



December 21, 2018

Dear Friend,

Greetings from a wintery Somes Pond! The Sanctuary has had another full year of conservation and education activities in our watershed and beyond. We have interesting news to share with you about loons, alewives, education programs, and other Sanctuary activities.

We had a mixed year of loon breeding success on Mt. Desert Island in 2018. Loon pairs established territories in most of the usual locations, but not all of them actually nested. Some pairs started nesting, but did not lay eggs. One egg was laid on the Eagle Lake nest, but it was abandoned by June 18th for unknown reasons. The first MDI loon chicks to hatch this year were on Somes Pond on June 12th. One only survived 5 days, likely falling prey to a large snapping turtle or large pickerel or bass. The second chick was looking fit and responsive but also did not survive, likely due to eagle predation or attempts of visiting/intruding loons to take over the territory. There are limited suitable breeding territories available here (and elsewhere) and competition can be fierce to obtain and keep one. One egg hatched on the Southern Neck Cove nest on Long Pond, but that chick only made it about two weeks. The Upper Hadlock pair produced two chicks, one of whom fledged in mid-September.

We built and deployed a nest platform this spring off Echo Lake Beach to help overcome chronic nest site selection problems with fluctuating water levels, raids from mammalian predators, and high human visitation/proximity. To our great delight, and that of thousands of observers, the breeding pair took to the platform immediately and raised two chicks all the way to fledging in late October! Our total 2018 MDI loon production was 7 eggs hatched and 3 surviving to fledge. Not a big number, but there are years when all MDI territories combined produce no surviving chicks. Last year we had 6 eggs hatch and 4 chicks fledge.

We started a new MDI Loon Watch interpretive program at Echo Lake this summer. Sanctuary Staff and volunteers teamed up with Acadia National Park (ANP) Interpretive Staff to help visitors learn more about loon ecology, behavior, and conservation. Early to mid-summer we had staff present on the beach to share information and help with observations. Over 2,300 visitors were able to use binoculars and spotting scopes to get good views without having to be very close. We are hoping the loon pair uses the nest raft again next season!

The MDI loon observation group continues to gain members and contributors. We share our observations, photos, questions, and love of loons. Send an email to somesmeynell@gmail.com if you would like to join! We are raising funds to band as many of next summer's chicks and unbanded adults as possible, so we can identify birds with certainty and learn more about their behavior, movements, and survival.

Alewife arrived in Somes Harbor at the beginning of May this year. Similar to the past two years, we had high stream flows from heavy late winter and early spring rains. Despite the high volume of water cascading over the Somesville Mill Pond dam



*Dedicated to Environmental
Conservation and Education*

Founder

Virginia Somes Sanderson
(1898 – 1990)

Board of Directors

William Ferm
Robert Fernald
E. Pat Foster
Maureen Fournier
Judith Goldstein
Daniel S. Kane
David MacDonald
Jerry Miller
Alan Parks
Chris Petersen
Carole Plenty, President
Julianna Reddish Bennoch
Roberta Sharp
Jesse Wheeler

Director

William Helprin

57 Pretty Marsh Road
PO Box 171
Mt. Desert, ME 04660
(207) 244-4027
somesmeynell@gmail.com
www.somesmeynell.org
Find us on Facebook:
Somes Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary

(over)

and blasting down the fish ladder, the first alewife ascended on May 12th, the same day last year's run began. That first day, 345 alewife entered the Mill Pond when we opened the gate, on their way to Somes Pond and Long Pond to spawn. By the end of the migration's first week we had counted 11,272. Volunteers and Sanctuary Staff counted 37,678 alewife entering the Mill Pond and 12,745 (33.8% of total) at Long Pond this year. Last year's count numbers were 39,813 (MP) and 8,669 (LP, 21.8%). We'll see if next spring's migration numbers jump to a new level or stay around 40,000. Hopefully, they will overwinter successfully and we'll have a big return.

Maintaining fish passageways around the four dams is critical to the continued success of alewife recovery in this watershed, and movement of other species as well. It is not easy work, as high flows from big rain storms and freeze-thaw cycles degrade the fish ladder walls, obstructions of all sizes block passage, and low summer water levels make out-migration impossible at times. Constant monitoring and adjustments have to be made throughout the year. Thanks to our many partners and volunteers who help us do this!

We had a great second year with the Floating Classroom Program for 140 MDI School District 8th graders. This fall we added to the comprehensiveness of the field day by engaging students in examinations of high and low quality watersheds, more sampling technique prep work before the Somes Pond visit, and more data analysis afterwards. As was the case last year, we had help from Park Education Rangers and Sanctuary Volunteers. The experience provides students with a memorable day of science practice and team work. It is also a lot of fun on the water! These students will never look at Somes Pond or another lake without the benefit of a better understanding of what is happening around and under the surface of the water.

This September we hosted another successful aquatic invasive species long weekend with our ANP and Lake Stewards of Maine partners, and many volunteers. We finished the three year project of surveying all MDI lakes for aquatic invaders, and did not find any invasive species. This is our baseline picture of what is going on and we'll have to stay vigilant for new introductions, which can happen very easily. With the help of 20+ experienced aquatic botanists from around the state helping us, we have developed our local ability to monitor conditions. Next year we are hoping that our "local and away" combined team can help inventory lakes in Hancock County that haven't been surveyed in a while or get lots of boat and seaplane use. What happens off MDI can significantly change our lake water quality as easily as one boat leaving an infested lake with hitchhiking exotic species and entering one of ours. It is important to know what is happening in our greater ecological neighborhood.

Our Courtesy Boat Inspection (CBI) prevention efforts at Long Pond are aimed at directing boaters to check their own boats, trailers, and fishing equipment each time they leave and enter a water body. "Clean, drain, and dry" equipment that goes in and out of the water and "remove all plants" are the basic messages. This year we increased our hours of coverage significantly thanks to great volunteer help. If you would like to join the CBI effort, even for a couple of hours per week next summer, please contact the Sanctuary.

Thanks to all volunteers, partners, and supporters of the Sanctuary for your important role in making the Sanctuary as valuable as can be to local residents, teachers, students, visitors, and of course, the wildlife that depend on our good stewardship. We will keep building on our foundation of wildlife conservation and education in our immediate watershed and beyond, with your help. Thank you very much to all who have contributed financially so far this year and for your continued support. We couldn't do it without you!

Sincerely,



William Helprin, Director



Fish Passage Maintenance



Floating Classroom Sampling



Frozen Classroom Play