

2019 Loon Log

All entries by Dick West

4-24-19

The Loon Platoon has done it again!...and with very exciting results!

Andy Hickman and Paul Winkler got busy today and successfully launched the two nesting platforms at the south end of the lake. Andy had previously prepared the platforms with new anchor cables, and fisherman extraordinaire, Paul, had his boat available for today's launch.

And none too soon for our anxious loon pairs. Loons have been spotted on the lake for a few weeks, so now that the ice has cleared it was the perfect time to launch...a fairly warm, sunny, calm day was taken advantage of by our Platooners. Just as happened last year, as soon as the platforms were in place two pairs were immediately checking them out. In fact, on their way back past the platform near Recreation Point, Andy and Paul saw two loons already climbing up onto it. I hope that pair has better success than last year.

A sincere thank you from all of us and a thank you yodel from the loons to Andy and Paul.



This was taken thirty minutes after installation on the southern area of Intermediate Lk. Didn't take them long. They were waiting for us as we installed it! Andy Hickman

4-27-19

The blustery, chilly weather has kept me off the lake, but I did take a walk down to Gorham Beach today...and was rewarded with my first loon sighting of the year!

The water level is still very high of course and the little island there is almost entirely under water. But lo and behold, what must be our Gorham Beach pair were there checking it out. One was right on the highest part of the island while the other was circling close by. I am confident they will stick around until they have a

dry spot to nest on as they did last year.
It is exciting to see them back again.

4-28-19

Clear, calm, cold morning...32 for my first kayak ride of 2019. Talked to the Gorham Beach pair near their site then to the Recreation Point pair by their platform. Saw one lone loon by Openo Rd.

5-9-19

12:00 noon...Walked down to check on the Gorham Beach pair. They are hanging around the little island, I think waiting for the water to go down more so they have more dry land to nest on.

5-10-19

1:00 Drove down with my binoculars and checked out the two southern platforms. From Bacon's lot at the new log cabin had a good view of the Recreation Point platform. Did not see a loon on it but there was at least one loon bobbing in the big waves close by the platform.

From the Maples I saw a loon clearly in nesting posture on the southernmost platform. The second loon of that pair was close by. The weeds in that area are not above water yet so that platform is really exposed to these cold winds and waves...but there is plenty of straw on board and the loon appeared resigned to its task.

Based on that observation, I think we may have

our first chick around the end of the first week of June...last year it was June 6th or 7th...hopefully this pair will give us two more healthy chicks to watch.

5-11-19

The Loon Platoon is happy to announce all nesting platforms and buoys are in place.

Andy Hickman got his pontoon boat launched recently so he and I were able to take advantage of this nice calm sunny but chilly morning to get the equipment out.

Now we just watch to see what kind of results the loons can produce.

5-12-19

On one of my earlier trips to check on the Gorham Beach situation I had seen one of the loons pulling weeds around like it was working on a nest. It didn't keep at it long while I watched and the water was still pretty high so my conclusion was they were still waiting it out.

Yesterday Andy and I both saw a loon that appeared to be nesting on that same spot.

Today I am convinced that pair is sitting on an egg or two...no more waiting for them!

The main reason I am convinced is because this morning on my paddle boat ride I saw the sitting loon again...but more importantly, I was able to talk to the son of the lady, Jean, that lives right by that little island. They too have been watching the sitting loon.

He told me he actually watched a "changing of the guard". The sitting loon made a few loud calls then soon the other loon came over, at which time the sitting loon left the nest. The other loon went onto the nest, appeared to turn an egg or two and then hunkered down. That activity would not be happening on an empty piece of ground.

So now we have two active nests to keep our eyes on...and hopefully two new loon families in the first week or two of June.

It will be interesting to see what happens if the water level fluctuates very much...if it goes up those eggs could be in trouble...if it goes down the loons could have a difficult trek up to the nest. Lets hope we don't get much rain.

Lets also hope the Recreation Point pair settle in and lay some eggs soon...some good fertile eggs this year...

Sure is fun watching nature at work!

By the way, I did see an eagle in the eagle tree yesterday morning...always fun to see that...

5-13-19

Scot had mentioned seeing the GB pair chasing away a single loon. This morning I saw that too. Both of the pair were near the dropoff dealing with the intruder. As soon as it was chased away one went right back to the nest. At the same time 7 deer were in the water near the beach.

