

Late Summer, Autumn and Loons

Frank Bolton

The Monday before the New York City Marathon (always held the first weekend in November), the NYC Parks Department was busy trying to make sure that Central Park was safe for the 200,000 spectators. The mild snowstorm that had come through the previous Saturday afternoon – the first October snow here since the late 50’s – dropped only 2 to 3 inches of snow on New York. Further north, the snow was dry but here, it was a wet snow and the leaves were still on most of the trees. Central Park – designed by Olmsted and Vaux, who also designed Boston Common and Prospect Park near my house – is likely to lose about 1,000 trees (of 25,000).

Nearly every year as we begin to close our camp, someone will ask something like, “Do you hate leaving?” The answer is no – we live in a city because we choose to. It offers a great deal. But life is very different.

One big difference is that the chilly mornings of late August in Aroostock are held at bay for another two months. It was Halloween when I turned the heat on. That’s fine with me. Another difference is the sky. After our first few days at our newly acquired camp in 1984, our daughter Liz, a six year old at the time, complained that the sky was too big. Night before last, I looked up and noticed a new moon, something I hadn’t been aware of. In Orient, we watch it rise many nights of the summer. I have to wonder if city kids realize that the moon doesn’t rise at the same time every night.

So in a word, our life in Orient isn’t something I pine for during the winter; it is simply different, with its own richness. I walk three blocks to sing in a community chorus every Monday evening, I walk to the supermarket. In fact, I walk most places – we don’t have a car down here. When I don’t walk, I ride with the *hoi poloi* – the common folk – on the subway or the bus. Though the details are different, I am sure the same is true for all the Chip Lake summer residents.

A happy winter to you one and all. And may the memories of the lake and its environs be fond, happy ones, offering joy during the coming months.

Speaking of the lake, the city, and Central Park, about five years ago I was walking around the reservoir in that park when I saw a large, dark-colored bird alight on the water. As it settled in, I determined it was a loon: the familiar low-slung silhouette was unmistakable. Never having seen a loon in New York City before, I was quite surprised.

Recently, I had to know something about loons and used Google (what a terrific tool) for quick research. I discovered the following about loons, much of which I had not heard before. Maybe most of you have, in which case I apologize.

- Loons stand about 2 feet tall, weigh about 8 to 11 pounds and have a wing span of 60 inches. A Canada goose, by contrast, stands at between 21” and 43”, weighs 5 to 15 pounds and has a wing span of from 50” to 73”.

- What makes loons such good divers, capable of descending to 200 feet and staying submerged for as long as 10 minutes, is the fact that, as opposed to other birds, they have dense bones.

- It is their large body mass that accounts for their ‘running’ across the water: they need as much as 1/4 mile to become airborne. Once airborne, they are fast: pilots report seeing them flying as fast as 80 mph.

- Loons stand up in the water shaking their wings to preen themselves. They also do so simply to stretch their wings or to dry them after a long dive.

- A loon’s legs are situated well behind its center of gravity so a loon has great difficulty walking or even standing up. The result is that a loon tends to come to shore only to go to its nest, built near the shore of reeds and other materials.

- The reason a loon has red eyes is a pigment that acts as a filter so that it can see well under water.

- It is difficult to tell the difference between a male and a female loon. There are two tip-offs: only the male yodels and if you see two of them side by side, the male is usually larger.

- Loons migrate in flocks and end up in coastal waters off the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. At least that’s where the loons from Wisconsin go, so I would presume the loons from Aroostock go there too. That accounts for a loon in Central Park — New York City is surrounded by water from the Atlantic Ocean.

- It seems that immature loons do not return to the lakes for two or three years. FYI, they are capable of feeding themselves before they migrate south for the winter.

- Some research indicates that a loon population can flourish on as little as 9 acres of water. In Maine, if my memory serves me correctly, a great pond is 10 acres or more.

- Banding indicates that loons return to the same lake every year, with males returning to the same territory independently. It seems ‘mates’ do not migrate or winter together and don’t mate for life. Loons apparently also change ‘mates.’

- A loon carries a chick on its back as protection from predators and to help conserve the chick’s energy and heat.

- Loon signals: hoots are a signal of happiness or curiosity or both. The yodel and the tremolo are both signs of agitation, as is the ‘penguin dance’, where they stand up on their legs with their wings tacked to their sides (when they do this, they are frantic, so back away). The wail indicates a loon is separated from its chick or a mate has not returned.

- A female lays two eggs a year in nests very near the water (because they walk with such difficulty).

- Loons tend to live about 20 years.

This information was collected from the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin. Ashland is Lake Superior’s ‘home town.’ See the box on the next page for how you can help the loon population.

Did you know that . . .

The loon's courtship ritual consists of head dipping and shallow dives.

