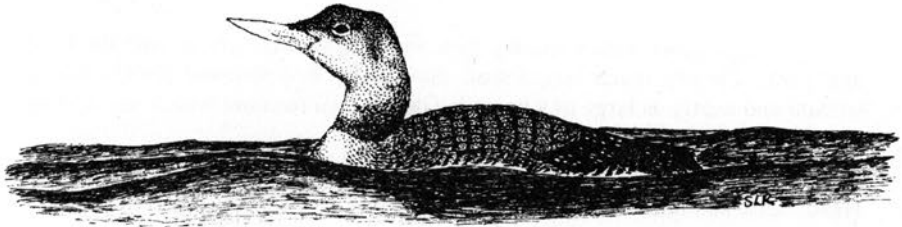


White-billed Diver in Largo Bay.



I was visiting Ruddons Point on 16th October 1994 in order to recce a site for a future wader mist-net catch. The tide was rising and the waders were pouring onto the small tidal island just off the point. The prospects looked excellent for a substantial catch of Knot *Calidris canutus* and Bar tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, two species I had not rung many of before, and so my spirits were high. I was in such a good mood that I was able to dispel my thoughts of escaping the biting wind and nipping into Elie for a quick refreshment and a bit of a warm up, so I decided to scan the sea off the point mainly with Surf Scoters *Melanitta perspicillata* in mind. At 1355 hours, I turned to walk the 20 metres or so to where I had parked the car up on the grassy area and as I did so, a diver *Gavia* just offshore caught my eye. I raised my binoculars and saw it dive immediately (what else should I have expected!).

It stayed under for what seemed like an age before re-appearing in approximately the same place. Once it re-appeared I was able to confirm its identification as a White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* and take some initial notes. It was obviously feeding over what, at low tide, is an exposed mussel bed. This undoubtedly has rich pickings for fish when covered by the tide. The bird surfaced 4 or 5 times with flatfish.

I watched the bird and took notes for approximately 15 minutes before the excitement became too much for me and I had to summon other observers. After looking around for birders I had seen in the vicinity earlier (without success), I drove to Elie to find a 'phone box whereupon I called Rab Shand. He responded immediately and met me back at Ruddons Point. I had arrived back at around 1425 hours and relocated the bird. I lost it after a prolonged series of dives as it moved further out. The tide having been in was starting to ebb- the bird was moving away with the out-going tide.

RS arrived and was followed shortly after by several others, one of whom located the bird approximately 150-200 metres offshore. I was then able to complete my notes after viewing the bird for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Description.

General size and structure:

A large bulky diver with a chunky look about it, particularly around the head and neck. Clearly much larger than the nearby Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata* and nearly as large as a juvenile Gannet *Sula bassana* which was resting on the water next to it.

Head, neck and bill:

The head and neck were thick set and bulky. The head had some indication of a forehead bump, this though was not as pronounced as I had assumed it would be. This caused the bird to look very flat topped. The face, chin and throat were pale, the eye standing out against this pale background. The forehead and nape were darker than the centre of the crown. The nape and rear of the neck were dark brown which extended onto the ear coverts and were much the same as the colour of the mantle and wings. The dark rear part of the neck extended forward to form a semi-collar near the base of the neck.

The bill was ivory coloured with a slight pale blue/grey base. Some feathering extended along the culmen approximately 1/3 the length. The bill appeared roughly diamond shaped with a very pronounced gonys. The distal part of the lower mandible was longer than the proximal part and overall the bill looked long with a tapering point and very up-turned, perhaps due to the head being angled upward. At times during the second part of the observation, when the sun was lower in the sky, the bill was clearly translucent particularly at the tip and along the cutting edges.

Rest of plumage:

The underparts were silvery white including the underwings. These features were seen during bouts of wing stretching and preening.

The mantle, back and upperwings were a nearly uniform dark brown, however the mantle appeared slightly paler brown than the rest of the upperparts, perhaps due to it catching more of the strong sunlight and it appeared to have a sort of chevron or diamond shaped pattern of feathering (with no white spotting).

The colour of the eyes and legs could not be seen

Alan W. Lauder.