



# Montana Loon Society 2024 Newsletter

## **Loon Rescues and Handling Live Loons** *By MLS Secretary and Newsletter Editor, Donna Love*

On January 14, 2024, the Montana Loon Society received a report from a rancher in the Dillon, MT area of a downed loon near their home. They took it inside and put it in their bathtub. It is suspected that the young juvenile bird was forced down in the ongoing snowstorm. It is a mystery why it was migrating so late in the year. 2023 had a warm, late autumn, so maybe it didn't migrate when it should have earlier that fall. No matter why, the call went out as to how to best help this loon. Due to the loon being found not only just before the weekend, but also the long weekend of MLK Day, as well as the current ongoing snowstorm, MLS and others with MT FWP's could not quickly get to the loon on the remote ranch. The rancher, busy with ranch work, could not take care of the loon over a long period of time. Plus, they had no way to feed it. They felt the loon would be better off in water where it could feed itself and not grow weak with hunger, with the hope that in better weather the loon could continue its migration. They released the loon on the Salmon River, the nearest large river with open water.

We do not know what became of this young loon. We are hopeful it found its way south, and we appreciate the predicament of the rancher. We value their care and concern for the bird. They did the right thing within their ability and situation.

Other loons in Montana have been found in distress over the years, too. Often it is a loon trapped in lake ice. Protocol has been adapted by MT FWP's on how to and when to handle a live loon. The plight of this young loon provides a perfect opportunity to review that protocol, which can also be found online at [Common Loon | Montana FWP \(mt.gov\)](https://www.mt.gov/loons)

### INTRODUCTION:

The Montana Common Loon Working Group represents professional wildlife biologists and others interested in Montana's loons. We are con-



*Young loon downed by a snowstorm in January 2024, near Dillon, MT. Photo provided by the rancher that found the loon.*

cerned with: a) the welfare of individual loons, b) the persistence and strengthening of the state's breeding population of loons, and c) the health and diversity of Montana's aquatic ecosystems. As such, members are routinely tasked with rescuing injured loons, banding loons, recovering loon carcasses, as well as collecting various biological samples. This appendix is provided as a guideline for those procedures.

### CAPTURING AND HANDLING COMMON LOONS

The purpose of capturing common loons is to investigate various aspects of loon ecology including survival, behaviors, reproduction, response to bioaccumulants, and in some cases to rescue birds. Capture methods for breeding common loons and their chicks are explained in detail in Evers (1992). Note: All attempts to capture and handle common loons, whether to rescue or to band, must be done with or by qualified state, federal, or tribal biologists or similarly qualified loon researchers. If none of these people are available to assist in the capture and handling operations, make direct contact with them, follow their advice and recommendations, and proceed in a safe manner. Every loon that is handled, if healthy enough, should be banded so it can be monitored over time. It is very  
*(Continued on Page 6)*

# PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By MLS President, Lynn Kelly



Happy Spring Loon Lovers,

I hope all of you are enjoying the arrival of warmer days (don't get complacent!), the splash of crocus, daffodil and tulip color in the flower beds and the arrival of our feathered friends from the south. Just as it's great to see the continuing compliment of spring arrivals, it's also been fun to join a national monthly zoom meeting usually hosted by Dr. Mark Pokras who is a retired veterinary researcher from Tufts University. Mark facilitates the discussion "what's happening in your neighborhood" focused on loons. Among the participants are agency managers, rehabbers, ice rescue specialists, researchers and other interested people from around the nation. I wanted to share the news from this month's national meeting so we don't think we are all alone in our endeavors to keep loons on Montana's landscapes.

The first newsflash is that lakes across the northern tier of the US are not icing over and staying iced up as they did in the 1980s and before. Flathead Lake has not totally frozen over since the mid-1980s, but we didn't realize this was a national phenomenon! Dr. Pokras reported large lakes in Massachusetts froze solid 40 years ago but around year 2000, those same lakes experienced only partial freezing and loons were seen in the unfrozen portions of open water. If a sudden deep freeze occurred, some of these birds become icebound while others flew the remaining distance to the ocean. Today, these Massachusetts lakes remain open except for sudden freezing events with a relatively quick thaw and loons are not flying all the way to the ocean but are wintering on freshwater lakes at varying distance from the Atlantic ocean. Jami Belt, co-chair of Montana's Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) works in Glacier National Park and noted that Lake McDonald was completely free from ice on March 9, 2024, and a loon was present on that lake. For those who don't know...that's nuts! I believe we are watching loons adapt to climate change in real time. But adapting to these changes can be perilous as loons discovered in the "forever mild" fall of 2023. Suddenly a deep freeze occurred and loons across the northern tier of the nation,

