

## SECTION NINE: Wildlife

© Copyright 2001-2013 Mike Tremblay / Last Updated: 2/5/2013

This is by no means a comprehensive or scientific list of wildlife on the island, nor is it meant to be. It is my experience and some pictures of wildlife most commonly experienced on the island and my impressions. DO NOT feed the wildlife on the island no matter how close they come and how "cute" they beg. This can only cause problems for them in the long run.

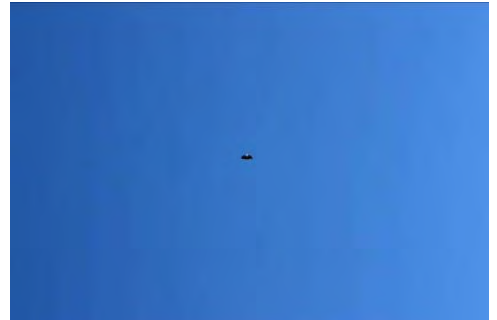
This being an island, there are very few mammals on the island as it is and not easy to get to. The only mammals on the island are, deer mouse (the only mouse found surprisingly), 6 species of bat, beaver, fox, muskrat, red squirrel, snowshoe hare, moose, wolves, river otter, marten, weasel and mink. There were once coyote and caribou, but they have since died out, presumably when wolves and moose came.

There are many bird species that can be seen on the island. However, the majority of them are "nesting" only (summer residents) or "migratory" (passing through in spring and fall). There are very few resident birds. Some of the residents that can usually be heard or seen are the great horned owl, several species of woodpeckers, gray jay (Canadian jay) and raven. In the spring and fall you will undoubtedly hear geese flying over.

Like mammals, there are very few species of amphibians and reptiles on the island. They are eastern newt, spotted salamander, American toad, spring peeper, 5 species of frog, painted turtle, red-bellied snake and garter snake.

### Bald Eagle

Eagles can be seen somewhat frequently on the island, definitely more than on the mainland. My usual sightings have been along the Lake Superior shoreline. The most thrilling sighting I had was on the Voyageur, when we were idling down McCargoe Cove toward the dock, when an eagle came down and scooped up a large fish from the water and flew away carrying it in its talons as the fish was wildly thrashing about. I have frequently seen them along the north shore near the Huginnin Cove area, especially along the shore of the Huginnin Cove East Trail.

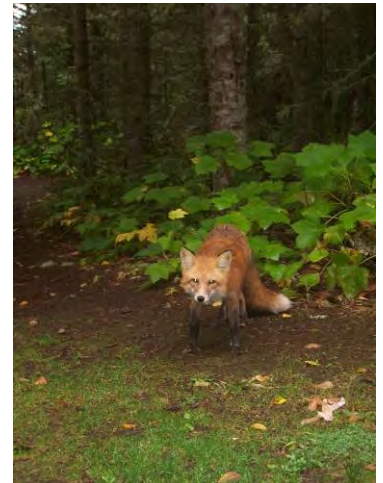
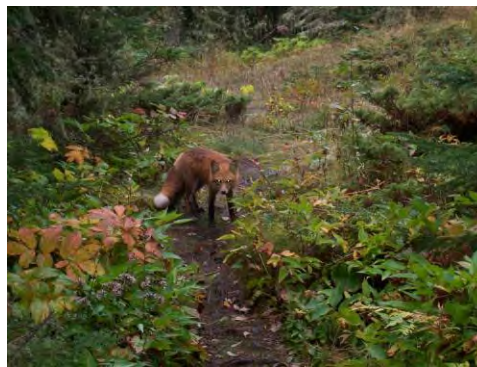


### Fox

Red foxes are quite common on the island. They can be seen frequently, especially in areas where the most people frequent. In those areas, they have very little fear and will come right into camp. In the backcountry, they tend to be more timid and will avoid you.

Foxes are known for grabbing things and taking off with them. Do not leave things lying around, especially when they are present (which is in most of the popular campgrounds, especially Washington Creek and Rock Harbor). I once had one grab a platypus with some water in it. I followed it into the woods until it dropped it, where I found a pile of things including socks and a metal canteen. When I am in the campgrounds, I keep things picked up when I am around and if I leave, I make sure everything is put somewhere safe. No matter where I am, I make sure I tie my boots together and to something. They like the leather in boots and that is something you really cannot afford to lose.

Concerning feeding foxes, there is a saying you may hear on the island, "a fed fox is a dead fox". This is true because they will become more aggressive and may have to be put down, plus they will not know how to fend for themselves when there aren't any people there.



They eat squirrels, mice, birds, snakes, salamanders and some insects. They also feed on moose carcasses, when possible. They are sometimes preyed on by wolves and live one year on average, but can live up to five or six years.

