

Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

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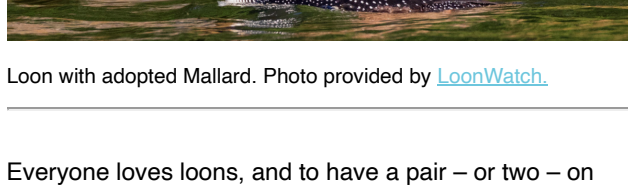
For the Love of Loons

By Allison Slavick
Contributing Writer

"The canoe was drifting off the islands, and the time had come for the calling, that moment of magic in the north when all is quiet and the water still iridescent with the fading glow of sunset. Even the shores seemed hushed and waiting for the first lone call, and when it came, a single long-drawn mournful note, the quiet was deeper than before... Then came the answers we had been waiting for, and the shores echoed and re-echoed until they seemed to throb with the music."

— Sigurd Olson, Wilderness Days

Did you hear the one about the loons who adopted a duckling? It's no joke! As if loons could get more endearing, last year, in Oneida County, a loon pair that lost their chick [adopted a baby mallard](#).

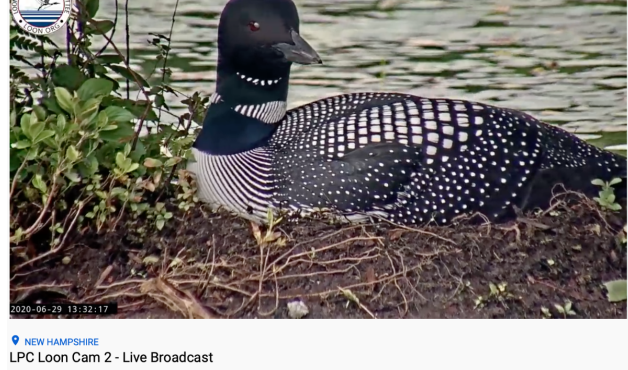


Loon with adopted Mallard. Photo provided by [LoonWatch](#).

Everyone loves loons, and to have a pair – or two – on the lake on which you live or seek recreation is special indeed. With somewhere around 4,000 loons in Wisconsin, most people who have been on a northern Wisconsin lake have seen one. [LoonWatch](#), affiliated with Northland College, advocates for loon protection through education, research, and monitoring. And the organization's annual LoonWatch poster (available through the site) features a charming photograph of the adoptive parents with their mallard duckling and the full story of the discovery and the birds' unusual behavior.

The natural history of the common loon may be one of the best known of all the bird species found in the loon's range. Most people know that loons are awkward on land – their legs are set far back on their bodies – and thus they nest at the very edge of the water, preferring small islands or floating hummocks of vegetation.

[Floating platforms](#) installed in lakes are successful in helping loons find a safe place to nest. Loons lay one or two eggs (rarely, three) and the chicks, which hatch in about 28 days, will ride on the back of either parent. Loons have solid bones (most birds have hollow bones – think of a chicken bone) to enable deep dives under water to catch fish. Loons are territorial and will defend their lake (or region of a large lake).



Live [web cam](#) of a loon on its nest on a floating platform in New Hampshire. Hatch is expected around July 9-11.

The common loon is so easy to identify! *Without reading ahead*, take a minute right now to think about how you would describe a loon to someone who has never seen one. You may have thought "They are large aquatic, diving birds, with a glossy black head, red eyes, a long, sharp black beak, and a black-and-white checkered body. A ring of black and white stripes surrounds the neck. They often swim low in the water." Any combination of those features means you passed the quiz! If you said the black head is iridescent, you've earned extra points.

The calls of loons resonate across lakes and in our hearts. Who can forget hearing a loon's mournful, haunting wails, the laughing tremolo, the soft, short hoot, and the alarming yodel? Naturalist Sigurd Olson called the cry of the loon the symbol of the north country. Stretch a line from Green Bay to St. Paul, Minnesota, and most of Wisconsin's loons live north of that line.

Calls and songs are how birds communicate, and each of the [four calls of the loon](#) has a distinct purpose and meaning. Let's start with the "yodel." Only male loons yodel; it's a territorial call, and is used when threats appear. You may have heard a loon yodel when an eagle flies overhead, for example. The male may rise up and flap his wings while he yodels. The yodel is distinct for each male, and male loons will change their yodel if they change territories.

In the quote above from Sigurd Olson, he was writing about the "wail," the eerie, haunting call often heard at night. Loons will wail back and forth to each other to determine their location. It's an unforgettable sound. The "tremolo" is a wavering or trembling tone and is likely the source of "crazy as a loon." It is used as an alarm and to announce a loon's presence on a lake. The fourth call is the "hoot," and it requires close listening. It's a soft, short sound used by loons to keep in close contact. Adults will often hoot to their chicks. It can sound like a soft "coo." You can hear the hoot and watch an adult interact with its newly hatched chick as it hops around the adult at this [2019 recording of a loon on its nest](#). Skip ahead to nine minutes into the recording, and you'll see the adult leave the nest and the two chick follow, swimming for the first time.



[Loon Cam](#) from MNBound.com.

Learn these four calls and, combined with your identification skills and natural history knowledge, you'll be an expert on loons and can share your admiration for loons with others. Like observing a bear amble through your yard or seeing a patch of wild iris in bloom along the shore, being in the presence of loons and hearing their communication is one of the treasures of living on Lac Courte Oreilles.

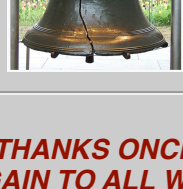


Allison Slavick works as a consultant to nonprofits all over the country, especially museums. For fifteen years she directed the Cable Natural History Museum, and previously worked as a scientist at the New York Botanical Garden and the Smithsonian Institution. She mountain bikes, skis, and picks berries near her home on Crystal Lake in southern Bayfield County. Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles may be sent to her at allison.slavick@gmail.com.

