

2020 Loon Log



All entries by Dick West

4.25.20 AM

The ice cleared off the lake early this year and loons were spotted as soon as there was open water.

With the coronavirus social distancing and stay at home restrictions we were not able to get Loon Platoon members together or a motor boat out to launch any nesting platforms.

But today we have good news to report!

Our stalwart Loon Platoon member, Andy Hickman, was able to single handedly get a platform in place this morning near the northern weedbed in the south end of the lake, not far from Recreation Point. As was the case last spring, his valient effort was immediately

shown appreciation by a pair of loons in the area ready to take occupancy. Andy sent the above picture of that pair for us to enjoy. Our thanks to Andy for a job well done.

Another pair of loons has been sighted spending time on and around the mini island near Gorham Beach. I expect that pair to be another regular returning pair that will soon nest on their preferred spot.

We hope to get more nesting platforms out in the near future. It appears we are already off to a good start to another summer of loon watching...and hopefully a few families with healthy chicks for us to observe.

4.25.20 PM



An update...already!

We have more good news today...thanks to Andy's diligence and the cooperation of Jeremiah at The Maples...the second nesting platform in the south end of the lake is in place!

Again, as expected, another pair of loons immediately took interest in it. Andy reported that from shore it appeared they had already gotten up on it. This is the third year in a row that loon pairs were on site ready to occupy these two platforms as soon as they were launched.

This is very exciting for all of us loon watchers. It means we can anticipate eggs being laid shortly. Last year these two platforms were installed on April 24 and the southernmost pair took the "First Chick Award" for Intermediate Lake on May 30.

5.11.20

Dave Egert reports the lake and waves are down so a loon was sitting on the little island at Gorham Beach as of this morning. The lake level gage is at about 7.57.

5.15.20

Our nesting pairs...

As noted earlier, the two pairs of loons in the south end took up occupancy of those nesting platforms as soon as the platforms were launched. The Gorham Beach pair unfortunately had to deal with the high water, forcing them to delay nesting until now.

Dave and Kay Egert have been keeping an eye on that

pair and the little island. Over the last few days the loons have been spending plenty of time on the island preparing and sitting on a nesting spot. This morning Dave reports that a loon was on the nest steadily all day yesterday. That is pretty much a sure sign there is an egg or two being attended to.

With that good news, Intermediate Lake is again host to three nesting pairs of loons for this season! Hopefully, we will have six baby loons to entertain us soon.

As always, there is never a lack of interesting activity on and around the lake in my opinion...like the big bear and the disgruntled pilated woodpecker reported on Kencam, or the cutest fox family amusing my neighbor Julie Ebersole, or one of our resident eagles diving into the lake for a meal observed by Bob Webb recently...

5.25.20

We have baby loons!

This is very exciting!

And very quick work by the southernmost pair. Again this year they win the First Chick Award!

Paul Winkler reported seeing two chicks near the southern platform earlier today. At least one was confirmed by Linda Gallagher this evening.

Hopefully, the other pair in the south end will give us two more chicks very soon.

The Gorham Beach pair are still sitting but are in danger of losing their eggs if the water level goes up much higher. Lets keep our fingers crossed for them.

There has been concern voiced about not having buoys out near the platforms as in the past. Unfortunately, the Loon Platoon was hit by very early ice melting along with the virus situation. Andy Hickman did a great job of getting the two most important platforms out timely...and that obviously paid off! We weren't able to coordinate placing the buoys at the same time. At this point I personally don't think the buoys are needed. I have watched fishermen very close to nesting loons, well within the buoys last year and, surprisingly, it didn't seem to bother the sitting loon at all...they didn't even hunker down. I think they are used to fishermen calmly passing by. Putting a buoy by the Gorham Beach nest may actually disturb the loons more wth people going over to see what that is there for. At this point, most people don't know that nest is there and don't go into that shallow area.

5.31.20

I am finally up here for the summer!

It's about time...

We don't have our pontoon boat in yet so I have not been able to get down to check out the new chicks at the south end. I did get out on my kayak this morning to check out the Gorham Beach pair and the other platform in the south end.

Things look normal at the Gorham Beach site even after the windy weather yesterday. There was a loon sitting but I did not see the other loon in the area. That

nest appears to be high enough to stay dry, although the waves yesterday must have been coming close. As I approached the northern platform in the south end I saw a loon well away from the platform. I noticed the nest was empty, then I spotted the other loon in the water not far from the nest. I was hoping to see babies but with the adults not close together I figured that would be unlikely. The first loon surfaced quite close to me and stayed quiet and calm, another sign there were no babies yet. That was confirmed when each loon dove. After just a few minutes, the loon closest to the platform went to it and settled back on the nest after turning the eggs. I think it turned two eggs but I can't be 100% sure of that.