## Loons

Loons can be seen and are almost always heard anywhere on the island, when near the water. In the spring, they nest on islands in nearly all the lakes, as well as the bays and coves on the Lake Superior shoreline. Males are usually slightly larger than females, but it is hard to tell the difference. Loons are particularly vulnerable to actions by humans and may abandon a nest if humans get too close.



This is from a poster hung at one of the campgrounds:

"A good rule is if a loon alters its behavior when you approach, you are too close. A loon who feels threatened may move away, sink low in the water, frantically flap its wings, give a tremolo call, or repeatedly dive around your boat. Any of these are signs that you are too close.

From late May to mid-July small islands and protected coves should be avoided. These are potential nesting sites. If you see a loon on shore it is most likely incubating eggs. If it is crouched low with its head down, it is feeling threatened and is trying to hide from you. If you see a loon slip into the water, you have scared it off its nest.

From late June through August, watch for adult loons with chicks. For the first few weeks, loon chicks are small fluff balls of brown downy feathers. As they grow, the young will look similar in shape to the adults, but with subdued gray and white coloring. Adult loons who are preoccupied with avoiding people spend less time feeding their young, decreasing the chicks' chances of surviving their first critical weeks.

Four different calls of the loon, each with its own meaning:

**Tremolo:** A high-pitched "laugh". This is the call of a threatened loon. It may be directed at other loons, cormorants, people, or anything that is perceived as a threat.

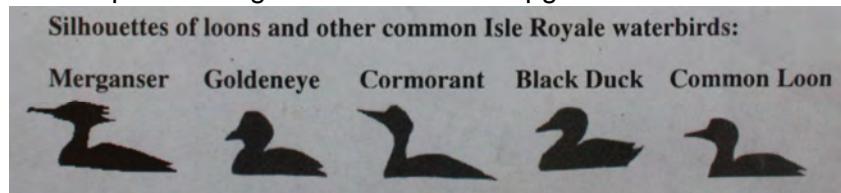
**Yodel:** A call that starts with one long note followed by repeating short notes. This call is used exclusively by male loons and signifies a defense of a territory, and may be as unique to an individual as a fingerprint.

**Wail:** Frequently mistaken for howling wolves, this call is often heard at night all around Isle Royale. Its meaning appears to be communication between mates, indicating an interest in gathering.

**Hoot:** A single, short, soft hoot. This is often communication between mates or between parents and chicks, it also occurs in social groups."

This text and the picture below are also from a poster hung at a one of the campgrounds:

"Unlike mergansers, Black Ducks and Common Goldeneye's, which you may see with up to 20 chicks, a loon pair will hatch only one or two young each year, Loon parents are protective of their young,



often carrying small downy chicks on their backs. Mergansers have a long, narrow red bill and often a shaggy appearance. Goldeneye bodies are more squat and have a somewhat circular head in profile. Cormorants are all black with a yellow face; they also have an upturned pale bill when sitting on the water. Black Ducks look very similar to Mallards, but are darker brown in color. Common Loons, with their classic black and white patterning, look streamlined with a longer body and head."

## Moose

Moose can be seen in many parts of the island at any time. In the springtime, they seem to be more skittish and prone to run as soon as you are detected. They will also go up on high ridges for the plants just coming out in the spring. In the summertime, the best time to see them is in the early

morning and evening because as the temperature rises, they will stop moving and look for cool places to rest. In the fall, they seem to care less about people and have other things on their mind (the "rut"). In my years going to the island, I have seen the population rise and fall and have seen the moose population change, greatly. It used to be that Feldtmann Lake, Washington Harbor and Chickenbone Lake always had moose around. Lately, with the balsam fir being so over-browsed in these areas, I have not seen many. Most recently (2008), I had my first trip ever, where I did not see a single moose. I used to say you are guaranteed to see a moose, but with the recent population decline, I now say, you are almost guaranteed to see one.

Surprisingly, moose can be amazingly hard to see considering their size. They blend into the forest very well. That also makes it very easy to walk up on one and startle both it and you. This has happened to me quite a few times. I have literally come within 3 feet of a moose before we saw each other and it is not a good feeling (for either one I suppose). The first thing to do when you see a moose is to look for cover. Cover being a good size tree to put between you and the moose. If you stand next to or behind a tree, they tend to lose track of you. One fall, during the rut, I had a bull moose going in circles around a large birch tree with me. I am pretty sure he thought I was another moose after his "girl". I finally just jumped behind another tree, stood still, and he went on his way. I've also been stuck waiting on a trail while a moose stood there for close to a half hour before moving on and letting me pass.

Me with a Bull and Cow Moose in the fall.



Bull Moose walking in the water in the fall.



That same Bull Moose swimming across to visit us.



Bull Moose in late September.



Cow and twin calves at Washington Creek in the fall.



Spring Bull Moose with a good example of winter tick effects.



Bull Moose's antlers at the beginning of May.