mostly six month old juveniles, were frozen into the ice and became bald eagle food. Ice rescues of loons using specialized equipment to enhance human safety have become fairly common in the Midwest. The Common Loon Working Group intends to study these rescue techniques. Loons may be wintering on Flathead Lake! We haven't spotted them because we aren't looking for them. Loons are flightless between late December to February as they molt their flight feathers. All they need to survive winter is open water and fish. They don't have to be on an ocean.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been found in dairy cattle and in milk in the USA, so it has been in the news of late. Low Pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) is constantly present in bird populations while HPAI cycles through every few years. An outbreak usually lasts about a year...until about 2020. That's when HPAI began it's latest deadly rampage through the bird world causing more than 90 million domestic fowl to be killed and untold millions of wild birds to perish. This cycle has lasted 3 years and continues with the unsettling news that the virus has mutated and has been found in many mammal species. Here is a brief and partial summary of HPAI news since February 2024:

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- Before March 2024, 9 common loons (2 from Wyoming) had died from HPAI but within one month that number doubled.
- HPAI killed more than 20,000 seals, walrus, and sea lions along the east coasts of North America, South America and the Antarctic in early 2024.
- At least 2 people in China and 1 in the US contracted the disease from their domestic poultry. One US person contracted HPAI from their dairy herd.
- A goat tested positive in the US Midwest marking the first time the virus had been found in that species. *(Continued on Page 6)*



To help Montana's loons, please purchase the Montana Loon Society License Plate for your Montana Vehicles or Trailers.

## 2023 AREA LOON REPORTS

"Area Loon Reports" are written by Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) area coordinators and wildlife biologists (and/or loon rangers) in the U.S. Forest Service, Glacier National Park, MFWP, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), and Blackfeet Tribe. Many individuals representing these agencies and other groups, including MLS, monitor Montana's loons. Chicks counted on Loon Day in July are assumed to have survived to migrate in the fall. The following summaries are greatly condensed versions of longer reports. To obtain full length loon reports contact the Common Loon Working Group at [montana-loonworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:montana-loonworkinggroup@gmail.com)

### **Blackfeet Indian Reservation**

*Jami Belt, Biologist Citizen Science*

Ten lakes were surveyed on the Blackfeet Indian reservation land by the Piikuni Land Crew with the help of Citizen Science volunteers. These included Duck, Goose, Kipps, Twins, Four Horn, Mitten, Lower St. Mary, Lower Two Medicine, and Sherburne. Pairs were detected on Duck, Goose, Lower St. Mary, and Lower Two Medicine Lakes. An exciting late season nest was found on Lake Sherburne which sits on both Park Service and Blackfeet Indian Reservation land. The nest ultimately failed with probable cause being that the water level dropped significantly while the pair was still incubating making the nest inaccessible. The Babb Beaver pond which sits just outside Glacier National Park had a successful nest with 2 chicks, and on the Eastern Front off the reservation, 2 chicks were counted on Pishkin Reservoir so **4 chicks were counted on the East Front on July Loon Day.**

### **Blackfoot/Clearwater (Ovando/Seeley Lake)**

*Bay Noland Armstrong, MT FWP Technician*

Four lakes in this area hatched chicks including Hidden Lake (2), Placid (2) and Seeley (1) in the Clearwater Drainage, and Shoup Lake (1) in the Blackfoot Drainage. Two unusual observations occurred during the year. On Summit Lake, the nesting loon pair was seen quarreling with a family of river otters. Immediately after that incident the loons left the nest. The otters may have predated the eggs, and the loon pair did not re-attempt nesting. On Coopers Lake, one lone sub-adult loon enjoyed lake for the season. **6 chicks in this area survived to July survey day**

### **Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex**

BMWC loons and nesting activity info is greatly appreciated. (Loon calls count, too!) To report sightings, contact the nearest Forest Service Ranger Station. Nesting info is especially needed for Big Salmon Lake, so please contact the Hungry Horse Ranger Station if you have relevant information, including past observations.

