

Montana Loon Society Newsletter



Montana Loon Society License Plate Sales

By Patricia Bouta

The new Loons of Montana license plate became available in July 2010. Don Skaar, MLS Treasurer, reports that as of mid-March the sale of the license plate has provided \$1,860 to the Montana Loon Society. Show your support for putting



loon rangers in the field, providing educational programs, and purchasing loon buoys by purchasing this plate rather than a regular plate. A \$20 donation goes to the Montana Loon Society when you purchase the plate and renew it each year. The license plate is available in court houses in Montana.

When it is time to renew your registration, why not go to your country treasurer's office to purchase this plate and help provide financial support for the Montana Loon Society projects.

Dr. Mark Pokras conveys the dangers of lead to loons at The Wildlife Society Conference

By Laura Holmquist, Tally Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest

In February, The Montana Common Loon Working Group brought Dr. Mark Pokras to Missoula. This was made possible through the generous support of the Montana Loon Society and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. As one of the world's leading experts in lead toxicosis, Dr. Pokras spoke to the plenary session at The Wildlife Society's Montana Chapter Conference. His message was clear: lead is bad for loons. Just as our Montana Loon Society president, Lynn Kelly, has become known throughout Montana as the "Loon Lady", Dr. Pokras, a veterinarian at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tuft's University in North Grafton, Massachusetts, is the "Dead Loon Guy". Almost half (44%) of the dead and dying breeding loons submitted to Dr. Pokras at the Wildlife Clinic suffered from lead poisoning. Virtually all of this is from loons eating lead fishing gear. While Montana's loons have fared much better so far, we must be proactive to keep it that way. Dr. Pokras, who volunteered his time to come to Montana, also met with the Montana Common Loon Working Group, which has recently adopted a "Lead in Fishing Gear" position statement. His information, ideas, and resources will help us find new ways to ensure that loons are exposed to fewer threats while here on their breeding lakes. Until then, learn more about Dr. Mark Pokras' efforts and about lead's effects on loons at <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/loons/>, and **start looking and asking for nontoxic alternatives to lead fishing tackle for this coming loon season.** Our loons are back for another year of breeding and nesting. What can you do to help keep their waters free from lead?

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Area Loon Reports

The *Conservation Plan for the Common Loon in Montana* states “The Montana Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) divided the range of Montana’s loons into Coordinator Areas to facilitate efforts such as data collection, habitat management, and public education. These 16 areas (Figure A) have from four to 60 lakes.” Figure A is shown below and the following 10 reports are titled according to the areas on the map, and cover 12 of the areas. The name that the area was called in the 2010 Newsletter is shown in parentheses.

Murphy Lake Ranger District (sometimes called Fortine/Stryker)

By Melanie Finch

The Fortine Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest was spring and summer grounds for 22 resident adults. Of these 22 individuals, nine pairs attempted to nest, with one pair attempting to nest twice. The pair that attempted to nest twice was a new nest attempt for this observation year but resulted as a failure both times. This lake was actually located on the neighboring Rexford Ranger District, but was included in the observation year and results of this report. Overall, ten loon chicks successfully hatched with six to eight surviving. The status of one of two chicks on Murphy Lake was unknown on the July Loon Day, but overall three chicks were confirmed as fatalities on these breeding lakes. With the fabulous carpentry skills of Chuck Schwartz, five floating platforms were installed on five breeding lakes. Three of these platforms successfully hatched three loon chicks. One of the other platforms was not used and the fifth platform resulted in a nesting failure.

