











Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: north pier at Presque Isle State Park, Erie Co., Pa.

Date: February 14, 2009

Time: 10:20 to 10:35 AM

Weather: Cloudy, light wind, temp. 25 F

Viewing distance: about 50 feet

Optics: Kowa TSN 4 with variable objective lens set at 30 X

Details: A flock of about 100 redpolls were feeding in a European White Birch along the coast guard road at the channel. The flock was very nervous because of the traffic, so they didn't stay put for long before flying off into the woods. After a minute or so when the cars had passed they would fly back to the trees and begin feeding again. One time, all but about five birds flew off into the woods. I was able to scope the five very well as they fed parrot-like on the catkins for several minutes. One female immediately caught my eye, because it was so frosty looking. The mantle was boldly streaked with white. I would say the white streaks were at least equal in width to the dark streaks. The side of the face was blushed with buff and the nape was white with very fine dark streaks. The front of the face was flat and the bill was very short and triangular. This made the forehead appear to be very steep. The typical redpoll patch was on the forehead as was the dark patch on the chin. There were two, and perhaps a partial third, narrow streak down the flanks. The belly and undertail coverts were un-streaked. The rump was unmarked white. The general size and shape of the Hoary Redpoll was similar to the accompanying Common Redpolls, though they had longer bills and shallower foreheads. The pale streaking on the mantle of the Common Redpolls were buffy, not white, and appeared to be about a quarter of the width of the dark streaks. The heavier dark streaking gave their mantles an overall darker look than the Hoary Redpolls mantle. The Common Redpolls had heavier dark streaking on the flanks as well, perhaps twice as thick as the flank streaking on the Hoary Redpoll. The Common Redpolls also had varying amounts of streaking on the undertail coverts and rumps. When the other redpolls came back to join them I was able to look through the flock for more comparison and all were noticeable darker overall and more heavily streaked than the female Hoary Redpoll. The overall pale or frosty appearance, the flat-faced profile, and the stubbier bill stood out most of all in separating it from the Common Redpolls. There were surprisingly few adult male Common Redpolls among the flock. I only saw perhaps three or four altogether.

This is the third Hoary Redpoll I have identified. I have observed thousands of Common Redpolls, which has given me the opportunity to see the many individual variations.

**Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni exilipes*)**

**Age/sex:** unknown, but not an adult male

**Date:** February 15, 2009, intermittently between 8:30 AM-10:00 AM

**Location:** Fry's landing, Presque Isle State Park, Erie County

**Site:** Brush and early successional woods between the main park loop road, burn pile at Fry's landing, and beach 11 parking lot.

**Observer:** Ben Coulter  
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**Habitat:** European White Birch (*Betula pendula*) was the dominant woody vegetation, with a large component of invasive honeysuckle (*Lonicera sp.*) and various small forbs.

**Distance to bird:** Between fifty meters to as close as twenty meters.

**Conditions:** Largely overcast, with occasional sun for brief intervals.

**Optics:** Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica Televid APO, Canon Powershot SX10 IS

**Description:** The bird was a small *Carduelis* finch, similar to Common Redpoll or American Goldfinch, with a plumper body, thick neck, slightly forked tail, and was noticeably paler than the other redpolls.

Head whitish, streaked darker gray, washed with buff on auriculars, and with small reddish cap on crown. Paler whitish collar surrounding the head. There was a dark eyeline extending through the lores to a bib on the chin. Nasal bristles well developed.

Upperparts, including back and scapulars pale and frosty, with slightly darker gray central streaks. Rump very pale whitish, with minimal markings. Underparts white, with thin flank streaking. Tertiaries blackish with thin pale edges. Remiges blackish. Greater secondary coverts dark, with white tips and outer webs creating wingbar. Rectrices blackish, with paler edges. Outermost pairs of rectrices slightly longer than central pair, making tail appear forked. Undertail coverts unstreaked, or at most, with very faint shaft streaks.

Iris dark. The triangular bill was mostly yellowish, and rather short and stubby, though this is likely accentuated by the long nasal feathering. Feet and legs dark.

**Behavior:** The Hoary Redpoll was closely associated with a large flock of at least one hundred Common Redpolls. The birds were feeding on white birch catkins basically the entire period of observation, and were extremely shy and difficult to approach, and vehicular traffic on the road often flushed them. This made documenting the bird exceedingly difficult.

**Supporting Evidence:** see photographs by Ben Coulter.

**Similar species:** Common Redpoll is the main confusion species. The identification of Hoary Redpoll is also complicated by redpolls showing intermediate phenotype between HORE and CORE. This individual showed all the generally accepted marks for Hoary Redpoll, including a thick-necked appearance, frosty rear scapulars, pale nape, only thin streaking on the flanks, very thin streaks or none on the undertail coverts, a more isolated red cap, a short-billed appearance, and fluffy nasal feathering.

**Discussion:** I cannot rule out the possibility of multiple Hoary Redpolls in this flock, as I never was able to scan every single individual before the flock would flush, circle around,

and reposition. All sightings of Hoary appeared to be the same plumage. This is likely the same individual reported by Jerry McWilliams on 2/14/09 at the North Pier.

**Prior experience:** I have extensive prior experience with Common Redpoll, and am very familiar with the identification criteria of Hoary. This was my first unambiguous Hoary Redpoll, although I have seen pale redpolls in the past.

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation – Round One**

Species: Hoary Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*

Date of Sighting: 14 February 2009 to 15 February 2009

County : ERIE

Location : PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams, Ben Coulter

Date of Submission: 2009

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams, Ben Coulter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

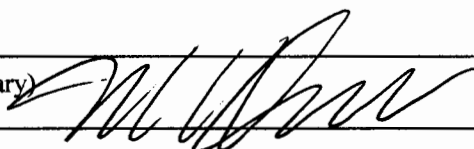
Specimen: No

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							
<del>G. Rutt</del> K. Fryberger	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh		X						
TOTALS	6	1						
DECISION	X							

Comments: *76*

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

*9/24/09*