



# The Montana Loon Society 2012 Newsletter

## Montana Loon Society Celebrates 25 Years of Counting Loons!

To a loon enthusiast - next to watching loons and hearing their calls - it doesn't get any better than counting loons. And the Montana Loon Society has been counting loons for a long time. Starting officially in 1986, Loon Day was launched as a volunteer effort. It always was a midsummer survey and is now held the second Saturday in July. On this day, volunteers around the state count loons, record loon behavior, and note the location of the sighting. On average, 200 loons are counted each year.

To illustrate how far the MLS has advanced, in the 1970s, the late Dr. P.D. Skaar, author and creator of the *Montana Bird Distribution*, provided the first early information on Montana's loons. In 1982, Dr. Skaar's son, wildlife biologist Don Skaar, started the Montana Loon Study, organizing the first set of volunteers to help observe and monitor Montana's loons. Like his father before him, many loons were counted by Don himself. In 1986, Don began writing the first MT FWP Loon Management Plan and instituted the first official loon counts. In 1989, Don's management plan was implemented by MT FWP.

Educator and wildlife biologist, Lynn Kelly became unofficially involved in 1985 and officially in 1986. She completed her master's thesis on loons in 1991, demonstrating that placing floating signs around nest sites played a pivotal role in chick survival. When the Montana Loon Study transitioned into the Montana Loon Society in 1993, Lynn became the president. She has faithfully lead the Society ever since.

Here's to another 25 years of loon counting!

Montana Loon Society's accomplishments in the past 25 years:

- 1986-Began first systematic Loon Day Count
- 1992-To reduce nest abandonment, floating loon nest sanctuary signs were placed around nest sites
- 1996 & 97-Banded first loons in MT, which revealed that some of our loons winter off the coast of Northern California
- 1999-Common Loon Working Group organized.
- 2000-2003 Helped develop pilot Loon Ranger Program—Program Hosts: Seeley Lake and Ovando.
- 2001-A second round of banding reveals that MT loons follow large waterways to the Pacific
- 2003-Developed Montana Loon Society web site at [montanaloons.org](http://montanaloons.org)
- 2005-A banded MT loon made historic flight from Morro Bay, CA to Lower Stillwater Lake near Kalispell, traveling over 1000 miles in 3-5 days. Also found MT birds wintering off coast of Oregon and Washington.
- 2006-Developed Educational Loon Trunks for use around the state (see inside page 4)
- 2010-Developed MLS specialty MT license plate, which you can now proudly wear to show your love of loons! Get one for your vehicle at a county courthouse near you.



# PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By MLS President, Lynn Kelly

Greetings Loon Watchers,

Around April 20, spring fever got the better of me and I jumped in my trusty "loonmobile" truck and headed for Upsata Lake east of Seeley to see what the loons were up to. Upsata was once a very productive lake for loons but has had little production in the past few years. I found a single loon intensely fishing. As I waited to verify the loon's presence, sandhill cranes flew across the lake - calling as they traveled. A large group of coots were hugging the shoreline while mallards, ring-necked ducks, hooded mergansers, red-necked grebes and geese conversed amongst themselves. I proceeded to Brown's Lake where I discovered a pair of loons along with a flock of snow geese. Avocets were sunning themselves on a spit, meadow larks were calling and tree swallows were investigating bluebird boxes. Later that day I made a serious attempt at getting stuck in snow on the road going into Alva Lake where I heard but didn't see any loons.

I share all this because you never know what you are going to see or end up doing when you go out "loon watching". Loons are a spectacular part of the amazing wetland/lake ecosystems of northwestern Montana. As much as I am partial to loons, I am always thrilled to see the other species that share the lakes with loons. For many reasons, it's been a while since I have been "out and about". The reasons vary from needing to grade papers to chasing after kids and their softball games. Don't make the mistake of not going to your favorite loon lake to "say hello" to your feathered friends. Make the time to just sit and watch and soak in the atmosphere of water and sky and all the critters that fill that space.

It's possible that while you are watching, you will notice that a bird is sporting bands around their flattened legs. Be sure to let someone know what you saw. If you are in need of a new license plate for your vehicle, please consider getting the Montana Loon Society plate because part



MLS President, Lynn Kelly scopes loons on Seeley Lake.

of your purchase goes towards the funding of loon rangers and other loon management tools. Finally, you are cordially invited to attend the Common Loon Working Group meeting in July and the annual Montana Loon Society meeting in September. For now, get out there and enjoy our loons.

