



2012 Loon Report

TO: CHRIS RUTTGER AND MEMBERS OF THE BAY LAKE IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

FROM: JON WEFALD, BAY LAKE RESIDENT AND SUPPORTER OF THE BLIA

First, this summer I have not had the opportunity to count the number of loons for one reason or another--until this morning, Saturday, August 11, 2012. As you might recall, in the middle of last summer, my wife, Ruth Ann and I, counted 32 loons on the various bays that make up our truly beautiful Bay Lake. I sent you an email at that time. At that time, I think we hit it just right because we saw several gatherings that students of the loons call "social gatherings." Those kind of gatherings tend to happen in late July, August, and early September. They tend to happen either in the early morning or the late afternoon. You have to be quite lucky to see a huge "social gathering." There are examples where loon biologists have seen as many as 25 to 30 loons gathering together to have the equivalent of a "PTA" meeting where they are communicating with one another and even showing off to one another. Some of the gatherings generate loon behaviors, as Evers and Taylor write in their book entitled *CALL OF THE LOON*: "where the loons often engage in behaviors such as 'the circle dance, splash diving, peering, and wing rowing.'" I personally have not witnessed one of these extraordinary social gatherings of our Bay Lake loons. But, in the summer of 2011 when we saw smaller social gatherings, Ruth Ann and I saw one group of 7 loons and another of 5 or 6 loons--which, of course, was a thrill. Those two groups helped get the number of loons we saw in that late July afternoon in 2011 up to the number of 32 to 33 loons.

Second, this Saturday morning, August 11, 2012, we personally saw 25 different loons on the various bays that make up Bay Lake. With that number in mind, I think you can speculate that at any one time that Bay Lake has somewhere between 30 and 38 loons or so on our lake from mid-April to late September until our loons migrate to the Gulf Coast. I think we will try and do another count in the next couple of weeks. (*See addendum.*) But I think we have another superb group of loons our lake this summer. And, at this point, I do not see any reason for this general number of loons to change on our lake. Climatologists with the National Weather Bureau and the Minnesota Weather Bureau suggest that in the years ahead Minnesota will get warmer but, importantly, our total precipitation from January to December will also increase. That

is very important because we do not want to have a summer that much of the Great Plains and Great Lakes states have had this summer where the temperatures have been above normal and the rainfall way below normal. Our Minnesota central lakes area in the 75 miles around Brainerd in every direction, on the other hand, has had about 27 inches of rain from the last week of May to the second week of August. Brainerd's normal rainfall from January 1 to December 31 is about 25 to 26 inches for the whole year. We all know Curt Hansen and he told me he has been here since the late 1930's and he said: "I have never seen the lake level of Bay Lake as high as I saw it in mid to late July of 2012." Thus, we have been very, very blessed.

Third, I could almost talk as much about the Loons of Minnesota and Bay Lake as much as I think and talk about Kansas State University football where I was the president from 1986 to 2009. We should have a Top 15 to Top 20 program this fall. But back to the Bay Lake and Minnesota loons. If you read my paper on the loons, you might remember that America only has 22,000 loons. They are found in Minnesota north of the Twin Cities, northern Wisconsin, northern Michigan, and, then, you skip all the way to northern New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. that is where the 22,000 loons are. But, remember, we are blessed to have half of all the loons in America. We have 12,000 loons and 13,000 lakes. And, evidently, the loons love Bay Lake because we have from 30 to 40 loons every year. thus, every bay in Bay Lake has two to three loons. But I would say that from the big channel north on Bay Lake to Ruttgers that upwards of 70 per cent of our loon numbers are north of the big channel. (There are about 500,000 pairs of loons in Canada where there are thousands of cool, clear, clean lakes with lots of fish.)

Fourth, I would like to give you several quotes on the loons of Minnesota. In his excellent book, Alan Hutchinson says: "The Common Loon is a symbol of wilderness and of special places yet untarnished. It is a touchstone to the natural world and to our past, to things unknown. Could that be why the calls of the loons provokes such awe and mystery." Hutchinson also writes in his book, JUST LOONS that "Loons as we know them today have existed for at least 20 million years. Humans have only walked this earth for three million years. Loons have succeeded in raising the next generation for 20 million years. Loons have filled summer nights with their ancient, wailing calls for 20 million years." Kate Crowley and Mike Link, in their book LOVE OF LOONS, say this about the Loons of Minnesota: "The loon has taken on a significance that goes way beyond its beauty as a bird, the biology of the species, and the struggle for existence. The loon is engrained in today's society a measure of our concern for the land, our relationship with the water, and our pleasures in the wilderness."

All the best and thanks to the BLIA,

Jon Wefald
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Addendum:

On September 4, 2012, Jon reported seeing substantially lower numbers of loons in late August. Subsequent discussion suggests that the record high water levels (and rapid rise in level) beginning in mid June due to heavy rainfall may have disrupted loon nesting.

The address for the DNR Loon Monitoring Program is:
http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/mlmp_state.html