



Volunteer Position Description: Canadian Lakes Loon Survey Participant



Survey Summary:

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a long-term program delivered by Birds Canada. Participants survey the lake of their choice visiting it at least three times during the breeding season. The information participants collect helps track the reproductive success of Common Loons across Canada. While the program is not designed to identify population indices, the reproductive trends let us know how the species is doing across the nation and regionally.

Purpose: The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey was launched in Ontario in 1981 by Birds Canada (then Long Point Bird Observatory) with support from various partners. It went national in the early 1990s. In 40 years, more

than 4000 participants have monitored breeding Common Loons on 4500 lakes. This impressive effort allows us to achieve many important outcomes, including:

1. Assess Common Loon reproductive success at different scales;
2. Investigate links between reproductive success and habitat;
3. Contribute to conservation management and planning; and
4. Increase public awareness of the importance of lake conservation.

Location: Surveys can be conducted on any lake

within the breeding range of the Common Loon. Normally lakes need to be a minimum of 60 acres (24 ha) but you may see loons on clear, smaller lakes, in the prairie regions. To assist your decision, visit tinyurl.com/cllsmap (type or paste into your browser) to see where existing survey lakes are

(https://drive.google.com/open?id=19vHvb6SACHLVFMIUot790oa0BQQSfzz_&usp=sharing).

Keep in mind that we welcome additional surveyors on any lake.

Key Responsibilities:

- Register to survey and confirm your annual participation. Ensure we have an up-to-date address and email.
- Choose an appropriate lake or lake section (e.g. bay) to survey.
- Review protocol, how to determine chick ages, and commonly misidentified species on an annual basis or as needed.
- Visit your lake(s) at least three times, once in each of June, July, and August.
- Survey following the protocol, ensuring that you are confident no loon pairs or chicks are missed on your survey area (entire lake or lake section).
- Track number of Common Loon pairs, adults, chicks, and chick age.
- Record other cottage/lake bird species (optional).

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- Collect data following the standardized data form.
- Mail data to Birds Canada or enter it online.
- Be available to answer any questions by email or phone regarding the data you collect.

Reports to the Volunteer Manager

The Length of Appointment: Surveyors are asked to participate for as many years as possible. Many cottage and lake users create traditions surrounding their loon surveys with family and friends working together to ensure the data are collected. Many participants take their commitments even further, working to support loon and lake conservation actions within their community.

Recent studies, including those by the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, have shown a periodicity, or cycle, to loon reproduction. These studies suggest that loon reproduction success increases and decreases in about a 10-year pattern. The most recent Status of the Common Loon report for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recommended that a minimum of six years of data are needed to identify true reproductive success for a single lake

Time Commitment: This depends on the size of the area you survey. Three well-timed surveys can suffice but many surveyors are regularly at the lake and constantly survey loons. Often loon surveys can be conducted during your other lakeside activities. Thus, many participants survey loons for hours – as they fish, swim, boat, or just enjoy the lake they are on.

Support: Birds Canada will provide a training factsheet and data forms. Participants can contact the Volunteer Manager if they have questions or concerns. Birds Canada stores the data collected, analyses simple trends annually, and shares those trend with participants. Program data are also available online.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey creates reports periodically and our most recent report is available on the website. In addition, we publish scientific articles; report in *BirdWatch Canada*; share conservation and stewardship blogs; and provide data and information to scientists, lake managers, and lake associations.

Age Requirement: None. This program is family friendly. The lead participant will need to be able to interpret the materials and potentially use a watercraft. Birds Canada will also support high school volunteer hours – just provide the appropriate paperwork with your data return.

Dress Code: Dress appropriately for being outside in the sun on a boat. Please wear a PFD.

Risks and Safety Concerns: The most common issues are dangers associated with paddling on lakes, sun exposure, and boat failure. Please wear an appropriate floatation device when on/near the water and ensure your watercraft meets all legal safety requirements for your province or territory.

Equipment Needed/Other Concerns: Most situations require a watercraft - only a few of the lakes can be surveyed from land. Binoculars are required (to ensure chicks are seen) and, if available, a telescope is very handy.