5-30-19

We have a chick!





I just received these two pictures of our first baby loon! They were taken by Paul Winkler this morning at the southernmost platform. Thanks Paul!

Again the southernmost pair has taken the "First Chick Award". This chick has appeared about a week ahead of when I was guessing for the first hatch. This pair didn't waste any time. Obviously there is one more egg in the nest so hopefully we will have another chick soon.

Let's keep our fingers crossed for the pair on the other southern platform having a fertile egg or two.

The high water has been a major concern for the

Gorham Beach pair. They are still sitting and the water level is starting to recede...but it is very close to flooding that nest...big waves could possibly even be a problem. That pair has proven to know what they are doing...we can only watch and see what happens.

5-31-19

More good news!

We have two chicks!

Having plans to go downstate today, at about 8:30 I made a quick car trip to The Maples to check on the southernmost nest. I saw that it was empty and after several minutes I spotted the family in their usual nursery area along shore not far from The Maples. I watched for about a half hour, clearly seeing one chick with the two adults. One adult appeared to be sheltering a chick under it's wing but I couldn't confirm the second chick.

I left my binoculars in the car and as we headed south at about 11:15 I made another stop at The Maples. I could not spot the family but lo and behold, I spotted Andy Hickman drifting in the area on his pontoon boat. Immediately calling him, he said he had been watching the family for about a half hour and, just as I observed earlier, had only seen one chick but suspected another was resting under an adults wing. He said he would watch a while longer then go check the platform to see if there was an abandoned egg there.

As I was getting back to my car, Andy called back...excited to report he had clearly spotted two

chicks in the water!

So it is official...the southernmost pair has given us two chicks to keep our eyes on.

Congratulations to them for a job well done...and good wishes for them to complete their bigger job of raising them to the point of independence.

6.7.19

Loon update

...and this time the news is hard to report...

We have lost one of our chicks.

Andy, this morning, and I, this afternoon, made pontoon trips to the south end. We both easily spotted the southernmost family. We each watched them for several minutes from fairly close range and only saw one chick. In fact, we both saw the two adults go under water at the same time leaving just the one chick alone on the surface for several seconds.

The remaining chick appears healthy and is growing fast. It will soon be bigger than a mouthful for most predators if it isn't already.

Of course we still have two pairs diligently tending nests on the lake. Hopefully they will add to the chick population soon...very soon. If all is proceeding well on those nests, I predict the population will increase within the next week. But then again, you can ask my wife if I have ever been wrong...

So there you have it...the latest example of nature giving and nature taking away. It is all interesting to report. Just sometimes the reports are sad.

June 8, 2019

An incredible kayak ride...

It was a beautiful morning so I skipped the ILA meeting to go on a kayak ride.

The Gorham Beach pair validated my decision with one on the nest and the other actually coming over to greet me.

It didn't make a sound but amazingly it dove and swam under water up to and under my kayak, then surfacing literally inches from my kayak. 3 times it did that as I slowly paddled along. What a thrill to see that huge bird mere inches away and not alarmed...just checking me out. And watching it swim under water is spectacular.

Finally moving on, I saw the platform in the south end still has a loon sitting on the nest.

I also saw an eagle in the eagle tree. On my way back I saw the eagle flying just above the tree tops. It circled around, dove down to the water and flew off with a fish dangling from it's claws. More excitement!

But wait...there is more...

Further along on my way back, the adult in the water by Gorham Beach came calmly out to greet me again...and again it dove and very closely circled my kayak under water...just once this time...but still a rare treat!

This was definitely a ride for the record book.

Wish I could have gotten some pictures but these unexpected things happen so fast there is no time for

photography.

June 8, 2019 continued...

NEWS FLASH...

The Gorham Beach pair have given us another chick! There is only one chick, just as they produced last year. I was sitting at the end of the dock watching the sun go down when I heard the loons making a whole lot of racket. They sounded very agitated. I grabbed my kayak and hustled down there to see what the problem was.

Well there was no problem...I think they were just bragging about their new baby...or maybe they were just hollering to get me down there...wondering why I hadn't shown up yet to welcome the little one...cuz the chick hatched sometime between 12 noon and 3:30. Kay and Dave Egert, whose cottage is very close to the nest, saw a loon on the nest at noon when they left for a boat ride. When they came back from their ride at 3:30 the pair and the baby were hanging out in their nursery area along the undeveloped shoreline near Gorham Beach/Deep Water Point.