### **Flathead Basin #2 (DNRC lakes in North Flathead and North Fork)**

*Vicki Forristal, DNRC Wildlife Biologist*

In 2023, DNRC monitored nine lakes in the North Flathead and North Fork area. Intense territorial behaviors were observed at Beaver Lake with up to five loons, and at Woods Lake where there were three loons. Nesting was not detected at either of these lakes. Cyclone Lake and Upper Whitefish Lake hosted pairs but no nesting was observed. In May, a single loon was seen briefly visiting Meadow Lake, but there was no other loon activity on this lake during the surveys. However, it was exciting to see two swans and their three cygnets cruising around on Meadow Lake! Loon chicks successfully survived on Little Beaver (2), and Murray (1) lakes for **a total of 3 chicks in this area on July Loon Day.**

### **Flathead River-Forks**

*Tallie Steiner, USFS Wildlife Technician*

In 2023, nine lakes were monitored in the Flathead River Forks area. Four lakes had breeding territories and two of these lakes had successful nests which hatched three chicks that survived until the July survey day. The pair on Stanton Lake reared one chick and the pair on the Cedar Creek Reservoir reared two chicks. The pairs at Lion Lake and Halfmoon Lake both attempted to nest though both of these failed. High levels of recreation at Lion Lake likely contributed to the nest failure, whereas bald eagle presence likely influenced the pair on Halfmoon. **Overall, a total of 3 chicks survived until the July survey day.**

### **Flathead Indian Reservation**

*Kari Kingery, CSKT Wildlife Manager*

The Flathead Indian Reservation and Flathead Lake are important staging areas for migrating loons that are regularly seen in spring and fall.

*(2023 Area Loon Reports Continued)*

Fifteen water bodies, including irrigation reservoirs, mountain lakes and Lower Flathead Lake, are surveyed for loons annually during early and mid-summer. Both adult (and occasionally Stage 4+ juveniles in their first migration) are observed on the Reservation, but no territories or nests have been located. Variations in reservoir water levels due to irrigation poses a challenge to nesting loons. Past nesting attempts have failed due to this water level fluctuation, and floating platforms have not been successful in mitigating drastic irrigation water level changes.

### **Glacier National Park**

*Dee Baginski—GNP Citizen Science*

Forty-five lakes were monitored with the help of our wonderful Citizen Science Volunteers in Glacier National Park. There were seven successful nesting pairs resulting in eleven total chicks reported on July Loon Days and a one-hundred percent survival rate for the season. Winona (formerly Mud), Trout, and Harrison all hatched one chick. Upper Howe, Lower Quartz, Middle Quartz, and Doverspike lakes all hatched two chicks. It was very exciting to see a chick on Harrison Lake because it has not had a successful nest in over 10 years! Three nest failures included Swiftcurrent, Hidden Meadow and Logging lakes. The Park placed closures on both the Logging Lake backcountry campground and on the Swiftcurrent Lake public boat dock to try to keep disturbance low for the nesting Loons. Swiftcurrent Lake sits right outside the Many Glacier Lodge and is a very popular place for recreation, which creates a lot of disturbance for the nesting pair. Logging Lake had two nesting pairs and both nests failed for unknown reasons. Potential reports came in from Kintla Lake as having a pair with a chick this season, but after several confirmation visits, a chick had not been detected. Therefore, it was not counted in the final chick count. The size of Kintla Lake (and several lakes in the park) makes surveying and especially chick detection difficult. Seven successful nests produced **10 chicks that were counted on July Loon Day.**

### **Kalispell West**

*Bay Noland Armstrong, MT FWP Technician*

Twenty lakes were surveyed by FWP employee, Bay Noland Armstrong, who pulled double duty and monitored lakes in the Blackfoot-

as well as Kalispell West. She did a lot of driving but she said she had a ton of fun! Island Lake has three territories on it with little success this year. Neighboring Lynch Lake had a single loon on it that they suspect was causing some ruckus on Island Lake. In addition, 2 chicks were counted on Ashley Lake, **so 5 total chicks for this area.**

### **Ksanka Ranger District (Eureka, Fortine & Murphy Lake Areas)**

*Sarah Dickinson, USFS Wildlife Technician*

Twenty-nine lakes were monitored in the Ksanka Ranger District, with seven priority lakes being monitored on a weekly to biweekly basis to observe potential nesting. Buoys were deployed on Dickey, Bull, and Murphy Lake to protect nesting habitat and platforms from recreators. No unsuccessful nesting attempts occurred on the district, with a small exception to the Murphy Lake loons, who changed nesting locations mid-season but were still able to successfully nest and produce a chick. Unfortunately, six of our known territories did not have a nesting pair this year and three loon pairs were observed making no attempt to nest.

