

Helping the common loon survive

Nancy Robinson

Environmentally yours



Have you been worried about our loons, perhaps not hearing their call as often as you used to?

Field researcher at the Mersey Tobetic Research Institute (MTRI), Colin Gray, has generously provided the following information about a relatively new project to help our dwindling loon population:

In 2016, MTRI developed an artificial loon platform project with the hope of assisting the recovery and long-term sustainability of one of Canada's most iconic wildlife species, the common loon.

Loons in the southwestern areas of Nova Scotia are imperilled by many threats, including water fluctuation related to climate change. Our research with the Canadian Wildlife Service at Environment Canada during the last decade shows their reproductive rates in the Kejimikujik area are lower than anywhere else on the continent.

Nesting platforms have been shown to increase the nesting success of loon pairs that have repeatedly lost nests because of

changing water levels or human disturbance; they can also help loons on lakes that lack natural nesting sites. Natural nesting sites are marshy areas along the lakeshore or on small islands with naturally vegetated, gently sloping shores.

With funding from Mountain Equipment Co-op and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources Habitat Conservation Fund in 2016, MTRI was able to build and launch 20 artificial nesting platforms. Volunteer LoonWatch stewards were recruited to launch, monitor and remove the platforms each year thereafter. These platforms will help mitigate threats from fluctuating water levels, a lack of island habitat on a lake, and avian predation.

The project continues in 2018 with funding from Nova Scotia Power to install four more platforms in their Hydro Development Watersheds.

Sadly, our research shows that reproduction rates are below what is necessary to sustain local populations; so, we know that continuing our work is important from a conservation point of view. We would ask the public observe loons carefully on lakes in southwestern Nova Scotia and get involved in MTRI's LoonWatch program.

With your help we will continue to work with decision-



PHOTO BY JASON HEADLEY

The Common Loon Nesting Platform Project: this platform with a nest is held in place with two cinder block anchors. The locations are selected based on surrounding habitat, wind exposure, lack of human presence and far enough from shore that it cannot be easily reached by predators.

makers and the public to help inform natural resource management in an effort to improve

wildlife habitat and biodiversity. Contact MTRI at info@merseytobetic.ca or phone

902-682-2371. Learn more at the website at www.merseytobetic.ca