



Why is Chick Watch important?

The goals of Chick Watch are to: 1) increase loon chick survivorship by protecting loon families from boat collisions and human disturbance; and 2) to educate lake users about the needs of the loons, brooding behaviors of loons, and how they can help protect loon families.

Loon chicks are subject to two main sources of anthropogenic stress: 1) direct mortality from collisions; and 2) indirect mortality from human disturbance (i.e., close approach of boaters, which increases stress and can reduce the ability of a loon to survive).

Collisions

- Collisions from motorboats and ski jets are the second-leading known cause of death of loon chicks, accounting for 22% of collected mortalities for which the cause of death could be determined.
- Why does this happen?
 - Very young loon chicks are small, dark, and can be difficult to see on the water.
 - Loon chicks are not able to dive as well as adult loons
 - People may expect loons to dive out of the way, but loon chicks cannot dive as quickly, deeply, or for as long of a duration as adult loons.
 - Adult loons may not always be present with the loon chicks.
 - They may be underwater searching for food for chicks and leave chicks alone on the surface of the water.
 - When the chicks are ~4 weeks old, the adults may begin leaving the chicks alone for extended periods of time. The chicks will simply float by themselves at these times.
 - Loons cross coves to go between various brooding locations.
 - Loons have favored brooding areas within a territory. These may be on opposite sides of a cove or area of a lake, requiring them to cross open water with their chicks and putting them in danger of boat collisions.
 - Loons and chicks do not only spend time by LPC's "Caution: Loon Chick" signs.
 - LPC's orange "Caution: Loon Chick" signs are intended to indicate *general, not specific* areas of the lake where loon families are located. Sometimes they are placed at entrances to coves to serve as a general warning that loon chicks are in the cove.
 - *Loon chicks may be anywhere within these marked coves. Boaters need to boat slowly through these coves and keep an eye out for loons and their chicks.*

Human Disturbance

- Close approach by people in motorboats or canoes/kayaks can severely stress the loons, reduce the ability of loons to care for their chicks, and may result in reduced fitness and/or the death of the chick(s).
- Why does this happen?
 - When boaters approach loons, loons are forced to watch the boat rather than feed and care for their young.
 - If this occurs too often and/or for long durations, the adults may not be able to spend enough time feeding the chicks. Also, stressed loon chicks may refuse to eat.
 - Both of these situations may result in chicks that are not as well-fed or as strong as they would have been had they not been subject to disturbances.
 - In such cases, the first-hatched chick may dominate the younger chick and exclude the younger chick from being fed. This may result in the eventual abandonment and death of the second chick.
 - Boaters may cause loons to swim out from safe brooding areas into more open water/less protected areas of a lake or cove, placing the loons in danger of collisions.
 - This swimming and movement results in an energetic cost, especially for the chicks. This may also reduce chick fitness.
- *Boaters should stay at least 100 feet away from loons and loon families to allow them to go about their normal behaviors to care for themselves and their chicks.*
- *Boaters should also be alert for signs of concern or stress on the part of the loons.*
 - Loons often reveal stress in subtle ways. Boaters should be alert for movements of the loons and changes in behavior (e.g., simply watching the boat rather than normal maintenance behaviors) as a result of the presence of the boat.
 - See “Learn to read the signs” brochure

Chick Watch Protocol

Duration: Shifts of 1-3 hours

Scheduling: Arrange schedule with Jennifer Mattrick (SLA)

Protocol

- Slowly approach loon family and position boat at a respectful distance (at least 100 feet away) from loon family
- Shadow family as they move around territory
- Educate boaters that approach the loons about the needs of the loons and how they can help protect loons
 - Protect loons from oncoming speedboats

- Wave arms or shout to get attention of speeding boat
 - If boat slows down and approaches closely enough, take the opportunity to speak with them and educate them
 - Protect loons from boats approaching for a “closer look” or “a good picture”
 - Educate them about the impact of disturbance and stress from the close approach of boats
- Distribute brochures as appropriate
 - Educate boater about the dangers of lead fishing tackle to loons
- Fill out volunteer logs
 - For each approaching boat, please record:
 - Type of boat
 - Speed of boat when approaching the loons
 - Brochures distributed
 - Please note any vocalizations or signs of stress displayed by the loons in the Comments section (e.g., swim or dive away from boater, raised forehead, etc.), or any other notable feature of each interaction with respect to either the boater or the loons

Etiquette around Loons:

Remember: “If you cause an animal to change its behavior, you have already impacted that animal.”—Judy Silverberg, NH Dept. of Fish and Game

- When carrying out Chick Watch, **please do not approach or come too close to the loons!**
 - You are too close if:
 - Loons begin to swim/drift away from you
 - Remember, loon reactions tend to be subtle—they may drift away from you almost imperceptibly. If you notice that they are suddenly farther away from you, you are/were too close. Please back away!
 - Loons are looking at you and not resuming normal behavior
 - This is a critical impact of close approaches on loons’ ability to raise their young. If loons are looking at a boater, they are not able to focus on feeding and caring for the chicks. Frequent disturbances of this nature may result in the death of a chick.
 - Indications of stress, per “Learn to read the signs” brochure
 - Raised feathers on forehead
 - Low in water
 - Stretches neck up
 - Vocalization
- **Please do not interfere with any natural disturbances/events.**

- Chick Watch is intended to help loons cope with the impacts of boating on loon chick survival. **In the event of a natural disturbance (loon intrusion, natural predation, etc.), we ask you not to intervene.**
- *Please remember that loons are wild animals and natural mortality is normal. LPC is dedicated to helping loons cope with increased human pressures in their environment and to prevent human-caused mortalities. However, it is LPC's policy not to interfere with normal natural processes.*

Etiquette Towards Other Lake Users:

- Please remember you are representing the LPC and SLA and *educating* other lake users. If you approach a boater and they are unreceptive to your comments, please do not get into a confrontation. Thank them for their time and move away to avoid a potentially unpleasant situation.
- If someone wants more information about loons, please ask them to visit www.loon.org or contact the Loon Preservation Committee at info@loon.org.

Safety

- Please follow all normal rules of safety on the water.
- Please do not go out in the event of thunder, lightning, or strong wind.
 - Please be aware of rapidly changing weather conditions and leave the water if necessary.