On my way back the Gorham Beach nest was empty but there was a loon close by it. As I approached that loon dove and surfaced fairly close to me. It was quiet and calm and I just kept paddling slowly away. The loon simply turned and headed back towards the nest. In a few minutes it was back on the nest. I did not see the second loon in the area.

Not a very exciting report, but at least everything seems to be as it should. I expect more babies in the south end very soon if those eggs are healthy.

6.2.20

from Sue Thomas

As of Tuesday AM, i spy 2 eggs still in nest at mid lake nesting site and one egg in nest at GB. All adults diving.

6.2.20 afternoon

Just so you know...

And not that anyone really cares...lol...but my summer is officially under way!

I got our pontoon boat in the water and we took a leisurely three hour cruise around the lake, with my first order of business being to check out the new chicks at the south end. And that wasn't easy. Knowing the usual nursery area for the southernmost pair, depending on wind direction, is along the west side of the lake from the river to a little north of the big island, that is where I headed, binoculars in hand. After cruising that entire shoreline and continuing around to the east side, even past the cottages on Walleye Lane, I figured my eyesight must be getting as bad as my hearing and I missed them. Yup, I missed them alright. Circling back along the same route, there were the two chicks and one adult right where I expected to find them along the west side...and so my summer started! We never did see the other adult but I'm sure it was someplace close by.

We also saw an eagle circling and eventually land in the eagle tree.

The other nest sites each had a sitting loon with another adult close by. I am getting nervous that the pair on the platform don't have any chicks yet. Hope those eggs are good.

By the way, while getting Sue's report today on the number of eggs on those two nests was interesting,

she admittedly, and unknowingly, went much too close to the nests on her paddleboard. Even though the adults are off the nest, they are in the area keeping an eye on it and it can be stressful to them. Please keep your distance from the nest sites until the loons have permanently left the nest...hopefully with chicks.

6.7.20

We have two more chicks!

I just got a message from Andy Hickman saying that he was looking at two new chicks near the second platform in the south end near Recreation Point. He first saw the two chicks in the water then on the back of one of the adults.

This is especially fantastic news since we were worried that those eggs might have been infertile. Both this pair and the southernmost pair started nesting at the same time but these chicks were born about twelve days after the first.

The two chicks at the southernmost end are doing well and growing rapidly. Andy reported both of those adults were diving at the same time leaving the two youngsters alone on the surface for a few moments at a time, already not needing constant guarding.

Now the only remaining nesting pair is on the nest near Gorham Beach. The lake level has dropped to almost normal summer level so that nest is very high and dry at this point...in fact, those adults have a pretty big slope to climb onto the nest. Hopefully they will have a successful hatch soon and not have to make that

climb. However, we may not see their offspring for up to another week or so.

Let's keep our fingers crossed for a third successful loon family on the lake.

6.8.20

They did it!

The Gorham Beach pair have hatched a chick!

At about 11:30 this morning Dave and Kay Egert

clearly saw that pair off the nest with just one baby.

Last night the Egerts reported a lot of noise and

activity around the nest. This morning when I paddled

by at about 8:30 one was still sitting on the nest and

the other was nearby. On my return trip I was probably

100 yards from the nest but the one in the water dove

and surfaced only 6 feet away from my kayak hollering

like crazy! It was clearly telling me to get the heck out

of there cuz they're going to have a baby!...shortly after

that, they did.

Intermediate Lake has done it again...three loon

families for us to watch grow up. As I have mentioned

before, we are very fortunate to have such a wonderful

environment at our doorstep...let's make sure we don't

mess it up.

Get out and check out our loon families. Just don't get

too close.

Gorham Beach family portrait from Dave Egert

6.8.20...the day the chick hatched:



6.17.20
Loon update...

And it is a good one...

What a beautiful day to be on the lake! Clear sky, light wind and pleasant temperature. Just right to go for a long pontoon boat ride and drift this afternoon. I hope all of you are enjoying this great stretch of weather as much as I am.

It appears the loons are enjoying it. We saw all three families today.

In past years I usually spotted the families in the south end near the shore on the west side. The last two trips out both families have been in the shallow areas in the center of the lake not far from their nesting platforms. But wherever they are hanging out they are doing well. The chicks in the far south end are really getting big. In fact when I first spotted them I thought I was seeing two adults with no chicks. With the binoculars it was easy to see they were two chubby chicks, and quickly the two adults popped up close by bearing beaks full of tasty morsels for their gluttonous offspring. I think those guys will soon be diving for their own morsels. The other two chicks in the south end are also growing nicely and appear to be healthy and both about the same size. Of course they are still very small but are approaching the "more than a mouthful" size where I start to feel less worried about them getting gobbled up by a muskie, pike or turtle.

