



Adult and chick in mid-July. All photos courtesy of Doug Welykholowa.



2018 LOON INITIATIVES REPORT: MADGE LAKE, DUCK MOUNTAIN PROVINCIAL PARK

Doug Welykholowa

YFBTA Loon Initiatives Committee

Chairperson

dougwelyk@gmail.com

The Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Loon Initiatives Committee (YFBTA LIC) once again conducted its annual loon survey at Madge Lake over the spring and summer months. We also continued to work on other initiatives involving education and information about the Common Loon with the Duck Mountain Provincial Park Interpreters.

Loons that have previously established territories on Madge will normally return to the same spot, unless something has happened to disrupt the pair, or if undesirable changes to the territory have occurred. Each year we have noted up to a 25 per cent change in territories, with the old ones being abandoned or modified and new ones established. This may be a result of old pairs not returning, and new pairs establishing a new territory, or established pairs abandoning one area for another. We have also noted some modifications to the rough

boundaries of older territories each year, based on where each pair tends to frequent.

The maps in Figures 1 and 2 show the changes to the territories observed from 2017 to 2018. Twenty-six territories were observed in 2018, up one from 2017. Four territories from 2017 were abandoned, and five new ones (marked with * in Figure 2) were established. Note that three of the four abandoned territories were initially occupied in the spring, but they were abandoned by early July. This is similar to what was observed in previous years. We also observed that three territories that were abandoned in 2016 were reoccupied this year. We suspect that these are being taken over by loon pairs new to the lake. What has become apparent since we started keeping detailed records in 2012, is that the birds avoid certain areas, but will re-use a previously occupied area, either due to the protection offered or because of the depth of water and abundance of small fish in those areas. Other open areas tend to be avoided.

The territories marked with a C indicate where chicks were successfully

hatched and survived into September. Six nests (marked with an N) were found this year, one more than last year.

We found six newly hatched chicks on June 19 and an additional one on July 5. We spotted two young (~one week old) chicks on August 10, which is quite late. This may have been a second attempt by that particular pair, as they had been spotted on their nest in mid-June. By the end of August we had spotted 12 chicks/juveniles. An additional four juveniles were noted on the lake on September 6, for a total of 16 juveniles. These latter four were likely fly-ins from other areas, as they were feeding in areas outside the established territories. By this time, only eight adults remained on the lake, with the others departing for their winter feeding grounds. The two adults with the late hatching were still with their young, while the other juveniles were now on their own.

Four of the six observed nests produced surviving hatchlings. Two of the four nests were on the flanks of beaver lodges, while the others were on well-protected shorelines. This was the first time that the one nest



Juvenile in early September

we have been observing for six years has produced chicks that survived to become juveniles.

One member of one pair observed in mid-June was still in its winter (grey) plumage. This is odd, as most loons moult into their summer colours before leaving their winter feeding grounds in April, and are usually flightless for about three weeks during this moult.

As in previous years, we observed a large number of unpaired young adults feeding on the lake in July and August. Up to 20 unpaired birds were observed on any given day, singly or in groups of up to seven birds. Extrapolating our figures, the lake was averaging 65-70 loons throughout the summer, including the 26 territorial pairs and the unpaired groups. This is consistent with previous years' counts. Overall, the Madge Lake loon population continues to thrive. See Table 1 for the monthly counts.

In addition to the annual Madge Lake Loon Survey, the LIC continues to work on related projects, providing the park interpreters with photos and research documents on the Common Loon, and assisting the interpreters in presenting their loon program on two occasions.

We will continue to work with the park staff to improve awareness of nesting loons on Madge Lake through information provided by the park interpretation program, brochures, signage and via reports to the cottage owners.

I am also appealing to have other cottage owners with boats assist me in doing periodic counts in areas that

TABLE 1 - 2018 Count Results

PERIOD	PAIRED ADULTS	UNPAIRED ADULTS	CHICKS/JUVENILES
JUN - EARLY JUL	56	6	7
MID JUL - MID AUG	52	20	9
LATE AUG - SEP	52	4	16

