

## **Loon Nesting Behavior - Great Pond - 2025**

17 September 2025

**REPORT for: Ms. Muriel Ingalls, President, Kingston Lake Association (KLA)**

**FROM: Jim MacDougall, Member, KLA**

### **Summary:**

- For the first time in modern memory, a pair of loons successfully hatched chicks on Great Pond (Kingston Lake). The pair chose to nest at the same spot on Clark Island (Map 1) where they had nested in 2024. They nested earlier (May 31) than previous attempts (Table 1). The nesting pair shared duties and appeared generally to be committed fully to the nest. For a considerable amount of the nesting season, one adult sat on the nest while the other patrolled in sight of the nest. Eagle activity on the lake was constant throughout the spring and summer. Several encounters between the loons and an eagle were seen. Undoubtedly many more occurred. So far, the loons have been up to the task.

### **Observations:**

- One loon was in the cove at the State boat ramp on 25 March. Ice out was on/about 21 March.
- By 22 April a territorial pair were patrolling the lake.
- On 6 May four loons were on the lake. Two looked smaller than the other two. They swam in a column, sometimes turning to swim in a line then back into a column. It gave the appearance of synchronized swimming. Occasionally one or two would make a shallow dive while the others peered. The diver/s would rise not far away and linger, eventually reforming a column or line for a few minutes, and so on. After roughly 45 minutes, one loon dove, resurfaced 50 feet away and swam slowly away from the group. Shortly after, a second did about the same. There were no visible signs of aggression in the group. In fact, at one point one loon, at the tail end of the line, laid its head on its back and appeared to rest. One loon was later seen flying off the lake.
- The nesting raft was towed out on 13 May. During the second half of May the loon pair often were seen surveying the shoreline around Clark Island, particularly around the SW point. They were seen swimming near the nesting raft, but didn't seem to pay it much attention.
- On 31 May in the late afternoon the pair was feeding just East of Grape Island. They turned to face the South side of Clark Island and swam slowly but steadily on a line to the shore of the island. One loon (female, I think) went to the same spot on shore where the pair nested last year. It wallowed onto land and started pulling vegetation from the water and putting it in a rough semi-circle around her. She changed positions and continued placing vegetation around the circle. The second loon (male, I think) was in the water close by and at times pulled up vegetation and dropped it in the nest

area. At one point they both went onto the water, 20-25 feet from the nest area. After a bit the female moved back onto the nest area and the male moved further out on the lake. Two eagles were seen soaring over the eastern shore of the lake.

- The morning of 1 June two loons were seen about 40 feet from the shoreline to the west of the nest. One eventually moved to the nest and sat on it. The other patrolled slowly along the south shore of Clark Island. The warning buoy was brought out and floated carefully to a spot out from the nest. Not long after the buoy was in place the sitting loon left the nest, joined the other, swam to the buoy and inspected it, above and below water. The pair moved towards the nest and one wailed. Over the lake and an eagle flew by.
- On 4 Jun from Grass Island, the pair were seen switching places on the nest. To date, they had been diligent about nesting duties. Near the nesting raft an eagle was seen perched on a downed tree in the water.
- Throughout the middle of June, the pair continued to tend the nest diligently. Oftentimes the loon not on the nest would patrol a wide area from the SW point of Clark Island to Grass Island. At these times the patrolling loon seemed to maintain a line of sight to the nest.
- On 16 June an eagle dove at the nest. The trajectory of the dive was low. When the eagle was about 40 feet from the nest and 15 feet above the water, the sitting loon lunged off the nest and wing-rowed directly into the path of the diving eagle. The eagle swerved and landed in a pine tree east of the nest. It climbed from one branch down to another, screeching all the while. The two loons moved to the middle of the lake, wailing back and forth repeatedly. After 30 minutes the eagle left the area, flying east and then north. The two loons made a few final wails and moved slowly in the direction of the nest. In the last 50 feet of the approach to the nest, one loon moved stealthily through the rushes, almost laying down on the water. It climbed onto the nest and turned the egg/eggs.
- On 18 June an eagle perched in a pine tree on Spofford's Point then flew tightly around the SW point of Clark Island. The nest was not in sight but the wails of a loon were heard, then the wails of two loons. Shortly thereafter, the two loons moved to the middle of the lake, wailing on the way. Once stopped they began calling wildly with wails, yodels, tremolos and hoots. After about 20 minutes an eagle was seen flying east from a perch just west of the nest, lower and closer to the nest than on 16 Jun. Once the eagle left the area, it took close to 30 minutes for the loons to retake the nest. They made several dives into shore then back out a ways. They scanned the shoreline on both sides of the nest. An adult sat about 10 feet from the nest nearly onshore for 5 minutes then went onto the nest. Their behavior retaking the nest was very cautious and deliberate.
- Throughout the second half of June, regular checks of the nest showed the loons continuing their dedicated behavior. On 24 June the temperature reached 104 deg. Nonetheless, the loons seemed to maintain their routine.
- At 9:30 a.m. on 30 June the adult on the nest opened its wing partly and one chick popped up, then a second. They both plucked at the rim of the nest and stretched.

