



LOONWATCH

SIGURD OLSON ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTE

Dear Wisconsin Loon Population Survey Loon Rangers,

While COVID-19 cases are increasing in different parts of the country, we are fortunate to have relatively low numbers in our region at this time. Therefore, we are still planning to implement the Loon Survey on July 18th. We will continue to monitor developments with COVID-19 as well as state and federal guidelines and restrictions, and will be in touch with you if the situation changes.

If your circumstances have changed, and thus you will not be able to help with the survey, I completely understand. Just notify me about your decision as soon as possible. You can reach me at 715-682-1220 or loonwatch@northland.edu

Seeking WI Loon Population Survey Volunteers

- We are still seeking volunteers for the Wisconsin Loon Population Survey.
- Every five years LoonWatch coordinates the Wisconsin Loon Population Survey.
- This survey occurs on 258 pre-selected lakes - NOT a lake of your choosing.

To learn more, select a lake and register, click [here](#).

Chick Season!



Recently Hatched

Linda Grenzer



Photo by Kittie Wilson

Chicks are starting to hatch. Until about the age of two weeks, they spend a lot of time on their parent's back for warmth and protection. If you are monitoring, use

Help Protect Chicks

1. The Fourth of July tends to be an especially busy time on our lakes, and hazardous for loons. Young chicks cannot

binoculars to confirm the presence of chicks. They are difficult to see at this size.

JUNE OBSERVATION TIPS

- **When will the chicks hatch?**
 - This year hatching dates are complicated by the black fly outbreak, which caused some loons to abandon their first nesting attempts. During a typical year, loon nesting starts in mid-May and the first chicks hatch in mid-June. If your territorial pair continued to nest through the black fly outbreak, you should see chicks very soon, if they haven't already hatched. Second nests attempts will hatch in late June/early July. Those chicks will be approximately 1 to 3 weeks old on the July 18th Loon Survey.
 - After hatching, the loon pair will leave the nest and take the chick(s) with them to a nursery area. This is an area of emergent vegetation in a quiet area of the lake.

- **There's one chick on the nest with the adult. Why aren't they leaving the nest?**
 - The parent is still brooding another egg. Eggs hatch in the order they were laid, often one day apart. If the

yet dive deep, and pop back up like little corks. Let visiting friends, family, lake residents and lake visitors know to avoid these precious little grey fluff balls by boating slowly on the lake and avoiding loons.

2. Give the loon family some space. Use the 200 ft rule and observe this adorable family from a distance. This allows the adults to care for the chicks, and for you to see natural behavior.

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second egg doesn't hatch within a couple days, the loons will take the chick to the nursery area and leave the egg.

- **Why does the young chick(s) hang out on their parent's back?**
 - Protection from predators and warmth. Chicks do not yet have a well-developed preen gland (called the uropygial gland). Adult loons use this oil to keep their feathers waterproof, which keeps them warm.
 - Chicks are vulnerable to predators at this stage. Eagles, large game fish, and snapping turtles are common loon chick predators.



Peek-a-boo! See the chick tucked under the adult's wing in this photo? If your loon pair is off the nest and you don't see chick(s) right away, don't give up looking for

Helpful Hints

1. Whenever you go out on the lake, remember your monitoring form, pencil, binoculars, and field guide. Be safe and look at the weather forecast before venturing out on the water, and bring [all necessary safety equipment](#).

2. Continue filling in your Loon Log (page 3 on your monitoring form). This will help you see the big picture of what is happening on your lake, and makes it easy for you to fill out the Loon Season Summary this fall.

3. Inspect and clean your boat to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Follow these [tips](#).

them. The chick may be tucked under the wing, or stashed in a nursery area hiding in tall vegetation.

Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference

The Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference is providing a virtual on-line educational event this Friday, June 19th. Topics include water quality, wildlife, policy, AIS and many more fascinating lake topics. Registration is \$10. Click [here](#) to review the agenda and register.

