

Thom Townsend  
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## Looking back, ... and Looking Ahead

*A sequel to 28 Days on a Nest (2015)*

Like most things in life, it is hard to believe that 8 years have passed since that magical summer of 2015 on Province Lake. Having twin chicks born on our Lake was both unexpected and unprecedented. In the ensuing years, further inquiries about the lake have uncovered no documented cases of Loons having hatched babies previous to 2015. In fact, the existence or frequency of adult loons annually spending their summers on Province Lake prior to 1990 is still not clear to this author. Loons reached a very low population across NH in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is likely that the now common occurrence (every summer!) of a mating pair of Common Loons on Province Lake from mid-April until late October is the result of the dedicated work of the leadership, staff and volunteers of the Loon Preservation Committee, (LPC) headquartered on Lake Winnepesaukee. We are fortunate to have this world leading organization practically in our backyard.

Continuing with the story from 2015, ... despite a very late hatching, those chicks grew rapidly during late summer and early Fall. A scheduled attempt by the LPC to come to Province Lake and leg band the adults in early Fall was cancelled due to weather and then staff availability. As is typical with loons, in late October, the adults left for warmer waters, - likely the southern Maine coast or further south on the Atlantic shore. And while no one saw them depart, the twins, then with their feathers grown in, similarly headed out a few weeks later.

The ensuing years have seen a variety of successful and unsuccessful nesting. Working with Steve and Mary Craig, we adjusted the location of our man-made loon raft/nest closer to the shore, where they had nested on a tenuous tuft of weeds and reeds in 2015. The adult pair has consistently claimed it as their summer home every year since. We put up a few "Loon Sanctuary" signs as soon as they begin to frequent the area multiple times per day, ... and when they begin nest-sitting 24x7, we double the signage. If we are fortunate to have a chick or two hatched, we then change over to CAUTION- Loon Chicks signs. Most boaters respect the signs.



In some of the recent years, a 3<sup>rd</sup> adult loon has been on Province Lake much of the summer. Observation by LPC summer interns and local volunteers has revealed banding on one leg consistent with the male of the pair that was banded here in 2017. It is likely that this single loon was replaced in the pair by another adult male, an occurrence that happens occasionally.

Unfortunately, there have been more nest failure years than successful nesting years. Some of these past 7 years have had cases when an egg was produced but did not hatch, some when the egg broke or disappeared, and some when we do not believe an egg was ever produced. We have had years when a large, pesky snapping turtle has threatened the nest, and years when curious eagles make frequent threatening fly-bys. Anything, including curious kayakers, can cause a sitting loon to temporarily abandon their nest, which threatens survivability of the egg.

This is a photo of a loon egg (dark, next to an XL chicken egg) that was collected by LPC from our nest one year, after it failed to hatch and the adults had abandoned it.



We have also had successful years. In 2017, we had a single chick hatched on July 1, that we named Indy. The attentive parents did a great job raising and protecting Indy, and like its cousins in 2015, it left the lake after its parents had gone. That summer (2017), the LPC and our local volunteers were able to ‘identity leg band” both parents one very late night. Research continues as to where the adults go in winter, and if they return to the same lake and as the same pair in ensuing summers.

This is a 2017 photo of Indy riding on a parent’s back at one week.



In 2019, another single egg was laid and successfully hatched on July 11. Early July is the typical time of year for a chick to be hatched in our area. We decided to name this chick Luna. Luna appeared healthy, but the parents were less attentive to it than what we had observed in 2015 and 2017, often leaving it tucked away near shore while they both went off searching for food. The chick did thrive and grow, although in mid-August its body was found and retrieved by LPC along the Bonnyman Road shoreline. A subsequent necropsy concluded that the death was consistent with injuries from an adult (3<sup>rd</sup> loon?) attack.

We begin each year with optimism. The loons have arrived for 2023 (within a day or two of ice-out), and their unique calls can be heard across the lake. Steve completed the annual repairs of the nest, and it was launched in late April. Usually within a week, the adults will begin to check it out. The adults are fun to watch and to listen to, but what we all really want is a baby chick to watch and worry about!

Let's all hope that 2023 is a magical year with one or two chicks to fascinate us.

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*Note: This sequel, written in 2023, is a follow-up to the 4 section write-up of the account of two Common Loon chicks born and raised on Province Lake in 2015. Observations are almost exclusively made from inside our cottage with an 82mm-60X zoom birding scope.*