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Tiny Wings, Record-Breaking Journey! AWCC-Tracked Hummingbirds Make History!

A record-breaking journey from Alaska to Mexico reveals new insights into hummingbird migration and the power of collaboration between wildlife researchers and Alaska's tourism industry.

PORTAGE, ALASKA – Three tiny hummingbirds are making BIG waves in wildlife research, setting a new known hummingbird migration record!

This summer, three Rufous Hummingbirds were fitted with tiny telemetry devices at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) as part of an ongoing collaborative research project with biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Banding Coalition of the Americas (BCA). Since departing Alaska, these remarkable little travelers have made their way south, reaching as far as Guadalajara, Mexico, and breaking the previously known hummingbird migration record!

Despite their small size, Rufous Hummingbirds are extraordinary long-distance travelers, journeying thousands of miles between their northern breeding grounds and southern wintering areas. Thanks to innovative tracking technology, researchers are gaining valuable insight into their migration routes and the incredible journeys these birds undertake each year. This record-breaking discovery highlights the importance of collaborative wildlife research and the remarkable endurance of these tiny birds.

A 16-Year-Old Migration Record Broken!

In 2010, a Rufous Hummingbird banded in Tallahassee, Florida, was recaptured just 166 days later in Chenega Bay, Alaska, an astonishing 5,679 km (3,529 miles) away! That remarkable point-to-point migration record stood for 16 years.

Until now.

This summer, the Alaska HumTrack Project documented three extraordinary journeys, with point-to-point distances of 5,553 km (3,450 miles), 5,678 km (3,528 miles), and a record-breaking 5,821 km (3,617 miles), including birds tracked as far south as Guadalajara, Mexico! The 5,821 km journey exceeds the previously documented 5,679 km point-to-point record; the figures do not represent total distance flown.

Even more remarkable, these are minimum flight distances! The birds may have traveled considerably farther as they navigated their migration routes.

These discoveries are helping researchers piece together the remarkable southbound migration of Rufous Hummingbirds breeding in Alaska, revealing valuable information about their movements and raising exciting new questions for the 2027 research season.

“These tiny birds are teaching us something extraordinary about migration. Not only have we documented a record-breaking journey, but we’re discovering routes we never expected, including flights directly across the

Gulf of Alaska. It's an exciting reminder of how much there is still to learn about Alaska's wildlife." **Sarah Howard, Executive Director, Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center**

An Unexpected Connection: Tourism Meets Wildlife Research

One of the most fascinating aspects of this research is the role Alaska's tourism industry and outdoor recreation community played in tracking these tiny travelers!

Signals from the hummingbirds' telemetry devices were detected by receivers carried by rafters along the Placer River, hikers exploring remote areas, and even cruise ships crossing the Gulf of Alaska. These detections helped researchers piece together migration routes across some of Alaska's most remote and challenging landscapes.

Perhaps even more surprising, the telemetry data revealed that some hummingbirds traveled directly across the open waters of the Gulf of Alaska! Researchers had previously expected the birds to follow the coastline before turning inland, making these overwater crossings an exciting and unexpected discovery.

From river rafting adventures to cruise ship voyages, Alaska's visitors and outdoor enthusiasts helped contribute to wildlife research, demonstrating how tourism and conservation can work hand in hand to advance scientific discovery.

"Tourism is about so much more than bringing visitors to Alaska. It creates opportunities for discovery, education, and conservation. This project is a wonderful example of how our tourism industry can help advance meaningful wildlife research. From rafters exploring the Placer River to cruise ships crossing the Gulf of Alaska, the very activities that connect people to Alaska's incredible landscapes are also helping researchers better understand and protect the wildlife that makes our state so special." **Nicole Geils, Director of Sales & Marketing, Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center**

See Their Record-Breaking Journey!

Follow the incredible migration paths of these three tiny hummingbirds in this fascinating video:

LINK: Watch the Hummingbirds' Journey

Small Birds. Big Science.

AWCC is a sanctuary dedicated to preserving Alaska's wildlife through conservation, education, research, and quality animal care. In addition to providing a forever home for orphaned and injured wildlife, AWCC supports important research initiatives that advance our understanding of wildlife and conservation.

The Rufous Hummingbird Research Project, in collaboration with USFWS and BCA, is an exciting example of how partnerships in wildlife research can lead to groundbreaking discoveries that extend far beyond Alaska.

Through this collaboration, researchers deployed tiny transmitters to better understand hummingbird movements at the northwestern edge of their breeding range. Despite the challenges of tracking these tiny travelers across Alaska's vast wilderness, the team gathered valuable data, made remarkable discoveries, and uncovered new questions about their migration.

LINK: Learn More About AWCC's Rufous Hummingbird Research

Big Discoveries. Bigger Questions.

And we're just getting started!

With Rufous Hummingbird populations declining, understanding their migration routes and critical habitats is more important than ever.

In 2027, researchers plan to build on the 2026 discoveries with a more focused effort to answer important questions about where these birds travel and what they need to survive.

The Alaska HumTrack Project is funded entirely through private donations to AWCC, and continued support is essential to keeping this research moving forward.

Contributions will help fund another season of field research, tracking technology, and data collection, bringing researchers closer to understanding and protecting these extraordinary little birds.

LINK: Support the Alaska HumTrack Project: Learn More and Support the Research

From Alaska to Mexico, these tiny travelers are proving that even the smallest wildlife can make history!

Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center

About Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center

The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) is a nonprofit sanctuary dedicated to preserving Alaska's wildlife through conservation, education, research, and quality animal care. Located in Portage Valley, surrounded by the breathtaking Chugach Mountains and Turnagain Arm, AWCC provides a forever home for orphaned and injured wildlife.

The sanctuary encompasses more than 200 acres of spacious habitats where resident animals display their natural behaviors while serving as education ambassadors for their species. Through a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, AWCC leases an additional 110 acres dedicated to wood bison conservation. Visitors can experience Alaska's iconic wildlife, from brown bears swimming and moose strutting to wood bison roaming, muskox playing, wolves exploring, and porcupines climbing.

Through collaborative research initiatives, AWCC also contributes to scientific discoveries that advance wildlife conservation in Alaska and beyond.

Learn more: www.alaskawildlife.org

Media Resources, AWCC Media Kit LINK: https://canva.link/awccmediakit

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