

It's Spring! Flowers Everywhere, and the Loons are Back

Last year was a good one for Andover loon pairs

Lee Carvalho, for the *Beacon*

Ouch! My first black fly bite of the year, and — sure enough — it arrived on Mother's Day, the traditional opening of the black fly season.

While I was annoyed by this bite, I recognize it as just one of many harbingers of the season that brings so many pleasures for the ear and eye. Coltsfoot colonies line dirt roads with patches of bloodroot on the banks. In the woods I see yellow violets, painted and purple trillium, and hobblebush flowers and am delighted to hear my first wood thrush ee-oh-lay of the season.

Along streams it's all yellow: the bright blooms of the marsh marigold below thickets where yellow warblers and common yellowthroats hunt and sing. Three pairs of great blue herons have built nests on snags in the beaver pond at Fenvale.

In the evening and at dawn, the season is marked by the woodcock's display. With the expert help of Bruce Rose, Suzy Norris and I had a chance to hear the nasal peent calls of a male strutting around a field in East Andover.

A loon on Adder Pond has snagged a trout feast. Photo: Donna Crowell

A sure sign of spring is the return of the loons to our lakes and ponds. From

Highland Lake, long-time loon caretaker Donna Baker-Hartwell reports, "The loons are back on the lake and spending most of their time together. The ice was mostly out on the 17th of April. One loon was seen on the 18th, and both shortly afterwards.

"Even though spring appeared to be late, ice-out in 2001 didn't happen until the 27th of April!

"The floating loon nest has been moved to the area where the loons nested last year, on the southeast side of the island. A floating nest would be a safer choice than the shore; however, this pair has never used it. I will keep folks posted on their progress.

"If Beacon readers would like to be updated via e-mail, they can send me (DonnaBH@tds.net) their address. Any concerns or issues that might come up in regards to the loons this summer should be sent either to me at 735-5586 or 381-5586, or to the New Hampshire Loon Preservation Committee. Contact John Cooley by e-mail at JCooley@loon.org, or call 476-5666."

Mr. Cooley supplied this summary of loon activity last year: "In 2014, two of three loon pairs in Andover succeeded in raising young to fledge. Of the three chicks, two were from Adder Pond and one from Highland Lake.

"That productivity (one surviving



Lady slippers put on a spectacular display every year on the Rail Trail between Bridge Street and Potter Place. Pictured here are showy lady slippers at Eshqua Bog near Woodstock, Vermont. Photo: Lee Carvalho

chick per pair) is almost double the statewide average. Andover is in our Sunapee monitoring region, one of the most productive loon sub-populations in the state in the last decade — a region where the recovering population is gradually recolonizing good suitable habitat. Adder Pond is a great example as a place where last year's chicks were the first recorded nesting success in our monitoring of the pond in the last two to three decades."

Donna Crowell spends much of her time paddling on Adder Pond, her favorite in the area. She sent me a photo she took last year of one of the Adder Pond loons about to enjoy a trout for dinner. She is hoping the single loon currently on Adder will have a mate soon.

According to Deb Brower and Mindy Bicknell, a loon pair returned to Bradley Lake on April 18, the day the ice went out. How do the loons time their return so perfectly?

Later this month you might want to take a walk or bike ride on the section of the rail trail between Bridge Street and Potter Place. Just east of the bridge over the Blackwater River, the banks are filled with lady slippers.

Too Good to Throw Away?
ANDOVER YANKEE TRADER!

Further away, but worth the drive, is the spectacular display of showy lady slippers at Eshqua Bog near Woodstock, Vermont. The bog, a legacy of the post-glacial era 10,000 years ago, is technically a fen because the water source includes groundwater in addition to rainwater and run-off. Along the



A loon on Adder Pond has snagged a trout feast. Photo: Donna Crowell

boardwalk you will see Labrador tea, cotton grass, pitcher plants, buckbean, and many species of dragonflies, as well the lady slippers.

If the weather cooperates, we have a chance to see a rare conjunction of Venus and Jupiter on Wednesday, July 1. The two bright planets will be extremely close in the western sky just after sunset.

Send news, observations, and questions to AndoverNaturally@gmail.com.



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