

## **Kosh Lake Loon Project (Phase One) Report September 7, 2019**

**Introduction:** Our goals of this two-phase project were to determine if the building and deploying of artificial nesting platforms on Lake Kashtabog is necessary, and if so, to build, deploy and evaluate the effectiveness of the platform(s) over time.

The ***first phase of this project*** (May-September 2019) focused on gathering relevant quantitative and qualitative information. The LKRA Loon Committee:

- 1) Mapped the territories of loon pairs;
- 2) Identified the number of loon pairs;
- 3) Monitored the nesting/hatching habits, including habitat selection;
- 4) Monitored the interactions between breeding loons and intruders (human and predators) that visited territories;
- 5) Monitored the chick-rearing behaviour and parent-chick interactions;
- 6) Recorded the number of births and survival rate of the loon chicks.

**Methods:** We recruited loon monitors who conducted weekly observations of one nesting pair each for approximately 12 weeks. A chart was used by each monitor to ensure consistency of information. The use of general/additional observations at the end of the chart also assisted in capturing other relevant information. The loon charts were collected weekly and analyzed by the Loon Project Coordinator (Nancy Bidgood). In addition to the volunteer loon monitors, we hired a project assistant to provide in-depth information on two to three nesting pairs. At the end of the first phase of the project, the monitors were invited to share their observations with one another and propose recommendations for next year.

**Results:** The total number of loon pairs counted for 2019 (May – August) is **19** pairs or **38** loons in total. Thirteen of those pairs were monitored by 21 volunteers. There are **9** chicks on Kashtabog Lake associated with the following pairs:

- # 2 - 2 chicks in MacDonald Bay hatched around June 12
- # 12 - 2 chicks near Green Island hatched around June 17
- # 8 - 1 chick near Oak Island hatched around June 30
- # 15 - 2 chicks in Portage Bay hatched around June 30
- # 14 - 2 chicks in back bay near Stoney Point Marina, not sure when hatched approx. July 4
- # 5, # 6 & # 11 nests failed to hatch their eggs, 2 due to predators and one of unknown causes

Currently, all nine chicks are healthy, which is an improvement from previous years:

- 2018- 13 pairs of loons, 3 chicks hatched- 3 survived
- 2017- 18 pairs of loons, 7 chicks hatched- 4 survived
- 2016- 19 pairs of loons, 9 chicks hatched- 2 survived
- 2015- 16 pairs of loons, ? chicks hatched- 3 survived

**Main observations:**

- Nests tend to be approximately 6 inches above the water line in shallow areas, mostly on islands
- Loon chicks ride on their parents' backs for about one week or as close to one parent as possible
- Loon parents with chicks stay close to islands and shore when there is lots of boat traffic
- Intruders around nests, loons and chicks are great blue herons, gulls, crows, ravens, geese, ducks, snapping turtles, muskies, wake boarders, boats and people
- Loons make shrilling calls and attack when intruders are present
- One-month old chicks make long dives up to 25 seconds long
- Mallard and merganser ducks attacked loons with eggs on a nest or chicks in the water. In response, the loons chased them from the area, flapping their wings and using various calls
- Loons without chicks would visit those with chicks by flying in and forming a circle. Up to 6-8 loons were observed doing this at various times
- Loon parents seem to be on a very consistent schedule with the chicks, feeding every 10 minutes, teaching them to dive by one month old and feeding on their own by 6 weeks with their parents giving them larger fish.

**Recommendations:** Fourteen loon monitors attended the loon luncheon meeting on August 25<sup>th</sup>. After sharing some general observations (e.g. noticeably more ducks and geese this year, fluctuating water levels), a number of recommendations for next year were proposed. These include: 1) loon charts (e.g. revise first page with or without chicks-nesting habits, human traffic and other intruders; begin weekly monitoring Monday-Sunday; provide an example of a comprehensive chart; include pictures; 2) recruit more loon monitors so each pair is observed; 3) loon monitors to meet in May to review process, importance of completing charts consistently and with as much detail as possible; 4) track those pairs who have failed nests/no chicks over the years; and 5) hire two project assistants if we continue to have more than four nesting pairs.

**Conclusion:** Given our project observations, it is premature to begin phase two of the project (building and deploying artificial loon nests. Since more in-depth information is required, we recommend that we continue our observations for the period of May- September, 2020. In summary, it has been an interesting summer learning more about the safety and health of our loons on Kasshabog. This would not have been possible without the volunteer monitors' help and the funding provided by Covia. For this we are very grateful.

The 2019 Kosh Lake Loon Project  
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