

## **Why Have The Loons Abandoned Their Nest?**

Comments at the Seymour Lake Association Annual Meeting  
by Charles “Woody” Woods, Ph.D, retired biology professor

### Recent history of Seymour Lake’s nesting loons:

Seymour Lake’s current pair of nesting loons near Camp Winape is relatively new, and occasionally they come close to nesting, but just don’t quite get it right. In the summer of 2013 the loon chicks hatched but didn’t survive; and in both 2014 and 2015 near the end of the nesting season, the loon parents abandoned the platform. The summer of 2012 was the last time we had successful loon chicks, so essentially we’ve had three failures in a row. In 2011 the first nest failed, but a second nesting was successful with two chicks, but the smaller chick was still on the lake as late as mid-December just before the lake froze over....a close call. Something seems amiss.

Additionally, our loon count has also steadily decreased on Seymour Lake:

2015	5
2014	7
2013	10
2012	11
2011	8

I’ve consulted with Eric Hanson, the State of Vermont’s loon biologist, who runs the loon recovery program. Interestingly, the State appears to be near its carrying capacity of loons, with 75-80 nesting pairs. Some ponds in our region, such as Norton, have had great success in recent years with nesting loons. Obviously, the smaller lakes have ponds tend to have less human activity.

### So what’s happened, and is there anything we can do to help?

The downward trend in the number of loons on Seymour and recent failures of our nesting loons have many of us troubled. No one knows definitively what’s happening, but in conversations with Eric Hanson and other knowledgeable loon observers around the lake, there are a number of likely possibilities. There are behavioral changes we humans could make that would likely have a positive result on our loon population and nesting success:

1. It’s been observed that people in boats, jet skis, and kayaks go too close to the nesting loons. Please don’t do this and stay well beyond the floating signs indicating the loon nesting area.

2. Also, it's been reported that people have walked along the shoreline right behind the nesting platform and that this has disturbed the loons as they take turns sitting on the eggs.
3. Boats or jet skis that go round and round at high speeds are likely very disruptive to nesting loons.
4. Fireworks generally occur at the same time that loons are on their nest, and the resulting noise, lights, and booms possibly upset to the loons.

Some of these activities are just part of our summer fun on the lake. Thoughtful and caring residents can work together to have fun on our wonderful lake and still have successfully nesting loons and a healthy loon population. But the downward trend of loon activity on the lake is concerning and something we can all come together to try to change