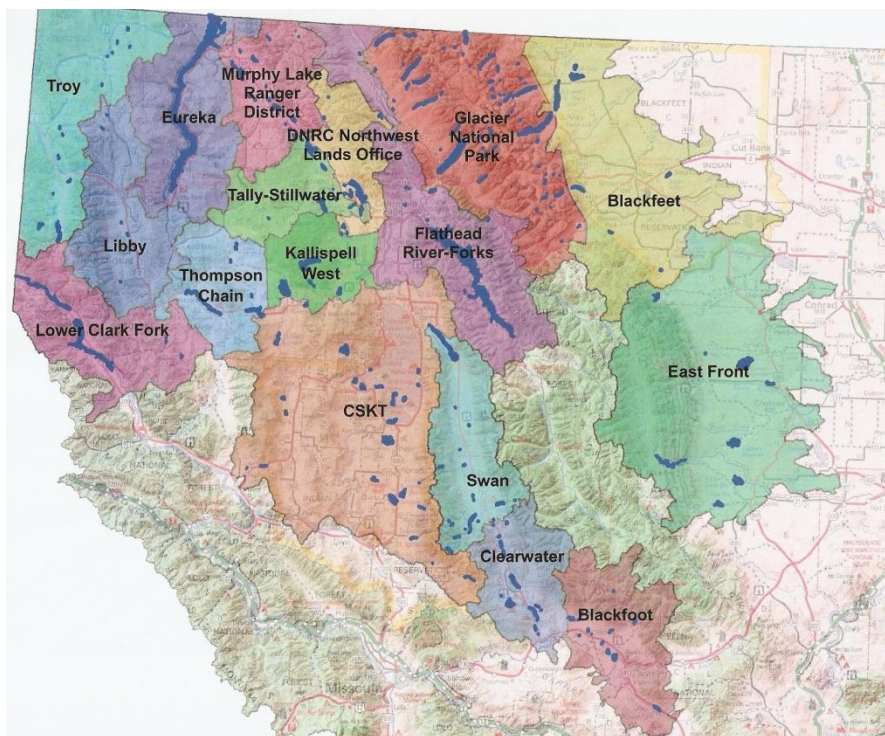
Predators consisted of bald eagles on Murphy Lake and Frank Lake. One adult bald eagle chased one of the loon adults off of the Murphy Lake nest and was observed to be perching on the loon nest for about one minute before the other adult loon chased it off. Murphy successfully hatched two chicks, but the status of one of those chicks was unknown on the July Loon Day.

Private landowners living on Frank Lake reported seeing two or three bald eagles flying around this lake on more than one occasion. Frank Lake successfully hatched two chicks; one resulted in a fatality in June and the other in July. The adult male of the loon pair was also found dead along the public boat launch shore.

Troy

By Mandy Rockwell

The Three Rivers Ranger District had three successful nesting loon pairs this summer with a potential fourth unconfirmed sighting. Two of successes occurred on historical breeding lakes, Okaga and Alvord Lakes, with the third occurring on Slee Lake. Slee Lake is a new breeding territory that will be added to our yearly survey efforts. Each lake produced a single chick by the July Loon Day. A fourth possible nesting pair with a chick was observed on Bull Lake. Bull Lake is surrounded by many private homes and two campgrounds, receiving a lot of recreational use, and has not been a



productive lake for loons in the recent past. The sighting was interrupted by a passing boat and could not be confirmed. Here's to hoping!

Three traditional nesting lakes reported loon activity this summer. Rene Lake was used by three adults this year, but no observations of a nesting attempt was made by our volunteer. A fisherman on Kilbrennan Lake reported observing a pair of loons just prior to Loon Day and a USFS employee reported a single loon in the week following. Hoskins Lake reported a pair. A single loon was reported on Savage Lake. None were observed on Skinner or Vinal Lakes. Three Rivers Ranger District experienced a transition in Loon Day coordination this year and unfortunately the May surveys did not occur. We were very happy to have made it to the majority of our traditionally surveyed lakes this July and to be able to report three successes!

Flathead River-Forks (sometimes called Hungry Horse, Glacier View, and Spotted Bear Ranger Districts, Flathead National Forest)

By Angela Daenzer

We were once again extremely fortunate to have quality help with loon monitoring this season. Volunteers Doug and Joanne Schwartz travelled from California to offer assistance, and we hosted a student program employee, Ariel Paxson, who also played strong role in monitoring our lakes. A RAC grant helped support their efforts, helping us afford a vehicle for the summer, as well as field equipment. With modern scopes in hand, they were much better able to see bands from our observation points.

Loon pairs hatched chicks this year on Tepee Lake, Mud/Garnet Lake, Cedar Creek Reservoir, and Spoon Lake (which was terrific news after losing the long-time territorial female there last year). One loon chick survived on Tepee Lake, Cedar Creek Reservoir, and Spoon Lake. The Tepee Lake loon pair again made use of the platform built last year by Rachel Potter and Gael Bissell (which last year led to the first successful nesting there since 2003).

