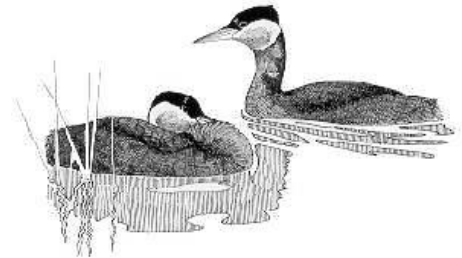


# Alaska Loon and Grebe Watch Instructions for Volunteers

## Identifying Loons and Grebes

There are 3 loon and 2 grebes species that typically occur in southcentral Alaska during the summer. These are the Common Loon (large, black-headed), the Pacific Loon (gray-headed with white bars on back, formerly called the Arctic Loon), Red-throated Loon (smaller, gray-headed), Red-necked Grebe (chestnut neck, white cheek patches), and the Horned Grebe (smaller grebe, yellow-cheek patch). Please see attached identification guide to familiarize yourself with these birds.



## Finding Loon and Grebe Nests

The best time to watch for nesting loons and grebe is in May and June. This is when loons and grebe will be incubating eggs. If the loons are incubating, you are most likely to see only one loon out on the lake during this time. Both adults share in the incubation duties and will exchange places periodically.

**Careful watching from a distance with binoculars will often reveal the nest location as the loons go to and from the nest.** If you want to search for a nest, **wait until after the loons are done nesting**, then investigate the likely areas right along the shoreline for a large bowl made of mud or open space with eggshell fragments.

Grebes build floating nests which are typically visible from the shoreline. Both adults also share nest building, incubation, and parental care duties.

Often loon and grebe pairs will reuse the same area for nesting year after year. If the eggs are lost due to predation or accidental causes, loons and grebes will usually renest (potentially in a different spot).

Knowing where traditional nest sites are located can be valuable information for protecting loons and grebes. Development projects, shoreline modifications, aquatic vegetation removal, and recreational activities can threaten loon and grebe nesting habitat and success. However, these activities can often be modified if it is known that they would impact a loon or grebe nesting area.

## **Counting Loon and Grebe Chicks**

The best time to determine the number of loon and grebe chicks hatched is during mid-June or early July. During this time, the chicks are still small and will stay close to their parents. If you haven't seen any chicks by the middle of July, most likely the eggs didn't hatch or the pair didn't nest at all. Infrequently, eggs from a second nest will hatch in mid-July or later. However, these chicks may not have time to grow to flight stage before ice-up in the fall.



## **Counting Surviving Juveniles**

Once the chicks grow to be larger than half of the adult size, they usually survive to flight stage. Counts for surviving juveniles should be done about mid-late August for Pacific and Red-throated Loons and Horned and Red-necked Grebes. Counts for surviving Common Loon juveniles should be made from August to mid-September. The time frame may be later if chicks hatched from a second nest.

The adults typically leave the lake before the juveniles, usually well before ice-up. Occasionally, sick or injured birds become trapped on an iced-in lake, but sometimes healthy juveniles do not fly off until ice-in is imminent. Common and Pacific Loons usually are not able to take-off directly from water or ice, but there are instances where it has happened.

## Counting Adult Loons and Grebes

Lakes generally fall into 3 categories: those used by a nesting or territorial pair(s); those used by non-breeding loons and grebes only (from 1 to several visitors or residents); and those that are not used by loons or grebes at all (due to lack of fish or other reasons). During spring migration, sometimes groups of loons and grebes will be seen on a lake for a short time. From the end of July through September, loons and grebes that did not nest or were unsuccessful often travel to other lakes in groups. This is most common on larger lakes towards fall as the loons and grebes are getting ready for migration. At this time, you may see the greatest number of adult loons and grebes on a lake.



For more information about the Alaska Loon and Grebe Watch please visit our website: [www.wildlife.alaska.gov/management/nongame/citizen\\_science.cfm](http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/management/nongame/citizen_science.cfm)

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