



WHITE LAKE PRESERVATION PROJECT

White Lake Loon Survey and Wildlife Observations

Monday June 29th to July 3rd 2015

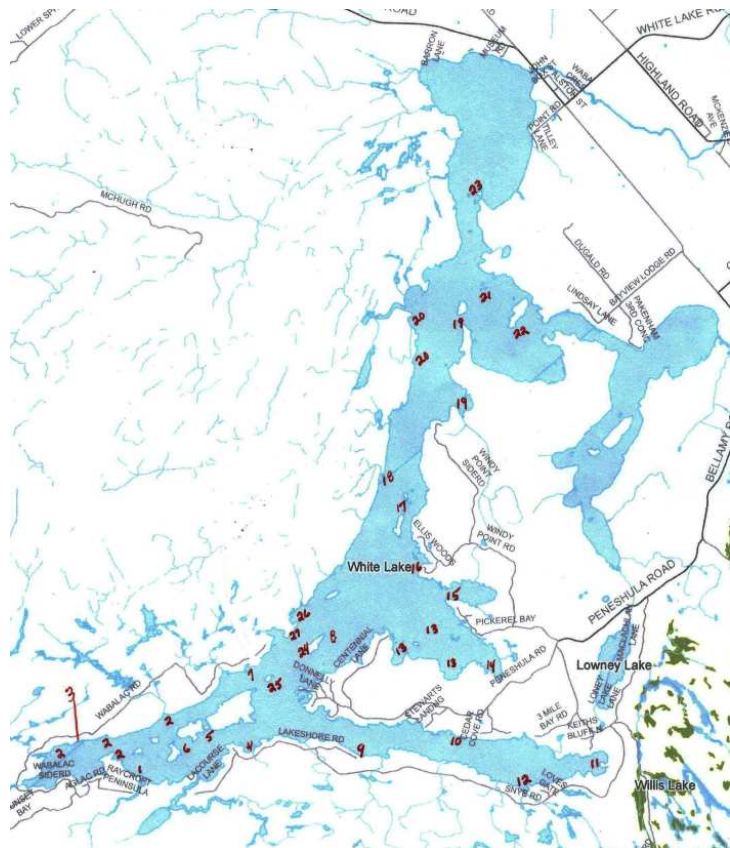
Joyce Benham and Bob Carrière

This year loons on White Lake were plentiful, very active with most couples producing two fair size chicks. In past years, numerous couples only had one chick at their side. Chicks were also between 10 to 15 days old when observed, indicating that they were hatched earlier in the season than in previous years. All chicks appeared to be well fed. Loon chicks were too large to allow them to ride on the parent's back. Most of them were swimming fast and diving on their own and coming up with tiny minnows in their beaks.

Last year, Blue Herons were scarce with only a few observed. This year they were almost everywhere on rocky outcrops or flying across the bow of the pontoon boat.

Using the map shown, individual observations of loons and other wildlife

are numerically referenced. A tally of the loon population on White Lake gives a total of 40 adults and 17 chicks. During the 2013 season, the tally was 23 adults and 16 chicks indicating that a large number of young adults have moved into White Lake in the intervening two years.



Referenced Observations Sites

1. Area extending from grassy area of Broad Brook to the small island below Hardwood Island: As in previous years 2 adults and 2 chicks observed repeatedly, very actively fishing and very relaxed in our presence. Also numerous sightings of muskrats swimming carrying grass/twigs in their mouths.
2. Blue Herons were observed repeatedly along the north shore from the shallows of Sunset Bay to the shore just north of Hardwood Island.
3. Young deer were seen browsing near the water's edge on the north shore.
4. South shore near Lakeshore road: Blue Heron perched on rocky outcrop seen repeatedly fishing and quite successful.
5. Lower section of Hardwood Island- east side of channel: The customary loon nesting site is vacant and in disrepair for the second year.
6. East end of Harwood Island: Two adults feeding – no chicks.
7. In front of the Bay just west of McLaughlin's Island: Late evening gathering spot just before dark for 5 to 6 adults doing the typical "line dance" cooperative fishing. This activity consists of numerous adults that gather just after sunset (too dark to photograph) and before total darkness. They were swimming in a loose line formation, moving abreast a few metres apart until one sees fish and they all dive in a frenzy. They resurface and line up to repeat the process. This seems to occur on late evenings when the lake is calm. It is my opinion that these adults are amongst the coupled adults that we have seen during the day. They seem to gather at dusk for some serious social fishing. I believe they account for the many loon cries we hear as night falls. We have witnessed similar calls between adults, when observing them early in the morning, where one is at stationary site 1 and the corresponding adult out of sight on the other side of Burnt point. After some calling the adult would quickly swim around the point to rejoin the other adult and chicks.
8. North east side of Birch Island: Similar gathering at sunset for cooperative fishing: 5 or 6 adults.
9. Beginning of 3 miles Bay: 2 adults were on various occasions - no chicks.
10. Three Mile Bay between Stewarts landing and Cedar Cove resort: The customary osprey nesting site is gone. The tree that held the nest has fallen. Instead we observed 2 adults and 2 chicks in the north shallows just within site of the swimming area. Kids kayaking within 100 meters did not seem to bother the loons who were busy fishing and feeding their chicks.
11. Three Mile Bay – extreme east end of the Bay: Usually a reliable and productive site for loons. None were seen this year, which is a first for the last 4 years.
12. South shore of Three Mile Bay near Love's gate: 2 adult loons with chick actively fishing.
13. Pickerel Bay: As usual, numerous couples of adult loons with 2 chicks were observed. The numerous coves, bays and shallow rocky areas are ideal for the loons. They seem to tolerate the fast motor boats and water skiing as this is a high traffic area.
14. Far east end of Pickerel Bay past the marina towards the grassy area: A particularly cooperative and friendly loon couple kept us entertained while feeding their two large chicks. Again, the relative size of the chicks this year meant they were much more independent and fishing on their own alongside the adults. It was hilarious to watch the parents trying to feed ever larger

