

# HERON

UNMANNED SURFACE VEHICLE

**USER MANUAL**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Clearpath Robotics Heron is a rugged and easy-to-use Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) for research and rapid prototyping applications. This guide contains information about the setup, operation, and maintenance of your Heron USV.

## 1.1 What's Included

Included with each Heron are the following:

- 1x Clearpath Robotics Heron USV
- 1x 14.4V NiMH Battery Pack
- 1x Battery Pack Charger
- 1x Futaba Backup Remote Control (R/C)

Hérons are often deployed with a Clearpath Long Range Wireless Network Station (sold separately). The Long Range Network Station includes:

- Clearpath Robotics Long Range Network Station
- Base Station Battery
- Base Station Battery Charger

## 1.2 What's Required

The embedded PC onboard Heron runs Ubuntu Linux 12.04 and ROS Hydro. For maximum simplicity, a development computer should be running the same operating system as the onboard computer; however, any version of Ubuntu supported by ROS Hydro will work. If a laptop option was purchased with Heron it will already be configured with ROS and the appropriate ROS packages. For assistance setting up the development computer, please see the PC Setup section on page 16.

Heron may also be driven using the included Futaba R/C controller as described in the Getting Started section on page 13. The R/C controller is intended as a backup to allow powered retrieval of Heron in case of a PC or network malfunction while on the water.

## 2 THE BASICS

This section provides an overview of the key specifications of the Heron platform. Figure 1 and Figure 2 give a tour of Heron's major components.

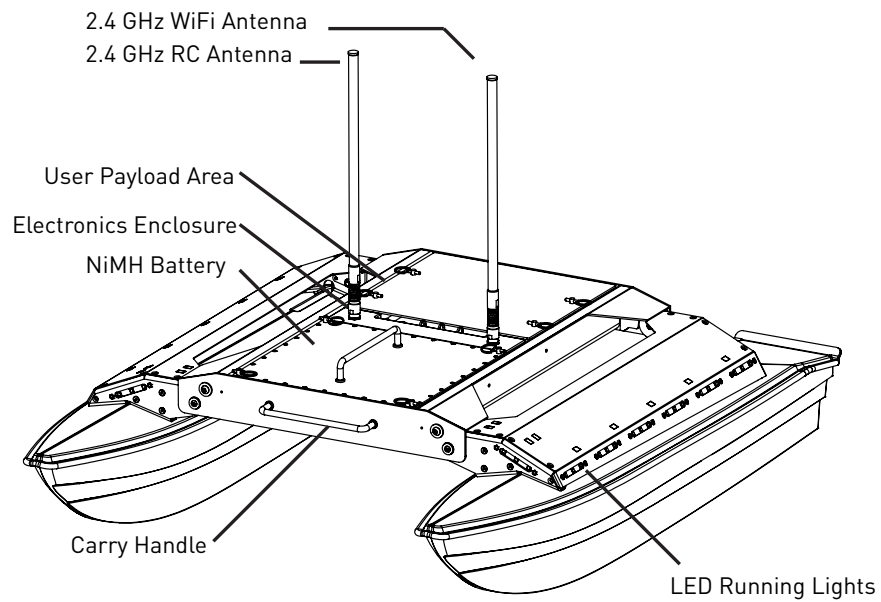


Figure 1: Heron at a Glance (actual boat may vary slightly from image shown)

