



LOONWATCH

SIGURD OLSON ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTE

LoonWatch sends newsletter-style emails with observation tips and information throughout the monitoring season for our citizen science volunteers (Loon Rangers), or anyone who is interested in learning more about loons.



Photo by Linda Grenzer

Loon mating behavior is subtle. Swimming in circles and bill dipping as seen in the above photo is typical. Loon pairs will stay close together until they start nesting.

Loons In May

After about one month of replenishing their energy reserves, loon pairs are ready to start nesting in mid-May. Chicks begin hatching one month later in mid to late June. Some pairs who lose their first nest may try a second time. Those chicks will hatch into early July. Loons lay one to two eggs per nesting attempt, but on extremely rare occasions three eggs have been documented. Loons only raise one to two chicks per year.



Photo by Jeff Weber

By mid-May, many loons start nesting. Both male and female take turns incubating the nest. Incubation is 26 to 30 days.

Loon Observation Tips

The territorial pair seems to have split up. What happened?

Helpful hints.

1. Whenever you go out on the lake, remember your monitoring

- It is likely that one loon is on the nest while the other is on the lake fishing, preening and looking out for intruders.

Where are they nesting?

- If you cannot find the nest, watch the loon in its territory. The loon pair will switch "duties", and the loon on the lake will swim toward shore, toward the nest. This may take several hours, so have patience.
- Remember to use binoculars to observe loons, and employ the 200 ft. rule.
- It is important to go out early to locate the nest, or fast-growing vegetation will obscure the view.

Why are they chasing each other?

form, pencil, binoculars, and field guide. Be safe and look at the weather forecast before venturing out on the water, and bring all necessary safety equipment.

2. Continue filling in your Loon Log (page 3 on your monitoring form). This will help you see the big picture of what is happening on your lake, and makes it easy for you to fill out the Loon Season Summary this fall.

3. Inspect and clean your boat to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Follow these tips.

- The resident loon and an intruder (of the same sex) are in a territorial dispute. They are trying to wear each other out. These battles can become quite physical, sometimes ending in death. If the intruder wins, they will take over the territory with the other resident loon (opposite sex). Check out [Cornell's Cyber Tower video](#) to learn more.



Photo by Laura Woodward

When a loon feels threatened, it's first defense is to remain inconspicuous. The loon in this photo is in hangover position, and feels threatened. If you see a loon on a nest like this, back off and give it some space.

LOON ETIQUETTE

- Use the 200 ft rule when observing loons, especially around nests. Keep a distance of 200 ft. from loons.
- Participate in the WI DNR's [monofilament recycling program](#). Never fish near loons, and clean up monofilament line so loons and other wildlife do not become entangled.
- Use [non-lead tackle](#). Ask your tackle shop to carry non-lead tackle.
- Slow down! Especially during nesting season, boat wakes and waves can wash out nests.
- When kayaking or canoeing, give nesting loons a wide berth (200 ft. rule). If a loon is startled off its nest, it will not return until it feels safe.



Photo by Lorna Kane-Rohloff

The loons in this photo are in a territorial dispute. The resident loon of the opposite sex is watching the resident loon and intruder loon (of the same sex) fight each other. The observing resident loon will nest with whichever loon wins the dispute. Sometimes disputes can last for weeks, with the intruder(s) returning for more disputes. Or the new resident loon defending against new intruders, or even the old resident. Learn more about loon behavior on the [LoonWatch website](#).

[LoonWatch](#) is a program of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at [Northland College](#).

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