After 3-4 minutes the adult corralled the chicks with its wing and under the wing they went. The second loon was patrolling very close in. A few times it laid prostrate on the water and then quietly made a short dive. For the next couple hours, it seemed like the two chicks would appear about every 45 minutes for a few minutes. No sign of eagles.

- At 2:00 p.m. on 30 June a chick was in the water 5-6 feet in front of the nest, swimming and frolicking in the rushes. The adult slid off the nest and made a call that sounded part yodel, part tremolo. After about five minutes the adult got back on the nest. In another five minutes the chick climbed up the path and went back in the nest. For the next two hours there was no sign of chicks. During this, the second loon was close by. Lots of cooing and low hooting between the adults.
- At 9:00 a.m. on 1 July one adult and one chick were seen in the rushes just off the nest. The second adult and second chick also appeared. All four moved east along the south side of Clark Island. Just off the bed of rushes on the SE point of Clark Island they spent a few anxious moments rounding the chicks into order. From there they proceeded apace towards the middle of the lake in a column formation with the chicks in the middle. En route they made a few subdued wails and tremolos. Once in the middle of the lake they grouped together and the adults let loose a tumult of calls. Tremolo duets, yodels, wails, all mixed-up. This performance lasted about 30 minutes. The loons then moved slowly towards the eastern shore of the lake, calling a few times, and generally sounding less high-strung. They moved quietly into an area of reeds and rushes.
- Around 8 p.m. the loons were calling from the cove east of the State Park.
- At 10 a.m. on 2 July the loons were between Camp Lincoln and Saint's Rest. Thereafter for the first ten or so days, the loons and chicks seemed to spend the majority of their time between the Camp Lincoln and Ridgewood Beach shorelines. They occasionally moved into cover in the rushes south of Saint's Rest, but generally stayed in the Back Bay or along the edge of the lake.
- By 10 July all four loons had moved beyond Back Bay and were seen in the cove below the camp on Clark Island. One loon drifted to the middle of the lake. The other stayed closer to shore. The chicks were not visible, apparently riding on the adults' backs. The loon closer to shore wailed. An eagle flew from a perch on Clark Island towards the loon in the middle of the lake and landed on the water next to the loon. They jostled slowly for position but there was no commotion. It seemed like the eagle was floating alongside the loon, trying to loosen a chick from the adult. The loon closer to the shore of Clark Island wailed, slid the chick it had off its back and wing-rowed straight at the eagle/loon pair in the middle of the lake. As this second loon got closer, fully reared-up and nearly flying across the water, the eagle flew off in the direction of the camp on Clark Island. The pursuing loon turned and wing-rowed back to the chick it had dropped near the island. The loon from the middle of the lake swam back to the island with a chick on its back, and all four were reunited. The eagle came to a perch just off the water on a dead tree below the camp on Clark Island. After 15 minutes it flew off in the direction of the State Park.
- The annual Loon Preservation Committee state-wide loon census was held on 19 July. Report at Tab 3.