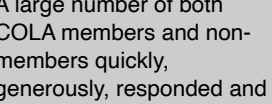
Questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles may be sent to communications@cola-wi.org.

[View this email in your browser](#)

HAPPY JULY 4TH!



THANKS ONCE AGAIN TO ALL WHO DONATED TO THE ECO BEAST CAMPAIGN



A large number of both COLA members and non-members quickly, generously, responded and donated at total of slightly more than \$100,000 needed to purchase and operate the Eco Beast starting next spring.

Donations ranged from modest to very generous, all from people supporting COLA because they know it is the most involved, dedicated organization working to save and protect these two lakes.

The future is bright indeed.

COLA'S ANNUAL MEETING AND PICNIC ARE CANCELLED

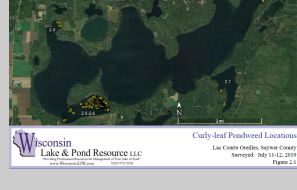
COVID-19 continues to disrupt plans. COLA will not be able to host its in-person annual meeting in 2020. Instead, we will provide a written summary of activities and finances in the coming weeks. We will greatly miss the opportunity to meet and talk with all of you at both the annual meeting and picnic. Next year!

COLA NEEDS YOUR HELP

COLA is a **volunteer organization**. That means essential jobs don't get done unless someone steps up to help out. The biggest needs right now are people who can help with **AIS Coordination and Grants/Financial Support**.

But if you have special talents in other areas such as communications, web design, fisheries biology, recreation, water quality, environmental mitigation, social services, NGO operations, ... or even something we haven't thought of yet but you think we should be doing, please step up.

COLA can provide all training and support to do these essential jobs. Contact communications@cola-wi.org if interested or you need more information.

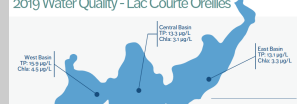


2020 AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES TREATMENT

Late last summer a COLA Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) [contractor identified and documented](#) the location of all known AIS in the LCO lakes. The two AIS are curly-leaf pondweed (CLP) and Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) ([more](#)). Five locations are too large or the plants so dense that herbicide treatment is the only feasible option to manage the spread of these infestations this year.

COLA applied for a [WDNR permit](#) to apply herbicide at the [five locations](#) this mid-spring for CLP and mid-summer for EWM.

Next year we hope to deploy the Eco-Harvester to control AIS without herbicides.



LCO WATER QUALITY SUMMARY FOR 2019

Here's a quick glance at the state of [LCO's water quality in 2019](#).

PLEASE RENEW YOUR COLA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2020-2021

[Renew your membership](#) today in one of Wisconsin's most active and respected lake associations.

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

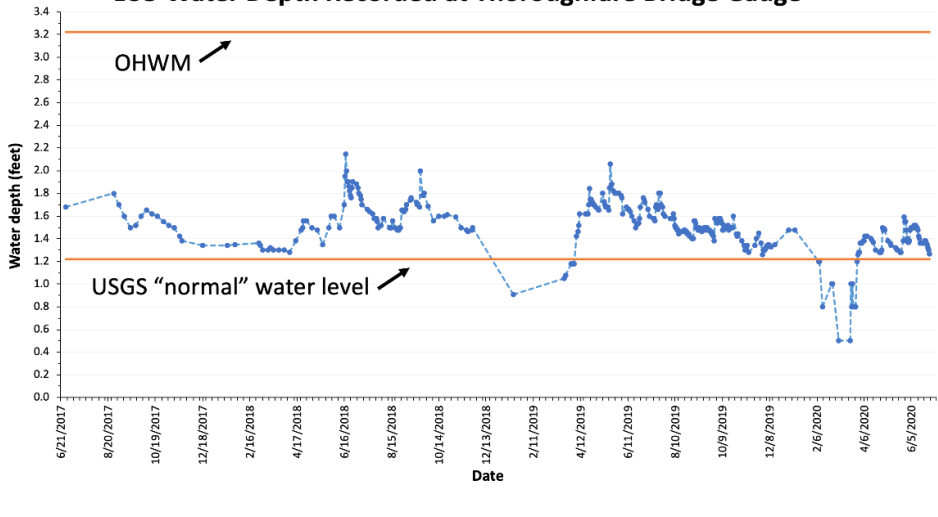
700 FT SETBACK REQUIREMENTS FOR ENHANCED BOAT WAKES

A enhanced boat wake ordinance became effective on November 12, 2018. To view the ordinance [click here](#).



A higher resolution map of the 700 ft setback requirements for enhanced boat wakes is provided [here](#).

[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES](#)



Volunteers regularly monitor the depth gauge at the Thoroughfare bridge. The gauge and the chart readings are in tenths of a foot (1/10 foot = 1.2 inches). The first point on the chart, June 27, 2017, was when the gauge was first installed. The USGS "normal" water surface elevation for big LCO is 1287 feet and is represented by the lower orange line.

The Ordinary High Water Mark (OHHW) is represented by the upper orange line. The OHHW establishes the boundary between public lakebed and private land, was established for big LCO in 1955 and is 1289.27 feet above mean sea level. The OHHW is "the point on the bank or shore up to which the presence and action of the water is so continuous as to leave a distinct mark either by erosion, destruction of terrestrial vegetation or other easily recognized characteristic."

Periodic readings are recorded as accurately as reasonable. The water itself is in perpetual motion, not only flowing downstream but rising and falling due to waves, the current in the channel, the wind which can actually push water and "stack" it toward one end of the lake or the other and the seiche effect caused by the gravitational pull of the moon and sun.

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COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas; while respecting the interests of property owners and the general public; and 2) to consider the study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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