

Loon Caller

Summer 2013

VERMONT CENTER

Vermont Loon Recovery Project

A program of
the Vermont Center for Ecostudies and
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department



Zack Woods Pond Conserved and Added to Green River Reservoir State Park

Edited by Eric Hanson (some information from Trust for Public Lands press release)

The Zack Woods Pond area consisting of almost 400 acres of land has been purchased and added to Green River Reservoir State Park in northern Vermont. The Zack Woods tract includes 11 undeveloped bodies of water, including Zack Woods Pond, Perch Pond, and the last unprotected stretch of shore on Green River Reservoir. Loons have nested here since 1996. The area is popular for fishing, hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, skiing on the Catamount Trail, and snowmobiling on the VAST trail. Zack Woods is considered a gem by both scientists and local residents for its natural resources, including several rare plants.



Zack Woods Pond—Crayfish Snack

about 12 chicks in a 10 year period. The statewide average is about 7 chicks in a 10 year period per territory. The numbers are pretty astounding for a 30 acre pond. It is likely the adults spend a fair amount of time on nearby ponds, including Green River Reservoir, to ensure the pond has enough food for the chicks.

The purchase was spearheaded by the Trust for Public Land who spent several years navigating the complicated process with the assistance of several nonprofit and state partners, including the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and Sue Premo of the Friends of Zack Woods Pond. Eric Hanson, the VLRP coordinator, was a board member of

Loons started nesting on Zack Woods Pond in 1996 when there were only 21 pairs nesting statewide. Since that time, 24 loon chicks have fledged from the pond with a productivity rate of

the Friends of Zack Woods Pond. Sue Premo started the Friends in 2008 after the landowners, Morrisville Water and Light, Deana

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Details from the 2012 Season – Vermont Tops 100 Territorial Pairs

Territorial Pair Activity:

Throughout the 1980s there were less than 20 territorial loon pairs in Vermont. In 2012, we identified 92 pairs where nesting had occurred within the last 3 years, and 11 potential territorial pairs, each of which was observed consistently for 6 weeks or more but had no recent history of nesting. New nesting pairs included L. Elmore, Long P. (Eden), Metcalf P., and Mollys Falls R.– Island. Twenty-two pairs that have nested in recent years did not nest in 2012 because of intruder loon activity, high water, or lack of suitable nest sites. A raven, flooding, and human disturbance contributed to some of the 22 failed nests in 2012.

We rarely determine the cause of nest failures, but predation is likely a major reason. More often than not, the eggs are gone when a volunteer or the VLRP biologist inspects the nest after the adult loons leave the area.

Rescues and Mortalities:

Seven adult loon mortalities were documented. Causes included monofilament (2), lead fishing gear, and depredation. A loon on Zack Woods Pond was rescued after being in territorial fights; it was released on nearby Mud Pond but died a few days later as result of lead poisoning. It is likely the lead poisoning was making the loon weak and thus an easy target for the territorial loons. Several rescues and/or searches were made for 4 other loons caught in fishing line or other thread material. Two loons were not found (Daniels, Moore), one attempt was successful (Seymour), and one loon was not rescued after 4 attempts (Echo – Ludlow). The loon on Echo L. was healthy enough to fly with the fishing line and was not reported later in the fall. Several failed rescue attempts were made for an adult loon missing most of its primary feathers on one wing (Long P. in Westmore); this bird was depredated by a coyote after the ice froze.

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The Vermont Loon Recovery Project is a joint program of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) and Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD). The VLRP's mission is to restore and maintain Vermont's Common Loon population through monitoring, management, education, and research.

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The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to advance wildlife conservation through research, monitoring and citizen engagement. With a reach extending from New England through the Caribbean to South America, our work unites people and science for conservation.

To make a tax-exempt donation in support of our work, please visit our website, www.vtecostudies.org, or call (802) 649-1431 x5. Donations of any amount help us achieve our conservation mission.

The *Loon Caller* and VCE's *Field Notes* are free to citizen scientists, donors, and partners.

Vermont Center for Ecostudies
PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055

Volunteer information and VLRP publications are available on VCE's website. Communications about the VLRP and the *Loon Caller* may be addressed to:

Eric Hanson, VLRP Coordinator
PO Box 22, Craftsbury, VT 05826
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Management Results: nesting rafts and nest warning sign buoys

Of the 70 known nests, 26 were on artificial nesting rafts (85% successful), 25 on islands (76% successful), and 19 were on shorelines (47% successful). Nests with warning sign buoys had a 75% success rate compared to 65% for nests without signs. However, warning sign buoys are more frequently used for islands and rafts which tend to have higher success rates than shoreline nests where fewer signs are used.

Volunteer Effort

Volunteers assisted with either loon nest warning signs and/or nesting rafts on 39 of the 59 lakes where these management tools were used. Volunteers were critical in helping to inform the VLRP biologist about lakes and ponds with increased loon activity, potential territorial pair development, and loons in distress and identifying all 4 of the new nesting pairs. Thank you volunteers; this program could not function without you.

Christmas Morning 2012

On a frozen lake, ice auger and a big net. Tracking, not footprints, but body path of a loon,

Leaving the lake, pushing 1/3 mile up a ridge, searching for water, under logs, around trees, otter-like slides down the other side.

Frozen bed where it rested and slept, moving on to find the other pond, also frozen.

Coyote tracks, expectations drop, more shrubs to crawl around and under.

Was it trying to reach Lake Willoughby? Feathers and the end for this loon.

Two predators in winter; one was thankful it survived another day.

June 2013: a new male replaced this loon and the pair is now nesting on the Long Pond island.



© Eric Hanson

VLRP intern, Lauren Schramm, putting out loon nest warning signs from our new Souris River kevlar canoe.

At 42 pounds, lifting this canoe on and off the VLRP loon truck 10 times a day is a bit easier than the former 70 pound canoe. The canoe also handles really well in the water. We thank Souris River for giving us a really good deal and for helping the loons in the process. For more information about Souris River Canoes, go to <http://www.sourisriver.com/>.

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Mission: to protect and conserve our fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the people of Vermont.

For more information: www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Please support the VT Nongame Fund through the tax check-off and the purchase of the conservation license plate



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& Terry Judkins, and Mary Harris all agreed to sell their respective properties for conservation. The Friends in teamwork with Vermont Fish & Wildlife and Water Resources improved the pond accesses to reduce erosion and placed a donated informational kiosk from Forest & Parks on the property while the long-term conservation of this land proceeded. Morrisville Water & Light and local volunteers worked diligently to remove trash from the area, and local Eagle Scouts put up wooden signs. The \$1.47 million to buy the land came from the U.S. Forest Service *Forest Legacy Program*, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and other state sources.

At the same time, another 100 acres to the east of the Zack Woods area was conserved through a conservation easement donation by Mary Jane Dexter to the Northern Rivers Land Trust. These lands now ensure more conserved habitat connectivity from the Worcester Range to the Lowell Mountains.

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy said "This project helps conserve an important Vermont aquatic resource, which is evident by the broad array of partners I worked with to make sure this project received Forest Legacy funds." Sally Laughlin, President of the Friends of Green River Reservoir, added that "The beauty of this property will only grow in value for each coming generation."

And the loons will have a place to nest and raise their young for their future generations too.

Keep Your Waterfront Wild for Future Generations

- Talk and plan with your children and grandchildren.
- Avoid building near shore and retain as much undeveloped land as possible.
- Protect current and potential loon nest sites, including islands, marshes, coves, and uplands with small peninsulas.
- The woody material that falls in the lake is critical for fish, aquatic insects, and other aquatic wildlife.
- Re-create the "vegetated buffer" zone by transplanting native trees, bushes, and grasses from the nearby woods; **it's free.** Let the grassy areas re-grow into young forest, and keep your lawns small and away from the water.

