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COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

RED-THROATED LOONGavia stellata

Location: Cherry Creek Reservoir; Cherry Creek S.R.A.; Arapahoe County, Colorado

Date: November 14, 15, 1992

Setting:

I found this bird about 9:20 a.m. and watched it with my scope (Kowa 20-60X) until 10:15 a.m. I also observed it at even closer range on the afternoon of the 14th for about 1/2 hour and in the morning and afternoon of November 15 as well. In all observed the bird for about 1 1/2 hours at distances of 200 yards to 1/2 mile. The light was excellent and the wind conditions were quite calm. Viewing was excellent. The Red-throated Loon alternated between bouts of active feeding, when it would be under water for 90% of the time, and periods when it loafed along the surface, turning and preening, and generally showing off its plumage.

Description:

The bird was about 24" long, a noticeably small and slender loon. The most marked feature, which struck me when I first saw it in binoculars, and which it never abandoned, was its habit of holding its bill tipped up at about a 10 degree angle. I never observed it in any other disposition. It seemed clearly smaller than a Common Loon (which were also present in the vicinity), with a proportionately smaller and rounder head, more slender neck and thinner bill. The smallish head was smoothly rounded in profile without the heavy angular or blocky look of the Common Loon. The crown, side of the head, face, and back and sides of the neck were an even, light silvery grey. This color was lighter than the darker, grey-brown, vaguely mottled, back. The chin was white, as was the lower neck and breast. The sides of the fore-neck, the lower face and the throat were duskier and blended in gradually into the white chin and lower neck. (The lightest part of the bird was the white chin and the lower neck and breast). There was a obscurely lighter area behind and below the eye. The border between the silvery-grey neck and face, and the white foreneck, chin and throat was even, blended and smoothly-transitioned, without the distinctive darker border of the Pacific Loon. The bill was very slender, not terribly long, and very sharply pointed. It had a straight upper edge to the upper mandible and a two-level, angled-up lower mandible. The bill's size (small and needle-like), shape (up-turned below, straight above) and position (held tipped-up about 10 degrees at all times) were very distinctive.

Similar Species:

The Common Loon is darker, larger and with a larger, blockier head. The bill is heavier, more dagger-like with a curved culmen, and is held horizontally, not up. The Yellow-billed Loon is much bigger, with a large, pale, up-turned bill. It has a darker, not lighter, area behind the eye and shows rows of spots on the back. The Pacific Loon has a straight, horizontally-held bill, a less mottled face and neck and a distinct blackish border between the dark rear- and light fore-neck.

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 and in March 1992 in the Seattle, Washington area. I have seen Yellow-billed Loons twice in Colorado.

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

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001

