

LOON ECHOES

*Newsletter of the Michigan Loon Preservation Association
July 2011*



“Tina’s Loon” by Dan Lantis, Loon Ranger

For Us All

*By Joanne Williams, MLPA-MLW
State Coordinator*

As we gaze out over a field, a woodland or a lake, we realize that no matter how much we may or may not see, life is in that place; flourishing rich and full in so many different forms and all going about their own ways. It has so often been taught that animals other than ourselves have no emotions nor ability for direction of thought, no purpose but to mindlessly go about their shallow lives, led by instinct alone. But many who work closely with the creatures of this Earth realize that this is untrue; there is so much that we can perceive if we but allow ourselves to encompass realities beyond our own.

Every creature has its ways, its reason for being and its individual life; and as we share with them this space and time, to see them for themselves is a gift that is there for anyone to possess. It is easy to find this in our pets, with whom we spend so much of our time; but it is there also in the wild. And we know that in our animal companions the wild ancestry is ever-present.

We who work with the Loon see it as a special and exquisite bird, which indeed it truly is; and, as are all creatures of the Earth, it is perfect in its way. It has adapted over millennia to do what it must to survive, and every aspect of its behavior and its physical form is absolute perfection. We can observe this, seeing in every action the refinements that through countless ages of adaptive changes, time and circumstance have brought to this present moment. But there is something else, too; something beautiful and mysterious, another world if you will, that we had not even known existed; a world that opens to us the realization of, as W.W. Gibson told with simple eloquence, "...the heart-break in the heart of things".

Well we know of heartbreak. It comes upon us without warning, and with that catching of the breath that seems to stop us where we stand. But heartbreak is not always from a deep sadness; it can be from an overwhelming joy as well, or from a knowing that touches us deeply at the most fragile and guarded places within. That is why tears are shed even at sudden moments of happiness as well as at those of pain. Over the years, so many stories encompassing these things have come to me from Loon Rangers: those who observe the wild day-to-day.

There have been desperate situations, when loon parents have come to the Rangers seeking help for a young one trapped or in trouble, guided the Ranger to the area and waited patiently closeby as their chick was rescued. And there have been joyful times as proud new parents loudly announce their chicks' arrival; and then, calling, parade them around the entire lake past each cottage to show them off, much to everyone's delight. And, too, some stories can touch us in a way that we cannot forget, as when a chick was lost only a very short time after hatching and yet for a few days the mother still went through all the motions as though her little one were with her; her mate following protectively near as she went about upon the quiet water, hooting softly, guarding and guiding her baby that was not there.

Surely, there is more than instinct alone within these wild hearts. These stories touch our own hearts and lives, and in doing so tie us each together; for together we are, here in this moment of time. Perhaps the greatest gift that we can give ourselves, our fellow creatures and the Earth we share is to be aware of what is around us; to understand, and with kindness, that it is the same for us all, whether of need or joy or grief. The life of every animal is precious to its own self, and for its place in the world. To recognize and respect this truth enriches us all, as together we travel on.



“ Five Loons ” by Sandy Witvoet, Loon Ranger

Loon News!

By Jacque LaFreniere, Loon Ranger

Sunday, July 3, just as I was leaving for church, Bud R. called “There’s a loon in the middle of Sloptown Road. What should I do?” I asked him if he had a jacket he could throw over it and take it to Barney’s Lake. He said no and wondered if it would attack him. I had my doubts that it was a loon, but he said, “It’s calling. Can you hear it?” Yes- it was a loon. So I said, “I’m coming”, grabbed my fleece jacket and ran to the car. I yelled to Mark to tell the priest I would be there. We had a new priest

this weekend and I had been asked to lector on this, his first Sunday. I told Mark I would be there before the first reading.