Along with monitoring, a group of roughly 45 local first graders participated in a June “All about Loons” field trip. The educational trunk was used to give a presentation about loons, dress a student in a loon costume, and create loon necklaces.

As of July 15<sup>th</sup>, six of the lakes had pairs that were able to successfully nest and produce chicks. **No chicks were lost this season, providing a total of 9 chicks on the district.**

### **Lower Clark Fork Area (Cabinet Ranger District) Ron Torretta, USFS Wildlife Biologist**

Two lakes (Sylvan and Miller) and one bay (Vermilion) were monitored during the May and July survey periods for Common Loons in the Lower Clark Fork area. No loons were observed during the May survey period. One single adult loon was observed at Sylvan Lake during the July survey period. No evidence of breeding was detected during the survey periods.

Cabinet Ranger District employees opportunistically spotted a single adult Common Loon on 5/2/2023 on the Noxon Reservoir along the east shoreline of the reservoir near Rock Island while conducting Peregrine Falcon monitoring in the area. No evidence of breeding was observed.

One loon sighting was reported on 6/13/2023 to Avista. While canoeing, the observer saw a loon swimming on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. Location



*(2023 Area Loon Reports Continued)*

was downstream from Bull River and upstream of Avista dock permit #C. The loon was calling repeatedly and swam towards a group of stumps on the north shoreline. No chicks hatched in this area.

### **Libby Ranger District**

*Ed Morgan, USFS Wildlife Biologist*

Rainbow Lake had no observations for loons in 2023. Loon Lake had a pair observed in July but no evidence of young. Kessler Lake on private land did not have loons observed. Double N Lake, another private lake, had one nesting pair that hatched two chicks, but one was taken by a bald eagle in June. The other survived to July Loon Day, **so 1 chick reported for this area.**

### **Swan Geographic Area**

*Libby Lutz and Jacob Steinle, USFS Technicians*

The Swan Lake Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest had two loon rangers who monitored 12 lakes for the 2023 field season. This summer we had 5 nesting attempts with 2 successful nests producing one chick each. Both chicks survived to July Loon Day for a 100% success rate.

Holland Lake produced one chick this year which, after having no nesting attempts between 2004 and 2018, this is the 5th year in a row that loons have hatched chicks on Holland! We also have exciting news for Peck Lake, as they historically had no known territorial pairs between 2003 and 2021 but this is the 2nd year in a row that loons have hatched chicks there.

Big shout out to Lauri, our resident loon watcher on Lake of the Woods this summer! She followed the loon pair throughout the nesting season and was fortunate enough to see two chicks hatch from the nest. Unfortunately, the loons lost one chick, but the other survived to July loon days and is still growing strong! This year, **this area had 3 chicks, one on Holland, one on Peck and one on Woods Lake.**

### **Tally Lake/Stillwater Area**

*Brittany Watling, USFS Wildlife Technician*

Seventeen lakes were monitored on the Tally Lake Ranger District (TLRD). Seven nesting pairs were reported, four of which were successful in producing seven chicks. Blanchard, Spencer, and Lupine lakes, each produced two chicks, and Dog Lake had one. Skyles was responsible for one chick late in the season, likely a second nesting attempt. Three lakes; Finger, Bootjack, and Upper Stillwater,

held promise for chicks however come July Loon Day all three pairs were seen off the nests with no chicks.

The remaining ten lakes provided good habitat for foraging adults throughout the season. Sylvia, Lost Lake, Lagoni and Twin lakes teetered from breeding lakes to foraging lakes having a frequent resident pair however no known nesting attempts were reported. Hanson-Doyle, Tally Lake (North and South territory) and Lower Stillwater provided foraging habitat for one to several loons at a time but no breeding activity. The last two lakes, Hole in the Wall, and Rainbow reported no sightings of loons. On July 13, 27 adults were observed on the district. Dog Lake lost one chick to unknown circumstances leaving the district with eight healthy chicks. With the one fatality the district recorded a chick survival rate of 86%.