Lake Five, which has been reported to have visiting loons occasionally over the past several years, had a pair make a nesting attempt on a small island. The nest and eggs only lasted a short while, in spite of buoys and watchful neighbors, but the attempt led to great discussions, collaborations, and outreach with residents there.

Kalispell West / Thompson Chain

By Logan Degenhardt

This year proved to be quite successful for the loons in these areas and also brought about some very interesting changes in the nesting pairs occupying some of the lakes. A new male took claim over the eastern lobe of Upper Thompson Lake, but with this, the pair was unable to successfully hatch a nest. The male who was kicked off this lobe was spotted twice with another bird on Loon Lake, but no courtship activity was witnessed. A new banded bird was also spotted on Island Lake, and this bird was identified to be a bird that was banded in 2004 on Rainy Lake. We were also able to band the two adult loons on Rogers Lake in June.

The number of chicks hatched was 10, and the pairs were able to keep all the chicks alive. The following is a list of lakes and chick numbers: Ashley Lake 2, Lone Lake 2, Monroe Lake 2, Lower Thompson Lake 2, Rogers Lake 1, Middle lobe of Upper Thompson Lake 1. This area had the highest number of chicks this year and a hundred percent survival rate. Overall, a great nesting season for the loons in the Kalispell West – Thompson Chain of Lakes areas.

Swan Valley

By Mark Ruby

The Swan Valley experienced a very wet June for the loon breeding season in the summer of 2010. Loons in the Swan nest 1-2 weeks later compared to first documented nesting attempts in the Blackfoot and Seeley Lake areas. The Swan Valley had two known nests and produced one surviving loon chick for the season. For the past eight years the Swan Valley has only hosted one successful nest despite four to five other loon pairs present on lakes within the valley.

However, in 2010 the Swan hosted two successful nesting pairs on the historically successful Pierce Lake and Loon Lake within the Kraft Creek drainage.

Loon Lake had been a historically active nesting lake until the late 90's, but unknown events changed the lake's productivity. A loon pair attempted nesting on Loon Lake in 2009, but the attempt came unusually late in the summer (beginning of July) and the nest was abandoned after two weeks. In 2010, a loon pair nested on Loon Lake in late May and hatched two chicks. One chick survived through the season, while the source of mortality for the second chick remains unknown.

The loon pair on Pierce Lake nested on the third week in May two days after the ice was reported to be clear of the lake surface. The Pierce Lake pair includes one banded bird and nests nearly consistently within a week of the same date in May each year. The pair uses a nesting platform near the south shore of the lake. While this platform supported many loon nests over the years, the platform is showing signs of age. In 2009 buoys were slid underneath the wooden frame to give the aging wood more buoyancy. A replacement platform is being considered, but changing the nesting conditions for a sensitive species like the common loon can be tricky especially on the most productive lake in the Swan Valley.

The nesting pair on Pierce hatched one chick. This chick was found dead on the nest in mid-late July. The cause of mortality is unknown, but speculation surmises that the chick was caught between an adult body and the nest and was inadvertently crushed.

Other loon pairs were present on Van, Lindbergh, Swan, and Holland Lake. Single loon sighting occurred all around the valley on pot holes to larger lakes including higher elevation lakes above 6,000 feet in the Mission Mountains and Bob Marshall Wildernesses.

Blackfoot / Clearwater

By Donna Love

The Blackfoot/Clearwater produced two loon chicks in the summer of 2010, both on the same private lake in the Blackfoot drainage near Ovando from the same pair. No chicks survived in the Clearwater drainage. Ben Turnock, the 2010 Blackfoot/Clearwater Loon Ranger speculates a wide variety of reasons for the failures.

Ben surveyed a total of 21 lakes in both areas with nine lakes in the Blackfoot and 12 lakes in the Clearwater. Of the nine lakes in the Blackfoot, three had nesting loons and all but one lake (the one with the two surviving chicks) lost either the nest or chicks. While surveying Upsata, the only public lake in the Blackfoot, Ben observed that the loons displayed territorial behavior all the way from their nest at the end of the lake to the boat launch. Eggshells were collected after the nest was abandoned, so the pair had laid eggs. A MLS member observed one chick on Upsata but the chick did not survive. While Ben was surveying Little Doney on June 14, an immature bald eagle was seen on a snag above the nest. On the July 17 Loon Day Count, no chicks were surveyed on Little Doney.

