

On May 17, 2023, I shot some photos of a loon out in front of our camp and when I looked at the pictures later, I noticed it had a broken beak. I sent the photo to the Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation, and the director told me that they had banded an identical loon on Big Bay in 2004, and at that time she was adult (so at least 2-3 years old). I photographed this same loon again in August 2024 and July 2025, so she is at least 23 years old now.

Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) can live to be over 30 years old, but they have to be lucky. Collisions with boats, ingestion of even one small lead fishing sinker or jig (loons pick up small stones off the bottom of lakes to aid in food digestion and if they accidentally choose a lead sinker they will die of lead poisoning), mercury poisoning, entanglement with discarded fishing line, as well as normal predation are all causes of loon mortality. While adult populations in the Adirondacks seem to be stable, their reproductive success (as measured by the annual loon census) is declining.

Because we see loons on the lake all the time it is easy to assume all is well with them, but we have not had a successfully fledged loon on Piseco in decades – and by that I mean a baby who has grown up enough to not need its parents anymore, and who will migrate off the lake in the late fall. (We did have a baby loon on the lake this year, but it only survived for 3 days.) So, our girl with the broken beak may have lived a long life, but you have to wonder if she's left any progeny.

The best actions you can take to help our loons is to go through your tackle boxes and trade in any lead tackle at a participating Outfitter (see the list on the Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation web site). When you are on the water (especially in a kayak) glance along the shore and clean up any fishing line that is snagged. Stay vigilant when boating. We are so lucky to have our loons!

Cindy Kindle