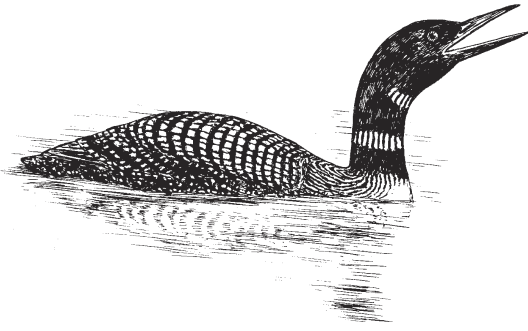


Vermont's Wildlife Heritage

Nongame and Natural Heritage Program

FACTS ABOUT NONGAME WILDLIFE SPECIES



Common Loon

Gavia immer

Birds resembling loons first evolved 130 million years ago. This primitive bird has since become a symbol of grace, beauty, and wildness for many people. Native Americans believed it was "The Spirit of the Northern Waters," and the French named it "The Diver with the Necklace."

Of the four species of loons found in North America, the common loon is the only breeding species in Vermont. Loons are sensitive to disturbances, especially during the breeding season. People are encouraged to remain at least 300 feet from nesting and nursery areas during this period.

Loons were removed from Vermont's Endangered and Threatened Species list in April 2005.

DESCRIPTION

A dark head and black, pointed bill distinguish the common loon from other loons. In the summer, the neck has two large, white patches striated vertically with black, a white breast and abdomen, and a black back geometrically spotted with white in lateral rows. During the winter, the plumage is like the juvenile's—dark above with white below. Other characteristics include:

■ **Sounds:** Often identified by its unique vocalizations, the loon is known for its wail, "laugh" or tremolo, and yodel.

■ **Size:** The male and female are approximately the same size, which ranges from 28 to 36 inches in body length with a wingspan of 52 to 58 inches. Loons have nearly solid bones and massive muscles, making it more efficient to dive under water than fly. Adults weigh between 6 to 14 pounds.

■ **Food:** Loons eat mainly fish, but their diet also includes insects, crayfish, and some vegetation.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Loons breed on lakes and deep ponds. They nest close to shorelines or on small islands. The nest is a simple pile of vegetation or a small depression in the soil, and in it are laid one or two eggs, ranging in color from pale olive to medium brown with darker spots.

The common loon breeds from northern Canada south to New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Loons winter along the coast down to Florida and the Gulf of Mexico. Some loons may stay on Lake Champlain if there is open water.

REASONS FOR DECLINE

In 1977, annual statewide surveys of the breeding status of the common loon in Vermont were begun by the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS). The surveys have found that many lakes and ponds where common loons had bred in the past have been abandoned by breeding pairs.

Reasons for the vulnerability of the Vermont loon population include:

■ Water levels can affect loon nesting. Rising water can flood a nest. If the water level drops—caused by reservoir drawdowns for power, for example—loons may abandon their nest. Their legs are so far back on their bodies that they move awkwardly on land.

■ Human interference can cause nest abandonment. Boating or water skiing too close to a nest may cause the parents to desert a nest.

■ An alarming number of loons have died from lead poisoning after swallowing lead fishing sinkers and jigs lost by anglers.

■ Some loons have become entangled in fishing line left by anglers, with serious injury or death resulting.

■ Increased development along lake shores causes fewer desirable sites to be available for loon nesting.

■ Competition between loons for nesting sites.

■ Predation by raccoons and other animals.

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The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) is responsible for managing and enhancing Vermont's native plants, natural communities, and animals that are not hunted or fished (nongame species). A unit within the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the NNHP's mission includes the preservation of Vermont's rich and varied natural heritage for present and future generations.

MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

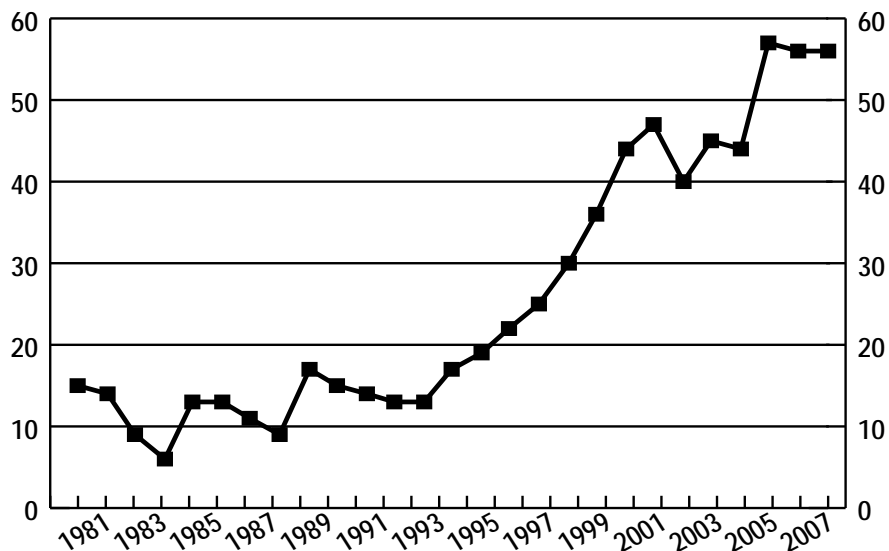
Increased productivity of loons in Vermont will hopefully continue with the efforts of many people and organizations including the Vermont Departments of Fish and Wildlife and of Forests, Parks, and Recreation; the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Wildlife Federation; and certain Vermont power companies. Management activities include:

- Drawdowns from reservoirs by power companies are minimized during the loon breeding season.
- People are encouraged to keep at least 300 feet from loon breeding and nursery sites by signs that may be used to mark these areas.
- Ongoing monitoring determines trends or fluctuations in numbers and offers a better understanding of what conditions loons need to survive.
- Artificial nesting platforms are occasionally placed in suitable waterbodies. These platforms help reduce the vulnerability of nests to predation.