- Throughout the remainder of July and August the loon family seemed to thrive with the chicks passing through the various phases of development. As the chicks grew older, the threat from eagles, though present, seemed to diminish somewhat. At times it appeared as though the adult male shadowed the movements of an eagle and wailed an occasional warning to the others.
- By early September it appeared that the loons most often split up into two units, one adult and one chick. They were often widely separated, working on diving and fishing skills. One chick (first-born?) was comfortable moving from one adult to the other, even across considerable distances.
- On 8 September we towed the raft in.
- On 11 September one chick turned into the wind off Grass Island and wing-rowed about seven or eight strokes, afterwards lapsing into the water. Not long after, the chick made another attempt, with similar results. It won't be long before it learns to fly. And so its sibling. And fly they will, around the time the ice comes back.

#### Discussion – 2025 Nesting Season:

- The pair nested earlier than ever and in the same spot where they nested last year. They spent less time scouting the shoreline for a nest site. In general, the loon pair has been business-like and committed to the nesting and rearing process.
- No direct territorial challenges were observed. Neither did we see any floaters. This seems to suggest a mature pair of loons that has established a strong claim to the lake.
- Typically, after a nesting failure loons choose a different site. It is worth noting that in this case they again chose the site where they failed in 2024 yet succeeded this year. It will be interesting to see if they choose the same site next year.
- The loons paid little interest to the nesting raft. In past years they also showed no particular interest. Should we keep putting out the raft?
- Eagle activity on the lake seemed more constant than in years past. Maybe the eagles have a nest nearby. We should be on the lookout. It would be worth checking with the NH Audubon Society as well.
- Encounters between eagles and loons were common. In many of these encounters the loons moved to the deepest area in the front lake. They also moved there initially with the chicks when they left the nest. From this area were heard the wildest, most frenzied calls, in response to eagle activity.
- Placing the warning buoy the morning after the nest was built was timely.
- After the loons left the nest an inspection of the site revealed no egg shells or other signs of the hatching. Later I spoke with Mike DiGioia, Seacoast Biologist for the Loon Preservation Committee (LPC). He said he had checked the nest and had recovered

eggshells. I believe LPC conducts tests of these. Information in this regard may assist in the Kingston Lake Association's on-going water quality efforts.

**Recommendations:**

- There is much enthusiasm around the lake for the loon chicks. It is a good time to build a core group of people committed to the loons' success. Continued efforts to provide information about the loons will likely be well-received. The new sign at the State ramp is helpful. Next season, we should have the LPC information brochures available at the boat ramp. A presentation from the Loon Preservation Committee at the library might also be considered.
- Organize wider involvement in the annual LPC census.