Of the 12 lakes in the Clearwater, six are pair/bond lakes with regularly nesting loons. A strong hailstorm on Placid Lake the night that at least one chick hatched might have killed the chick(s). The loon pair on Seeley Lake were nesting on May 15, and was later seen with one chick, but lost the chick in July. A forest service employee reported a person on a wave runner chasing the chick a few days before it disappeared. Alva Lake's pair was seen nesting on the island on May 17, but soon abandoned the nest. During later surveys, the loons weren't on the nest. Ben suggests that recreation and boating might be the reason for Alva Lake's continued failure. The island is a big draw for people to explore. Rainy Lake nested, but may have lost the nest due to an intruding loon or loons as other loons were seen on the lake. Clearwater Lake had a nesting pair and was tolerant of float tube and bank fishermen, but the nest failed anyway. Summit Lake had one chick, but it was only seen for about three weeks and then was reported missing.

The following chart shows Blackfoot/Clearwater chick counts since 2000, a span of ten years. (Facts are taken from Loon Ranger Reports, past MLS Newsletters, and my Seeley Lake Loon Watch articles that I began writing for the Seeley-

Swan Pathfinder in 1997. To read past Loon Watch articles about the Blackfoot/Clearwater area go to donnalove.com and click on “Other Writing.”)

YEAR	CLEARWATER CHICKS	BLACKFOOT CHICKS
2000	4	2
2001	5	4
2002	5	4
2003	4	5
2004	3	4
2005	3	0
2006	6	0
2007	1	0
2008	8	2
2009	3	1
2010	0	2

Become involved with the Montana Loon Society

You are encouraged to attend the Annual Membership Meeting scheduled for Sunday, September 25 this year. A postcard will be mailed announcing the location.

Questions or additional information – call me, Patricia Bouta, the Newsletter Coordinator at 406-210-4701 or contact the Director for your area. E-mail and phone numbers for Directors are listed on page 13 of this Newsletter.

DNRC Northwest Lands Office

By Garrett Schairer

Loon season on the lakes monitored by DNRC biologists was rather uneventful, with only two chicks being produced. On Beaver Lake, one to two singles were observed during the nesting season, but didn't produce chicks. On Boyle Lake, two individuals were observed, but also didn't produce chicks- this happens to be the third year in a row that this previously rather successful lake didn't produce any chicks. The inconsistent presence and nesting in the last few years causes some wonder whether these are the same birds that were so successful in the past. The lone bright spot in terms of chick production in the DNRC monitoring area was the production of two chicks on Cyclone Lake.

Glacier National Park- Continued Success of Glacier's Citizen Science for Common Loons Project

By Melissa Sladek

2010 marked the sixth year of the Citizen Science for Common Loons project in Glacier National Park. Once again all 45 priority lakes in Glacier were surveyed at least three times – prior to, during, and after Loon Day. These season-long surveys provide resource managers with a more accurate estimate of population status as well as show particular factors that may or may not affect nesting success. Last year's season-long monitoring efforts estimate that 41 adults (including 18 pairs) and five chicks reside within Glacier National Park. This compares to 41 adults (including 16 pairs) and 11 chicks in 2009. *For survey results since 2006, please contact Jami Belt at the Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center at glac_citizen_science@nps.gov.*

Making all of these results become a reality include countless citizen scientist volunteers, not to mention



Hale Morrel searches for common loons

dedicated interns and essential funding from the Glacier National Park Fund (additional funding provided by the Glacier Park Associates and the Rocky Mountain CESU). In 2010, 105 citizen scientists surveyed 46 loon lakes and 33 new volunteers were trained to monitor common loons. A total of 1,840 hours were contributed by our loon citizen scientists, allowing for another successful year of monitoring common loons in Glacier National Park. Although we are grateful to all of our volunteers, last summer's success would not have happened if were not for two dedicated individuals. Hale Morrel, a student at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, spent seven weeks with the Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center (CCRLC) assisting Citizen Science Coordinator Jami Belt. Hale focused mainly on the Citizen Science for Common Loons project where she assisted with training citizen scientists, conducting surveys and entering data. Most importantly, Hale coordinated and organized Loon Day, in which she involved 46 observers surveying 44 lakes.

