



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Issue #45 April 1, 2021

The following article was inspired by the many comments COLA received last fall regarding the [View From Your Dock Survey](#). Many thanks, and please keep up with the feedback!

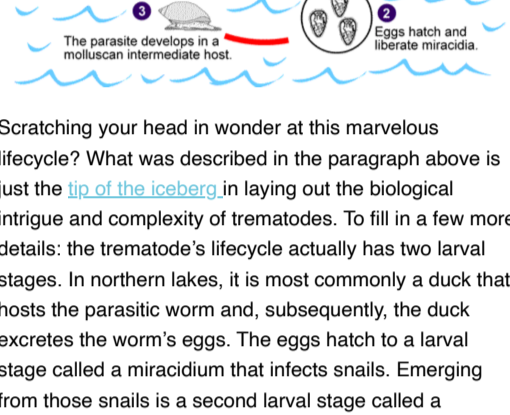
Do Swimmers Itch?

Allison Slavick
Contributing Writer

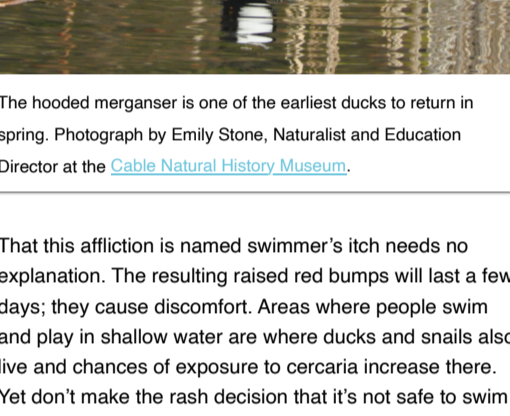
Kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species. Every basic biology class introduces this system of classification, which is used with both plants and animals. The science of naming – taxonomy – was introduced in 1735 by the Swedish [scientific](#) and [creative genius Carl Linnaeus](#). Linnaeus advocated for the use of Latin names for scientific classification so scientists around the world could be sure they were talking and researching and writing about the same thing.* Thus, the tiny floating organism that causes a scourge of summer, swimmer's itch, is classified as Kingdom Animalia, Phylum Platyhelminthes, and Class Trematoda. There are two orders (Monogenea and Digenea), more than 250 families, and thousands of species. In common parlance, these small flatworms are called trematodes.

At a time when many people are itching for spring after a long winter of isolation during a devastating pandemic, you may not want to think about trematodes. Not yet, anyway. Swimmer's itch, if you are unfortunate enough to be familiar with it first-hand, is caused by one stage in the lifecycle of parasitic trematodes that are found in freshwater lakes. Birds, and some freshwater mammals are the parasitic food hosts, and snails are an intermediate host. A study of lakes in just one Province of Canada found 79 trematode species and five host snail species.

The trematodes comprise a large group of animals, indeed. They provide insight to biodiversity and ingenuity in reproduction, but trematodes can influence your life in negative ways, too. If swimming humans, minding their own business with a beachball and an innertube, insert themselves into the life cycle, an opportunistic larval stage of the trematode will burrow into the skin of those humans. The result is an allergic reaction – a rash – in some people.



Scratching your head in wonder at this marvelous lifecycle? What was described in the paragraph above is just the [tip of the iceberg](#) in laying out the biological intrigue and complexity of trematodes. To fill in a few more details: the trematode's lifecycle actually has two larval stages. In northern lakes, it is most commonly a duck that hosts the parasitic worm and, subsequently, the duck excretes the worm's eggs. The eggs hatch to a larval stage called a miracidium that infects snails. Emerging from those snails is a second larval stage called a cercaria. The cercaria is the evil-doer that burrows into the skin of humans in a hit or miss manner as it seeks out its typical host of bird or mammal. Upon discovering that a human is not the hostess with the most-ess, the larvae die under the skin.



The hooded merganser is one of the earliest ducks to return in spring. Photograph by Emily Stone, Naturalist and Education Director at the [Cable Natural History Museum](#).

That this affliction is named swimmer's itch needs no explanation. The resulting raised red bumps will last a few days; they cause discomfort. Areas where people swim and play in shallow water are where ducks and snails also live and chances of exposure to cercaria increase there. Yet don't make the rash decision that it's not safe to swim in Lac Courte Oreilles. If after playing or swimming in a lake you dry off thoroughly with a towel upon leaving the water or rinse off with hose right away, it would be a fluke to get swimmer's itch. Swim in deeper water away from shore, if safe to do so, and you'll avoid the habitats of snails.

It's irrational to think you can control swimmer's itch by putting chemicals in the lake, by removing submerged aquatic plants, or by killing snails. When humans interfere with natural cycles is when things go awry. Millions of the infecting larvae may be found in a lake, and they drift with waves and wind. Feeding ducks on your waterfront attracts the guilty party to your shore.

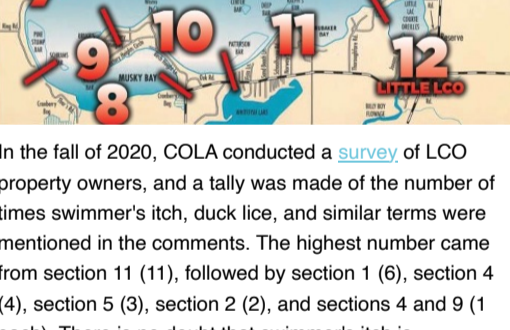
From the Summary of the 2020 COLA View From Your Dock Survey

"Swimmer's itch is ... a recurring issue, and there's no doubt that swimmer's itch really detracts from our enjoyment of the lakes. It's also obvious that COLA needs to do more to make people aware of the relationship between ducks, snails, and swimmer's itch – the parasitic flatworm causing swimmer's itch relies primarily on ducks and snails to complete its life cycle. But other waterfowl and mammals such as raccoons, otters, muskrats, and beavers may also be involved. Simply put, feeding ducks or any lake wildlife is not a good thing to do if we want to reduce the incidence of swimmer's itch."

