

Individual identification of Black-throated Divers

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Individual differences in the plumage of Black-throated Divers (BTDs) have been studied on lake Suontee (61° 39' N, 26° 31' E). Three different criteria were found: 1) white stripes on the sides of the neck, 2) Number of dots close to water on both sides in the rear of back, and 3) angular dots at shoulder just back of the neck.

Males and females can be distinguished by observing BTDs exactly from the side. The end face of female is curved smoothly while the male has a sharp angle of the forehead and top of the head. The male is slightly larger than the female. The difference in size is, however, often difficult to observe.

Most often BTDs have white five vertical stripes on both sides of the neck. In general, the second stripe from front is the highest, next highest is usually the first or the third stripe, then the fourth and the fifth is the shortest stripe. Often, the first and the fifth, and at least the fifth stripe are narrower and fainter than the other ones. Stripes are of different thicknesses and the thicker they are the more powerful-looking figure is. Great criteria for individual identification is, however, small deviations from the normal: there are sometimes short stripes or white dots or partly broken stripes. In addition BTDs may have four, and even only three stripes and sometimes six or even seven stripes.

BTDs have at the in rear of the back on both sides 20-55 white dots. They can be calculated in floating bird. The number of these dots remain the same from year to year. Angular dots at shoulder just on back of the neck can also be used for individual identification.

The same BTD pair was followed during six consecutive years 2007-2012 and all criteria remained almost the same from year to year.