

Pacific Loon

Gavia pacifica

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Walnut Creek access, Erie Co., Pa.

Date: Nov. 6, 2018

Time: 8:15 AM

Weather: Mostly cloudy, wind S to 25 mph, temp. 53 F

Viewing distance: about 150 to 200 yards offshore

Optics: Kowa spotting scope at 30X

Details: I was conducting my waterbird count when five Common Loons swam past me moving from west to east about 150 to 200 yards offshore. They were actively feeding as they continued to move east. Suddenly just ahead of them a Pacific Loon appeared and was also actively feeding. At one point it was within a few feet of a Common Loon so I could get a direct comparison. The Pacific never stayed above the surface for long and every time it surfaced it would drift farther east of me and eventually I could not relocate it. At least a couple of the Common Loons also could not be seen in the area. A little farther offshore was an immature Red-throated Loon showing much clean white on the side of the neck and on the face. The Pacific Loon was noticeably smaller than the nearby Common Loons. The bill was small which it held fairly level. The mantle was dark showing fine pale chevrons. The back of the neck was dark near the body becoming a paler gray on the nape and top of head. The face was dark down to and including the eye with a white throat and front of neck. There was a distinctive thin black chin strap. The side of the neck was sharply demarcated black from the pure white front of the neck forming a straight line with no white indentation as in Common Loon. No white flank patch was seen as in Arctic Loon. Unfortunately the loon would not remain above the water long enough for me to get photographs. This is the fifth Pacific Loon I have seen in Erie County. The first was in November of 1992 that I photographed, then I photographed one off Sunset Point during my waterbird count in November 2014. I also photographed two (one in the channel and one in Presque Isle Bay) in December 2015.