**Attachments:**

**Tab 1: 2 x Maps**

**Map 1: Loon nesting activity 2025**

**Map 2: Loon nesting activity 2020-2025 (Clark Island)**

**Tab 2: Table 1: Loon nesting dates 2021-2025**

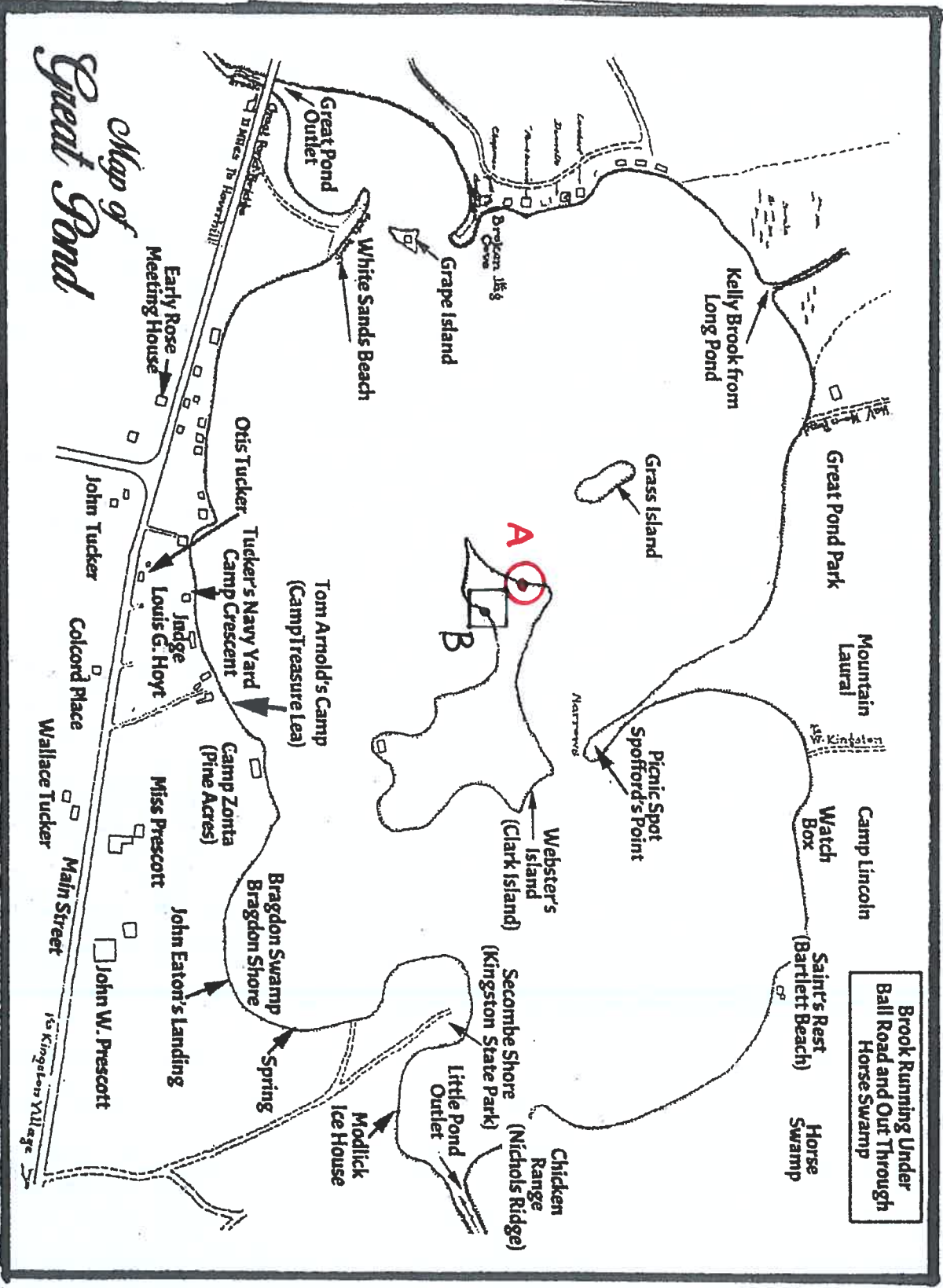
**Tab 3: 2025 New Hampshire Loon Census  
(Great Pond/Kingston Lake) with Map**

TAB 1

# LOON NESTING ACTIVITY 2005

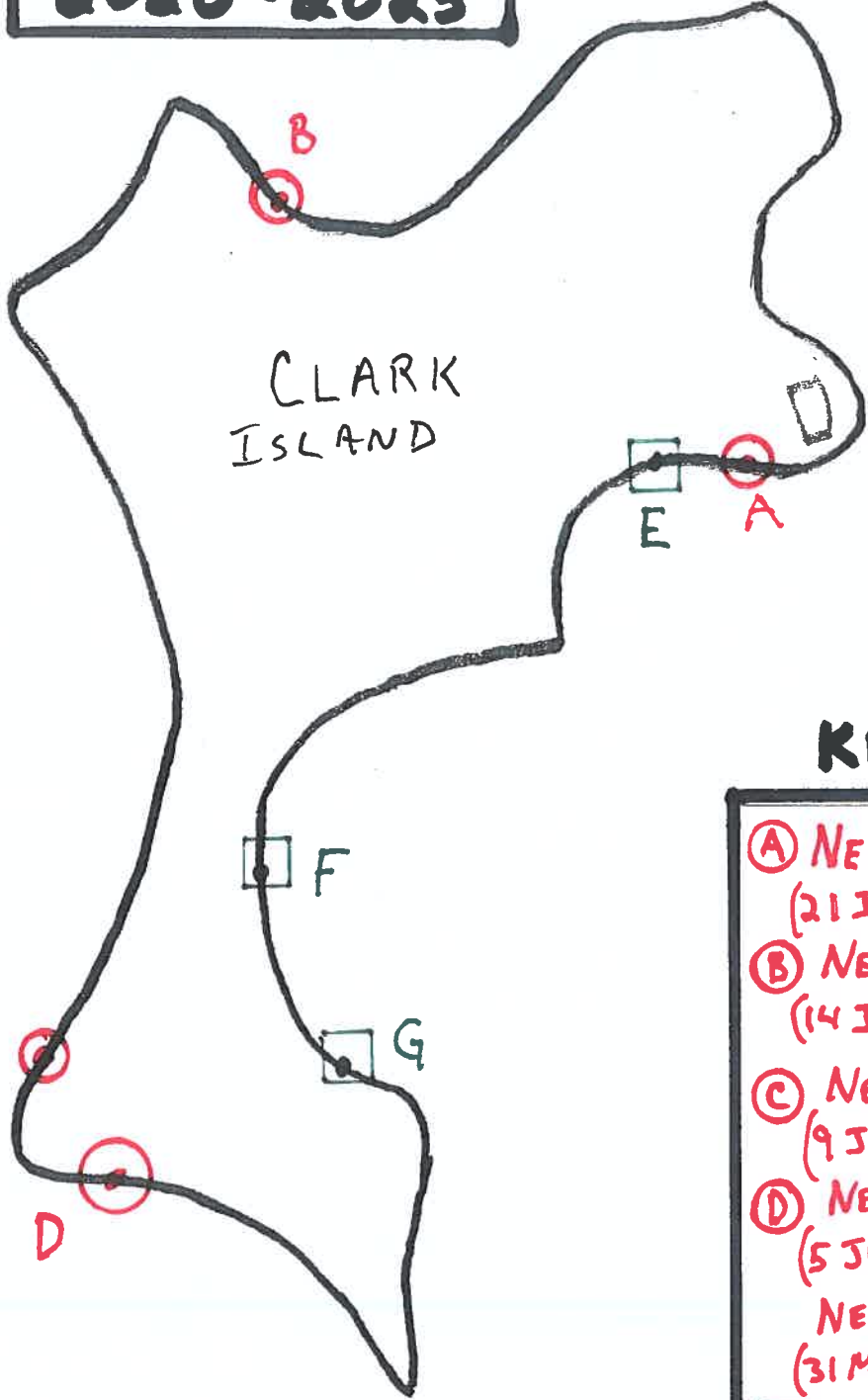
## Key

- A) NEST
- 31 MAY - 1 JUL
- B) NESTING RAFT



MAP 1

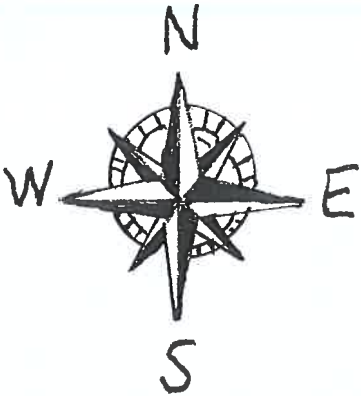
# LOON NESTING ACTIVITY 2020-2025



CLARK ISLAND

## KEY

- (A) NEST 2021  
(21 JUN - 11 JUL)
- (B) NEST 2023  
(14 JUN - 16 JUN)
- (C) NEST 2023  
(9 JUL - mid-July)
- (D) NEST 2024  
(5 JUN - 19 JUN)
- NEST 2025  
(31 MAY - 1 JUL)
- (E) NESTING RAFT  
2022
- (F) NESTING RAFT  
2023
- (G) NESTING RAFT  
2024  
2025



GREAT POND  
(KINGSTON LAKE)

MAP 2

TAB 2

## Great Pond (Kingston Lake) Loon nesting dates 2021-2025

<b>2021</b>	<b>21 June</b>	<b>11 July</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>14 June</b>	<b>16 June</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>9 July</b>	<b>mid-July</b>
<b>2024</b>	<b>5 June</b>	<b>19 June</b>
<b>2025</b>	<b>31 May</b>	<b>1 July*</b>

- Two chicks were seen in the nest on 30 June. All four loons left the nest area on 1 July.

**TABLE 1**

TAB 3

Save paper and send us your sightings on-line! You can submit this form at [www.loon.org/census.php](http://www.loon.org/census.php)



**New Hampshire Loon Census**  
**Saturday, 19 July 2025**  
**8:00 AM - 9:00 AM**

Lake: Great Pond (KINGSTON LAKE) Town: KINGSTON

Observer(s): JIM MAC DOUGALL, Muriel, Joy

Telephone: (603) 583-0835 E-mail: macd3939@aol.com

Address: KINGSTON, NH

Total number of people in party: 3

**Observations:**

	Time	# Adults	# Chicks	# Immatures	Location/Direction
Example	8:17	1 AD			Flw in from east
1	8:00-9:00				
2		2 ADULTS	2 CHICKS		Feeding in area
3		+ see attached			around KINGSTON
4		map & comments			STATE PARK.
<b>TOTALS</b>					

Please note any hawk/eagle sightings during this hour & the loons' response (i.e. vocalizations):

No eagles were seen.