## 2011 MLS Annual Board Meeting

The 2011 Annual Meeting of the Montana Loon Board of Directors was held on Sunday, September 21 in Polson. Seven of ten board members were present. The Board completed a 10-year review of the Montana Loon Society By-laws. The Board's proposed recommendations were drafted and at a following date these will be approved by the membership.

## 2011 MLS Annual Membership Meeting

The 2011 Annual Meeting was held on Sunday, September 21 in Polson. Ten members were present. During the business meeting, meeting minutes and treasurer's report were approved. The Loon Report recorded that in 2011 **41 chicks were hatched in the state and survived until July Loon Day.** Election of officers included Lynn Kelly for president, Don Skaar for Treasure and Donna Love for secretary to serve the remaining year for the past secretary who resigned after serving one year of her two year term. Lynn and Don will each serve a two year term.

## 2011 AREA LOON REPORTS

*Area Loon Reports are composed each year by various people around the state. Some are loon rangers hired as summer college interns, while still others are technicians working for the U.S. Forest Service or MT FWP. All report to members of the Common Loon Working Group, a collection of individuals from various agencies, the Confederate Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and industry, who along with MLS, monitor Montana's loons, place signs and platforms and provide public education during loon season, mid-May to mid-July each year. Chicks counted on Loon Day in July are assumed to have survived and migrated in fall. The following summaries are greatly condensed versions of longer reports. To obtain full length versions contact Chris Hammond, 406-752-4582, [chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov)*

### **Glacier View/Hungry Horse, Flathead National Forest** (North, South, and Middle Fork of Flathead River)

*Loon Monitor: Terence McClelland, Biological Technician, Hungry Horse Ranger Station*

10 lakes are monitored in this area; 7 nesting lakes and 3 foraging. 17 adults were observed on Loon Day, with 14 of those in pairs that nested. Cedar Creek, Halfmoon, Mud/Garnet, and Spoon lakes produced 2 chicks each and Stanton had one chick, for a total of 9 chicks. It was the first documented nest attempt on Halfmoon and the most productive hatching/rearing season in this area since 2000, which is the first recorded data. Prior to 2011, the highest number of chicks was 5 chicks with an average of 2 to 3. **All 9 chicks were counted on Loon Day in July.**

### **Kalispell West**

*Loon Ranger Michael Strickland*

19 lakes in this area had 30 loons counted on May Loon Day, but only 10 on July Loon Day. 13 lakes had nests of which 6 produced 8 chicks. Island, Upper Thompson, Middle Thompson, and Rogers each had one chick. Rogers lost its chick to bald eagle. Horseshoe Lake hadn't had chicks since the 1980s. Little McGregor was a new nest lake this year, not having had chicks

or nesting loons since recording began. Lower Thompson and Little McGregor had 2 chicks each, so **7 chicks were counted in this area on Loon Day in July.**



2011 Clearwater Loon Ranger, Alissa Anderson uses a spotting scope on Alva Lake.

### **Blackfoot/Clearwater (Ovando/Seeley Lake)** *Loon Ranger Alissa Anderson*

13 lakes are watched for loons in the Clearwater Drainage and 5 in the Blackfoot. 26 birds were counted on Loon Day in the Clearwater and 9 in the Blackfoot. Seeley Lake had 2 chicks, Rainy Lake, 1, and Clearwater Lake, 1, but of these only the 1 chick on Rainy survived. (A high, long run-off due to heavy winter snowfall may have caused nest failures, and/or pike or eagle predation.) In the Blackfoot, Shoup Lake had 2 chicks and Big Doney, 1, so with the chick on Rainy, a total of **4 chicks were counted in this combined area on Loon Day in July.**

### **Murphy Lake Ranger District**

*Loon Ranger Colter Dickinson*

13 lakes are monitored for loons in this area with 9 nesting pairs and 29 loons counted on Loon Day. 9 nesting pairs produced 11 chicks. Bull, Lick, Martin and Murphy lakes each had 2 chicks. Dickey, Dickey Pond, and Loons Echo had 1 chick each. Bull Lake lost both chicks and Martin lost 1, leaving a total of **8 chicks counted in this area on July Loon Day.**