She is currently a junior majoring in Ecology and Wildlife Biology. Her enthusiasm for the outdoors and interest in wildlife research allowed for a perfect match with the CCRLC's Citizen Science Program. The feeling appears mutual on Hale's end as she explains, "My time here at Glacier was extremely valuable and taught me a lot about research for the sake of conservation."

Soon after Hale's departure, Dylan Lewis arrived to the CCRLC. Dylan, originally from New York, is currently a senior at Northwestern University where he is majoring in Political Science and minoring in Environmental Policy. This internship provided Dylan with several opportunities including how to collect and record data as well as working with and assisting a diverse population of citizen scientists. While in Glacier, Dylan also worked on his senior thesis, which focuses on volunteerism in national parks and, in particular, what motivates individuals to donate their time to the National Park Service.

Thanks to our interns and all of our volunteers and funders for making the Citizen Science for Common Loons project a big success in 2010! Without your help, we would not have essential population data on Glacier's loons. We look forward to another great year in 2011.

Libby

By Jenny Holifield

Loon surveys were conducted May 17th 2010 at Loon Lake, Howard Lake, and Rainbow Lake on the Libby Ranger District by Dan Snell, Wildlife Tech, and no loons were seen. A Fisheries Biologist on the district saw a loon at Loon Lake on the Libby Ranger District. No formal loon monitoring was done this year as there was only one wildlife person on the district throughout loon season.

Tally-Stillwater

Upper Stillwater was abandoned twice, Lower Stillwater was abandoned once and then lost the chick on their second attempt. Lost Coon was likely a reneest, but they lost their chick. Bootjack Lake lost their first chick and their reneest was successful. Three chicks still remain (two on Spencer, one on Bootjack). One bird breeding on Lost Coon was banded as a juvenile either on Alva or Upper Stillwater (same color combination, different large number on bands). There was possible competition between the pairs on Blanchard and Lost Coon.

Want to keep up to date on the doings of the Montana Common Loon Working Group? Send an email to Amy Jacobs at ajacobs@fs.fed.us so you can be added to our e-mail list. Its use is limited mostly to agendas and meeting notes, alerts about upcoming loon surveys, and announcements about the availability of reports or various loon conservation opportunities.

Common Loon Working Group Summer Meeting

By Amy Jacobs

The Montana Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) had another fine summer meeting, July 21 and 22, 2010. The meeting started Wednesday morning at the Fisher River Fire Hall, with an afternoon field trip to Thompson Chain of



Lakes. Most of us camped out in the group area at Logan State Park campground, sharing a fun potluck dinner (Thanks, Plum Creek, for the bratwurst!). After a big breakfast together, we re-adjourned at the fire hall. The meeting was well attended, with folks representing Montana Loon Society; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Plum Creek Timber Company; Flathead National Forest; Kootenai National Forest; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; and the Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center at Glacier National Park; as well as our four college interns (see photo at end of article). Contact Amy Jacobs (758-

3544, ajacobs@fs.fed.us) for a copy of the meeting notes or to get yourself added to the CLWG email list.

MONTANA LOON PLAN FINALIZING – After two years of intensive work and meetings, the “Conservation Plan for the Common Loon in Montana” was ready for final approval. This plan, written by Chris Hammond with input from many CLWG members, provides standardization of survey methods, signing, platforms, handling loons and specimens, loon rescues, best management practices, site-specific lake/territory plans, etc. It will be updated as needed, especially for area coordinator changes, lake status changes, etc. (The plan has since been published on the Internet at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/management/commonLoon/>)!

AREA COORDINATORS – Montana CLWG has 16 “Area Coordinators” who have several duties originally performed by the Montana Loon Society. These include overseeing public education and loon nest area signing (monitoring need, setting out and taking down, procuring, storing); arranging for coverage of lakes for May and July surveys; and getting survey data entered into the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks loon database. The coordinators and their contact information are listed in Appendix A of Montana’s loon plan. Most of these have been firm for years, but the Clearwater, Blackfoot, and East Front areas are up in the air. If anyone can help in these areas please contact Amy Jacobs at 758-3544.

