

## **Common Loons of Yellowstone and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem**

Walter Wehtje<sup>1\*</sup>, Vincent Spagnuolo<sup>2</sup>, Jeff Fair<sup>3</sup>, Arcata Leavitt<sup>1</sup>, Douglas W. Smith<sup>4</sup>, David Evers<sup>5</sup>, and Lauren Walker<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ricketts Conservation Foundation, P.O. Box 300, Bondurant, WY. 82922.  
wwehtje@rickettsconservation.org

<sup>2</sup>Ricketts Conservation Foundation (retired), Bondurant, WY.

<sup>3</sup>Palmer, AK.

<sup>4</sup>National Park Service (retired), Yellowstone National Park, WY.

<sup>5</sup>Biodiversity Research Institute, Portland, ME.

<sup>6</sup>Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD.

In the 1900s, Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) experienced a population decline and northward range retraction throughout North America. The retraction created a small, isolated population in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). This island population was understudied relative to many loon populations at the species' southern edge. In 2011, GYE loons experienced poor reproductive success, and some long-standing on territories went vacant. Yellowstone National Park (YNP) and the Wyoming Game & Fish Department identified loons as a species of conservation concern, which sparked an extensive private-public partnership study to understand the issue and enact management actions to mitigate identified threats. Since 2013, the authors have conducted surveys for loon presence and reproductive success in the GYE, and investigated threats to survival, reproduction, and habitat quality. Identified threats include human disturbance of nest sites and mortality as bycatch in gillnets set for lake trout control in Yellowstone Lake. Loon conservation strategies developed in other population areas were adapted to this unique population including nesting and brooding area closures, nest rafts, outreach, and education. The population appears to have stabilized in recent years and research efforts now focus on determining the parameters required to create an effective integrated population model (IPM) that can be used to monitor this species.