If you own considerable shoreline frontage, consider creating a conservation easement

- ◇ Easements can be tailored to meet your family's needs, including protecting a specific portion of your land and keeping some land set aside for future sale or the kid's camp.
- ◇ If you sell or subdivide, consider protecting undeveloped shoreline. Contact your local land trust for details.
- ◇ For more information about conservation easements, contact Eric Hanson (ehanson@vtcostudies.org, 802-586-8064) or the Vermont Land Trust, Northern Rivers Land Trust, or other local land trust organization.

Photography and Loons

Obtaining that really good photograph is not as easy as it seems. Boating the extra 30 feet closer will usually not give you the prize winning photo as the pair starts swimming away or dives. Trying again and again will usually make the situation even worse. The number one phone call I receive about loon harassment is about photographers. Most photographers justify potentially disruptive behavior believing their work is about conservation. It's human nature to put blinders on while doing something we feel passionate about. When conducting any potentially invasive wildlife work, such as banding, one must always ask, "Is it worth it?" The loon scene in the internationally acclaimed documentary *Winged Migration* is as invasive as I have seen with a loon yodeling on the nest repeatedly.

How do photographers snap that amazing shot of an adult feeding a chick or rolling an egg in a nest? And how can you obtain a beautiful print to put in a card or frame?

- ◇ Purchase a photograph.
- ◇ Luck. Sometimes you happen to be in the right place.
- ◇ Patience. Let the loons come to you. If you drift in a boat 100-200 meters from the loon family without moving, sometimes (but not very often) the loons might



These are examples of poor photos. On the left, the nesting loon is in hiding position and is stressed. On the right, the loon family noticed the photographer onshore and started swimming slowly away.

swim relatively nearby. The good photographers spend days and weeks just watching and waiting.

- ◇ Use a big lens or a big zoom.

Things not to do:

- ◇ Never boat at the loons, especially repeatedly.
- ◇ Do not repeatedly drift at the birds with the wind. It can turn into harassment.
- ◇ Never approach a loon nest from shore. The loon will think you're a predator and may leave the nest leaving those eggs exposed for a real predator.
- ◇ **If the loons start calling because of your presence, please back-off slowly.**

So, watch those loons from a distance. Enjoy that perfect 8x10 framed print that you purchased from a photographer who has hopefully spent the time to do it right. ***

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LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION

A LEGACY GIFT TO VCE WILL HELP SUSTAIN OUR MISSION OF ADVANCING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION THROUGH RESEARCH, MONITORING, AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT. PLEASE HELP VCE MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION.

NAME VCE AS
A BENEFICIARY

LEAVE A BEQUEST TO
VCE IN YOUR WILL

GIVE THE GIFT
OF STOCK

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

U.S. Geological Survey Loon Migration Website

This amazing mapping program shows daily movements as loons migrate to the ocean and back. Biologists and veterinarians placed telemetry units in loons from the Northeast U.S. and the Midwest. You can then track these individuals on the website. Two loons, TR and V1, were caught in the wintering grounds on the Gulf of Mexico after the Gulf oil spill. Both of these loons migrated to Saskatchewan Canada, but used very different routes to get there.

Google search: loon migration or go to http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/loons/migrations.html



Please support the VLRP, VCE, and Vermont's loons through a tax-deductible contribution today.

Your donation supports:

- 1) statewide monitoring efforts,
- 2) nesting platforms and nest warning signs,
- 3) volunteer coordination,
- 4) public outreach programs,
- 5) loon rescues, and
- 6) research on threats to loons.

Donors receive the *Loon Caller* and VCE's newsletter *Field Notes*.

Donations can be mailed to:

Vermont Center for Ecostudies
PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055
(Include a note that the donation is for the VLRP)

Funded in part by the Nongame Wildlife Fund through a State Wildlife Grant. Please support Nongame Wildlife by purchasing the Conservation License Plate and through the tax check-off on your VT income tax form.

Other major VLRP funding comes from TransCanada and in-kind support from Souris River Canoes.

Thank you volunteers and all donors for your support.