- (1) Record only the FIRST sighting of each loon or group, then be sure to total the number of loons observed on the appropriate line. Note the direction in which the loons move or fly.
- (2) If possible, please attach a sketch/map of census area and the location of any loons you observe.
- (3) It is CRITICAL that observations continue for the ENTIRE HOUR.
- (4) Remember, a report of zero is just as biologically important as a report of 10 loons.
- (5) Your sightings from throughout the summer are also valuable. Please comment on loon activity observed at other times on the reverse of this page.

**CENSUS FORMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY JULY 27 TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FINAL TALLY.**

Please return this form to the LPC: PO Box 604, Moultonborough, NH 03254,  
or you can fax it 603-476-3497 or email it to [volunteers@loon.org](mailto:volunteers@loon.org).

If you were part of a coordinated census effort on a larger lake, please send this form to your coordinator so they can send the forms in all together.

## Loon Census 2025 – Great Pond (Kingston Lake)

### Observations:

A family of loons (two adults and two chicks) was observed on Great Pond from 8:00 – 9:00 a.m. on 19 July 2025. They drifted from pt. 1 to pt. 2 (see map) feeding casually with one adult fishing and one accompanying the chicks. At pt. 2, pretty near the Adirondack Shelter at Kingston State Park, they left the chicks on the surface and both dove simultaneously and repeatedly for times up to 45 seconds. They all ate heartily and drifted slowly towards pt. 3.

### Background:

The loon chicks were hatched on or about 29/30 June so are at this census about 20 days old.

No eagles were seen during this census period. Eagles have been a regular threat to the loons during nesting and on the open water since the chicks have hatched and begun to develop.

