

# 2021 LOON INITIATIVES REPORT: MADGE LAKE, DUCK MOUNTAIN PROVINCIAL PARK



Loon feeding chick, 19 June 2021. All photos courtesy of Doug Welykholowa unless otherwise indicated.



Loon with chick on back (second chick under left wing), 19 June 2021.



Two chicks jumping ship, 19 June 2021.

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Bob Wynes and I were able to do 14 complete counts of all the loons on the lake between 19 June and 21 September 2021. Three of these we did together, while the others were completed separately, often with guest spotters aboard. Our first spotting of loon chicks was on 19 June – about the same time as last year.

Total numbers of Common Loons this year were similar to previous years, with a high count of 80 adults on 14 July. We also found 15 chicks on the lake, 14 of which survived into mid-September. Two of those were only discovered as juveniles in September. We are fairly confident that they were hatched on the lake, as they were closely accompanied by two adults in one of the known nesting territories. It is quite possible that the chicks avoided our previous counts by hiding in the reeds, which are quite extensive in that territory. Prior to spotting the two juveniles, every time we spotted the adults in that territory, at least one adult kept close to the shore, just outside the reeds. This has happened on occasion in previous survey years in other territories.

A total of 23 nesting territories were noted this year. This is a drop of three territories from 2020. Four territories were abandoned, and an old territory that was last occupied in 2018 was re-established (see Figures 1 and 2 for comparison).

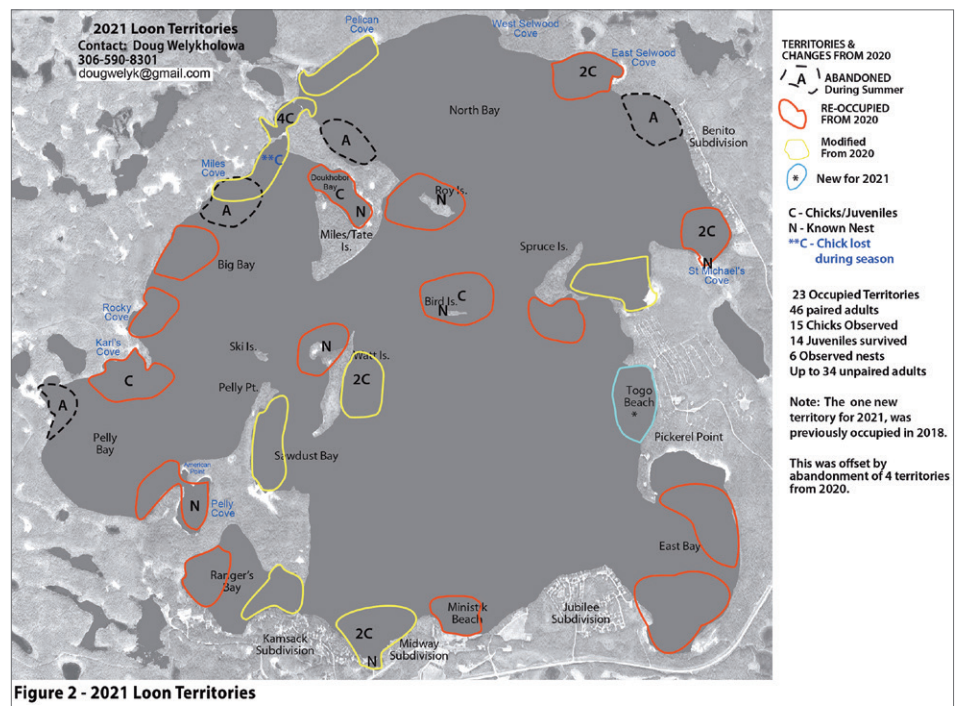
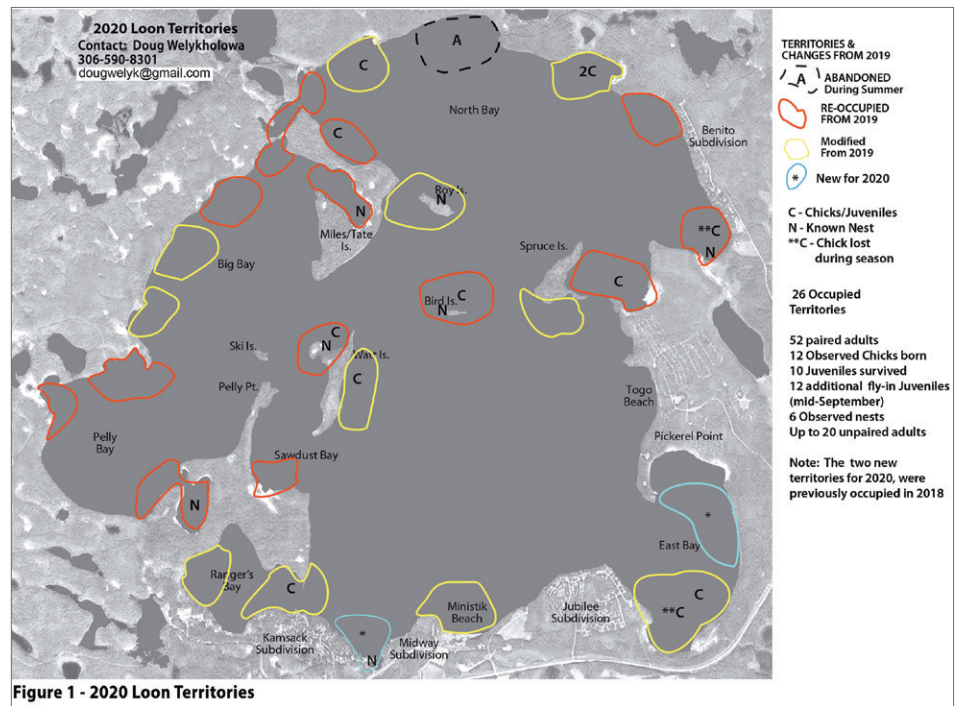
The highlight of this year's count was finding one pair of adults with a brood of four chicks. Although all



