





Long-billed Murrelet (*Brachyramphus perdix*)

Lake Nockamixon, Bucks County, PA

December 14, 2007 (I observed the bird 2:15-4:30 PM)

Optics: Swarovski ATS 80HD scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece

I received a call midday that Jason Horn had found a Long-billed Murrelet at Nockamixon. After picking a few people up around Harrisburg, I got to the lake a bit after 2 pm and was able to then observe the murrelet until 4:30, for a total observation time of perhaps 2 hours (the bird disappeared for a bit at one time before popping up quite a ways down the lake). The bird was observed at a distance of more than 150 meters except for a brief period when it came within perhaps 75 meters of the fishing pier before flying off back up the lake.

Initially, I saw a bread loaf-sized, compact, black-and-white bird bobbing on the water. Structurally, it was roughly oval in profile, with points at each end (the short, stubby tail and a medium-length, stout bill). The bird was dark gray above and white below, with a broad white scapular bar separating the dark gray back from the blackish wing. The wing point was just short of the tail at rest. The undertail coverts were white, and fell just short of the black, square-appearing tail tip. A large rear white flank patch extended up into the black lower back. Some grayish flecking was evident on the flanks and chest. As for head patterning, the bird's white throat/ cheeks were separated rather cleanly from the blackish remainder of the head, the dividing line of which ran from the bill back through the eye and down the neck in one clean, elegant line. The eye, embedded in the black area of the face/ head, was large and black, framed by a small white "v" at the back corner of the eye. The bird did not show obvious white eye arcs (even at fairly close range as viewed through high magnification). Faint grayish crescents (2) were present on the back of the head behind the eyes. This feature was hardly noticeable when the bird's neck was tucked in, as seen between dives while it was actively feeding. However, when the neck was extended somewhat, the grayish crescents became substantially more noticeable.

When diving, the murrelet flicked its wings out and quickly took a few halfhearted wing strokes before lurching its head down into the water and submerging. One time the bird emerged with a sizeable minnow that was perhaps 30% of the bird's body length. At rest in between dives, the murrelet's wings drooped into the water and the bird held its head low to the water, giving an impression that the bird was ill or exhausted, something I have witnessed regularly with Dovekies on the East Coast and murrelets/ auklets on the West Coast in similar situations. When the murrelet was not diving regularly, it tucked its wings into its sides and extended its neck, holding its head up in an alert-looking posture.

I saw the murrelet fly for about 20 seconds at one point. In flight, the clean division between black upperparts and white below was evident, and the underwings appeared completely dark. Lighting (poor, but some late afternoon sun low from the southwest) may have precluded an accurate assessment of underwing detail (compounded by distance). The wings were fairly narrow and the bird's body was quite chunky in the

middle and evenly tapered at both ends, reminiscent of a football (clichéd in reference to alcids, but oh-so-apt).

This was a Long-billed Murrelet because of the combination of a broad white scapular bar, a large white flank patch, a clean line division between black head and white throat/cheeks without large white scoops on the neck, and the pale gray markings toward the back of the head. This combination rules out all other small alcids, including the closely related (indeed, previously considered conspecific) Marbled Murrelet, which has obvious white intrusions into the black neck/ nape on each side of the body. I am fully confident in the identification; while this was my first Long-billed Murrelet, I have observed numerous other small alcids in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

These notes were written on Dec. 17, 2007 from extensive field notes and sketches taken in the field while observing the bird (and while discussing it with co-observers Cameron Rutt, Andy McGann, and Jared Derr). I also snapped some diagnostic but poor quality digiscoped photos which I will attach to this written documentation.

Thomas Brodie Johnson 12/17/07

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Long-billed Murrelet Brachyramphus perdix

Date of Sighting: 14 December 2007 to 14 December 2007

County : BUCKS

Location : NOCKAMIXON STATE PARK

Observer(s): Jason Horn, m.obs

Date of Submission: 2007

Submitted by: Jason Horn, T. Johnson, E Crunkleton, G Dewaghe

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

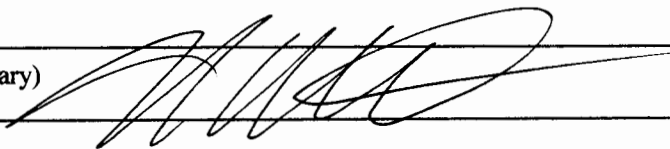
Specimen: No

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: 7/10

Signature (Secretary)



Date: 6/21/08