



Waterfowl: Movement Studies

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Atlantic and Great Lakes Sea Duck Migration Study

Many North American sea duck species are experiencing population declines, and biologists are still unsure why. In order to better evaluate sea duck populations, we need to first determine population ecology, dynamics, and potential limiting factors.

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What We Studied

Satellite telemetry is a critical research tool used to track individual sea ducks as they move from important breeding, molting, migratory staging areas, and wintering locations (population delineation). Extensive satellite telemetry has been used on Pacific coast populations of sea ducks, but little information is known about Atlantic populations.

The Sea Duck Joint Venture and its various research partners, including BRI, have been capturing and equipping satellite transmitters to Atlantic wintering populations of sea duck species considered of conservation concern: the Black Scoter (*Melanitta Americana*), Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*), White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*), and the Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*). These species are captured on their important wintering areas or staging sites.



What We Found: Study Highlights

Currently, more than 300 sea duck individuals have been equipped with satellite transmitters and provide detailed information on the locations of vital breeding, molting, wintering, and staging areas, and define migratory pathways. The three scoters species and Long-Tailed Ducks have been tracked to breeding areas between northern Quebec and east of Hudson Bay to the northern reaches of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. Atlantic wintering scoters and Long-Tailed Ducks generally follow three varying migration paths: 1) a coastal route along the US and Canada, through the Gulf of St. Lawrence; 2) an overland route through the Great Lakes region; and 3) an overland route through the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Tagged sea ducks appear to return to similar wintering areas each year, frequently using the same migration routes.

The Atlantic and Great Lakes Sea Duck Migration Study will continue in 2015.

Photo Credits: Deploying a floating mist net to capture wintering sea ducks. Photo © BRI/Lucas Savoy Surf Scoter entangled in a floating mist net trap used to capture sea ducks. Photo © BRI/ Lucas Savoy Untangling the Surf Scoter from a floating mist net trap. Photo © BRI/ Lucas Savoy

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