

SPRING 2023

GPA Newsletter



News from the Georges Pond Association

New initiative for protecting the pond

GPA Launches Septic System Inspection Program

The GPA is launching a septic system inspection program as **a benefit to GPA members** and as another way to help protect Georges Pond.

Proper septic system maintenance not only **protects property values**; it also helps to keep Georges Pond clean. It takes only one or two failing septic systems to adversely affect the health of the lake.

Last year, the GPA launched a pilot program to see if it would be helpful to GPA members if the GPA stepped up to help schedule and coordinate **confidential septic system inspections**. This highly successful program was funded by our second 319 Maine DEP grant to protect the lake and keep its water clean. A handful of GPA members volunteered to have their septic systems inspected and have expressed their strong appreciation for the GPA's assistance. All parties involved agree about the importance of proper septic maintenance as well as the ongoing challenge of arranging qualified inspections.

This year, the GPA is offering the following **assistance to GPA members who wish to volunteer**:

- The GPA will help schedule and coordinate septic inspections with a licensed professional inspector.
- Priority will be given to older and high-use systems (year-round and rental properties).
- The GPA will pay 100% of the inspection costs for systems installed before 1974 and 50% of the costs for systems installed between 1974 and 1995.

If interested in participating in this program, please **fill out and submit the application** form that is posted on the GPA website (www.GeorgesPondAssociation.org).

Several property owners have also expressed their interest in replacing aging septic systems and have asked the GPA for funding assistance. We greatly appreciate that these homeowners want to maintain their properties and keep the pond clean, but currently, the GPA does not have the **funding to replace septic systems**. However, we are actively seeking such funding by applying for grants and also by supporting proposed Maine legislation for these purposes. Please contact the GPA to find out the latest information about these initiatives.



The Winter 2023 newsletter ran John Eliasberg's photo of the blueberry fields (*left*). GPA member Katharine Trowbridge Carroll then sent us her 2023 Christmas card with the almost identical photo (*right*)! Isn't it more than serendipitous that many of us enjoy the fall colors at Georges Pond and want to share them with others? Thank you, John and Katharine, for sharing your beautiful photos!

Join the 40th Maine Audubon Loon Count July 15



On Saturday, July 15, over 1,400 volunteers will venture onto lakes and ponds across Maine to count loons.

The observations recorded by Audubon's volunteer community scientists provide an excellent snapshot of the state's loon population, which in 2022 was 3,057 adult loons and 298 chicks.

(These estimates are for Maine south of the 45th parallel, roughly south of a line from Rangeley to Calais, an area which has enough lakes covered by counters to make a reliable estimate.)

To learn how you can get involved, contact Maine Audubon at conserve@maineaudubon.org.

Your Loon Questions Answered

Adapted from Maine Audubon

Do loons return to the same lake year after year and nest in the same place?

Once a chick fledges and migrates to the coast for its first winter, it won't return to lake breeding grounds until it's two to five years old. Then it may wander between lakes over a few breeding seasons before settling on a lake to breed, either the same lake where it was raised as a chick or one within a dozen miles of its natal lake. Once settled on a breeding territory, loons show high site fidelity, returning to the same lake each spring, year after year.

Do loons mate for life?

No, pair bonds last, on average, six to seven years. Pairs often change when a loon challenger takes over a territory or a mate doesn't return to the territory after the winter.

How often do loons have chicks, and how many do they have each year?

Loons start to breed when they are about six years old. Once they have a territory and a mate, loons can potentially produce one brood of chicks per year. On average, loon pairs successfully hatch and fledge one chick every other year.

How long do loons live?

Most common loons live to be about 20, some as old as 35.

Where do Maine loons go in the winter?

Because our lakes freeze, common loons normally migrate in late fall to salty coastal bays and coves, the mouths of coastal rivers, and sometimes even areas up to 60 miles offshore. Adults leave before juveniles, and both will often gather in social groups before making their way to wintering grounds. Loons that breed on Maine's lakes often don't migrate very far, even wintering right off the coast of Maine. Some overwinter in New Jersey, Maryland, and beyond. Wherever they travel, most will return to the same four to eight square mile area every winter.

How do they adapt to being in a saltwater environment in winter?

Loons likely do not drink saltwater. However, they do have a salt gland above the eye that helps get rid of excess salt they ingest from feeding on marine fish, crabs, and other marine organisms.

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Is flooding from boat wakes a threat to loon nesting success and chick survival?

Because their feet are located far back on their bodies, loons can't walk on land. As a result, they nest right on the shoreline, making their nests vulnerable to flooding by boat wakes. Eggs can also be washed out of a nest by boat wakes.

What about lead poisoning, and has the lead tackle law helped?

The number of lead-poisoned loons is going down as a result of legal restrictions on the use and sale of certain sizes and weights of fishing tackle. However, lead poisoning continues to be one of the leading causes of death for loon adults in Maine. Additional steps and cooperation are needed to get lead out of tackle boxes and to curb the use of lead tackle purchased in other states and brought into Maine.

Are eagles a threat to the loon population?

Eagles are a top predator, and loon chicks can be an easy prey item. However, common loons and eagles have coexisted across the same North American range for many thousands of years. With more eagles now across Maine, loons may be adapting by improving their defensive tactics.

Why do loons get trapped when lakes freeze?

Because loons need a long "runway" to be able to take flight, when lakes start to freeze, it reduces the area of open water, and loons can get stuck. Loon rescues in winter are dangerous and take special equipment and training. If you find a loon stranded in ice, do not attempt to rescue it yourself. Instead, call the Biodiversity Research Institute (207-839-7600) for help, and also let Maine Audubon know by emailing conserve@maineaudubon.org.



