

RED-THROATED LOON RESCUED FROM MUD PUDDLE IN FORT NELSON, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Myrna Blake

PO Box 2002, Fort Nelson, BC V0C 1R0

On 4 October 2007 Gary Foster, a local businessman in Fort Nelson, British Columbia, spotted a forlorn-sounding loon in a small mud hole behind the True Valu hardware store. He called Bill Craddock, owner of Royal LePage, who has an interest in birds. Knowing that loons don't spend much time in mud puddles Bill tactfully suggested it might not be a loon but Gary insisted it sure sounded like a loon. Bill went over and sure enough there was a loon floating in a deep, dirty, water-filled rut (Figure 1). It had snowed heavily the night before so the bird probably came down in that weather and it was obvious that the stranded bird did not have enough room to taxi across the water and fly off.



Figure 1. Red-throated Loon forced to land in a mud puddle in Fort Nelson, BC. during poor weather. 4 October 2007 (Myrna Blake). BC Photo 3550.

Bill called me and thought the loon could be caught with a net but I suggested we try catching it in a blanket since a net was not immediately available. The rut was deep enough for the loon to totally submerge. Bill thought it was best to get the loon out of the water before we tried to capture it. And that

is what he did. The loon soon scampered quickly across the ground out onto the street where we were able to pin its wings to its sides and then cover it with the blanket (Figure 2). In gratitude, the loon nipped Bill's lips!



Figure 2. Bill Craddock holding rescued Red-throated Loon. Fort Nelson, BC. 4 October 2007 (Myrna Blake).

We decided to drive the bird to a local lake, appropriately known as "Loon Lake", where it would be released. During the ride to the lake the feisty loon came out of the blanket and dropped onto the floor in the back of the vehicle. At the lake we re-wrapped the bird, carried it near the water, and watched it run across a light blanket of snow to the lake (Figure 3). It seemed healthy and vigorous and once on the water the loon flapped its wings and swam away (Figure 4).

The following day I visited the lake and arrived in time to see the loon flying in short circuits around the lake before dropping back into the water. There are no fish in this lake so the loon could not feed. On the morning of 6 October the loon had departed no doubt continuing its southward migration.

I forwarded the photographs of the loon to Wayne Campbell who identified it as a juvenile Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*). This species is considered a very rare to rare spring and autumn transient in the interior regions of British Columbia (Campbell et

al. 1990). It also appears the rescued Red-throated Loon is the first occurrence for this species in the Fort Nelson area (Erskine and Davidson 1976; G. S. Davidson pers. comm.).



Figure 3. Myrna Blake releasing Red-throated Loon at “Loon” Lake near Fort Nelson, BC. 4 October 2007 (Bill Craddock).



Figure 4. Safely returned to a familiar environment, the rescued Red-throated Loon adjusts its feathers before swimming away. “Loon” Lake near Fort Nelson, BC. 4 October 2007 (Myrna Blake).

Literature Cited

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About the Author

Myrna has lived most of her life in the “north” country, including the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory and from Manitoba to British Columbia. She prefers a small town to cities and since a child has enjoyed the outdoors with a passion for wildlife and photography. Her 30+-year career in real estate sales has spanned the North Country and since 1990 she has called Fort Nelson home.
