

COMMON LOON MANAGEMENT IN MONTANA—AN UPDATE^{TWS}

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Common loon, (*Gavia immrr*) have been monitored in northwestern Montana since the early 1980's. The number of summer residents has remained relatively constant through this period, at about 200. Approximately 60 pairs attempt to nest with 24-26 pair successfully raising 1-2 chicks each year. Beginning in 1988, nest sites on lakes prone to high human recreational activity were protected by floating signs, which formed voluntary closures to help the public stay an adequate distance from the nest. The use of these signs resulted in a significant increase in the number of 2 chick broods produced and their use continues to present. Extensive public education occurs in the area of the lakes with signs so that the public understands the reason for the closure. This has resulted in high levels of compliance. In 1996 a banding program began in which loons were uniquely color-marked in hopes of determining the frequency of territory/partner changes, survival rates of 3 year olds returning to natal lakes, distance of dispersal from natal lakes, and the location of wintering sites. Blood and feather samples were taken to examine the extent of mercury bioaccumulation. Use of these samples has been incorporated into continent-wide genetics and physiologic investigations. The latter has determined that loons are extremely sensitive to environmental loads of methylmercury and are excellent biosentinels for this heavy metal.