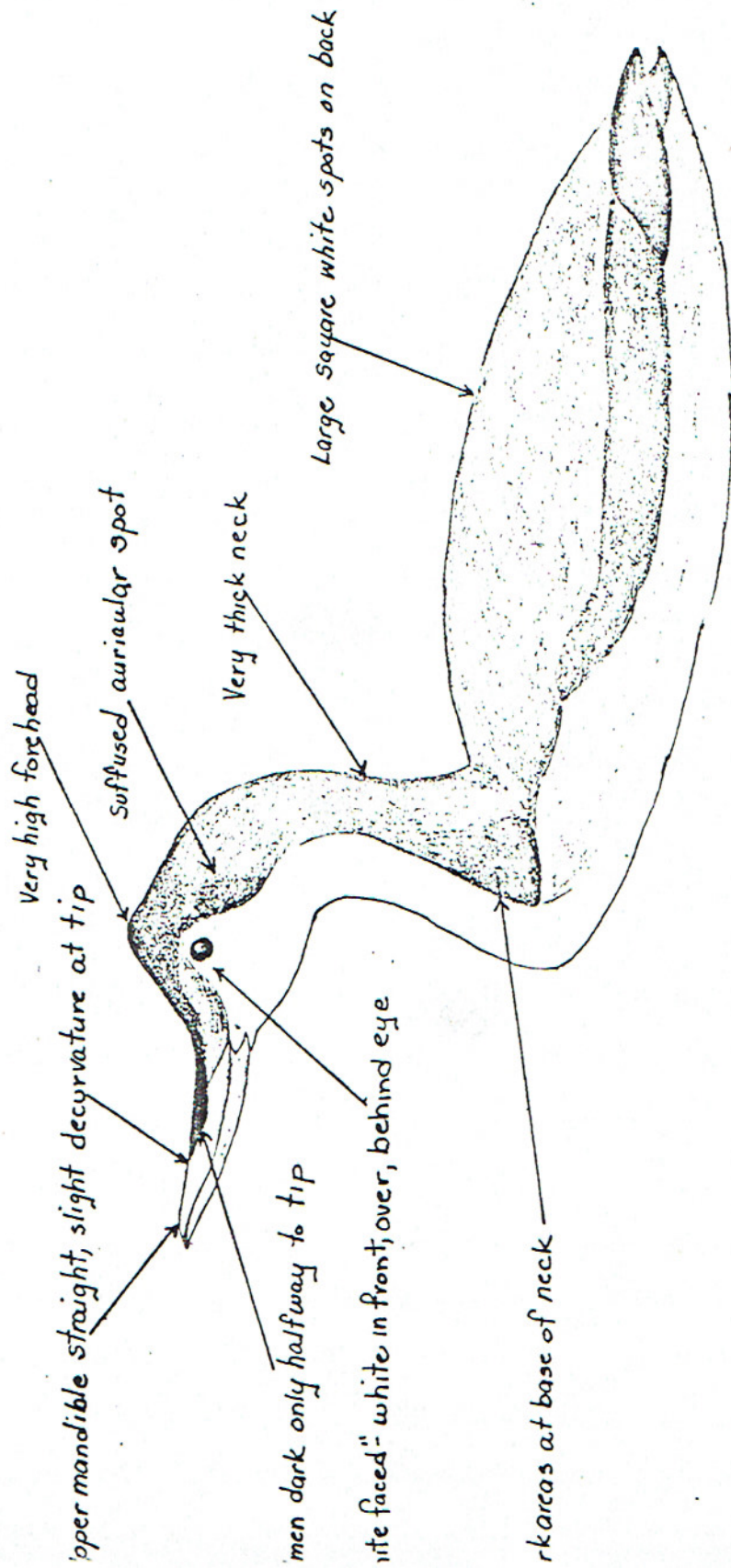
VOCALIZATION: None heard.

BEHAVIOR: Bird swam and dived with brief interruptions for just loafing on a glassy-surfaced, fresh water reservoir. I first found this loon swimming and diving in the company of an Arctic loon (*Gavia arctica*), at times swimming side-by-side with each other. The much larger size of *adamsii* was obvious. While there were four individuals of *immer* on the reservoir, none came close enough to *adamsii* for a direct comparison size-wise. There was nothing exceptional concerning its behavior that would tend to separate it from all other North American loons. It did seem to stay submerged for very long periods of time (timed twice - once for 45 seconds and a second dive of 60 seconds). However, I have never timed any other species of loons, so this may not be of any significance. The bird nearly always reappeared from a dive at the same point from where it submerged.