So I drove quickly around the block about 1 ½ miles and saw Bud parked by the loon beneath the microwave tower where the Ospreys nest. Could there be a correlation? Bud had parked his car with the hazard lights flashing to alert other drivers of the loon. As I pulled near, I couldn't believe it! It was a mature and very large loon sitting on the road. It wasn't happy but didn't seem too distressed. It let out a call. I said to it. "What are you doing in the middle of the road, you silly loon?" Then I proceeded to try to catch it with my jacket. I didn't like the looks of the large pointed beak and didn't want to get stabbed. Bud encouraged me with "Throw it now" comments. It tried to scoot away and moved both wings in flapping motions but couldn't do much more than push along with its chest on the road. Eventually, I caught it and wrapped it in the jacket, making sure that beak was under the coat. I ran to Bud- "take me to Barney's Lake!" Bud opened the back door of his car and I jumped in with the Loon safely in my arms and the dangerous beak under wraps.

He quickly drove the mile or so to Barney's Lake. The loon struggled some and a foot popped out with which it kicked at me. I located the beak through the coat and hung on to it tightly! We got to Barney's and I quickly took it close to the water. The beach line was mucky and I didn't want to get my feet and shoes all full of muck and then go to church. I got as close as I could and set the bundle down, opened it up and its head was stuck in the coat. Between my trying to maneuver the coat and the loon's struggles we eventually got it free. At first, it didn't see the water and sat glaring at me so I waved the coat at it to get it to turn its head and see the water, which it finally did. Once it saw the water, it scooted off the shore and swam out several yards. All seemed well and I needed to get to church.

I looked down at my pants and there were blood streaks on one leg. Bud drove me back to the car and I knew I didn't have enough time to change. I hoped it would come out with soap and water at church so I wouldn't have to walk the aisle in blood stained pants. It did, mostly, and I was on time and able to perform my church duties successfully, once the adrenaline rush had left and I was no longer shaking like a leaf.

Mark checked the lake later and the loon was gone. So it must have recovered and flown to wherever it was supposed to be. The only reason I could think that the loon was in the road was that the osprey had attacked it as it flew by the nest and knocked it down on the road. Why else would a mature loon land on a dirt road?

And then, the next day, another loon on a blacktop road in the late morning

I've been doing these walks to locate Phragmites. There was a lady walking with me whose brother owns Deerwood, near Barney's Lake. I told her all about the story Tuesday morn as she loves loons too! So we finished our walk and on her way down the drive (about a mile back) found a loon sitting in the driveway/road. So she drove to the house and called me, found a coat and headed back. I got home, got the message on the machine and headed back out. By the time I got there, she, with help from another, had captured the loon and transported it to Lake Michigan and released it, where it swam, dove and called. This one also had a bloody foot and left blood in the car! So she had her own story to tell.

Begs the question whether it was the same loon or not? They were about the same size, but hard to tell if it was the same. I vowed the next time it happened, if soon, I would mark the loon with a ribbon or paint or something. In both cases, we know it was not a nighttime landing as there was travel over the road by those who found the loon in the morning about 8 a.m. and returned to find the loon between 9:30 and 11.

Editor's Note: Maybe the osprey took a dive at the loon as he was flying past the osprey nest, just minding his own business. Usually we only see this sort of bad landing in a big windstorm or a wet road, but I think that loon would know the territory pretty well. And a good weather landing like that is just about unheard of. Was the second one same loon that tried to fly along that same route again and the osprey took exception to that, or even another loon or the other osprey parent? We'll never know, but we do know that this has been a summer of strange loon events!

P.S. If it was the same loon, we hope he got the message!

