



## 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

## COTTAGE Q&A

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could play the music until 11 p.m. Do restaurants have special noise privileges?

—BEVERLEY TYNDALL, VIA EMAIL

Mostly, no. “There is no specific legislation in terms of licensed premises in Canada,” says David Martin, an associate professor at Ryerson University’s Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management in Toronto. “Bars and restaurants must comply with local bylaws on noise, which in most communities is 11 p.m.” Check your municipality’s bylaws (usually these are posted online). “If the noise is going beyond that, a person would have every right to call the bylaw officer,” says Martin.

Let’s assume that it won’t come to this. “It sounds like there’s an opportunity for compromise here,” says Michael van Grondelle, the head of the Restaurant and Hotel Management program with Saskatchewan Polytechnic in Saskatoon. “I always believe that as a hospitality business, we need to be a good neighbour, because everybody is a potential

customer. We need to be able to work with people to ensure that we are all happy.”

Maybe the restaurant could turn the music down at 9 or 10 p.m. Expecting no music at all is probably unrealistic. You may not love spending your Saturday evenings listening to Top 40 or ’90s slow jams or somebody’s acoustic guitar cover of “Starboy,” but other people do. Other people might actually be going to the restaurant to hear this.

The restaurant owner will probably be more inclined to change if you can show evidence that other lake neighbours—who are also potential customers—are bothered by the music too. “One complaint doesn’t always mean a lot,” says van Grondelle. “If you had 20 or 30 cabin owners with the same complaint, he might feel differently.”

Keep things casual, not confrontational. Martin suggests a “kindly worded letter” with a signed petition to get the ball rolling on a conversation.

**THERE’S** a lot I love about the idea of building a cottage from shipping containers. As I imagine it, it would take

less time to build, and it would be cheaper than building from scratch. Is this true? And could it still be insulated?

—ROB MAURIN, MUSKOKA, ONT.

All those things can absolutely be true—though it depends a little on the cottage that you want to build.

Standard used containers are typically either 8 by 20 feet or 8 by 40 feet and cost from \$2,000 to \$4,000. One of the simplest ways to turn one into a livable cabin is to leave the main doors on but install sliding glass doors behind them, says Adam Hellicar, the owner of Honey-Box, a company that designs container cabins in Victoria. “It can be very bright and very nice. And you can make the inside look like whatever you want.” But the outside will still look like a shipping container. “For some people, that look—with dents, scratches, and some rust—is all part of the character and charm,” says Hellicar. If you want to cabin-ify the container, with exterior siding and a pointy roof and lots of windows and a deck, the project becomes a little bigger. In which case, it may be no different—time- and cost-wise—than constructing

a small building from scratch, says Hellicar. “If you don’t want it to look like a container, you might not be the best person to *have* a container.”

Chris Gyuk, the owner of Dynamic Carpentry in Kingston, Ont., used an 8-by-20-foot container for his recent bunkie project. “In a lot of ways, it’s cheaper and faster because you have the external shell already.” The 140 sq. ft. of space inside gives him a main living and sleeping area; a kitchenette; a bathroom; and a utility room with a hot-water heater and an electrical panel. He used rough-sawn pine, sanded and white-washed, for the ceiling, and oak for the hardwood flooring. He was able to insulate it up to R40, using rigid-foam in the floor, spray foam in the walls, and a combination of spray foam and batt insulation in the ceiling. It took him less than six weeks, “start to finish,” says Gyuk. “But I put a lot of thought into what I was going to do beforehand.”

Be choosy when shopping for a used container, says Hellicar. “Used” ones are often about 10 years old and are water-tight and structurally sound. They may,

however, smell, says Hellicar. “If I were going that route, I’d want to cherry-pick mine.” (“New” containers cost at least \$1,500 more, and they’re actually still used, because they’ve made a one-way trip to Canada.)

Two other factors can derail a shipping container plan: strict municipal building regulations and lack of access to your site. Getting a container to a very remote or water-access property isn’t always possible. Or cheap. “I guess if you had the money, you could bring it in on a helicopter,” says Hellicar.

**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?

—KEVIN KENT, 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.

“Spiders love propane,” says Mike Rumolo, a co-owner of Dickson Barbeque Centre in Toronto. Well, that’s nice for them. But a slightly blocked tube is annoying—it limits the amount of heat that the burner produces. And a fully blocked tube gets crazy dangerous. “The gas finds the blockage and then comes back out, towards the control knobs,” says Rumolo. “You can get a flashback fire.” The solution is to remove the affected burner and clean out the venturi tubes with a specialized, curved venturi brush (check hardware stores).

It’s also possible that your barbecue tank’s safety switch—which restricts the flow of propane between tank and burner if the system detects a problem—has been accidentally triggered, maybe because someone didn’t start the barbecue properly last time, says Rumolo. (Someone? Whatever. It was totally the spiders.) To reset: turn everything off, disconnect, and wait five to 10 minutes; reconnect the tank’s hose, and try again. ➔

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