

## **Media Alert**

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### **Satellites to Seize Sea Duck Data**

At times the Sea Duck Joint Venture seems more an adventure as scientists chase after a little known species of waterfowl to remote wilderness regions than an international scientific collaboration illustrating the Power of Partnerships, on the eve of International Migratory Bird Day, May 8, 2110.

Scientists will use satellite transmitters surgically implanted in sea ducks to gather basic information about their habits and movement in eastern coastal waters. Their seasonal lifestyle takes them from remote arctic landscapes to open water habitats along the eastern coastline. The priority species of the study are black scoter, surf scoter, white-winged scoter and long-tailed ducks. Little is known about the lives of sea ducks, a resolute band of 15 species of waterfowl. What biologists do know is not comforting. The population has been steadily declining for unexplained reasons.

As sea ducks travel the Atlantic Flyway during seasonal migration they continually face a gauntlet of natural obstacles. Now, in an era of alternative energy demands, some of their seasonal habitats are being considered for off-shore wind farm development. What impact that might have on them is another question waiting to be answered through the joint venture.

Studies first began in 2001 as several independent, unconnected endeavors seeking information about sea duck behavior and movement. These efforts evolved into the joint venture. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service in partnership with provincial, academic and non-government organizations will soon begin a coordinated high-tech examination of sea duck seasonal movements using satellite transmitters surgically implanted in a few birds.

Similar studies in the Pacific have provided a wealth of information. One notable study documented the travels of Godwit E7, a female bar-tailed Godwit tracked by

satellite, which flew an 18,000 mile, non-stop migratory trek from Alaska to New Zealand.

From December 2009 until February 2010, long-tailed ducks were captured near Nantucket Sound and outfitted with satellite transmitters. Biologists with the U.S. Geological Survey, a joint venture partner, captured birds in the upper Chesapeake Bay region and implanted transmitters that are already sending back some surprising data. Biologists are now preparing for another expedition to Restigouche River, New Brunswick, to catch and attach transmitters to more birds in late April. The joint venture plans to implant transmitters in nearly 300 birds over the next 3 years and then analyze the concert of satellite data streaming earthward. The joint venture's website <http://seaduckjv.org/> will eventually feature a Web page where visitors can monitor sea duck movements along with scientists.