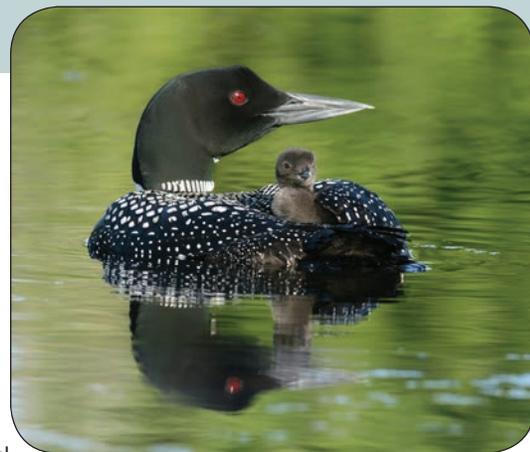


The Common Loon

COOL FACTS:

Scientific name:	Gavia immer
Average weight:	2500–6100 g (7–15 pounds)
Average length:	66–91 cm (26–35.8 inches)
Wingspan:	104–131 cm (40.9–51.6 inches)
Lifespan:	15 - 30 years



PHYSIOLOGY

The Common Loon is easily recognizable with its black and white checkered back. It has a pure black head, red eyes, a white ring around its throat and a white underbelly. In the winter months, the feathers on their backs lighten to a greyish colour. The Common Loon weighs between 7-15 pounds and measures about a metre from bill to outstretched webbed feet. The life expectancy of the Common Loon can range from 15 to 30 years.

Loons have solid bones, unlike most birds. This makes them less buoyant and better divers. They can also compress their feathers and force air from between the feathers from air sacs in the body, allowing them to quietly submerge in the water. The average dive is about 5 metres, but they have been known to dive to depths of 70 metres. They can stay underwater for more than 3 minutes, but an average dive is 40 to 45 seconds.

Common Loons propel themselves with their feet and are very agile under the water. They can make quick turns to help them catch their prey. They do eat most of their prey underwater, as they have projections on the roof of their mouth and tongue that assists in holding slippery fish. A loon's diet in summer consists of crayfish, frogs, snails, salamanders and leeches, but they prefer fish like perch, suckers, catfish, sunfish, smelt and minnows.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Common Loons are stealth divers and spend most of their time on the water. This is due to the fact that their legs are far back on their bodies, which is great for swimming but not so great for walking. Loons spend little time on land and sleep out in deep water to avoid predators. They only come to shore to mate and lay eggs.

The Common Loon builds its nest in late May to early June along the shoreline out of dead plant materials. It produces 1 to 2 eggs each year. The eggs are brown with dark splotches. They incubate for about 26 days, and when the young are born, they are covered with black down and have a white belly. The young are able to swim shortly after hatching. They do, however, ride on their parent's backs to conserve heat, energy, and as protection from predators. Parents move from the nest after hatching to a vegetated shallow section of a lake to feed, hide and protect the young. The new location is referred to as a nursery. The young are usually able to fly in about 12 weeks, they are a greyish colour, and will not change to the adult black colour until they are about 2.5 years old. Most loons migrate to the Atlantic Ocean or the Great Lakes in the winter.

MORE COOL FACTS:

The Common Loon has been featured on the Canadian stamp and on the Canadian dollar, known as the "loonie."

