



TODDY POND ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020

Issue 44

OUR MISSION

We believe that we have a responsibility to protect Toddy Pond and its watershed so that we and future generations may enjoy its beauty and the recreational opportunities it provides. Our objective is to protect the air, water, soil, plant and animal life of the watershed and to preserve its economic, ecological and aesthetic value by encouraging responsible land and water use.

Waiting for Summer

Chris Dadian

*Sumer is icumen in, lhude sing cuccu!
Growep sed and blowep med and springþ þe wde nu.
Sing cuccu!*

As the famous old lyric proclaims, the coming of summer is a propitious time and must be celebrated. Sing cuccu! For the last decade a part of that celebration for us, right around the solstice, has been the happy communal rite of the Toddy Pond BBQ. We knew this year that it couldn't be, in the interest of keeping everyone safe – *I hope you and yours are all safe* – but how to keep the ritual duty of summer's inauguration? It would be a poor substitute, but we thought one way might be to celebrate in the Toddy Pond Newsletter. We had two wonderful offerings from Mark Pokras to anchor the issue (see below), so all that was needed was a bit of propitious news. But that was elusive.

In May there was news of house fires on Toddy. Gladly no one was injured, but there was loss and anxiety. By the end of May, when the spring issue of the newsletter usually comes out – in time to remind folks of the BBQ – we were in the middle of a drought of biblical dimensions: forty days with a total of less than a third of an inch of rain. The lake level began a drop that has continued steadily ever since (despite near-normal rainfall in July and early August).

So we waited. In early June the alewife run, usually a bounteous, propitious happening as we'd reported in past issues, spluttered and petered out, the estimate less than 25% of the 2019 run. But around that time we learned that several loon pairs were nesting at sites around the pond, and so we doubled down. Through the big void around the time when the Toddy Pond BBQ should have been bringing our community together, Nina and I scanned from our dock a quarter mile away the narrow beach on Indian Island, where "our" pair had nested; we were alternately horrified and elated as the pair pertinaciously warded off several eagle attacks. On July 10, when Fran Owen texted that a pair of chicks had hatched and were with their parents in the water, we ran down to see the two black dots bobbing across the strait between Indian Island and Big Pine Island, headed for the sheltered cove. With any luck,

in a few days we'd have an appropriately distanced photo for the newsletter and Toddy summer, though a bit late, would have begun. Six hours later, both chicks were gone, taken we think by the eagle that had harried their parents, whose lamentations kept us awake through that night.

Later that month we participated in the annual Audubon Loon Count, a mid-summer ritual. For the second year in a row we saw no loons in our large survey area on North Toddy, and as you'll read in Steve Antell's report below, others were similarly disappointed. While the overall results were not disastrous, they were hardly propitious.

I won't go on about renewed drought in late July and early August, dangerously low water levels – a neighbor has told me that he can't operate his boat lift and risen rocks are everywhere – or the tragic, fatal boating accident that shocked us all.

And I don't mean to complain as if of personal misfortune. In July we had a lovely visit from our son and his new wife, have managed a few sweet, socially distanced encounters with friends and neighbors, taken some nice hikes and paddles ... and stayed healthy. But while we waited for summer to begin summer was passing by at its usual relentless clip.

I had just decided that the now very late spring newsletter must go to press when Donna and Tom Tamaki sent me a beautiful photo Tom had taken of a recent visitor to their part of South Toddy, a very handsome great egret.



These birds are seen on Toddy from time to time, but not nearly as often as their cousin, the great blue heron. So, exotic but not novel (there's a word much in need of redemption), a true *rara avis*, so in short perfect for augural and inaugural purposes. I've since seen an egret – maybe the same one – in our cove but haven't been able to get a picture nearly as good as Tom's. (This one makes a nice reverse silhouette, but I couldn't get close enough to get the fine details and the digital zoom is kind of furry.)