The family was such a pretty sight tonight...relaxing close together with the baby cozy and safe on an adult's back as the sun was going down...the spectacular sunset gracing us with a colorful ending to this fantastic day.

We are very fortunate to have the opportunity to witness and enjoy such acts of nature.

6-9-19

News Flash Correction

The Gorham Beach pair has two chicks!

I didn't see them last night but before I went by there this morning another friend said they clearly saw two babies on their pontoon ride yesterday afternoon.

So I went by and easily confirmed two babies. They were both on one adult's back next to the other sleeping adult.

I'm sure it won't be long before they venture out beyond their nursery area.

6-10-19

A pleasant surprise on a dreary day...

Looking out this morning to see the windy, cold, rainy conditions was expected but still disappointing since there was no way I would be paddling down to check on our newest loon family.

So what a surprise to open our front shades to see a loon in shallow water right in front of my neighbors' cottage!

Seeing that, I was sure the rest of the family would be close by...and they were...

Those incredible birds knew I wouldn't visit them in this weather so they came over to visit me! (And don't try to tell me it is just a stroke of good luck...this family and I are buddies!!)

Anyway, I have been watching them for over three hours. I keep expecting them to move on but they seem content staying in this area. They are about 100 yards away but using my fairly high powered telescope

it is like they are about 20 feet away. The scope being on a tripod with decent optics I am seeing incredible detail even through two panes of glass.

The two chicks have been on the mother's back almost the whole time in this chilly choppy water. (Assuming it is the female since it is slightly smaller.) They are either completely hidden under her wings, especially when the rain comes down harder, or nestled between her wings as if in a baby's crib...with daddy bringing them snacks...preening their little fuzzy feathers...stretching their tiny feet out...and flapping their insignificant wings...occasionally hopping in the water but very seldom.

Daddy will infrequently give mommy a snack, which I had never seen before. He also takes short trips away from the floatng crib out to the dropoff for a few dives...probably for his own snacks...and sometimes he wiil rest close by with his head tucked back for a little nap.

The chicks do get on daddy's back sometimes but not for very long that I have seen. One chick flopped off of him and made several tries to get back on...then giving up to go back over to mom, with her lifting a wing to help the chick get on board. Dad did not seem as cooperative as mom.

I could watch this show all day...but I don't want to miss lunch...and I don't want to give my wife more ammunition to question my sanity...

6-11-19

Good news and bad news...

First the good news...

And the good news is VERY GOOD NEWS!

The second pair down in the south end have finally produced a chick!

This afternoon, Andy Hickman was cruising slowly around the platform near Recreation Point and thought he saw a little black head right up next to the platform, with an adult close by in the water and another adult sitting on the nest. He was not real close to the platform but he shut off his motor and just drifted...watching for several minutes before he was able to confirm there was a baby loon there. He then saw the adult loon bringing food to the baby.

A chick from this pair is huge news since they laid infertile eggs the last two years. Of course we don't know if this successful pair are the same two that nested there previously, but we suspect they are judging by how quickly they took to the platform. There is a loon still on that nest so we may have another chick hatch soon. We should see another baby or see the nest abandoned by tomorrow probably. The weather might not let us check on the nest by boat but we should be able to at least check it from land. Let's keep our fingers crossed for a perfect hatch rate of two chicks each for our three nesting pairs.

Now for the bad news...

The Gorham Beach pair have lost one of their chicks. Personally this is extremely bad news, since as you know, I keep very close watch on my Gorham Beach

buddies.

After having a great time yesterday morning watching the two chicks, I paddled out this morning and quickly spotted the family in front of the big log home. As I got close enough to try and get a picture but still 100 yards away, I realized I was not seeing two chicks. I watched them for a half hour or so and saw both adults go under water with only one chick in sight.

I did notice yesterday that one chick was smaller and seemed less active than the other. Perhaps it was not healthy or just easy prey for some hungry creature. At least we have three families to watch, and maybe even another chick will appear today or tomorrow. Stay tuned...

6-12-19

The good news continues!



We are batting a thousand! The pair by Recreation Point did produce another chick!

Between rain showers today Paul and Andy went out fishing/loon watching. They clearly saw two chicks in the water with the two adults.

