

recent oil spills.

During the summer of 2004, I was fortunate enough to photograph a nesting pair of loons in the Yukon. I had been exploring one of the many small lakes that dot the tundra far north of Dawson City when I discovered a Red-throated Loon sitting atop a crude nest. The nest—which contained a single egg—was simply a pile of dead and matted aquatic vegetation placed strategically among the reeds near the lake's edge. The loon was well camouflaged and sat perfectly still, and only when I approached closely did it slide into the water without a fuss.

I began to plan how I might photograph it. I soon realized, however, that I would have to be very creative to get close enough for good shots. The small island the nest sat on was boggy and precarious, and as I neared the nest to examine it, I found myself sinking to my waist. On the long drive back to Dawson—in my soaked pants—I had time to refine my strategy. I would rent a small inflatable boat and buy several sections of half-inch particleboard. This way I could lay the boards out in a path from the shore to the nest, helping to distribute my weight more evenly over the marshy ground. I could then drag the inflated boat to a spot near the nest, where I would set up my blind and equipment, hopefully secure from the possibility of getting wet.

This was much easier said than done, but I am not one to give up easily. I rented a large dinghy the next day from a store in Dawson—lightening my wallet by 75 dollars. I then made my way to the timber company, spent 30 more dollars, and had two four-by-eight-foot sections of particle board cut vertically so I could tie them to the roof of my small Honda Civic.

The final piece of the puzzle was convincing someone to assist me. Fortunately, one of the other actors working with me, David James, was a good sport and agreed to get up at the crack of dawn the following day so we could travel the 160 kilometres up the unpaved Dempster Highway to get to the nest.

When we reached the lake, the loon was still there incubating the lone egg. David and I immediately set about hauling all the equipment from the car to the shore of the lake—no small task, considering that walking across tundra is similar to walking across a beach of soft sand. The ground is uneven and far too yielding, and carrying equipment seemed to make the trip exponentially more difficult.

It took us over two hours to set up the equipment because my plan had a few holes in it. The crude gangway I had constructed to the nest worked to a degree, but my 155 pounds were still too much to keep the wood from sinking under a foot of water. It also took forever to inflate the



boat, which had a few leaks. Balancing my tripods and the valuable strobes was agonizingly difficult, because every time I set one in place and then shifted my position to set up the other one, the first tripod would move out of position and tilt precariously over the water. After playing "pick-up sticks" for half an hour, I had just two strobes in position and decided to abandon my backlight as I had no safe way to get behind the nest. I then set up my blind and thrust the inflated boat through it for stability.

In the meantime, David had been busy taking pictures of me fighting against the laws of physics and gravity. He found the whole affair slightly comical, since most of my time was spent staring into space trying to envision the impossible and cursing when it became clear that most of what I envisioned was indeed impossible. At any rate, I did manage a

The loon's red eye matches its red throat, presenting a striking profile.