

6 ways to save cottage wildlife

1. Be a slow and low-polluting boater

When close to shore, always drive at a “no wake” speed (10 km/h within 30 metres of shore) to protect aquatic and shoreline nurseries from wave and prop action, and prevent erosion. Get your engine tested to ensure it meets or exceeds EPA 2007 standards. If you’re in the market for a new engine, four-strokes and direct-injection two-strokes are much cleaner than old-style two-strokes.

2. Post nesting- and spawning-area signs on your waterfront

Give a heads-up to boaters, especially visiting ones, about the critical habitats of birds and fish on your lake.

3. Get the lead out of the tackle box

Too often lead tackle ends up in the gullets of aquatic feeders such as loons; in fact, 25 per cent of loon deaths are caused by lead poisoning. Switch to non-lead sinkers and jigs and protect our cottage-country icon.

4. Keep the aliens away

Exotic species such as zebra mussels and dragonfish can wreak havoc when they arrive in a new lake environment, often hitchhiking on boat hulls and in live wells and bait buckets. Before you launch in a new lake, drain the bilge water and bait buckets and scrub the hull bottom to avoid transferring these alien species. If you use live bait, always use local species and never dump unused bait into the water.

5. Leave standing dead trees

Not just for woodpeckers, these “snags” are a veritable hotel for a host of other birds, mammals, and insects. Let them stand, unless they pose a safety hazard; if felled, leave them on the ground to decay, providing another source of food and habitat for creatures such as salamanders and chipmunks.

6. Create a wildlife corridor

Many animals and birds won’t cross open areas, needing a corridor of dense vegetation to get from the top of your lot to the water’s edge. Chart a course through the low-traffic areas of your property and fill in gaps with native shrubs, such as dogwood, grasses such as big bluestem or Canada wild rye, and flowers such as butterfly weed or blazing star, which will attract lots of birds and butterflies.

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