



LOON ECHOES

Summer 2026 • Membership Report •

A Reminder of Nature's Challenges

The sight of a loon calmly sitting on its nest may appear peaceful, but that bird is often enduring a host of challenges unseen from shore. Black flies are one of the many natural obstacles loons face each spring. Understanding these interactions helps us appreciate the resilience of Michigan's iconic waterbird and the importance of protecting the habitats it depends upon.

When you hear a loon calling across a northern lake this summer, remember that its successful journey from nest to chick required overcoming challenges both large and small—including some of the tiniest adversaries in the natural world.

First Annual Michigan Loon Count

The Michigan Loon Preservation Association (MLPA) is calling on bird enthusiasts, lake residents, boaters, and conservation-minded citizens to participate in **Michigan's first-ever Statewide Loon Count on Saturday, July 18, from 7:00 a.m. to noon.**

www.michiganloons.org/annualloon-count/



Black Flies Affect Common Loons

Each spring, as Michigan's lakes come alive with the haunting calls of Common Loons, another seasonal arrival makes its presence known—the black fly. While these tiny insects are a familiar nuisance to people enjoying the outdoors, they can pose a serious challenge for nesting loons.

What Are Black Flies?

Black flies are small, dark-colored insects that emerge in large numbers during spring and early summer. Unlike mosquitoes, black flies slash the skin and feed on blood. Female black flies require a blood meal to produce eggs, and many species seek out birds and mammals as hosts.

For Common Loons, black fly season often coincides with the critical nesting period.

A Difficult Time for Nesting Loons

Loons typically build their nests at the water's edge, where they incubate their eggs for approximately 28 days. During incubation, adults must remain on the nest for extended periods, making them vulnerable to black fly attacks.

Black flies are particularly attracted to the exposed skin around a loon's eyes, bill, and head. During severe infestations, dozens or even hundreds of flies may cluster around a nesting bird. The



To respond effectively to loon emergencies statewide, our nonprofit must operate a coordinated, well-structured system built on rapid communication, trained responders, and strong partnerships.

Setting up is involved;

- Recruit and train local volunteers all over the State to form small rapid response units.
- **Emergency Hotline/Text Line:** A 24/7 number or text alert system for public or members to report incidents. Mobile App / Online Portal: Allow photo uploads, geolocation tagging.
- Supply rescue equipment to area coordinators through out the state with training to have available to their rescue teams.
- Have Licensed Wildlife Vets available in zones to get injured loons to in a timely manner. Make sure they are funded and have the equipment specific for loon rehabilitation, such as a swimming tank to feed them minnows.
- Set up an endowment for injured loons. Full X-rays under sedation to assess issues - **\$310**. Surgical removal of hook/lead including anesthesia, pain meds, antibiotics and fluids- **\$3750**.
- 24-hour hospitalization including feeding, minimum \$50/day for minimum 8 weeks. **\$3000**
Antibiotics and pain meds: minimum \$25-40 per drug per day. Approx.: **\$2000**
- **Total for this one patient: \$9,060**

constant irritation can cause loons to shake their heads, scratch, and leave the nest more frequently than normal.

Researchers have documented cases where intense black fly harassment contributed to nest abandonment. When a loon leaves the nest for extended periods, eggs may cool or become vulnerable to predators such as raccoons, gulls, crows, and eagles.

Weather Makes a Difference

Black fly activity is strongly influenced by weather conditions. Warm, calm days generally favor black fly activity, while cool temperatures, rain, and strong winds can reduce their numbers.

Interestingly, loon nesting success often improves during years when spring weather suppresses black fly populations. Conversely, mild springs can lead to explosive black fly outbreaks that increase stress on nesting birds.

Nature's Balancing Act

While black flies can negatively affect loons, they are also a natural part of aquatic ecosystems. Black fly larvae develop in flowing water and serve as food for fish and other aquatic organisms. Their role in the ecosystem reminds us that nature is a complex web of interactions, even when some participants seem particularly annoying.

Loons have evolved alongside black flies for thousands of years. Most loon pairs successfully cope with these insects and raise chicks despite seasonal outbreaks. However, when black fly pressure combines with other threats—such as shoreline development, fluctuating water levels, boat wakes, or predators—the cumulative stress can become significant.

