

## ***THE MICHIGAN LOON PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION DEFINES THREE THREATS TO LOONS AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT THEM***

Loons face threats to their survival from both natural and human causes. Natural threats are predation, water level changes, and invasive species which contribute to deaths by botulism. In many cases, these natural threats are heightened by human activities.

The Michigan Loon Preservation Association/Loonwatch (MLPA/LW) is committed to protecting loons and their habitat by enlisting volunteers statewide to take action locally to deal with threats to loons. Most of these cases involve human-augmented or human-caused conditions. Dealing with these problems involves education and mediation with the people that have contributed to the problem and enlisting them and volunteers to arrive at a solution

**Please join the Michigan Loon Preservation Association by visiting our website [www.michiganloons.org](http://www.michiganloons.org) or by contacting Luanne Jaruzel [jaruzel@tds.net](mailto:jaruzel@tds.net)**

To aid anyone interested in helping protect loons, we here outline the three major threats to loons:

### **1. HABITAT DESTRUCTION:**

Habitat destruction includes shoreline development which eliminates the nest or nursery site, water level fluctuations, dredging and filling, and the presence of algae in the water from fertilizer runoff.

If a nest site is eliminated, loons may leave the lake because loons are faithful to the nest site. High water levels can flood the nest or prevent the loons from reaching the nest. Algae-clogged water may reduce the availability of the fish upon which loons rely for survival.

If you live on lakes where loons nest or feed, please contact Joanne Williams [michiganloons@yahoo.com](mailto:michiganloons@yahoo.com). Your lake will be registered with the Michigan Natural Features Inventory which then red flags it if a request for development or water level change occurs. Joining MLPA also gives you a contact which will aid you in the process of protecting loons. Loon Alert signs, educational brochures, and materials and presenters for educational programs are available by contacting the e-mail above.

MLPA/LW also urges lake residents to form a lake association. Visit [mlswa.org](http://mlswa.org) for details. Lake associations are the best way to ensure that wildlife habitat can be protected and that water level alterations or weed treatment will not be detrimental to loons. It is also important for lake residents to establish a legal water limit to keep the lake at a stable level which is essential for the protection of the loon nesting site.

On a personal level, becoming a member of the Michigan Loon Preservation Association will provide you with materials to educate other lake residents about loons and their concerns. You can also limit or eliminate your use of chemicals and fertilizers around lakes, maintain a greenbelt, and use watercraft wisely.

Should nesting habitat be lost or loons are consistently unsuccessful, an artificial nesting island may be a solution. For information, contact Jeff Lange at [uncommonloons@gmail.com](mailto:uncommonloons@gmail.com).

## **2. DISTURBANCE OR HARRASSMENT BY WATERCRAFT:**

Personal watercraft can be a great problem for loons because of their small size and speed which allows them to rapidly enter shallow water. Approaching a loon family at high speeds can happen so quickly that buoyant chicks cannot dive to escape, or can become separated from the adults. Speeding watercraft can overrun chicks and adults and kill them. Rapidly moving watercraft of any size create wake, which can wash eggs off the nest and swamp young chicks.

Know the warning signals of a loon in distress – the tremolo call, and the penguin dance are both defensive behaviors. When boating, be aware of the loons and avoid them. Keep speeds at no wake in loon nesting, nursery, and fishing areas. Observe Loon Alert signs and heed buoys marking nest sites.

MLPA Loonwatch provides the brochure, *Michigan's Loons and Responsible Watercraft Use*, for educational programs. Loon Rangers may also purchase and install Loon Alert buoys which can be placed to inform boaters about the presence of nesting loons. These must be permitted by the Law Enforcement Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The best time to establish a rapport with law enforcement agencies dealing with wildlife protection is before the boating season begins. Inform the officer that you will be observing loons as part of the MLPA/Loonwatch program. Ask how you can assist that person to protect loons. In that way, you will have a contact which is already established during the height of the lake activity season. In many cases, private individuals can greatly assist conservation officers.

If your lake experiences heavy boating traffic, especially on holidays, call your local Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) conservation officer. He or she may be reached by contacting your sheriff's office.

If you see an incident of loon harassment, note the description of the watercraft, its MC number, and the location on the lake where the incident is occurring. Call the your local sheriff's office with the information and it will be forwarded to the appropriate MDNR law enforcement officer. You can also call the Report All Poaching (RAP) Hotline 1-800-292-7800.

### 3. LEAD POISONING:

Birds commonly eat small pebbles to grind food for digestion. Small lead sinkers that have fallen to the bottom are often picked up by all water birds, including loons. A bird that eats lead will die as acids and abrasion in the gizzard break down the metal allowing it to be absorbed into the blood stream.

A bird with lead poisoning will exhibit physical and behavioral changes including loss of balance, tremors, and an inability to fly. The weakened bird may fall prey to predators or secondary infections such as *Aspergillosis*. One lead sinker or jig can poison the bird so that it dies within two or three weeks. Entire jigs with the lure attached have been ingested by loons. Almost half of the loons necropsied in Michigan have died from lead poisoning.

What can you do?

- a. Switch to lead-free substitutes. Including jigs, these account for most of the lead poisoning deaths in Michigan. Encourage sporting goods stores to stock these alternatives to lead. When you find a shop that sells lead-free tackle, let MLPA know by contacting [westhova@ferris.edu](mailto:westhova@ferris.edu). We will publish the name and location in our newsletter, *Loon Echoes*.
- b. Avoid fishing when loons are near. Loons will be attracted to your bait fish or to the lure, possibly swallowing it, thus ingesting lead.
- c. Pick up discarded monofilament line and attempt to recover lost tackle.
- d. The Michigan Loon Preservation Association brochure, ***Loons and Lead***, is available for circulation by individuals or groups. Help the MLPA by educating fellow fishermen and the public about the dangers of lead. Pass these brochures along to bait shops, at fishing shows, and at lake association meetings. Copies are available by e-mailing Joanne Williams at [michiganloons@yahoo.com](mailto:michiganloons@yahoo.com).
- e. Support legislation banning the use of lead tackle. In order to do this, suggest alternatives to lead tackle to your legislators and encourage lead exchanges. "Getting the lead out" protects loons as well as many other species.

Although human activity can cause problems for loons, we can be the key to solving these problems. Join the Michigan Loon Preservation Association, form a lake association, educate your neighbors, and help ensure that the sound of the loon will be heard across our lakes today and in the future.

Arlene Westhoven and Jerry Weinrich