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Species Profile

Harlequin Duck Eastern population

Scientific Name:	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>
Taxonomy Group:	Birds
Range:	Nunavut, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador
Last COSEWIC Assessment:	May 2001
Last COSEWIC Designation:	Special Concern
SARA Status:	Schedule 1, Special Concern

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Description

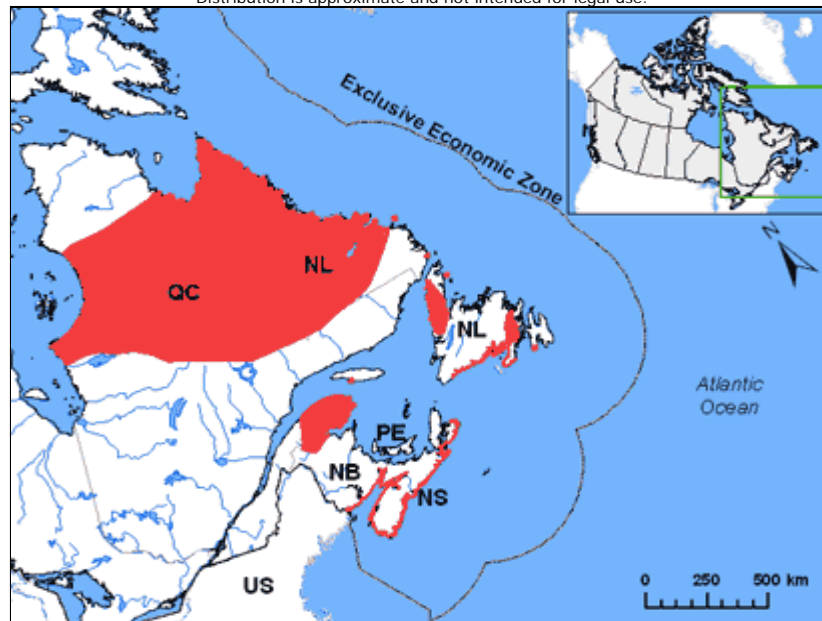
The Harlequin Duck is a small, subarctic sea duck. The adult male appears dark from a distance, but has colourful patches. He has slate blue plumage, chestnut sides, and streaks of white on the head and body. The crown has a black stripe with a chestnut stripe on either side. The belly is slate grey. Females are a rather plain brownish-grey with patches of white behind, below and in front of the eye. Immatures resemble the female until late autumn of their first year, when young male ducks begin to resemble the adult males. They do not gain the full adult plumage until the next winter.

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Canadian Distribution of the Harlequin Duck,

Eastern population (shown in red)^{1,2}

Distribution is approximate and not intended for legal use.



¹ Author: Canadian Wildlife Service, 2004

² Data Sources: The main source of information and data is the COSEWIC Status Report. In many cases additional data sources were used; a complete list will be available in the future.

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Distribution and Population

Four populations of the Harlequin Duck are found world-wide, two of them in Canada: the western population along the Pacific Coast, and the eastern population along the Atlantic Coast.

Harlequin Ducks of the eastern population mostly breed throughout much of Labrador, along eastern Hudson Bay, and the Great Northern Peninsula of the island of Newfoundland. There are also known breeding populations along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Gaspé Peninsula, northern New Brunswick, and southeastern Baffin Island in Nunavut.

Satellite telemetry and banding information have indicated that the migration patterns of Harlequin Ducks are variable. Many of them spend the winter on the east and south coasts of Newfoundland, in southeastern Nova Scotia, in southern New Brunswick, in Maine, and at a few locations south of Cape Cod. Small groups may spend the winter along the Gaspé Peninsula and Anticosti Island of Québec, and a few individuals may spend the winter in Prince Edward Island. Approximately half the wintering population can be found in New England.

The eastern North American wintering population has declined from historical estimates of 5000 - 10,000 to fewer than 1500 individuals. Numbers appear to be increasing in North America over the last ten years to an estimated 3700 individuals, but still less than 2000 Harlequin Ducks spend the winter in eastern Canada.

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Habitat

Harlequin Ducks spend most of the year in coastal marine environments, but they move inland each spring to breed along fast-flowing turbulent rivers. During the winter, the Harlequin Duck are often associated with offshore islands, headlands, and rocky coastline where the surf breaks against rocks and ice buildup is minimal. These ducks feed close to rocky shorelines or rock skerries.

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Biology

Harlequin Ducks first breed at 2 or 3 years of age. Their nests are usually built on the ground along the banks of fast-flowing streams. Surprisingly, the first two active Harlequin Duck nests ever reported in eastern North America were both on cliff ledges, one about 20 m above the water. The clutches of 3 to 8 creamy eggs are incubated by the female, who later leads the hatched young to secluded streams to feed. Fluctuations in food and water levels can affect breeding success. The reproductive rate of Harlequin Ducks is low, which makes it more difficult for this duck to recover from a decline.