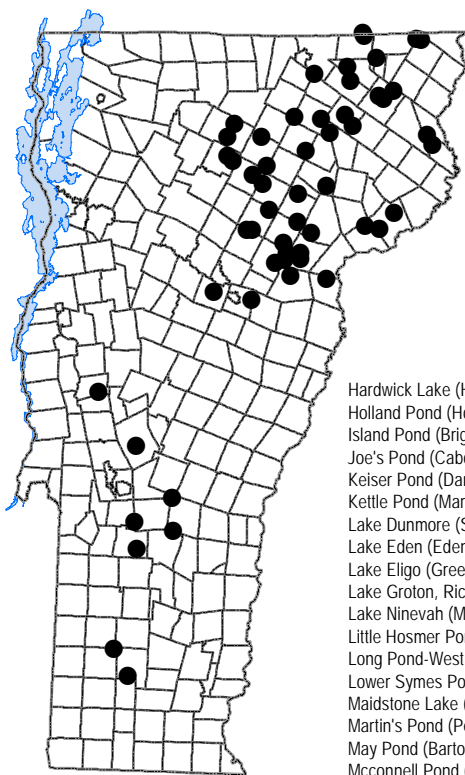
WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Avoid getting within 300 feet of loon nesting and nursery areas during the breeding season (May through August). Honor warning signs when posted.
- Maintain a respectful distance from wild animals. (Travel with binoculars!) If a loon vocalizes as you approach, immediately back off.
- Observe and report on loon sightings and nesting activities in your area. Participate in the Vermont Loon Watch held annually on the third Saturday in July.
- Avoid depositing toxic lead sinkers and fishing line in Vermont waters.
- Donate any amount to the Nongame Wildlife Fund at the sign of the loon on the Vermont income tax form, on hunting and fishing license applications, or by direct donation (see box).

Common Loon Breeding Status in Vermont, 1980-2007



Breeding Locations of Common Loon in Vermont, 2007



- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Averill Lake (Averill, Norton) | Molly's Falls Pond (Cabot) |
| Baker Pond (Barton) | Newark Pond (Newark) |
| Bean Pond (Sutton) | Nichol's Pond (Woodbury) |
| Beaver Pond-Holland (Holland) | Norton Pond (Warrens Gore) |
| Berlin Pond (Berlin) | Osmore Pond (Peacham) |
| Bourn Pond (Sunderland) | Peacham Pond (Peacham) |
| Brownington Pond (Derby, Brownington) | Sabin Pond (Calais, Woodbury) |
| Bruce Pond (Sheffield) | Seymour Lake (Morgan) |
| Chandler Pond (Wheelock) | Shadow Lake-Concord (Concord) |
| Chittenden Reservoir (Chittenden) | Somerset Reservoir (Somerset) |
| Coles Pond (Walden) | South Pond-Eden (Eden) |
| Echo Lake-Charleston (Charleston) | Spectacle Pond (Brighton) |
| Forest Lake (Averill) | Spring Lake (Shrewsbury) |
| Fosters Pond (Peacham) | Stiles Pond (Waterford) |
| Green River Reservoir (Hyde Park) | Thurman Dix Reservoir (Orange) |
| Hardwick Lake (Hardwick) | Wallingford Pond (Wallingford) |
| Holland Pond (Holland) | West Mountain Pond (Maidstone) |
| Island Pond (Brighton) | Wolcott Pond (Wolcott) |
| Joe's Pond (Cabot, Danville) | Woodward Reservoir (Plymouth) |
| Keiser Pond (Danville) | Zack Woods Pond (Hyde Park) |
| Kettle Pond (Marshfield) | |
| Lake Dunmore (Salisbury) | |
| Lake Eden (Eden) | |
| Lake Eligo (Greensboro) | |
| Lake Groton, Ricker Pond (Groton) | |
| Lake Ninevah (Mount Holly) | |
| Little Hosmer Pond (Craftsbury) | |
| Long Pond-Westmore (Westmore) | |
| Lower Symes Pond (Ryegate) | |
| Maidstone Lake (Maidstone) | |
| Martin's Pond (Peacham) | |
| May Pond (Barton) | |
| McConnell Pond (Brighton) | |
| Miles Pond (Concord) | |
| Mirror Lake (Calais) | |

Loon recovery efforts in Vermont, including this fact sheet, are funded by contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. These tax-deductible gifts are used by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program to inventory, monitor, and manage species and their habitats and to provide planning assistance and educational programs. Direct gifts are accepted, payable to:

Nongame Wildlife Fund
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