

News from MassWildlife

Poor Nesting Season for Common Loons

MassWildlife State Ornithologist Brad Blodget reports that common loons experienced another poor nesting season due to a lack of natural nest sites, a lack of nesting rafts, and heavy rains in June. The 22 territorial loon pairs identified on 7 water bodies represented a 3-pair increase over 1999, but nesting success was dismal with only 9 chicks presumed to have fledged.

Quabbin Reservoir, where loons were first discovered nesting in 1975, had a record 13 territorial pairs present during the summer months. Four chicks were produced on the 25 thousand acre man-made reservoir. Blodget believes high water levels, resulting in fewer natural nesting islands, and the effects of June thunderstorms were likely limiting factors for loon reproduction but adds that field checks of Quabbin's loons were sporadic at best, and the exact status of several of the pairs is unknown.

Wachusett Reservoir was home to 4 territorial pairs of loons, 2 of which nested successfully, producing 1 chick each. Persistence was the key to success for one Wachusett pair, which calls the Reservoir's South Bay in Boylston home. According to volunteer observer Fran McMenemy of Worcester, this pair produced a single chick on June 27, only to lose it during a torrential thunderstorm later that day. The pair renested in July, which is very unusual after having already produced a chick from their original attempt, and hatched another chick during the second week of August. Blodget notes that loons often lay a second clutch of eggs if the first eggs are lost during incubation, but the behavior displayed by this pair to lay eggs, hatch a chick, renest, relay and hatch another chick is extremely rare.

Single pairs of loons were present at Bickford Pond in Hubbardston (1 chick), Upper Naukeag Lake in Ashburnham, Wampanoag Lake in Gardner (1 chick), Fitchburg Reservoir in Ashby, and Hycrest Reservoir in Sterling. Blodget also received reports of loons from Haynes Reservoir in Leominster but could not rule out the possibility of these birds being the same ones that attempted to nest at Hycrest Reservoir but dispersed after failing.

Statewide totals revealed 22 territories, 11 confirmed nesting pairs with eggs, 7 pairs that successfully fledged chicks, 9 chicks fledged, and 0.82 chicks fledged per nesting pair.

Peregrine Falcons

Dr. Tom French, Assistant Director for MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, reports the Commonwealth's 4 nesting pairs of peregrine falcons produced a total of 10 chicks in 2000. The Customs House pair in downtown Boston had 4 chicks while the peregrines nesting on the Christian Science building had 3. The Springfield birds had a single chick while the Fall River pair nesting under the Braga Bridge had 2 young. Worcester hosted a

territorial pair of peregrines late into the season, but actual nesting was never documented.

Two Young Bald Eagles Released

Two young Bald Eagles, hatched and reared by permanently injured adult eagles maintained at the Western Massachusetts Bird of Prey Facility in Conway, were released to the wild in September by their human caregiver, Tom Ricardi. Ricardi has been successfully producing Bald Eagle chicks by pairing up adult eagles that are unable to fly or otherwise survive in the wild. These full-grown offspring were released near the mouth of the Merrimack River in an area rich with fish, waterfowl and waterbirds, all of which figure prominently in an eagle's diet. MassWildlife owns two wildlife sanctuaries, Carr and Ram Islands, as well as Eagle Island, immediately downstream from the release site. DEM's 484 acre Maudslay State Park, with abundant undeveloped river frontage, is located just upstream. MassWildlife biologists believe the young eagles may linger near the release site briefly before moving upriver or north along the coast in search of prey. The birds will wander throughout the northeast for the first four years of their life, staying in areas with seasonally abundant food sources. It is hoped that they will survive and reach maturity at about five years of age, at which time they should return to southern New England to nest, further bolstering the growing resident eagle population that was reestablished by MassWildlife in the 1980s.

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