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Harrisburg, Dauphin County, PA / May 6, 2007

This was an incredible find for the state and one that I had to see. The bird was announced the evening of 4 May and I arrived the morning of 6 May and it was still present. Many birders were looking at it and shared their experience of the bird's activities.

I watched the bird for at least 45 minutes and it continuously hunted the entire time. I worked its way upriver diving repeatedly. Eventually it was spooked by a drifting boat of fishermen and was out of sight for a while.

When it was on the surface of the water I looked at it through my 20-60 power Leica scope and attempted to take a few photos, which was nearly impossible due to the bird's constant activity. The lighting conditions were also poor; the bird was backlit in the morning sun. I am including one photo taken through my spotting scope. I did manage to obtain about ten seconds of video which is fairly good, but not as close as I'd prefer, and I included two video captures with this description.

Description:

The bird was in breeding plumage (or nearly so and others remarked) allowing easy identification

- The bird was obviously a loon based on build, habits and especially appearance.
- The head was dark, appearing black at a distance, however through the scope I could see it was dark green.
- The dark color extended down the neck. It was interrupted by a white collar of vertical lines, forming an oval shape on both sides of the neck, a different shape compared to the neck patch of a Common Loon which is not oval shaped. It also had a small patch of white stripes just below the chin.
- The back was black with white oval spotting; a typical loon pattern.
- The obvious field mark was of course the yellow bill. The upper mandible was straight and the lower bent upward. This feature made the bill appear upturned, and the bird seemed to hold its head up at times which enhanced this feature. Also the bill was massive, noticeably larger than the bills of the Common Loons that were also on the river.

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-----Original Message-----

From: Chuck Berthoud [mailto:cberthoud@comcast.net]

Sent: Sunday, May 06, 2007 9:18 PM

To: 'Tom Johnson'; nickpulcinella@comcast.net; sharp@acnatsci.org

Cc: 'Cameron Rutt'; Deuane Hoffman

Subject: PORC documentation for YBLO

Documentation for yellow-billed loon sighting, Harrisburg, Dauphin County, May 4, 5 and 6, 2007. This is the first PA record and a life bird for me.

The attached photo is raw and un-cropped. You will get better photos, but I liked how the setting sun turned the translucent bill tip red.

An adult YBLO was found Friday evening, May 4 by Cameron Rutt. By the time it got dark the first night it was in close proximity with an adult common loon and 2 second year COLO lending for nice comparisons. During the day all loons foraged separately. The most common food the YBLO was seen to eat was crayfish. Greg Burgdorf told me he saw YBLO eat a fairly good sized fish. The two adult birds were essentially similar in size. None of the loons were seen flying. Rather they swam upstream and drifted down frequently.

There were four ID points I worked on over three days.

1. The yellow bill was obvious, the adult COLO was all black.
2. the bill shape was asymmetrical in comparison to the more symmetrical COLO
3. YBLO had larger white spots on its back than adult COLO
4. the neck collar tapered at the front and back in YBLO whereas the adult COLO collar was more of a line.

Dave Krueel of eastern PA summed up this event best in a May 5 post to PABIRDS: Somehow, I had always thought (and hoped) that some day I'd be looking at a Yellow-billed Loon in PA. However, I expected that it would be a distant, winter-plumaged bird on a large reservoir in the freezing cold of winter. I never expected to see it in near-breeding plumage while wearing a short-sleeved shirt and so close that I could see the water droplets on its head! A memorable day to say the least. Thanks Cameron.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Yellow-billed Loon (Gavia adamsii)

Date of Sighting: 4 May 2007 to 7 May 2007

Location: DAUPHIN

County : HARRISBURGH

Observer(s): Cameron Rutt, multiple observers

Date of Submission: 2007

Submitted by: C. Rutt, T. Johnson, C. Berthoud, G Malosh, J Horn, M Fialkovich

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson	X							
B. Coulter	X							
E. Witmer	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary)

Date:

12/6/07