

NOTES

A YELLOW-BILLED LOON IN BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

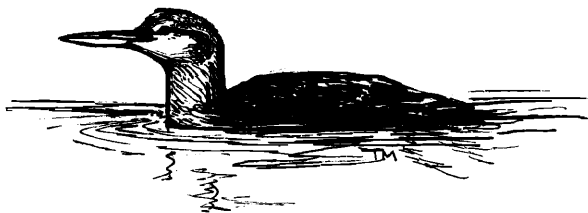
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Late in the afternoon of 30 June 1973 we observed a loon offshore at Pete's El Paraiso approximately 9 miles by road north of San Felipe, Baja California, Mexico. Upon setting up our 20x spotting scope we were amazed to discover that it had a very large, very yellow bill.

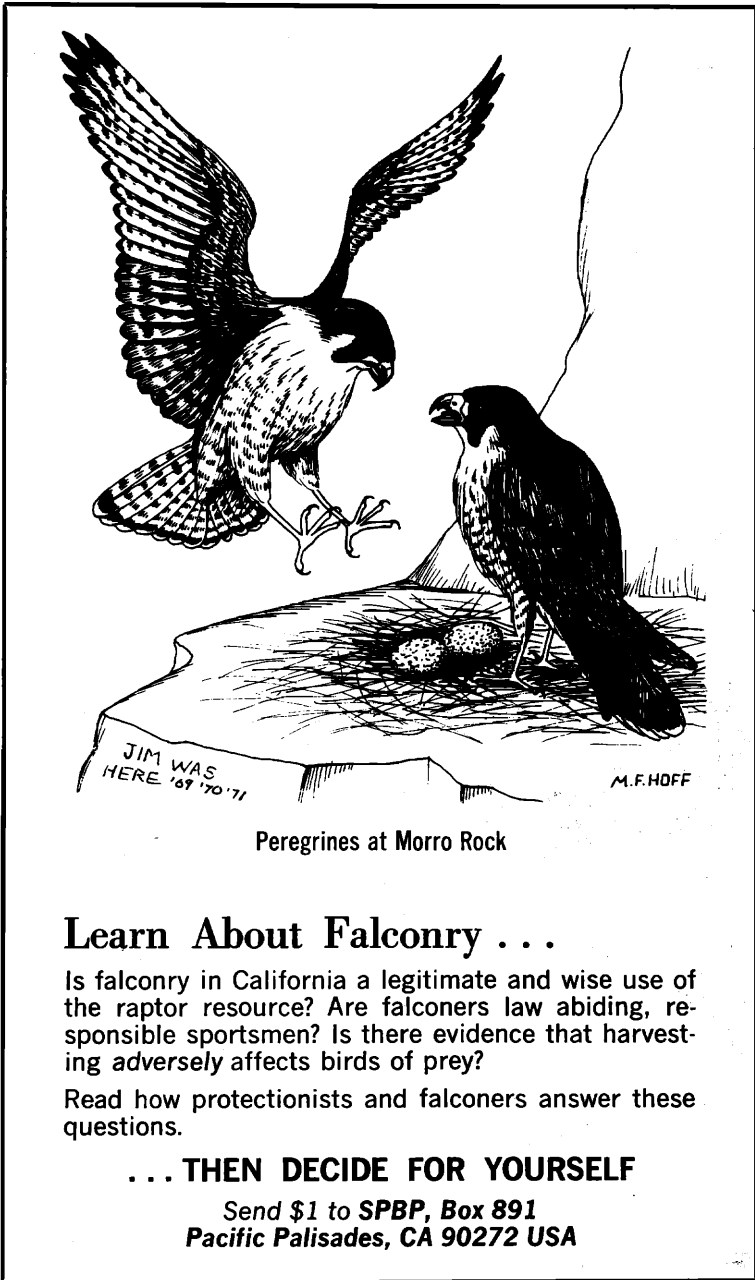
The bill was pale sulphur or butter yellow becoming white at the tip. There were dark brown markings extending approximately a fourth of the total length of the bill from the base and along the gape as well. The gape markings appeared to be on both mandibles. The bill was very long and high at the base. About a third of the way from the base, the lower mandible began to angle up; the bill thus appeared to come to a long attenuated point. The culmen was straight along most of its length angling up slightly at the tip. The bird seemed very large with a disproportionately thick neck. It was assuming a black and white plumage. The head, throat and upperparts were mostly blackish, but some white still remained on the posterior cheek and auricular areas, and the wing coverts and scapulars bore four rows of large white squares. Thus the bird was at least two or more years old.

We feel that we conclusively identified a Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) on the basis of the foregoing description. Unfortunately we were unable to photograph the bird, nor were we able to relocate it on a return trip there the following weekend.

This sighting is remarkable in several respects. It is the southernmost North American record of the species. It is only the second known occurrence in Mexico, the first being a specimen taken in extreme northwestern Baja California (Jehl, Condor 72:376, 1970). This sighting in the warm Sea of Cortes is one of the very few records away from the Pacific. The date is unusual in that summer records are scarce in California, Oregon and Washington. Finally, most records in the United States south of Alaska are of birds in brown plumage.



Sketch by Tim Manolis



Peregrines at Morro Rock

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