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Incorrect Identification of a Red-throated Loon as a Pacific Loon Based on Bill Shape

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Red Knots that reach the Dry Tortugas would appear less likely to come from the population wintering on the nearby Florida Gulf coast than from the Patagonian population, despite the fact that the Dry Tortugas is well removed from the population's ordinary flyway. Furthermore, according to Harrington et al. (1988), spring migrants from the population wintering on the Florida Gulf coast tend to by-pass New Jersey, where our individual was seen in two successive springs. We speculate that the knot we saw—and others from the Dry Tortugas—is likely to have been a member of the population that winters in Patagonia.

We thank Brian Harrington and Ted Below, both former frequent Tortugas visitors, for supplying unpublished data on marked knots, and them and Henry Stevenson for reviewing our manuscript.

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**INCORRECT IDENTIFICATION OF A RED-THROATED LOON
AS A PACIFIC LOON BASED ON BILL SHAPE**

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On the lower Wakulla River (Wakulla Co.), 14 Dec. 1971, I collected a loon that appeared to fit the description of the Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*). This specimen was placed in the Tall Timbers Research Station collection and is referred to as TTRS 2783. Also in the TTRS collection are a Red-throated Loon (*G. stellata*) taken by Lovett Williams, Jr., on the St. Marks River, 3 Jan. 1957 (TTRS 2827), and one taken from a small lake in Tallahassee on 4 Jan. 1978 (TTRS 3592). The bird taken in 1957 had the upturned bill (culmen) commonly attributed to *G. stellata*, but the other two had bills as straight as a Common Loon's (*G. immer*), but shorter and more slender.

After examining these specimens in October 1990, W. B. Robertson, Jr. and G. E. Woolfenden pointed out that the three specimens appeared to represent a single species.

When the two doubtful specimens (with straight bills) were sent to R. W. Storer at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology for examination, both were pronounced *G. stellata*.

TTRS 2783 had been erroneously referred to as a Pacific ("Arctic") Loon in *American Birds* (Stevenson 1972), the *Florida Field Naturalist* (Kittleson 1976), and the book *Vertebrates of Florida* (Stevenson 1976); it was also alluded to in the *Florida Field Naturalist* (Hopkins and Woolfenden 1977). The removal of this record from the list of Pacific Loons in this state leaves 12 possibly credible records, including the following specimens: skeletons from Lake Worth, 21 Nov. 1959 (USNM 431142, National Museum of Natural History), and the Dry Tortugas, 20 April 1976 (GEW 5024, Archbold Biological Station), and a skin from Indian Rocks Beach, 12 April 1976 (GEW 5000). Sight reports come from Pensacola, winter of 1982-1983 to 20 May 1983 (Ortego 1983, Imhof 1983); near Jacksonville, 26 Dec. 1983 Langridge 1984, (Markgraf and Powell 1984); Wakulla Beach (Wakulla Co.), 15 Dec. 1959 (James and Stevenson 1980); Dry Tortugas, one of two records there (see above; Robertson 1986); Pensacola, 6 June 1986 and 3 May 1987 (Duncan 1988); Santa Rosa Island, 1 June 1988 (Imhof 1988; Duncan 1988), and 18 June 1988 (Jackson 1988); and one at Perdido Bay, 1 Jan. 1986 (Muth 1986). Gaither and Gaither (1968) published a sighting of a supposed Pacific Loon at Shalimar (Okaloosa Co.), 26 June-30 July 1967, but the photograph suggested a Common Loon (*G. immer*) in basic plumage.

Field guides and other references often tend to emphasize bill shape as important to the separation of Pacific and Red-throated loons in the field, stating that the bill of *G. stellata* is "upturned," "upcurved," or "uptilted." There is some question as to whether it is bill shape or bill orientation that is described. An examination of 11 field guides and references revealed partly contradictory or unclear information about "bill" shape, and the shape of each mandible was seldom clarified. Two of the more helpful references were Forbush (1925)—"Bill varies . . . but usually . . . concave at nostrils. . ." (emphasis added), and Palmer (1962), in which a sketch of a "juvenile" Red-throated Loon by R. M. Mengel shows an essentially *straight*, slender bill. Whenever bill shape is the only criterion used in separating these two loons, errors are sure to occur.

Some of the references examined gave other criteria for separating *stellata* from *pacifica* in basic plumage. A plate in Godfrey (1966) showed solidly dark upperparts for the winter adult of *pacifica*, as in the common Loon. A painting in Natl. Geogr. Soc. (1983) showed a conspicuous dark line on each side of the neck, separating the gray dorsal from the whitish ventral sides; also a dark necklace around the throat. Both of the latter features are discussed by Walsh (1988), who added that *pacifica* often has a dark streak across the vent. Probably neither the chinstrap or the vent strap occurs in all Pacific Loons; Roberson (1989) found that 80% of the specimens he examined in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology "showed an obvious chinstrap." Langridge (1984) emphasized the importance of using a variety of field marks in the identification of *pacifica*.

Most authors point out a difference in back pattern in these two loons, the scapulars and feathers on the mantle of *pacifica* having whitish edges that form a scalloped effect and those of *stellata* showing rounded white spots. In general, the Pacific Loon in winter resembles the Common Loon (*G. immer*) except for its smaller size and more slender bill.

I thank Peter Merritt and Bill Robertson for several useful and pertinent comments on my first draft.

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ANOTHER CASE OF BLUE JAY KLEPTOPARASITISM

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Robert Loftin's note on kleptoparasitism in a Florida Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) (1991, Fla. Field Nat. 19: 55) prompts me to report similar behavior in the species from the western edge of its range. Our home in Dickinson, Galveston County, Texas, is situated in mature riparian forest, with large oaks predominating. Blue Jays are abundant and probably the dominant species in the neighborhood. Shortly after we moved there in late 1987, we put up a feeder in the backyard and supplied it with sunflower and mixed seeds. As resident and wintering birds began to visit the food, I noticed on several occasions that a Blue Jay in the dense woodlot next door gave a vocal imitation of a Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), which caused birds already on the feeder to fly off; the jay then flew in,