

Assiniboine Park Conservancy Supports Research and Education about Migratory Birds and Wildlife with Installation of New Motus Station

For immediate release: Winnipeg, October 3, 2024 – With the recent installation of a new Motus station on the roof of the Qualico Family Centre, the Assiniboine Park Conservancy (APC) has joined an international collaborative network that supports research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System (Motus) is a program of Birds Canada delivered in collaboration with a vast network of more than 2,500 partner organizations and researchers in 34 countries around the world. The program utilizes a network of antennae equipped with cooperative automated radio telemetry to track small radio transmitters affixed to birds, bats, and larger insects (e.g. monarch butterflies). The technology allows researchers to collaboratively monitor the migration movements of some of the smallest animals possible, with a high level of precision, over great distances.

“We are very pleased to join the growing Motus network and contribute to the expanding body of knowledge regarding migratory wildlife,” said Laura Burns, Conservation Program Manager, Assiniboine Park Conservancy. “The data collected by the Motus system is incredibly valuable and helps inform science-based recommendations, decisions, and actions that support the conservation of wildlife and the habitats they rely on.”

APC’s motus station was installed in mid-September after years of careful planning and will also advance our participation in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) North American Songbird SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction) program. The Assiniboine Park Zoo has been an active member of this program since 2019, working alongside other zoos and aquariums to reduce threats to North American songbirds and secure sustainable wild populations through education and conservation activities at AZA facilities, in the community, and at state, provincial, and national levels.

“The Motus network gathers information on the movements of a great variety of migratory birds, not just large waterfowl like geese and ducks. This includes songbirds, shorebirds, aerial insectivores, and grassland species that have suffered severe population declines due to habitat loss and other human impacts,” said Burns. “Understanding this behaviour is critical to the creation of effective conservation strategies for habitats and species at risk.”

While the Motus network is very well established in North America, most stations are located in the United States and areas of higher human population, such as along the East coast. Stations in the central part of the continent, which is home to the Mississippi flyway, provide critical information for this major migration corridor between the Arctic tundra, boreal forests, and wintering grounds in the south.

The new Motus antenna's range and centralized location on the rooftop of the Qualico Family Centre will allow it to detect the movement of animals affixed with Motus tags that fly anywhere in the Park and even into some surrounding neighbourhoods. APC's Conservation and Research team is not currently deploying any Motus tags, but that could be considered in the future, which would further support the collective objectives of the Motus network and provide valuable information about biodiversity within the Park and the important role that urban green spaces provide to wildlife.

"Understanding and protecting urban biodiversity is an important part of our conservation strategy here at the Assiniboine Park Conservancy," said Burns. "The addition of Motus tracking capacity continues the tradition of using technology and community science to learn about and protect the amazing biodiversity in Assiniboine Park."

In addition to the new Motus station, APC's Conservation and Research team works with other APC departments, volunteers, and our community on several other initiatives that benefit wild birds including the installation and monitoring of permanent bird-friendly window mitigation to reduce collisions in the Park and Zoo, enhancement of naturalized bird habitat, creation of artificial nesting sites for species at risk such as chimney swifts and other aerial insectivores, participation in local conservation committees and community science projects, and public education and engagement activities.

More About Motus

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System (*Motus: Latin for movement or motion*) is an international collaborative research network that uses cooperative automated radio telemetry to track small flying organisms (birds, bats, and insects). Data collected by Motus is revolutionizing our understanding of migratory animals and is being used in conservation planning for species and sites, status assessments and recovery plans for species at risk, environmental assessment and mitigation planning for development projects, and contributing to numerous continental conservation efforts. While any automated telemetry project can operate in isolation, operating as a Motus project combines the collective impact of local, regional, and even hemispheric projects into one massive collaborative effort that expands the scale and impact of everyone's work and optimizes scarce research and conservation dollars.

For more information, visit motus.org.

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