

WILDLIFE

Maine Audubon's annual loon count is just around the corner

Nearly 1,500 volunteers count the state's loon population each year. Counting this year begins July 20.



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MAINE, USA — If you frequent Maine's ponds and lakes, you've probably seen or heard loons enjoying the water, too. Maine has the largest loon population in the Northeast. Last summer, Maine Audubon counted nearly 2,900 adult common loons and 411 chicks.

The 41st annual count will take place on July 20.

"The third Saturday in July is a really great date because if they are going to be chicks that year, most of them have already hatched," Hannah Young, community science manager with Maine Audubon, said. "It's a great time we can really grab that snapshot which includes the chicks."

Maine Audubon can make the annual count happen with help from volunteers.

On average, 1,500 volunteers participate each year, waking up early to get it done during a half-hour window from 7 to 7:30 a.m.

"[That] is also a great time because it's before you have a ton of boaters out on the lake," Young added.

Young said one reason to keep track of this particular bird is because they can indicate the quality of Maine's waterways.

"Loons are a really great indicator species for lakes in Maine," Young explained. "They

need clean clear water, so we know that if the loon population is doing really well that means we have a lot of really great lakes in Maine."

You can help with the count by shore, kayak, or boat. The amount of manpower needed to cover any given area will vary.

"Sebago, which has what we call survey areas, and they have 49 different survey areas and each of those survey areas could be anywhere from 10 acres to over 2,000 acres," Young said. "So those big areas like Sebago are going to take up to 50 to 60 volunteers to cover."

Whether you're a bird enthusiast looking for a new activity, Young said all are welcome.

"I love how accessible it is, it's a really great way to kind of dip your toes into community science," Young enthused.

If you do decide to head out for the count, Young said make sure to keep your distance.

"We don't want you actively searching through the foliage and stuff to find nests," Young explained. "If you see a nest, you can mark that down, but we definitely don't want to disturb any of the loons."

If you're unsure whether the bird you are scoping out is a loon or not, Young offers these indicators.

"Loons can't walk on land, so if you see a bird walking on land, you know it's not a loon," Young said. "They are going to be generally out on the water or in a nest. They have that really distinctive black and white color and red eyes and this really beautiful, elongated beak."

If you would like to volunteer for the loon count this year, you can email conserve@maineaudubon.org.

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