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### FAST FACTS

**NAME:** Pacific loon

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Gavia pacifica*

**AVERAGE WEIGHT:** 1000 to 2500 g

**AVERAGE WINGSPAN:** 110 to 128 cm

**AVERAGE LENGTH:** 58 to 74 cm

**DID YOU KNOW?** Pacific loons often flock in groups of several thousand. They are also said to be the most sociable of the loon species.

### PHYSIOLOGY

The Pacific loon is one of five loon species and perhaps the most abundant loon in North America. It closely resembles the Arctic loon and until recently, the two loons were considered the same species.

The Pacific loon can be distinguished from other loons by its grey head and small size. The Pacific loon's most notable feature is its vibrant purple throat. It also has a stout body, long neck and ruby red eyes. The Pacific loon's bill, tail and rump are black and its under parts are mostly white. Its wings and upper-back are checkered with black and white feathers that make four distinct patterns. In the winter, these feathers change colours and become blackish-brown.

Pacific loons are built to be swimmers. Their three-toed webbed feet help them paddle through the water and their wings help them steer. Pacific loons are also exceptional divers and have been caught in fishing nets 73 m below the water's surface.

When on land, the Pacific loon looks extremely awkward because its legs aren't designed for walking. For this reason, the loon can only take flight from water.

When attempting to fly, the Pacific loon is not very graceful. In order to become airborne, the Pacific loon needs about 30 to 50 m of take-off space. It usually skids across the water's surface, furiously flapping its wings before it finally leaves the water. Once in-flight, loons can be distinguished from other birds by their slow wing beat and low-slung heads.

### HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The Pacific loon prefers to dwell in deep waters. Its habitat includes the ocean, bays, estuaries, channels, coves and fresh water lakes. Pacific loons nest less frequently in inlets and lagoons.

The Pacific loon feeds on a diet of Pacific herring and other small fish. They also eat aquatic vegetation, insects, mollusks and frogs. When alarmed, the loon uses its voice as a siren to make a loud piercing screech. It also prefers to dive rather than fly to safety.

### RANGE

Like its name suggests, the Pacific loon spends most of its time nesting along the Pacific coast, ranging from Alaska all the way to Mexico. In summer months, the loon returns to northern Canada and inland Alaska to breed on Arctic lakes and the Hudson Bay coast. The Pacific loon has a wide distribution and can also be found nesting in Japan and other areas bordering the Pacific Ocean.