

The common loon is a well known and loved bird of northern lakes. The sound of its haunting call and sight of an adult in full breeding plumage bring magic to Maine's lakes. People often come to Maine with hopes of seeing a loon and their chances of doing so are excellent. The latest estimates put the population of loons in Maine at about 4,000 adults and around 250 new chicks each summer. The population has been fairly stable in Maine over the last twenty years, but loons still face many threats on our waters. The Maine Loon Project, part of Maine Audubon, has worked on loon conservation since 1977 with education and outreach programs, research projects, and on-going management activities. Only through active involvement of concerned citizens like you can we expect these birds to continue thriving in Maine. This fact sheet outlines the major threats to loons in Maine, and what you can do to help these impressive birds.

### HABITAT LOSS DUE TO DEVELOPMENT

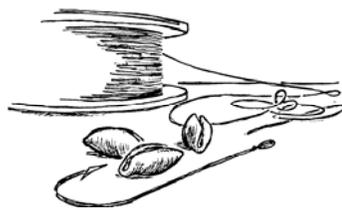
Loons are known to return to traditional nest sites year after year. Buildings and boat ramps on islands and shorelines near traditional loon nesting sites can cause loons to abandon nest sites.

#### **What You Can Do:**

1. Be aware of where loons nest in your area. Watch for loons returning after lake ice melts, and watch where pairs or adults with chicks spend their time.
2. Try to protect these areas through town planning processes and proper siting of boat ramps and other development.
3. Help gather long-term data on loon populations by participating in Maine Audubon's annual loon count on the third Saturday of July.

### FISHING LINE AND LEAD FISHING TACKLE

Lead poisoning from the ingestion of lead sinkers and lead-headed jigs is the leading cause of death for adult loons in Maine and throughout New England. There is no cure for lead poisoning, and once a loon ingests a lead sinker it dies in a few weeks. Every year, loons in Maine also die after they become entangled in fishing line or swallow hooks or lures.



#### **What You Can Do**

1. Use only lead-free fishing sinkers and jigs, available at many retail outlets. In fact, the sale of lead sinkers 1/2 ounce or less will be banned in Maine after January 2002.
2. Alert other anglers to the problems associated with tackle and urge them to switch to lead-free alternatives.
3. Tell tackle shop owners and other retailers about the availability of lead-free alternatives.
4. Retrieve all loose and broken fishing line and fishing tackle.



### BOATING ACTIVITY

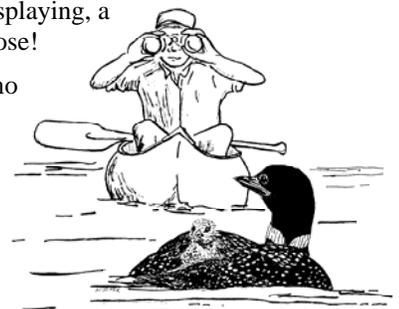
Because loons use all different parts of a lake, from deep waters for feeding to sheltered coves, bays and marshy areas for nesting and raising young, they are subject to all types of disturbance from boating activity.

Wakes from boats can wash eggs out of lakeside nests. Loons can also be easily disturbed off nests by boat traffic and recreational activities, leaving their eggs vulnerable to predators or exposure. Fishing boats that approach a nest and remain nearby for long periods of time can disturb nesting loons, as can quiet kayaks and canoes that maneuver easily into shallow areas. Heavy and continuous boat traffic can even cause some loons to abandon their nests altogether. On some lakes, loons have adapted to heavy boat traffic and will remain on their nests despite steady disturbance.

Maine Audubon receives reports each summer of boats chasing and harassing loons, and more than two dozen loons have died as a result of boat-related injuries in Maine over the last ten years. Loons that are harassed while feeding by boaters may not be able to adequately feed themselves or their chicks. Boats can easily get between adult loons and their young and can separate a family. A lone chick that can't relocate its parents will die without their protection.

#### **What You Can Do:**

1. Report harassment to the Warden Service at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. You will need the boat license number and documentation of the incident.
2. Educate your lake community and boaters about loons. Obtain copies of Maine Audubon's "Living with Loons" brochure to distribute at local lakes.
3. Post large, bright-yellow "Look Out For Loons!" signs (available from Maine Audubon) at marinas and boat launches to let lake users know loons are nearby.
4. Use binoculars to view loons from a distance. Do not approach nests and loons on the water, especially if the loons are calling and displaying, a sure sign you are too close!
5. Observe the 200-foot "no wake zone" to assure that wave action will not destroy lake-side nests. Encourage fellow boaters to do the same.



