

**YELLOW-BILLED LOON: FIRST SIGHTING IN OKLAHOMA**

BY JO LOYD AND PATRICIA SEIBERT

At approximately 1330 on 11 December 1988, while studying ducks at Lake Yahola, a city reservoir in Mohawk Park, 6 miles northeast of Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, we noticed a loon unfamiliar to us. Its very light head and pale bill first brought the bird to our attention. The loon was actively feeding in the center of the 425-acre reservoir and for two hours we observed it, at distances ranging from 25 to 150 yards and from several locations along the edge of the lake. We noted extensive white on its face, throat, foreneck and breast. Its cap was quite dark, the nape and hindneck a shade lighter. The back was dark brownish-gray and the scapular feathers had pale edgings, giving the loon a "scalloped" appearance. Around and above the dark eye was a light area and a small darkish patch could be seen behind it. Upper and lower mandibles were yellow except for the basal third of the upper, which was grayish. The head, held at an upward tilt, gave the bill an upturned appearance.

A Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) was feeding nearby, allowing a good comparison of size, shape and coloration between the two birds. Compared to it, the loon we were studying appeared to be larger and more thick-necked. Its yellow bill also contrasted with that of the Common Loon, which was noticeably



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*Numerous observers studied this bird at Lake Yahola in Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, from 11 December 1988 to 6 January 1989. Photo taken by Steve Metz on 20 December 1988.*

darker and smaller.

Identification of the bird as a Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) was made after we had consulted several field guides and other works. Peter Harrison (1985, Seabirds, an identification guide, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, p. 211) wrote: "White-billed Divers [Yellow-billed Loons] in winter months [are] best separated at all ages by white culmen, and distinct pale-headed appearance — an excellent field character visible at considerable range. By comparison Great Northern [Common Loon] usually have a black culmen with darker head and neck markings extending well below level of eye." After studying Harrison's illustrations (plate 6, p. 34) and his text, we believe that the bird we saw was a first-winter Yellow-billed Loon. A description written by Ralph S. Palmer (1962, Handbook of North American birds, Vol. I, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, Conn., pp. 37–38) supplements this conclusion. Palmer stated: "The slightly uptilted bill usually separates it [Yellow-billed Loon] from the Common . . . the white of cheeks a bit more extensive (usually to or slightly above eye)."

That evening we called Jim Hoffman, who on 12 December saw the bird and concurred with our identification, as did John Tomer, Steve Metz and Bob Jennings. The loon was observed on a daily basis by many persons until 20 December 1988 and again reported on 24 December by Terry Mitchell and on 2 and 6 January 1989 by Bob Jennings. John Tomer took definitive photographs on 14 December. Others taken by George Hansen on 20 December 1988 show the Yellow-billed and the Common Loon together, and one by Steve Metz on the same date is shown on the front cover. Photos are filed with the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee.

The Yellow-billed Loon is "primarily [a] Eurasian species . . . and its migration routes are only partially known" (Palmer, 1962, *op. cit.*, p. 38). In North America, the normal winter range for the Yellow-billed Loon is off the Pacific coast, primarily southeast Alaska to British Columbia, with occasional sightings as far south as Baja California (Don Roberson, 1980, Rare birds of the West Coast of North America, Woodcock Publ., Pacific Grove, California). The American Ornithologists' Union (Check-List of North American birds, 6th ed., 1983) indicated the same winter range and referred to casual occurrences in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nevada and New York. There have been a number of recent sightings in the continental United States. According to published reports in American Birds there have been five since 1986: Idaho, March 1986; Illinois, December 1986; Montana, January 1987; Michigan, May 1987; and Minnesota, October 1988.

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## BREEDING STATUS OF THE BLACK-NECKED STILT IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE

BY KENNETH D. SEYFFERT

The first reported nesting of the Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) in the Texas Panhandle was that of A.S. Hawkins (1945, Bird life of the Texas Panhandle, Panhandle Plains Hist. Rev. 8:133–134). On 16 June 1945, he and a man named Thompson found a nest containing four eggs in