REDDALL, J. W. YELLOW-BILLED LOON - *Gavia adamsii*

1981

December 19



1-82-2 A

SUPPORTING DETAILS: UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES AND/OR SPECIES IN HIGH NUMBERS

CBC name Denvec CBC date 19 Dec. '81 Compiler Jack Reddall

Observer writing this account and date Robert Andrews - 1 January 1982 (from notes made in the field during observation)

SPECIES Yellow-billed Loon NUMBER, AGE, SEX One - apparently adult

Distance from bird(s) 100-150 yds. ^{Minimum estimated} Relative size of bird large (see notes on overall appearance on reverse side)

HEAD & NECK (Describe forehead, crown, auricular, malar region, median line, etc.)
prominent, high forehead with a sloping rear crown; neck long and very thick; crown and nape light gray-brown,

becoming darker brown on back of the neck, and solid dark brown projection at base of the neck, face mostly whitish
with dark eye completely surrounded by white; white area behind eye; small, dark auricular spot and an

EYE & LORES (Describe supercilium, ring, stripe, color, etc.) ascending whitish wedge or
crescent behind the spot; throat and front of neck white, with a pale brown chinstrap; pale-dark demarcation on
neck quite strong, but much fuzzier and much less conspicuous on the face

UPPER & LOWER MANDIBLES See reverse

LEGS & FEET Not seen

UPPERPARTS (Describe nape, back, rump, upper tail coverts, etc.) anterior part of back
grayish (lighter than neck), becoming darker (more blackish) posteriorly; wings and lower back with parallel
lines of quite large, square white marks (very noticeable at a great distance).

UNDERPARTS (Describe throat, belly, side, flanks, crissum, etc.) White; pale brown
chinstrap; flanks pale gray (darker at the bend of the wing).

RETRICES (Describe inner, middle, outertail feathers, color pattern, shape, etc.)
Not observed

WING (Describe color, length, shape, linings, bars, coverts, leading and trailing edges, etc.) Described above as parts of the upperparts

VOCALIZATION None heard

BEHAVIOR Sometimes sat on the water for long periods without any activity; at other times made numerous
dives; dives very long (2 timed at 48 and 60 sec.); bird usually reappeared very near where it went down;
Sometimes swam rapidly across the surface

Date of observation 19 Dec. 1981 Time 1200-1400 Weather calm, dry Sky cover overcast

Duration of observation 4 hrs. Bird - Sun orientation no sun

Exact location Chatfield Reservoir

Habitat plains recreation and flood-control reservoir Other observers Mark Holmgren, Jack Reddall

Optical equipment 15-60x telescope

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS Additional notes and sketch on reverse side.

AN ACCOMPANYING SKETCH OR PHOTOGRAPH CAN BE AN EXCELLENT FURTHER DOCUMENTATION

Bill: General appearance of bill was quite large and quite pale.

Upper mandible was light straw yellow except for dark gray on the proximal half of the culmen. The yellow distal half of the culmen was distinctive and very noticeable. Lower mandible light straw yellow with grayish cast (especially toward the base of the bill). It appeared that the culmen was straight, with a slight downward slope at the tip, a feature observable only under careful scrutiny at the closest range the bird was observed. Other specific shape of features of the bill could not be determined with certainty (except for an angle on the lower mandible). Tip of upper mandible appeared to slightly overhang the lower mandible. Head and bill consistently tilted upward at about a 20° angle.

Overall appearance of bird: a large, stocky, pale loon, with a large, pale bill carried upward, a pale face and extensive white markings on upperparts. Although Common Loons were on the lake, the Yellow-billed Loon was not seen with any of them; the only bird I saw it in direct comparison with was an Arctic Loon; the Yellow-billed was at least 20% larger than the Arctic Loon.

Elimination of Common Loon:

The identification of this bird as a Yellow-billed Loon was based upon the features discussed by Binford and Remsen [Western Birds 5: 111-126, 1974 - Identification of the Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*).]

The most important mark according to Binford and Remsen is the pale distal half of the culmen (culmen all dark in Common). The yellow distal portion of the culmen was very apparent, and the all-dark culmen was observed in the Common Loons on the lake.

Other useful characteristics:

mostly straight culmen (usually more decurved in Common). Other specific bill shape features could not be determined.

conspicuously thick neck (less so in Common).

upward tilting of head and bill (rarely in Common).

