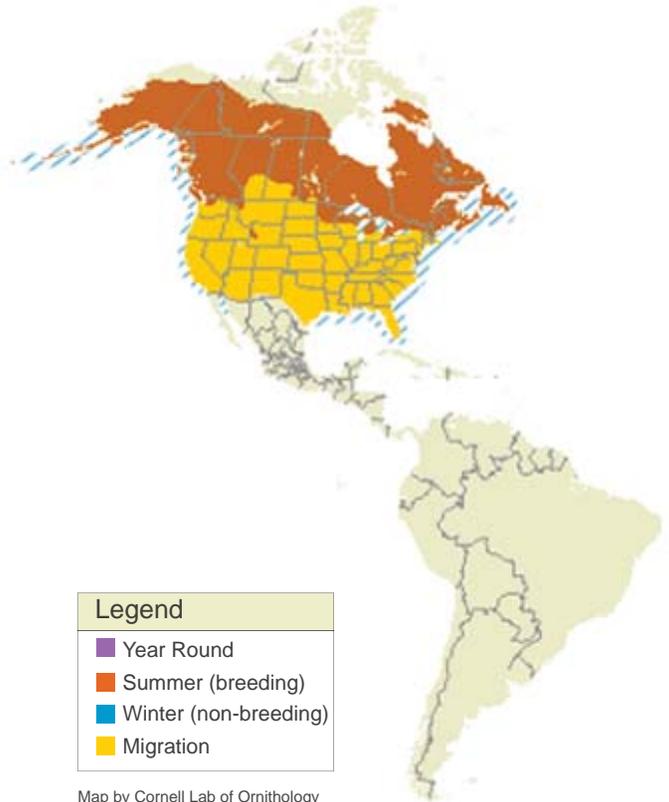


Common Loon

Gavia immer

The eerie calls of Common Loons echo across clear lakes of the northern wilderness. Summer adults are regally patterned in black and white. In winter, they are plain gray above and white below, and you'll find them close to shore on most seacoasts and a good many inland reservoirs and lakes. Common Loons are powerful, agile divers that catch small fish in fast underwater chases. They are less suited to land, and typically come ashore only to nest.



Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Common Loons are large, diving waterbirds with rounded heads and dagger-like bills. They have long bodies and short tails that are usually not visible. In flight, they look stretched out, with a long, flat body and long neck and bill. Their feet stick out beyond the tail (unlike ducks and cormorants), looking like wedges.

Color Pattern

In summer, adults have a black head and bill, a black-and-white spotted back, and a white breast. From September to March, adults are plain gray on the back and head with a white throat. The bill also fades to gray. Juveniles look similar, but with more pronounced scalloping on the back.

Behavior

Common Loons are stealthy divers, submerging without a splash to catch fish. Pairs and groups often call to each other at night. In flight, notice their shallow wingbeats and unwavering, bee-lined flight path.

Habitat

Common Loons breed on quiet, remote freshwater lakes of the northern U.S. and Canada, and they are sensitive to human disturbance. In winter and during migration, look for them on lakes, rivers, estuaries, and coastlines.

Cool Facts

- The Common Loon swims underwater to catch fish, propelling itself with its feet. It swallows most of its prey underwater. The loon has sharp, rearward-pointing projections on the roof of its mouth and tongue that help it keep a firm hold on slippery fish.
- Loons are agile swimmers, but they move pretty fast in the air, too. Migrating loons have been clocked flying at speeds more than 70 mph.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 26 - 35.8 inches
- Wingspan - 40.9 - 51.6 inches
- Weight - 88.2 - 215.2 ounces