LOON BANDS – We had much discussion about what loon bands can tell us and how we can gather this information. Band observations provide essential data for Montana’s loon population models, they help us understand interactions between loons based on known relationships, and teach us about things like juvenile dispersal distances. We are now at 6% (6 out of about 100) return rate for loons banded as juveniles. About 80% of bands that should be on breeders are being confirmed as there or not. Please send observations of loon bands to Chris Hammond as soon as possible after you see them (751-4582, chammond@mt.gov).

NEW LOON OBSERVATION DATABASE – Most of the data from CLWG’s two annual population surveys are in a centralized database maintained by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It has recently changed from an online database to an Access database, of which Chris Hammond would have the master copy. It will be easier to enter data, as the screen is similar to our form, and there are drop-down menus for coordinator areas, observer names, code values, etc. Banded loon observations have a separate screen that will be directly linked to Chris’s loon population model tools.

LEAD COMMITTEE – A draft position statement on lead in fishing tackle got lots of discussion. Our desire is for voluntary compliance not regulation. We plan to make a Montana-specific lead brochure, and are hoping to convince stores that sell fishing tackle to sponsor brochures. The committee is also bringing Mark Pokras (Tufts professor who has worked extensively with loons and lead) to our next CLWG meeting and to speak at the next Wildlife Society Annual Meeting in Missoula.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – The committee showed off some accomplishments, including purchasing 1000 temporary tattoos (funded by MLS), which have been a big hit. A “Table Tub” was assembled, with almost everything you could want for a roving loon education display table, funded by MLS with Plum Creek Timber Company. We made a CD for Loon Rangers that includes training powerpoints/videos/sounds, forms and survey

tools, MLS information, kid activities, etc.) and wrote a “popout” article about loon conservation for publication in the Flathead Watershed Sourcebook (<http://www.flatheadwatershed.org/>). Donna Love finished a loon family coloring book, and Amy Jacobs put together a Loon’s Necklace bead craft to keep kids at the table so we can talk with their adults.

PRIORITIZATION OF CLWG EFFORTS – We used Gael Bissell’s sticky-dot technique to prioritize and focus future CLWG efforts. The top votes went to things like: getting the observation database functional and caught up, forming a research committee, preparing a Montana lead brochure, getting more durable shore signs, working with local sporting goods stores about lead fishing tackle, training interns about aquatic nuisance species, and GPSing loon nest locations and observation points.



Attendees at the Common Loon Working Group Summer Meeting

Awards

2010 Partner of the Year

Ron Steiner of Plum Creek Timber Company was a Montana Common Loon Working Group co-chair in 2009 and 2010. He helped with organization and logistics for our meetings, put together educational resources for loon conservation, manned the loon table for the annual Family Forestry EXPO, and provided essential funding for efforts such as our Loon Ranger intern program. His efforts convinced his corporation to temporarily close public access at the outlet to Ashley Lake to protect nesting loons. In addition, his communication skills and positive attitude were essential in resolving issues. Ron has been re-assigned to work in and near Coos Bay Oregon. We much appreciated his efforts and will miss him!

2010 Volunteer of the Year

Patricia Bouta of Seeley Lake - The 2010 Montana Loon Society Volunteer of the Year Award goes to a person who is new to the Society, but jumped right in and took it upon herself to become our Newsletter Editor, almost sight unseen, since we hadn’t had a newsletter editor for four years. We appreciate not only her hard work, but how wonderful the 2010 Newsletter turned out. It was beautiful and it was the first time that it was also available in electronic format, which will save the Society in future printing and shipping cost. We also recognize her for her fabulous loon costume that she made for loon functions. One has already been used at the Loon and Fish Festival and the 4th of July Parade in Seeley Lake and other functions. Another contribution she has made to the cause of loons is to become the new MLS secretary. Since the secretary is in charge of keeping the membership files and she has a new computer, she has entered all the Society’s membership information into a new database. So, thank you for all your help, Patricia Bouta! Loons of Montana appreciate your service and talent!

Montana Loon Society Annual Membership Meeting Report

The 2010 Annual Membership Meeting was held at 1:00 on Sunday, September 26 in Polson. Sixteen people were present. The 2009 Annual Membership Meeting Minutes were reviewed and accepted as read, with change of one word, morality to mortality. The Treasurer's Report by Don Skaar was reviewed and accepted as read. The Treasurer's Report includes four funds: General, License Plate, Loon Ranger, and Loon Trunk, along with the Statement of Assets and a Summary of All Activities.