### **Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex**

*2011 Area Loon Reports Continued...*

**Tally Lake Ranger District**

*Loon Ranger Nicole Montgomery*

15 lakes in this area had 26 loons counted on July Loon Day. Of the five nests attempts, 3 were abandoned and two, Lower Stillwater and Blanchard, produced 1 chick each. 2011 was a wet year with deep snow. Flooding is expected to be the cause of low nesting and survival rate. **No chicks survived until Loon Day in July.**

**Glacier National Park**

*Citizen Science*

Glacier National Park has 45 lakes that have the possibility of being monitored for loons on Loon Day in July. In 2011, 38 loons (including chicks) were counted on 41 lakes. 12 of the lakes are considered high priority for counting loons. Of these Babb, Grace, Hidden Meadow, Howe, and Lower Quartz had loon pairs with 1 chick on Hidden Meadow and 2 on Babb. Of the lesser priority lakes, Kintla, Red Eagle, Akokala and Quartz had nesting pairs. Since the Glacier National Park count only takes place in July, it is not known how many chicks actually hatched, but it is known that **3 chicks survived until Loon Day in July.**

If you would like to volunteer to count loons in the park, contact Jami Belt, Glacier National Park Citizen Science at (406) 888-7986. [Jami.Belt@nps.gov](mailto:Jami.Belt@nps.gov)

Kintla Lake, Glacier National Park NPS photo



**Loon Trunks Available to Teachers**

Educational Loon Trunks are available in four places around the state. Check out a trunk near you. Great for classrooms or homeschool!

- ◆ Montana Natural History Center  
120 Hickory Street, Missoula, MT 59801  
(406) 327-0405, [info@TheNatureCenter.org](mailto:info@TheNatureCenter.org)
- ◆ Tally Lake Ranger Station  
650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 758-3544 [ajacobs@fs.fed.us](mailto:ajacobs@fs.fed.us)
- ◆ Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Natural Resource Department  
301 Main St., Polson, MT 59860  
(406) 883-2888, [germainew@cskt.org](mailto:germainew@cskt.org)
- ◆ Murphy Lake Ranger Station  
12797 U.S. Hwy 93 S, Fortine, MT 59918  
(406) 882-8345 [lmjohnson@fs.fed.us](mailto:lmjohnson@fs.fed.us)

**Loons Topic of MT FWP Article**

The July-August 2011 issue of MT FWP Montana Outdoors magazine featured loons in a 3-page article. The article recounts that only 17-25% of juvenile loons survive their first 2 1/2 years on the ocean. Chris Hammond, MT FWP biologist said this loss of juveniles on the ocean is due to predators and other natural causes, so MT has to produce as many chicks as possible to make up for the loss. However, between 1992 and 2008 boats on many Montana lakes nearly quadrupled. Even so, loon numbers have remained stable. Gael Bissell, MT FWP biologist explained that "...we're pretty confident we are mitigating those effects with public outreach and education." In addition, since 1989, MLS and MT FWP have placed yellow floating signs around nests in May and June to alert boaters to keep their distance. In conclusion, through the use of signs and responsible boating, loons and people can continue to enjoy Montana's lakes together.

To view full article go to:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2011/loons.htm>

## Montana Common Loon Working Group, Spring 2012 Update

The Montana Common Loon Working Group held its 2011 Summer Meeting in Glacier National Park, with a field trip to Winona Lake. Its 2012 Winter Meeting was at the Plum Creek Timber Company office in Columbia Falls (Thanks Plum Creek for the room and the pizza!).

The Summer 2012 CLWG Meeting is planned for July 18 and 19, hopefully in the Seeley/Blackfoot/Clearwater area. Everyone is welcome to these meetings. Contact Amy or Chris to get on our email list for meeting information and other announcements.

The website for Montana's loon conservation plan changed to <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/commonLoon/>. It has information about Montana's loon conservation efforts, loon surveys, use of signs and platforms, education, etc.

Several CLWG's Area Coordinators have changed. Tally-Stillwater is now Laura Holmquist, Swan Valley is Mark Ruby, DNRC Northwest Land Office is Chris Forristal, Clearwater River Drainage is Patricia Bouta, and Blackfoot River Area Lakes is Elaine Caton.

This year's interns are from last year or have extensive loon intern experience, so Loon Ranger training was not held in April as had been previously announced. A mandatory refresher was held in mid-May. Improvements for this year's Loon Ranger training materials and other resources include a loon PowerPoint by Chris Hammond for use for presentations, contact info for FWP wardens, and loon research literature. CLWG and MLS will also provide Loon Rangers with floating signs, lead-free fishing sinker samples, and temporary tattoos and other materials.