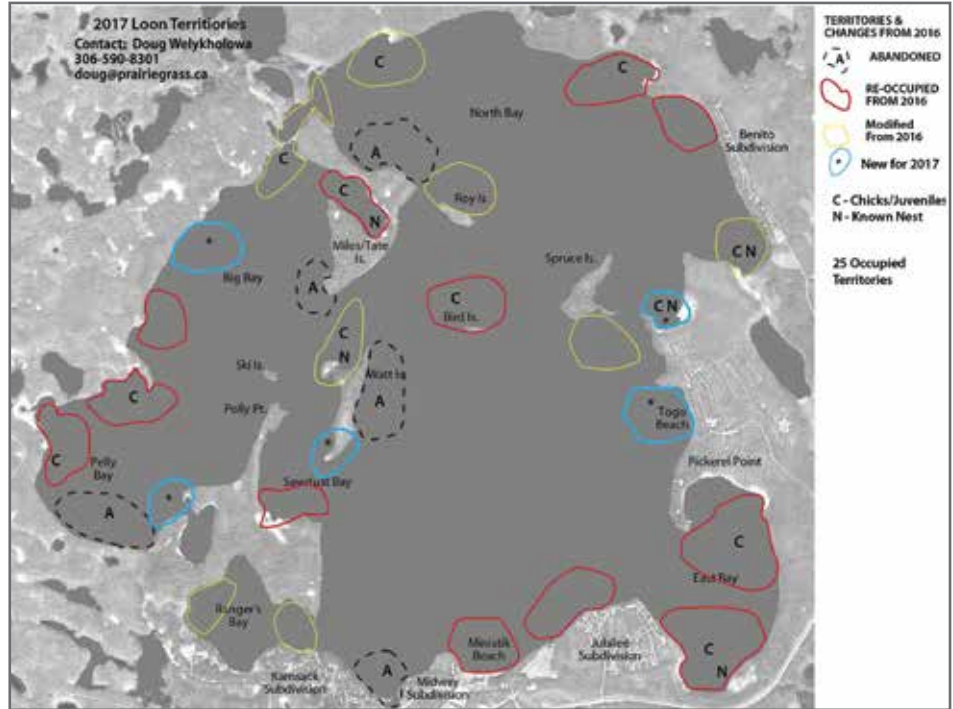


FIGURE 1. 2017 Established Loon Territories

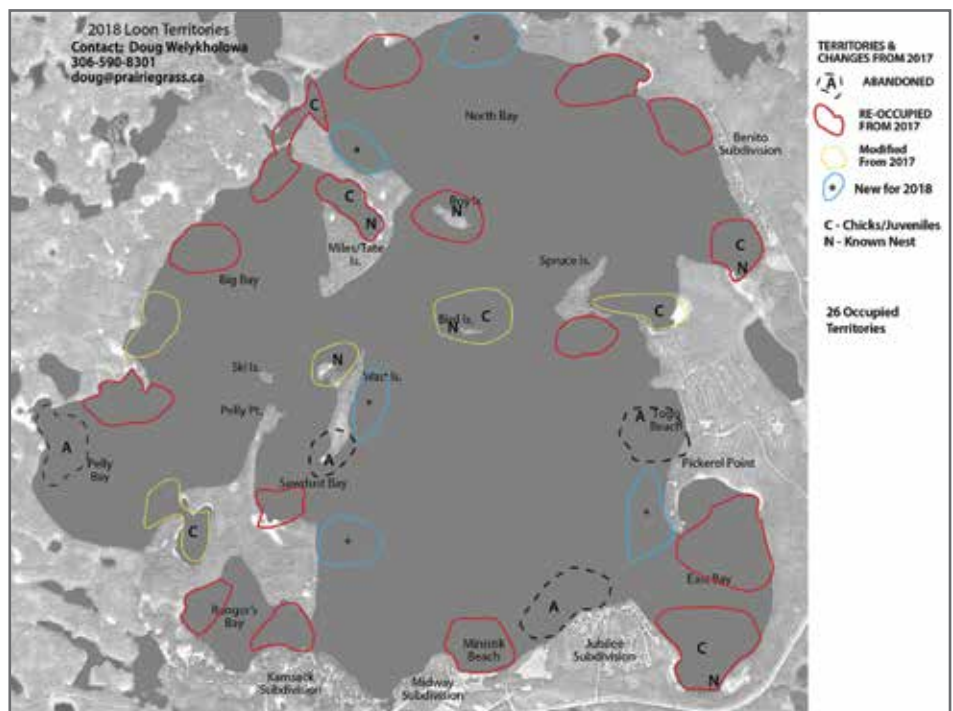


FIGURE 2. 2018 Established Loon Territories

they may frequent throughout the summer. This would greatly assist us by providing additional statistics, which will help us in better analyzing our count information. I have count sheets available for their use. Please contact me if you are interested.

We would once again like to thank the many agencies that have provided assistance and sponsorship for our various projects: Duck Mountain Provincial Park Staff, the Saskatchewan Fish and Wildlife Development fund, Nature Saskatchewan, Bird Studies Canada and the YFBTA. We would also like to thank the park residents who have taken an interest in our projects and those who have contributed to the annual survey. These include Sharon Korb and Kevin Streat, Lloyd and Sandra Benson, Jim and Patti Hack, Kim and Lucy Schindler and Randy and Barb Trofimenikoff. We would also like to thank the park staff and the park interpreters, who have provided excellent support and continue to work closely with us on all our loon-related projects. Lastly, thanks to the Madge Lake Cottage Owners Association (MLCOA), which sponsors our continuing membership in the Birds Studies Canada annual Lakes Loon Survey. 🐦



Adult and nest



Adult and chick in mid-July



Loon with chick on back mid-June