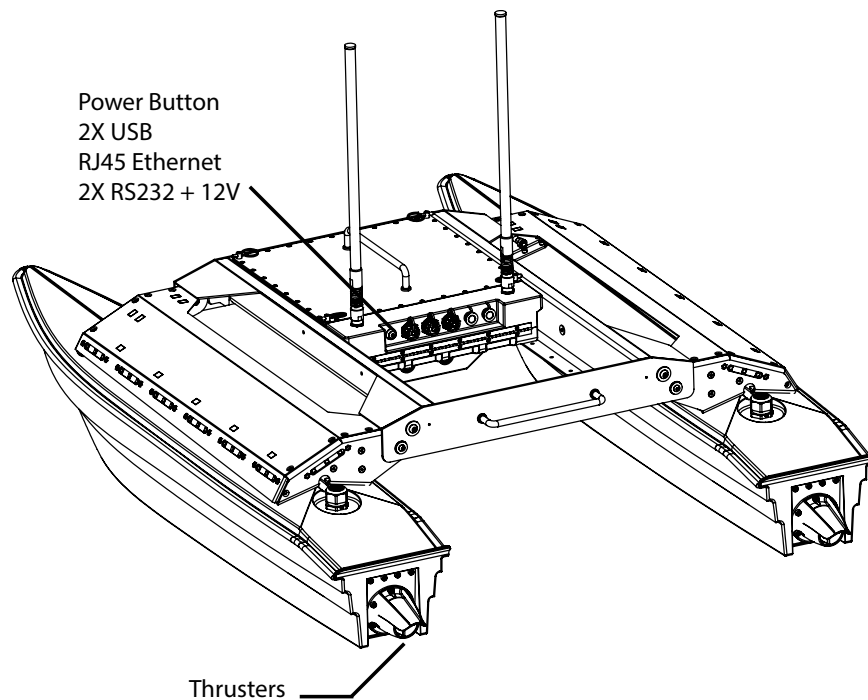


Figure 2: Heron at a Glance (actual boat may vary slightly from image shown)

## 2.1 Hardware Architecture

Figure 3 gives an overview of the standard devices which make up Heron. This diagram is provided to aid the user in understanding the Heron system architecture.

The eth0 interface is connected to a weatherproof connector in the User Payload Area. This connector is used to connect Ethernet payloads, such as an IP camera or LIDAR, but may also be used to connect to the vehicle over SSH, especially to adjust the wireless configuration (for example, to change the wireless password, or to associate with a different base station).

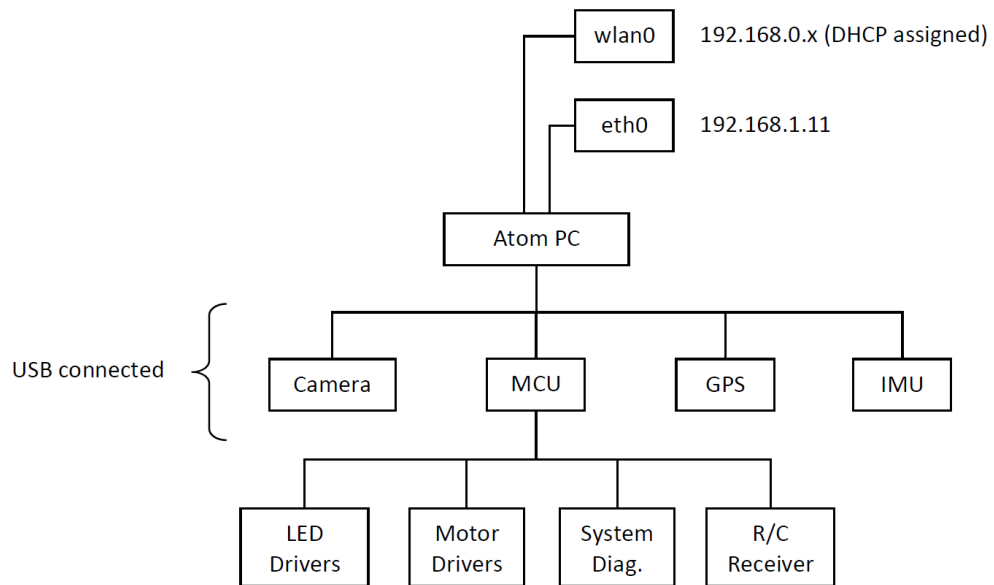


Figure 3: Heron Architecture

## 2.2 Status Indicators

The red and green running lights on the port and starboard sides of Heron indicate vehicle status based on the frequency and pattern of flashing. These patterns are described in Table 1.

The precedence order in the table is downward—that is, the bottom-most condition which is true will be what is indicated by the lights.

Light Pattern	Description
Solid	<b>No errors.</b> PC and wireless are active, and a command stream is being received and processed.
Slow Single Pulse	<b>No command.</b> Indicates that the system is fully up, but the thrusters are not active due to an absence of command messages. Command messages must be sent at 10Hz or faster to maintain steady operation.
Slow Double Pulse	<b>Wireless Error.</b> Indicates that the onboard PC is unable to find the base station's wireless network. If this indication is seen, check the battery level and indicator lights in the base station.
Slow Triple Pulse	<b>Computer Error.</b> Indicates that the micro-controller in Heron cannot see the onboard PC. This is expected for about two minutes when first powering on, while the computer boots up.
Fast Single Pulse	<b>Manual Override.</b> Indicates that manual control by the Futaba R/C controller is active, and any commands originating from the PC will be disregarded.
Fast Double Pulse	<b>Critical Battery Pack.</b> Indicates that the system battery level is at or below 13V. Return to shore immediately.

