

## 2016 Mississippi Lake Loon Survey

Conducted by the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN)  
and submitted by Cliff Bennett



As our iconic common loons gather in groups on Big Mississippi Lake, readying themselves for the journey south to warmer climes, what better time than now to consider the results of the Mississippi Lake Loon Survey for 2016.

The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is conducted across Canada by Bird Studies Canada and as in previous years, members of both the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) and the Mississippi Lake Association (MLA) participated in the 2016 survey by counting breeding pairs of local loons on our lake. MVFN observers were divided into four teams of two and each team was supplied with an MLA boat driver. These teams visited the lake in June, July and August.

**Team 1 - Lower Lake:** Chris Baburek (Clayton), Anne Cameron (Carp) and driver Glen Moulton. In June, three mated pair with three young chicks were observed. In July, the same three pair still had three chicks; however, in August, only one pair was found with chicks. The other two pairs may have moved further up the lake.

**Team 2 - Middle Lake:** David Garcia (Almonte), Chris Barlow (Blakeney), and boat driver Ron Pollock. In June, three pairs of mated loons were seen. Two pairs had a total of three chicks and one pair had none. In July, four pairs were counted, still with three chicks. In August, Gloria Opzoomer and Paul Sprague, both from the

Balderson area, counted five pairs of loons, but no chicks. The chicks were either off on their own or had been predated.

**Team 3 - the Narrows:** MVFN members Lynda Bennett (Clayton) and Pat Enright (Blakeney), along with boat driver Gregg Robinson. In June, two pairs were counted, each with one chick. In July, the same two pair had only one chick; however, they also observed another pair with no chicks. August yielded three pairs, each with one chick.

**Team 4 - the Big Lake:** Cliff Bennett (count compiler) and Brenda Boyd (MVFN President), both from Clayton, along with boat driver Rick Erskine (Innisville). In June, they found five pairs of loons and three singles, spread out over the lake. Of the pairs, two had one chick each and another had two chicks. No chicks were seen with the other two pairs. July's count produced seven pairs - two had two chicks each, one pair had one and four pair had no chicks. No singles were found, but in August the picture changed dramatically. Only three adults and five juveniles were found.

In summary, July's count totaled thirty-five adults, formed into seventeen pairs with eleven chicks. In August, only seven chicks, almost fully grown juveniles, were found.

This survival rate seems very low and could be attributed to predators such as pike, raccoons and possibly the pair of bald eagles nested on Greig Island. Harassment from careless boat drivers could be another contributing factor. As human habitation overtakes more and more of the shoreline, loon nesting opportunities will diminish; however, establishing loon nesting platforms in discreet locations on the lake would help to mitigate this loss.

***Remember - loon populations are a great indicator of a healthy lake.***