

2024 Vermont Loon Conservation Project (VLCP) Summary

We identified 123 Common Loon nesting pairs in 2024. Eighty-five pairs successfully hatched 125 chicks with 81 of them surviving through August. The increased nesting rates in 2021-2024 can be explained by several new nesting pairs each year. The decline in chicks surviving per territorial year (0.52 ch/tp) can be attributed to lower nest success (69%) and chick survival rates (65%). The 20-year average for nest success rate is 76%, chick survival rate 76%, and ch/tp 0.66. More than 350 volunteers helped monitor Vermont’s loons this summer with assistance from Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department game wardens.

Vermont Loon Summary	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24
Nesting pairs	61	66	72	72	70	81	84	87	93	97	91	101	96	109	106	108	123
Successful nests	49	53	57	52	50	62	57	65	65	74	66	75	65	77	78	73	85
Territorial pairs	86	90	92	98	103	106	110	112	117	118	123	129	135	137	139	149	157
Chicks surviving through August	55	74	70	60	66	71	62	69	80	92	73	87	74	84	88	78	81
Chick survival	73%	89%	82%	79%	76%	73%	67%	67%	78%	79%	76%	76%	74%	67%	77%	70%	65%
Loonwatch # adult loons in VT	225	228	210	271	280	297	301	298	301	308	356	339	358	349	379	348	368

Eleven new nesting pairs were identified, including Adams Res. (1 chick), Colby P. (2 chicks), Crystal L. (1 chick), Echo L. – Cedar Pt (Charleston)(lost chick), L. Elligo – north (failed), Holland P. – flagpole (lost chick), Marshfield P. (1 chick), Norton P. – Hurricane (1 chick), L. St. Catherine (1 chick), Shadow L. (Glover)(failed), and Wallace P. (lost chick). The loon pairs on Glen L. had a chick for the first time ever-recorded. Volunteers counted slightly more adult loons in the far northeast part of the state on the annual statewide Loonwatch day July 20, and fewer in west central Vermont.

We documented 9 adult mortalities. We will be conducting most necropsies in the fall of 2024 with the assistance of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science and Tufts University. Known causes of some mortalities included fishing gear (Joe’s P. and Sunset L. – Benson). We made 3 rescue attempts in 2024 (as of 10/01/2024). Two of these loons were successfully released and one died while at VINS. An adult on Forest L. was involved in a territorial dispute in early June and progressively became weaker. We captured the loon on 6/20 and brought it to VINS. The bird had high lead levels; chelation was started. The bird was treated for tapeworms, slowly put on weight, and was released on Lake Morey 7/2. She was re-observed in August. VFWD game warden, Kelly Price, picked up a beached loon on the West River (Brattleboro). VINS staff found the loon healthy and released it on the Connecticut River.

Nests: 41 pairs nested on nesting rafts (88% successful), 38 were on islands (68% successful), 31 were in marshes (61% successful), and 13 were on shorelines (31% successful). Nest warning signs were placed around 67 active nests. Seventy-two percent of signed-nests were successful compared to 66% for un-signed nests.

Nest Failures: The nest success rate was 69% (20-year average 76%). Of 42 pairs whose first nest attempts failed, 12 re-nested, and 4 were successful. Known causes of nest failure included flooding (12 nests), depredation (8 nests), loon disturbance (3 nests), human disturbance (1 nest), and over-incubation (4 nests). The remaining failed nests were abandoned for unknown reasons with depredation and disruption from intruder loons being the most likely causes.

Chick Loss: The chick survival rate through August was 65% with 0.52 chicks surviving per territorial pair (ch/tp) in 2024. From 2004-2023, the 20-year average chick survival rate was 76% with 0.65 ch/tp. The estimate for a stable and sustainable population is 0.48 ch/tp (Evers 2006).