

FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE _____

Common Loon Encounter: Big Squam Lake, New Hampshire

Summering at Big Squam Lake in New Hampshire gives my family and me a great insight into the lives of the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*). A loon pair nests every year in the environs of Rattlesnake and Lily coves, sheltered by Hoag Island, and in 1993 a single chick appeared from their nest on July 24.

But July 28 was a bad day for our loon pair and a worse day for the chick, which was missing by midday. The two adults with their chick were in Lily Cove near Small Island (located about 100 yards from our dock) on the morning of the twenty-eighth. At about 9:30 A.M. eight loons appeared in Rattlesnake Cove. This aroused the protective instincts of one parent adult in Lily Cove, and the bird swam out to investigate. The other adult retreated with the chick to the northern and marsh edge of Lily Cove and reappeared without the chick to observe the proceedings. The eight loons disappeared around a peninsula in the coves, and the two adults rejoined one another behind Small Island. The chick was with them. I returned to our house.

At about 10:45 A.M., I heard a disturbance in Lily Cove. One adult stood up, flapped its wings, and yodeled twice. Then both birds dove continually for several minutes, appearing to search the water between Small Island and the marsh edge. Did something get the chick this time? Possibly. At 11:15 A.M. two swimmers placed themselves between the parent loons, and one of the birds swam right up to one swimmer and yodeled and thrashed its wings on the water in an apparent attempt to draw the swimmer away from the area and its mate.

The two separate yodeling moments seemed to have attracted one of the eight loons in Rattlesnake Cove back to the edge of Lily Cove. One bird of the pair then attacked the intruder. The two birds stood up in the water with their beaks open, striving to catch onto the other's head or neck and drag it under the water. They wing-thrashed each other continually from that standing position; there was no vocal calling. After ten to twelve minutes of this struggling within an area of thirty to fifty square yards, the invader simply gave up. Three times, in the course of about two minutes, the intruder emitted a call, which sounded like a short, high-pitched, "yee-e-ee-eek," a call which I certainly had never heard before from any loon. I interpreted the call as a vocal sign of defeat. The birds swam rapidly across the surface of the lake, with the defender in pursuit, both using their wings as feathered paddles. The protecting bird would catch up to the intruder and grasp it with its beak, and they both would fight for a moment, as previously described, and then the top-of-the-water pursuit would be renewed. The invader dove and changed directions, but the pursuing bird continued to pursue and try to submerge the invader. This went on for about eight to ten minutes until the birds disappeared from view.

The protecting bird returned in about twenty minutes and rejoined its mate.

They swam back to Hoag Island and stayed near the island about one-half mile from where they had once been with their chick. It appeared that they had realized the loss of their chick. The marsh of Lily Cove holds large—very large—snapping turtles and the coves' waters hold large smallmouth bass and chain pickerel; one of these may have taken the chick.

Eric Cutler, Dedham, Massachusetts

A Brambling in Groveland

Shortly after 12:30 P.M. on November 8, 1993, I received a call from my good friend and birding companion, Lois Cooper.

"Doug," she said, "come over quick. I have a Brambling in my backyard." You can imagine my reaction.

Lois had been looking out into her backyard around noon when she saw a strange bird sitting in the grass leisurely pecking at the ground feed, which she had spread out earlier in the day. Lois is an experienced local birder and was struck by the fact that she could not immediately identify the bird.

Shortly after spotting the bird, her son, a casual birder, arrived. Together they poured over the field guides until they found the bird in the *National Geographic* guide. It was a Brambling. She immediately realized that this sighting was an event, and to confirm her identification she called me. She knew that I had seen Bramblings last February during my trip to England.

When I arrived, the bird was hidden from our view by a low juniper bush in the middle of her backyard. I only had to wait about ten minutes before the bird made its way out to where I could see it. It was feeding on the ground by a small leafless tree at a distance of about forty feet. It was a sunny day, and the view of the bird was perfect. One look told me that it was definitely a Brambling. The field marks were indisputable and definitive: a grayish brown head, orange and white belly, orange scapulars, black wings, sharply forked tail, and especially the white rump and lower back. The Brambling was most cooperative as it stayed in view for most of the time between 1:00 and 3:30. It flew occasionally into the forest that lined the back of Lois' yard and usually stayed in the forest for only a few minutes. One time it left for a period of about twenty minutes.

While in the yard, it spent its time perched in a small leafless tree or feeding on the ground feed at the base of the tree. Although the Brambling was not obviously with any other birds, it seemed to come and go with the chickadees and Tufted Titmouse that were the regular visitors to Lois' feeders.

Almost immediately Lois and I attempted to send the word out, but because it was Monday afternoon our telephone calls were mostly answered by recorded messages, and we could contact only three people, none of whom saw the bird. The next day, the bird was no longer present, and it never returned.

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