

# 'Loon Rangers' on patrol

Paddling his trusty silver canoe, a loon ranger on one of Michigan's northern lakes greets a newcomer to the area. He does not wear a mask or carry silver bullets, but a loon ranger is determined to do what he can to save the common loons in Michigan.

Loon rangers in many states, including Michigan, are arming themselves with information to teach lake users and lake shore residents about how they can co-exist with a declining symbol of wilderness.

Loon rangers are not lone rangers, they are organized by the Michigan Loon Preservation Association c/o Michigan Audubon Society, 409 E Avenue, Kalamazoo, Mich. 49007. They are coordinating efforts and providing information that cottage owners can use to help loons.

Common loons once nested in Oakland and Barry counties in southern Michigan, but their nesting is now restricted to northern Michigan. When island lakes thaw in spring it is only a matter of days before loons will arrive. Open water is necessary for them to find fish and crayfish, their primary foods.

In order to ensure enough food to feed themselves and their young, loon pairs will establish and defend a territory against other loons. Small lakes with an area from 50 to 135 acres will be able to sustain one pair of loons.

Territories on large lakes, that can accommodate more than one pair, average about 160 acres.

Lake shore residents are asked by the loon ranger to be on the look out for loons nesting on their lake. They are identified by their black plumage with square white spots, a white necklace, and stately appearance. Their penetrating yodel and tremolo calls also announce their arrival.

Some loon rangers have constructed artificial floating nest platforms to supplement the loss of natural nesting habitat. But more important they inform those around the lake to minimize any disturbance during the critical nest selection-construction-early incubation period. If conditions are not right during this period, the pair likely will abandon their nesting efforts.



nature

**Timothy Nowicki**

Once the pair incubates, or cares for young, disturbance to the adults and young should be minimized too. Unnecessary disturbance will make the nest, or young, more vulnerable to predators.

There are probably several reasons why loon populations are de-

clining in many areas, but at least informed lake users can help to minimize one factor.

The writer and illustrator is staff naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park.



## Dramatic Duo performance set as benefit

An original mystery, "Dramatic Duo" will be presented by the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency's theatrical group called Murders Too!, at 7 p.m., Friday at the Holiday Inn, 1801 South Telegraph in Bloomfield Township.

Cost is \$20 for dinner and the play. A portion of each ticket sold will be used to assist low income, elderly and handicapped persons served by the agency in Oakland and Livingston counties.

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