



Laura Bottomley Brown's 6th grade class at Central Lake Middle School (above) proudly show off their completed artificial loon nesting platforms, which will be "dressed" with straw to look natural before being placed on Intermediate Lake in the next few weeks. Central Lake Common loon enthusiast Bill Truscott (inset) shows a group of Central Lake 6th grade students the ins and outs of putting an artificial nesting platform together for threatened loons.



# Central Lake students construct nesting platforms for local loon population

By LINDA GALLAGHER

CENTRAL LAKE - Intermediate Lake may still be frozen solid, but in just a few weeks the ice will thaw, just in time to welcome the return of some very special "snow birds"-Intermediate Lake's population of threatened Common loons.

And when the birds return, they'll find brand new nesting platforms waiting for them, thanks to the efforts of 28 6th

grade Central Lake Middle School students and local loon enthusiast Bill Truscott.

Under the supervision of 6th grade teacher Laura Bottomley Brown, Truscott, and volunteer Keith Verellen, the students spent a recent early spring afternoon building four nesting platforms from plastic PVC pipe, sheets of foam insulation, and plastic mesh fencing, much of which was purchased through the assistance of D & M Service,

a Central Lake heating and cooling business owned by Dean and Krista Willson.

As he helped the students fit and glue the piping together, then add the insulation which helps in keeping the platforms afloat on the lake, Truscott explained that the hands-on effort was the second portion of the student's "loon education".

"Several weeks ago, Mrs.

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# Platforms

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Brown was kind enough to invite me into her class, where I presented a power point demonstration on the life cycle of our common loons, and my own history with them," he said, relating his decade of work with nesting platforms, which has resulted in a booming population of loons on the upper Chain of Lakes.

As a result of those efforts, a total of 32 chicks have successfully hatched from the three platforms placed in the water near the islands at the south end of the lake, Truscott noted, smiling.

"That's a record for northern Michigan, I've been told," he said. "And last year, for the first time that anyone could recall, we had three nesting pairs of adults on the lake. When I first got involved in doing this, we only had one nesting pair, and it was rare for them to successfully raise a full clutch of two chicks. Now, that's pretty common."

In fact, several students commented that they had not only been lucky enough to see the

big waterfowl on the lake during family boating outings in recent years, but had seen chicks as well.

Last year, Truscott worked closely on several occasions with Joseph Kaplan, a nationally noted wildlife biologist known for his research on Common loons, as well as members of the Michigan Loon Preservation Association and Intermediate Lake Association, to fit U.S Fish and

Wildlife Service identification bands, as well as several geolocating archival tags, on several of the lake's birds, with much of the funding for the work raised through benefit fund raisers held by Truscott at Central Lake's Blue Pelican with the cooperation of Pelican owners Chris and Merrie Corbett, and the loon enthusiast's long time friend Keith Verellen, who is general manager of the three Blue Pelican dining establishments.

The bands, along with the archival tags, will provide critically needed data regarding survival of the birds over the winter in the Gulf of Mexico, where it is believed most of the waterfowl head each fall, along with vital

new information on migration distance, duration, and routes.

Also much anticipated will be information gained from the highly sensitive birds on the effects of crude oil, toxic dispersants, and heavy metals such as mercury as a result of last year's Deepwater Horizon explosion and resulting oil spill.

Kaplan is planning on returning this summer to recover that data, Truscott noted. "He needs to know, if at all possible, the exact date that the birds first appear on the lake this spring, so we would appreciate hearing about initial sightings from anyone who sees the birds out there in the next few weeks."

But first, the birds, probably already on their way north, need to return to Intermediate Lake. When they do, they'll find four brand new nesting platforms, along with 28 Central Lake 6th graders eagerly awaiting their arrival.

Common loon sightings on Intermediate Lake in the month of April can be reported by calling 1-231-342-7038 or [Truscottw@yahoo.com](mailto:Truscottw@yahoo.com)