

Connecting Wyoming's Breeding Harlequin Duck Population to their Important Wintering and Molting Areas and Identifying Crucial Habitats

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Through the generous support of the Meg and Bert Raynes Wildlife Fund, the Biodiversity Research Institute (Portland, ME), Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Grand Teton National Park, and Environment and Climate Change Canada initiated a harlequin duck tracking study in Grand Teton National Park (GTNP). In May 2016, the field team successfully captured two breeding pairs of harlequin ducks and attached a tracking device to each bird to map their migratory movements to the Pacific coast. A satellite transmitter was surgically implanted in the male harlequins by an experienced wildlife veterinarian. A geolocator tracking device was externally attached to the leg band of the female harlequin ducks. The satellite transmitters implanted in the males enables the field team to remotely monitor the movements of each bird for up to a year. The female harlequins must be recaptured on their breeding streams to remove the geolocator and download the tracking data. The field team will revisit the breeding streams in 2017 in an effort to recapture the female harlequins and extract the tracking devices.

The two male harlequin ducks successfully migrated from the GTNP streams in July and arrived on their Pacific coast molting areas 3-9 days later in British Columbia, Canada. We will continue to monitor the movements of the harlequin ducks. The project was highly successful and provided momentum to continue the study in 2017. A publicly accessible project page was created on Biodiversity Research Institute's website: <http://www.briloon.org/harlequin-duck-study-in-wyoming>.



Photo: Wildlife Biologist Susan Patla (Wyoming Game and Fish Department) and veterinarian Malcolm McAdie, release of a pair of harlequin ducks after they were equipped with tracking devices. Photo by Mark Gocke, Wyoming Game and Fish Department.