

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

1-95-3

Accepted (7-1)

YELLOW-BILLED LOON

Gavia adamsii

Location: Pueblo Reservoir, Pueblo; Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: December 17, 1994 through March 11, 1995

Setting:

Four of us spotted this bird on the Pueblo Reservoir Christmas Bird Count. We first saw it at a great distance about 11:30 a.m. Then we saw it off and on for the rest of the afternoon. We had great light and calm conditions and got as close as 150 yards when we looked down on it from the bluff. We watched it for over an hour with scopes (including Questar) and binoculars. I observed this bird on nine more occasions, sometimes at a distance of 50 yards; always with a scope. I discovered a second Yellow-billed Loon on January 8, 1995. The two loons often cruised the lake together for the next five weeks. This bird spent a lot of time in close company with a smaller Common Loon on the first day. It mostly floated calmly on the surface, but it fed occasionally by diving for rather long periods. After that it was usually in close company with the second Yellow-billed Loon.

Description:

The bird was about 2 1/2+ feet long. It was a juvenile in first winter plumage. It was a noticeably large and light-colored loon, even at a distance. Compared to the Common Loon it was about 4-6" longer, clearly wider-bodied from the back, and proportionately longer- and thicker-necked. It floated nearly a "head higher" than the smaller Common Loon. It had a large, blocky head; double-peaked and bulging over the eye, like a Common Loon.

It held its head and bill up-tilted about 10 degrees (compared to the level-headed Common). Compared to the Common Loon it was much lighter, being grey-brown vs bluish-black, on the back. It had a stouter, up-turned bill. The bill shape showed a slightly curved culmen, much straighter above than the Common loon, and a noticeably tipped-up lower mandible with a strong gonydial angle. The bill color was pale: rather bright yellow distally, yellow-grey basally and with a darker ridge at the base of the upper mandible about as far out as the nostril.

The eye was proportionately quite small, dark, and placed in the middle of the pale whitish face. There was white in front of and above the eye. The crown and nape were pale grey (paler than on Common Loon). This darker grey also appeared above the eye and as a distinct patch behind the eye on the ear coverts. The foreparts and fore-neck were white. The back was medium brownish-grey with distinct, broad, white tips to the scapulars creating distinct whitish rows. The sides were light grey but usually submerged. The rear-parts were blackish. As the bird aged it became distinctly scruffy looking. The white edges to the scapulars wore off, giving the bird a ragged, darker appearance. By March 11 a ghost of a neck band seemed to be appearing.

Similar Species:

The Common Loon is darker, smaller and with a smaller head and shorter, thinner neck. The bill is grey, 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. We had the advantage of side-by-side comparison of this bird with a Common Loon.

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 twice before in Colorado (also at Pueblo Reservoir).

This report was prepared from memory and notes made at the time of observation.

Mark Janos
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Mark Janos

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD

UNUSUAL RECORD

☒ First spring record
for the Pueblo

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

Species: Yellow-billed Loon
(Vernacular Name)Gavia adamsii
(Scientific Name)Date(s): March 2, 4, 21, 24, 25, 31, April 2, 3, 22, 26 May 11, 1995Number of birds seen: one Sex: unknown Plumage: immatureLocality: Pueblo Reservoir near North Shore Marina Elevation: _____Nearest town: Pueblo West County: PuebloTime(s) observed: various timesDuration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): 170 minutes total from 3/25/11/1995

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

David Ely and John Bowser on 3/25.Mark Janos on 4/12.Peter Ginsburg of CH on 4/13.

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

Mark Janos (finder) 10 Sedum Court Pueblo, Colorado 81001 719-544-5002one bird 12/17-1/7 1994-95.two birds 1/8-5/13, 1995 also Jon Dunn of Ohio on 4/11.

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

excellentOptical equipment used (e.g. power, types): 10X40 Bausch & Lomb Binoculars. 15-60X BEL SpDistance, and how measured: 30 to 40 yards.If photographed, type of equipment and film: not photographed.Who else photographed the bird? no one.

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

The bird was seen on the water floating. The bird was preening several times. The bird did not dive when it was watching it.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 observed in the field: The size was about 34 inches. The shape was loon shaped. The plumage was an immature because of the lighter color back, older birds have darker backs. The color pattern is as follows: yellow bill, dark eyes, white front, and when the bird was preening the underneath was all white. The head from the bill to the nape was dark brown. The brown went above both eyes. The face was whitish with two small brown dots behind one eye and one faint brown dot behind the other eye. The both sides of the neck were lighter brown than the color on the

Description (continued): head. From the nape to the start of the back was dark brown the same color as the head. The back was lightish brown with whitish lines going through the back. The tail was also light brown. The flaps were also light brown. The feet were pinkish when it perched. Details of the bill was upturned and thick. The wings and tail was typical loon shape. I identified the bird by its yellow upturned bill and large size. Also by its loon shape.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): no sounds heard.

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

The bird was observed on a large man-made reservoir in Southeastern Colorado.

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

Common Loon: dark bill, back is darker, and the size is smaller.

Red-throated Loon: size much smaller and thinner bill.

Pacific Loon: dark bill, gray head and nape and much smaller.

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

Yellow-billed Loon: 1 previous in Colorado in 1992 at Pueblo Reservoir.

Red-throated Loon: 6 in Colorado. 3 Pueblo Reservoir, 1 Lake Henry, 1 Chatfield Lake Beckwith. Also many in California.

Pacific Loon many in CO each fall since 1989. Common Loon many in CO, CA, ND
List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: National Geographic Society's Birds of NA.

b) after observation: Birds of Europe

This report was written from reports made during X, after observation _____ from memory _____

Date and time report was written: 2:25 PM March 2, 1995

Reporting observer: Brandon K. Percival Signature: Brandon K. Percival

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