

————— If you see any of these signs of distress, back away! —————

Relaxed

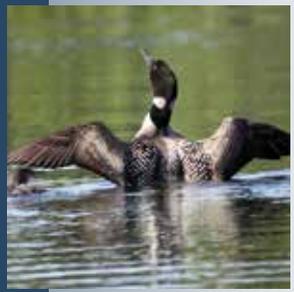
Relaxed loons are better able to incubate and hatch eggs, and feed and care for their young.



Relaxed neck:
A relaxed loon holds its head in a neutral position while on the nest or on the water.



Preening:
Relaxed loons spend time each day bathing and preening, using their bills to smooth and maintain the waterproofing of their feathers.



Wing flapping:
Flapping their wings is a normal part of preening and bathing for loons. Loons also sometimes flap their wings to indicate unease.

Concerned

Be alert for subtle changes in posture that may tell you that a loon is feeling threatened. If you see any of these signs of concern, back away until the loon resumes normal behavior.



Raised "squared-off" forehead:
A nervous loon may raise the feathers on its forehead giving it this "squared-off" look.



Stretched neck:
This loon is aware of a potential threat and is stretching its neck to look around and evaluate any danger.



Riding low:
This loon is watching a possible threat while trying not to be seen. Loons normally float low in the water, but when concerned they will sink even lower, and may also put their heads down.

Stressed

Any vocalizations or dramatic behaviors given when you are close to or approaching a loon can indicate stress. If you see or hear any of these behaviors, you're too close!



Crouched on nest:
When loons feel threatened while on the nest, they will put their heads down. This position indicates the loons may leave the nest and expose the eggs to heat, cold, or predators.



Penguin dance:
If you are too close, a loon may perform a "penguin dance"—rearing up and rapidly paddling its feet in the water, with its wings either spread out or clasped against its body.



Warning calls:
If you approach a loon on a nest or one with chicks, it might give a loud "yodel" or a "tremolo" alarm call that sounds like laughter.

Photo: Robert Alford

Photo: Gail Smith

Photo: Mark Wilson

Photo: Kittie Wilson

Photo: Kittie Wilson

Photo: Gil Shelden

Photo: Mark Wilson

Photo: Kittie Wilson

Am I seeing a territorial pair?

Look for two adult loons interacting together and defending an area from other loons over a number of weeks. Territorial pairs engage in:



Courtship Behavior

Synchronized swimming, diving, feeding, and bill dipping displays; exchanging wail or hoots; circling each other. May also include mating or exploring nest sites.

Fighting and Direct Attacks



Territorial Confrontation

When an intruder challenges a pair, they often try to fend off the challenger with sudden dives, bill dipping, circling, chases, the “penguin dance,” wing rowing, or attacks. Vocalizations are often heard during confrontations.

Wing Rowing



Penguin Dance



Chick Development: What to look for at each stage

0-4 weeks



Downy Young

Small chicks covered with dark downy feathers or lighter brown down, with a white belly. If chicks are riding on a parent's back, they are less than 10 days old.

4-10 weeks



Small Young

Chicks with a mix of fluffy down and smooth feathers, often looking ragged or unkempt. Do not ride on parents' backs. May attempt to fly towards the end of this stage.

10+ weeks



Large Young

Chicks covered with smooth gray and white flight feathers in the shape of an adult. No fluffy down feathers. Some can fly, some still dependent on adults. Note: If you see a loon that looks like this early in the season, it may be an immature loon (not this year's chick). Immature loons will not be with parents and may be in groups.