Leonard Lake

Success with encouraging the return of Nesting Loons

Objective

- Share what was done on Leonard Lake to encourage the return of nesting loons.
- We are not experts, just individuals with a passion to protect and nurture the
  - natural environment, and
  - wildlife that lives in and around Leonard Lake.
- Leonard Lake is location on the west side of highway 118 between Bracebridge and Port Carling

Background

- In 2002 - realized we had not seen nesting loons for a few years.
- Spring of 2006 Bob and Mark Greenham launched Leonard Lake's first man made loon nesting platform; regrettably unsuccessful
- April 2010 – after in-depth research Leonard Lake Stakeholders Association launched two loon nests.
- Spring of 2012 Success! Mark Greenham and Gordon Roberts announced that a pair of loons had accepted LLSA's offer to move into the Leonard Lake community and start a family.

Key Points to Consider Before Building

- 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.
- Improper placement of nesting platforms can expose loons to hazards and result in the loss of nest and eggs.
- If you are seeing downy loon chicks on the lake a nesting platform is not needed.

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Key Points to Consider Before Building

- Natural nesting sites are marshy areas along lakeshore or small islands with naturally vegetated, gently sloping shores.
- When deciding on where to place the nesting platform need to look at your design and placement through the eyes of the loon
- Nesting platforms need to be placed in a spot that is sheltered from both the prevailing winds and human traffic.

Key Points to Consider Before Building

- Loons nest right beside the water so they can slip on and off the nest easily, quickly, and quietly, without being seen by predators.
- If frightened off a nest, the loon may not return until the intruder is gone and all the while leaving the eggs susceptible to predators or fatal cooling
- May need to use of a Avian Canopy (camouflage mesh netting shrouding the nesting raft protecting it from overhead / airborne predators).

Key Points to Consider Before Building

- Nesting platforms need to go in the water early in the season, as close to ice out as possible. Loons start defending their territories and looking around for nest sites as soon as they return in early spring.
- Putting platforms in quiet coves, away from wave action and in deep enough water that they will not be stranded if water levels drop, will improve chances of success.

Key Points to Consider Before Building

- The nesting raft should float fairly low in the water, with the nesting base approx. 4" above the waterline to allow for easy access by the loon while keeping the nest dry
- It is so very important that people and boats stays clear of the nesting raft while the loons are nurturing their very special eggs.
- When all goes well, a loon pair will incubate their eggs for about 29 days, then leave with their newly hatched chicks to spend the rest of the summer on open water.
- It can take up to three years for a loon pair to use a loon platform, so patience.

Key Points to Consider Before Building

- Need to check with
  - authorities to ensure that you can place a nest at the selected location
  - local shoreline owners to ensure that they are supportive of your plans

Loon Nest Platform Material

- Five or six 6’x8 to 10’ cedar posts with bark off (untreated)
- Heavy duty landscaping cloth
- Heavy galvanized meshing to cover platform (recommend chain link fencing)
- Galvanized bolts, nuts and washers
- Six cement building blocks or two large cement blocks with sufficient weight to hold platform in place.
- Heavy duty galvanized fence staples
- Wire cables, at least 3/16”, including cable clamps
- White or blue Styrofoam is obvious to avian predators; do not use.
- Finally…… “A pair of loving loons”

Construction

- Begin construction of nesting platform frame near the waters edge.
- Secure wire mesh to frame and then place the frame into the water; fasten the wire mesh over the top of the frame.
- Place frame in water.
- Add landscape cloth on top of wire mesh; need to extend cloth at least 2 feet on all sides of frame.

Construction

- Add soil, sod, decayed wood, roots of plants.
- Once nesting platform is anchored at site
  - plant indigenous vegetation including ferns, grasses, sedge mat, mosses, etc. (suggest doing this Intersperse with a lot of wetland type debris for nest building (early spring add annually)
  - add natural barrier to the wind; good for loon to hide behind; not to high, loon requires a 360 degree field of vision


HONDA

Moving to Site

- Fold landscape cloth over nest before moving; this will help stop nest erosion while moving across the lake.
- Slowly moving nesting platform to the site.
- Lake must by calm.
- At site anchor nesting platform and add more nesting material
- Add vegetation and other material
- Post signage around the lake
- Post floating nesting area signs near nesting platform

Completing Loon Nesting Platform

Care and Feeding

- Continue to maintain the nesting rafts
- Platform needs to be dry
- Add nesting material annually; early spring

Thank you & Credits

- Leonard Lake Stakeholders Association (LLSA) for funding, support and encouragement
  - - and the generous contributors to the “Loonies for Loons” jar at the 2009 AGM!
- Bird Studies Canada – Loon nesting platform construction information
- Numerous Canadian & American website; search loon nesting platforms
- Bob Greenham “Wise Old Loon” - our catalyst and mentor.
- Mark Greenham “Loony Assistant - Construction Foreman” LLSA Director - wild life enthusiast.
- Gordon Roberts “Loony Assistant - Construction Resource Manager” LLSA Director – partner with nature.