I'm sure this poor bird deserves better than to be summarily elected harbinger of a summer that for some of us didn't begin before it was nearly over. It was just in the right place at the right time. Less than an hour after taking this picture, while surveying my plant patrol sector, I stopped to talk to Cyndy and Ron Garlick, who were sitting on their dock. I learned from them, to my great surprise and delight, that one loon chick, hatched on the Penobscot side of Middle Toddy, had survived, though it hadn't been picked up during the loon count (this was later confirmed by Siggy Cognetta, who lives near the nesting site). With any luck that chick will fledge soon.

I guess the moral is that if you want propitious, sometimes you just have to go looking for it.

Sing cuccu nu!

More Good News ... and Some Less Good

Though we sadly had to cancel our two annual social gatherings this year, the Toddy Pond Association continues its work. Courtesy Boat Inspection (CBI), Invasive Plant Patrol (IPP), Water Quality Monitoring, the Loon Count, and, at long last, the newsletter have all been able to go forward.

The program that has struggled most is CBI, despite the heroic efforts of Sarah LeVine, who salvifically took on sole responsibility for coordinating CBI on top of her duties as secretary of the TPA and new member liaison.

A major factor this year is that unlike our other programs CBI requires volunteers to work under conditions – assisting boaters inspect their craft for plant material at the public boat landing on Route 1 – where social distancing is usually possible but cannot be guaranteed. Volunteers from past years have understandably expressed concerns about the risk involved, and some have elected to stay away, at least for this year.

Our wonderful paid inspectors, Sandy Kuykendall and Steve Sheehan, had been covering shifts for five days a week, but Sandy has had to take some time off, and though Steve has generously increased his hours total coverage has been less than hoped, and Sarah has had to scramble to fill as many shifts as possible with remaining volunteers.

But the biggest issue predates this extraordinarily difficult year. Coordinating CBI, which involves recruiting, scheduling, and training volunteers and paid inspectors, entering and maintaining the data they collect, and writing an annual grant proposal – I've probably left a couple things out – is far too much for one person. If we're not able to find people willing to take on some of that burden, it's possible that this vitally important first line of defense against invasive species may have to be severely curtailed next year or even eliminated. We must not let this happen.

If you are able to help out by taking on one or more of these administrative functions, please contact Sarah at sarahlevine5@gmail.com or 667-1293.

Toddy Pond Loon Count 2020

Steve Antell

For the second year in a row, fog played a major role in the count, forcing one volunteer to resort to a GPS and compass to find his way to his territory. There is no doubt in my mind that loons were missed because of the conditions, but the news still isn't terrific. A total of 17 adults were counted, 1 in Toddy Pond North, 2 in the narrows, 5 in Middle Toddy, 1 in the second narrows, and 8 in South Toddy. That's two more adults than last year but still a bit below our average for the past 37 years. Sadder still, no chicks were seen on count day and none have been reported since the 18th. We know a pair of chicks hatched in Middle Toddy earlier in July but suspect they fell victim to a bald eagle. Another nest was noted in Middle Toddy in July but does not appear to have been successful. This is the first time since 2014 that no chicks were reported.

Thanks to all 27 of you who participated in this year's count. Let's hope for better viewing conditions and healthy chicks next year.

Loon Kills Bald Eagle

Mark Pokras

It was a warm July night in 2019 when a woman staying at her camp on Highland Lake in Bridgton, ME heard a great commotion from loons out on the lake, a "hullabaloo" as she later described it. The next morning Nat Woodruff was out at about 6 a.m. for an early kayak and found a dead bald eagle floating face down.

Wondering what to do, he contacted Kappy Sprenger, a well-known wildlife rehabilitator in Bridgton, and she recommended contacting the Maine Warden Service.

Maine Game Warden Neal Wykes recovered the body of the eagle and noted what looked like a puncture wound in the bird's chest. He also found a dead loon chick nearby that had some wounds on it. Thinking that there was a possibility that the eagle had been shot Warden Wykes brought the eagle cadaver to Norway Veterinary Hospital. There radiographs (x-rays) revealed no evidence of bullets or shot.

