

Gaviidae on Stamps

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Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

The haunting wail of the common loon (*Gavia immer*), the plaintive response from the mate across the cold woodland lake and the crisp northern air at dusk, thrill nature lovers every spring in north America. Those who most admire this lovely red-eyed bird with the iridescent green highlights on his polka dotted body feel the mystic association of the loon and the natural world. In Native American folklore the loon holds an iconic role as a creature who can cross between the tangible world and the spiritual to benefit mankind. So it comes as no surprise to learn the *Gavia immer* has profound meaning for those who know him.

What many loon lovers may not know is that in the late twentieth century the common loon came to the brink of extinction. Since the loon eats fish and amphibians, through them he ingests lead that has already entered the food chain via the lakes and streams along migration routes to the Gulf of Mexico. In time, the lead destroys the bird's liver, resulting in huge kill offs that have prompted serious conservation efforts to save the bird from extinction. Although loon numbers are now increasing, they have not, and probably never will reach previous levels.

Today, the more exotic pacific, red-throated, yellow-billed, and arctic loons face similar challenges: shrinking numbers due to habitat loss, global warming, commercial fishing and a variety of other human interferences. Thus, the avian species that have survived since the dinosaurs remains beloved but endangered.



Black-throated Loon (*Gavia arctica*)



Pacific Loon
(*Gavia pacifica*)



Red-throated Loon
(*Gavia stellata*)



Yellow-billed Loon
(*Gavia adamsii*)

Image size adjusted for clarity and inclusion.