(By the way, in paddling around on my morning trips I have seen a lot of pike in the shallows and a couple of really big turtles. Hope those guys don't think my toes look like a snack when I am out floating!)

The Gorham Beach chick is doing well too. I have spotted that family almost every day very close to their nest site. I haven't seen them come by my cottage, which is a half mile from the nest, at all yet as a family. Most years I see them out front within a couple of days of hatching. Today I didn't see them near the nest and thought I missed them, but later we did see the whole family directly across the lake.

As an additional treat, we saw two eagles in the eagle tree. They were sitting there like royalty gazing out over their kingdom...a beautiful sight on a beautiful day.

6.20.20

Update on the Gorham Beach family.

After seeing them a couple of more times across the lake, they have made it back to this side and came by my place this morning.

While I am always happy to see them out front, this morning I was given a special performance when I saw the youngster diving along with the adults. It seems to me at less than two weeks old this is pretty early for it to be diving. At first the chick was just sticking it's head under to watch the adults as they dove for snacks. Then I saw it dive down with the adults. They stayed down 10 to 15 seconds and all three came back up at the same time...and it did it more than once. This little guy is obviously healthy and developing fast...and providing me with some good entertainment.

6.21.20

Answer to Kurt Hochstein re protecting the Gorham Beach loons:

Hi Kurt,

Steve forwarded your message to me.

Thanks for your observations.

There is no nesting platform placed at that location to be used by that pair. They prefer to nest on the tiny little island formed by a few bushes that somehow got a foothold there several years ago.

We also don't put warning buoys there because it is very shallow so boats don't usually go too close. Plus, putting buoys there would actually call attention to the nest site drawing curious people closer to see what those are there for...not what we want to happen.

Once the chicks hatch, the family immediately leaves the nest and does not return to it. Within a few days, the family will wander far from the nest site but still stay in the general area. This family has already been across the lake and back. They wander over a very large area while the two families in the south end of the lake stick closer to their nest sites but still wander back and forth across the lake. The families seem to be careful to not intrude on each others territory during this time.

That being said, there is no way to completely protect the families because they are constantly moving once the chicks hatch. You just happened to see them wandering near the nest site...as I am writing this they

are out in front of my place and have been within 100 yards of here for over two hours. Lots of fun to watch them feeding and napping then feeding again.

Hopefully this long winded explanation will ease your concerns about the safety of our loon families.

Dick West

7.2.20

When I opened the shades this morning at about 7:25, the first thing I saw was the Gorham Beach family heading in right by our slide. It looked to me like they were going to "park" the baby, as the baby stayed put sleeping while the adults started to wander off. But I think when they saw me open the shades and moving around inside they appeared to change their mind.

They both came back to the baby, then one, I think the male, wandered off but not too far. The baby was just sleeping. A barefooter came by fairly close that woke it up. After the skier left the male came back. Then the adults did "park" the baby right by the slide and went out towards the middle of the lake. They both had their heads held very high on alert. At 8:08 I saw a loon straight out from me take off and circle north. Then I saw there were three other loons straight out from the resort about a third of the way across the lake. At 8:10 I saw two of those loons take off and fly south. The baby was still "parked" right by the slide. Now I can't spot any adults. The baby dives occasionally, but comes back up right by the slide and keeps a very low profile. The baby is definitely "parked" while

the adults are off dealing with the intruders. At 8:17 the two adults flew back here, squawking loudly and landing close to the baby. The family stayed together in front of my place for a while. The lake started to get a bit busy with boats and by 840 the family was slowly wandering to the north keeping in fairly shallow water as usual.

I didn't even have to paddle anywhere to see some action today!

There may be some scientific term for it, but I have often seen the adults do what I call "parking the baby"...where the adults seem to tell their babies, that have reached about a month old, to stay in a certain area while both adults go off to do whatever. Today it was clearly to deal with some intruders.

Interesting stuff that I thought you might like to hear about.

8.11.20

Our loon families are doing well.

On our pontoon ride around the south end we saw both families and on the way back spotted the Gorham Beach family. All of the youngsters are getting very big and look healthy.

It continues to be fun watching the adults feeding the youngsters even though the young ones are nearly the size of adults now. I have no problem grasping the fact they are easily catching crayfish for a snack but when I see them come up time after time with a minnow it just amazes me that those big birds can snag a

wiggling little minnow...I sure can't do that.

