

The rescue of an entangled loon



Birds I View

Bill Monteverchi

Thanks to quick thinking and incisive action, Raylene Tremblett Osmond saved a loon from a certain, slow agonizing death. Driving east on the TCH early in morning of June 11, Raylene pulled over and picked up a loon stranded on the white road line at the Bay Roberts on-ramp. The bird was tangled in salmon and monofilament fishing line with a large barbed hook imbedded in its right leg, a fly in its wing and another in its mouth. Its tongue and beak were wrapped in choking cutting lines.

Loons need a long water runway for takeoff and cannot take flight from the ground. Unless rescued the loon on the road was grounded for good. With line twisted about its wing it had little flight range and during the night likely mistook the black asphalt for water and smacked down.

Raylene, Janet Montevocchi and I carefully and slowly unwound the strangling line. We managed protrude the barb from the leg and cut it releasing the hook and then removed the fly from the mouth and the other from the wing.

After a thorough body check, the loon was released on Neary's Pond where it remained for the next few days before leaving (George and Carolyn Mayo). With good geographic memory and navigational skill, it will hopefully find its way back to its mate and home pond in the Bay Roberts area.

We wondered how could the loon have gotten entangled in so much fishing gear? It seems that the loon encountered a poacher's line of hooks and flies strung across a salmon river over night. The fly in the bird's mouth suggests the loon took a small fish on the fly then became ensnared in the works.

Need for a rescue center for injured wildlife

Salmonier Nature Park is a world class centre for animal rescue, care, housing and exhibition. Yet when people encounter injured animals, there is rarely anywhere to turn to get help or advice 24/7. The SPCA carries out excellent work with domestic animals but has no capability to deal with wild animals.

Recall the excruciating and very public agonizing death of a gull impaled atop St. Patrick's Cathedral last summer. Many people called repeatedly to municipal, provincial and federal agencies to initiate a rescue or a recovery but to no avail, as the crucified gull slowly roasted on the scorching metal roof of the cathedral.

Enhancement of the wildlife rescue capability at Salmonier would be a welcomed development. As evidenced by the many dozens of calls that I receive, there is clearly a need for better wildlife rescue capabilities in the province.

Piping plover on Musgrave Harbour beach

On June 9, a piping plover scurried along the water's edge of the Musgrave Harbour beach chasing sand flies. The plover did not appear "nesty", yet it was extremely uplifting to see the tiny Endangered shorebird on the sandy northeast coast. The plovers formerly nested in the area but no longer do owing in large part to dirt-biking, ATV activity and pellet-gunning through their sand dune nesting and foraging habitat.

Having just returned from the enchanting Miquelon where ATVs are banned from the sand dunes and beaches, we need to protect more sand dune habitat on the northeast coast to accommodate the many shorebirds that visit the area. Here's hoping for a come home year for the plovers.

Oiled murre reported from the site of the *Manolis L*

During late June, Cyril Gidge a local duck hunter reported slicks and seven oiled murre on the water above the sunken, oil loaded and leaking vessel *Manolis L* off Change and Fogo Islands. It is telling that every report of oil and oiled wildlife has come from local hunters, fishers and residents. Public vigilance is a vital component of environmental protection.

When coast guard reports that there are no slicks in rough water and that no oiled birds were seen, this sounds uncomfortably reminiscent of the “out of sight – out of mind” approach directed by BP in the Gulf of Mexico disaster. Positive identifications trump negative ones in these cases, and the patched, loaded and leaking Manolis L continues to rust thin.

Birds in area and around province

A tight group of 5 common loons skirted the roadside edge of Windsor Lake early on June 27. Perhaps one was the loon released on Neary’s Pond?

On 23 June, seven male ring-necked ducks and 4 male greater scaup were swimming in the waterfowl pond in Garnish. Their female mates were likely incubating nearby.

A male ring-necked pheasant was seen by the Foxtrap Marina on June 25 (Carmel Dyer). The bittern in the Western Gully marsh in Portugal Cove is calling (Angie West).

The ring-billed gull with the orange wing tag 1008 that was at Burton’s Pond (Clara McFarlane Tranquilla) is a male that was tagged on March 3, 2013 on the Charles River in Newton, Massachusetts. The gull was seen in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in early April before being initially seen in St. John’s in mid-April (Anne Hughes).

Boreal owls have been calling during the night and day near Neary’s Pond (John Foster, April Hedd). On the west coast, Darroch Whitaker encountered a tooting saw-whet owl atop a hill near Deer Arm where he found the tiny owl in 2012. He also had a northern hawk owl near the Main River where an encouraging number of 11 gray-cheeked thrushes was also reported.

At Neary’s Pond a male blackpoll warbler crashed into the Mayo’s patio door but slowly revived and flew off. A dozen cedar waxwings were feeding on apple blossom petals on the MUN campus in mid-June (Seth Bennett). A powerful long-winged swift was flying rapidly back and forth over jetty at Branch in the howling winds of mid-June.

Spotted sandpiper young and eggs were found in Ned Walsh’s Cove on Baccalieu Island and near the Little Salmonier River (Owen Myers). A 4-egg northern waterthrush nest was nestled on the ground among storm-petrel burrows on Gull Island in Witless Bay (Seth Bennett).

Rose-breasted grosbeaks have shown up in eastern Newfoundland this spring and summer. Joyce and Rodger Randell sent a photo of a male feeding on black oil sunflower seeds at their cabin in Stock Cove, Bonavista Bay.

In Noggin Cove, Sam and Isobelle Winsor run their feeders throughout summer and are attracting a diversity of goldfinches, downy and hairy woodpeckers, and adult and juvenile evening grosbeaks. Sam provisions feeders on the excellent Carmenville wetlands hiking trails. In St. John’s, American goldfinches are feeding on dandelion

seeds (Les Samuelson) and a juvenile red crossbill visited Howard Clase's feeder in Churchill Park.

In early July, Anne Marie Dalton and Paul Bowlby encountered a rare male brown-headed cowbird on the south-side road in North Harbour St. Mary's Bay.

Lots happening out there. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 864-7673 (w), 895-2901 (w), 693-5305 (c)