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Canadian Lakes Loon Survey Celebrates more than 30 Years of Volunteer Action

12 June 2012 – Common Loons have returned to Canadian lakes for another nesting season. Hundreds of volunteers for Bird Studies Canada’s Canadian Lakes Loon Survey are also returning to their lakes – to monitor Common Loons, and to educate lake users on loon and lake conservation.



Photo: Frank and Sandra Horvath

With more than 80% of the world’s Common Loon population breeding in our country, Canadians have a critical role to play in conserving and monitoring loons. Each summer, volunteers participate in the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey (www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/clls). Surveyors monitor loons’ breeding success, and undertake conservation activities to help protect wildlife, waterbirds, and especially loons (which build their nests very close to the water’s edge) on Canadian lakes.

Bird Studies Canada is extremely grateful to all loon surveyors for their outstanding work. BSC staff are currently analyzing the 30+ years of loon survey data for an upcoming report. The results are impressive: more than 4500 lakes have been surveyed for at least one year, with an average of over 500 lakes surveyed each year, between 1981 and 2011. This translates into information for nearly 19,000 breeding attempts by pairs, enabling scientists to detect trends in the numbers of chicks produced over time. **This large and extremely useful dataset would not exist without the valued help of Canadian Lakes Loon Survey participants.** Bird Studies Canada is eager to share the report later this year, and to say a big “Thank You!” to all the volunteers who have helped support loon conservation over the last three decades.

Survey Participants Needed

Even with more than 600 participants nationwide annually, there are still many undersurveyed lakes. The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a great opportunity for volunteers to help lake conservation and loon research while enjoying their favourite lakes. To participate, visit the lake map at <http://goo.gl/NGtI2>, choose a lake

that you regularly spend time on, then register as a participating member online at www.birdscanada.org/shopping/shop.jsp. For more information, contact Kathy Jones at volunteer@birdscanada.org or 1-888-448-2473 ext. 124, or visit www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/cls.

Help Protect Lakes and Loons

At the lakeside, you can help breeding loons and other waterbirds by following these tips: avoid adult loons, chicks, and nests; when boating, steer clear of shoreline areas that show evidence of loon activity; keep pets leashed; and dispose of garbage properly (to prevent ingestion by loons, and to avoid feeding nest predators such as gulls and raccoons).

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a self-supporting program, so participants need to purchase a Bird Studies Canada membership. Membership fees cover the costs of materials, data processing and management, and program administration. Additional costs, such as special reports, educational materials, and program outreach are covered by other funding sources. Special thanks to TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and the Kenneth M. Molson Foundation for supporting 2012 outreach and educational activities and the 2012 report.

Bird Studies Canada (www.birdscanada.org) administers regional, national, and international research and monitoring programs that advance the understanding, appreciation, and conservation of wild birds and their habitats. We are Canada's national body for bird conservation and science, and we are a non-governmental charitable organization.

– 30 –

For further information contact:

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Photos available on request.

FACT SHEET

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey was developed three decades ago, as “dead” lakes caused by acid rain were being discovered in central and northern Ontario. It quickly grew into a national research program that assesses the long-term health of Common Loons and the lakes on which they depend.

Loons are excellent indicators of broader lake health. Loon reproductive success can help us understand how lake acidification and other stressors are affecting fish stocks and aquatic life.

Each summer, hundreds of Canadian Lakes Loon Survey participants watch their lakes at least once in June for signs of nesting, once in July for chicks, and once more in August to see whether the chicks survive long enough for their first flight. The surveyors submit their observations to Bird Studies Canada.

Data collected through the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey over many years suggest that acid and mercury

levels in lakes decrease loon chick survival. As well, loon productivity has been consistently higher in western regions of Canada (British Columbia, Yukon, and the Prairies) than in the east (Ontario, Québec, and Atlantic Canada).

Ongoing threats facing loons across Canada include increased boating activity, water level fluctuations, contaminants, and habitat loss due to shoreline development.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey and its participants believe educating lake users is the most effective safeguard for loon populations. Cottage and Lake associations, marinas, schools, and the general public can order signs and brochures about loons and loon-friendly activities through the program, or download electronic copies of materials at www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/clls.

