April 29, 2013 Name That Loon!

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Loon Calls

Last week in class, my students were learning about the byproducts of coal burning power plants. We were investigating how mercury can end up accumulating in the tissues of water birds like loons. Since we don’t have a lot of loons in Chicago, I brought in a plush loon from Wild Republic:

Shortly after this photo was taken, this little loon found his way into Ranger’s mouth…

While my students thought the loon was cute, they didn’t really appreciate the beauty of the bird’s calls, so I had them watch the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s YouTube video of the calls of the Common Loon:
While poking around The Cornell Lab's YouTube channel, I happened upon video of the Yellow-billed Loon, which makes its home in Arctic lakes. Hmm...Arctic lakes. Might this be relevant to my trip this summer?

It must be fate...

So loons are beautiful and all, but why on earth am I devoting an entire journal entry to them? Well, if you couldn't tell by that last video, there is obviously a connection here. Toolik (i.e. Toolik Lake, Toolik Field Station) MEANS LOON. Yup. I was reading the journals of a former PolarTREC teacher, Susan Steiner, when I saw that Toolik means "loon." Check out Toolik Field Station's logo in case you don't believe me:

Toolik Field Station Logo. Courtesy of The Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

Am I the only one who thinks this is a cool coincidence?

Travels with Charley. Or James. Or Petunia.

Obviously my little stuffed loon will be making the journey to Toolik with me, and will probably show up in more than a few of my pictures and videos. Before I stow him (or her) into my carry on, I think it is important that the bird gets a name. That's where I need some help from my audience. Submit your ideas for names in the "Ask the Team" section of my journal and my students and I will vote on them before I leave. Stay tuned for the naming!