

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The Prairie Naturalist

Great Plains Natural Science Society

2022

Review of *Loon Lessons: Uncommon Encounters with the Great Northern Diver*, by James D. Paruk

Kristin Bianchini

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tpn>



Part of the [Biodiversity Commons](#), [Botany Commons](#), [Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Commons](#), [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), [Systems Biology Commons](#), and the [Weed Science Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Natural Science Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Naturalist by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

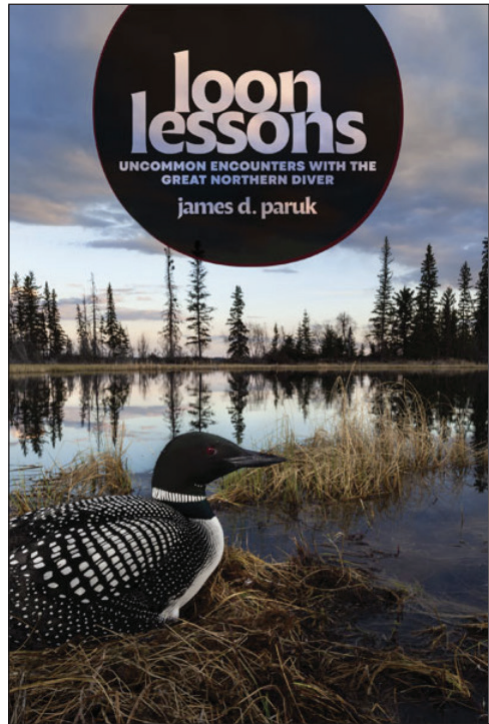
Loon Lessons: Uncommon Encounters with the Great Northern Diver, by James D. Paruk. 2021. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. 221 pages. \$24.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-5179-0940-6.

Gavia immer Brunnich (Common Loon) is a bird that has captivated bird watchers, wildlife enthusiasts, campers, cottagers, and others interested in the natural world for centuries. The loon also features prominently in Native American mythology. For many, the loon symbolizes the wildness of the north, and it is often used as a sentinel of lake health. Indeed, the Common Loon has inspired a wealth of literature, both scientific and popular, describing this species' ecology, behavior, and fitness in the face of environmental changes. To this literature, *Loon Lessons: Uncommon Encounters with the Great Northern Diver* adds a complete and accurate account of loon behavior, natural history, and conservation that will appeal to both long-time loon enthusiasts and to those looking for a first-rate introduction to this species.

Loon Lessons begins with a discussion of the evolution of the Common Loon, including an overview of its ancestors and close relatives. It goes on to discuss loon anatomy and the physiological adaptations that allow loons to be excellent swimmers and fish predators. Five chapters are devoted to a thorough examination of loon breeding behavior. Later chapters review our current understanding of loon migration and wintering behavior. The book ends with a discussion of some important threats to loons and ways in which people can help conserve Common Loon populations. Numerous grayscale images throughout the book and a section of beautiful full-color pictures illustrate and help to explain these topics and to enhance information found in the text.

A major strength of *Loon Lessons* is that readers will learn about Common Loons from an author who was actively involved in—and most often leading—the cutting-edge research that gathered the information found in this book. Paruk is a leading expert on Common Loons, and his experience and deep understanding of loons are evident in this well-researched and highly informative read. *Loon Lessons* provides a comprehensive look at relevant and current Common Loon information, and it provides an excellent update to Judith McIntyre's (1988) classic *The Common Loon: Spirit of the Northern Lakes*. *Loon Lessons* also raises questions and highlights what remains unknown about the Common Loon. These questions help to engage the reader and to get them thinking about the mysteries that continue to drive ongoing loon research. In reading *Loon Lessons*, both novice and experienced loon watchers will enjoy gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of these fascinating birds.

Moreover, *Loon Lessons* is a highly enjoyable read. Paruk's passion for loons is unmistakable. Even those not already captivated by the Common Loon will find the author's



enthusiasm for this species contagious. Paruk is an excellent storyteller and teacher, and his remarkable, often humorous, and at times very moving, on-the-ground accounts of personal encounters with loons help to ground complex ecological concepts in a relatable, human perspective. They also highlight the devotion required to conduct research on Common Loon behavior and ecology.

Loon Lessons is a book that will make readers eager to get into nature and to observe loons with a deeper understanding of how and why they do what they do. There is a reason that people love loons, and in learning more about this species, readers of *Loon Lessons* are likely to come away even more captivated by these incredible birds.

Book Reviewer: Kristin Bianchini, Wildlife Biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Gatineau, Quebec J8Y 3Z5, Canada. kristin.bianchini@ec.gc.ca

Literature Cited

McIntyre, J.W. 1988. *The Common Loon, Spirit of Northern Lakes*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, USA.