Miscellaneous: The TLRD Timber crew reported one bizarre fatality. A lone dead loon was retrieved from one of their timber sale areas, over a mile away from any sizable water source. Cause of death was unknown. **However, 8 chicks were counted on this area on July Loon Day.**

### **Three Rivers Ranger District/Troy**

*No Report Available at the time of printing.*

## **TOTAL 2023 MONTANA Loon Chicks**

51 chicks are reported in this newsletter that were counted during the 2023 July Loon Day Count, which includes 10 chicks in Glacier National Park. (An additional two more were counted after the official count.) Here's an interesting look back at the number of chicks reported in the newsletter.

<b>2022—48 chicks</b>	<b>2020—75 chicks</b>
<b>2021—52 chicks</b>	<b>2019—50 chicks</b>

**Thanks to our loon rangers and volunteers our loon numbers continue to hold steady. ♦**

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**TO BECOME A LOON VOLUNTEER**

**Contact**

[montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com)

**Or**

[Montanaloonsociety@gmail.com](mailto:Montanaloonsociety@gmail.com)

*(Loon Rescues, Continued from Page 1)*

important to coordinate with MT FWP's. The rescue of common loons should be attempted in some cases. Rescue may be appropriate when a loon is injured or when it is unable to escape from a situation such as a wet highway or a freezing water body. Rescues should not be limited to human-caused problems. However, we generally would not rescue a loon that was injured while another wild species attempted to prey on it or one that was injured in a dispute with another loon. The safety of people attempting the rescue must be a paramount consideration. A loon in hand can cause serious injury, especially if its bill makes contact with your eye. Rescues on rough water or thin ice should not be attempted, nor those involving inclement weather or unsafe watercraft. Veterinary assistance should be obtained any time the rescue would involve: a) causing additional injury such as surgical removal of a fishing lure, or b) removal of the loon to a facility for rehabilitation.

A loon that requires handling or transport should be kept restrained with its eyes covered to prevent it from hurting itself or its rescuers. The loon should not be allowed to rest on its keel for long periods of time. Use a rolled towel or other pressure-relieving technique. Watch for signs of heat stress and, if needed, cool the loon by setting it on a bag of crushed or cubed ice that is covered with towel or fabric. If the air is very cold, keep the loon warm inside a heated vehicle or by body contact with someone holding the loon. If rehabilitation is needed, place the loon in the care of a wildlife rescue facility recognized or registered by the government authority for wildlife care and rehabilitation. As soon as the loon recovers sufficiently, return it to the water body where it was found or to the closest appropriate location. During loon breeding season, do not release a loon into the territory of a territorial pair that could re-injure the loon. In fall or winter, do not place a loon that cannot fly in a lake that may freeze over. Consider the loon's welfare and the potential for its successful and long-term rehabilitation. If the loon is suffering significant pain or distress that cannot be relieved, it should be humanely euthanized. Seek the opinion of a qualified veterinarian. From: [Common Loon | Montana FWP \(mt.gov\)](#)

Once again, we would like to thank the Dillon rancher for caring for this particular young loon. In our large, rural state, their help and care for the loon was greatly appreciated. ♦

*(President's Report, Continued from Page 2)*

- As of Friday April 18, at least 26 dairy herds in the 8 US states have been impacted by HPAI.
- Barn cats associated with dairy herds have contracted HPAI.
- Interestingly, critically endangered California condors are being vaccinated for HPAI.

The bottom line is to use caution around sick or dead birds, including loons. If you find a dead loon, contact MT FWP's. Wear gloves and mask if you do handle dead birds, including loons. Watch for further developments of HPAI in the news and visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for more technical information.

Montana loons are on their territories (mid-April) as we speak. A pair on a private lake in the Troy area may actually be on the nest. If you live on a loon lake, your observations are a great help to MLS and our loon management partner MT CLWG. Please consider recording the date that your lake is ice-free and when you first observed loons. Watch for nesting and let us know when that critical event seems close or has occurred. Then contact our Nongame biologists Jessie Coltrane (Region 1 Kalispell) at 406.752.5501, or Torrey Ritter (Region 2 Missoula) at 406.542.5500, or MLS/CLWG. This will let us know if the floating loon signs are needed to protect the incubation period. If you would like to help with this process, let us know. If you are a part of a lake homeowners association and would like a loon program, call the same folks mentioned above. It takes all of us to keep the sights and sounds of loons on Montana's landscape. The contribution of time, money, and energy of everyone receiving this newsletter is what makes this possible! Thank you, thank you!