New guidelines were developed for our boats, floating signs, and nest platforms to reduce the chance that we spread Aquatic Nuisance Species. We'd also like Loon Rangers to be well versed in the subject for chatting with boaters. We had a confirmed case of Eurasian milfoil on Beaver Lake in northwest Montana. The public boat

confirmed case of Eurasian milfoil on Beaver Lake in northwest Montana. The public boat launch was closed until the invasion was contained.

The Lead Committee prepared a new Montana brochure about lead fishing tackle and loons, based on the one made for Washington State and with permission from Ginger Gumm and Dan Poleschook, Jr. We don't know if Montana's loons are being affected by this, but we know it happens elsewhere and we don't want it to happen here.

CLWG still wants to keep respecting loon nesting and nursery areas voluntary. It is great news that Montana FWP now has two wardens that are past Loon Ranger interns.

The colored leg bands on about half of Montana's loons continue to yield valuable information for loon conservation. This includes juvenile return rates, tolerance of returned young, dispersal distances, and mate/lake fidelity. In 2011, Chris Hammond and crews captured 23 loons for banding, bringing Montana up to 75 marked adults that we know are still alive plus over 100 juveniles. CLWG plans to continue to banding loons in the 2012 season. Plum Creek Timber Company again provided a generous contribution towards a loon band observation contest (see next page and also at (<http://www.montanaloons.org/scans/WantedPosterBandContest2012.pdf>). In 2011, the contest boosted band return rates to 74%, up from 62%.

Let us know if you know any SCUBA enthusiasts that might help us retrieve sunk "floating" signs.

CLWG set up a Facebook page for MLS. To find it, just query Facebook for "Montana Loon Society". Stop by and "like" it! Feel free to post your loon info and photos or videos throughout the season.

Montana CLWG Co-Chairs:  
Chris Hammond, 406-751-4582, [chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov)  
Amy Jacobs, 406-758-3544, [ajacobs@fs.fed.us](mailto:ajacobs@fs.fed.us)

## 2012 LOON BAND CONTEST

### Cash prizes for the greatest number of 2012 observations of unique banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons.

- ◆ \$200 for the most observations of banded and unbanded breeding loons reported by May 31.
- ◆ \$200 for the most observations (cumulatively) reported by July 16.
- ◆ \$100 from a random drawing of all individuals who submitted at least one observation.

Send band observations to Chris Hammond of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks ([chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov)) before the dates above. (\*Federal and State government employees are not eligible for a cash reward.)

The most useful band reports are the ones that come in as soon as possible, so send them in as you see them, even if you are not 100% sure of your observation. Qualified observations will be determined and counted solely by Chris. Winners will be announced at the summer meeting of the Montana Common Loon Working Group on July 18th-July 19th.

### Information About Band Sighting:

To determine population characteristics of common loons and better understand their behavior, look for color band combinations beginning as soon as ice out this year on both breeding and foraging lakes. During the early part of the season, many pairs will tolerate visits by offspring or other loons. This is one of our best chances of seeing and documenting the young birds we banded in previous years return to Montana.

If you spot common loons this spring, summer, or fall, and have a spotting scope handy, take a few minutes to check them for the presence of color leg band combinations. You can usually see a band, if one is present, within 10 minutes, but it could take up to an hour. If your scope is not adequate or your time is limited but you see a band, report this to Chris Hammond immediately. He can possibly provide a high power quality scope or send someone out to that lake to get the band combinations.



To observe bands, catch a loon raising one leg out of the water to stretch or scratch. The most common is when a loon is preening or loafing.

Each leg will have a band; sometimes two on each. Some bands have stripes or dots. For the right and left leg, record the color of the bands along with whether any stripe or dot is present on the band, and if so the color of the stripe or dot. Be sure to figure out correctly which color band is closest to the body and which is closest to the foot (not always intuitive when the bird is facing you and moving around).

