2014 to 2018 Loon Survey Results

By Sheila Johnston

Thanks to the efforts of 23 dedicated GCOLA Loon Watch volunteers, we had a successful 2018 loon survey. We were able to cover all areas of the chain to get a good count.

In reviewing the data for the past five years, we are seeing some positive changes in the Gull Chain of Lakes loon population. From 2014 to 2017, Nisswa Lake had 0 chicks, and 1 to 2 adults. This year there were 2 adults and 2 chicks counted on Nisswa Lake. On Roy Lake, the number of chicks has held steady at 2 for the past three years. The number of adults on Roy has fluctuated between 9 and 4, with 4 adults counted on the lake in 2016 and 2018. The number of chicks on Bass and Spider Lakes has ranged from 0 to 2, with typically 1 to 2 chicks except in 2017. In 2017, the Bass Lake nest was washed out. Adults on the same lakes ranged between 2 and 4, with 4 adults in 2018. On Upper Gull the number of chicks ranged from 1 to 6. There were 5 chicks in 2018, and two of the chicks were the offspring of a new pair on the north end of Upper Gull. These two chicks were observed on the lake in late September, and will hopefully have a safe migration. Adults on Upper Gull ranged from 6 to 9, with a five-year average of 8 adults per year. There was good news on Lake Margaret! After three years of no chicks, there were two chicks in 2017 and one chick was counted in June in 2018. However, the pair from the north end of Lake Margaret had a chick late in the season that was not recorded in the 2018 count. Lake Margaret’s adults ranged from 2 to 4, with a five-year average of 3. There were 0 chicks recorded on Love Lake during the five years of record keeping. There were 6 adults counted in 2014, and 0 adults in the following years. On Gull Lake the chicks have ranged from 6 to 11, but the average is over 8 over the course of the five years. Adult numbers ranged from 29 to 81. Due to the size of the lake, an accurate count of chicks and adults is more difficult, and it is likely that there was an error in the adult count in 2017. In 2018, we had 21 chicks counted on the chain. With the additional late comer on Lake Margaret, we had a total of 22 chicks in 2018. In previous years the total ranged between 9 and 18.

It is great to see our chick numbers increasing! You can do your part to protect our adult loons and chicks by staying away from nesting sites, using caution, keeping distance, and reducing speed when boating near loon families. Please do not feed loons! Loons that are fed, then go after baited lines and can become hooked. If you are a fisher person, please use lead-free fishing tackle. Loons often swallow lead sinkers discarded by anglers when they scoop up pebbles from the bottom of a lake to help grind their food. Eating just one lead sinker can fatally poison a loon. The MPCA maintains a directory of companies offering lead-free tackle. It can be found at [www.pca.state.mn.us](http://www.pca.state.mn.us). Never cut your line and leave it in the water. Loons become entangled in the fishing line and get hooked by the lures. Please be on the look out for cut fishing line when you are boating or paddling and retrieve fishing line that you find in the water. Let’s all work together to protect our loons!