the chicks appeared to be the same age, we don't know if they all were from the same parents. We initially spotted three, followed by four a week later; however, based on the location, one chick may have been hiding in the reeds on the initial sighting. The four chicks all survived to seven weeks, after which only three were present for the remaining counts. We didn't find the nest, as the cove where it was likely located isn't accessible by power boat and is about a 5-kilometre paddle by kayak. There is a possibility that one or two of the chicks were adopted from an adjacent territory. Kathy Jones, the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey Volunteer Coordinator at Birds Canada, noted that this is only the 10th such sighting of a four-chick brood in 40 years of data collection across North America. Needless to say, we were very excited to have observed this rare event.

Comparing data over the last 11 years (Figure 3), the adult loon population has been very stable. The year-to-year variation is likely due to inaccuracies in counting the unpaired adults. As in previous years, the lake played host to a large number of unpaired young adults (3-5 year-olds). These loons were often spotted in different locations on the lake with each count, and group size varied from 10 to 34 birds, depending on the day. It is quite common for these young adults to gather in larger groups in the middle of the lake during the evening, while dispersing during the day to feed in other locations, including the many nearby kettle lakes surrounding Madge.

We again were fortunate enough to spot a pair of Trumpeter Swans with three cygnets in late September. Swans were noted earlier on nearby kettle lakes, but we didn't spot any nesting sites on Madge this year. Bald Eagles and Osprey were spotted throughout the season at various locations around the lake. One Osprey



**Figure 3 - Madge Lake Loon Count Summaries 2010 - 2020**

Survey Year	Total Adults	# of Territorial Pair	Surviving Juveniles	# of Chicks or Juveniles Lost
<b>2010/12 average</b>		25	9	
<b>2013</b>	75	26	14	2
<b>2014</b>	86	26	9	2
<b>2015</b>	78	26	6	2
<b>2016</b>	82	26	10	0
<b>2017</b>	78	25	16	1
<b>2018</b>	72	26	12	0
<b>2019</b>	75	25	7	1
<b>2020</b>	72	26	10	2
<b>2021</b>	80	23	14	1





Loon with three chicks near west end of Miles Island, 14 June 2021.



Loon with four chicks at Miles Island, 26 June 2021. Photo credit: Bob Wynes.



Loon with chicks (approx. four weeks old), 14 July 2021.



Adult Loon, 26 July 2021.

family took over a Bald Eagle's nest, which was within 100 m of a known loon nest. Last year, while the Bald Eagles were occupying their nest, the loons nearby failed to produce chicks. This year, with the Osprey occupying it, the loons produced one chick that survived to fledge. Our sightings of Great Blue Heron and cormorants were down significantly from last year. Two pelicans were spotted on the lake throughout the season.

Thank you to everyone who accompanied Bob and I on our surveys: Nancy Welykholowa, Sharon Korb and Kevin Streat, Shevon Wilson, Rob Wilson, Bert and Dale Sebastian, and Norm and Wendy Lawrence. Also, a big thanks to the Park and its staff for the support they provide us every year. This year the Park again deployed No Wake Zone buoys in front of cottages and the Jubilee Boat Launch. The latter covers one of our nesting sites, while the Kamsack Beach/Midway buoys cover another. These will be monitored in the future to gauge any significant effects on these two sites. The Park Interpreters and I once again gave a talk on the Common Loon, which was well attended and received. Thank you to YFBTA, the Kamsack Times and Nature Saskatchewan who continually publish this annual report. Lastly, thank you to Kathy Jones from Birds Canada for providing feedback on the four-chick brood. 🐦



Trumpeter Swans with three cygnets at Pelly Bay, 22 September 2021. Photo credit: Bob Wynes.