

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

Submitted to Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC)

**IORC RECORD
NUMBER:**

This form submitted as supporting documentation of (check all that apply):

2017-049

Unusual species; ___ Unusual date; ___ Unusual number;
___ Unusual plumage; ___ Unusual breeding record; ___ Christmas Count record; ___ Spring Count record;
___ Breeding Census record; ___ Other: _____

1. **SPECIES:** Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)
2. **Number of birds** 1 **Age/sex/plumage:** adult, non-breeding plumage
3. **Date(s):** November 4, 2017
4. **Location (include county):** Thompson Lake, Emiquon Preserve, Fulton County, Illinois
5. **Observers:** Mike Ingram

Documenter: Your name: Mike Ingram

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Others agreeing with identification: n/a

Observers NOT agreeing with identification: n/a

6. **Description of bird, including size; shape; proportions; details of both color and patterns on head, back, chin, throat, breast, flanks, undertail, wings, and tail, etc.; coloration of soft parts (bill, eye, legs and feet). Include only details actually seen in the field:** Large diving bird SE of the observation deck at The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve. I became aware of it after seeing several Common Loons, and this one appeared smaller and more graceful. Its overall length appeared shorter than a Common Loon, and the body appeared much more humped in shape, whereas Common Loons seem long. The back and tail were dark gray, bordering on black, as was the backside of the neck, nape, top of the head and onto the face above and including the feathers around the eye. I did not notice any feather patterns on the dark back. The face of the bird had white below the eye, and the white color extended up behind it - slightly reminiscent of a Canada Goose - before extending to the bill and then onto the throat and breast. The only color I noticed on the bill was gray. The eye was dark. I did not notice an eye ring, and at no time did I notice white feathering above or to the level of the eye. The contrast of the side of the neck area was abrupt and smooth between black and white from the back of the neck to the throat and breast and to the waterline. There was no hint of any white barring on the dark part of the neck and no raggedness at all regarding the transition of color between the breast/throat and neck/nape/flanks. The bird rested with its head slightly higher in comparison to the nearby Common Loons, and this important area for ID was relatively easily seen. The shape of the head was also interesting, as the bird did not have a steep forehead from the bill to the top of the head where it formed a peak. It was simply a more evenly-rounded, elongated shape from front to back, and I observed this both at rest and while the bird was in an actively diving state. It had a large bill but not a thick, huge bill. In short, the head and bill seemed proportionate with no obvious outstanding features. I did not see any underparts or undersides of the wings or tail as I never saw it fly. I only observed it on the water and diving/reemerging.

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Species: Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) **Date seen** 11-4-17 **Documenter:** Mike Ingram

7. **Description of behavior:** Floating on the water surface and diving.
8. **Description of vocalizations:** None heard.
9. **Description of immediate and surrounding habitat(s):** Relatively large Illinois River backwater lake(s) with some marshy shallow water areas and shoreline.
10. **Viewing conditions:**

Optical equipment used for observation (type, power): Vortex Razor HD spotting scope, 85mm. 20x60 zoom.

Distance/how measured? Estimated at approximately 1000 feet.

Time(s) of observation: Approximately 8:45 AM **Total time of observation:** Off and on for around 90 minutes, but it was easy to lose it for several minutes at a time as it dove a lot and swam underwater for impressive distances and duration.

Weather (including regional or national weather patterns if relevant)/ sky conditions/ relative position of the sun: Total overcast with moderate to heavy fog at times with occasional light drizzle.
11. **Previous experience with this species and similar species:** I observed and reported two PALO in 2012 on the Illinois River in Peoria County that was not accepted. I observed one at Thompson Lake with another observer that I did not submit, but I believe it was submitted and accepted, but I am not positive. I think this was 2015. I see Common Loons regularly in spring and fall migration in central Illinois, mainly on the Illinois River and its associated backwater lakes. I have not seen any other loon species.
12. **Please eliminate other similar species and/or hybrids (use additional paper, if necessary):** Common Loons appear much longer than this bird did and also appear grayer. I believe Common Loons show a bit of an eye ring. All these things I noted on obvious Common Loons seen that morning on the lake. Also, the Common Loon seems to have a particularly large bill and head that usually appears blocky with a pronounced hump on the top of the head between the bill and the eye, resulting in a steep forehead. Common Loons also have longer and thicker bills. I think its overall size eliminates Yellow-billed Loon, and I did not notice an area of white feathering towards the tail area on the flanks that might indicate an Arctic Loon, and believe me, I looked! I could not note a thin, dark "chin-strap" on this bird, but I don't think that field mark would be easily noted at that angle and distance. I have not seen a Red-throated Loon, but from what I studied in assorted field guides, the RTLO has an area of white on the face that includes the eye that the reported bird lacked and it appeared darker than RTLO in all aspects, nor did it rest with a lifted bill that RTLO is said to do, as the reported bird rested with a more or less level bill. There have been several Western Grebes on this body of water recently (which I have seen) but the reported bird lacked the long snake-like neck and the green-yellow bill. It also appeared much larger and longer than a relatively nearby Red-necked Grebe, which I also observed for a time and was able to compare. It was much darker than a female or juvenile Red-breasted Merganser would appear. There were numerous Double-crested Cormorants on the water, but they have orange bills and are darker and larger. I don't think I could eliminate any unusual hybrids other than to say it seemed pretty much like a typical adult Pacific Loon in basic plumage.

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13. Where photos obtained? No. **If so, by whom?** n/a **Attached?** n/a

14. Books & illustrations consulted, and advice received. How did these influence this description?

They mainly supported my observations. Immediately I believed this was not a Common Loon, but I wanted to check the appearance of Arctic Loon and Red-throated Loon and eliminate those. For this I consulted my Kaufman and Sibley field guides in my car.

15. How long after the observation were field notes recorded? I did not physically record field notes.

16. How long after observation was this form completed? Approximately 80 hours.

17. Additional remarks: Although it was dark and sometimes rainy with light to heavy fog, important details were capable of being seen and differences with the Common Loons were also possible to be recognized, at least up to a point when the heavier fog obscured every detail. I did not attempt photos due to the distance, weather conditions and my lack of sufficient telephoto camera lenses, I highly doubted they would have proven useful for this report. Thank you for the opportunity to report on this bird.

Signed: Mike Ingram

Date: November 7, 2017

FORM REVISED April 2015