

SURVIVAL OF A DOOMED LOON

By Heather Kailburn

On Monday, October 9, 2006, two more cottages on Mellon Lake were closed for the winter—the Robinson's and Sharyn Bachlet's. As the Robinsons were saying goodbye to us, Sharyn phoned us about a distressed loon. She told me that, as she headed her boat away from her cottage she saw a loon struggling with what looked like a fish line. It was painful for her to watch, and even more agonizing to not be able to help, short of a phone call. Little did she know at the time, that call ultimately saved the life of the loon. Thanks, Sharyn!!



Shortly after the Robinsons left, my daughter, Wendy, and family arrived from Nashville, TN for four days. I told them of the loon's predicament, and was hoping my husband, Dan, and our son-in-law, Steve, would take the boat out to find him. Tuesday and Wednesday the weather was not good. Thursday morning my granddaughter, Abigail, woke me up to say she thinks she sees the loon in front of our home. Abigail said she had asked God to bring the loon closer to us, and He did. The weather was good; Dan and Steve quickly prepared to go with a large, covered, plastic bin, a fish net and video camera. They found the loon near the north shore totally unable to move his head or dive. All he could do was paddle around. The fish line was wound around his entire body, and pinned his head to the left shoulder, with his tongue wound tight to his bill. Totally a gut-wrenching sight! Check out the photos. The guys knew they could use the net without injuring him because he couldn't fight them. He was quickly collected and upon arrival at our dock, I called Sue Meech, who was available and ready to help.

Sue is a Licensed Wildlife Custodian at Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre in Napanee, ON (613-354-0264, www.sandypineswildlife.org). SPWC operates on donations only, receiving no government grants.

We all piled into Steve's 15-passenger van (Steve, Dan, me, Lydia, Abigail, Joshua, Elizabeth and Daniel—and the very quiet loon), and headed out on our 25-mile journey to Napanee. The kids and I asked God to help the loon survive this ordeal.



Upon arrival, Sue very patiently started snipping away at the fish line, and eventually pulled several feet of line from his insides. Once he was free to move about, she put a sock over his head and proceeded to weigh and examine him. She said he was this year's loon, (not sure of gender) and appears to be in good health. All we needed to do was get him back to the lake ASAP and release him. He had been without food and water for at least three days.

Thursday, October 12 at 1:06 pm Dan removed the lid from the bin at the water's edge, and tipped it into the lake. The loon hesitated as he calculated his next move. He finally slipped into the water and just floated for maybe 50 seconds. All eyes and cameras were on him as we tried to be quiet. Then he made a powerful and quick dive and swam across our little bay. What an exhilarating (and teary) moment that was for each of us. Our loon must have been experiencing even more relief and excitement as he began the first day of the rest of his life. He hung around the bay for a few hours, and later ventured out into the lake. We have digital photos and video of this.



Friday afternoon my daughter's family of 7-1/2 with Molly, the dog, left for Rochester, NY. Saturday at 6:45 pm Dan and I witnessed our loon fly away, after watching him preparing his feathers for flight for quite a while out in the middle of the lake.

I hope this story, and these pictures, will cause fishermen to think twice before cutting a line or discarding fish line on the shores and in the waters. When people compromise the health and safety of our wildlife, other caring people are compelled to step in to help, which further traumatizes them. They are much better off being admired and respected from a distance. In the meantime Dan and I are so thankful to Sharyn, Steve and family, Sue Meech and God for their concern and love for this little helpless creature. God does indeed "see the little sparrows fall" and He does indeed answer our prayers for them.



Heather Kailburn

613-539-2802

kailcan@explornet.com This email address is being protected from spam bots, you need Javascript enabled to view it

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