Another thing that amazes me is that after as many years as I have been watching the loons, I still see different mannerisms displayed. This year I have noticed a loon can definitely strike fear into other waterfowl. On a few occasions this summer right in front of my place I have seen both mergansers and Canadian geese taking great pains to avoid any confrontation with a loon.

In the first instance, a small flock of 13 Canadian geese had just rounded the end of my dock and looked like they were going to head in to graze on my grass. As I stood up from my swing on the beach to chase them away the whole flock quickly moved towards me and the shoreline rather than away from me as I expected. Then I saw the reason. A loon had surfaced right at the dropoff and then swam in towards the geese. The geese came right into shore not 5 feet away from me even though I hollered, waved my arms and even threw some small pebbles at them. They paid absolutely no attention to me. They cowered together in the shallow water right by me until the loon moved on.

A week or so later, a family of about eight mergansers were cruising along, all spread out from the shore to about 80 feet out, running on the water and diving like young mergansers do. Suddenly, the mother gave a loud sharp warning and the whole flock quickly scooted to shore and huddled together by the mother, all out of the water. Then I saw what frightened her...a

loon was hunkered down with its head and body barely visible just inside the dropoff. The loon moved in closer to them but then dove and disappeared. The mergansers stayed huddled in place for a full ten minutes before leaving that spot, staying close to shore.

I saw a similar instance where the young loon by itself came in after a flock of mergansers, chasing them onto the shore but ignoring a few mallards in the area. Just today as I was watching the baby loon and an adult out by the dropoff, a lone merganser was moving along about 50 feet from shore. All of a sudden, the adult loon attacked the merganser from underwater causing huge splashing as it surfaced and the merganser took to flight!

That was certainly something to see...and as I mentioned, I had never seen such signs of aggression by the loons or fear and avoidance of them by the other birds until this year.

The loons continue to amaze and entertain me...I hope you are all enjoying watching them too.

8.15.20

Our babies can fly!

Just the other day I was watching the Gorham Beach family out in front of my place and the baby was rising up flapping it's wings after a dive. It looked to me like those wings were pretty well developed.

Well apparently they are...cuz this morning at a little after 8:00 I spotted the little guy all by itself about a

third of the way out across the lake. There was a fairly brisk southeast breeze blowing creating a bit of a chop. It raised it's head up into the wind making me think he might be going to fly. A few moments later I watched it take off into the wind, running across the water as they always do when taking flight. As soon as it's feet cleared the water it simply stopped flapping it's wings and slid into a graceful landing on it's belly. It wasn't much of a flight but it definitely was airborne. With this being the youngest chick on our lake, if only by one day, we can assume all of the chicks are developed enough to fly. Now they just need to practice and get stronger to be ready for a very long flight south. They will still take two and a half to three months to do that so we still have plenty of time to enjoy watching them.

9.12.20

Our lonesome loons...

The babies are pretty much on their own now.

Over the past few weeks we have seen plenty of adult loon activity, with groups of 3 to 6 hanging out together and doing various types of communicating, on the surface as well as apparently under water. Often that activity is very entertaining. Now that the summer weather has suddenly disappeared so have our adult loons. I haven't seen an adult loon in several days now. (There was a cormorant hanging around for a couple of days but I think it is gone now.)

About a week ago I did see three young loons together

just north of the sand bar at Recreation Point. I am guessing those were the Gorham Beach chick along with two chicks from the south end. Shortly after that I was watching what I thought was the Gorham Beach chick well out away from shore, and then I spotted another youngster feeding along the dropoff just to the east. I guess that means with the adults gone the youngsters are wandering away from their home areas. It also means when I see a young loon out in front of my place I can no longer assume it is the Gorham Beach chick.

Whatever birds I am seeing, they are all looking healthy. I recently had one of them make three practice flights out in front of my place...giving me over an hour of entertainment on an otherwise dull and chilly day. It was definitely not having any trouble getting airborne...but on the the last flight I saw, it turned some and ended up making a cross wind landing that was less than graceful. That's why they practice...lol... As I write this, there have been two youngsters moving along the dropoff, spending most of the time under water, probably feeding. Occasionally they surface close together without any noticeable interaction. As soon as one dives the other dips its head in to watch then dives as well. In the last half hour they have only moved about 100 yards. Now they are close together, calmly preening in the rain, as they slowly move out away from shore. They sure appear to be siblings, but who knows.

It will be interesting to see how long the chicks hang

around before they head south. I'm sure it will be after our first couple of snow events.

Over the next several weeks, Loon Platoon members communicated any loon sightings, with them being very rare after the end of October. We don't know if the loons we saw were local or migrant ones just passing through. The last reported sighting was on December 7, 2020.

The big part of the lake froze over on about January 2, 2021.

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