

NOTES

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR OF A RED-THROATED LOON

Laurie J. Bryant, Department of Paleontology, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720

L.D. Courtright, Jr., 42 Eastfield Drive, Rolling Hills, California 90274

In the summer of 1978, Courtright observed and photographed a solitary Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) near the mouth of Ballona Creek where it enters the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles County, California. Its remiges were tattered or poorly developed, perhaps due either to some nutritional deficiency or normal molt. A band of dark brown across the lower neck, extending faintly down the breast and belly, indicates that the bird had encountered oil on the water. Possibly related to these factors was the bird's unusual behavior in coming ashore. It swam rapidly toward the shore on the surface of the water and, without using its wings, leaped forward into the air and alighted on the beach.

This bird was first observed swimming on the water surface near shore, rising from the water occasionally and stretching its wings. It then swam rapidly toward the shore, wings tightly folded against the body. When the water became very shallow, it simply launched itself into the air at a low angle to the water. It glided for some 2 m, back hunched, tail spread and depressed, wings folded, feet trailing and toes appressed, and came to a rest with considerable force on its belly on a concrete boat-launching ramp. The loon lay with wings folded but slightly relaxed, the hind limbs flexed so that the tarsus and toes pointed forward. When alarmed by the nearness of the photographer, the loon made its way back into the water, using its feet to push itself along on its belly, and then swam away. At no time did the loon use its wings in flapping flight.

Harle (1952) and Peakall (1953) reported *G. stellata* alighting on and taking off from land, the only species of loon for which this behavior has been reported (Palmer 1962). Neither Harle (*ibid.*) nor Peakall (*ibid.*) illustrated this behavior; Figure 1 is thus the first published illustration of a loon alighting on land. There are no known published reports of loons leaping from water to land as described here, but the Red-throated Loon can leap up from water directly into flight, unlike other loons which require a running start (Terres 1980).

We wish to thank Joseph Morlan for his review and helpful comments.

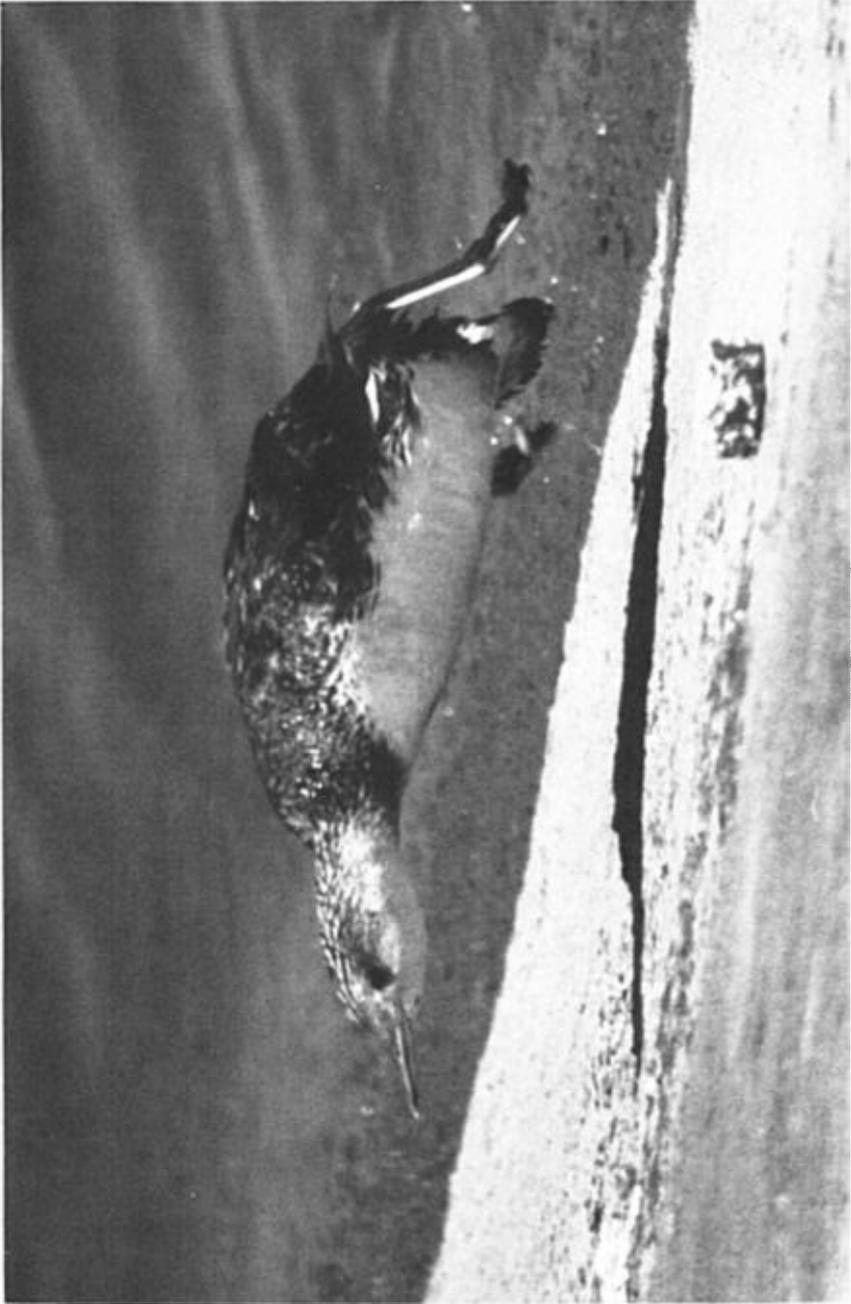


Figure 1 Red-throated Loon leaping ashore near the mouth of Ballona Creek, Los Angeles Co., California, summer, 1978

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LITERATURE CITED

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Accepted 7 November 1983



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Sketch by Narca Moore-Craig