

2 June 2009



Loons Nesting on Canadian Lakes *How are Common Loons faring in Manitoba?*

Winnipeg, Manitoba... From Lake of the Woods to Lake of the Prairies, and from Lake Manitoba to Manistikwan Lake, Common Loons can be found throughout Manitoba. But what is the status of Manitoba's loons? How many pairs nest on each lake? How many pairs are able to rear young? Manitobans can help answer these questions and support lake and loon conservation through the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey.

With more than 80% of the world's Common Loon population breeding in our country, Canadians have a critical role to play in conserving this species. As more people move into the remote habitats on which loons depend, we need to be aware of human impacts, and enjoy lakeside activities in a responsible manner.

Since 1991 Manitobans have participated in the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, a Bird Studies Canada (BSC) program aimed at monitoring the breeding success of loons on lakes across Canada. The program's goals are to help conserve loons, to use loons as an indicator of the health of freshwater lakes, and to address conservation issues on local, provincial, and national levels.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a long-term program which analyzes loon reproductive success periodically. In 2003, BSC published the trends from the first 20 years of data (10 years in Manitoba). This report showed that overall, Common Loons were stable and breeding well throughout the country and that they showed greater reproductive success in western provinces. What will ten more years tell us? Are loons faring better or worse? To answer these questions, we are beginning to prepare for our next analysis and plan to analyze a minimum of 30 years of data. To successfully compare today with yesterday, participants are needed on previously surveyed lakes. If you live or spend time on a lake in Manitoba this may be a project for you.

Do Canadian loons have any problems? Yes! Eight years ago the overall population looked stable, but within each region there were "hot spots" where loons had less success, showing low to medium reproduction. In these areas it became apparent that closer scrutiny of loon breeding success was needed, as well as additional conservation and educational measures. To help achieve these goals, BSC provides today's participants with easy-to-use data reporting forms, online data entry options, educational pamphlets and reports, loon nesting platform instructions, and educational and loon awareness signs.

Loons nest between May and July, and build their nests very close to the water's edge. Threats affecting loon survival such as contaminants, water level fluctuations, increased

predation, and nest disturbances are the result of increasing human activity on breeding lakes. By practicing loon conservation activities, lake users also help ensure that other wildlife and waterbirds are protected on their lakes.

All people can help by following these tips while at their favourite lake:

1. Watch for loon pairs, nests, and chicks along shorelines.
2. Avoid loon nests and adults when possible. Disturbance can interfere with nesting and cause distractions that make eggs and chicks more vulnerable to predators.
3. When boating, steer clear of shoreline areas that show evidence of loon activity. Watercraft can flood nests and disturb loons, sometimes permanently separating parents from chicks.
4. If you must approach the shore or shallow areas, slow down and limit your wake.
5. Keep pets leashed.
6. Take trash and food with you when you leave.
7. Use lead-alternatives for fishing.
8. Participate in monitoring programs such as the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey.

Presently there are 22 Manitoban lakes where past surveys have been conducted. To help ensure an accurate comparison of today's loons with yesterday's, participants are needed at as many bays on these lakes as possible. Surveys conducted on previously unsurveyed lakes are also helpful. Are you available to survey this year or during the next few years? To learn more or get involved, contact Bird Studies Canada at agsurvey@birdscanada.org or 1-888-448-2473 ext. 124, or visit us on the web.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a self-supporting program, so participants are required to purchase a Bird Studies Canada membership. Membership fees cover the costs of materials, data processing and management, and program administration.

Bird Studies Canada administers national, regional, and international research and monitoring programs that advance the understanding, appreciation, and conservation of wild birds and their habitats. BSC is Canada's national body for bird conservation, and is a non-governmental charitable organization.

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