## WATER QUALITY

Loons are visual predators and must have clear, clean water to be effective predators. Water quality is affected by shoreline development, agricultural and lawn runoff, logging activities, sewage, and atmospheric pollution.

Invasive aquatic plants like variable-leaved and Eurasian milfoils change the quality of lake habitat. By growing in thick, choking mats they reduce the diversity of fish and invertebrate populations and have an impact on loons and other wildlife.

Acidified lakes are unable to support certain fish life. Loons attempt to raise young in some of these lakes but cannot catch enough fish for their chicks to survive.

Maine lakes have very high levels of mercury. Mercury is taken up by fish, and in turn by loons. Loons with high levels of exposure to mercury have been shown to have many irregular behaviors, leading to decreased reproductive success.

### **What You Can Do:**

1. Contact your legislators and urge them to sponsor and support mercury-reduction bills at both state and federal levels.
2. Keep your boat trailer free from aquatic plants when traveling, especially when coming into Maine from other states.
3. Maintain shoreline buffers and look into other measures developed by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to reduce siltation and maintain water quality.
4. Use only phosphorous-free fertilizer on your lakeside lawn.
5. Become a steward for water quality in your lake through your local lake association or the Maine Congress of Lake Associations.

## **WHO TO CONTACT:**

**Maine Audubon**, Maine Loon Project, 20 Gilsland Farm Rd., Falmouth, ME 04105, (207)781-2330, [conserve@maineaudubon.org](mailto:conserve@maineaudubon.org), [www.maineaudubon.org](http://www.maineaudubon.org); *For general information about loons, their population in Maine, lake-specific loon information, reports of dead or injured loons, "Look Out For Loons!" signs, loon kits and other educational material for teachers, loon slide shows.*

**Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife**, Warden Service, 284 State St., 41 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333, 1-800-322-3606, [www.state.me.us/ifw/index.html](http://www.state.me.us/ifw/index.html); *To report injured loons or harassment of loons and other wildlife.*

**Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection**, 17 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333, (207)287-7688, [www.state.me.us/dep/home.htm](http://www.state.me.us/dep/home.htm); *For information about dams, mercury, soil erosion, milfoil and other invasive aquatics, and general water quality.*

**Maine Congress of Lake Associations**, P.O. Box 38, Readfield, ME 04355-0038, Toll free: 1-877-524-2511, [info@mainecola.org](mailto:info@mainecola.org), [www.mainecola.org](http://www.mainecola.org); *For information about lakes and water quality.*

**North American Loon Fund**, P.O. Box 68, Mount Pleasant, MI 48804, (603) 279-6163, [loonfund@hotmail.com](mailto:loonfund@hotmail.com), [facstaff.uww.edu/wentzl/nalf/analfhomepage.html](http://facstaff.uww.edu/wentzl/nalf/analfhomepage.html); *For listings of loon organizations in North America, information on national loon issues, educational materials.*

Maine Audubon is a state-wide, independent, non-profit, membership organization dedicated to the protection, conservation and enhancement of Maine's ecosystems through the promotion of individual understanding and action. For more information contact Maine Audubon, 20 Gilsland Farm Rd., Falmouth, ME 04105, (207) 781-2330 or visit [www.maineaudubon.org](http://www.maineaudubon.org).

*Written by Barbara Charry and illustrated by Bob Hooper, 1991.  
Edited and updated by Susan Hitchcox, 2001.*

## FLUCTUATING WATER LEVELS

Loons in Maine typically sit on eggs from the middle of May through June, though they can also nest later in the summer. The eggs take about 29 days to hatch. Because loons build their nests within a few feet of the shore, changes in water levels can cause nest failure by either flooding eggs or stranding nests too far above the water for adults to reach.

### **What You Can Do:**

1. Water levels on many lakes are controlled by dams. Contact your local dam operator and explain the problems fluctuating water levels may cause for loons nesting in the area. Ask if it is possible to hold water levels constant during the critical nesting period from mid-May through June. To find dam operators, contact the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (see box below).
2. If water levels cannot be maintained and nests are repeatedly failing from water level fluctuations, look into placing an artificial loon nesting platform on the lake. Maine Audubon has directions for building platforms, and these come with an evaluation form to assess the feasibility of this management option. Evaluation forms should be filled out and returned to Maine Audubon

## PREDATORS

Predation is a major cause of nest failure. Raccoons, skunks, American crows, common ravens, and herring gulls are major predators of loon eggs and chicks. These scavengers have increased in number due to plentiful human garbage.

### **What You Can Do:**

1. Secure garbage cans and do your part to collect lakeshore litter.
2. Keep pet food out of reach of wildlife.