The Common Loon Working Group provided a report including productivity on lakes, the Common Loon Conservation Plan, cost share agreements, zebra mussel concerns, loon ranger funding, loon band results, lead poisoning, and regulation/enforcement of signs.

For old business some of the items discussed were the 2010 Newsletter, loon license plate, and loon display box (Table Tub). For new business there were discussions on having Dr. Mark Pokras speak at the next Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society conference in February 2011, the donation from the Grounded Eagle Foundation, loon coloring book and banners, and the inspirational videos made by 3Screens of children removing loon signs with a loon ranger.

The Vice President and Secretary are elected in even-number years for a term of two years. Christie Ferruzzi was elected as Vice President and Patricia Bouta was elected as Secretary. Directors elected were Mark Ruby for Region 2 (Kalispell to Swan River) and Tony Dawson for Region 4 (Ashley Creek to Thompson/Fisher). Region 6 (Yaak, Kootenai and Bull River) is still vacant.

A working session had been held in the morning to discuss short-term (1-5 years) and long term goals (6-10 years), and dividing the duties that Donna Love did that were not part of the Secretary's responsibilities.

The "Conservation Plan for the Common Loon in Montana" prepared by Chris Hammond is complete and on the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks website at

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/management/commonLoon/>

The "Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Common Loon Field Guide" is at

http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_ABNBA01030.aspx

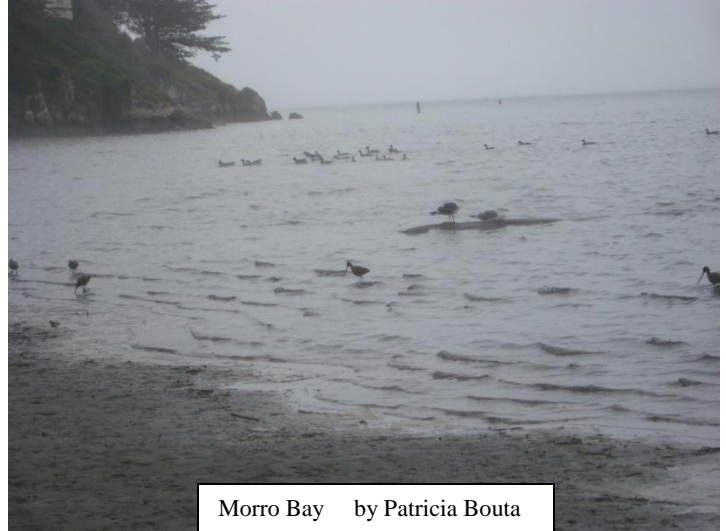
Wintering Loons in Morro Bay and Elkhorn Slough

By Patricia Bouta

The fog rolled in from the Pacific ocean covering the water with a blanket so thick I could not see my kayaking husband who was 30 feet away. I called out so we would not get completely lost from each other in the large expanse of water and mudflats. Swirling into the air like eddies of smoke from a campfire, the fog dissipated revealing my husband in the distance as we both tried to avoid getting stuck in the mud in the shallowest water and as the tide went out.

As we neared the shore I heard that magical sound, the haunting call of the loon. Looking around, I was thrilled to see several adult loons in their muted winter plumage. We were in Morro Bay in southern California. I had heard Morro Bay was one of the places the loons from Montana go to winter and I had been excited at the possibility of seeing loons, but didn't know exactly where to look for them. And then they appeared. I had been to Morro Bay five years prior to that while living in California, but at that time did not know it was a wintering ground for loons.

One of the loons dived, and then appeared later on the other side of the kayak. I watched it dive and surface repeatedly for five minutes as it got further and further away from the kayak. At the same time, the tide was going out and the distance of mud I would have to walk through when reaching shore increased. Torn between watching the loons and knowing that the longer I stayed on the water the squishier the newly revealed mud would be, I got off the water and carried the kayak through the mud, feeling joyful and content at seeing my first wintering loons.



