

A NOTE ABOUT THE CORRECT USE OF ARTIFICIAL LOON NEST PLATFORMS

Thanks for your inquiry about artificial loon nest platforms. I have enclosed plans outlining the correct construction and placement of these valuable aids for nesting loons. Nest 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 small islands with naturally vegetated, gently sloping shores.

However, artificial nest platforms have the potential to lure loons away from quality natural sites to nest in busier, less sheltered or otherwise inappropriate locations on the lake. Improper placement of nesting platforms can expose loons to hazards and result in the loss of their nest and eggs. Please make sure your nest platform will help, rather than endanger, the loons on your lake. Pay special attention to the placement of the nest platform, making sure it is placed in a spot that is sheltered from both the prevailing winds and human traffic. You will also need to check with local authorities to ensure that you can place a nest at that location.

For a thorough overview of the natural history of the Common Loon, including the use of floating platforms by nesting loons, I recommend one of the following two books: Judy McIntyre's [The Common Loon: Spirit of Northern Lakes](#) (published by the University of Minnesota Press, presently out of print but may be available at your local library) or Tom Klein's [Loon Magic](#) (published by North Wood Press). Either of these books should be available, or easily obtained, at your local library. [Loon Magic](#) may be available at the nearest bookstore.

This material is provided to you by the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, a program of Bird Studies Canada. The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey (CLLS) is a nationwide program that contributes to the conservation of Canadian lakes and their loons by coordinating volunteers in monitoring breeding loons. The program's objectives are to monitor Common Loon breeding productivity on Canadian lakes and to provide information on the effects of pollution, human disturbance and other factors on breeding loons. It is a self-sustaining study, delivered by a non-profit organization, and is financed by supporter fees, corporate and government sponsors, and private donations. Success in achieving these goals depends on people like you! Please consider supporting the CLLS through a financial donation or by joining Bird Studies Canada as a CLLS supporter.

Good luck with your project! If you have any specific questions about the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, loons, or nesting platforms that aren't answered in this material, please feel free to write or call me!

Sincerely,

Kathy Jones
Aquatic Surveys Volunteer and Data Coordinator
aqsurvey@bsc-eoc.org



INSTRUCTIONS ON BUILDING AN ARTIFICIAL NESTING PLATFORM FOR LOONS

A North American Loon Fund Paper

Please carefully consider whether this platform will improve the nesting success for the loon pair, i.e., has the pair's previous nesting attempts failed because of 1) lack of an appropriate site or 2) large water level fluctuations. If you are seeing downy loon chicks on the lake a nesting platform is not needed.

AN ARTIFICIAL ISLAND FOR LOONS

Loons will select the best nest sites they can find sheltered from the prevailing winds and wave action. These sites may occur on the mainland side of an offshore island, at the edge of a cove in the lee of prevailing storms or upon an artificial island properly located.

But artificial nesting islands must accomplish what nature provides ... suitable habitat!

MATERIALS NEEDED: (per island)

- 4 or 5 6'x8" cedar posts with bark off (untreated)
- 1 (one) 5' x 5' piece of heavy turkey mesh wire fencing (galvanized, 2"x4" mesh 12 1/2 ga.)
- 16-20 8" galvanized spikes
- 2 8x8x16 cement building blocks
- Heavy duty 1 1/2" to fence staples (galvanized)
- 4 cable clamps
- 40' 3/16" wire cable anchor lines

PLEASE NOTE: white or blue Styrofoam is obvious to avian predators. Please do not use it in your platform. If you do use it, your platform will become an easy target.

TOOLS NEEDED:

- Chain saw, bucksaw or power "skill saw"
- Hatchet, adze or axe
- Carpenter's hammer
- Wire cutters
- Adjustable wrench

ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION:

- 1) Notch cedar posts Lincoln log-style and spike together to make a four-log frame. Add a fifth log across the center for extra buoyancy and rigidity.
- 2) Staple turkey mesh about every 4 inches to the bottoms of the logs wrapping it halfway up the sides from underneath.
- 3) Secure mesh all the way around the sides making sure there are no protrusions or "wild" wire ends which might injure a bird.
- 4) Attach anchor lines; one each to opposite corners (allow enough scope for water depth, usually about 20 ft. overall length) using 1 clamp on each line.
- 5) Attach one cement block to each line using the 2 other clamps.

INSTRUCTIONS ON BUILDING AN ARTIFICIAL NESTING PLATFORM FOR LOONS

LAUNCHING AND PLACEMENT OF THE ISLAND:

Ensure the platform is placed where it's best for the loons - i.e. a quiet shallow cove, sheltered from the prevailing winds and waves (including boat wake). See PLACEMENT diagrams.

- 1) Place it in the water with the mesh side under slung.
- 2) Build up a heavy layer of sod, decayed wood or duff (for the roots of plants to take hold in).
- 3) Then plant with indigenous vegetation (about 2 bushels) including ferns of all kinds, grasses, sedge mat, mosses, sheep laurel, blue flag iris, cattail, bulrush, and other emergent vegetation. Please do not use purple loosestrife or other non-native, invasive species.
- 4) Intersperse with at least 2 bushels of wetland-type debris for nest building.
- 5) If needed, provide a "natural" barrier on the windward side to prevent waves from washing over nest (spray is OK but heavy wash will drive the bird and the nest away).
- 6) Excess loose material provided will enable the bird to add to its nest from time to time as compaction occurs.

BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO OVERLOAD THE ISLAND CAUSING IT TO FLOAT TOO FAR DOWN IN THE WATER!

THEN, as soon after ice out as possible:

- 7) Firmly anchor the island in water at least 4-6 ft. (1 – 2 m) deep
- 8) 30 to 50 yards (27 – 46 meters) from shore
- 9) in a spot protected from prevailing winds and wave action
- 10) with a 45° angle to anchor lines (note they are slackened to allow for fluctuations in water levels).

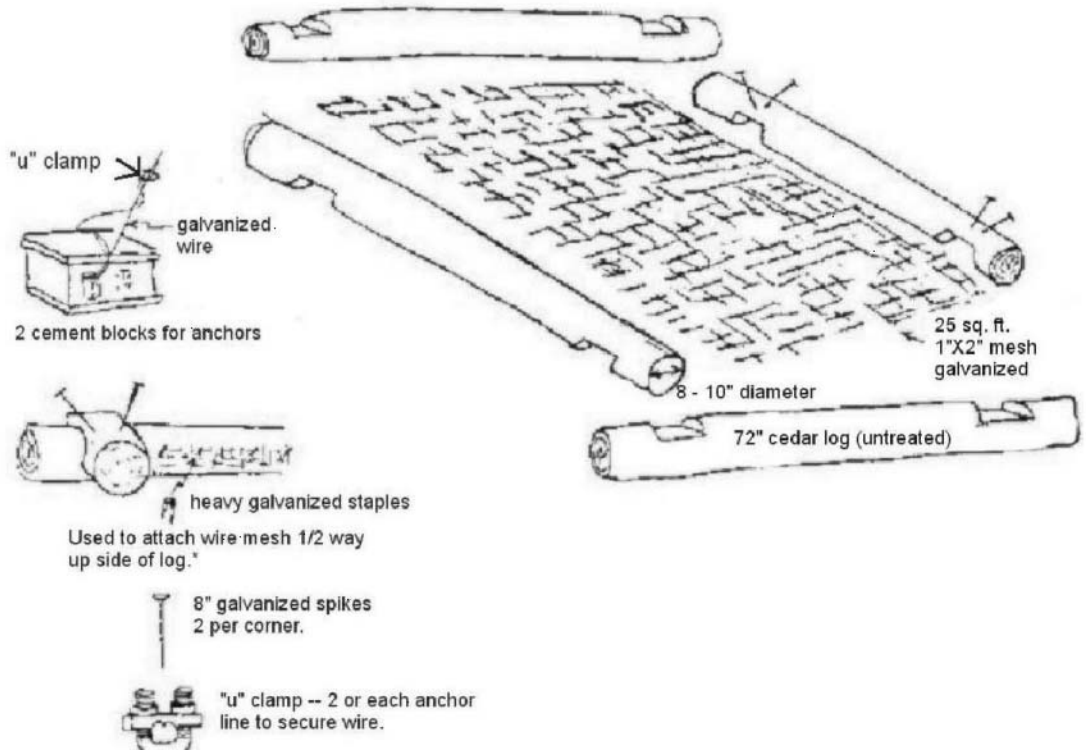
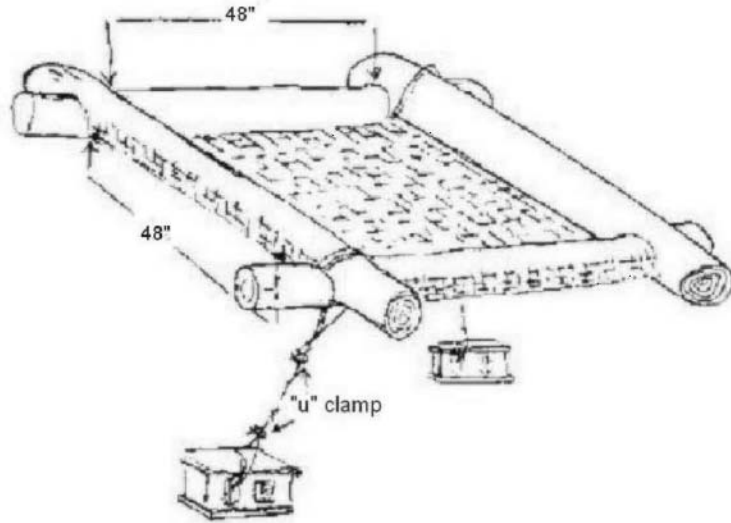
PROTECTION OF NESTS FROM HUMANS

Human disturbance, a major threat to artificial island nests (all nests for that matter!), can be averted. Educational posters, available at the Loon Preservation Committee office, should be placed at marinas, alongside launch sites, on town hall and supermarket bulletin boards, and in other obvious places. Floating warning signs may also be moored near approaches to nests.

On heavily traveled portions of lakes and ponds, actual patrol may be required to keep prospective loon parents from being scared off their nests. If frightened off a nest, the loon may not return until the intruder is gone and all the while leaving eggs susceptible to predation or fatal cooling. If you have questions that are not answered here, please contact Bird Studies Canada at 1-888-448-BIRD or aqsurvey@bsc-eoc.org

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is delivered by Bird Studies Canada, a non-profit research organization. Participant fees, corporate and government sponsors, and private donations finance the survey. The hundreds of participants across Canada are the backbone of the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey.

Construction



Placement

