



Sample Script: Presenting to Groups

When to Use This Script: This document provides Look Out for Loons Volunteers with a sample script for formal group presentations. It is designed to be used with the slide deck titled Look Out for Loons Community Presentation.

The presentation is designed to be done in 30 minutes plus, Q&A, but may need to be streamlined depending on the time you are allotted for your presentation. In either case, the goal is to educate the audience about Maine loons and help attendees understand the risks loons face and what individuals can do to provide them with safe habitat during nesting season.

Introduction:

[Slide1]

- Welcome & thank you inviting me to speak with you tonight.
- My name is _____.
- I am a volunteer with *Look Out for Loons*, a program of Maine Lakes and Maine Audubon.
- We are making sure that people are aware of our resident loons and know a few simple things which each of us can do to make sure we are providing the safe habitat loons need to nest and raise their young.

Agenda:

[Slide 2]

- Tonight, I will start by reviewing some loon basics. We will discuss:
 - The life history of loons,
 - Understanding key behaviors,
 - Understanding risks loons face.
- All of this is to make sure you to leave here tonight clear on simple things you can do to help:
 - Decrease loon mortality.
 - Increase loon nesting success.
- [Summary & Segue]: Okay, hopefully this gives you a good sense of what our goal is tonight.

Loon Basics:

[Slide 3]

- Let's get started by talking about a few basics about common loons.
 - Common loons are large diving birds:
 - 32 inches long,
 - 3.8 feet wing span,

- And can weigh 9 pounds on average with males generally larger than females.
- It is a big, heavy bird with feet located far back on its body. **[Slide 4]**
 - This makes it an excellent swimmer. **[Slide 5]**
 - However, it cannot walk on land and they do not come on shore for anything other than to nest. **[Slide 6]**
 - This means they need water-front property to raise their young so they can slip in and out of the water quickly and easily.
- These birds can live a long time but they are slow to reproduce.
- Because loons spend almost all their time in the water, they must leave our lakes in the winter before ponds freeze over. **[Slide 7]**
- They spend the winter in ice-free, sheltered waters further south and along the Atlantic coast.
- In the spring, after ice-out, our loons return from the coast and breed here on Maine's abundant lakes where they specialize in catching and eating fish.
- The spring and summer are for breeding, nesting, and chick raising.
- Loons raises 1-2 chicks per season.
- Parents must work hard to successfully fledge 1-2 chicks.
 - Experience counts.
 - And what us humans do can make all the difference in their success rates.
- Before we talk about risks let me review a year in the life of a loon:
 - They arrive on Maine lakes after ice out and establish territories. Usually April – May. **[Slide 8]**
 - They form pair bonds and select a nest site and lay eggs starting May 1st – mid-June in most cases. **[Slide 9]**
 - Chicks hatch mid-June to mid-July:
 - Chicks leave the nest within hours of hatching but they are completely dependent on their parents. **[Slide 10]**
 - The first week or so is when chicks may be seen under a parent's wing or on their back. **[Slide 11]**
 - They grow fast and start catching some of their own food by week 8. **[Slide 12]**
 - Loons leave our lakes starting in mid-September to November.
 - One or both parents may depart before juveniles depart.
 - Juveniles are usually capable of feeding themselves and flying after 12 weeks of age.
- Those are a few basics about our loons. **[Slide 13]**
- Now let's talk about important behaviors to watch for and understand.

Understanding Loon Behavior:

- When watching loons, you are likely to see a lot of different behaviors. **[Slide 14]**
- For our purposes, the most important is understanding how to read the signs that indicate when a loon is:
 - Relaxed,