General website: www.birdscanada.org/loon (provides links to all other information)

Volunteer Portal: www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/clls (for participant's resources, annual registration, data entry).

Donation Site: <https://www.birdscanada.org/give/> (The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is completely supported by Birds Canada's members and supporters).



How to register using our simple, quick, two-step process:

1. Go to www.birdscanada.org/loons and click on **Volunteer Portal** (at the very bottom).
2. **Sign up using the NatureCounts platform offered by Birds Canada.** If you already have a NatureCounts login, just add the loon survey to your profile.
3. **Sign up for the current season.** If you are new to NatureCounts, you may have to log back in to do so. Please let us know if you would like a paper kit or an online kit (tip – get a paper kit if it's your first year. Once you are more comfortable with the survey, you can switch to an online kit).

Lake Assignment: Birds Canada does not directly assign you a lake nor do you need to inform us of your choice in advance. We just ask you to survey the lake(s) that you spend the most time on. To see a map of present and past survey lakes, visit <https://drive.google.com/open?id=19vHvb6SACHLVFMIUot790oa0BQQSfz&usp=sharing>. When you return your data, please ensure that you provide enough details on your forms for us to cross-reference your lake to our database.

Additional Information.

When to register: Ideally before mid-April each year. If you register after July 31st your registration will be put towards next year's survey.

I am registering for the loon survey in July. Can I still help? Yes, absolutely! If you register in June or July, the survey will start before your materials arrive. But, the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is one of the few programs we have for which we accept "back-filled" data forms. We know that many of the people who register late have been tracking "their" loon pairs and chicks for weeks, if not years, so most participants have no problem filling in the forms. Start making notes on what you see (# loons, #pairs, #chicks) and then fill out the forms when they arrive. Please don't guess on the forms if you are uncertain, just leave the data field blank (or mark it uncertain) and write us a note.

I think my Association should get involved – any advice?

If you are part of a conservation group or lake association and your organization would like to survey multiple sections on a single lake, there are three basic registration options. You can:

- 1) register your organization as a single participant (your group will need to distribute forms and compile data but you have better control of the survey activities),
- 2) register specific participants (Birds Canada would distribute survey materials to your participants or
- 3) encourage individuals to register on their own (each member is independent and receives their own communications. This option provides our association with the least control of survey activities).

We have had many associations involved with the program and there are a lot of tips we can share on how to make this work. Please don't hesitate to contact us directly and we can help you decide on your best options for moving forward.

Associations can also request bulk education materials and signs. Please consider making a donation to help cover the costs.). Additional resources including text and pdf documents and photos that can be used in Newsletters can be provided – but check our website first as we try to have appropriate and current materials available on the resources page.

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What if you can't Survey? Is there anything else we can do for Loon and Lake Conservation? To see how you can help your lake and your loons, please review the stewardship resources on our website including our latest factsheet/poster "**Top Six Ways to Help Loons**". You can also request brochures and other loon and lake conservation information to share with your neighbours and lake association. We have articles, brochures, signs, posters, and loon platform information – much of which are available online.

Without a doubt, the most useful action that you can take is to decrease your ecological footprint, especially by using less electricity and fossil fuels. We know that mercury and acid rain are still the predominant issues. We are also seeing the potential for impacts caused by climate warming (lake temperature increases, see 32-year report on our website).

Please give for loons: The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is one of Birds Canada's oldest projects and is self-supporting. We do find funding to cover some of the educational materials we produce, but the program itself is funded completely through Birds Canada membership donations. These donations completely cover the costs of kit materials, postage, staff time, and data processing (entering and proofing online data, analysis, producing scientific publications). For this reason, we ask that all participants consider donating to Birds Canada.

We have a great newsletter! As part of your membership we will subscribe you to our eNews. This great email/blog is delivered to your inbox once a month and informs you of all the bird "happenings" in Canada including any activities associated with the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey. You may want to consider subscribing to our quarterly magazine *BirdWatch Canada* if you are not ready to commit to the loon survey (yet) but want the newsletter, you can subscribe to it via our home page at birdscanada.org.

I hope you will join our team and I look forward to hearing from you.

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