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Threats

The primary cause of the decline of the Harlequin Duck is not clearly known, however, over-hunting could be an important cause. Although hunting of this population of Harlequin Ducks has not been permitted in recent years, the birds remain extremely vulnerable to hunters because of their tameness, their tendency to feed close to shore, and the resemblance of the female and immatures to ducks of other species which may be legally hunted. In addition, the contamination, destruction, and alteration of their habitat are considered important factors for the decline of the eastern population of the Harlequin Duck. Some of the once fast-flowing streams have been altered by hydro and mining projects, and other human activities have impinged on both the breeding and wintering grounds and the food supply. Oil spills and chronic oil pollution are major threats to the duck's wintering habitat.

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Protection

Federal Protection

The Harlequin Duck, Eastern population, is protected under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). More information about SARA, including how it protects individual species, is available in the [Species at Risk Act: A Guide](#).

The Harlequin Duck Eastern population is protected by the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. Under this Act, it is prohibited to kill, harm, or collect adults, young, and eggs. Harlequin Ducks are also protected in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador under their respective *Endangered Species Acts*.

Provincial and Territorial Protection

[To know if this species is protected by provincial or territorial laws, consult the provinces and territories websites.](#)

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Recovery Initiatives

Status of Recovery Planning

Recovery Strategies :

Name Management Plan for the Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) Eastern Population, in Atlantic Canada and Québec

Status Final posting on SARA registry

Number of Action Plans 0

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Recovery Progress and Activities

Summary of Progress to Date

Over the last 10 years, Harlequin Duck population numbers have slowly rebounded and there is evidence suggesting their distribution is widening from their traditional core locations. Although their numbers have not yet achieved historic population levels, they are presently experiencing a strong recovery across much of eastern Canada.

Summary of Research/Monitoring

Many studies have been completed or are underway to aid in the recovery of the Harlequin Duck including, mark/recapture analyses, and habitat, diet, genetic, and disturbance assessments.

Banding and satellite telemetry has proven useful to identify Harlequin Duck movement patterns while also informing scientists and biologists on site selection for staging, breeding, wintering, and moulting habitat.

Monitoring of four important wintering hot spots has contributed to the knowledge and recovery of the species. The four core survey locations are Cape St. Mary's (Newfoundland), The Wolves (New Brunswick), Isle au Haut (Maine, USA), and Sachuest Point, (Rhode Island, USA). These sites have offered insight into the status of Harlequin Duck populations and have allowed researchers to monitor population change. The knowledge gained from these core sites offers insight into the stewardship needs for Harlequin Ducks, while also contributing to our knowledge of this species' habitat requirements, and the importance and need for habitat protection.

Summary of Recovery Activities

The hunting of Harlequin Ducks was banned in the four Atlantic Provinces and Québec in 1990. This ban effectively stopped all hunting for this species within the Atlantic Flyway – allowing their populations the opportunity to rebound from the impacts of this threat.

A species at risk stewardship coordinator is working with the Innu Nation, the Labrador Metis Nation, and the Nunatsiavut Government. The stewardship coordinators provide information on species at risk to community members through presentations as well as act as community contacts for species at risk in the area. The stewardship coordinators also represent their community on recovery teams to ensure that local and traditional knowledge is included in recovery planning.

Newfoundland and Labrador has been host to significant conservation efforts aiding the Harlequin Duck's recovery. Posters and brochures have been created and distributed across Atlantic Canada, and presentations are being given at local schools to create public awareness for the Harlequin

Duck. Displays have been erected at local airports around the province to reinforce the stewardship of this species.

Through consultation and discussion with local hunters in coastal communities throughout eastern and northern Canada, traditional knowledge on the Harlequin Duck has been gathered, and, in turn, used to further create materials and programs relevant for species recovery.

URLs

Canadian Wildlife Service: Québec Region

http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/sauvagine/html/harlequin_duck.html

Canadian Wildlife Service: Atlantic Region

<http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/harlequin/index.html>

Hinterland Who's Who: Harlequin Duck: <http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?pid=1&cid=7&id=47>

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Documents

[Management Plans](#) (1 record(s) found.)

1 record(s) found.

Management Plans

[Management Plan for the Harlequin Duck \(*Histrionicus histrionicus*\) Eastern Population, in Atlantic Canada and Québec \(2007\)](#)

The Harlequin Duck is a migratory bird covered under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and is under the management jurisdiction of the federal government. The Species at Risk Act (SARA, Section 65) requires the competent minister to prepare m...

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