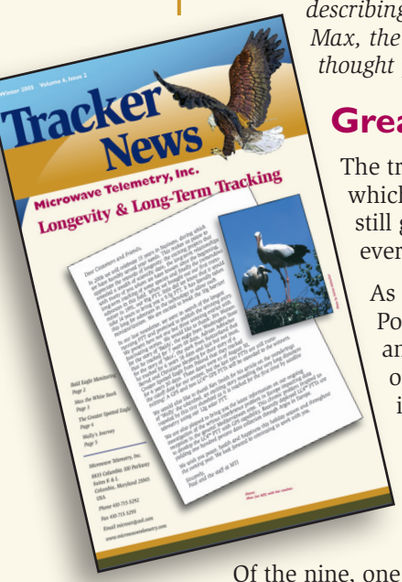
Updates

In 2005 MTI went in search of the longest running PTT's and was rewarded with 3 great success stories from our customers. Our readers may recall the original articles in the Winter 2005 issue of Tracker News describing the tracking of one record holder— a female Greater Spotted Eagle; and introducing Max, the stork from Switzerland who, at that time, had been tracked for 6 years 58 days. We thought you might be interested in an update on these birds.



Greater Spotted Eagle

The transmitter of the adult female Greater Spotted Eagle which I trapped in Summer 1999 is still working and we still get locations. The transmitter is programmed to transmit every 10 days.

As part of a long-term research program in northeast Poland, we are endeavouring to raise the level of knowledge and thereby the protection of this species, by making use of the most advanced technology, i.e. satellite telemetry, to investigate its migration and overwintering.

Between 1995 and 2003 we equipped nine adult Greater Spotted Eagles (GSEs) with solar-powered satellite transmitters (PTTs) in the Biebrza river valley in northeast Poland and tracked them using the Argos satellite system.

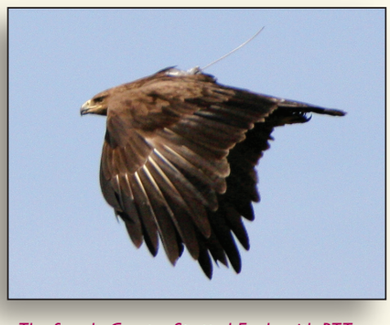


Photo by Dariusz Kowalczyk

The female Greater Spotted Eagle with PTT 08138 six years after fitting the transmitter at her breeding ground, Biebrza National Park, Poland, April 3, 2005.

Of the nine, one adult female, trapped on 13 July 1999 and tagged with PTT 08138, is our record holder for long-term tracking, having now transmitted for more than 8 years.

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Max

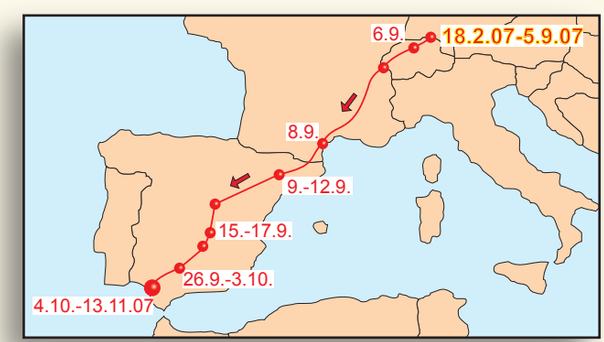
Max, our White stork, was fitted by the Museum of Natural History of Fribourg (Switzerland) with a 35 gram solar PTT on July 5, 1999 and is still being tracked. It is certainly the animal that the Argos system has tracked for the longest period ever.

Max, who was born in May 1999, has wintered since then in Northern Morocco and started breeding in 2002 in Southern Germany. Every year since then, she has produced between 2 and 4 young.

Photo Courtesy of the Museum of Natural History of Fribourg

Max with the new PTT in July '07.

Max's journeys were followed by thousands of people on the Internet. In 2006 the localizations were being received less often and the accuracy of the fixes was worse than in the first years. The bird was checked at the breeding site and it was found that the antenna of its PTT was damaged. Unfortunately, Max couldn't be captured before she started a new journey to Africa. But in summer 2007, Max was eventually caught and her PTT was replaced with a new one of the same type (35 gram solar). Since then, the tag is localized daily again with high accuracy. Max started her ninth (!) journey to Africa on September 6, 2007 and reached Andalusia in Southern Spain four weeks later. It seems that she wants to spend the winter for the first time in Spain. The researchers from the Museum of Natural History in Fribourg optimistically hope that this famous bird will be tracked for many more years.



The track of Max's most recent journey.

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Interference to the Argos System

Europe

As many of you are aware, a broad band radio transmission source (or sources) located somewhere in the northern Mediterranean area has severely reduced the ability of the Argos receivers to "hear" PTTs in that area for many years. (See our previous notes in Tracker News Winter 2005 and Spring 2006 issues, posted on our website.) CLS is now very aware of the problem and appears to be making some progress at identifying the source. We hope that this situation will soon be resolved.

Asia

A similar situation has recently developed over eastern Asia, affecting China, Mongolia, northern Malaysia and to some extent Japan. CLS has recently mapped the area using data from the satellites. Their findings match the field observations already known to us.

As Lee Tibbitts' Bar-tailed Godwits flew north from New Zealand on their way to Alaska, they skirted the edge of this new interference zone; the number of messages received and the grade of the fixes obtained was significantly reduced as they flew through the southern China seas and passed by Japan. Closer to northern China, the presumed source of the interference, it appears that reception of Argos transmissions is nearly completely blocked.

We hope that this "plague" does not spread to other parts of the world, robbing us of this precious research tool, Argos.