Working with Warden Wykes, Danielle D'Auria, a wild-

life biologist who focuses on wetland and aquatic birds for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, made arrangements to send the cadavers to the National Wildlife Health Center (part of the USGS) in Madison, WI for post-mortem examinations. The pathologist on the case, Dr. Valerie Shearn-Bochsler, examined both the loon chick and the bald eagle. She found that the eagle was an adult male that had been in good health and that it had died from the deep wound to its chest. Similar in size to a loon's beak, this wound had gone through the skin, muscles, and the bone of sternum puncturing into the left ventricle of eagle's heart and causing a great deal of bleeding. The bird must have died almost instantly. When the pathologist examined the young loon chick she found that it had died from wounds consistent with eagle talons and beak.

In reconstructing the story it appears as though the original "hullabaloo" took place when the eagle attacked the loon chick and, in defense, one of the adult loons, trying to drive it away, attacked and killed the eagle.

How often do loons and eagles come into conflict? Probably more often than we realize, and battles between loons and eagles are becoming more and more frequent. Loon populations have almost doubled in the southern half of our state since Maine Audubon started statewide loon counts in 1983. But even more notable has been the increase in bald eagles. In the early 1980s populations of bald eagles had been decimated by the earlier use of DDT and the so-called "hard" pesticides (remember Rachel Carson's classic, *Silent Spring*?). They were listed as endangered in Maine and throughout the lower 48 states and there were fewer than 50 nests in Maine. Today we are approaching almost 1000 breeding pairs of eagles in the state and the number increases each year.

Here on Toddy many people have taken notice. In the last 10 years or so we have many more bald eagles nesting near the pond and many years each nest fledges more than one baby.

One consequence of this is that bald eagles are eating more and more loon eggs and chicks every year. And sometimes the eagles even kill and eat adult loons when the loons are up on their nests and vulnerable. In 2017 a camp owner on Middle Toddy observed an adult bald eagle kill an adult loon that was sitting on its nest. Other nesting loons have disappeared under suspicious circumstances.

What can you do?

One of the most important things is keeping your eyes open and reporting your observations to TPA. It would be great to know from year to year how many loons and eagles are actually nesting on Toddy Pond, where they nest, and how many young survive. It would also be great if people could report any fights between loons and eagles.

Whatever you do, **DO NOT FEED LOONS OR EAGLES**. People love feeding birds. Many of us take joy at seeing chickadees, woodpeckers or hummingbirds at our bird feeders. In most yards there are few negatives to this, as long as the feed is fresh, and feeders are cleaned regularly. But in the case of loons and other large, long-lived birds, the negatives far outweigh the positives. When loons begin to associate people with free and easy food, it is almost invariably fatal for the birds. These are the loons that will more read-

ily approach anglers and boaters and risk entanglement, fishing gear ingestion, get struck by boats and jet skis, and even shot. Unfortunately not everyone has fond feelings towards these birds. To ensure their survival, it's best that loons remain wary of people. That's why it is SO unwise to feed loons from docks or boats.

The same is true for bald eagles. Photographers, nature lovers, and some anglers (especially those doing ice fishing) have found how readily eagles can be lured in close for photos or just those "oo and ah," close-to-nature experiences. But there are huge downsides. Such eagles tend to die fast. They are more likely to become entangled, swallow fishing gear, get hit by cars, get shot, and get into violent fights with other eagles. As eagles become more common, they've started preying more and more on common loons, both chicks and adults. So if you want to protect loons, it's important **not** to feed bald eagles or encourage them to hang around Toddy or other lakes where loons nest any more than is naturally taking place.

Practice loon-safe boating and fishing practices and do everything you can to help preserve the water quality of Toddy and other Maine lakes. TPA can always use more volunteers. You can also consider getting involved in statewide programs like LoonSmart and LakeSmart – take a look at the websites below.

Having loons and eagles on Toddy is wonderful. We hope that everyone in the Toddy Pond Association (and others) enjoys the presence of these impressive and charismatic neighbors and helps insure that that they are with us forever.