When loons chase one another across the water in the springtime, it is likely not part of a courtship ritual but rather territorial behaviour.

A loon's nest, comprised of sticks, reeds, grasses and muddy vegetation from the lake bottom, is shaped like a mound and is about 1 1/2 feet in diameter, with a hollow in the middle. A loon's eggs are olive green with brown spots and are about 3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches in size..

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TEMP - Return Service Requested

(Hug a Tree: *continued from page 2*)

In the basin formed by Half Moon Island, there remains a vestige of the old time log drives: an immense, straight hemlock that was likely a part of the log boom mooring system still bobs in the waves inviting boats to tie up. This old fellow probably started growing circa 1820, was cut and installed as a mooring log about 1910 with a length of 60 to 65 feet. Originally closer to Bear Island, it was moved in 2002. If our guess is right, it held one end of a log boom awaiting a tug boat haul to the mills in Work Cove or Forest City – the other end anchored by the heavy iron ring lodged on the point of Half Moon . Next summer, see if you can find the ring!

And at the end of autumn, when your hard-working trees have glorified the waning days, you might say, "Thank you, trees." You won't be the first to express your gratitude.

Semi-Annual Yard Sale

CLIC's yard sale this summer netted us about \$700.00. Items that were donated /sold included a motorized golf cart, chain saws, weedwackers, bicycles, antique furniture, and more. If folks donate again next year, we will hold another sale. Don "Bones" Ellis also reported on 11/25 that hundreds of salmon can be seen from the Orient / Fosterville bridge, "flashing" as they chase each other in their race to spawn.

Hug your Trees Lately?

Bob Foster

This may be a nostalgic time for many Lakers. We think of idle days on the water, boating, swimming, sailing and fishing and as winter approaches, we are comforted by thoughts of our shining inland waterway.

Although the water is often our focus, our lakes would be nothing without our magnificent trees. Not to be taken for granted, our trees play their role in our photographs and in our memories.

Being a living organism, trees change – look at a picture of your cottage 20 years ago, and see surprises: the trees have changed shape, density, makeup, sometimes colour. They can open up a view of the lake, compliment the scene or obscure a vista.

Trees are busy all the time. While we go about our fun on and around the lake, the trees are cleaning our air, adding oxygen, protecting us from a cool breeze or broiling sun. For sailors on the lake, trees are a great challenge for they change the shape of the wind and its direction – this creates work, as the sails must be repositioned each time. Sea sailors contend with “wind shifts” 3 or 4 times a day, but lake sailors can face 15 to 20! That’s why lake sailors always look so old and tired.

Want to start your lake season early? Share the joy of a springtime Chickadee Lane maple syrup boil with friends and family for something truly special!

A few facts you might like to have about our busy and beautiful trees . . .

A single acre of trees can remove up to 12 tons of greenhouse gases from the air each year.

In a natural forest, the chances that a seed will grow into a mature tree are about 1 in 1 million.

Sometimes, when a tree puts out an enormous seed crop, it is an indication that it will soon die.

Only 1.6% of all New Brunswick 6 million hectares of forested land is harvested every year.

Over one billion trees have been planted in New Brunswick during the last 30 years.

Forestry accounts for 27,000 direct and indirect jobs in NB each year, 37% of all exports.

In Maine, the Pine Tree State, forestry employs 25,000.

Compare waistlines: the largest white pine is in Maine; it’s 229 inches around and 43 yards tall.

See the trucks? It takes 400,000 truckloads to keep all 10 NB mills operating each year.

A cord of wood can yield 61,000 #10 envelopes, or 90,000 sheets of 8 1/2 X 11 paper.

Want a clean tree joke for your youngster?

Q: What did the tree wear to the pool party?

A: Swimming trunks!

Q: What did the beaver say to the tree?

A: It’s been nice gnawing you!

Some trees are especially memorable . . .

On the treed portion of Billy and Nan Islands stands a majestic white pine, in which the lucky boater will often see a bald eagle waiting patiently for lunch.

(continued on page 4)

Help Protect Loons

View loons from a respectful distance of at least 200 feet.

Do not approach loons or nests, and do not picnic or run dogs on islands potentially used as nest sites (especially from spring ice-out until July 4). You invite predators to eat the loon eggs and chicks if you flush a loon off its nest or separate the chicks from the adults. Intentional harassment of loons carries a fine of \$5000 and a six month jail sentence.

Respect slow / no wake zones and rules because loons nest right at the water’s edge.

Don’t fish next to a loon because it may mistake lures and jigs for live prey.

Use non-lead fishing tackle.

