

Boy Scout Loon Nesting Project

“In the fall the loon came, as usual, to moult and bathe in the pond, making the woods ring with his wild laughter....”

...Henry David Thoreau

People are captivated by the loon's haunting cries, but what is soulful music to our ears, is language to the loon. Imagine a northern lake without the haunting mournful call and stately presence of the Common Loon. The estimated 15,000 loons in the Upper Great Lakes States of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan comprise nearly three-quarters of the loon population outside of Alaska.

The Common Loon is currently a threatened species in Michigan with an estimated population of less than 500 breeding pairs. Contributing to the decline of this beautiful bird, are reduced water quality limiting the availability of food, development of lakeshore property eliminating nest sites and predatory animals threatening eggs or adults sitting on nests.

In an effort to help increase the loon population in Michigan, local Eagle Scout, Gerrit Bakker from Ithaca Boy Scout Troop 631 researched what could be done and found that artificial loon nest islands (ANI) are being used to help replace damaged loon nests and encourage loons to nest off the shoreline to avoid nest damage from predatory animals such as raccoons. Over the past five months, Gerrit, the Ithaca Boy Scout Troop and Boy Scouts from the Order of the Arrow (Boy Scouting's National Honor Society) Mischigonong Lodge 89 with boys from Midland, Bay City, Grayling, Alpena and Frankenmuth have worked together under Gerrit's direction to construct five of these twenty-five square foot nesting islands to be placed on lakes that are being targeted for re-introduction of the loons.

The Michigan Loon Preservation Association has volunteers who monitor each of the loon nesting islands and the loon population in general. They work with officials from the Michigan DNR to maintain and hopefully increase our loon population to remove it from the threatened species list.

Gerrit received a \$500 Grant from the Great Lakes Loons baseball team and the Michigan Baseball Foundation in Midland to purchase the materials needed to build these nest islands and also received a materials contribution of recyclable flotation bottles from Marnie Basney, Environmental Education Specialist with the Isabella County Recycling Center.

Gerrit is working toward earning the William T. Hornaday Silver Medal which is the highest conservation award attainable in the Boy Scouts of America. This award program was started in 1917 by William T. Hornaday, Director of the New York Zoological Park and founder of the National Zoo in Washington D.C. The award is earned by only 2-3 boys per year in the United States and since 1938 has only been awarded to one Boy Scout in the State of Michigan.

This is Gerrit's second of the four projects needed to earn the award (his first was starting a battery recycling program for the City of Ithaca). Gerrit is 14 years old and will be a freshman at Ithaca High School this fall.



An example of a PVC Loon nest in the wild.