And, be sure you go out and visit a favorite lake and loon family (from a distance) sometime in the next five months! ♦

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## 2023 MLS Partner of the Year

### Kelsey Preslar



*Kelsey Preslar  
catching a big one.  
Photo: Bob LeBlanc*

The 2023 Partner of the Year was awarded to Kelsey Preslar, Wildlife Biological Technician on the Eureka Ranger District from 2018-2023, who is now a GIS Analyst on the same district. Kelsey graduated from Portland State University with a major in Environmental Science and completed her masters in GIS at Northwest Missouri State University. Before becoming a Loon Ranger, she worked in various environmental summer camps, held forest/avian research positions, and even conducted train rides at a zoo. She said, “All of these experiences were tied together by my love of the outdoors and my passion to get others involved and excited about this beautiful planet we all live on.”

While working with loons she enjoyed playing the ultimate game of hide and seek while trying to determine nest locations, and seeing the adorable fluff-ball chicks those first few days after hatching. She loved the soap opera-esque drama of territorial disputes, to bald eagle alerts, to Canada geese platform takeovers. She said, “Getting those little inside glimpses of life as a loon is something you really only get to appreciate by spending ample time around these amazing animals. No matter where life takes me, I will never tire of hearing the loon’s haunting wail travel across a lake.”

MLS Board Member, Christie Ferruzzi, who nominated Kelsey for this award said, “We greatly appreciate Kelsey’s years of dedication to the monitoring, management and outstanding reporting on Northwest Montana’s loons.” ♦

## 2023 MLS Volunteer of the Year

### George Leighton



*George near home in  
Missoula. Photo: Tim  
Love*

2023 MLS Volunteer of the Year George Leighton, has served as a Board Member for 30 years, since about 1994, when he retired as a forest planner in 1993 on the Lolo National Forest, Supervisor Office in Missoula.

With a cabin on Salmon Lake in the Clearwater drainage, George has also been a dedicated Clearwater Resource Council water quality monitor since 1996 when the lake received a water quality rating of “impaired” due to past issues. This helped the Council take steps to actively improve water quality on the lake. (To become a part of their Adopt-a-Lake program, contact [Contact Us — Clearwater Resource Council\(crcmt.org\)](#)) Throughout all these years, George has also monitored loons. He said, “The common loon is unique in so many ways.” He loves hearing its calls and watching the birds rear their young. He is amazed by the yearly migration to and from the ocean, and how they return to their same lake. He knows loons have a great affect on people and enjoys seeing them return. MLS member, Tim Love, who nominated George for this award said, “George is more than an enthusiastic member of Montana Loon Society. He’s an active member that has donated numerous hours tracking loons on Salmon Lake for over 30 years. What’s more, he’s been a Board member representing the Seeley-Blackfoot area for nearly the same time. His dedication and faithfulness to Montana’s loons is commendable and noteworthy. Thanks George!” ♦

## MLS Educational Loon Trunks Available In Four Places Around the State

- ♦ MT FWP Region 2 Office  
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804  
(406) 542-5551, [torrey.ritter@mt.gov](mailto:torrey.ritter@mt.gov)
- ♦ Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Natural Resource Department  
301 Main St., Polson, MT 59860  
(406) 883-2888, [germainew@cstkt.org](mailto:germainew@cstkt.org)
- ♦ Rexford Ranger District  
949 US Highway 93 N.  
Eureka, MT 59917 406-296-2536  
[lauren.michelsen@usda.gov](mailto:lauren.michelsen@usda.gov)
- ♦ Tally Lake Ranger Station  
650 Wolf Pack Way, Kalispell, MT 59901  
[mark.ruby@usda.gov](mailto:mark.ruby@usda.gov) (406) 758-3544



**Check out a loon trunk  
near you.  
Great for  
classrooms or  
homeschool!**





## **Montana Common Loon Working Group Spring 2024 Update**

From Jessica Swanson, CLWG Co-Chair

Hello fellow loon enthusiasts!

