

# Common Loon Field Observation Form

(for season-long volunteers)

(only fill out "address" and "telephone" on first form)

Vermont Loon Recovery Project (VLRP)

VINS / VT Fish and Wildlife Nongame Program

Lake/Pond: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

- Lake status: ( ) breeding/territory  
( ) loon activity only (no breeding history)  
( ) potential loon habitat (infrequent loon use)

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town/County: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions? contact: Eric Hanson, VLRP biologist, (802) 586-8064  
PO Box 22, Craftsbury, VT 05826 e-mail: ehanson@vtlink.net

## Instructions:

### 1) How often to survey and report sightings to Eric Hanson via phone, email, or mail?

#### A) Lakes with breeding and territorial loons:

Pre-hatching: at least once every 2 weeks

Post-hatching: about every 3-4 weeks through August

**IMPORTANT:** - When loons first observed on nest or chicks hatch, call or send note to Eric right away.

**B) Lakes with loon activity but no breeding history:** at least **3 to 6 surveys** (e.g., mid-May, mid-June, mid-July)

### 2) What to survey

**A) Lakes with breeding and territorial loons:** You can focus on finding the loon pair. However, if they are not in usual area on large lakes, other parts of lake would have to be surveyed before counting as negative survey

**B) Lakes with loon activity but no breeding history:** survey the entire lake before entering "0" loons.

- Make comments on partial (p) surveys (e.g., from your cabin or roadside), but please indicate what you did and did not survey (e.g., "pair at S. end of pond, did not check N. end")

### 3) Record important changes and significant events including:

- 1st observation of adults
- 1st observation of nesting
- 1st observation of adults w/ young
- # of visiting adults and their behavior
- aggressive behavior between loons
- evidence of human disturbance
- nest location, if known (written description, sketch a map)
- confirmed abandonment of nest and possible causes
- confirmed disappearance of a chick and possible causes
- presence of possible nest or chick predators
- (gulls, eagles, otters, crows, ravens, raccoons, etc.)
- water level changes

### 4) Observation etiquette: watch from a distance....do not agitate or disturb the loons.

- Do not search actively for the loon nest....knowing the general location is adequate.
- Watching loon behavior can confirm nesting (e.g., observing male and female exchange positions on nest).
- **You are too close when: a) a loon "crouches" down on the nest or in the water, b) tremolos at your presence.**

### 5) Dead or injured loons and abandoned nests

- If you come across a dead or injured loon, call the local game warden and Eric immediately.
- If possible, place the dead loon in a clean plastic bag and store in a freezer so an necropsy can be performed.
- If you observe a nesting pair off the nest for several days, and there is an unhatched egg still on the nest, call Eric.  
We will want to retrieve the egg and store it in a freezer for analysis later.

### \*\*\*\* 6) When to call the VLRP biologist:

#### **IMPORTANT**

- Call if you cannot visit a breeding lake during your pre-arranged survey schedule (e.g., bi-weekly)
- Call when you first observe loons nesting, chicks, or an abandoned nest.
- Call if you observe major changes in water levels.
- \*\* Call the local game warden and Eric immediately if you observe any intentional harassment.

Please send in observation updates every 2 weeks pre-hatching and every 3-4 weeks post-hatching, so that Eric knows the lake is being surveyed (unless you've made other arrangements)