Lay My Egg

This activity is part of the **Water Conservation** theme

What's the purpose of this activity?

This activity helps students become more aware of the variety of birds which utilize water bodies and to emphasis that many of these birds require different types of habitat for other stages of their lifecycle, such as nesting. Students will also get some identification skills through bird profiles and photos as well as an opportunity to link these birds to their preferred nesting habitat with true to size and colour eggs.

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Key Messages:

- Water is home to much more than just ducks: mergansers, loons, waders, shorebirds and even some raptors depend on our water systems and the surrounding habitats as well.
- Although many bird species spend a majority of their time on or in the water, other types of habitats may be just a crucial for their survival.

Materials

Permanent:

- Laminated waterfowl poster
- Nests/Baskets (8-10)
- Life Sized plywood cut outs of featured water birds
- Laminated bird name tags
- Laminated picture/photo of each featured bird (optional)
- Laminated eggs of featured birds → with associated numbers and Velcro tabs on back
- Laminated "Lay My Egg!" cards → with associated numbers and Velcro tabs on back
- whistle

What will I be doing?

You will introduce and explain the activity and provide general supervision while the students are placing their eggs. At the end of the activity you will take up the activity with the students and correct any mistakes.

1- Ask the students: *"What types of wildlife use water habitats such as this lake?"* (Answers: moose, beaver. fish, turtles (reptiles), frogs (amphibians), birds, etc.) Explain to the group that we are going to focus on birds.

2- Ask the students *"What kinds of birds use water habitats?"* (Possible answers: ducks, herons, seagulls, loons, red winged blackbirds, etc.). Most people think of ducks, and you can point to the Waterfowl Poster, and there are a lot of different types of ducks.

3- Introduce the activity. Explain that their objective is to find the right nest for the eggs that are in their basket. Attached to the back of each egg is a "Lay My Egg!" card. On each card there is a description of a bird, some of its habits and where that particular bird likes to nest. The students will walk down the trail and see life sized cut-outs of different birds that are placed in the preferred nesting habitat of that bird and have their names listed on a name tag. Using the written descriptions on the "Lay My Egg!" card, the student will try to find the appropriate bird cut-out and then place the egg which is attached to the back of the "Lay My Egg!" card in the "nest" basket beside the bird profile.

4- Pair up students or have them work in small groups. Give each group a basket with 2-4 eggs/"Lay My Egg!" cards (divide up the set of eggs/Lay My Egg! Cards among the groups). Give the students 5-7 minutes to "lay their eggs" and then regroup them at the start of the trail by blowing the whistle

5- As a group walk through the trail, stopping at each bird profile and checking the nest basket (bring the spare set of eggs). There may be one egg in the basket, there may be more than one or there may be none … depending on how the students did in finding their eggs' homes. Have the students who placed their egg in that basket read the description on the "Lay My Egg!" Card and explain why they thought that this egg belonged to this bird. If it is right … Excellent! If it is the wrong egg, then go through the description together and show

the students the right egg from the spare set you are carrying.

Collect the eggs and cards and place them back in the basket before the next group comes.

Background Information

Some general facts on common water birds of Haliburton:

Common Loon

- Surface dives - Floats and then dives, swims underwater using feet and/or wings, Legs set far back and far apart therefore walking is difficult. Heavy bodies and require a running start on water for take off
- Eats fish and some aquatic invertebrates and crustaceans
- Territorial displays - Bill dipping, splash-diving, "penguin dancing" (vertical position with wings outspread). Yodel call
- Nest on aquatic vegetation at edge of shallow water (platform nest)
- Usually lays 1-2 eggs

Mallard Duck

- Dabbler or "puddle duck" - Floating on surface in shallow water, pivots headfirst downward while raising hindquarters above water to reach food on or near substrate (feeds by tipping tail-up)
- Feed on aquatic plants, seeds, aquatic insects and snails
- Do not require a running start to take off from water but spring directly into flight
- Nests in uplands near water in the concealment of grass, cattails or other vegetation, Nest is a scrape
- Usually lays 7-10 eggs

Hooded Merganser

- Surface dives - Floats and then dives, swims underwater using feet and/or wings
- Eats mainly fish and some crustaceans, insects, molluscs and inverts
- Breeds in forested habitats near water
- Nests in tree cavities near water, lines cavity with grass, leaves and down
- Usually lays 10-12 eggs

Great Blue Heron

- Wader - long legs, neck and bills for stalking food in shallow water
- Stalk & Strike - Stands motionless on bank or in water and spears fish, frogs, etc nests in trees
- Breeds in marshes, swamps, lakes, river
- Nests in trees - Platform nest
- Eats mostly fish but will also eat small mammals, nestlings, frogs
- Usually lays 3-5 eggs

Wood Duck

- Perching duck - equipped with sharp claws and can be seen perching on snags, stumps or branches
- Dabbles - Floating on surface in shallow water, pivots headfirst downward while raising hindquarters above water to reach submerged plants or animals on or near substrate
- Eats seeds, acorns, berries, grain, aquatic and terrestrial insects and other invertebrates
- Breeds in wooded swamp, flooded forest, pond, marsh
- Nest in tree cavity - Lines nest with wood chips and down
- Usually lays 10-15 eggs

Osprey

- Raptor, bird of prey - The only raptor in area which plunges into water for food
- High dives drops from height into water to catch fish
- Hovers at 30' to 100' and dives for fish but will also eat rodents, birds, small vertebrates, and crustaceans
- nests in trees - breeds along rivers and lakes, platform nest of sticks
- usually lays 3 eggs

American Bittern

- Wader - long legs, neck and bills for stalking food in shallow water
- Stalk & Strike - Stands motionless on bank or in water and spears fish, frogs, etc breeds in emergent vegetation of marshes
- nest on dry ground above water or mud in tall emergent vegetation
- eats aquatic invertebrates and small vertebrates
- usually lays 4-5 eggs

Kingfisher

- High dives - drops from height into water to catch fish
- eats fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects, young birds, mice and aquatic invertebrates
- breeds along watercourses
- nests in a borrow in vertical bank near water, prefers sandy soil
- usually lays 6-7 eggs
- eggs are a white colour

General egg characteristics

- *white to pale blue eggs* - usually laid by birds that nest in holes or covered nests, it is thought that the

light colouring enables the parent to see their eggs more clearly in a dark environment. Also laid by birds which cover their eggs with vegetation when leaving the nest, such as ducks and grebes, or those birds that rarely leave their eggs unattended because the do not need colour or patterned shells to hide their eggs from predators

- *strongly coloured (ranges of colours from yellow to red to brown to olive green) and patterned eggs* - usually laid by birds that nest in exposed sites on the ground (like waders). The colour and pattern is camouflage. Birds which nest in large colonies lay eggs with individual patterns which may help the parent to recognize their own eggs
- although eggs can be irregular shape in some cases birds rely on egg shape to help lead to a successful hatching - conical eggs can be packed closely together in the nest so that they all receive maximum warmth from the parent bird
- triangular, or pear shaped, eggs roll around in circles thereby avoiding rolling off of rock ledges or cliffs

Clean Up procedures

Bird cut-outs can stay in place for the 3 days if they have been secured (ask volunteer supervisor)
Nest baskets should be collected and counted (8-10)
If there are laminated photos with each plywood cut out, these should be collected, counted and put into proper container/envelope
Laminated name tags should be counted and collected then placed in proper container/envelope
Laminated eggs and associated “Lay My Egg?” cards should be counted and put in proper containers/envelopes