LoonSmart

<https://mainelakessociety.org/loon-smart-2/>
<https://www.maineaudubon.org/projects/loons/>

LakeSmart

<https://mainelakessociety.org/lakesmart/>
<https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/lakesmart>

Let's NOT Use

Anticoagulants for Mice

Mark Pokras

I don't know about you, but for as long as we've had our camp on Toddy Pond we've had trouble with mice getting into our stuff ... especially in the winter when the camp is closed up.

In the old days everyone used classic mouse snap traps baited with peanut butter or cheese to eliminate these rodents. But no one liked seeing (or getting rid of) the little dead bodies. So in the 1940s modern science started producing rat and mouse poisons that kill by interfering with blood clotting – the so called "anticoagulant rodenticides." The first one on the market was a bait with warfarin. These poisons cause rodents to bleed to death internally. For the homeowner, this usually means that we don't find dead bodies around. Affected mice eat the poison and then creep away to die hours or days later in attics, basements, wood piles ... just away someplace where we can't see them.

People loved the convenience, but over a couple of decades many rodent populations evolved resistance to warfarin and it no longer killed mice and rats. In response, companies have come up with stronger and stronger anticoagulants that you

can buy in hardware stores everywhere. These chemicals definitely kill today's rodents, but unfortunately they have some real downsides.

First, they don't kill rodents quickly. Studies have shown that it takes 3-5 days for the animal to die, and that these deaths are nasty. The rodents get terribly thirsty and have agonizing abdominal pain. Second is an even larger-scale problem. These chemicals are killing off the natural mouse traps, wild predators that eat mice. How does that happen? Poisoned mice are in pain and act abnormally. They may come out in the daytime, don't hide, and are more likely to be caught by a predator. And if predators eat very much of this, the same thing happens to them ... they die. More and more wild species, including hawks, owls, foxes and weasels are being found dead or dying. Recent studies across the US have shown that over 90% of birds of prey have been exposed to one of these rodenticides. Veterinarians are also seeing many more outdoor cats and dogs being poisoned. It's becoming a serious ecological problem.

Possible Solutions

We stopped using any anticoagulants at our camp and home years ago. What are the alternatives? While you're at camp, you can use killing traps or traps that catch the mice alive. If you decide to catch them alive, consider what you'll do with them. Mice have a tremendous homing instinct and may return even if taken a mile away. Further information from the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife can be found at the end of this article.

As many people have said to me, "Get a cat." In our case, the camp is unused for months each year, so that wouldn't work. In addition several of our family members are severely allergic to cats, so this is not an option. But if it works for you, that's great. The only thing that I would caution is to try and **make sure that your cat stays an indoor cat**. As a veterinarian, I know that cats that are not allowed to wander outside typically live significantly longer and have many fewer diseases and injuries. Plus, many studies have shown that outdoor cats, both owned and feral, are very destructive of native wildlife including small birds, mammals and reptiles. If you feel like you must take your cat outdoors, try a leash. Contrary to popular belief, most cats *can* learn to be very comfortable walking on a leash and there are special harnesses made just for cats.

Snap traps work. They are cheap and if you set them correctly, they almost always result in killing mice almost instantly. The dead mice, having no poisons in their bodies, can be tossed out in the woods to serve as food for native predators and scavengers.

Another alternative are bucket traps. Just do an online search for "bucket trap for mice" – you can purchase them or make them yourself. These can either be used as live traps or killing traps in which the mice drown. Drowning may not be nice, but it's *much* quicker than anticoagulants or starvation on a sticky trap.

There is some disease risk to people from handling dead mice or their urine or feces. If you're going to sweep or vacuum where mice have been, it's important to moisten things so as not to get dust into the air. One should always make sure to wear a mask and either disposable painter's gloves, or some-

thing similar (*NOT* the pair of Playtex gloves you use for doing the dishes!). And whatever you do, make sure to wash hands carefully afterwards. There are any number of websites that have further information about how to safely clean up after mice in your home, camp or trailer including:

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/documents/pdf/Flyer-v2-0521-final.pdf>

<https://maineseniorguide.com/maine-camps-opening-camp-watch-out-for-mice/>

There are some non-toxic mouse repellants. A couple of years ago a friend introduced me to mint oil (one brand is MouseMagic®) as a deterrent for mice in your home or automobile. You can buy this mouse repellent at most hardware stores and in my experience, it seems to work well for a few weeks but then loses its strength and has to be renewed.

