



## Vermont Loon Recovery Project

\* a program of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) and \*  
the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD)



This project funded in part  
by a VFWD State Wildlife Grant  
with major support from  
individual donors

### *The 2009 Breeding Status of Common Loons in Vermont*

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) and the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD) continued their statewide monitoring and management program for the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) for the 32nd year. Vermont's breeding loon population reached a record high 66 nesting pairs and 90 territorial pairs. The Common Loon was designated a state endangered species in 1987 and removed from this list in 2005. Vermont's breeding loon population gradually increased from 1984-1989, stabilized during the early 1990's at 13-16 nesting pairs annually, and increased substantially since 1995. Population numbers and results from the annual statewide loon count, Loonwatch, are presented below.

Vermont Loon Summary	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09
Nesting pairs	26	30	33	38	38	40	44	43	53	58	62	61	66
Successful nests	21	23	25	36	34	34	38	34	47	44	47	49	53
Territorial pairs	37	40	42	48	49	59	64	64	72	77	83	86	90
Chicks surviving through August	25	30	36	44	47	40	45	44	57	56	56	55	74
Chick survival rate	78%	81%	88%	79%	84%	77%	73%	81%	84%	85%	79%	73%	89%
Loonwatch # adult loons in VT	99	106	127	126	135	166	179	184	191	201	218	225	228

Six new breeding pairs were identified on Daniels/Rodgers P., Great Hosmer P., Kent P., Little Averill L.-North, Sunset L. (Marlboro), and Wantastiquet P. Fourteen pairs that have nested recently did not nest because of intruder loon activity, high water, or lack of good nesting sites. Fifteen nest failures were documented, which includes 2 re-nests. One of these re-nests was successful. Causes of nest failure include possible human disturbance (1 nest) and flooding (3 nests). The remaining failed nests were abandoned for unknown reasons. Three new potential territorial lakes were identified (Greenwood, Joes-2<sup>nd</sup> pond, Somerset-NE). Pair status was uncertain on 4 lakes (Caspian, Crystal, Jobs, and Warden). Another 29 lakes had high levels of loon activity that will be monitored closely in 2010.

**Mortality and Threats to Loons:** The causes of mortality of most chicks were unknown. One chick disappeared after interactions with intruder loons. Seven loons were caught in or ingested fishing line. One died, 2 were rescued and released, 3 likely freed themselves, and 1 was still being monitored as of Oct. 2009. Another adult died after fights with other loons, and 2 others died for unknown reasons, although both died within occupied loon territories in the Spring.

**Education and Management Efforts:** The VLRP worked with several lake associations, state parks, and other groups by distributing loon conservation fact sheets, presenting 11 programs to over 280 adults and 140 children, and hosting discussions at lake association meetings. Management efforts included enhancement of loon nesting habitat through the placement of artificial nesting rafts and warning sign buoys to reduce human disturbance. In 2009, 24 of the 66 breeding pairs nested on nesting rafts, 20 on islands, and 22 on shorelines. Thirty-eight nesting rafts were placed. Warning sign buoys were placed around 34 of the 66 nests. These management efforts contributed to Vermont's high productivity in 2009 with a chick survival rate of 89% and 0.82 chicks surviving per territorial pair (North America average 0.53, Vermont 32 year averages: chick survival 82%, chicks surviving per territorial pair 0.71). Hydroelectric companies and other regulatory agencies continued their efforts to stabilize water levels during the nesting period. Over 120 volunteers monitored lakes with loon activity throughout the spring and summer and educated people about appropriate boating behavior when near nest sites and loon families. VFWD game wardens and biologists and Vermont State Park personnel also provided much assistance to the VLRP.

*For more information about the VLRP, contact: Eric Hanson, VLRP Coordinator  
PO Box 22, Craftsbury, VT 05826 802.586.8064 ehanson@vtecostudies.org www.vtecostudies.org*

**Please support loons in Vermont. Donations can be sent to the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE)**

Donors will receive the VLRP newsletter *Loon Caller* and the VCE newsletter *Field Notes*.

VCE, PO Box 420 • Norwich, VT 05055 802.649.1431