

Help Us With the Algonquin Park Loon Survey – 2010

No one who has ever camped in Algonquin can ever forget the magical laughter and wails of the Common Loon. But that doesn't mean we can take this embodiment of wild northern lakes for granted either. Late in the fall our loons migrate to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States and, unfortunately, many of them fail to return. Sometimes thousands of loons succumb to heavy metal poisoning or botulism and wash up on southern beaches. Even back here, there are grounds for concern. Although we have not yet documented any significant damage to our lakes from acid rain, it is obvious that lakes turned fishless would no longer support loons.

In 1981, we began a project to document just how well our loons were doing and, with your help, we will continue this summer. Only a long-term monitoring program can distinguish real trends from normal yearly fluctuations and we need observations from as many lakes as possible. Please give us a hand!

How to Record Sightings

Forms are available at, and should be returned to, the Visitor Centre or any access point office.

1. Observers should record all sightings of adult loons, their nests, and young. *Do not disturb loons on nests!*
2. When more than one pair, family group, or flock of loons is noted on a lake, record these separately – rather than lumping one total for the entire lake. In the case of big lakes, identify the bay or section of lake in your report (e.g., North Arm of Lake Opeongo).
3. If it appears that no loons are present on a lake, please record that also.

Thanks for helping.

Loon Reproduction in Algonquin Park Since 1981

Year	Number of lakes surveyed	Percent with nests/young
1981	121	38%
1982	184	28%
1983	237	21%
1984	298	34%
1985	210	37%
1986	216	35%
1987	261	43%
1988	260	40%
1989	240	41%
1990	248	40%
1991	201	50%
1992	203	39%
1993	232	43%
1994	183	46%
1995	223	45%
1996	219	42%
1997	173	45%
1998	175	42%
1999	190	33%
2000	216	44%
2001	168	39%
2002	143	41%
2003	120	46%
2004	144	41%
2005	156	40%
2006	147	41%
2007	138	43%
2008	169	39%
2009	146	40%



Going for a hike?

When you are going on a day-hike, know the length and difficulty of the trail and give yourself enough time to be back to your vehicle before dark.

Algonquin Park is Black Bear country!

Bears are a natural part of the Algonquin landscape and, as a visitor camping in bear country, you have a responsibility to follow the bear rules and know what to do if you encounter a bear.



If you leave your campsite during the day, ensure that all food, coolers and garbage are stored properly. (Campers can be charged for failing to keep a clean campsite and unlawfully storing wildlife attractants.)



For more information on Black Bears and camping in bear country, see page 20 of the *Algonquin Information Guide*, check out the Black Bear exhibit at the Visitor Centre, or attend an interpretive program on bears (see *This Week in Algonquin Park* for dates and times).

Looking for Internet access?



The Visitor Centre now offers free WiFi internet access... and while there, don't forget to check out The Friends of Algonquin Park bookstore, or enjoy a light snack or meal at the Sunday Creek Café.



1 Never feed or approach a bear

Bears can quickly become accustomed to human sources of food and people who feed bears create problems for both other campers and the bear.

2 Store your food properly

In picnic areas and campgrounds, store all food inside the closed trunk of your vehicle.

In the backcountry, put all food in a pack and hang it well off the ground and away from your tent.

3 Keep your campsite clean

Clean your dishes and cooking equipment immediately after each meal. Deposit your garbage, compost and recycling **daily** in the bear-proof containers within your campground.

Help us keep our wild animals wild... observe the bear rules!

A Natural and Cultural History Digest
Algonquin Provincial Park



The Raven



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August Issue

Why the new look?

You have probably noticed that *The Raven*, the official newsletter for Algonquin Provincial Park, looks different this year. Why the new look?

2010 represents a new era for *The Raven*. For the first 50 years, *The Raven* had only two authors... Russ Rutter from 1960 to 1973 and Dan Strickland from 1974 to 2009. When Dan announced recently that he was going to end his run as the author, the Park thought that we should also retire *The Raven*... but we heard from you and you wanted us to keep the newsletter.

