

In that I hope I have you hooked on getting this book to read, may I add a last personal and unforgettable observation regarding Eastern Kingbirds? On 1 April 1970, along with my long-time birding companion, Norm Chesterfield of Wheatley, Ontario, I stood at the top of Cerro Azul, a hill near Panama City, where, after stepping out of a bus, we gazed down in the valley below us to see a wide swath of Eastern Kingbirds flying north and extending in both directions as far as

the eye could see. This lucky observation had to take place between its crowded, Amazon basin winter home and our open, green areas where it chooses to nest.

This book has no glossy pages, only information-crammed text. I make no apologies for making this review sound more like a eulogy of Steve Hilty's work than a critique. It's excellent and the price is unlike that of other tropical bird books!

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Photo Quiz

by
Bob Curry

Most readers will quickly have identified last issue's quiz waterbird with the stout dagger-like bill as a loon. In addition to the fairly obvious overall impression, only grebes and loons have the feet set so far back on the body. Grebes have much less impressive bills and are more delicately proportioned especially in the head and neck area than is this bird. But which loon is it?

Red-throated Loon is a more finely built bird with a serpentine head and neck. Almost always the bill of Red-throated is more delicate with a straight culmen and a lower mandible which sweeps upward. This shape coupled with a head and bill which are held up at an angle to the horizontal lend it a unique profile

allowing for at least probable identification at great distances over the water. Moreover the white forepart of the throat and neck extend well onto the sides and the crown and nape are pale grey which give the entire head and neck an almost ghostly pale appearance. If all this is not enough, at close range such as our subject bird, the back is finely spotted with white on juvenile and winter plumaged Red-throated Loons.

Great care must be taken if one believes one has a small loon which may be a Pacific/Arctic. Hereafter, I will use the appellation "Pacific", the only one of this species-pair known to occur in Ontario. Some loons — probably juveniles — can appear

remarkably smaller and more delicate than all others in the vicinity (or, worse still, a single bird may appear to be very small). Light feather margins can give juvenile Pacific a scaly appearance like the photo bird. However, the bill of Pacific would be slimmer and less robust than ours with no angle of gonys on the lower mandible although, it must be admitted, there is precious little gonydeal angle on our bird. More importantly the entire head and neck plumage is different from this. There is a smooth, sharp demarcation between the black of the side of the neck and the white foreneck in Pacific — not "bays" of white extending into the dark and at least one "peninsula" of dark penetrating the white foreneck. The black of the sides of the head extend down to include at least the upper half of the eyes so that there is never an eye surrounded by white in Pacific. The overall effect is of a sharp clean crisp appearance in Pacific as opposed to a fuzzier effect in Common Loon. The crown and nape of Pacific Loon is a lovely soft grey and the head seems puffy like that of an aroused cobra. In fact the head profile tends to be more rounded and softer than on Common Loon without the angles fore and aft of a more flattened crown.

So we have a large loon that is quite pale in appearance and has a whitish looking bill. Do we have a Yellow-billed (*Gavia adamsii*)? Before rushing to the nearest telephone let's take a deep breath and check out some details. The whitish-buff margins on the back feathers of Yellow-billed are very broad and the overall effect is of a series of transverse scalloped bars. The colour

of the head and neck is a pale brown with extensive dirty white areas posterior to the eyes and on the sides of the neck. Almost always there is a black smudge or vague spot of dark in the ear coverts set against this lighter ground colour. The head shape of *adamsii* is even more angular than in Common Loon (*G. immer*) with sometimes a kind of raised "bump" at the anterior and posterior ends of the crown. Several bill characteristics are diagnostic in distinguishing the two large loons. Common Loon in winter has a bluish white bill whereas in *adamsii* it is a creamy white. More important, in *adamsii* just the base of the bill may be brownish or blackish with the entire culmen, save for about the basal one quarter, unmarked. In *immer* at least the distal half of the culmen ridge is blackish.

Usually the culmen in *adamsii* is straight and there is a more pronounced angle of gonys although both these features are less developed in young birds. Yellow-billed holds its bill upwards in the manner of Red-throated which accentuates the differences in bill character from *immer*.

As is the case in all similar appearing birds a combination of characters is required to clinch identification. Such a combination leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the quiz bird is a juvenile **Common Loon**. If you wish to read more about loon identification I can recommend two excellent articles which have appeared in *British Birds* (Appleby et al. 1986, Burn and Mather 1974).

Literature cited

Appleby, R.H., S.C. Madge and K. Mullarney. 1986. Identification of divers in immature and winter plumages. *British Birds* 79: 365-391.

Burn, D.M. and J.R. Mather. 1974. The White-billed Diver in Britain. *British Birds* 67: 258-296.

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Editors' Note:

Our next quiz species is a landbird!