Loon Capture Tip: Often we hear that when someone has to capture and hold a loon, they worry about getting pinched or jabbed by the sharp beak. And well they should; that beak can be lethal. It is the loon's main defense weapon and the bird will go for the eyes to effectively disable its captor. We have always recommended wrapping a towel or blanket around the bird, putting a loose cloth over the head and holding the beak firmly. Remember to hold the loon away from you and from your face. Be on guard even if the loon is quiet; it is in shock and can wake out of it with an instant fury. *Jacque's knowledge served both her and the loon well in this encounter.*

. . . . *It was near twelve.* Along the northern horizon a rosy glow, fading to the west and deepening to the east. marked the unseen dip of the midnight sun. The gloaming and the dawn were so commingled that there was no night,---simply a wedding of day with day, a scarcely perceptible blending of two circles of the sun. A kildee timidly chirped good-night; the full, rich throat of a robin proclaimed good-morrow. From an island on the breast of the Yukon a colony of wild fowl voiced its interminable wrongs, while a loon laughed mockingly back across a still stretch of river

Jack London, "*The God of His Fathers*"
from Tales of the Klondyke, 1906



"Solitary on a Summer's Day" by Sandy Witvoet, Loon Ranger

Mission Statement of the MLPA

The Michigan Loon Preservation Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve the Common Loon as a breeding bird in Michigan through public education, research and the protection and management of loons and their habitat.

If you wish to learn more about becoming a Loon Ranger and/or Area Coordinator; please contact us at "Loon Central" 989-828-6019.

Thank you, Loon Rangers and Area Coordinators, for all you do!



“Canopied Nest Island and Buoy” by Ross Powers

LOON ALERT! LOON ALERT! LOON ALERT!! DON'T MISS IT!!

**Twenty-fifth Annual Michigan Loon Preservation Association
ANNUAL MEETING & PICNIC**

Sunday, August 7 – 12 Noon – 4 PM

At the lake home of Ross and RoseAnn Powers

909 Hillcrest Drive, Boon MI 49618, 231 775 6316

Noon – Picnic: Hot dogs and buns provided. Bring a dish to pass, your beverage, and a chair.

**1:00 PM - Members Meeting: “Milestones in Loon Protection”
Election of Officers**

**1:30 PM – Artificial Nest Islands – Their Success in Loon
Productivity**

2:00 – 4:00 PM – Loonwatch – bring your binoculars & camera

Games, Activities & Prizes

All Are Welcome—Hope To See You There!

Directions: Off M-115: *North from Cadillac:* about 8 miles & right onto "27 Road"

South from Mesick: about 8 miles & left onto "27 Road"

****On “27 Road”, go 1.8 miles (north) and then turn left & immediately right, going down the hill on Hillcrest Drive. At bottom of hill take a left at the "Y" and look for brown brick garage near road. Note "909" on garage. Loon signs will lead the way beginning at the entrance to "27 Road”.**



Dear Auntie Arloon

(Auntie Ar was privileged to meet Dr. Paul Spitzer at the Kirtland's Warbler Festival where he presented his story of Osprey recovery. Dr. Spitzer's interest in wildlife ecology ranges from raptors to Monarch butterflies to plant communities. Here he shares some little known facts about the life of loons after they leave our northern lakes.)

The Dark Side of the Loon: A Challenge for "Celebratory Research"

By Paul R. Spitzer, Ph.D

During spring and summer, northern ponds and lakes reverberate with the wails, yodels, and tremolo laughs of breeding loons. As much as spruce, fir, and white pine, loons are part of the northern landscape, a signature species. But when cold weather returns, these fish-rich nesting sanctuaries freeze over. Loons must depart for the rest of their annual cycle, much of it lived on open salt water, far from our perception. Loons are also marine birds, and their evolutionary origins are probably marine. Living out on the sea for months of winter maritime weather, loons have molted to drab non-breeding "basic" plumage. They communicate with short "yip" calls.

This is "the Dark Side of the Loon": Obscure compared to the breeding season, and far more challenging to study. But ahh..., so interesting. And important, because much of these long-lived birds' mortality occurs during their non-breeding season.