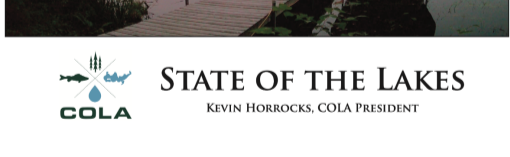
Regard swimmer's itch in the same manner as mosquitos, flies, and ticks, and [become familiar with its biology](#). The school of Public Health at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, has a [swimmer's itch research team](#). You can participate in their research by pinpointing on a map those lakes in which you've gotten the itch. Swimmer's itch is a nuisance, and it's one that comes along with the privilege of living up north on these beautiful lakes.

*Linnaeus even gave himself a Latin name, Carolus Linnaeus. He had a dog named Pompe who would attend mass with him (Linnaeus's father had wanted him to study the ministry), and when Linnaeus did not attend church the dog would go on his own, sitting under the pew for an hour.

How common is swimmer's itch on the LCO lakes?



In the fall of 2020, COLA conducted a [survey](#) of LCO property owners, and a tally was made of the number of times swimmer's itch, duck lice, and similar terms were mentioned in the comments. The highest number came from section 11 (11), followed by section 1 (6), section 4 (4), section 5 (3), section 2 (2), and sections 4 and 9 (1 each). There is no doubt that swimmer's itch is widespread throughout LCO, but these sections were most notable from the comments.



STATE OF THE LAKES
KEVIN HORROCKS, COLA PRESIDENT

Click [here](#) for the 2020 report.

[View this email in your browser](#)

COLA NEEDS YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Please consider a tax-deductible donation today!

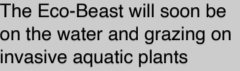
DONATE

WELCOME TO A NEW SEASON ON THE LCO LAKES

We really mean it!

Last year's pandemic horrors are slowly fading. Enjoying the LCO lakes with family and friends this spring will be so wonderful and even more special.

Take it all in and smile at our good fortune!



THE ECO-BEAST IS ALMOST HERE

Thanks to so many COLA supporters that made the Eco-Harvester, aka the Eco-Beast, a reality for LCO.

The Eco-Beast will soon be on the water and grazing on invasive aquatic plants throughout LCO.



BASS LAKE TOWNSHIP IS CONSIDERING AN ORDINANCE TO EXPAND ATV & UTV ROUTES

Please take a look at the [proposed routes](#) and the [proposed ordinance](#). The pink routes on the map are the proposed routes, and the green are the existing routes. If you are concerned about this issue, make your views known to the [Bass Lake Town Board](#).



2021 NATURAL HISTORY FIELD TRIPS

The field trips are finally back!

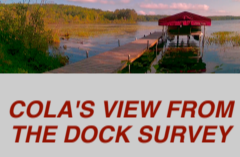
Click [here](#) to see this year's natural history field trips sponsored by the Extension Department at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College.

For more information, contact Cali Quaderer-Cuddy, Extension Program Coordinator, at cquaderer@lco.edu



MIKE PERRSON INDUCTED INTO MUSKIES INC. HALL OF FAME

Well done Mike! Mike is also on the COLA Board of Directors and has been tireless in protecting LCO's fishery. For more, see [this article](#) in the Sawyer County Record from Wednesday, March 24, 2021.



COLA'S VIEW FROM THE DOCK SURVEY

The "View From Your Dock" survey last fall was a great success. Most impressive was the thought put to answering the survey's questions coupled with the emotion expressed in the comments. The full report is provided [here](#), so take a look yourself.

It's obvious that we belong to a dedicated and thoughtful community, and the Lac Courte Oreilles lakes can look forward to a bright future.



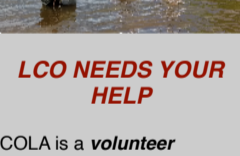
LAKE OBSERVATION FORMS

SEE ANYTHING WEIRD?

If you observe green water, algal mats on the surface or floating or dying fish - anything out of the ordinary - please take pictures and report this using COLA's [observation forms](#) immediately! COLA will alert the WDNR, the LCO Tribe, collect water samples, etc., to follow up.

Please, if you see something, do something.

Do your part to help enhance and preserve the LCO Lakes!



LCO NEEDS YOUR HELP

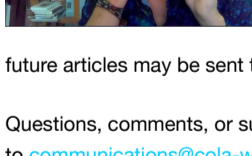
COLA is a **volunteer organization**. That means essential jobs don't get done unless someone steps up to help out. The biggest needs right now are people who can help with **AIS Coordination and Grants/Financial Support**.

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.



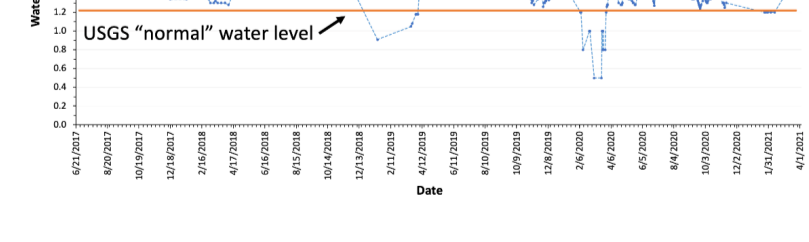
[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TAILS](#)



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.

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LCO Water Depth Recorded at Thoroughfare Bridge Gauge



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 (OHWM) is represented by the upper orange line. The OHWM 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 OHWM 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 rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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