If you find an injured loon:

Maine Audubon is not equipped to assist with loon "rescues," but there are organizations able to help:

Warden Service, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife: (207) 287-8000.

Avian Haven: (207) 382-6761.

Biodiversity Research Institute: (207) 839-7600.

What to do if?

If you find a dead loon

Report the loon to Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), and also call the Biodiversity Research Institute because their biologists can help in recovering loon carcasses. Take photos of the loon, note the location, whether the loon has colored or silver bands on its legs, and if there are any other clues as to what caused the loon's death.

Do not attempt to touch or collect the dead loon. There are diseases, like Avian Influenza, that can be spread through touch and/or contamination via clothes. For your own safety, and the safety of other birds, please allow DIFW or BRI handle collection and transportation.

If you find a loon egg

Do not collect loon eggs that you find floating or find on a nest that you believe to be abandoned! Egg collection is not permitted under state law. Instead, take a photo and mark the location. Send the photo, location information, and any information you have as to the approximate date and suspected cause of the floating egg or nest abandonment to Maine Audubon at conserve@maineaudubon.org.

In Memoriam



With sadness the GPA notes that **Leona S. Bellai**, 89, died peacefully February 3, 2023, at her home in Franklin. Leona was an avid cook, gardener, animal lover, and devoted member of the Georges Pond community. She is survived by her spouse of 66 years, Joseph M. Bellai Jr. of Franklin; her daughter Beverly Brown (and husband Marshall) of Farmington, CT; her brother Peter Szarek; and by many nieces and nephews in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York. Contributions in Leona's memory may be made to the SPCA of Hancock County, 141 Bar Harbor Road, Trenton, ME 04605 or a charity of one's choice.

Donations Received

The GPA is grateful to have received a donation from Nancy Cooper *in honor of Chuck and Sue Dawes* and from Ann Feaver and June Goudey *in honor of Frank Brooks and Marvin Ellison*. Your generosity helps support the GPA's ongoing efforts to protect and preserve the Pond for generations to come.

Thank you



There's still time to renew your GPA membership for 2023. Act today!

Congratulations to Brian Friedmann!



Brian and Linda Friedmann (above), and Brian's 10-year volunteer certificate from Lake Stewards of Maine.

LakeSmart Statewide
45 participating lakes
99 volunteer educators
237 evaluations in 2022
87 LakeSmart awards

LakeSmart at Georges Pond
7 LS volunteers
10 evaluations in 2022
86 total evaluations
28 LakeSmart awards

Georges Pond
Georges Pond Association
2021
WWW.LAKESMART.ORG
LakeSmart GOLD AWARD
LIVING LIGHTLY ON THE LAND FOR THE SAKE OF OUR LAKE
Awarded by Maine Lakes
www.lakes.me

Six easy ways to get a beautiful shoreline -- and promote a healthier lake

Source: Catherine Collins, Cottage Life (June 10, 2022)

1. Do Less Work!

If you're lucky enough to have a natural shore unaltered by manicuring, clear-cutting, or concrete barriers, **love it and leave it alone**. That strip of native plants, shrubs, and trees with their extensive root systems forms a "green wall" of protection for cottage properties to buffer erosive forces coming from the lake, such as waves and boat wakes, and to prevent runoff from carrying nutrients and sediments into the water.

2. Learn to Value What's There

Check out iNaturalist, an app that can take a picture of a plant or animal and then help you identify it. Simply putting a name to a "weed" can change perceptions. Sweet gale, for instance, a common shore shrub, smells wonderful and repels biting insects, so what's not to like?

3. Minimize Your Mowing

Often a lake's **biggest problem is the lack of natural vegetation**, thanks to manicured lawns running right to the shore. Close-cropped, shallow-rooted grass is a hard surface that gives contaminants such as fertilizers and pesticides an easy ride into the water.

4. Recreate a "Living" Shore

In many cases, all you have to do is **stop clearing vegetation and removing deadfall** from the shallows for a shoreline to slowly repair itself, but you can lend a hand by planting a buffer of native species from water's edge to drier land.

5. Don't Add to Your Lake's Nutrient Load

You're forgiven if you think "nutrient" sounds like a good thing. In fact, these naturally occurring elements, like phosphorus, do nourish plant growth, but when an **overabundance of phosphorus** wends its way into the lake, it fosters suffocating algal blooms that steal oxygen from other aquatic life and degrade water quality.

Faulty septic systems are another nasty nutrient loader because wastewater is rich in phosphorus and nitrogen. Be preventive by pumping out yours every two to five years and having periodic inspections,

6. Don't Sacrifice Your Trees for Sightlines

The green giants on the upper slope of your cottage shoreline aren't there to muck up your view. They are the heavy lifters when it comes to absorbing runoff, taking water from the ground and transpiring it through their leaves into the air. If you **let your birches and other trees play their role**, you can still see the lake by giving them what is sometimes called a "vista prune," trimming the lower branches and leaving the higher ones.



Mark your calendar!

**GPA Annual Meeting
Sunday, July 9, 2023**

Town Office

**Renew your GPA
membership
today!**

Georges Pond
Association

**Interested in the
GPA's septic
inspection program?**

**Use this QR code to find the application
form . Point your phone's camera
at the QR code and click on the link.**

Voila!



**Uh-oh! Tracks on the ice tell a cautionary tale.
The good news? It wasn't not on Georges Pond -- this time!**

Georges Pond Association

PO Box 30

Franklin, ME 04634