- Concerned,
 - Or stressed.
- It is important to understand these behaviors to ensure we are not stressing nesting birds or their chicks.
- Stressing these birds during nesting and chick rearing decreases their success and can lead to loon deaths.
- And, as I said earlier, loons are slow to reproduce.
- The goal here is to make sure you know how to observe loons from a safe distance – a distance that does not stress the birds.
- So, let's start with behaviors that indicate the bird you are watching on a nest or in the water is a relaxed, happy loon.
- A relaxed loon looks like this: **[Slide 15]**
 - It has a relaxed neck.
 - It might be looking underwater or feeding.
 - It might occasionally flap its wings, stretch a leg, or preen its feathers
- This is what you want to see - a relaxed bird.
- What are signs that a loon is becoming concerned? If you or others get too close you might see subtle changes such as: **[Slide 16]**
 - A raised forehead – this gives its head a more squared off look.
 - If its neck stretched up and looking around – this is a sign that the bird is evaluating something that is making it uneasy.
 - Riding low in the water with its neck and head outstretched, chin in the water is a sure sign that the bird is trying not to be seen.
- These are all indicators that something is making this bird uneasy and it is time to back away.
- To continue risks stressing a bird which is the last thing we want.
- Stressing a bird can cause it to leave the nest or chicks.
- So, what do you watch for? **[Slide 17]**
 - Crouched on a nest - This is an indication that the loon is about to leave the nest because of a perceived threat.
 - Penguin dance – This is not the casual flapping of a relaxed bird. This is aggressive, territorial behavior that loons use to ward off other loons or a predator. It includes:
 - Rearing up with wings back,
 - Its head and neck in a S-shape with its chin tucked and ready to strike.
 - It will also rapidly paddle with its feet splashing forward.
 - If you see this, it is a bird trying to tell someone or something to GET AWAY.
 - The final stress indicator is a warning call – If a loon has chicks or a nest and you approach too close you are likely to hear a loud “yodel” or a “tremolo” alarm call.
 - Again, this is a bird is trying to say GET AWAY.
- So, these are the key behaviors to understand so that you can observe these birds from a safe distance. **[If you are providing brochures direct them to the**

How Close is Too Close? brochure. Also, direct them to a digital version at <https://simplebooklet.com/howcloseistoo-close-an-overview-of-loon-stress-behaviors>.]

- **[Summary & Segue]:**
 - So far, we have talked about loon basics.
 - We have also talked about how to observe them from a safe distance
 - More important, we have reviewed how to know you are at a safe distance and know the signs that a loon is nervous or stressed.
 - Now to wrap up tonight, I want to review the challenges loons face and more important, what to do if a problem arises. **[Slide 18]**

Threats to Maine's Loons:

- Let's start with winter threats. **[Slide 19]**
- What are the challenges loons face in the winter.
 - Freeze up. If loons are not able to leave out lakes in October or November before freeze up this is obviously a problem.
 - There is also a cost to migration.
 - Scientists tell us that birds face the most risks during migration.
 - It takes a lot of energy and they face unknowns along the way.
 - Another risk is coastal pollution such as oil spills.
- **[Summary]** Those are some of what loons encounter during the winter.
- What about the summer threats when they are here on our lakes? **[Slide 20]**
- There are a variety of issues they face:
 - Predation/Flooding/Drought/Disease can all result in loon deaths each year. **[Slide 21]**
 - Despite this, loons have been around for millions of years and have survived and thrived despite these issues.
 - But these issues combined with human driven factors are leading to increased mortality in recent decades.
 - So, let's look at these more closely.
 - Lead poisoning from fishing tackle and death from entanglement continues to be a problem. **[Slide 22]**
 - The good news is that this is an area where progress is being made. **[Slide 23]**
 - One of the reasons is the state wide Fish Lead Free initiative.
 - This program aims to remind us to retrieve all fishing line and tackle.
 - It includes Tackle Exchanges, placing Collection Bins, and Tackle Buyback programs.
 - The reason this program has been effective is because Maine has passed a law banning the use of lead sinkers and bare-headed jigs 2.5 inches or less or 1 ounce or less.
 - New laws going into effect also includes painted jigs as well.
 - Starting September 1, 2024 the sale of painted led jigs will be prohibited.
 - Starting September 1, 2026 the use of the jigs in this range will be prohibited.

- These laws have been very helpful at reducing deaths that occur when loons ingest these things and get lead poisoning.
- For those who fish, please pick up a *Fish Lead Free* brochure when you leave tonight.

[NOTE: If Tackle and Fishing Line Collection Bins have been placed where you are speaking, please point this out. If a Tackle Exchange event is scheduled in your area, this is also something to point out.]

- Another worrisome risk to loons is boat collisions & boat wakes:
 - Unfortunately, boat strikes are one of the growing causes of death for Maine loons. **[Slide 24]**
 - Please keep a careful watch for them. They can pop up at any time. So, boat drivers always need to be prepared to slow down if loons are in the area.
 - Also, it is important not to create a wake within 200 feet from shore [or from the loon raft if applicable]. **[Slide 25]**
 - Loon nests are on the ground [or a raft if applicable] and waves can swamp the nest.
 - That would be a disaster.
 - So please, no wake within 200 feet from shore or an island or from a nest platform – this is a state law.
- Disturbance & habitat loss is another growing risk. **[Slide 26]**
 - We can love loons TOO much.
 - Our attempts to watch, photograph, or help loons often causes disturbance.
 - Loud noises can flush adults from a nest.
 - Pursuing loons or getting too close can:
 - Interrupt feeding,
 - Separate parents and chicks,
 - Cause nest or chick abandonment.
- **[Summary & Segue]:** Those are a summary of the many threats our loons face.