What Can Lake Residents Do?

Although black flies themselves are a natural phenomenon, people can help reduce other stresses on nesting loons:

- *Respect loon nesting areas and maintain a safe distance.*
- *Observe no-wake zones near known nesting sites.*
- *Keep dogs away from shoreline nests.*
- *Support shoreline habitat that provides natural protection for nesting birds.*
- *Participate in loon monitoring programs and report nesting activity. Know your lake's loon rangers, contact them.*

By minimizing human disturbance, we help give loons the best possible chance to withstand the challenges that nature presents—including the annual arrival of black flies.

LAKE ANN LOON NEST - Black flies 2026

Scott Hedberg

April 25th we met to assemble the loon nest. It comprises of 7 parts.

May 12th Loons laid eggs.

May 18th Loons had abandoned the nest. Cold spring, bad easterly storms ravaged the nest. Black flies covered everything. Couldn't breath without swallowing black flies... mask is recommended in retrospect.

May 24th I recovered the loon eggs, contacted the DNR Lab about doing necropsy. Shell thickness, stage of development and chemicals present. In particular mercury, because loons accumulate it at 1000% what is recommended fish consumption by an adult human. **Loons will not lay eggs on a nest with DEAD EGGS. They have to be removed, buried or with my case used for research**



May 26/27th I rebuilt the nest. Loons had ripped up the blue filter material to make the nest. We had tried using pine wood chips because not wanting to introduce mold contaminated grasses that could give the loons aspergillosis. Chips needed to be presoaked, to stop floating or blowing away. I used them as a base and covered with bark from dead ash trees. I added more plants as the 6 planted previously didn't survive the storms.



Problem was what to treat the nest that could last 28 days to repel black flies and be safe. Mint plants alone were not enough!

Black flies covered every part on the nest, even the buoys.

The challenge is the black flies out of our control. Weather & water level impact their timing and numbers. The small mint plants that I put on the nest were washed out and did nothing to repel the flies. My undergrad, was in Bio-Chem. I'd researched toxicology of pesticides to understand how they worked and persisted in the environment. Mint, *Mentha piperita*, has a mentholated compound. We know it's "cooling" sensation. In the leaves it's concentration low, dried it's higher but with peppermint oil, it's the highest!. Oil loses effectiveness in 2 days. I researched what could last a month plus without having environmental effects. **Pyrethrin** is a fast-acting botanical insecticide from the chrysanthemum. Bees and bugs leave the flowers alone because it's toxic, once dry it doesn't do anything.

Permethrin is a synthetic copy designed to last and is used for spraying clothes only. After it's dry it lasts up to 8 washings and repels ticks and black flies. This is toxic to fish if sprayed on water! Since the permethrin is designed to spray on clothes and let it dry before wearing, then safe, I thought of how I could use cloth on the loon nest. Burlap came to mind so I made some light frames and covered them with burlap, spraying with a mask far away from the lake. I also sprayed the branches as they were covered with black flies. I gave 24 hrs of drying before installing with gloves. For the nest, I made a spray mix of 2 teaspoons peppermint oil, 1 teaspoon of white vinegar (**kills molds & a mild bacterial sanitizer**) with a couple drops of detergent as an emulsifier. This acted as a quick repellent for at the most 2 days. I'm hoping this experiment will work during the peak of black fly season.



