



Common loon *(Gavia immer)*

The common loon, protected under its status as Minnesota's state bird, features a dense, solid skeleton. While the light, hollow bones of most birds make them adept flyers, loons' bones help them plunge underwater in search of fish,

their primary food source. Loons can remain underwater up to five minutes and dive down 250 feet. Look for them on bodies of water—you'll recognize their characteristic spotty black and white pattern and, if you get close enough, their red eyes that are adapted for underwater use. You may also see a loon dive for food, possibly resurfacing several minutes later and hundreds of feet away, or run as much as 600 feet along the surface of the water to gain the momentum needed to propel its heavy frame into the air. You might hear one of the loon's four distinctive calls echoing across the water to claim territory, express aggression or communicate between parents and young.

Minnesota boasts more summer loons than any state other than Alaska. In fall, many loons gather together on large lakes in preparation for migration, when they fly to their winter habitat on the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico. The adults leave in September; with year's young following a month later. The adults will return in the spring, but the young loons won't be back until they reach breeding age at three or four years.