

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
2459 Hammertown Road
Narvon, Pennsylvania 17555-9726

28 June 1995

Jonathan Heller
194 Newcomer Road
Mount Joy, PA 17552

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for submitting details on the Pacific Loon you saw near Marietta, Lancaster County on 30 October 1993 to P.O.R.C. After careful review, we regret that we are unable to accept this record. This was a tough vote for the committee and the record went a full two rounds before a decision was reached. Most committee members felt that the description was adequate except that no mention was made of the presence or absence of a flank patch, a noticeable field mark for separating Pacific and Arctic Loons. After much discussion, it was agreed that the record would be accepted as Arctic/Pacific Loon.

We hope that you continue to send detailed documentation on any rare birds you find in the future.

Sincerely,

Nick Pulcinella
Chairman

Record # 002a-01-1993

02A-01-1993

Jonathan Heller
194 Newcomer Road
Mount Joy, PA 17552

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) in Lancaster County

by Jonathan Heller

On 30 October 1993, I discovered a Pacific Loon on the Susquehanna River at Marietta. I first found the loon at about 1705 hours and studied it until 1745 hours, viewing it from the Marietta Boat Club boat launch. Upon arriving at the river, I had noticed a flock of approximately 25 Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) floating just out from the boat launch in the middle of the river. Initially, I watched them from the car through my binoculars (8.5 X 44 Swift Audubon binoculars). As I watched the loons, there was a steady rain falling with winds out of the northeast at 10-15 MPH. Although it had rained most of the day, the wind did not pick up until just past noon.

After a while, I noticed a loon that appeared to be smaller than the Common Loons; and directing my attention to this bird, I noticed that its bill was much shorter and thinner than those on the nearby Common Loons. Also, the bird was more slender in shape with a thinner neck and a smaller, less "blocky" head. After taking note of these details, I got out in the rain and set up my spotting scope (15-45 zoom Bushnell). At nearly the same time, the birds started to drift down river and closer to the boat launch. At its closest point, the bird was approximately 200 yards offshore; and it was in close proximity to the Common Loons about 90% of the time. During this time, I studied the bird closely and made the following observations. First, the bill was noticeably shorter and more slender than those on the Common Loons. Also, it was held horizontally, eliminating the possibility of a Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*). The dark crown extended down over the side of the head to cover the eye. I saw no white above or in front of the eye. This was quite unlike the Common Loons whose eyes were noticeably surrounded by white. When the bird turned to face me, I noticed a distinct "chinstrap" extending across the lower part of the throat. After this observation, I began to seriously consider the possibility of a Pacific Loon.

Continuing the description, the whitish color on the throat extended up onto the side of the head. From the chinstrap on down, the dark on the back of the neck was sharply divided from the white on the front of the neck. This division or demarcation was noticeably sharper and stronger than the demarcation on the Common Loons. Also, the demarcation went straight down the neck, differing in this respect from the Common Loons whose demarcations appeared ragged and uneven. I did not notice any pale markings on the dark back, and this would seem to indicate an adult. Finally, I would like to make a note about the bird's feeding behavior. During my observation of the bird, it fed actively, diving on many occasions. When it dived it did not

sink into the water like many Common Loons. This bird dived more rapidly, and appeared to lunge into the water.

Early the following morning (Sunday, 31 October 1993), Jerry Book and Tom Garner observed a "short-billed" loon with this same feeding behavior (dived 5-7 times). Both observers noted that this bird's bill was substantially and noticeably shorter than a Common Loon's bill (19 were present). One of the observers (Tom Garner) thought the bird was shaped differently than the Common Loons. Unfortunately, the light conditions were not the best at that hour of the day, especially because of the light rain and fog, so it was not possible to see more than a silhouette. Approximately 10 minutes after the initial observation, the Common Loons began to take flight and the loon in question departed with them.

My experience with the Pacific Loon is limited to two birds. The first was at Manasquan Inlet, New Jersey; and the second was at Erie, Pennsylvania. I have extensive experience with both Common and Red-throated Loons.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 2 of 2

Species: Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

Date of Sighting: 30 October 1993 to 30 October 1993

Location: MARIETTA

County: LANCASTER

Observer(s): Jonathan Heller

Date of Submission: 1993

Submitted by: Jonathan Heller

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V | | | Abstain |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|---------|
| | | | | | A | B | C | |
| F. Haas | | | X | | | | | |
| N. Pulcinella | | | X | | | | | |
| E. Kwater | | | | X* | | | | |
| R. Ickes | | | X | | | | | |
| G. McWilliams | | | | X* | | | | |
| P. Schwalbe | | | X | | | | | |
| J. Skinner | | | X | | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 5 | 2 | | | | |
| DECISION | | | | X* | | | | |

Comments: *The dissenters accepted it as Arctic/Pacific.*

Signature (Secretary):

F. C. Haas

Date:

3-31-95

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

Date of Sighting: 30 October 1993 to 30 October 1993

Location: MARIETTA

County: LANCASTER

Observer(s): Jonathan Heller

Date of Submission: 1993

Submitted by: Jonathan Heller

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V | | | Abstain |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|---------|
| | | | | | A | B | C | |
| F. Haas | | | X | | | | | |
| N. Pulcinella | | | X | | | | | |
| E. Kwater | | | | X | | | | |
| R. Ickes | | | X | | | | | |
| G. McWilliams | | | | | | | | |
| P. Schwalbe | | | X | | | | | |
| J. Skinner | | | X | | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 5 | 2 | | | | |
| DECISION | | | | | | | | |

Comments:

Send for second round.

Signature (Secretary):

J. C. Haas

Date:

9-25-94