Things NOT to use:

1. Sticky traps. These are considered very inhumane. Trapped animals die slowly from dehydration and starvation. In addition, such traps catch a lot of non-target animals including small birds, small reptiles, flying squirrels, and a wide variety of other species.
2. There are tons of gizmos advertized as pest repellents on the market that use electromagnetic, sonic, or ultrasonic technologies and are supposed to keep mice away. Although some have shown promise in the laboratory, the studies I read seem to find no evidence that they work in real-life situations ... maybe with improved technology in the future?
3. Again, try to avoid purchasing or using anticoagulants. These products are sold under a great many brand names, but when you look at the labels you'll see dangerous chemicals including warfarin (WAF), diphacinone (DIP), chlorophacinone (CHL), coumachlor, bromethalin and cholecalciferol, brodifacoum, bromadiolone, and difethialone.

We don't want to get rid of ALL mice. Just the ones causing problems indoors and in vehicles.

From a naturalist's point of view, it's always interesting to see what sorts of mice are visiting us and trying to figure out if there is anything we can learn from the behavior of that species that will help us keep them out of the camp. Most of the mice I trap in our camp are white-footed mice or deer mice (you can't really tell them apart without genetic studies). With their big ears, large, glassy black eyes, and white tummies, these inquisitive little guys are masters of sneaking through small cracks and can climb and jump really well. They love the sort of shrubby, semi-open habitats that we've created around our homes and camps. Mice are of major importance in natural food chains. They eat a lot of damaging bugs, and in turn, they serve as food for a wide variety of important native predators from hawks to owls to mink.

These mice can also carry the ticks that transmit Lyme and other diseases in people and domestic animals. So having healthy populations of mouse predators like hawks, owls and foxes is really important. One report showed that a pair of red-tailed hawks that raised 2 chicks could eat over 8000 mice in a year. Clearly these are nature's best mouse traps! Anything we can do to preserve the lives of these native predators helps keep us all healthy.

Although well-meaning people opposed to killing animals may prefer releasing the animal outside of its home range because it sounds benign, in fact there are distinct problems with releasing an animal in new territory and most biologists recommend against it:

- Mortality rates increase when animals are subjected to stress and trauma associated with capture, handling, transport and release in an unfamiliar territory.
- Animals that are released may harm or be harmed by resident animals in the course of territorial disputes, transmission of disease, gene-pool disruptions, etc.
- The same (or a competing) species may already be overly abundant in the area. Excess animals must move or die.
- Habitat conditions in the new area might not be suited to the animal being released.
- Many animal species have strong homing instincts and, upon release, they travel in the direction of their capture site, which may entail dodging cars and predators.
- Animals may cause problems for humans in the vicinity of the release site.

Counting Traffic at the Boat Ramp

Dale Dailey

As we all know, Courtesy Boat Inspections are the first line of defense for the prevention of invasive aquatic plants. As we learn about infestations to both the north and south of Toddy Pond, our CBI vigilance becomes ever more important. In recent years, through a combination of volunteers and paid inspectors, we've tried to expand the days and hours of coverage at the Orland boat ramp. In an effort to better understand the volume and timing of boat launches at the public ramp, the TPA has purchased a traffic counting device to be installed on the ramp. This device will be there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week collecting the boat launch data including date and time. We hope that this information will help us determine the most effective CBI schedule.

We have all the equipment and are ready to go. Even this late in the season we can collect valuable information, and installing the counter and operating it over the coming weeks will contribute to a smooth rollout for a full season in 2012. We need volunteers to help install and maintain the counter and to periodically collect the data using a laptop computer loaded with the necessary software. If you'd like to help, please contact me at 207-522-1448 or e-mail me at campme@comcast.net.



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