Like other heavy-bodied water birds, loons molt their wing feathers simultaneously, and a flightless period ensues. Most ducks, geese, and swans do this immediately after breeding, using the abundant food and cover of late summer. In contrast, Common Loons are of a separate evolutionary stock, the order Gaviiformes, and the adults have evolved a wing molt and regrowth of the long, strong flight feathers which lasts throughout much of the winter. This dramatic specialization demonstrates what tough marine animals they are. Though flightless, loons remain remarkably mobile in response to food concentrations, storm stress, and cover provided by lee shorelines. Combine this with their deep diving capacity, and they resemble marine mammals. Still, the

additive stresses of toxic events such as oil spills or algal blooms; food limitation; powerful storms; and old age or youthful inexperience can result in March-to-May marine die-offs of emaciated loons which have not made it through this crucible.

Other adaptations to the non-breeding season include cooperative feeding on schooling, surface-active fish. These noisy, yipping feeding flocks, which a boatman (or fellow loons) might hear from a couple of miles away in calm weather, sometimes total well over 100 birds. This is a complete contrast to the famously aggressive behavior of pairs near their nest site. (see Walter Piper, "Troubled Waters", *Natural History Magazine*, pp. 22-26, December 2010/January 2011)

While some have viewed loons as "primitive", in fact they are highly evolved and specialized as obligate water-dwelling birds. Their diving body is ballasted with solid bone and muscle. Heavy-bodied loons fly only with substantial, sustained effort. A lengthy stretch of water is necessary for takeoff and landing. But loons migrate from the North Country to the Gulf of Mexico and back every year. They are slow to mature, with a low reproductive rate, but remain a widespread and successful species. I argue that their longevity and complicated life-history require decisions, beyond hard-wired instinct. Scientific research seeks to understand the nature of this "loon intelligence", as seen in migratory strategies and flock-feeding. I term this "Celebratory Research", as we learn how these remarkable loons meet their migratory challenges, and use the habitats of the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Kevin Kenow, of the USGS Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center, has now had satellite tags on several WI and MN loons for one annual cycle. Go online to "USGS Common Loon Migration Study" to see the timing and stopover locations of their cross-continental migration. You will note the long autumn stopover of many loons on Lake Michigan (where they are at times vulnerable to type E botulism). Healthy adult loons use Gulf coast habitats only during the cold portion of the year, arriving in late November and December, departing in early spring.

There is still no substitute for direct observation. At the beginning of spring 2011, I discovered a concentrated loon flyway up the middle of Florida's Apalachee Bay, right over the St. Mark's NWR. Migratory departure occurred mostly in the first hour after dawn, and so far it appears that loons leave only with the support of southerly tailwinds. Numbers, dates, breadth of the flights, and final flight altitudes all remain to be learned. Radar study is a likely way to answer some of these questions, as we continue to illuminate "The Dark Side of the Loon".



Northern Divers

*Loons in my life,
A constant thread.
Wailing calls
As I lie in bed
Soak into soft, gray folds of sleep.
The tremolo
As lake waves sweep,
With northern divers
Delving deep.
Yodel and hoot
When neighbors greet.
Talking long into the night
Until the year's autumnal flight
To warmer climes for months,
A few,
Until next season's spring
Is new.*

*Elaine D. Snively:
Loon Ranger*

In the Early Morning Mist . . .

*Oh, silent loon, so wild, so free; won't you sing,
just once, for me?*

That's all I ask; nothing more . . .

Anna Carol

From Somewhere, Long Ago

Auntie Ar Reports on "Get the Lead Out":

Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare MI, & Riverside Marina in Bellaire MI, and Butch's Tackle and Marine in Clam Lake MI all carry unleaded tackle. Be sure to ask for and purchase non-lead tackle at your local bait shop. Let Auntie know the name and location of stores that have non-lead tackle so we can include them on the website and in the newsletter. (westhova@ferris.edu)

Migrations

We are happy to welcome Jacque LaFreniere as our newest Area Coordinator. Our long-time Loon Ranger for Beaver Island, she will now oversee Charlevoix County as well. We appreciate Jacque's taking on this work!