Spring is in the air and loons are about. Your Montana Common Loon Working Group co-chairs are excited for another season of loon monitoring! Your support in collecting observations and band information is as important as ever.

Area coordinators and technicians will be gathering for our Spring Loon Survey Training on May 2 at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station. If you want more information please reach out to us at [MontanaLoon WorkingGroup](https://montanaloons.org).

**Spring Loon Survey: May 18**

**Summer Loon Survey: July 20**

**Annual CLWG Summer Meeting: July 30 - 31. Location TBD**

**Loon Banding sessions:** We are planning to band June 13-16 with potential for a second week June 25-31. We will be reaching out to Area Coordinators to identify active territories, as well as potential chicks for banding.

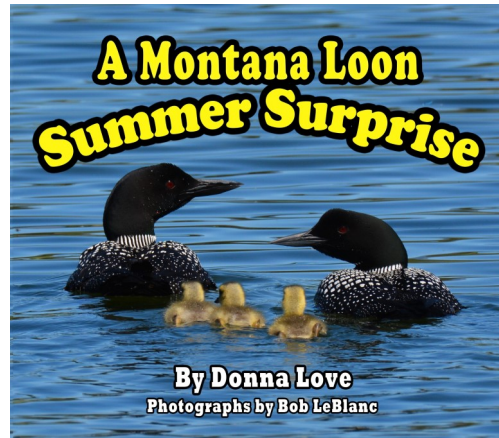
Have more questions? Want to try submitting your band observations online? Reach out to your area coordinator, they can help: <https://montanaloons.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CLWG-Area-Coordinator-List-with-Map-1.pdf>

Paper survey forms can be found and printed at: <https://montanaloons.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Montana-Loon-Survey-Form-1.pdf> ♦

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**REMEMBER:**

***The Non-Game Check-off***  
*at the end of each year's tax form supports loons, too, so be sure to donate part of your tax return to the Non-Game Check-off.*

## **2023 MLS ANNUAL MEETINGS**



*The new book, A Montana Loon Summer Surprise, by Donna Love and photographer, Bob LeBlanc, was reviewed by the MLS Board at the 2023 Annual Board Meeting. 50% of proceeds goes to MLS. Order now on Amazon.*

### **2023 MLS Annual Board Meeting**

The 2023 Montana Loon Society Board of Directors meeting was held in the morning of October 1 at Lone Pine State Park in Kalispell. Along with two guests, five of eight board members were present. After reviewing the Treasurer's Report and past Meeting Minutes, the Board was able to review new copies of the book, *A Montana Loon Summer Surprise*, by Donna Love and photographer, Bob LeBlanc. ♦

### **2023 MLS Annual Membership Meeting**

The 2023 MLS Membership Meeting was held in the afternoon of October 1. Five of 8 board members were present. The new CLWG Co-chair, Jessica Swanson, discussed the 2023 Loon Season and the CLWG 2024 funding request. Election of Officers included President Lynn Kelly, and Treasurer Don Skaar (both 2 year positions), and Board members George Leighton, (Blackfoot, Seeley) and Kris Kindberg (Stryker North to Canadian Border (both 3 year positions). Board member positions for both Region 5 (Glacier National Park and North Fork of the Flathead Valley) and Region 6 (Libby area) are vacant until replacements can be found.

If you would like to attend either of these annual meetings contact the Montana Loon Society at <https://montanaloons.org/> or email [montanaloonsociety@charter.net](mailto:montanaloonsociety@charter.net) for more details. ♦





# REWARD



## **FOR OBSERVATIONS OF MONTANA'S BANDED & UNBANDED LOONS!**

*The Montana Loon Society is offering cash prizes for 2024 observations of unique banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons!*

Two \$100 awards will be decided by a random drawing from all individuals who submitted at least one observation by July Loon Day. To qualify, submit a Montana Loon Survey 123 form, or send band observations to the Common Loon Working email:

[montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com)

(To learn more, go to: <https://montanaloons.org> and click on *Report a Loon Sighting*)

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 the CLWG. See the reverse side for information about how to observe and report loon bands. Winners will be announced at the Montana Common Loon Working Group Summer meeting in July.

