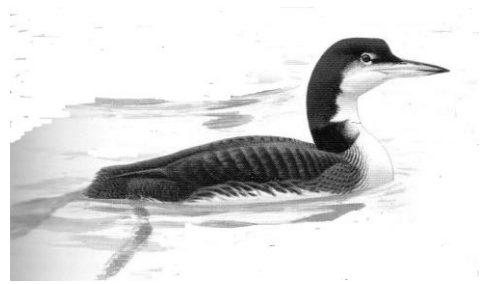


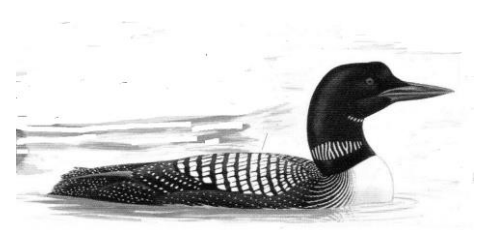
## Great Northern Divers

One of the small treats available to birdwatcher in the damp and dismal winter months is the possibility of seeing a Great Northern Diver in Dale Bay. They are not there every year, and their occurrence is very variable but this winter seems to have been a good one. Great Northern Divers are large black and white diving birds, almost as big as a Cormorant, and they spend much of their time underwater diving for morsels, often picking up small crabs which they sometimes bring back to the surface before swallowing whole. They sometimes hunt very close to the shore – as we all know there are plenty of crabs in the Dale shallows! Often there is just one bird but this year there have been up to three. Visitors are often surprised to see them as Great Northern Divers are not common or easy to see in most of the UK.



A small population of Great Northern Divers breeds in Iceland, but the main breeding population is in the northern parts of North America where they are known as the Common Loon. This name is presumably based on their rather manic laughing and wailing calls which we don't really hear on their wintering grounds. I don't think it is known whether the birds which winter off the Welsh coast are American or Icelandic birds.

In summer the Great Northern Diver is a truly spectacular bird. It is a poem in black and white. It has a black-and-white striped neck band on a jet black neck and black-and-white checkers on its upperparts with white spots on black towards the rear. Many years ago we were lucky enough to see a couple of birds in full breeding plumage just off the shore in Scotland in the spring – whether they were still on their way to their breeding grounds or they were non-breeding youngsters I do not know – but they were a fantastic sight and I have never forgotten it.



Summer

Black-throated Divers and Red-throated Divers can also be seen around the coast in winter. They are both smaller than the Great Northern and rarely come so close inshore. Generally speaking they are more common than the Great Northern and can be in small flocks, but they are further off shore, hard to spot and rarely come into the Haven. Both of these latter two species do breed in the UK, in the north of Scotland and they are the highlight of a birdwatching trip to the area as both are extremely smart in their summer plumage.

*Rosemary Royle*