

2-1995

Sighting of Yellow-billed Loon in Utah

On this day, February 19, 1995, I observed a yellow-billed loon in the Utah portion of Wahweep Bay, Lake Powell.

I drove to the north end of the Wahweep Marina at sunrise and parked at the middle parking area that is north of a spot signed as the Coves. I estimate the time was about 8:15 am. The sky was clear and the sun was to my right at about a 45 degree angle from my line of sight looking straight across the bay to where the bird was. There was a slight chop on the water and I estimate the temperature was in the 50s (F).

While scoping from the north to the south using my Kowa TSN-4 spotting scope, I sighted what I initially thought was a common loon almost straight across the bay from my position. I estimate the bird was 7/8 of the way across the bay; approximately a mile away, perhaps less. I "zoomed" in on it with the variable powered lens I have on the scope (20-60 power). What I saw very distinctly was a large loon with a light colored bill. I have seen both breeding plumaged and wintering yellow-billed loons before. I would have to say that, from that distance, I did not think the bill was yellow. It was definitely entirely light colored.

The second thing I noticed was the dark "ear spot" behind the eye. This was not always obvious due to the position of the head at times and the long distance. The face was very light colored and only when the bird's head faced away from me did I notice a thin dark line running along the dorsal side of the neck to a dark top of the head. The back was dark with light spots running in rows across the back.

After noting these field marks for about 10 minutes I also realized the bird always held the bill up at an angle, like a red-throated loon. The large size of the bill and its light color were always obvious.

I observed the bird for approximately 15 minutes. It never dove while I watched it and was constantly changing its course and turning its head, affording me good views in spite of the distance. I did not have a field guide with me but I checked the Peterson Guide that was for sale at the Glen Canyon Dam visitor center which confirmed it for me. I notified the Utah birding hotline after I arrived home that night. Hopefully, other birders will confirm this sighting, which according to my references, is a Utah first. (I have since learned a yellow-billed loon was seen at about this same period last year.)

If you desire additional information please contact me at; 403 Beverly Way, Tolleson, AZ, 85353, telephone (602) 936-7150.

Bill Grossi

2-1995

Ella Sorensen
3868 Marsha Drive
West Valley City, UT 84120

February 23, 1995

Dear Ms. Sorenson:

Enclosed is a report of a yellow-billed loon sighting I made recently while visiting the Page Arizona area. I hope it is of sufficient quality to cite in any future bird lists and annotated bibliography for Utah. I am not sure if it is appropriate to send this to you but I could not find an address to send it to in Utah Birds: A Revised Checklist (1985). I found your address in the series you wrote and published in Birding a few years ago.

I did not photograph or draw the bird because I know what it is (or was) and hope to get the bird confirmed by others. If you wish to communicate with me concerning this sighting please feel free to contact me at: 403 Beverly Way, Tolleson, AZ, 85353, (602) 936-7150.

Sincerely,
Big Bossi