

# Mississippi Lake Loon Survey 2017 Results

Report submitted by Cliff Bennett, MVFN Compiler



Once again, our intrepid and dedicated volunteers from the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) and Mississippi Lake Association (MLA) have completed the annual Loon Survey on Mississippi Lake.

Four teams of two, plus boat drivers, conducted surveys on four different sections of the Lake during the months of

June, July and end of August, 2017.

All sections of the Lake recorded an average number of adults over the summer, but the maximum number of chicks counted was much lower than those counted in 2016 (17 recorded in 2016 and 9 recorded in 2017). Nine chicks were found in June; nine in July; and, only six were found surviving by the end of August. There were no chicks found in the Lower Lake.

It does appear that the loon numbers on the Lake are relatively stable, which is a good indicator of a healthy lake system (clear water and good fish populations). The low chick count this past year may be the result of flooding that submerged loon nests; however, boating on the Lake can be a real challenge for our loons. Check out the article on Loons and Boaters published by the Friends of the Rideau for more information about how boating can impact our iconic birds.

The chart below summarizes results from surveys conducted from 2007 to the end of 2017

<b>Loon Count Numbers</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Maximum number of adults	24	35	35	39	40	43	35	37
Maximum number of mated pairs	10	12	11	12	13	12	17	18
Maximum number of young	8	7	5	8	8	12	17	9
Actual chick survival							7	6

We would like to acknowledge the following people who volunteered their time to this project:

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# Loons and Boaters

Published by the Friends of the Rideau

There are many ways that watercraft can have a negative effect on loons:

- Power boats can send waves crashing into shorelines, drowning nests
- Fishing boats, particularly bass and pike anglers, frequent areas preferred for loon nest sites
- Canoes can slip quietly into loon nesting areas and startle loons off their nests
- Personal Watercraft (PWCs) can speed in shallow water and run over chicks
- Boats pulling water-skiers and tubers may speed near shorelines and run over chicks.

## Nesting Loons

Most loons start to nest from the middle to the end of May. They generally lay 2 eggs which will hatch 27 to 29 days later (late June). Nests are usually on small islands or the back end of bays and inlets.

Since loons only have one or two chicks per year, every chick counts. The survival of loons depends on these chicks staying healthy until they are strong enough to fly south (late October - November).

## Boat Traffic Can Cause Loss of Eggs

Loon parents will leave the nest if a watercraft comes within 150 metres of the nest. This leaves the eggs without warmth or protection.

Loon parents may abandon the nest if disturbed too often. If they try to re-nest later in the season, the likelihood of chicks hatching and surviving is very low.

## Boats Can Easily Kill Loon Chicks!

- **Young chicks are not waterproof!** They need to be able to climb on their parents' backs to stay warm and dry. When watercraft come close, parents leave their chick to defend their territory.
- **Young chicks can't dive!** Young chicks are very buoyant and can't dive very quickly or very deep. This makes them particularly vulnerable to being run over by watercraft, particularly from June to September.
- **Chicks tire easily!** The presence of watercraft causes chicks to keep swimming instead of feeding and resting. This can weaken them, affecting their ability to survive.
- **Chicks frequent open water!** It is the habit of loon parents to move the chicks away from the small bay nesting environment, out into deeper water along more open shorelines, to avoid their natural predators. Unfortunately, this puts them into direct conflict with watercraft - particularly PWCs and boats pulling water-skiers, tubers and wake-boarders.

## What to Look For

**Be aware of loons** - be aware that if you see a loon from late June to September, chances are that one or two chicks will be close by. **Keep your distance.**

**Listen to loons** - if you approach a loon and hear it start to call, this means you are too close. **Move away.**

**Watch what loons do** - if you see a loon “dancing” straight up out of the water and slapping with its wings, it is alarmed by your presence. **Move away.**

### **What Everyone Can Do**

View loons from a distance. Enjoy their lovely haunting calls. Give loons their space - they need solitude to breed and raise their young.

### **Report Harassment**

Harassment of wildlife is against the law. If you see loons being harassed, report this to your local MNR office, local police or OPP, or call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS. Videotaping the event and/or recording the vessel’s registration number is helpful.