



Photo 4: Notice the small, pushed-in look on the Hoary Redpoll's bill. Photo by Eric Walters.



Photo 5: Note the shape of the head. See Sibley (page 533) for a comparison of Hoary and Common Redpoll head shapes. This head shape in this photo points to Hoary. Photo by Eric Walters.

Josh visited first on 17 February and noticed a very pale redpoll with markings of a Hoary! He immediately alerted others, but unfortunately the bird was not relocated that day nor the next two days. A snowstorm blanketed the region during those days, and when three of the six Common Redpolls appeared to have left, Josh thought this Arctic ghost had also left.

On 20 February, I stopped quickly at the site before going to church, and noticed a very pale redpoll at a niger seed feeder on the side of the house. I took some quick photos, then reported the bird to the state bird chat line, and then returned to find the bird still present with other Commons. Soon other birders appeared to celebrate one of few confirmed sightings of this species in the state.

While the identification of Hoary Redpoll can be troublesome, observers of the Skokie bird had excellent conditions for viewing the bird – extensive closeup views in a variety of lighting conditions on different days with Common Redpolls nearby for critical comparison. The Hoary was extremely cooperative, giving most patient birders a plethora of opportunities to see the important marks. Once, the bird even flew to the birders

on the nearby sidewalk and perched directly overhead giving awesome views of its undertail coverts, an important identification mark (see Sibley 2000, p. 533).

This Hoary had only one thin line on its undertail covert and a completely white rump, helping to clinch its identification as a male. A female Hoary would have more undertail covert marks, but Common Redpolls have even more streaking on their undertail coverts. Numerous white and brown feathers on the bird's back, nape, and head created the overall paler plumage affect compared with the Common Redpolls. Other marks noticed versus the Common Redpolls were thicker white coverts, more whitish secondaries, slightly larger overall size, a slightly smaller bill, buff-pale orange auriculars, and thin, lighter flank markings. The bird also had less extensive and lighter pink color on its breast compared with the nearby Commons. A few people also heard the bird call and described it as being slightly different than the Common Redpoll calls.

Redpoll plumages get darker as the winter progresses due to feather wear. With the Skokie Hoary Redpoll being so pale, one can only wonder

how much whiter it was a few months before. The bird was relocated every-day between 20 and 25 February. Early to mid-morning proved the most reliable time to find the bird, and it rarely appeared after 1p.m. A Cooper's Hawk often hunted the yard in the afternoon.

The first record of Hoary Redpoll came from Ridgway (1889) and included a specimen taken by Nelson in Cook County in March 1845. Thirteen other reports are all from northern Illinois, except one at a feeder at Jacksonville in February 1978 (Bohlen 1989). Joe Milosevich took photographs of a Hoary Redpoll in Joliet in 1982. Hoary Redpolls mingle with flocks of Common Redpolls, and behave similarly.

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H. D. The birds of Illinois. 1989. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, IN.

Sibley, D. 2000. The Sibley Guide to Birds. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

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