



'04 COLO Adult & Chick – Echo Lake

photo by Bill Lawless

Summary Findings
Common Loon Monitoring Project
Mount Desert Island
2004

A Project
By: -

BioDiversity Research Institute
19 Flaggy Meadow Road
Gorham, Me 04038

With Collaborative Support
From:

Somes Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary
&
National Park Service – Acadia National Park

This is a summary report, detailing the results of a comprehensive study of common loon breeding activity on Mount Desert Island during the summer of 2004. The goals of this 5 year study are to survey every water body to determine: 1) return rates for color marked birds 2) the presence of territorial pairs, 3) nest attempts, 4) eggs laid, 5) eggs hatched, and 6) chicks fledged (alive at 6 weeks of age*).

A total of 11 water bodies were surveyed. Common loons were observed on all 11 water bodies, but only 6 were inhabited by territorial pairs. Four of the 6 water bodies had one pair of loons, and two had multiple pairs (up from 1 in the previous 2 years). In all we found 9 territorial pairs of loons on the island.

Of these 9 pairs, 6 pairs nested. The 6 pairs laid a total of 9 eggs. Three of these 9 eggs hatched. Three eggs were abandoned and collected for scientific analysis, for Hg levels, and 3 were predated, most likely by mammals. Of the three chicks we observed alive, two of these survived to be at least 6 weeks of age. One was predated prior to 6 weeks of age.

Significant findings included the development of 2 new territories. Unfortunately, both of the new territories lack an abundance of good habitat for protected nesting, which is well hidden from curious humans and natural predators. Both nests experienced predicted disturbance from people, and the eggs were predated prior to hatching.

Human disturbance appears to be a significant factor in the pressures loons on MDI face to successfully nest and hatch young. In 2003, we documented cases of human disturbance on 2 nesting pairs, and in 2004, there were 3 nests affected. In addition, in 2004, one pair relocated their nest from the traditional island (relatively safe from most predators) to a marshy cove. The island site has not produced chicks since 1997, and it was one of the sites disturbed by people in 2003. Unfortunately, the new nest site failed due to mammalian predation.

In the final two years of this study, it will be important to continue to monitor the incidence of human disturbance on nesting loons as closely as possible, and to begin to formulate a strategy to combat the negative impacts. It is suggested, if possible, that more help from NPS personnel be enlisted, and civilian volunteers be recruited and trained to help.

Finally, of the 7 loons that have been captured and banded since 1997, 5 returned to the island in 2004. All 5 were paired with unbanded loons, and 4 of the 5 nested.

* Note: confirmed fledging parameters were increased from 4 weeks to 6 weeks in 2003 to account for the incidence of many chicks being predated between 4 - 6 weeks of age