Denise McEvers, our Area Coordinator for the Grayling vicinity counties, is retiring this year, as are several Loon Rangers. We are grateful for all that they have brought to Loonwatch and have done for the loons over the years.

Our sincere thanks to each of you!

Late Spring, Hard Weather in Iron County

A cedar loon nest was tossed around but the loon lay low and rode out the wind storm for 3 days. Another loon nesting platform made of pvc pipes was torn up and blew away, nest, eggs and all. Another loon had a nest but the winds and rain washed it away but they now have started another nest on the other side of an island on the lake. We are hoping for the best!

Karen Ivens, Loon Ranger & Area Coordinator, Iron County

Loon News and Notes

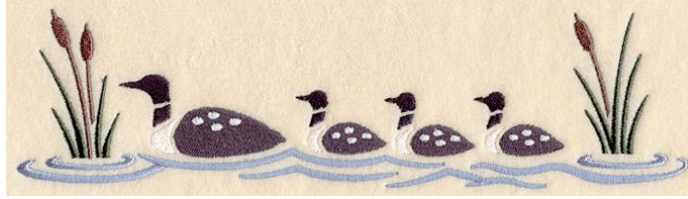
This season has already proven to be one of the most active and unusual for loon events than we have seen in many years. By the end of the season, we should have some interesting reports!

In Mecosta County, a loon pair made three nest attempts, which is very rare. The eggs were lost each time, likely to raccoons. A nest Island will be installed there next spring.

On a lake in Clare County, two loons fought to the death. We know that intruder loons have come to that lake in other years, and we have seen the heated conflict that arose. This time, there was one intruder that did not survive.

Fishline has been a big problem for the loons this year, and has caused many anxious days and hours on the water trying to help. One loon was able to extricate himself from the line, as (thankfully) sometimes happens. One three-week old chick, however, disappeared before help could arrive. His sibling was taken soon after hatching; a sad summer for the loon parents this year.

Our Loon Ranger Program is growing! Since January 1, we have added 20 new Loon Rangers; fourteen of them since June 1st. Remember, we welcome anyone who wants to be a Loon Ranger, and many of our listed lakes have more than one. This is of great benefit to the loons and their protection, which is our main focus. Everything we do revolves around that central goal. Many of our LR's do not live on the lakes they monitor, and having others who can be there perhaps at different times, or having someone who lives on the lake also record observations, helps us to fill in our knowledge of the birds and their needs. Also, it is often a good help to share LR duties, such as educating riparian owners and lake users about the loons and their needs, and to be available when there is a problem. One of our new Loon Rangers, Kimberli Bindschatel, perhaps said it best, "...the more people that are aware of their presence and express love for these birds, the better."



Remember! Loon Rangers, MLPA Members and Loon Lovers . . .
*We are happy to provide free advice, & loon informational & educational materials
 for your use. Thank you all for your continued support!*

*Your MLPA membership helps to protect and preserve
 Michigan's beautiful loons!*

MLPA Membership Form

Please indicate if this is a gift membership and include the giver's information

Mail to: Luanne Jaruzel, MLPA
 10181 Sheridan Rd.
 Millington MI 48746

Yes, I would like to initiate/continue my membership in MI Loon Preservation
 Association and have indicated my membership category below:

- \$10 Introductory/Individual
- \$15 Family/Student/Senior
- \$20 Supporting Individual
- \$25 Contributing
- \$50 Sustaining/ Organization/ Business
- \$100 Award
- \$500 Benefactor/Life

MLPA Contacts:
 Luanne: 989-871-4819
 Joanne: 989-828-6019
 Arlene: 231-796-6153
 MI Charitable Trust #:
 MICS1782

 Name (or Organization) (Date)

 Address

 City State Zip

 Amount Enclosed

Wishing You All A Wonderful Summer!
 From *Loon Echoes*, Michigan Loon Preservation Association and Michigan Loonwatch!