

Laura Richards, Nevada Department of Wildlife
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Walker Lake Water Bird Census

Nevada Department of Wildlife has conducted a census of common loons and other water birds on Walker Lake since the spring of 1988. Populations of loons and other water birds on Walker Lake are monitored on a yearly basis during the spring and fall migrations. Tui chub are the loons major prey base and the only native self-sustaining fish in Walker Lake. Without reproduction, Tui chub will be approaching a size class that loons cannot consume. Spring and fall surveys during 2005 were conducted on Walker Lake for loons and other water birds and the results are tabulated in Table 1.

Common loon numbers have steadily declined since 1997 on Walker Lake. This year the lowest fall count was recorded. Low loon numbers since 2002 is directly proportional to the lack of recruitment in the Tui chub population. The stress from a long migration coupled with lack of suitable prey has put this cohort at a high risk for mortality. These birds are likely to be staging at Walker Lake for a shorter period of time. Alternate water bodies with a suitable prey base located in central Nevada are Pyramid Lake and Topaz Lake. In contrast to the decrease in loon numbers American white pelican numbers have sharply increased since 2002. The previous three-year spring pelican counts were the highest on record. Pelicans are able to consume considerably larger prey fish than the loon. The youngest age classes of Tui chub are approaching a maximum size range that loons and smaller water birds can consume.

The spring Western and Clark's grebe numbers were the highest since the 1999 count. Eared grebes were reported for the spring and fall of 2005 and both showed over a 100 percent increase from the previous count. Cormorant numbers on Walker Lake since 1988 have fluctuated greatly between years.

Watchable Wildlife

Walker Lake Loon Festival

The annual Walker Lake Loon Festival was held on April 16, 2005. The boat tours sponsored by Nevada Department of Wildlife took 185 people out on the water to view loons and other water birds. This event has been a popular wildlife viewing activity since 1989. The focus of the festival is the hundreds of loons that use Walker Lake as a staging area in the spring. Presentations are given on the fish and bird resource by Nevada Department of Wildlife and Native American story-tellers. This is an important wildlife observation event and an effective way to promote the non-consumptive use of Nevada's resource.