

Share the lake with loons!

Here are some guidelines to avoid disturbance or harm:

- **Boat slowly** near loons to avoid colliding with them or creating large wakes that can separate parents from chicks or swamp shoreline nests. Loon chicks can be hard to spot on the water and loons may surface in the path of your boat—it's hard to avoid them if you're going fast. Boat collisions are a leading cause of loon deaths.
- **Obey no-wake laws.** You can protect nests from boat wakes by obeying laws requiring watercraft to travel at no-wake speeds within 200 feet of shore or islands. Additionally, any boats engaging in wakesurfing or wakeboarding activities must be at least 300 feet away from shore or islands and stay out of areas shallower than 15 feet.
- **Be careful near shore.** Canoes, kayaks, paddle boards, and fishing boats can move quietly along the shoreline and startle nesting loons. Watch the shoreline as you travel and move away from any loons or nests you observe. Stay away from areas with floating nests or signage.
- **Do not collect eggs** from unattended nests.
- **Watch loons from a distance** using binoculars. If a loon is showing stress behaviors, leave the area. You are too close if your presence causes a loon to move away or change its behavior.

The **Loon Restoration Project** is a five-year collaboration between Maine Audubon, Maine Lakes, Lakes Environmental Association, and Penobscot Indian Nation to increase loon nesting success and reduce mortality from boat collisions and lead poisoning from lead fishing tackle.

If you're interested in learning more about how you can help protect nesting loons and loon families, please contact any one of the project partners:

Maine Audubon
conserve@maineaudubon.org
(207) 781-2330

Lakes Environmental Association
maggie@mainelakes.org
(207) 647-8580

Maine Lakes
Info@Lakes.ME (207) 495-2301

Penobscot Indian Nation
(207) 817-7363

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How Close is Too Close?

How far away should I stay from loons?

It's a great question since loons may abandon their nests or their young if they feel they are in danger.

Some sources suggest staying at least 150 feet away from loons and their nests. Yet, distance guidelines alone are not always the best way to keep loons safe. On some lakes, loons are very sensitive to human presence and more distance is needed to prevent them from leaving the nest or their chicks. On other lakes, loons may be more relaxed and may even approach people! Reactions to humans vary by loon, and the same loon can respond differently at different times of the season or depending on *your* behavior.

An Overview of Loon Stress Behaviors

Loon Behavior

Learn to Read the Warnings

Nesting is a vulnerable time for loons, that typically incubate eggs between late May and July, and care for their young into the fall. Disturbance during the breeding season can affect nesting success. It just takes a little time to learn how to read the warning signs that you are too close. Thank you for keeping your distance and backing away or leaving if you see any of these signs of stress or concern.

Based on "Understanding Loons: Learn to Read the Signs" by the Loon Preservation Committee; reprinted with permission.

Relaxed

Relaxed loons are better able to incubate and hatch eggs, and feed and care for their young.



Relaxed neck:

A relaxed loon holds its head in a neutral position while on the nest or on the water.



Photo: Robert Alford

Preening:

Relaxed loons spend time each day bathing and preening, using their bills to smooth and maintain the waterproofing of their feathers.



Photo: Gil Sheldon

Wing flapping:

Flapping their wings is a normal part of preening and bathing for loons. Loons also sometimes flap their wings to indicate unease.

Concerned

Be alert for subtle changes in posture that may tell you that a loon is feeling threatened. If you see any of these signs of concern, back away until the loon resumes normal behavior.



Photo: Gail Smith

Raised "squared-off" forehead:

A nervous loon may raise the feathers on its forehead giving it this "squared-off" look.



Photo: Kittie Wilson

Stretched neck:

This loon is aware of a potential threat and is stretching its neck to look around and evaluate any danger.



Photo: Mark Wilson

Riding low: This loon is watching a possible threat while trying not to be seen. Loons normally float low in the water, but when concerned they will sink even lower, and may also put their heads down.

Stressed

Any vocalizations or dramatic behaviors given when you are close to or approaching a loon can indicate stress. If you see or hear any of these behaviors, you're too close!



Photo: Mark Wilson

Crouched on nest:

When loons feel threatened while on the nest, they will put their heads down. This position indicates the loons may leave the nest and expose the eggs to heat, cold, or predators.



Photo: Kittie Wilson

Penguin dance:

If you are too close, a loon may perform a "penguin dance"—rearing up and rapidly paddling its feet in the water, with its wings either spread out or clasped against its body.



Photo: Kittie Wilson

Warning calls: If you approach a loon on a nest or one with chicks, it might give a loud "yodel" or a "tremolo" alarm call that sounds like laughter.