minnows and full size sunfish to the chicks. If the chicks could not swallow these fish whole, the parents were quick to eat the fish themselves.

15. Eggshapped Bay: Single adult loon observed.
16. Above Windy Point behind Howard's Island: 2 adult loons – no chicks
17. North of Stanley Island below Waba Island: Usual site for loons: 2 adults and 2 chicks.
18. Off the west shore just north of Waba Island: Blue Heron observed on rocky outcrop.
19. Bay below Deadman's Island near grassy area: Customary nesting location for osprey on the north side of the shore line. A very active chick crying for food was observed. Parents flying in and out of the nest as fast as they could. Chick was not flying out of the nest. First flight will be tricky as there are no other large tall trees nearby.
20. Main channel below Stewart's Island: Very high traffic area coming from Bayview Lodge and White Lake marina. Channel between Island and Fisherman's Point could almost use traffic lights. This area tends to be windy and choppy with the wakes of large motor boats.

Notable Loon Behaviour – Possible Loss of Chicks and Nesting Site

On a particular early afternoon, just west of the bottom tip of Stewart's Island, two adult loons with no chicks in sight were seen very actively bobbing up and down in the choppy waters of the lake. Their hyper activity caught our attention and we moved in closer. With the wind, the ever passing high speed boats and the odd fishermen the area was quite busy. The activity of one adult loon was particularly odd. The adult was repeatedly and violently trashing her/his wings beating the water. At times it would slow down and seem to be grooming its wings but the motion became more agitated as if injured or a fishing line was caught in its wings. It would reach back in a grooming motion and suddenly turn completely upside down. Still beating its wings it would then dive underwater from that awkward position. Resurfacing it would beat its wings as if trying to take flight but staying in the water. After a few metres of wing beating it would repeat the upside down position, both feet trashing and dive again. This frantic exercise lasted nearly 30 minutes. Joyce managed a few pictures but a video would have been more appropriate but I could not leave the helm as I had my hands full following the loons while dodging speed boats and being mindful of the fishing boats near the vicinity. Only one of the adults was involved in this activity although the other one was always very nearby the whole time but not involved. Once exhausted the two loons slowly drifted towards the southern tip of Stewart's Island near a rocky sandy outcrop and what appeared to be a nesting site. As we drifted in the lee side of the island we could turn off the engine and witnessed the saddest sight ever. The two adults were cooing softly as if calling chicks, swimming back and forth near the nest. The one adult who we observed trashing was gathering grass and twigs and bringing them to the nest in a vain effort to repair it for chicks. Both gathering bits of vegetation and bringing it to the nest not in a systematic attempt to rebuild the nest but more in a grieving fashion.

Joyce and I had never witness such behaviour and concluded that their chick(s) had just possibly been run over by a speeding motor boat in the vicinity of the channel or predator.

21. East of Richardson's Island: Two adult loons with two smaller chicks, obviously late bloomers.
22. Near south end of Russel Island: Two adults with 2 large chicks.
23. Additional northern observations: The usual very active osprey nesting site on Ryan's Point contained 2 chicks bobbing up and down while being feed by their parents. Credit must be given to the cottage owner who tolerates the constant bombarding of very caustic "poop" from the ospreys.
24. Birch Island osprey: We had observed the osprey nest earlier in the week and it looked abandoned. Adult ospreys were seen flying around but not near the nest. We then discovered the two full grown osprey fledglings in nearby trees. The chicks were seen flying short distances from tree branch to tree branch until one sunny afternoon when one of the adults lead them

away from the island to soar in the rising air currents. All three were seen at high altitude fully enjoying the updraft but always circling above Birch Island. On a separate occasion, one of the Birch Island adults was seen scooping up a fair size fish (over 9 inches) from the open area east of the island and then flew back towards the nest area. We followed them to the west side of Birch Is. To find the adult perched near the nesting site.

25. McLachlin's Island east side: Two or 3 adult loons fishing on the lee side late afternoon.
26. Barry's Island inside the cove: Two adult loons with 2 chicks feeding.
27. Inside Barry's Island: We canoed to the rocky opening on the side of Barry's Island and paddled to the inside pool of white and yellow water lilies and in the process we scared off a brood of ducks who were hiding in the tall grass.