*(Federal and State government employees are not eligible for the cash reward if they observe loons as part of their job.)*

**This contest is generously funded by the Montana Loon Society.**  
*Loons are very sensitive. Please enjoy them at a distance.*

## How to Read a Common Loon Band in Montana

To determine population characteristics of common loons and better understand their behavior, we need everyone to 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 you see a band and your scope is not adequate or your time is limited, report this to the CLWG immediately. We can possibly provide a high power quality scope or send someone out to that lake to get the band combinations.

When you observe loons, you may catch them raising a leg out of the water to stretch or scratch. This is most common when a loon is loafing or preening.

If the loon is banded, 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).



### Tidbits to help with accurate band recording:

- ◆ Band colors: blue, red, white, orange, yellow, green, silver. Blue, green and red colored bands may also have an white stripe or dot and orange, white, and yellow bands may have a black stripe or dot.
- ◆ Silver on right leg means banded as an adult.
- ◆ Silver on left leg means banded as juvenile.

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.

**Please include the following info for all observations of bands or loons that you could clearly see the legs and can confirm that they are not banded. Please send photos if possible.**

**Lake name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date(s) observed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location on lake (Ideally coordinates or map with a pin):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your name and contact information:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Left Leg (closest to body) (closest to foot) Right Leg (closest to body) (closest to foot)**  
**(LL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ (RL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_**

Contact the [montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com) or submit our Survey123 form (contact your Local Loon area coordinator for info on how to download the mobile app) ASAP with all new banded loon sightings, even if you couldn't read the bands.

For details about observing loons and their bands, see Appendix C of the Montana Loon Plan -

<https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/common-loon>

See Appendix D of the plan for background on banding loons in Montana.

(To learn more go to: <https://montanaloons.org> and click on *Report a Loon Sighting*)

**Web Sites of Interest**

- ◆ **Montana Loon Society**  
[What is Montana Loons Society? - Montana Loons](#)
- ◆ **Montana Loon Society on Facebook**(20+)  
[Montana Loon Society | Facebook](#)
- ◆ **ABC Species Profile by Lynn Kelly**  
<http://www.montanaloons.org/ABC%20loon%20article.pdf>
- MT FWP Common Loon Conservation Plan**  
<https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/common-loon>
- ◆ **MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Common Loon Field Guide**[Common Loon - Montana Field Guide \(mt.gov\)](#)
- ◆ **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)
- ◆ **CBS News Clip:** <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/saving-loons-from-a-shrinking-range/>

**Officers**

President	Lynn Kelly	loon-mont@gmail.com
Vice President	Christie Ferruzzi	406.882.4856
Secretary	Donna Love	<a href="mailto:montanaloonsociety@charter.net">montanaloonsociety@charter.net</a>
Treasurer	Don Skaar	406.442.3254

**Board of Directors**

Blackfoot/ Clearwater	George Leighton	406.251.3925
Swan River Valley	Mark Ruby	<a href="mailto:mdruby@fs.fed.us">mdruby@fs.fed.us</a>
Kootenai/ Tobacco/ Stillwater	Kristina Kindberg	406.889.5077
Thompson/ West Kalispell	Tony Dawson	406.253.6111
Glacier Park	Vacant	
Libby/Troy	Vacant	

**Mark Your 2024 Calendar**

- ◆ May 18 — Spring Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ July 20— Summer Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ July 30-31, CLWG Summer Meeting, Location to be Determined (TBD)
- ◆ Early October—MLS Annual Board and Membership Meetings, date and location pending.

**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)	\$150.00
Raft of Loons (Organization)	\$300.00
Loon Lake (Life Member)	\$800.00

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_  
 State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email (optional, but nice to have):  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*(Membership is Tax-Deductible)*

**Now you can  
 DONATE ONLINE using PayPal  
 From our web site  
<https://montanaloons.org/>**

*or*  
 clip and mail this form and membership or donation to:

**Montana Loon Society  
 P.O. Box 2386  
 Missoula, MT 59806**



## **MONTANA LOON SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 2386  
Missoula, MT 59806

406.926.2131

[montanaloonsociety@charter.net](mailto:montanaloonsociety@charter.net)

<https://montanaloons.org/>

To:

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**TO READ THIS NEWSLETTER ONLINE go to**

<https://montanaloons.org/>

**and click on "Our Team."**

#### **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.