After much deliberation, we decided *The Raven* would continue, but with some changes. The new principal author will be Michael Runtz, a well-known Ontario naturalist, photographer and writer – with a strong connection

The Park thanks The Friends of Algonquin Park for its generous contribution to the production, printing and distribution of *The Raven* for the past 12 years. **THANKS!** Friends, for your support.



The sound of love is in the midsummer (night) air.

Learn more... see page 2.

to Algonquin Park. But we will also introduce guest writers and continue to reprint some of the old *Raven* articles.

The Raven will now have six issues a year (two in the spring, two in the summer, one in the fall, and one in the winter). *The Raven* was weekly in the summer but that format goes back 50 years when the newsletter was the only Park publication and represented the Park Information Guide, *This Week in Algonquin*, as well as the natural history essay. This new schedule will allow us to update our visitors with timely seasonal information and safety messages.

We hope you enjoy the new version of *The Raven* and welcome your comments. We know it is not the same but we hope that, after 50 years, you will allow us some flexibility to change!

The Raven is available online [www.algonquinpark.on.ca] and a limited number of complete sets of the previous year's *Raven* are available at the Visitor Centre and the main gates along Highway 60.

A Midsummer Night's Dreamboat

by Dan Strickland

Originally printed on August 8, 1991, we are pleased to reprint this Raven.

Who has not drifted off to sleep at this time of year listening to the pleasant chirping of crickets outside our tent or cottage? It is one of those familiar, comforting sounds of warm summer nights that tell us all is well with the world and help us forget our worries.

Most of the time we are as content as anyone else to accept the summer singing of crickets as the soothing background it is. Once in a while, however, our thoughts wander to the individual performers and we try to picture just what is going on out there in the black warmth of the night.

If you hear a cricket calling close by, for example, you can be sure that it is a male doing his best to attract females. The male produces the sound by "stridulating" — rubbing his wings together rapidly in such a way that special, hardened bumps on their surfaces give out a remarkably loud burst of "music."

The volume of one of these songs can be as much as 90 decibels, and the reason why a male puts so much energy into his singing is not hard to guess. The louder his song, the more attractive he is to females and the greater the distance he can pull them in from. And it really does work. Female crickets sometimes literally run towards calling males and they mate immediately upon arrival at the source of the sound. For a female cricket, a song in the night signifies Mr. Right — no questions asked.

You may find this a little strange because the females of most animals are

normally very fussy about the males they accept as mates. Generally speaking, females choose the strongest and fittest males so that the superior qualities of those males will enhance the survival prospects of their offspring. The apparently indiscriminate females of crickets seem to violate this general pattern, but in fact they don't. For them, any male that sings has already provided ample proof of his superiority and there is really no need to check him out any further.

The reality of life for male crickets is that they live in a very crowded and competitive world. At times it may seem that many crickets (perhaps too many) are singing you to sleep, but believe us, the ones that sing are only a small minority of the crickets that are actually out there. The ones that sing are the cream of the crop, the ones that are tough enough to seize an exclusive singing territory and defend it from a host of pretenders to the grass blade. Any male cricket that comes closer to a singer than about a metre will be viciously attacked and quite possibly injured.

No wonder, then, that females readily zero in on singing males and have them father their young. No wonder, either, that many males, apparently sensing that they can't compete with the territory holders, refrain from singing altogether. As long as they keep their wings firmly shut, such males can wander about, often very close to the singing males, without being attacked. As a matter of fact, they deliberately stay close to the singers (and are called "satellite males" as a result) because this gives them their one chance for success. Being silent, they can't attract females themselves, but once in a while they will waylay and

forcibly mate with a female running in towards the calling male. (Hey, it's dark out, crickets can't talk, and the boss will never know.)

