

# ON THE TRAIL OF BLACK SCOTERS



Black scoters, sporting external antennae, were tracked by satellite to staging, breeding, and molting areas, providing new life-history information for waterfowl managers./Matthew Perry

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The location of breeding and molting areas of some seaduck species is uncertain, and little is known of seaducks' migrational paths and of habitats used during migration, breeding, and molting.

The black scoter is of special concern among the seaducks, because it is both the least common of the three scoter species and the least studied. The Continental

Technical Team of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's Sea Duck Joint Venture recommended that research on this species be conducted to learn more about black scoter movements and to delineate its breeding and molting areas. The team received funding to implant satellite transmitters on this species in Baie des Chaleurs and Restigouche River in New Brunswick, Canada, with the purpose of delineating populations and identifying habitat affinities for staging, breeding, and molting.

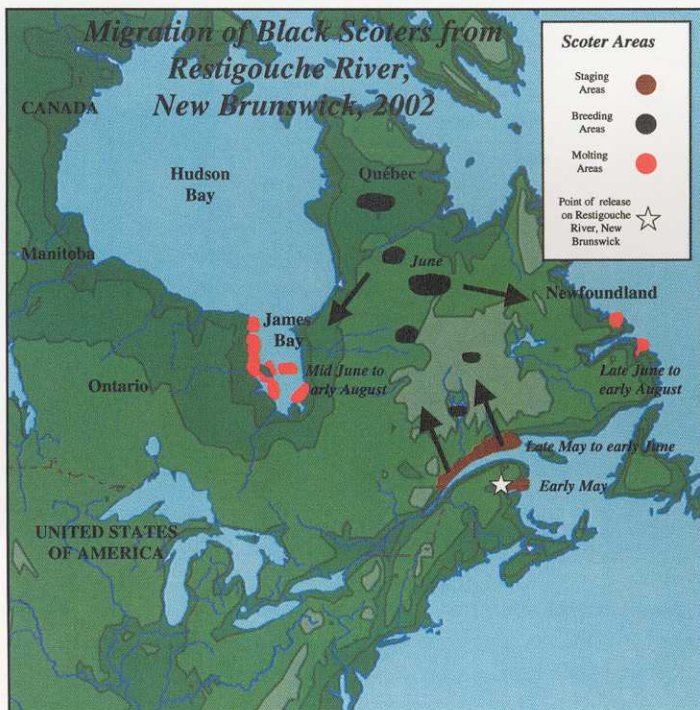
A variety of capture techniques was tested in the Restigouche River during April 2002, including the use of net guns, mist netting, and night lighting. Only the latter technique was successful in catching the scoters. For two consecutive nights in early May, researchers captured 13 black scoters: 11 males and 2 females. Scoters, numbering close to 100,000, were at the capture sites courting and feeding and were not too concerned about the lights or the boats. The weather conditions were ideal

for catching the birds: a high percentage of cloud cover and light precipitation.

Scientists transported all captured birds to a veterinary hospital where a U.S. Geological Survey veterinarian implanted a 39-gram Platform Transmitting Terminal device into the abdominal cavity of each duck. The transmitter's external antenna was passed through the back of the duck using a surgical catheter. Following surgeries, ducks were monitored for 1 day before being released at the site of capture on the Restigouche River.

Tracking data posted daily on the Internet showed the scoters moving from the Restigouche River for a lengthy stop on the St. Lawrence River. The birds appeared to use the central parts of northern Quebec's boreal forest as breeding areas. Ten of the 11 male scoters eventually went to James Bay for the July molting period. This information will help waterfowl managers to better understand and anticipate problems that black scoters may confront in their movements, and it will enhance scoter monitoring and management capabilities.

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Migration of black scoters from Restigouche River, New Brunswick, 2002