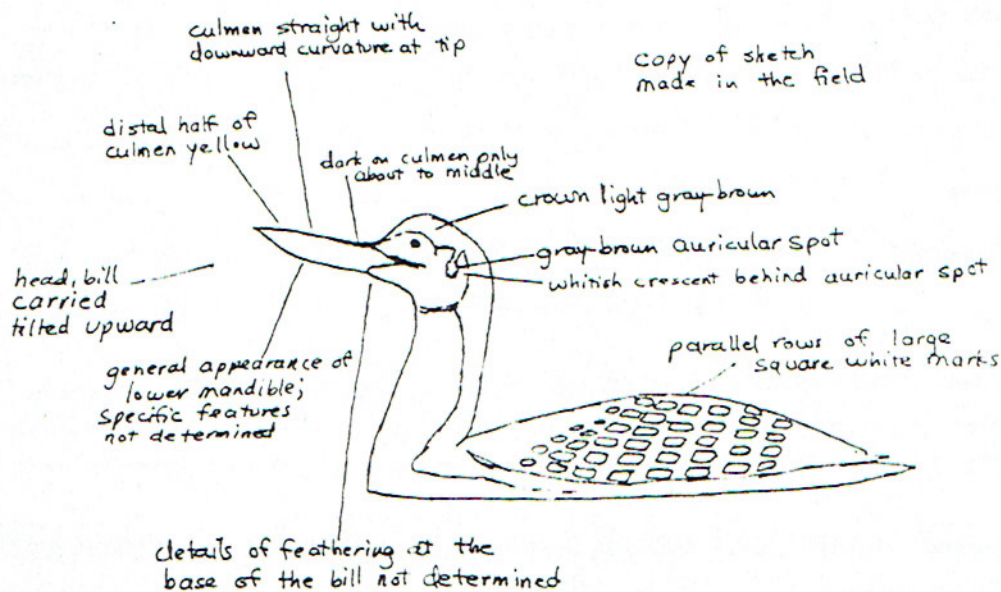
white face, with paleness extending above eye (face, esp. auricular area, usually darker and paleness not extending as far upward in Common).

well-defined auricular patch (lacking in Common).

Cross-banded mantle due to parallel lines of square pale marks (back pattern more scalloped, less ~~+~~ cross-banded in Common).

Features mentioned by Binford and Remsen we were unable to determine: specific bill shape features, chin feathering, eye size

Additionally, it appeared to me that there was a difference in head shape between the Yellow-billed Loon and the Common Loons. Both had a prominently pointed forehead, but the occiput (rear crown) appeared to be also rather pointed in the Common Loons but more rounded in the Yellow-billed Loon.



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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD ☒UNUSUAL RECORD ☐

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

Species: Yellow-billed LoonGavia adamsii

(Vernacular Name)

(Scientific Name)

Date(s): 19 December 1981Number of birds seen: OneSex: ?

Plumage: _____

Locality: Chatfield Reservoir

Elevation: _____

Nearest town: _____

County: Douglas-JeffersonTime(s) observed: 1200-1400Duration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): almost continuously for 4 hours

Other observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):

Jack ReddallMark Holmgren

Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers)

Larry Halsey

Light conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light):

no sun due to high overcast (but indirect light from sun behind observer's back); no heat wavesOptical equipment used (e.g. power, types): 15-60x telescopeDistance, and how measured: minimum estimated 100-150 yards

If photographed, type of equipment and film: _____

Who else photographed the bird? _____

Describe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying):

Sometimes sat on the water for long periods without any activity; at other times made numerous dives, which were very long (2 timed at 48 and 60 sec.); bird usually reappeared very near where it went down; sometimes swam rapidly across the surface.

Describe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observe in the field:

Head and neck: prominent, high forehead with a sloping rear crown; neck long and very thick; crown and nape light gray-brown, becoming darker brown on the back of the neck, and solid dark brown projecting forward at the base of the neck; face mostly whitish with dark eye completely within white area; white area behind eye, and a small, dark auricular spot and an ascending white wedge or crescent behind the spot; throat and front of neck white, with a pale brown chin strap; pale-dark demarcation on neck quite strong but much fuzzier and much less conspicuous on the face.

Description (continued):

Upperparts: anterior part of back grayish (lighter than neck), becoming darker (more blackish), posteriorly; wings and ~~lower~~^{upper} back with parallel rows of quite large, square white marks (very noticeable at a great distance).

Underparts: white; pale brown chinstrap; flanks pale gray (darker at the bend of the wing).

Description of bill and field sketch on accompanying page.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

None

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird:
plains recreation reservoir

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

See accompanying page.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

Have seen many Common Loons in Colorado and California; a few Red-throated and Arctic Loons in Colorado and many in California; never have seen Yellow-billed Loon before.

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: Binford, L. C. and J. V. Remsen. 1974. Identification of the yellow-billed Loon (Gavia adamsii). Western Birds 5: 111-126.

b) after observation: Same.

This report was written from reports made during X, after observation from memory
Date and time report was written: 7 February 1982 (from CBC rare bird report written 1 January 1982)

Reporting observer: Robert Andrews Signature: Robert Andrews

Address: 3260 W. 14th Ave., #144, Denver, Colorado 80204

All reports will be maintained permanently at the address below:

Return to:

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