Loons and other waterbirds die from ingesting lead fishing tackle. They ingest the tackle when they eat fish that have tackle left inside or when they pick up pebbles (or in

this case, sinkers or jig heads that look like pebbles) to aid with digestion. Small sinkers and jigs seem to be the biggest problem, and only one lead sinker will kill a loon from lead poisoning.

Check your boat for aquatic invasive species. Before you launch your boat or after you trailer it, please check the boat propeller, trailer, and other places for invasive plants such as Eurasian milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed. These plants negatively impact the fish population, lake ecology, recreational use, and ultimately loons.

Leave native vegetation and woody debris on the shore and in the water since removal of this debris from the water has been documented to cause population crashes in perch populations on a lake. Perch are the primary food for loons so a crash in the perch population may result in less food for chicks and loons abandoning their use of a lake. Fish popula-

tions rely on good aquatic plant and woody debris structure for protection and nursery areas. Leaving a buffer zone of native plants along the lakeshore will provide nesting cover for loons and other birds.

Use four-stroke motors or no motors at all since four-stroke motors contribute less pollution to the water and air. Since they are more efficient, they use fewer oil-based products compared to older two-stroke motors. Hundreds of loons (for some states this is equal to their entire population) can die in one oil spill.

Tell family, guests, neighbors, and other visitors to the lake about these practices.

Thesesuggestionswereprovidedbythe SigurdOlsonEnvironmentalInstitute at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin.

A New Facet to CLIC

From time to time over the years, people have asked, "What does CLIC do other than hold an annual hot dog roast and annual dinner and scatter a few picnic benches around the lakes? What do my dues go for other than that?"

If you talk with Bill Walton, the membership secretary (who generally hears more of these comments than anyone else), you will discover that this sentiment is expressed by more than a few of the enrolled membership of 265 members (though there are 410 or more individual members since many memberships are couples). The percentage making that complaint is pretty high for an organization that is more than just a social network.

If you look at the CLIC brochure which was mailed to members several years ago, the organization has done a great deal, much of which is invisible: water quality monitoring (as reported in this newsletter a year or two ago), water level and dam flow monitoring, free boat inspections, milfoil signs, bulletin boards, youth scholarships, installation of binoculars at the scenic byways lookout on Route 1, running educational programs for members and non-members, serving as your spokesperson with DIFW, Woodland Pulp (formerly Domtar), and various agencies. In addition, CLIC has made major financial contributions to various groups and projects focused on issues involving our lake chain.

The fact that there are 30 life members (and yet more on their way to becoming life members) shows that some people disagree with this perception. In addition, some contribute more than their annual dues each year, with additional contributions reaching as high as \$1,000.00 in one instance.

Realizing that there is a mistaken perception among some members that CLIC doesn't do much of anything, the Board of Directors has established a separate conservation fund within CLIC called the Chiputneticook Lakes Conservation Fund (CLCF). This will make some of what CLIC does more public. The Board will establish guidelines for the use of money in this fund. In the past, money has been given to CLIC in memoriam and that money has been moved into the CLCF. As reported at the annual meeting, CLIC has had two accounts: one an operating account and the other, a smaller account for the Smelt Fry Stocking Project (more about that below).

Money in the conservation fund will be used to partially offset the cost of worthwhile conservation work. For instance, CLIC contributed to the cost of fixing an erosion problem in Trout Brook. In the future, such a contribution could come from the CLCF rather than from the general operating fund. The fisheries project could fit into this category.

A suggestion has been made that an osprey or eagle nest platform be built below the binoculars on Route 1 (if the landowner would allow it). East Grand School has an outdoor program so it might be possible, if they have conservation projects, they could be partially funded from the CLCF. This coming spring, the Board will let it be known that funding is available for projects dealing with wildlife, fish, birds and water quality. The intention is that the fund would not be used in any land acquisition or for taking on a long term project, nor would it guarantee complete funding of a project.

A note about the Smelt Fry Stocking Project. The main food source for land-locked salmon is smelt (though they do eat alewives). Bob Lorigan Jr. cleans hundreds of salmon each year for the fishermen and women at Rideout's Lodge. During the past year, the lakes have seen the best salmon fishing in a long time and Bob reports there are more smelt in the bait chain this year, smelt about the size that the fry would be a year after hatching. DIFW does not say that the Smelt Fry Stocking Project is definitely working but funding is pledged again for this coming year. This is another area where the CLCF might come into play.

Membership forms will soon have an area for contributions directly to the CLCF, in addition to annual dues and general operations.

[Please note that this is simply a segregation of monies within CLIC and has no association with "The Conservation Fund," which is a national non-profit organization headquarters in Arlington, Virginia that works in partnership with local groups to conserve land. (The Conservation Fund is in partnership right now with the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust to acquire and conserve land from Typhoon LLC. Wagner Land Management is managing the lands involved in this acquisition.)]