Now, the fact that each calling male cricket is surrounded by several silent satellites raises a very interesting question. Perceptive readers will already be wondering how such a pattern could persist. If males that sing achieve more matings, they should leave more descendants (who would also be singers), and they should have long ago come to totally predominate in the cricket population. It shouldn't matter that satellite males sometimes steal matings; as long as they father fewer offspring than the singing males they (the silent ones) should dwindle more and more with each generation until, for all practical purposes, they have entirely disappeared. How, then, can we explain the continued presence of both singing and silent behaviours among modern crickets? There is in fact only one possible answer. Notwithstanding our first impressions, the two types of behaviour must in fact give rise to equal numbers of descendants. The only way for that to be true would be if singing crickets live shorter lives than silent crickets. If a singing male achieved four matings a night, but lived for just three weeks, he would leave the same number of descendants as a silent male who had only two matings a night but lived for six weeks.

But why would singing males, undoubtedly the strongest, toughest and most desirable of all, have shorter lives than their weaker competitors? There are apparently at least three reasons. To begin with, a singing cricket is exposed to sudden sneak attacks by satellite males who may try to take over the top spot. Even if the singer beats off the attacker, he may be injured and



©Stephen Marshall

This common Field Cricket (*Gryllus pennsylvanica*) can be heard "singing" in late summer and fall.

have his life shortened as a result.

A second serious risk run by calling crickets is that they attract, not only females, but predators as well. Crickets partly avoid this problem by being active only at night, but studies in the U.S. have shown that cats are very capable of homing in on the sound of crickets. Cats aren't a factor here in Algonquin, of course, but it is very likely that other night-time predators are a threat.

The most insidious danger of all faced by singing crickets is that their calls attract parasites. The females of certain flies are just as responsive to the cricket songs as are female crickets. When the flies arrive at the source of the sound, however, they deposit larvae on the doomed singer. The larvae burrow inside the cricket, feed and grow for about a week, and then emerge to pupate and transform to adult flies. You won't be surprised that this is rather hard on the male cricket, in fact, he invariably dies as the fattened-up larvae emerge from his body.

Of course, in the greater scheme of things, it doesn't really matter how a singing cricket dies as long as, on average, it is at an earlier age than for silent crickets. In that way, even though it attracts and mates with many more females in a given night than any silent satellite male, this advantage is cancelled out by the singer's shorter life,

and the two types leave equal numbers of offspring over the long haul.

In actual fact, things are even more subtle than this because individual males are capable of switching back and forth from one strategy to the other depending on the circumstances. If cricket numbers are low, for example, individual males can space themselves out and all adopt the singing strategy. If the population density increases, on the other hand, many of the same males may face such stiff competition that they will do better by becoming silent satellites.

We find it intriguing to think about these things when we turn in on a midsummer night, and we recommend

it to you too. What better way to lull yourself off to sleep than by listening to their songs and pondering eternal cricket verities. The male you hear chirping away unseen in the darkness is, for the local females, a dream cricket come true. Irresistibly they are drawn to his songs and mating takes place out there in the warm summer night. On the down side, it is true for some crickets that "the way to your lover's heart may lead to someone else's stomach," but don't lose any sleep over this. After all, there is a strong cricket tradition of living for today and not worrying about tomorrow. You know, "if music be the food love, stridulate on!"

Good night and pleasant dreams.

What is the fencing for along Highway 60?



Turtle photos
© Peter Mills



Snapping Turtle—be careful to avoid its jaws as it will feel threatened and may snap!



Painted Turtle—note the brilliant colours when viewed from both the top and underside.

Anyone driving Highway 60 in the Park will notice the black drift-fencing that has been installed in various places. This fencing is an attempt to keep Snapping Turtles and Painted Turtles off of the roadway and to try to reduce the mortality of these turtles. These turtles are attracted to the soft ditches and banks of roads

for nesting but road mortality can seriously harm the population.

If you see a turtle on the road, slow down. If possible, you may want to try to assist the turtle by moving it in the direction it was heading. Be careful with Snapping Turtles — you should not try to pick one up! *And, always remember, watch out for other traffic!*