

## Editorial

# Anglers must do more to prevent loon deaths

Monitor staff

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Few things stir the heart like the sound of a loon calling in the night. It is one of the experiences people come to New Hampshire to have. But the state's loon population continues to be threatened by the use of lead fishing sinkers and jigs, fish-shaped wedges of lead molded around a hook.

Between 2006 and 2007, the Loon Preservation Committee's census found that the count had dropped from 386 adult loons to 354. Census takers will be out on the state's waters this Saturday to take the 2008 count. The results won't be available for a few weeks, but as the Monitor's Melanie Asmar reported on Saturday, the count will show five fewer loons than it would have on June 24. Since then five dead loons have been found.

One died of natural causes but four of the loons either died of lead poisoning or were beyond help and euthanized. The birds were found on four different water bodies, Deering Reservoir, Pleasant Lake in New London, Pearl Lake in Lisbon and Sand Pond in Marlow. Loons often ingest lead jigs and sinkers along with pebbles, which they need to aid digestion. Just one lead jig or sinker is enough to kill a bird.

The sinkers and jigs that poisoned the loons might have been lost prior to 2000 when New Hampshire became the first state to ban the use or sale of lead jigs less than one-inch long and sinkers weighing less than an ounce. If not, the fatalities prove that, despite a long education campaign, many fishermen have yet to get the message.

Two of the dead loons ate lead jigs longer than one inch and thus legal. That raises the question of whether the one-inch limit is the right one. But getting anglers to give up longer lead lures will be tough.

"If something were to change and there was a ban on all lead, that would be a huge impact," David Duffy, vice president of the New Hampshire Bass Federation told Asmar. "Jigs are \$3 to \$4 to \$5 apiece. If a fisherman owns a lot of them, he's not going to throw them out."

Fine, we say. Hang them on the wall and look at them, but keep them out of the water. And don't throw them away. Take them to a recycling center or salvage yard.

Though it pioneered the effort, the state Fish and Game Department's lead education campaign has been hamstrung by the agency's chronic shortage of money.

The state's boat ramps and popular sites for fishing are in need of signs warning of the dangers of lead. The department has updated its "Get the Lead Out" brochure, but it doesn't have the money to include one along with each of the 120,000 or so fishing licenses it sells each year. And the state, save for an initial effort, does not operate or oversee a lead sinker and jig exchange program. The Loon Preservation Committee does do sinker swaps at its headquarters in Moultonborough, but it doesn't exchange jigs. Many states and Canadian cities do both.

The odds of state funding for an exchange program are nil. If it's going to happen, sporting clubs, stores that sell fishing supplies, environmental groups and concerned citizens will have to step up. We hope they will. It wouldn't cost much to sponsor one sign, a few thousand brochures or a supply of non-toxic sinkers and jigs.

In a few weeks, New Hampshire will find out how many loons it has left. But the state already knows that if the birds are to live, the lead has to go