

Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program - 2009



NONGAME WILDLIFE PROGRAM
MINNESOTA DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program (MLMP) was implemented in 1994 to detect changes in Minnesota's loon population and in the health of their lake habitats in Minnesota. With the help of over 1000 volunteers, the DNR's Nongame Wildlife Program has completed loon surveys in six 100-lake "Index Areas" annually since 1994. The Index Areas (Fig. 1) were chosen to represent different factors which may affect loons and their habitat throughout their breeding range within the state, including: human population growth, acid rain sensitivity, densities of humans and roads, and predominantly public or private land ownership.

After sixteen years of data collection, MLMP results indicate that Minnesota's loon population remains stable. An average of 66% of the lakes within the Index Areas have had loons present during this sixteen-year period.

Methods

Our MLMP volunteers are assigned to survey a lake (or multiple lakes) during the morning hours (between 5 a.m. and 12 p.m.) of one day within a 10-day period in July (in 2009, this period was from July 3rd to July 13th). Only lakes that are over 10 acres in size and deep enough to overwinter fish were surveyed within each Index Area. Depending on the size of the lake, the survey styles vary widely, with some volunteers using boats or canoes, and others surveying from the shore. Similarly, some use binoculars or spotting scopes, and others don't. Nongame Wildlife Program staff standardize these various methods by providing survey guidelines to all volunteers.

In addition to the numbers of loons observed, volunteers are asked to report on factors such as weather and shoreline conditions. Once the survey is completed, data forms are returned to the Nongame Wildlife Program for compilation and analysis.

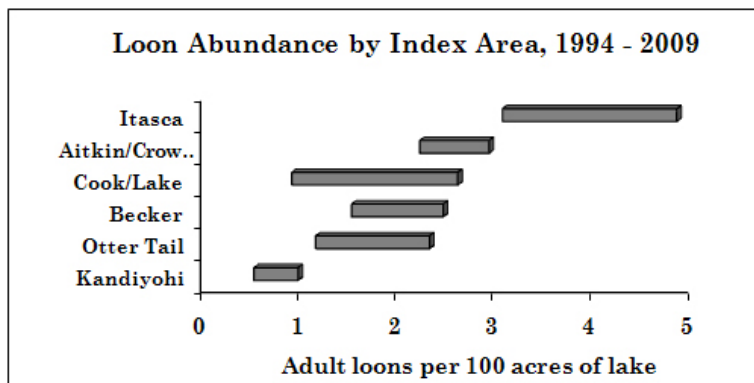


Figure 2. Loon Abundance between 1994-2009 within each of the six MLMP Index Areas.

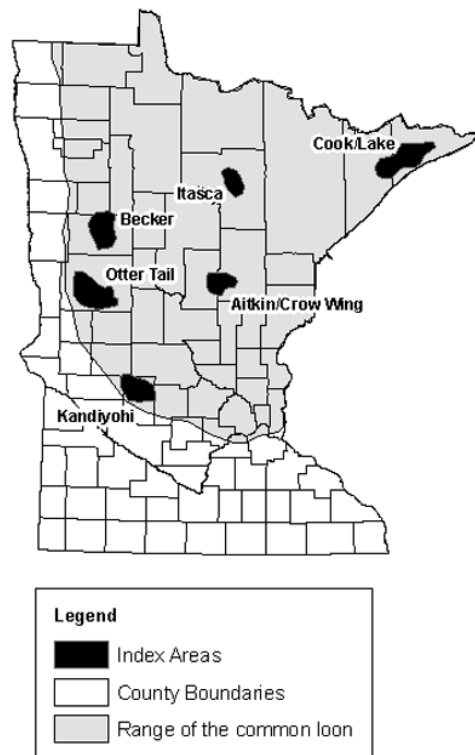


Figure 1. The six MLMP Index Areas.

2009 Results

The numbers of loons reported in the 2009 survey are consistent with past years of the MLMP. The number of adult loons observed per 100 acres of lake has remained stable over the past sixteen years for four of the six Index Areas, while a marginal change was detected in the number of adult loons observed per 100 acres in the Itasca and Otter Tail Index Areas over this time period (Fig. 3). Reports of juvenile loons have decreased slightly in the Becker and Itasca Index Areas between 1994-2009, although the average number of juvenile loons reported per pair of adults is highly variable from year to year (Fig. 5). The abundance of loons varies widely across the state, and continues to be lowest in the southwest (Kandiyohi), and highest in the northcentral (Itasca) Index Area (Fig. 2).

Legend for Figures 3-5.

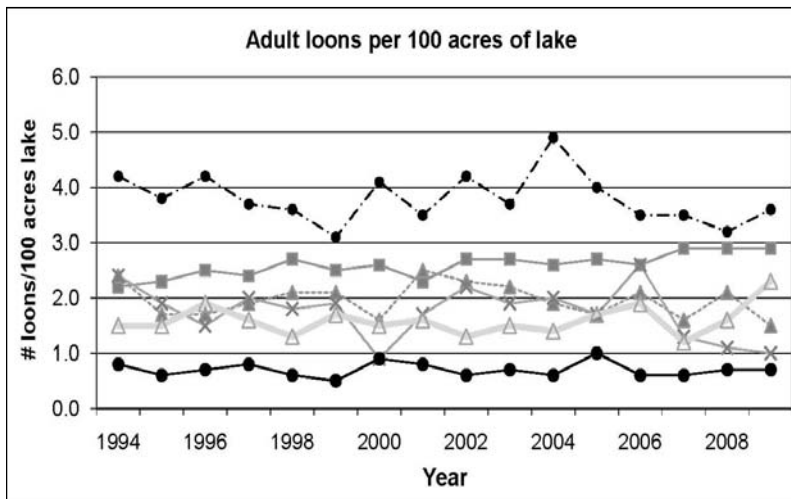
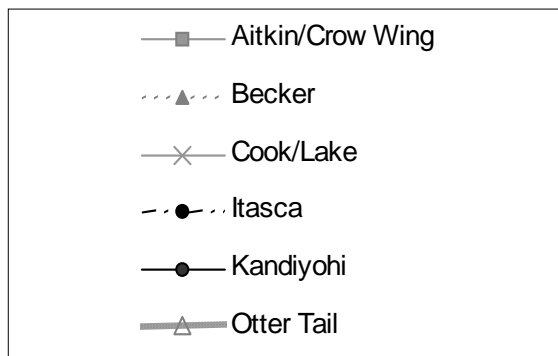


Figure 3. LOON ABUNDANCE: Number of adult loons observed per 100 acres of lake within each index area. The Itasca and Otter Tail Index Areas show a slight but statistically significant change in loon abundance. The other index areas exhibit no significant differences in loon abundance over the sixteen years of the MLMP.

In Summary

The loon populations within our six Index Areas have remained stable for the past sixteen years. This is good news for Minnesotans, who recognize and enjoy our state bird as an integral part of our lake ecosystems. The DNR's Nongame Wildlife Program will continue monitoring loons through the MLMP as Minnesota's human population and lake shore development continue to grow.

Acknowledgements....

THANK YOU MLMP VOLUNTEERS!!!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the hundreds of volunteer observers who continue to make the MLMP a success. Without your persistence and hard work, the DNR would be without a means of tracking the health of our state bird. We and Minnesota's loons appreciate your commitment!

The MLMP is supported with donations to the Nongame Wildlife Checkoff on Minnesota's tax forms.

DONATE AT TAX TIME, OR DONATE ONLINE AT:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/checkoff.html>

For more information, or if you are interested in participating in the MLMP, please visit:
http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nongame/projects/mlmp_state.html

or contact:

Krista Larson
 Minnesota DNR
 Division of Ecological Resources
 500 Lafayette Road, Box 25
 St. Paul, Minnesota 55155
 Phone: 651/259-5120
 E-mail: krista.larson@state.mn.us



Report Author and
 MLMP Coordinator: Krista Larson

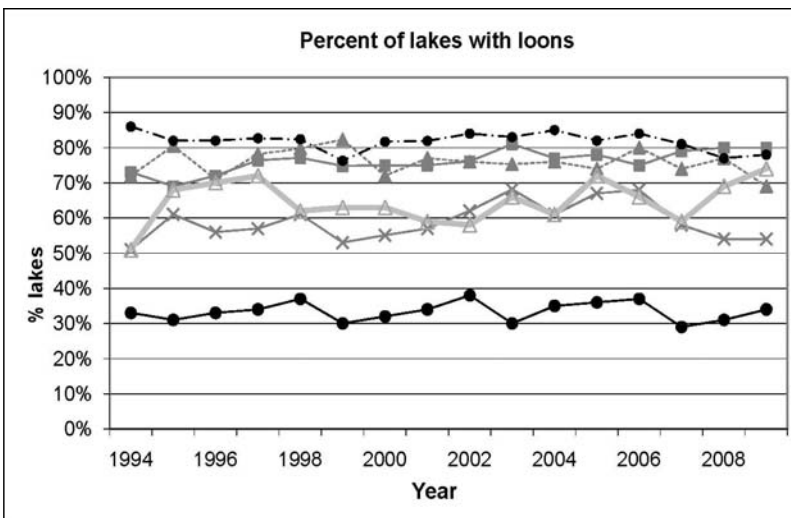


Figure 4. LOON OCCUPANCY: There has been a marginal increase in loon occupancy rates in the Otter Tail Index area over the sixteen years of the MLMP, and no statistically significant changes within the other five Index Areas.

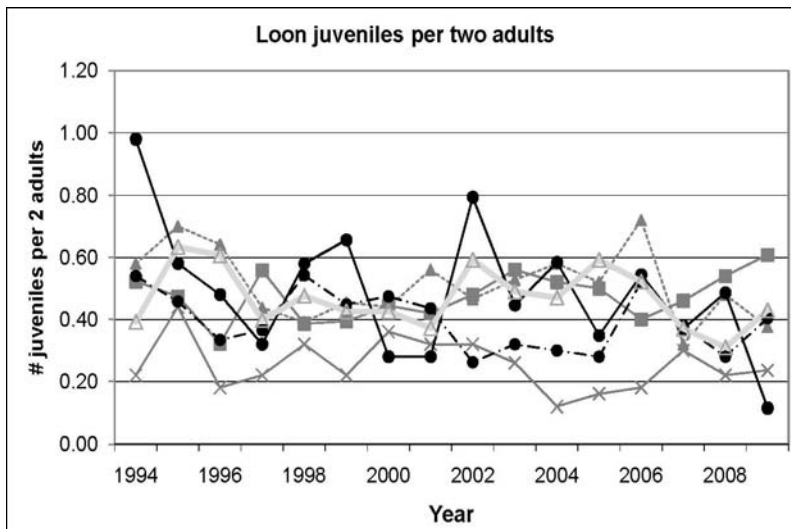


Figure 5. LOON REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS: Due to the difficulty of observing juvenile loons, reports of juveniles are highly variable from year to year within each of the Index Areas, although they are relatively consistent across Index Areas.