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Red-throated Loon (RTLO) – *Gavia stellata* (Pontopp.)

Breeding species. RTLO is considered as a breeding bird by Bannikov (1941) and Portenko (1972) on Wrangel Island based on two collected eggs and a clutch of two eggs, delivered by Ushakov.

RTLOs arrive on Island relatively late – the first birds appear at the end of first half of June. The earliest date recorded of the RTLO arrival was June 10, 1939 (Portenko, 1972). The main arrival of these birds on the tundra occurs in the second half of June, and prior to that they are found mainly along the shores. Birds begin nesting at the end of June. On one of the lakes situated in old river-bed of the floodplain of the middle stream of Neizvestnaya River, where two pairs of loons were observed, the nest was found on June 29, 1976, represented by a pit on the tussock with poor lining, surrounded by water. In the nest there were two nonincubated eggs. At the same place on July 12, 1976 the nest of the second pair was found (Krechmar et al., 1979). Sychev found nest with one egg June 30, 1980 on one of the large lakes in the Tundrovaya River basin.

The RTLOs occur regularly, though their numbers are not great. This species' distribution is limited exclusively by the plains of the Island (Fig.8), where there are more or less numerous lakes used as nesting habitats. Loons prefer lakes of relatively large sizes, not smaller than 300-400 m in diameter, or if they occur on smaller lakes, there must be larger lakes located within a group of such small lakes. According to Ushakov, the RTLOs sometimes nested on the sandy-pebbly spits of the island (Bannikov, 1941; Portenko, 1972). We have no such data, but parallel cases are not excluded, since such lakes with islands are practically absent, and they happen to be optimal nesting microhabitats.

According to the results of our counts in Tundra Akademii in 1983 and 1985, the average loon density was approximately 0.5 birds / sq km of lake water surface. Taking into account, that general (total) area of lakes of the Island is about 80 sq km (Svatkov, 1970), it's possible to suggest, that the number of breeding birds on the Island should not exceed 40 specimens, i.e. 20 pairs. Consequently, in 1985 in the regularly studied area, compiling about a quarter of the whole Tundra Akademii (north-east), we have recorded only 4 pairs, persistently occurring at the same sites. In 1983 in the plain part of Neizvestnaya River basin three similar pairs have been recorded, and in 1986 on lowland in vicinities of lagoon Bazovaya and Davydova, on the southern shore of the island, one such pair was found. One pair was observed during the same year also in rich with lakes region between Popova lagoon and Mamontovaya R. mouth also south of the island. The loons practically do not occur in the western part of Yuzhnaya [Southern] plain, because of the lack of suitable lakes.

Loons occur on the tundra mainly in pairs, thus the pair's territory maybe a group of lakes or one large lake where a pair stays as a rule. Sometimes we observed two or three pairs together, more seldom five adult individuals. One pair stays at one place continuously, while the rest of the birds occasionally fly away. We know of a single case when on one of the lakes in lower stream of Tundrovaya River on July 19, 1981 13 individuals of this species were observed simultaneously.

Loons feed in lagoons, which surround the island, where their density in the middle of July is about 0.1-0.2 birds / sq km of water surface, that is in accordance with above calculations of the total number. On the sea-shore we could not observe loons that were sitting on water, though birds flying over the sea were quite common.

At the end of July – beginning of August the downy loon chicks appear. Krechmar et al. (1979) reported a downy chick with two adults on August 2, 1976 on the same lake, where two nests were

found earlier, and on July 31, 1975 a pair of birds also with one chick was sighted on one of the lakes between Bazovaya and Davydova lagoons. We observed the pair with one downy chick on the lake between Hidrografovo and Krasnyi (Red) Flag Rivers on August 1, 1985. However later nesting dates were also recorded: a nest, represented by small depression near water edge and containing two incubated eggs, was found in Tundra Akademii on August 11, 1975.

The loons are registering on the island till late autumn; they can be often seen flying along sea coast (line) or sitting in lagoons. They disappear completely with ice cover forming.

Fig.8. Breeding range of the RTLO on Wrangel Island.

- 1- distribution area; 2 – large lakes, on which breeding or supposedly breeding pairs were observed.

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) (Gray).

Quite rare species, regularly occurs near banks (coasts) of the Island. Portenko (1972) points at the harvesting one Yellow-billed Loon near Havaii Cape in 1930. Velizhanin (1965) and Uspenskiy with co-authors (1963) suggest, that the YBLO annually occurs near a coast of the Island after the release of sea (Arctic Ocean) from the ice. Velizhanin also describes a record (7.0-8.60) July-August, 1960 of the brood of three birds in Somnitel'naya Bucht. Single specimens were observed by him many times till 5-6.10 (5-6 of October). Portenko (1972) has expressed doubt in the data by Velizhanin because other loon species were not mentioned there.

Individual Yellow-billed Loons were observed 2 July 1980 on Bazovaya Lagoon; 27 August 1980 – on the sea-coast near Bruch Spit and on 15 June 1982 – at the middle stream of Mamontovaya River, where birds were swimming and diving in the river bed. Three YBLOs were observed on one of the lakes near Naskhok R. mouth on 13 July 1986.