Thank you to Danielle D'Auria from the Main Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for allowing us to share this fascinating loon story that turns the heels on predator vs. prey.

Bald Eagle Shot Through the Heart – By a Loon!

By Wildlife Biologist Danielle D'Auria

Sometimes being a wildlife biologist means dealing with dead things. We get calls about all sorts of dead critters people find in their yards, on the highway, or washed up on shore. Sometimes we will collect these specimens for further study or to provide to a museum for preservation. For instance, as part of a common loon mortality study, every year I encourage people to let me know if they find a dead loon so we can then have a necropsy (wildlife autopsy) done to determine the cause of death. This allows us to understand the challenges these birds are up against, and how we can potentially alleviate those challenges.

I deal primarily with waterbirds – loons, herons, black terns, marsh birds – so when I heard from John Cooley, loon biologist at the Loon Preservation Committee in New Hampshire, that there was a bald eagle found dead near a

dead loon chick on Highland Lake in Bridgton last summer, I was intrigued. The bald eagle was collected by Maine Game Warden Neal Wykes and brought to Norway Veterinary Hospital for a radiograph to determine if it had been shot. No metal showed up on the image, but during the external exam a puncture wound on the eagle's chest was discovered. This puncture wound could have been due to an adult loon's beak as a result of its attempt to protect its chick from the eagle. A loon's best weapon is its dagger-like bill, and it will often attack adversary loons by coming up from beneath the water's surface with its bill straight towards the other loon's sternum, or chest. Many adult loons have several healed-over sternal punctures from fights like these.



Left Photo: The dead bald eagle was found floating face-down on Highland Lake in Bridgton on July 26, 2019. Right Photo: Maine Game Warden Neal Wykes inspects the dead bald eagle.

Bald eagles are protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and typically all dead eagles are sent directly to the National Eagle Repository in Colorado, so their parts can be properly distributed to Native Americans for ceremonial purposes. We obtained special permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to send this individual to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, for a thorough necropsy to determine if it indeed could have been killed by a loon. The reason this is so interesting to loon

researchers is that such a case has not been documented before. We know conflicts between bald eagles and loons have soared in recent years as a result of the recovery of our eagle population. We are seeing more and more eagle predation on loon chicks and even adult loons. Who would think a loon would stand a chance against such a powerful predator?

Sure enough, the pathologist who examined the eagle and loon chick in the lab, called me shortly afterward to tell me it indeed looked as though the loon was the culprit in this eagle's death. The size of the puncture wound was similar to the size of a loon's bill, and it extended straight to the heart which likely led to a quick death. Not only that, but the loon chick had puncture marks consistent with the spacing of eagle talons. There were no witnesses of what transpired. Nat Woodruff found the dead eagle floating face-down at 6am, and appropriately left it there while he contacted the Warden Service. Warden Wykes first came upon the dead loon chick and then the eagle. The only other information we know is that a woman in a nearby cabin had heard a "hullabaloo" the previous night, consistent with agitated loons. You can use your imagination to formulate how this all played out on Highland Lake that late July evening.

Loon Etiquette

- Use the 200 ft rule when observing loons, especially around loon families. Keep a distance of 200 ft. from loons.
- Participate in the WI DNR's [monofilament recycling program](#). Never fish near loons, and clean up monofilament line so loons and other wildlife do not become entangled.

- Use [non-lead tackle](#). Ask your tackle shop to carry non-lead tackle.
- Slow down! Especially after chicks have hatched. They cannot escape a fast moving boat by diving. They pop back up like little corks. Stay at least 200 ft from shore when throwing wakes or waves.
- When kayaking or canoeing, give loons a wide berth (200 ft. rule). This allows you to observe natural loon family behavior.



Watch from a distance, and you will likely see this precious exchange: loon parents feeding their chicks. Parents bring their tiny chicks small fish and aquatic invertebrates such as insect larvae and crayfish.

[LoonWatch](#) is a program of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at [Northland College](#).