



Duck, Dodgin' and Weaving for Harlequins Part II: 2018 Captures in Glacier National Park May 4-24 by Amy Seaman

Last year we had our boots on the ground scouring each region of Glacier National Park for their white-water, head-waters loving, Harlequin Ducks. This year, to follow-up on that research, we again partnered with Glacier National Park and Glacier National Park Conservancy, to go back in and capture pairs we had located – to affix geolocators to female duck's leg-bands, and to affix male ducks with tracking devices that transmit the male's daily location. Finding ducks is hard enough. Trapping this kind of moving target

is an exceptional task, however, for a species that spends such a short time in Montana, the efforts prove valuable.

Photos by Amy Seaman



(Top) Reynolds creek in Mid-may during a big snow year; (Above) A male Harlequin "PK" banded and given a transmitter in May 2016 (Below) Capture crew along McDonald Creek



Pair location data will help us answer questions about the bird's biology that are key to understanding management needs such as those surrounding home-range, site fidelity, the timing of movements, nesting location, and more. The Harlequin's unique breeding biology is such that the males follow females back to the female's natal stream, where they will nest and rear young. Unlike many other birds however, the male Harlequin duck separates from the pair shortly after the female begins to incubate the eggs. Males will

begin to migrate back to the coast. The mossy blanket she will weave to help protect her nest, and her cryptic coloration will be her only support. And she usually does well—without tracking devices, the chances of finding a Harlequin duck nest are almost zero. To get those transmitters deployed we were again lead by the intrepid non-game biologist in Glacier, Lisa Bate,



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(Above Top) A pair of ducks loafs on a rock in McDonald Creek. The female has a visible leg band; (Above) I released one of the captured females in Jackson Creek; (Left) despite his bright colors, male ducks are surprisingly cryptic in fast-flowing water



and joined by a hearty crew of professionals, game wardens, field technicians, wildlife veterinarians, white-water kayakers and volunteers. Water levels along Reynolds, Nyack, and Canyon Creek all proved to be too high to safely find and trap Harlequin Ducks so we were relegated to McDonald Creek and its many small tributaries. Week after week for four weeks we gathered for safety talks, equipment preparation, and long days in the field – trying to capture enough pairs in Glacier National Park to support our state goal of marking 17 pairs. Concurrent trapping efforts were carried out beyond the parks borders – given the high-water year, we are all celebrating the 14 pairs that we collectively trapped and tagged.

(Top) MTFWP biologist Alyssa Anderson slowly approaches a male Harlequin to flush him downstream;
(Below) GNP biologist Lisa Bate and volunteer Karen Chickering release a pair together after they received their tracking devices.

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We found just enough time in the field to pull the project together, and with the right team we made it a success. And just in time – By the last week of trapping one male had already begun moving out of the park to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River! But, there’s always next year – we have to relocate and trap the same pairs in 2019 to retrieve the female’s data. Luckily, with this team we can make it happen.

(Above) A pair of ducks is released along McDonald Creek after the male received a transmitter (see antenna sticking out!) and the female a geolocator (not visible). (Below) A pair of Harlequins and a lone male float below rapids on McDonald Creek.

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