What Can Be Done to Mitigate These Threats:

[Slide 27]

- So unfortunately, loons face greater risks than ever before.
- If they are going to continue to thrive, it is going to take all of us to ensure they have the habitat and clean waters they need.
- With all of these challenges it can feel hopeless.
- But the good news is there are simple things that each of us can do which will go a long way in helping decrease risks and increase loon's chances at raising chicks successfully.
- In fact, not only is the list of things we can do simple, but its also short.
- What more can you ask – simple and short!
- So here are the three things I'm going to ask each and everyone of you to do when you go back home to your lake or pond:
 - First, maintain a safe distance from loons.
 - What is a safe distance?

- We generally say 100 feet from loons and their chicks.
- Give nests a 200-foot buffer.
- Better yet, learn to read the behavioral signs that indicate when loons are relaxed versus when they are stressed.
- We have a simple brochure to help you know those signs. **[This is important if time did not allow you to go through the Recognizing Loon Behavior section above.]**
- Second, obey Maine's boat wake laws and your lakes no-wake-zones.
 - Maine's law says no wakes within 200 feet of shore or an island.
 - There are a host of reasons this is important, but decreasing wake problems for loon nests and chicks is a big one.
 - If you are a boater, just be aware of when loons are around and slow down.
- Third, fish lead free & retrieve all tackle & line.
 - Loons ingest small lead tackle and get tangled in fishing line – these things are deadly.
 - That is why Maine has passed a law banning the use of lead sinkers and bare-headed jigs 2.5 inches or less or 1 ounce or less.
- So those are the three things that we each can do to protect loons.
- Those are three ways you can ensure you are reducing risks to these wonder birds
- There is a 4th thing I'm going to ask
- The main goal of the Look Out for Loons initiative is to educate people
- But to do that we need ambassadors who can spread what I've shared with you today to others.
- So, the 4th thing you can do to protect loons is to help share this information with others. Become a volunteer "ambassador": **[Slide 28]**
 - Talk to your friends
 - Talk to your neighbors
 - Share information about loons with those who rent or visit on your lake
- We can provide training, tools and resources you can use on your lake to:
 - Have effective conversations
 - Provide short presentations to a lake association or other group
 - Hand out brochures
 - And more
- So, for those of you who want to help, please sign up as you leave and I'll be in touch about how to get you started as a Look Out for Loons ambassador.

Close

[Slide 29]

- I thank you for your time
- I hope what we've shared provides you with useful information on how to help protect Maine's loons
- I appreciate your commitment to Maine's lakes and its loons
- Its people like you who can make a difference.
- As you leave please
 - Pick up brochures
 - Sign up for the Look Out for Loons Program

- With that I'll take some questions
- The bad news is that our loons face more challenges than ever and many of them come from us humans.
- But as we have discussed tonight, the good news is there is a lot we can do to reduce those threats.

[Take time for Q&A]

Appendix

[Note: It may be helpful to put slides at the end of the presentation in case a particular question comes up. A good example is how to report a problem with a loon. Here is copy you can use if that slide is needed.]

What To Do if a Problem Occurs:

- Before closing I want to provide you with a little information about what to do if you encounter a problem with a loon: **[Slide 28]**
 - If you find a sick or injured loon contact:
 - The [Warden Service at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife](#): 207.287.8000.
 - [Avian Haven](#): 207.382.6761 an excellent rehab facility can answer questions and provide guidance on what to do.
 - [Biodiversity Research Institute](#): 207.839.7600 may be able to assist if it is convenient to their work sites.
 - If you find a dead loon contact:
 - Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) at 207-287-8000
 - Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) at (207) 839-7600
 - Reporting dead loons is very important!
 - Necropsies of loon carcasses can provide vital information about the cause of death, which is essential in targeting loon conservation efforts.
 - Please take photos of the loon, note the location, whether the loon 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.
 - If you find a loon egg contact:
 - Maine Audubon at conserve@maineaudubon.org. (Include photo and location information).
 - Do not collect loon eggs that you find floating or find on a nest that you believe to be abandoned!
 - Egg collection is not allowed or permitted by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife under state law.
 - What happens if you see behavior that endangers nesting loons or loons on the water you can report to:

- [Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife](#): 207.287.8000.
- A description of event, boat identifying characteristics, and outcome helpful.