



Common Loon

ontario provincial bird

~ 32nd anniversary ~

On 23 June 1994 the Ontario *Avian Emblem Act, 1994 (S.O. 1994, c. 15)* was officially passed and received royal assent. The Act is provincial legislation that officially designates the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) as the avian emblem (official bird) of the Province of Ontario.

Key points of the legislation include:

- > **Official Designation:** Section 1 of the statute formally adopts the Common Loon as the symbol of the province.
- > **Cultural Significance:** The loon was chosen for its strong association with the beauty, solitude, and wilderness of Ontario's countless lakes and rivers. The bird's call is deeply woven into the identity of the Canadian wilderness.
- > **Connection to the "Loonie":** The adoption of the avian emblem helped solidify the loon as a celebrated Canadian symbol. When Canada introduced the \$1 coin to replace the paper bill, it featured a swimming loon on the reverse and was quickly nicknamed the "loonie"*.

National Bird Contender — Not to Be

To date Canada does not have an emblematic national bird. The Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS) set about to change that. The objective was to select a National Bird as part of the Canada celebrations in 2017 marking the 150th anniversary of the country's confederation.

The Society launched its national bird project in January 2015 by inviting Canadians to help choose a bird species that could best represent our country composed of a variety of habitats. The idea of the poll was to encourage debate among Canadians about the need for a

\$20 banknote issued 1993-2004 featured loons on reverse side.

\$1 coin, the "Loonie", went into circulation 30 June 1987.



* One dollar coin went into general circulation on 30 June 1987 to replace one dollar banknote as a cost saving measure. The original coin design was to have featured a voyager image. But the master dies got lost in transit between Ottawa and the minting facility in Winnipeg.



National Bird, and to present a slate of potential candidates for a vote.

An online poll was conducted via Canadian Geographic magazine website. Almost 50,000 votes were cast and 40 candidates nominated by the pole deadline of 31 August. The public preference for national bird included these five that topped the list.

- > Common Loon (13,995 votes)
- > Snowy Owl (8,498)
- > Canada (aka Gray) Jay (7,918)
- > Canada Goose
- > Black-capped Chickadee

On 19 September 2016 the RCGS convened in Ottawa a panel of experts to publicly debate which species was most worthy to hold the title of being Canada's national bird. The 5-member panel of eminent persons each championed one of the above finalist birds. Based on the audience response the Canada Jay won the debate.

Following the debate, RCGS consulted a number of ornithologists and conservationists, as well as cultural experts and Indigenous Peoples. A set of criteria was established against which the finalist birds were evaluated. In the end only one of the birds best met all reasonable criteria.

On 16 November 2016 at their College of Fellows' Annual Dinner the RCGS announced that the Canada Jay was the candidate to be Canada's National Bird.

Some of the criteria that favoured the Canada Jay over other birds included following.

- > *Widespread presence* : It is a year-round resident found in the boreal forests of every province and territory. The vast majority of its range is in Canada, with only a small percentage crossing into Alaska and the western mountains of the United States.

- > *Year-round residency* : Unlike loons and Canada geese who migrate south in winter, the Canada jays are year-round residents of Canada. These tough birds are unique for nesting as early as February.

- > *Cultural history* : Canada Jay has deep ties to Indigenous folklore (often called "Wisakedjak"). Usually the first bird to have greeted explorers, fur trappers, prospectors, settlers and First nations folk around their campfires in the dead of Canadian winters.

- > *Official status* : The Canada Jay is not an official bird for any Canadian province and territory, nor any other country.

- > *Biological status* : The Canada Jay is not an endangered species, nor is it hunted.

- < *Temperament* : Canada jays are extremely friendly towards humans, and not regarded as an obnoxious or nuisance species.



Legal Status – RCGS submitted an official recommendation to the federal Minister of Environment to officially declare the Canada Jay as the emblematic bird for Canada. To date, the Minister has yet to act on the matter. However, on 28 May 2025 a private members bill received first reading in the Senate, to wit "An Act to provide for the recognition of the Canada jay as the national bird of Canada".