

# Grass River Almanac

## Nature in your back yard

### The Common Loon, Voice of the North



It's hard to imagine a northern lake without the haunting song and elegant presence of the symbol of the wilderness, the Common Loon.

Loons are strictly water birds, their legs and large webbed feet set far back on the body, provide excellent propulsion under water. Common Loons eat mainly small fish which they catch by diving. To escape when threatened, it is easier for loons to dive than to fly because take-off requires up to one-quarter mile of runway.

Common Loons always nest at the shoreline or on an island. The female usually lays two eggs, then both male and female share incubation for 28 days. During this critical time, boat wake or wave action can swamp the nest. Lowered water levels make it difficult for the loons to return to the nest. Close approaches may cause adults to leave the nest, exposing the eggs to overheating and cooling or to predators such

as raccoons and gulls.

Chicks leave the nest immediately after hatching. At this time the chicks cannot dive or fly to escape threats. If they are separated from their parents, they cannot fish for themselves. It will be about eight weeks before the chicks learn the skills to dive, fish, and fly. When they leave their northern lake, for the winter waters, they do not return until they are four years old.

Help us protect loons by learning more about them. Grass River Natural Area has programs about loons. You can also visit the Michigan Loon Preservation Association website <[www.michiganloons.org](http://www.michiganloons.org)> Help keep the "Voices of the North" returning to our northern Michigan lakes.

The Grass River Natural Area is a wonderful public resource for nature study and observation. Visit [www.grassriver.org](http://www.grassriver.org) for classes, events, trail maps, and more.