Tips for accurate band recording:

Band colors are blue, red, white, orange, yellow, green, silver, pink. Silver on right leg means banded as an adult. Silver on left leg means banded as juvenile. Red bands have a white base, so etched markings show as white. Orange bands have a black base so etched markings show as black. Bands are *always* recorded in order as: 1. Left leg closest to body, 2. Left leg closest to foot, 3. Right leg closest to body, 4. Right leg closest to foot. This is what the band data part of the loon observation form looks like:

Left Leg (closest to body) / (closest to foot)

Right Leg (closest to body) / (closest to foot)

(LL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

(RL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Chris Hammond *ASAP* with all new banded loon sightings, even if you couldn't read the bands -- [chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov), 406-751-4582. See Appendix C of the Montana Loon Plan (<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/commonLoon/>) for details about observing loons and their bands, and Appendix D of the plan for background on loon banding in Montana.

***Loons are very sensitive.***

***Please enjoy them at a distance.***

**This contest is generously funded  
by Plum Creek Timber Company.**

**Web Sites of Interest**

- ◆ **Montana Loon Society**  
[www.montanaloons.org](http://www.montanaloons.org)
- ◆ **Montana Loon Society on Facebook**  
[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (Search for “Montana Loon Society”).
- ◆ **ABC Species Profile by Lynn Kelly**  
<http://www.montanaloons.org/ABC%20loon%20article.pdf>
- ◆ **MT FWP Common Loon Conservation Plan** <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/commonLoon/>
- ◆ **MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Common Loon Field Guide**  
[http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail\\_ABNBA01030.aspx](http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_ABNBA01030.aspx)
- ◆ **Glacier Park Citizens Science Loon Count**  
[http://www.nps.gov/glac/naturescience/ccrlc-citizen-science\\_loons.htm](http://www.nps.gov/glac/naturescience/ccrlc-citizen-science_loons.htm)
- ◆ **Loons and Lead Poisoning**  
<http://www.tufts.edu/vet/loons/>
- ◆ **Flathead Watershed Source Book—Loons**  
[http://www.flatheadwatershed.org/docs/wpPDF/Popout\\_Jacobs.pdf](http://www.flatheadwatershed.org/docs/wpPDF/Popout_Jacobs.pdf)
- ◆ **Montana Outdoors: Crazy About Loons**  
<http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2011/loons.htm>

◆

**Officers**

President	Lynn Kelly	406.883.5797
Vice President	Christie Ferruzzi	cferruzzi@fs.fed.us
Secretary	Donna Love	406.677.3767
Treasurer	Don Skaar	406.210.4701

**Board of Directors**

Blackfoot/ Clearwater	George Leighton	406.251.3925
Swan River Valley	Mark Ruby	mdruby@fs.fed.us
Kootenai/ Tobacco/ Stillwater	Chuck Schwartz	406.882.4915
Thompson/ West Kalispell	Tony Dawson	406.253.6111
Glacier Park	Steve Gniadek	406.892.7406
Libby/Troy	Vacant	

**Mark Your 2012 Calendar**

- ◆ April 28 – Loon Ranger Training
- ◆ May 12– Weekend Exhibit Day, Family Forest Expo, Columbia Falls
- ◆ May 12- Spring Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ May 26 – 27—Loon and Fish Festival, Seeley Lake
- ◆ July 14 – Summer Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ July 18 – 19 – CLWG Summer Meeting - Location pending
- ◆ September 23 - MLS Annual Board Meeting and Annual Meeting, Polson

**Help Montana’s Loons**

Sign up for a membership today.

- \_\_\_ Single Loon (Individual)... \$15.00
- \_\_\_ Breeding Pair (Family) .....\$25.00
- \_\_\_ Loon Chick (Student).....\$10.00
- \_\_\_ Territorial Pair (Sustaining Member).....\$150.00
- \_\_\_ Raft of Loons (Organization) .....\$300.00
- \_\_\_ Loon Lake (Life Time Member) .....\$800.00

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Memberships are Tax-Deductible)*

Mail this form and payment to:

**Montana Loon Society  
P.O. Box 1131  
Seeley Lake, MT 59868**

**[www.montanaloons.org](http://www.montanaloons.org)**



## **MONTANA LOON SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 1131  
Seeley Lake, MT 59868  
406.677.3767  
[www.montanaloons.org](http://www.montanaloons.org)

To:

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### **The Montana Loon Society's Purpose is to:**

- ◆ Monitor common loons in Montana
- ◆ Increase public knowledge about Montana's loons
- ◆ Protect and enhance critical loon habitat
- ◆ Identify management or research needs and obtain funds for same
- ◆ Facilitate cooperation between agencies, lakeshore owners and the general public to accomplish these goals

