

# Loon Caller



Winter / Spring 2007

**Vermont Loon Recovery Project - Uniting People and Science for Conservation**



Ellen Kelton

Upwards of 40 loons landed on Island Pond on 17 May 2006; they were likely late migrants heading to northern Quebec.

## From the Managing Editor

### Loons Beyond Vermont's Borders

Property lines and state and national borders are rarely determined by ecological criteria. People are good at guiding their lives by these artificial lines, but wildlife is not and that includes loons. For example, loons living within a few miles of Vermont regularly fly back and forth across Vermont's border, and we may not track them. In addition, many current and past threats to loon populations are regional, not local. To address such issues, the Northeast Loon Study Work Group or NELSWG meets every spring to discuss the status of the Common Loon from New York and Massachusetts to Quebec and Newfoundland. NELSWG has allowed us to piece together the various political pieces (states, provinces, and sub-regions) into an overall ecological picture. NELSWG is made up of groups directly involved in loon conservation like the Vermont Loon Recovery Project (VLRP) and many other groups including universities, U.S., Canadian, and state wildlife and environmental conservation agencies, veterinarians, hydroelectric companies, individual biologists, and loon enthusiasts. In the ideal world, we would divide loon conservation efforts by lake regions and not state boundaries (see p.3 "what loons call home"), but funding, convenience, and state mandates (e.g., threatened and endangered species laws, boating and fishing rules) make this approach more difficult.

Despite these obstacles, it does make sense to look at and be aware of the region-based interactions of loons. Adult loons tend to return to the same region year after year. One region would include lakes in northeastern Vermont, northwest New Hampshire, and southern Quebec. Loons on Lake Fairlee and Morey likely interact with loons in western New Hampshire more than loons in Vermont. The nearest lake region to south-

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## The Loons Around Us: New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine

Edited by Eric Hanson. Excerpts from *Status Assessment and Conservation Plan for the Common Loon in North America* by David C. Evers, and other information from websites, newsletters, and personal communication with Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program, Loon Preservation Committee, and Maine Audubon.

Loons currently nest in all the states surrounding Vermont plus Maine. Below is a state-by-state summary of the loon organizations in the Northeast and a status report on loon activity. For more information, check out the websites listed on page 3.

### NEW YORK: The Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program

The Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program (ACLP) just completed its fifth year of loon research and education efforts studying the effects of contaminants and human interactions on the loon population in the Adirondack Park. ACLP evolved from loon contaminant research conducted by the Northeast Loon Study Work Group (NELSWG) in the Park from 1998-2000. The Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program has many similarities to the VLRP such as monitoring the status of the breeding loon population through volunteer surveys and trying to minimize anthropogenic impacts through numerous outreach programs. Tracking breeding loons and estimating the adult loon population is much more difficult in the Adiron-

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### Vermont Loon Recovery Project



A program of  
the Conservation Biology Department of  
the Vermont Institute of Natural Science  
and  
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department



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The Vermont Loon Recovery Project is a program of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) and Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD). The VLRP's mission is to restore and maintain Vermont's Common Loon population through monitoring, management, education, and research.

The *Loon Caller* is free to all citizen science participants and donors. For volunteer information, annual reports, and previous newsletters, go to the VINS website: [www.vinsweb.org/cbd/VLRP.html](http://www.vinsweb.org/cbd/VLRP.html)

Your support is vital to the VLRP and VINS, a non-profit membership organization. Membership contributions directly fund essential research, education, and conservation programs. Members receive free admission to the VINS Nature Center, our quarterly newsletter, *Vermont Nature*, program and nature shop discounts, and reduced admissions at other area attractions.

Contact our membership department at (802) 359-5000, or visit [www.vinsweb.org](http://www.vinsweb.org) for more information on how you can support VINS as a member.

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**VINS Education Director:** Teresa Mitchell

**VINS Development Director:** Karen Keane



## Loonwatch 2007

Save the Date: Saturday July 21

**2007 Loonwatch Day will be dedicated to VLRP volunteer and supporter, Lew Shattuck.** Lew passed away in August 2006. Despite being seriously ill, he told his family that he still wanted to survey Caspian Lake on LW day. Lew loved Caspian Lake in Greensboro, VT. He owned a little piece of land on the north shore. He never built a camp; there were some chairs and a grill (and maybe a tarp) to comfort his friends and family. Lew helped the VLRP improve its volunteer and outreach programs as a member of the advisory board. We'll miss him.

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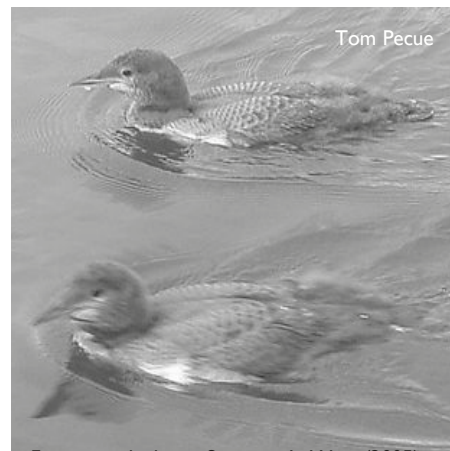
ern Vermont loons is in southwest New Hampshire and north central Massachusetts. We still aren't sure where the summering loons on Lake Champlain go to find breeding sites? New York, Quebec, or Vermont? Someday, we might be able to answer this question.

NELSWG gets us closer to the real world of loons by allowing us to evaluate loon populations and conservation on a regional scale. There are many site-specific threats to loons that are common throughout the northeast (e.g., recreation, shoreline development, fishing gear and lead) and regional threats that cross borders (e.g., airborne mercury pollution, botulism outbreaks on the Great Lakes, other diseases, oil spills on the ocean, other wintering area threats, and even vacationers).

In this issue, we will introduce you to some of the other NELSWG members, provide a summary of loon populations and programs in the northeast, and list some other groups working on loon conservation throughout North America. One of the primary loon groups, BioDiversity Research Institute (BRI), will likely be spearheading the development of the International Center for Loon Conservation. Dr. David C. Evers from BRI is about to complete the *Status Assessment and Conservation Plan for the Common Loon in North America* in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Although as individuals we tend to follow "our loon pair" on our favorite lake, the VLRP wants to keep you informed about our loony neighbors. What we learn regionally (and internationally) will help us to take better care of our loons here in Vermont.

Eric Hanson



Tom Pecue

First time chicks on Seymour L. West (2005)

## The Vermont Loon Recovery Project celebrates 30 years of loon conservation

Join us **Saturday July 28, 2007** to celebrate the successful return of loons to Vermont. **Location:** Ray and Evelyn Richer's Gallery at Loon Cove, Joe's Pond, Cabot, VT. **Time:** 4:30-8:00 pm

*Potluck dinner picnic, music, canoe rides, loon photo gallery, on-going loon slide show, silent auction, volunteers, anyone who likes loons.*

## What Loons Call Home

Something in a loon's genes tells it where its northern home is. Through the study of color-banded loons, we now know that loon chicks return to their natal lake region after spending at least 2 summers on the ocean. For example, in 2006 a color-banded adult loon was found dead (swallowed fishing gear) on East Long Pond that had been banded as a chick in 2000 on Mollys Falls Reservoir 4.5 miles away. Occasionally loons return early as subadults (1-2 year olds, gray and white, no dots or necklace). Once adult loons find a territory, 70 to 85 percent of the loon pairs return to their territory the following year, on average. There is less turnover on small, single-territory lakes than on large, multiple territory lakes (i.e., lakes with 2 or more loon pairs). The 15 to 30 percent of the loons that do not return to their territory in a given year have either been displaced by another loon, often in a territorial fight, chose a different lake for unknown reasons, or died. Usually the turnover involves just one of the former pair members, while the other member faithfully returns to his or her territory. In this light, loons can almost be thought

of as more site-faithful than mate-faithful.

Adult loons that are displaced from a territory tend to stay near their former nesting grounds. For example, banded loons on Somerset Reservoir (Dandeneau Cove) and Maidstone Lake (South) that lost spots in their respective territories, started new territories elsewhere on their lakes. A banded male from Martin's Pond moved a few miles away to Fosters Pond. Do loons ever stray far from "their" lake? Occasionally, yes, it appears. In New Hampshire, a subadult, non-breeding loon, was observed 50 miles away from its natal lake. This level of movement is likely infrequent but may explain how loons colonizes south-central Vermont. Loons started nesting on Lake Ninevah in 1995, which is located 40-50 miles from the nearest breeding lake. The average dispersal distance for returning chicks is 8 miles from their natal lake and 2 miles for adults who leave a former territory. Thus, there likely are many sub-populations of loons throughout the northeast that do not interact during the breeding season. Loons really do have a summer home.

### Northeast Loon Study Work Group (NELSWG) Members and Other Loon Groups in North America

Vermont Loon Recovery Project (VLRP)	<a href="http://www.vinsweb.org/cbd/VLRP.html">www.vinsweb.org/cbd/VLRP.html</a>
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dept.	Quechee and Craftsbury, VT (802) 586-8064 <a href="http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/wildlife_nongame.cfm">www.vtfishandwildlife.com/wildlife_nongame.cfm</a>
Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) (New Hampshire)	<a href="http://www.loon.org">www.loon.org</a> The Loon Center, Moultonborough, NH (603) 476-5666
Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program (ACLP)	<a href="http://www.adkscience.org/loons">www.adkscience.org/loons</a> Ray Brook, NY (518) 891-8836
Maine Audubon	<a href="http://www.maineaudubon.org/conserve/loon/index.html">www.maineaudubon.org/conserve/loon/index.html</a> Falmouth, ME (207) 781-2330
BioDiversity Research Institute (BRI)	<a href="http://www.briloon.org">www.briloon.org</a> (toxicology, mercury, populations) Gorham, ME (207) 839-7600
Tufts University Wildlife Clinic	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/vet/loons/index.html">www.tufts.edu/vet/loons/index.html</a> (loon mortality) North Grafton, MA (508) 839-7918
SEANET at Tufts University	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/vet/seanet/index.html">www.tufts.edu/vet/seanet/index.html</a> (NE Atlantic Coast seabird mortality studies)
U.S. Geological Survey	<a href="http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/loons/migrations.html">www.umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/loons/migrations.html</a> (loon migration)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	<a href="http://www.fws.gov">www.fws.gov</a> search "loon" Concord, NH
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	<a href="http://www.epa.gov">www.epa.gov</a> search "loon"
Canadian Lakes Loon Survey – Bird Studies Canada	<a href="http://www.bsc-eoc.org/clslmain.html">www.bsc-eoc.org/clslmain.html</a>
State Depts. Of Environmental Conservation (NY, VT, NH, ME)	<a href="http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/dec.htm">www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/dec.htm</a>
Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS)	<a href="http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/loons/index.html">www.ns.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/loons/index.html</a>

#### Other Loon Groups in North America

LoonWatch – Sigurd Olsen Environmental Institute (Wisconsin)	<a href="http://www.northland.edu/Northland/Soei/Programs/Loonwatch">www.northland.edu/Northland/Soei/Programs/Loonwatch</a>
Michigan Loon Society	<a href="http://www.michiganloons.org">www.michiganloons.org</a>
** Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources	<a href="http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecological_services/nongame/projects/mlmp_state.html">www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecological_services/nongame/projects/mlmp_state.html</a> St. Paul, MN
Montana Loon Society	<a href="http://www.montanaloons.org">www.montanaloons.org</a>
Loon Lake Loon Association (Washington state)	<a href="http://www.loons.org">www.loons.org</a>
Darwin Long's Loon Page	<a href="http://members.aol.com/GaviaRCool/loonpage.html">members.aol.com/GaviaRCool/loonpage.html</a>
Morro Coast Audubon Society (CA)	<a href="http://www.morrocoastaudubon.org/looncon.htm">www.morrocoastaudubon.org/looncon.htm</a>
Alaska Loonwatch	<a href="http://www.akloonwatch.net">www.akloonwatch.net</a>

\*\* VLRP biologist, Eric Hanson, developed the MN loon program from 1994-96.

### 2006 Volunteer of the Year and Lake Profile: Lake Ninevah

The loons on Lake Ninevah have become an integral part of Pat and Richard Nye's lives. The Nyes have taken care of the nest warning signs, educated boaters and lakeshore residents about respecting the loon nesting areas and the loon family, and helped launch an aggressive program to tackle the Eurasian milfoil problem when plants were found in the lake. Pat and Richard have been lucky enough to live a quarter mile from the primary nesting island. Pat has been able to enjoy each stage of a summering loon pair from courtship and nest building to nest exchanges and cooing among the chicks and parents. Of course, the loons (and the Nyes) have had their share of turmoil with attacks by intruder loons and Canada Geese and the loss of 2 chicks in a major hail storm.

**Lake Profile:** Lake Ninevah was the sight of the first loon nesting pair in south central Vermont in 1995 between the nearest nesting pairs on Somerset Reservoir (30 miles south) and Thurman Dix Reservoir (60 miles north). That first nest failed but since then they have produced 12 chicks over 12 years of nesting. Most nests have been on an island near the boat access and the Nyes, but the pair has attempted to nest on some hummocks in a spectacular marsh on the eastern end. Lake Ninevah's loon chicks have likely colonized some of the 5 nearby water bodies where loons now nest. The Nyes have truly helped bring loons back to central Vermont.

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dacks than Vermont because of the remoteness of the lakes. Currently, nesting platforms and nest warning signs are not used in the Adirondacks. The ACLP has developed two wonderful school programs that teachers can use with the help of ACLP staff, *Science on the Fly* and *Loon Scientists*. Maybe someday we can bring something like this to Vermont's schools.

Similar to other Northeast breeding loon populations, New York loons also experienced declines in the past. Loons historically nested in the Finger Lakes and across northeastern New York. By the late 1970s, biologists documented a 35% decline in the number of lakes with nesting loons. Breeding populations were restricted to 9 counties representing the Adirondack Mountains and the Thousand Island area of the St. Lawrence River and accounted for an estimated 155 territorial pairs. In the mid-1980s, a statewide survey estimated there were 216 to 270 territorial pairs, including some pairs on lakes south of the St. Lawrence River and outside of the Adirondack Park. Today, breeding populations appear to remain similar and stable, although another statewide population estimate needs to be conducted. The ACLP initiated annual volunteer surveys of lakes in the Adirondacks in 2001. In 2005, 461 adult loons and 67 chicks were counted on 151 of 221 lakes surveyed. Over 450 people partici-



Cows and loons — the return of loons to the New England landscape. This was the first successful loon family observed on Echo Lake in Charleston, VT (2005).

pated in the survey. The ACLP has started to survey a large set of randomly selected lakes to provide a more accurate region-wide population estimate that can be repeated and assessed over time.

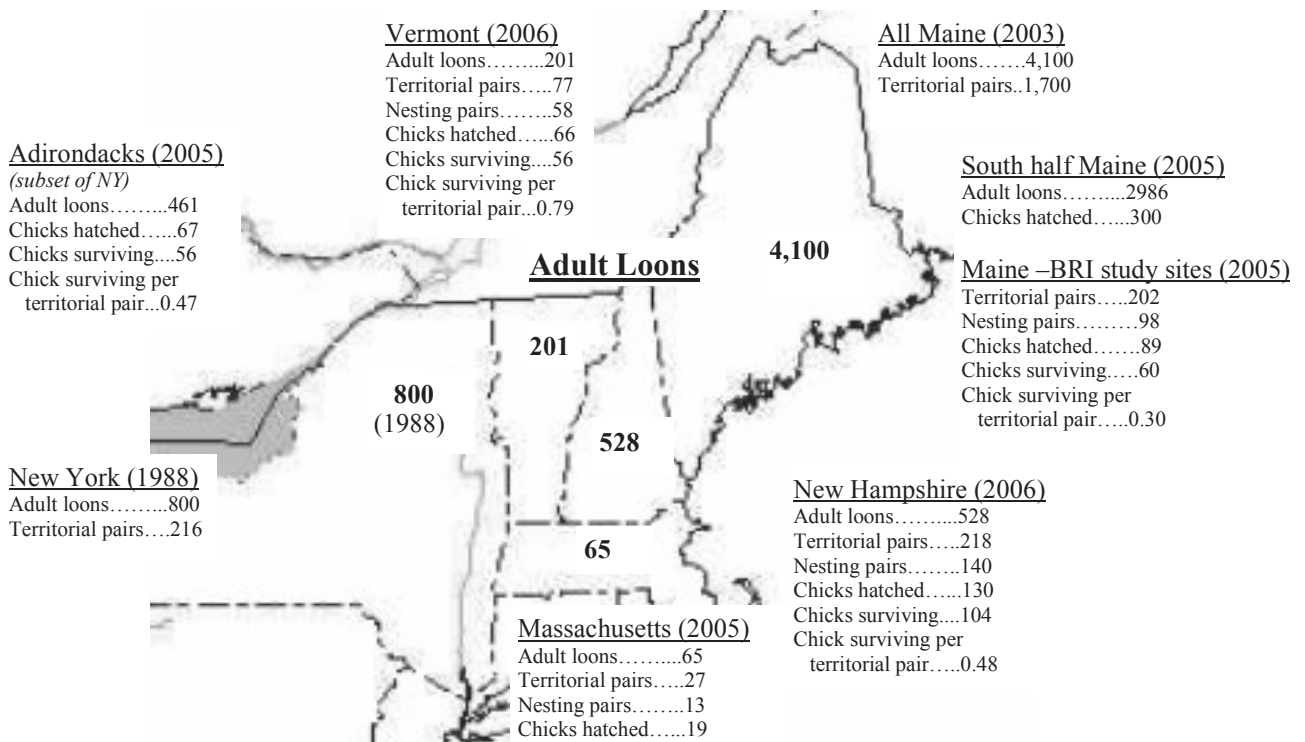
The ACLP is a partnership of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks, NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation, BioDiversity Research Institute (BRI), and the Audubon Society of New York State, Inc.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE: The Loon Preservation Committee

Of all loon conservation programs in North America, the Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) and the VLRP are the most alike as both states attempt to track loon activity on almost every lake in their respective states. Vermont and New Hampshire have the longest continuous data sets on loon productivity anywhere. LPC also utilizes nest warning signs and nesting

platforms (NH and ME use the term "rafts") to reduce the threats of disturbance to nest sites and water fluctuation. About 11 percent of New Hampshire's territorial loon pairs use rafts compared to about 30 percent in Vermont. What makes LPC stand out are its resources for conducting research on

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loon habitat and population modeling, collecting the largest database on loon mortality and population trends (with the assistance of Tufts University Wildlife Vet School), hiring up to 8 or 9 interns annually to carry out loon conservation efforts statewide, and having the only loon-centered nature center at the Loon Center and Markus Wildlife Sanctuary in Moultonborough, New Hampshire. LPC led the nation in exposing the dangers of lead fishing gear to loons and by helping to get the first state legislation passed. Biologists from LPC and BioDiversity Research Institute (BRI) and volunteers conducted much of the early research on mercury and loons comparing the behaviors of loons with high and low levels of mercury.

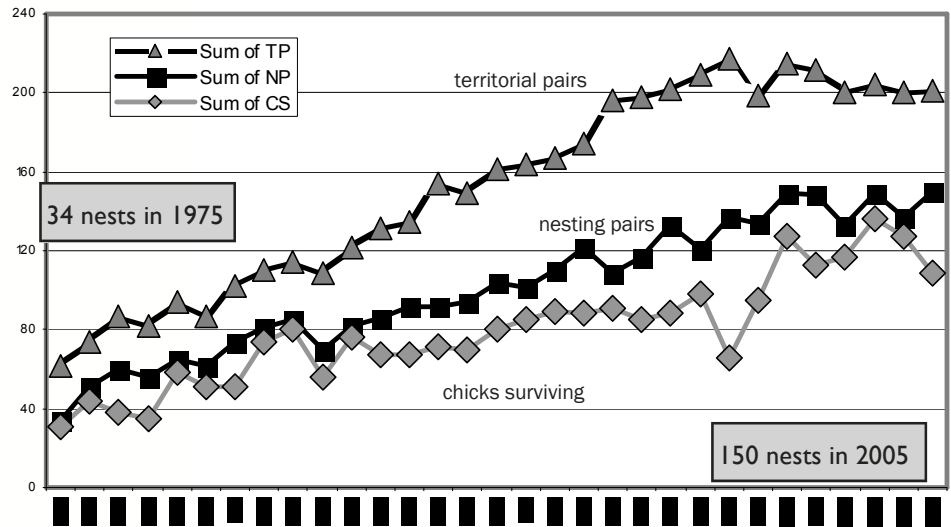
LPC conducted the first statewide loon population count in 1975. Historic loon population data, which was more available in New Hampshire than in Vermont, indicated at least a 50 percent decline compared to earlier in the 1900s. Since 1975, the loon's comeback has been well documented. In New Hampshire, the number of territorial pairs has more than doubled from 93 in 1976 to 217 in 2006. The core area of breeding loons is in central New Hampshire on Squam and Winnepesaukee lakes and surrounding smaller lakes. As the population has increased over time, loons have recolonized southern New Hampshire and occupied more lakes north of the White Mountains. Even in northern New Hampshire, loon numbers were at historical lows in the mid 1970s. In 1976, only 8 territorial pairs were found on Lake Umbagog and by 2000 this population had increased to 31 territorial pairs.

However, there have been some recent localized population declines whose ultimate cause(s) are unknown. On Lake Umbagog, LPC observed a decline from 31 to 15 territorial pairs between 2000 and 2002. In 2005, the number of pairs rebounded to 20, but dropped to 13 in 2006. Loon health could be a factor as West Nile virus, botulism E, and avian influenza (not the highly contagious H5N1 strain) were found in several dead loons on Lake Umbagog. On Squam Lake, there was a one-year decline from 16 territorial pairs in 2004 to 9 in 2005 and 10 in 2006, and on Lake Winnepesaukee, chick survivorship was only 50 percent in 2005 compared to the statewide average of 79 percent. Because of LPC's intensive monitoring efforts, these declines were detected quickly. The primary concern is the lack of clear evidence showing why these declines occurred. Despite 20 years of successful recovery efforts in New Hampshire and Vermont, these local declines highlight the need to remain vigilant in assessing all aspects of loon and lake health and the threats they face.

## MASSACHUSETTS: Massachusetts Fish and Game and Massachusetts Aquatic Conservation Society

Loons were gone from southern New England in the mid-1900s, but the historical southern periphery of the loon's

**New Hampshire Common Loon Activity 1975-2005**



breeding range included eastern Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Breeding Common Loons recolonized Massachusetts in 1975, and for several years breeding pairs were limited to Quabbin Reservoir.

Nesting loons are now found on 12 lakes in central Massachusetts where there were 27 territorial pairs in 2005. Thirteen of these pairs nested producing 19 chicks. Many of these lakes have protected shoreline habitat as they are used for drinking water supplies for nearby municipalities. Wintering loons are found in large numbers off the Massachusetts seacoast. Unfortunately, in 2003, an oil spill in Buzzards Bay killed more than 200 loons, and in 1996, the North Cape oil spill off the coast of Rhode Island killed more than 400 adult loons.

Surveys by the Massachusetts Fish and Game Department have been limited to a handful of reservoirs and lakes in the north central part of the state, thus there is a chance loons are present on other lakes in the state that have yet to be documented. A new organization, Massachusetts Aquatic Conservation Society (MACS), hopes to expand survey efforts statewide along with implementing outreach, management, and research efforts.

## MAINE: Maine Audubon and BioDiversity Research Institute

Maine Audubon and BioDiversity Research Institute (BRI) have both worked to conserve Maine's loons. Maine Audubon, based in Falmouth Maine, has focused its loon conservation efforts on conducting an annual census of southern Maine lakes and outreach, especially getting information out about the dangers of lead fishing gear and mercury and how to reduce threats to nesting loons. They recently produced a brochure titled "Living with Loons" that provides information on how people can help loons. Maine Audubon, like New Hampshire's and Vermont's loon programs, initiated loon surveys in the 1970s. With over 4,000 loons in the state, Maine Audubon has focused its monitoring efforts on detecting changes in the adult loon population. In 2006, Maine Audubon expanded their volunteer efforts to

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## IT'S OFFICIAL: the Common Loon has been removed from the Vermont endangered species list.

On 25 April, 2005, the Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources made it official. Peregrine Falcons and Osprey were also removed from the endangered species list. A few things must be said at this exciting milestone.

- 1) Congratulations to everyone who helped achieve this major milestone. In addition to all the volunteers and professional assistance, we should note some of the major players, including the Vermont Scientific Advisory Group on birds, the state Endangered Species Committee, Sally Laughlin who is part of both groups and started the loon surveys in 1977-78, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD) and Steve Parren (the Nongame Wildlife director), VINS and Chris Rimmer (the VINS Conservation Biology Department director), and all the past VLRP biologists, two of whom are still helping out (Roz Renfrew and Sally [Borden] Buteau).
- 2) Keep up the good work; we want to keep the loons off the list.
- 3) Because loons are a highly vulnerable species and most loon nests are located at high-risk sites, there will have to be some level of management and education (forever). Our lakes are only getting more developed and busier, not less.
- 4) VINS and VFWD want to keep the VLRP going as a volunteer-based program for many reasons in addi-

tion to the management and education needs. The VLRP is a wonderful way for people to get involved in watershed and lake conservation, and you don't have to be a trained ornithologist to participate. Loons are attractive and popular making them a great symbol for watershed conservation. By helping the loons, hopefully other species benefit as well.

- 5) The VLRP is developing a program to raise awareness about the importance of loon nesting habitat.
- 6) VINS and the VLRP biologist will have to work harder to raise the funds to keep the VLRP financially sound. On-going programs are difficult to finance, regardless of the species or its status. The VFWD is under continued financial strain and will likely shift their limited resources to other species in the near future. Currently,



Dan Poleschook

about 40-50 percent of the VLRP budget comes from the VFWD Non-game Program through the State Wildlife Grant program. If any wildlife project should be able to financially support itself, the VLRP should be it. Please keep up your support. Thank you.

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start monitoring nesting success, chicks hatched, and chick survival over the entire summer on a subset of lakes.

BRI has followed breeding success closely on several large reservoirs and lakes in the Rangeley Lake region for over a decade using the loon as a sentinel species to study the effects of mercury on aquatic ecosystems. They have worked closely with Florida Power and Light, who manage these reservoirs. Nesting rafts are essential for successful loon nesting on several of these reservoirs. BRI has expanded their toxicology research to assess mercury in many different ecosystems including montane forests, estuarine habitats, and oceans. For example, BRI has collaborated with CBD director Chris Rimmer and VINS conservation biologist Kent McFarland to measure mercury levels in Bicknells Thrush at high elevations.

The breeding loon population in Maine was far more buffered to historical human disturbance than nearby New England states. Still, southern areas of Maine were considered to have low numbers. Since the 1970s, breeding loon populations appear to have reoccupied some of the more southern areas of Maine and overall populations appear to have slightly increased. Statewide surveys estimated from 3,000 to 4,000 adults in the early to mid 1980s. In 1990, the statewide estimate was 3,949 adults (54% in the southern half). Estimates are based on a stratified random sample conducted by the Maine Audubon Society for the southern half of Maine and aerial surveys conducted by the Maine Department of Inland

Fisheries and Wildlife for the northern half. In 2003, combining both surveys, biologists estimated there were 4,100 adult loons statewide (or 1,700 territorial pairs). Population trends based on southern Maine indicate a stable number of adults. In 2005, 851 volunteers surveyed 317 lakes in the southern half of Maine, including Moosehead Lake (75,000 acres) where 58 adult loons were counted but only 2 chicks. There were 10 lakes where volunteers counted over 30 adult loons on each lake. The population estimate for the southern half of Maine in 2005 was 2,986 adult loons compared to 1,416 loons in 1983.

Recent high resolution monitoring of lakes in the Rangeley Lakes Region and in the Allagash Region indicate lower than expected densities and productivity. Further investigation is ongoing to study patterns and the potential need for adjusting population estimates in northern Maine. BRI has found that high mercury levels in 30 percent of Maine's loon population could be causing productivity declines of 37 percent.

### **The Future of Northeast U.S. Loons**

Loons in the northeast are some of the best-tracked loons in the world, but the pressures from people are also some of the most intense. We still have a long way to go to secure the loon's future. Oil spills, increasing lake use by people, loon population declines in specific areas, and numerous other persistent threats exist. The various northeast loon groups and their cooperators in NELSWG will continue to work together to make sure the charismatic Common Loon has a place on our lakes and ponds.

## 2005 / 2006 Vermont Loon Activity Highlights

	2005	2006
# nesting pairs.....	53	58
# territorial pairs.....	72	77
# nests flooded.....	1	5
# failed nests.....	6	15
# chicks surviving.....	57	56
# new nesting pairs.....	7	5
# nesting pairs disappeared.....	0	3
# nesting platforms.....	35	33
# platforms used.....	26	22
# lakes with nest warning signs placed:	33	34
# actual signs used:	174	178

### Loonwatch volunteer counts

	2005	2006
# adult loons.....	191	201
# lakes surveyed.....	122	133
high counts..	15 on Peacham	8 on Peacham
	13 on Norton	7 on East Long
		7 on Somerset



Mary Daly—Martins Pond

\* Total # loons in distress (both years): **19**.

\* Number of loons that landed on ponds to small to fly: **2**.

1<sup>st</sup> one was color-banded from Bald Hill Pond. She was captured and released and returned to Bald Hill and her mate on the nest. The nest was successful despite her being absent for at least 5 days. The 2<sup>nd</sup> loon was not catchable after several attempts. Two months later at the end of September, it got airborne, likely through a 30-foot gap between the trees when wind conditions were just right and the urge to migrate was strong.

\* Number of loons that took live bait or lures and were caught up in mono-filament fishing line in 2005 and 2006: **at least 10** with others reported.

3 were successfully caught and released (2 on Lake Eden and 1 on Wallace Pond). 3 were not catchable but likely survived after the line wore off. 1 did survive, spent the winter on the ocean, returned with line still wadded up at the base of the bill, nested, and raised a chick (Maidstone Lake). 2 died after their ordeals on Nichols and East Long ponds. 3 others died after ingesting lead fishing gear.

\* Number of platforms removed because natural nesting habitat existed: **2**.

\* Of these pairs, how many found a natural nest site the following year: **2**.

\* Size of a hole in the ice on Lake Eligo that 1 loon taxied off and flew: **25 ft.**

\* Diameter of hole that a 2<sup>nd</sup> loon kept open through -20 F weather: **4 ft.**

\* Where this fortunate loon was released after the hole finally froze up:

**Lake Champlain by the ECHO Center in Burlington.**

\* Pond where many long-distance open-water swimmers were concerned about loons approaching very closely after this loon pair nested and had a chick for the first time: **No. 10 Pond (Mirror L.).**

\* Lake where loons nested 100 yards down a channel because there is little or no nesting habitat on the rest of the lake: **Harveys Lake.**

\* Pond where an eagle carried a loon chick over 50 feet before dropping it: **Holland Pond** (the chick survived).

\* Lakes or ponds where loons attempted to nest within 10-40 feet of a dock, camp, or boat access: **Great Averill, Eligo, and Wolcott.**

\* Those which had successful nests: **Eligo and Wolcott.**

\* Location of chicks likely killed by motorboats: **Ricker and Groton.**

\* First pond in Vermont to have 3 pairs of nesting loons: **Peacham** (340 acres).

\* Date Vermont lead fishing gear law bans the use of lead sinkers ½ ounce or less: **1 January 2007.**

## Snapping Turtles — the underwater predator

On Friday the 13th (of August 2004), Finn McCoy was heading out to the pontoon work boat on Lake Eligo, where he was helping to clean up Eurasian milfoil. He had been watching the growth of the two loon chicks on the lake for the past five weeks with interest. Today, however, he noticed one chick by itself and thought that a little odd. Upon reaching the work site, he heard an adult calling wildly further down the lake. He decided to investigate. What he found was a flustered and angry parent loon watching its chick being taken underwater by a snapping turtle. Finn, an athletic college student, decided to help. He took a paddle and bonked the turtle on the head. The turtle, surprisingly, let go. I guess the turtle was not expecting a headache while catching breakfast.

The chick was observed over the next week, but we did not know whether it was injured. Two weeks after the incident, I only

observed one of the two chicks, thus I thought one had been lost. It ends up intruder loons were frequenting Lake Eligo causing the chicks to hide. Both chicks were observed from mid-September through early December. As ice formed at the shallow north end, I still saw both chicks. Concerned that the snapping turtle might have hurt the chick's leg and that the chick could not fly, I boated at the loons in early December to see how the chick dove. Both loons dove for the typical 30-40 seconds upon approach, thus they both appeared healthy. A few days later, the loons flew south just before the entire lake froze over. This was the first time loon chicks had fledged from Lake Eligo since monitoring began in 1978. Last year, the loon chick did get stuck on the ice, and I had to catch and transport the loon to Lake Champlain on 21 December 2005. Bad and good luck seem to follow these loon chicks.

E.H.

# Loon Caller



Vermont Loon Recovery Project  
Vermont Institute of Natural Science  
6565 Woodstock Rd., PO Box 1281  
Quechee, VT 05059

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## Reel in when loons nearby

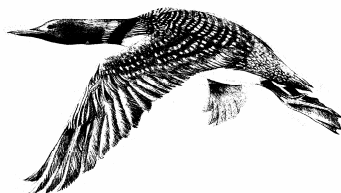
In 2005 and 2006, at least 12 loons took live bait or lures. Volunteers and VLRP Biologist Eric Hanson spent over 400 combined hours monitoring and attempting to catch these birds in distress. Three captures were successful and the loons were set free. At least 5 loons died from complications with the line or the presence of lead.

## Loon Volunteer Trainings and Loon Natural History Programs

6:30 - 8:00 p.m

Wed., May 16 Highland Lodge, Greensboro  
Thurs. May 24 VINS Nature Center, Quechee

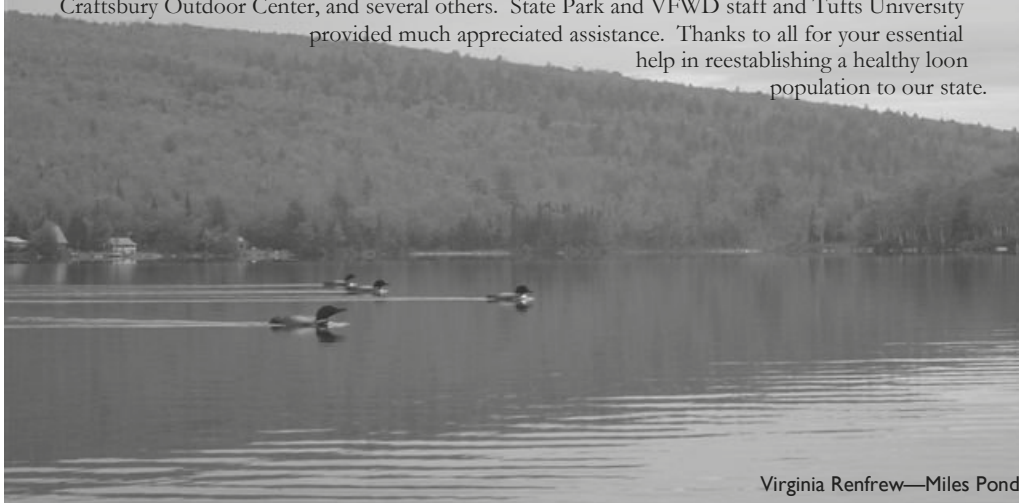
For more information, contact Eric Hanson  
(802) 586-8064 ehanson@vtlink.net



Evelyn Richer—  
www.thegalleryatlooncov  
e.com

## Thanks to VLRP Supporters and Volunteers

Yeah volunteers! Your work has brought loons back to Vermont. We thank the VFWD's Non-game and Natural Heritage Program for providing the baseline financial support for this project. We also thank numerous individuals and business for their financial support, including Jeff and Terry Marshall, Pat and Richard Nye, Guy Nichols, Judy Geer, Elinor and George Osborn, and Concept II. The past two years of work would not have been possible without grants from the Walter Cerf Community Fund, the Vermont Watershed Grant Program, and the Sustainable Future Fund. Ray and Evelyn Richer hosted the first loon volunteer picnic in 2005 at their home and wild-life photo gallery on Joe's Pond. They also donated several prints for the silent auction. Other contributions were made by the Highland Lodge, Cheryl Ecklund and Gaia Design Jewellery, the Craftsbury Outdoor Center, and several others. State Park and VFWD staff and Tufts University provided much appreciated assistance. Thanks to all for your essential help in reestablishing a healthy loon population to our state.



Virginia Renfrew—Miles Pond

Please support the VLRP and Vermont's loons through a tax-deductible contribution today.

Your donation supports:

- 1) statewide monitoring efforts,
- 2) nesting platforms and nest warning signs,
- 3) volunteer coordination,
- 4) public outreach programs,
- 5) loon rescues, and
- 6) research on threats to loons.

Donors receive the *Loon Caller* and VINS Conservation Biology Department newsletter *Field Notes*. Donations of \$40 or more entitle you to VINS membership. Donations can be mailed to:

VINS  
6565 Woodstock Rd.  
PO Box 1281  
Quechee, VT 05059

(Include a note that the donation is for the VLRP)



The Vermont Watershed Grant Program provided partial funding in 2006. Please support this program through the purchase of the new edition conservation plate with the Catamount on it.