

Dovekie: First Illinois Record

by John McKee

Since LaSalle Lake has been opened to public fishing through most of the spring, summer, and fall and is frequently blanketed in fog during the winter, the quality of birding there has declined considerably during the past several years. But because it is the only lake habitat in the LaSalle County area, bird watchers still try to check it out fairly regularly.

Having arranged the necessary permission, Cindy Watkins and I took advantage of some free time before the family Thanksgiving dinner to make a quick tour of the lake on the morning of 26 November 1992. The sky was overcast and strong westerly winds were blowing white caps across the water. Fortunately, that same wind served to blow the mists off the lake and provide us with unusually good viewing conditions.

As we drove east on the south dike we made periodic stops to observe the scattered ducks, loons, and grebes and to scan along the shore ahead to look for close-in birds before we flushed them. During one of these stops, Cindy glimpsed a small black and white bird dive below the 4-foot waves breaking into the far southeast corner of the lake. She speculated that it might be a Bufflehead, while I, always trying to make something more exotic

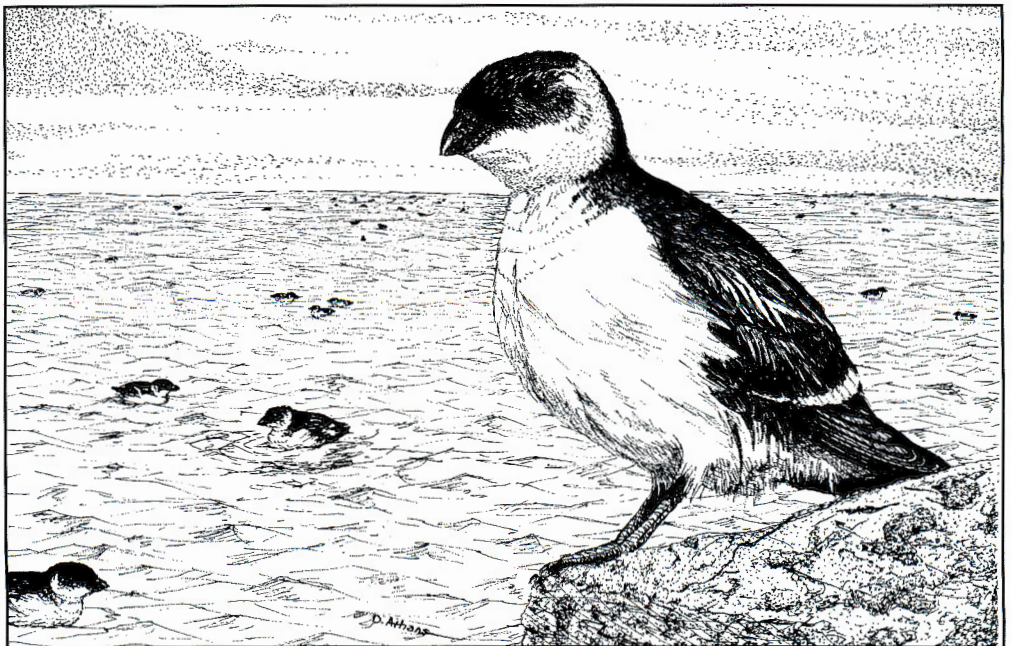
out of every yet-to-be identified bird, hoped it might be an Eared Grebe.

'The distinctive face pattern, dark eye, and stubby, finch-like black bill confirmed that it was indeed a Dovekie.'

Since there wasn't much else in that section of the lake we went directly to the east end of the dike and began searching for the diver. Suddenly, it popped to the surface and sat bouncing on the waves only 30 yards in front of us. In an instant we knew we had a good one.

Two months earlier, Cindy and I had done some birding in the Point Reyes area of California, and we quickly realized that the bird we were looking at was something akin to the Marbled Murrelets we had seen there. While she scrambled to get a scope mounted on her window, I searched the alcid section of the National Geographic guide zeroing in on the Dovekie (*Allee allee*) and Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) as our most likely identification.

The bird continued to make short duration dives fairly near to shore, and we were able to closely observe its small size and chunky, no-neck shape. It propelled itself into its dives using its stubby underdeveloped looking wings. The distinctive face pattern, dark eye, and stubby, finch-like



Dovekie in winter plumage. Drawing by David Athans.