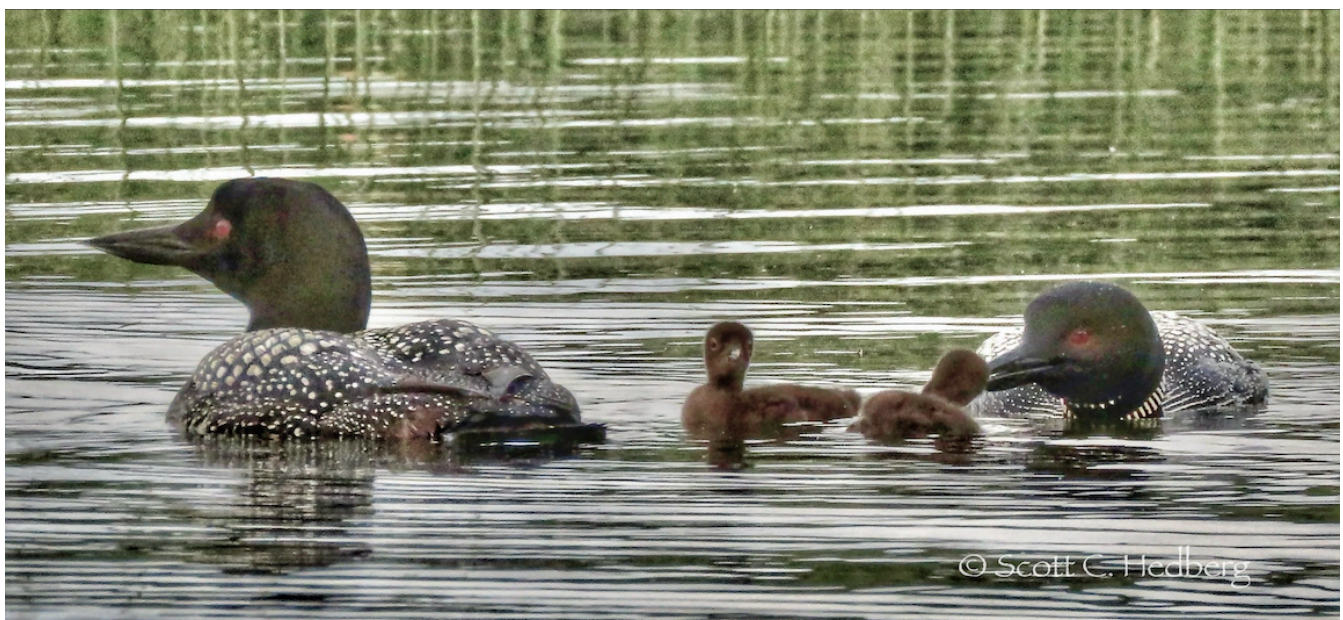
3 days later, May 30th, the loons were back on the nest.



One hatched June 25th, but a loon stayed on the nest, latter that day a second chick was hatched. Unusual for 2 eggs in a 2nd laying attempt.



With this being the 4th weekend, Notices have been sent out to the lake association and local social media groups. All we can do is pray and block the loons with boats for those boaters who don't know any better.



Donor Recognition 2026:

Dear Mr. Adams,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and leadership of the **Michigan Loon Preservation Association**, I extend our sincere appreciation for your professionalism and care in administering the estate of **Johanna Diepenhorst**, and for your role in facilitating the estate's generous charitable contribution to our organization.

We recognize the significant responsibility involved in estate administration and are grateful for the diligence, clarity, and respect with which you have handled this matter. Your stewardship ensures that Johanna's philanthropic intentions are honored with integrity and care, and we are deeply mindful of the trust placed in both you and our organization.

This meaningful gift will advance our mission of "protecting and preserving loon habitat through education, research, and stewardship", creating a lasting legacy in alignment with the values expressed through the estate. We are honored to be entrusted with carrying that legacy forward.

Please convey, if appropriate, our gratitude to all involved in supporting this process. Should you require any documentation, acknowledgments, or confirmations related to the charitable distribution, we would be pleased to provide them promptly.

Thank you again for your professionalism and for the important role you play in enabling charitable impact.

With sincere appreciation,
Scott C. Hedberg
President, Board of Directors.

Dear **Marilyn Hudson**, Loon Ranger - Lake George

On behalf of the Michigan Loon Preservation Association, I want to extend the thanks of the **Michigan Loon Preservation Directors** regarding your generous contribution. Your contribution helps support loon conservation, research, education, and habitat protection throughout Michigan. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to protecting Michigan's loons and lakes.

With sincere appreciation,
Scott C. Hedberg
President, Board of Directors.

Gift and Estate Planning - Make an impact beyond your lifetime for Michigan Loons and their habitats.

Michigan Loon Preservation is a 501 (c)(3) Nonprofit EIN# 38-292992