Morro Bay by Patricia Bouta

Another kayaking adventure was farther north up the California coast at Elkhorn Slough, a large tract of tidal salt marsh on the Monterey Bay coastline. The main channel depth is about 9 feet and can be as deep as 33 feet near the bay. The



Loon on Elkhorn Slough by Guido Niederoest

time of day of this kayaking trip was timed to take advantage of the tides. Entering on the eastern end of the slough when the tide was going out it was easy to paddle west toward the ocean at the beginning of the day. Sea otters floated playfully in the water and seals showed themselves then retreated under the water.

Loons appeared part way to the bay, a surprise. I did not know loons wintered in Elkhorn Slough so was amazed to see them. The coloring on the adults was muted just as in Morro Bay. We watched loons dive and surface for several minutes, then continued west as the wind was becoming more brisk and I wanted to make it as far as the bay that day. As we

approached closer to the bay the wind speed became fierce and I paddled more forcefully as waves broke over the bow of the kayak and sprinkled saltwater on me. It was exhilarating—water and wind together—two of my favorite things. The wind became so powerful we could no longer make any headway, so turned around and allowed the wind to push us back to our starting point. All I had to do is make sure the potent waves didn't flip me over.

Seeing wintering loons made the California coast adventure complete.



Dutch and Noel Teders with Melody Spafford as the loon

Loon Mascot at Seeley Lake Loon and Fish Festival

By Patricia Bouta

The Loon and Fish Festival sponsored by Alpine Artisans is held in Seeley Lake on Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. Alpine Artisans have been committed to preserving and promoting the arts in the Seeley-Swan area of western Montana since 1991. For the past three years a loon mascot has been appearing to the delight of children and adults alike. Some of the children hug the loon just as they do characters at theme parks, and some children are scared. When the loon is out on Highway 83 directing people to the Festival at the Elementary School, not a car goes by without the people waving to the loon. The costume was designed and created by Patricia Bouta, and this year she is making a fish costume that will join the loon.

Come on out to the 2011 Loon and Fish Festival that will be held at the Seeley Lake Elementary School Saturday, May 28, 10:00am – 5:00pm and Sunday, May 29 10:00am – 3:00pm. There will be art, crafts for children to participate in, speakers, wildlife films, and art demonstrations. Alpine Artisans website is www.alpineartisans.org.

Come see the loon and bring your camera to take your photo with the loon.

Mark Your Calendars

- May 7, Loon Table at the Family Forestry EXPO, Columbia Falls
- April 30, Loon Ranger training, mandatory for Loon Rangers
- May 14, May Loon Survey Day
- May 28 – 29, Loon and Fish Festival, Seeley Lake
- July 16, July Loon Survey Day
- July 20-21, Common Loon Working Group summer meeting Glacier/USFS North Fork area – for more information contact Amy Jacobs at ajacobs@fs.fed.us Meeting agenda will be e-mailed in June with information on camping for
- September 25, Montana Loon Society Annual Membership Meeting

Please join us in helping Montana's loons.

Sign up for a membership today! **Check your membership level**

Single Loon (*Individual*) **\$15** _____

Breeding Pair (*Family*) **\$25** _____

Loon Chick (*Student*) **\$10** _____

Territorial Pair (*Sustaining member*) **\$150** _____

Raft of Loons (*Organization*) **\$300** _____

Loon Lake (*Life Member*) **\$800** _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____ **Email address:** _____

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

Mail this form and your payment to

Montana Loon Society, c/o Patricia Bouta
PO Box 1589, Seeley Lake, MT 59868

Please make checks to the Montana Loon Society

All dues and donations are used for loon management and education.

The Montana Loon Society is dedicated to monitoring common loon populations in Montana, increasing public knowledge and awareness about loons, protecting and enhancing critical loon habitat and welfare, identifying management or research needs and obtaining funds for them, and facilitating cooperation between government agencies, lakeshore owners and the general public to accomplish these goals.

Montana Loon Society Board of Directors

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MLS

Committee Chairmen

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Auditing	
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Membership	
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Sales	Becky White
Loon Trunks	Amy Jacobs



Links to loon information of other states

Loon Watch in Wisconsin <http://www.northernwisconsin.com/loons.htm>

Loon Lake Loon association, Loon Lake, Washington <http://www.loons.org/>

The Loon Preservation Committee, New Hampshire <http://www.loon.org/>

Michigan Loon Preservation Association <http://www.michiganloons.com/>

www.montanaloons.org



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Mark Your Calendars

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Seeley Lake, MT 59868

Addressee: