Loon lure, noise annoy & grill gaffe

By Jackie Davis

WE USED to have loons on our lake, and we don’t see them anymore. Can we do anything to lure them back?
—DONNA GOLD, HUNTSVILLE, ONT.

We assumed the answer to this was, “Sure. Build a loon platform!” But it turns out that bringing loons to your lake isn’t as easy as getting ghosts to play baseball in your cornfield. If you build it, they won’t give a damn.

“Just plunking down a loon platform won’t work,” says Kathy Jones of the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey with Bird Studies Canada. Platforms are a good way to provide nesting spots in specific situations, for example, on a lake with fluctuating water levels. But it’s a solution for habitat-poor loons that are already on a lake, says Vincent Spagnuolo, a wildlife research biologist with the Biodiversity Research Institute’s Center for Loon Conservation, which researches loon populations in North America.

Keep in mind that a loon pair can disappear from a lake for natural reasons. Sometimes they split up, and both move away. “It’s called ‘natural divorce,’” says Spagnuolo. “It occurs from time to time, if nesting fails or the chicks die. The pair bond weakens, and the loons go their separate ways. It’s oddly similar to what can happen with humans.”

This sad scenario at least means that there may be nothing wrong with your lake. Be patient. After a few years, new loons could move in. In the meantime, avoid disturbing areas where the old pair might have nested, says Spagnuolo. The newcomers would likely pick these same primo spots. You don’t want to do anything that would spook them away.

On the other hand, loons will also abandon a lake if the habitat becomes unsuitable—lots of algal blooms; sudden, rapid shoreline development; excessive boat traffic and nest-swamping boat wake; or a drop in the fish population—and they can’t adapt. Can you undo some of this damage by following lake stewardship best practices, which will help return the shoreline to a natural state, boost marshy vegetation, and decrease the level of phosphates in the water? Hopefully, yes, if you get your lake association and neighbours on board. Will this lure the loons back? Hard to say. “But doing any of these things will make the lake a nicer place for the wildlife, fish, and any other birds,” says Jones. So it’s totally worth the effort.

EVERY Saturday night, the water-access restaurant across the river blasts either the radio or a mediocre singer–guitar player. When I politely spoke to the owner, he said he understood that he
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MY BARBECUE’S propane tank is full, and the knob is turned, but the gas isn’t flowing properly. I can’t find any leaks (or any other problems at all). Could something be blocking the line?—REXWORTH, PETERBOROUGH, ONT.

Assuming your gas grill has a venturi burner system, the culprit may be a clog in the venturi tubes—the tubes that feed gas and air to the barbecue’s burners. Dirt, insects, and spiders—in particular, their webs—and in particular, in the spring—can block these.

It can block the line—something be blocking the line?—REXWORTH, PETERBOROUGH, ONT.

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