

Contact: Jon Mobeck
Executive Director
National Loon Center
Office: (218) 692-LOON
Cell: (970) 418-0043

PO Box 642
Crosslake, MN 56442
jon@nationallooncenter.org
www.nationallooncenter.org



NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL LOON CENTER ANNOUNCES PROJECT TO REDUCE LOON MORTALITY BY STUDYING "WHY LOONS DIE"

Crosslake, MN, April 30, 2021: The National Loon Center (NLC) in Crosslake has announced a project intended to reduce loon mortality by examining "why loons die." NLC Executive Director Jon Mobeck has asked Minnesota citizens to watch for dead loons this summer so they can be given a necropsy to determine the cause of death. The NLC has obtained federal and state migratory bird permits to facilitate this research. The results of these studies will be shared with the Department of Natural Resources' Nongame Wildlife Program, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

When someone finds a dead loon, they should retrieve the loon and contact the NLC for instructions on who to contact for transferring the bird to the NLC in Cross Lake. Meanwhile, they should prepare a label with the finders' name, address, phone number, e-mail, date found, and lake and county where the loon was found. Then they should freeze the bird in a plastic bag. It is important to freeze the loon when it is still fresh. Decomposed or rotten loons are not suitable for necropsies or determining the cause of death.

Dr. Arno Wuenschmann, professor of Veterinary Pathology at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, will oversee the loon necropsy studies. The information resulting from these necropsies will be invaluable for developing educational programs to prevent unnecessary mortality in the state's loon population.

For example, when loons die from lead poisoning, it is important to inform the state's anglers to use small nontoxic jigs and sinkers. When lead jigs and sinkers are lost by anglers, they sink to the lake bottom and can be swallowed by loons that use pebbles to grind up the fish they eat. All it takes to kill a loon is one lead jig or sinker. Loons also may ingest lead when consuming fish prey containing lead-based tackle.

Sometimes loons are accidentally killed or injured by boaters who run over loons and their chicks. Sometimes loons die from diseases like aspergillosis or botulism, or they may be killed in territorial battles by

other loons. Loons may also become entangled in discarded fishing line, highlighting the importance of leaving the lakes clean.

Mobeck emphasizes that while Minnesota boasts the most loons in the lower 48 states, about 12,000 loons, he wants to keep it that way. Minnesota citizens can all play an important role in protecting our state bird by their choice of nontoxic fishing tackle and by watching out for loons while boating.

The National Loon Center Foundation in Crosslake, Minnesota aims to restore and protect loon breeding habitats, enhance responsible recreation, and serve as a national leader in advancing loon and freshwater research and education. The National Loon Center's world-class facility, slated to open to the public in the spring of 2024, will be an interactive and family-friendly educational destination that transforms visitors into champions for loons and freshwater everywhere. To learn more about the National Loon Center, please visit www.nationallooncenter.org.

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