Andy sent a picture that I zoomed in on so you can hopefully see what they saw. The picture is certainly clear enough to confirm two chicks between the two adults.

This is the first time I remember having six babies hatched in one season on Intermediate Lake. Obviously, losing two of them so quickly is disappointing, but this is still an historical year.

We can be proud that our little Great Lake is able to support such incredible wildlife.

Let's make sure we don't mess it up...

The platforms at Snowflake, near the Arnold property and west of the sand bar have remained unoccupied. We have heard reports of loons and other waterfowl checking those out but none has supported any kind of nest. At this late date it is unlikely any nesting will occur this year. We can only keep the "For Rent - Cheap" signs out and see what happens next year.

6-26-19

A brief report...

Finally it seems like summer!

This morning the Loon Platoon took advantage of

another beautiful calm day to remove the warning bouys from the lake. Andy and I loaded the bouys onto his pontoon boat and then made a loon watching cruise of the south end.

We spotted both families there as expected...two adults with one good sized chick at the far south end and another two adults with two chicks further north. Later in the day the Gorham Beach pair and their chick came by to say hello to my two year old grandson. All four of our remaining chicks look very healthy and are growing fast.

Loons have been spotted lately in the north end of the lake. That is a good sign for the possibility of another nesting pair on the lake in the future. However, the general consensus among us humans is that the Arnold property frontage is not a safe place for the loons to nest due to a lot of close, high speed boat traffic, even early in the year. We need to find another location for that platform for next year.

7-25-19

Another nice kayak ride...

We have been getting some great Intermediate Lake mornings...along with a few losers to remind us that we are in unpredictable Michigan.

I was able to get out to enjoy the good one this morning. Along the way, I was very fortunate to meet a member of the Greene family that owns a large amount of undeveloped waterfront property from the 90 degree turn/car wash curve/dead man's

curve, whatever you call it, eastward. Naturally I can't remember her name but she is Carol's daughter and was very much in favor of us putting a nesting platform anywhere along their property. In fact she said her mother would be thrilled to have a platform placed there...describing her mother as a definite "tree hugger".

So with that important approval, we can plan to relocate the platform currently at the Arnold property to a spot near the curve next spring. Based on boat traffic, it seems most of us are in favor of making that change.

As I continued my ride near the Snowflake platform I passed very close to two of my friends, the Gorham Beach juvenile and one adult. My curiosity as to the whereabouts of the other adult was soon answered. As I neared the point back into the biggest part of the lake I saw a group of 7 loons circling overhead from the south over that part of the lake and then heading back south. I did not see any of them again. But, in front of the big log home, I saw a lone loon that soon took off into the breeze heading east then making a low fast turn back around the point towards the two Gorham Beach loons. It did not come back around the point so I am guessing that was the other Gorham Beach adult.

On a pontoon ride a few days ago I did see the other two families in the south end. So all of our remaining four juvenile loons...we can't call them babies anymore...are doing well.

8-24-19

I'm happy to report that all four of our young loons are doing well. They are showing definite signs of being more independent from their parents...spending much more time on their own. They all should be able to fly by now as I have seen the Gorham Beach youngster take a couple of short flights.

I find it interesting that the Gorham Beach family wanders the entire big part of the lake, from near the sand bar to Snowflake to the 90 degree turn (aka car wash curve or dead man's curve), while the other two families stick fairly close to their nesting sites.

We are getting frequent loon visitors...often seeing groups of three to seven adults gathering and communicating in the big part of the lake and near the sand bar. I have seen these groups flying everywhere around the lake.

The Loon Platoon, in the form of Andy Hickman and I, went into action this morning to remove the nesting platforms from the south end and at the Arnold property. The south end platforms are regularly occupied by returning pairs and the Arnold platform will be placed elsewhere next year so there is no reason to leave those out for migrants to discover. The platform at Snowflake will stay in place until after most of the adults have gone south.

I continue to be thrilled watching our little lake produce four more healthy offspring in a species that dates

back thousands of years. We should all realise how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy all this while most of our fellow humans will never get such an opportunity.

Sep 17, 2019

Mission accomplished...

I took advantage of another beautiful calm morning to take out the nesting platform at Snowflake. And it was a good thing I did cuz one of the corner ropes had broken so it was being held by just one anchor. We had not put new cables on this platform.

Unfortunately for my loon watching activities, I was mostly downstate and not able to keep track of when the loons were last seen this year.

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