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RARE BIRD REPORT--SIGHT RECORD

REPORT FILED BY: Alan E. Versaw
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Red 4/20/00

SPECIES: Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*)

DATE(S): June 6, 2000

OF BIRDS SEEN: 1 SEX: unk PLUMAGE: alternate (breeding)

LAT/LONG: 12 ELEVATION: ~6200 ft.

TIME OF DAY: 0845 - 0915 LOCALITY: Ramah State Wildlife Area

NEAREST TOWN: midway between Calhan and Ramah COUNTY: El Paso

DURATION OF OBSERVATION: 30 minutes

OTHER OBSERVERS: none at same time (Donna Supinger reported the bird on 06/05/00)

LIGHT CONDITIONS: outstanding, full daylight, but still fairly low angle

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: Bushnell Spacemaster scope, Bushnell 8 X 42 Natureviews

DISTANCE: 60 - 80 yards and up

PHOTO DATA: none, too distant for a good frame

BIRD BEHAVIOR: The bird was diving, calling occasionally, and loafing on the water surface. Twice the bird stretched up and flapped its wings in typical loon fashion (making about a 70-degree angle to the water)

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: Medium gray head, even all over. Somewhat brownish red triangle in throat. I saw this mark twice in good light—not a terribly bright red, but a warm red and markedly different from the gray on either side and the white below. Abrupt line between throat patch and white of breast. Tops of wings were uniformly dark. References sometimes describe the back color as dark brown. I cannot confirm this based on this sighting, but the back was darker than the head. Uniformly dark on top of wings. Whitish belly showed when the bird stretched up. Fine dark and light alternating streaks on back of neck. Red eye. The head was generally held high, even though the neck seemed somewhat retracted most of the time the bird was loafing. Narrow bill (for a loon) was held somewhat above the horizontal plane.

SONG AND/OR CALL: The bird called occasionally (maybe 6 or 8 times during the entire half hour that I watched), though never with great gusto. Vaguely like the call of a Common Loon, but not the tremolo. The call is otherwise difficult to describe, but it certainly was not the quacking call recorded on the Peterson Western Bird Songs CD.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Moderate sized, and relatively shallow, prairie reservoir. Dam on one end, marshy area on the other. For the most part, the bird stayed toward the center of the reservoir. Reservoir has fairly clear water.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILAR SPECIES: Pacific Loon - throat patch should be very dark (and not at all red), with striping on side of neck rather than back. Also, the PALO has patches of lighter color on top of wings. Common and Yellow-billed Loon eliminated by red throat patch, slender bill, stripes up back of neck, smooth grayish color of head.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR BIRDS: The Red-throated Loon is a life bird for me. I've seen several Common Loons in both basic and alternate plumage, Yellow-billed and Pacific Loons in basic plumage only.

REFERENCES CONSULTED: Natl Geo 3rd edition (in field), Peterson Western Birds 3rd edition (at home), Peterson Western Bird Songs CD (at home), various web pages devoted to Red-throated Loons on breaks at work during the day (there are a surprising number of these web pages out there—try doing a search on Red-throated Loon sometime).

DATE OF REPORT: 06/06/2000

SIGNATURE: