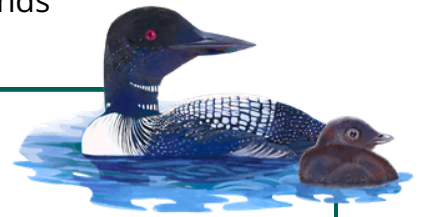


Instructions for LoonCount Day 2026

The annual one-day survey of Vermont's Common Loons

Thank you for joining the LoonCount and helping us capture a vital statewide snapshot of Vermont's loon population. Your data helps us track population trends and guide essential conservation work on lakes across the state.



When to LoonCount

Saturday, July 18, 2026

Lakes under 300 acres: 8-9 a.m.

Lakes larger than 300 acres: 6-10 a.m. ←Tip: It's usually less windy if you survey earlier

Back-up dates/times in case of high winds and big waves:

- Later in the day on Saturday
- Friday late day
- Sunday

How long will this take?

- 10 to 30-acre pond - 15 to 30 mins
- Small lakes (<50 acres) - 30+ mins
- Large lakes (>50 acres) - Up to several hours

Need to cancel? Contact the loon biologists ASAP at loon@vtecostudies.org

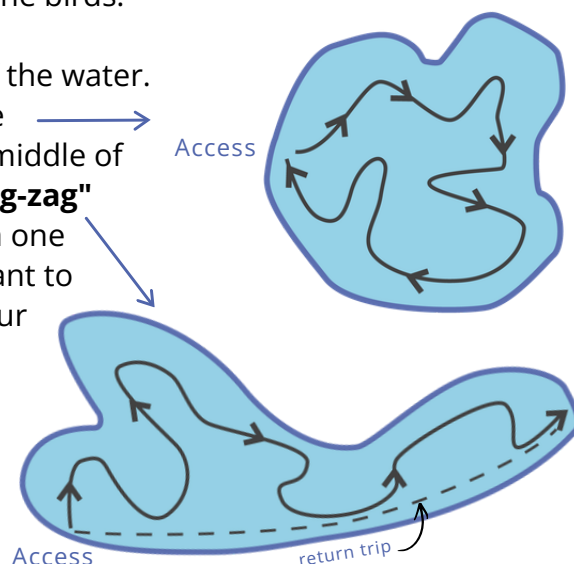
How to LoonCount

1. **Arrive and Set the Clock:** Head to your assigned lake at the designated time. Bring paper and pencil or your phone to record your sightings. Before you start scanning, **record your start time and the number of people in your party.** Having more eyes on the water is a huge help for spotting birds that might otherwise go unnoticed!
2. **Map Your Sightings:** Use a paper map to mark where and when you see a loon. To keep the data accurate, **only record the first sighting of each individual loon.** Keep a close eye on their movement so you don't accidentally count the same bird twice.
 - a. Do **not** count flying loons unless you see them actually land or take off. If you see a fly-over, just make a quick note of the time in the comments.
 - b. **When in Doubt, Undercount.** If you aren't sure if a loon you see is a new bird, it is always better to undercount than to overcount. Just add a comment to your notes explaining the situation—your field notes are incredibly helpful for us.
 - c. Once you're in position, pause and scan the area for several minutes at a time. Loons are expert divers and can travel long distances underwater; it often takes a few minutes for a "missing" loon to reappear. Stay sharp—they may only surface for a few seconds!
3. **Note the Details (Optional):** If you're able to, we'd love any extra intel on nesting (location and type), nesting behavior, predator sightings, or loon behaviors.
4. **Submit Your Data:** Once you've finished, **record your stop time.** When you're back home, transfer your map notes and totals to **LoonWeb.**

P.S. We are currently beta-testing a new phone app to make this process even easier. If you're tech-savvy and want to help us test it out, let us know!

Surveying by boat:

- **Maintain Your Distance:** Generally, stay 100 to 300 feet from the shoreline. This gives you a great view of nesting areas without disturbing the birds.
- **Pick Your Path:** Your route depends on the shape of the water. **On round lakes, move in a steady circle** around the perimeter. You may occasionally have to boat to the middle of the lake for a better view. **On long, narrow lakes, "zig-zag"** back and forth between the shores as you move from one end to the other. To avoid double counts, you may want to only record your survey one-way and only confirm your sightings on your return trip.
- **Every 1/4 to 1/2 mile**, stop the boat and scan the water with binoculars for a few minutes. Make sure to look both **ahead and behind you**—loons are stealthy and can easily pop up in an area you just passed!



What to Know About Large Lakes and Zones

Your number of loons may vary by lake size. **Small lakes** (under 200 acres) typically can only host one breeding pair, while **large lakes** (over 200–250 acres) may support several different pairs.

Look for "Extra" Loons: On any lake, you may see more than just the resident pair(s). We call these non-breeding loons "floaters" or "intruders." Keep an eye out for these additional birds as you count. Loon pairs are very territorial so you may get to see some interesting behavior as well!

Understand Your Zones: If you are on a large lake, it may be divided into zones. Sometimes these zones match a specific pair's territory (like the North and South zones on Harvey's Lake), and other times they are simply geographic markers (like the zones on Berlin Pond).

If you are working as part of a team, decide how you will cover the water before you start.

- **If you are surveying the entire lake as one group** (e.g., several people in one boat or kayaking together), you can report your findings for the "Entire Lake." To avoid confusion, only **one person** should enter the final data.
- **If your team splits up to cover different zones separately** (e.g., one person takes the North end and another takes the South), you have two options for submitting your results:
 - **Option A:** One person collects the notes from every zone and enters the total data for the entire lake.
 - **Option B:** Each team member "adopts" and enters data for their specific zone only.

Learn How to LoonSurvey Using LoonWeb

You can now submit your observations online through LoonWeb! Help our biologists save time on data entry by entering observations on the website vt.loonweb.org.

Not comfortable with technology? Don't worry – the system is user-friendly and easy to navigate! We have videos and cheat sheets to help you learn the system and we're always available to answer your questions.

Peruse our [online videos and printed cheat sheets](#).

If you haven't yet, sign up for LoonWeb. All you need is your email. You can find helpful guides to get you started here: [Sign up for LoonWeb](#).

Go to our [Events page](#) to find upcoming LoonWeb workshops, or if you miss them, contact us for a one-on-one tutorial via Zoom.

Reporting volunteer hours to VFWD online

It is important that you log your hours and mileage with Vermont Fish & Wildlife so we can match the grant that we receive from VFWD.

- EACH DAY OF OBSERVATION NEEDS TO BE LISTED SEPARATELY whether done online or on paper copy.
- Each person enters their own report.

Online volunteer hours: Our preferred method. Log in or create an account at [the VFWD website](#). See instructions [here](#) (also in the Volunteer Materials section of Vermont Loon Conservation Project page at vtecostudies.org). If adding multiple dates at one time, use the "+" button at the top of the volunteer details page before hitting the submit button. Project is "loons."

Paper forms: Please print TWO copies or ask us to mail you two. You will need to submit one form through June 30 and a second form for hours after July 1. Please scan mail or take a picture of the signed form and email it back by July 15 and August 30, even if you will still be monitoring chicks later. One form per person.

Have a fun season on the water, and thank you for making this program such a success. We could not do it without you!

VLCP is a program of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

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