Additional Resources: Loon Band Sighting Guide

Obtaining band combinations on loons is not easy. It requires patience, luck, and in time, skill. Follow these steps to aid in band sighting.

1. Use a spotting scope from shore (if possible), do not chase birds.

   Keep the sun at your back, look from a height of land if possible, and observe during flat water. Keep scope or binoculars as steady as possible.

2. Focus on the lower hind end of the bird. Look first for flashes of color on the left side, or a flash of silver on the right side. This at minimum confirms a banded individual has returned.

Getting the correct color band combinations is the next step. Most loons are banded as adults and will have two color bands on the left leg, and a silver USFWS band and color band on the right leg.

3. Report bands according to the leg and order of color band. For example, a loon with a red band on top of a blue band on the left leg would be reported as, "left leg, red over blue".

   Report only what you see. Just confirming a banded bird has returned without the color combinations is extremely useful.

4. Sighting bands is easiest during preening when the birds are most likely to foot waggle or belly preen. Loons preen most during and just after rain or 4-6 minutes every hour except pre-nesting.