Table 1: Heron Status Indicators

## 2.3 R/C Controller

Heron ships with a Futaba R/C transmitter integrated as a means of backup control. The RC controller provides reliable long range control of the USV. Vehicle battery voltage is displayed on the controller if the boat is within range and is equipped with a Futaba Voltage Sensor. It is recommended to remove all AA batteries and store them in a cool dry location when the R/C controller is not in use.

Please see Backup R/C Operation on page 15 for details of operating Heron with the RC controller.





Figure 4: Futaba R/C Transmitter

### 3 SYSTEM SPECIFICATIONS

Key specifications of Heron are shown in Table 2.

Deployed Dimensions	1300 mm length	51.2 in length
	940 mm width	37 in width
	340 mm height	13.4 in height
Stowed Dimensions	1300 mm length	51.2 in length
	550 mm width	21.6 in width
	340 mm height	13.4 in height
Chassis Weight (no battery)	20 kg	44 lbs
Battery Weight	9 kg	20 lbs
Draft	150 mm	5.9 in
Maximum Payload	10 kg	22 lbs
Rated speed (forward)	1.7 m/s	5.6 ft/s
Operating Time	2.5 hours typical	
	10 hours standby (no motion)	
Battery Pack	14.4V 29 Ah NiMH	
Battery Pack Charger	Short-circuit, over-current, over-voltage, and reverse voltage protection.	
Charge Time	10 hours	
User Power	12V fused at 2.5A	
Communication	USB, TCP/IP, RS232, RS485	
Standard Sensing	Battery Voltage, GPS, IMU, Hazard Camera	

Table 2: Heron System Specifications

## 4 SAFETY

Clearpath Robotics is committed to the safety of our users. Please be advised that Heron is research equipment designed for prototyping applications and we are not able to protect operators, observers, and equipment from all possible use cases. This section provides guidelines to help ensure the safety of personnel and equipment, but the ultimate responsibility lies with the operator.

### 4.1 General Warnings

Heron is a rugged and high-performance vehicle. For the safety of yourself and others, conduct initial experiments in an area that is clear of obstacles and deeper than 0.6 m [24 in]. Although Heron is able to operate in very shallow water, this will avoid any possibility of running aground.

Indoor swimming pools provide an ideal environment for initial testing.

When starting out, it is recommended to favor slower speeds. Operating at speeds lower than 0.5 m/s will give the user more time to react if things don't go quite as expected.

Adhere to all pool and open water safety considerations.

Never operate the Heron in a pool or other bodies of water while people are in the water.

### 4.2 Electrical System

Heron is powered by a single 14.4V Nickel-Metal Hydride (NiMH) Battery Pack, the same battery chemistry found in many electric RC cars and boats. Please observe the following precautions:

- Do not tamper with the plug attached to the Battery Pack.
- Do not tamper with the Battery Pack connection on Heron.
- Do not operate Heron without the Battery Pack clamped securely in position.
- Do not tamper with the Electronics Bay.
- Charge the Battery Pack only with chargers provided by Clearpath Robotics.

**The Battery Pack has a rugged exterior to protect it from bumps and scrapes, but it still stores a large amount of electro-chemical energy and is inherently dangerous. Observe the above precautions carefully.**

### 4.3 Lifting and Transport

For the safety of users and to maximize the lifetime of Heron, please observe the following when manually transporting the robot:

- Heron should be lifted using only the two carrying handles on the vehicle itself.

- Ensure that Heron is powered off and the Battery Pack is removed when transporting longer distances.

Do not lift the vehicle from the battery pack handle! This may damage the battery retention inserts in the electronics enclosure

## 5 GETTING STARTED

You are ready to go! This section details how to get the thrusters spinning.

### 5.1 Platform Deployment

Heron has been designed for easy deployment and rapid transit to and from work sites. The hulls and thrusters stow underneath the chassis to reduce the platform's overall size during transit. Unfolding the hulls is a tool-less operation, and is to be done prior to placing the platform in the water. Please see Figure 5 and the steps following.

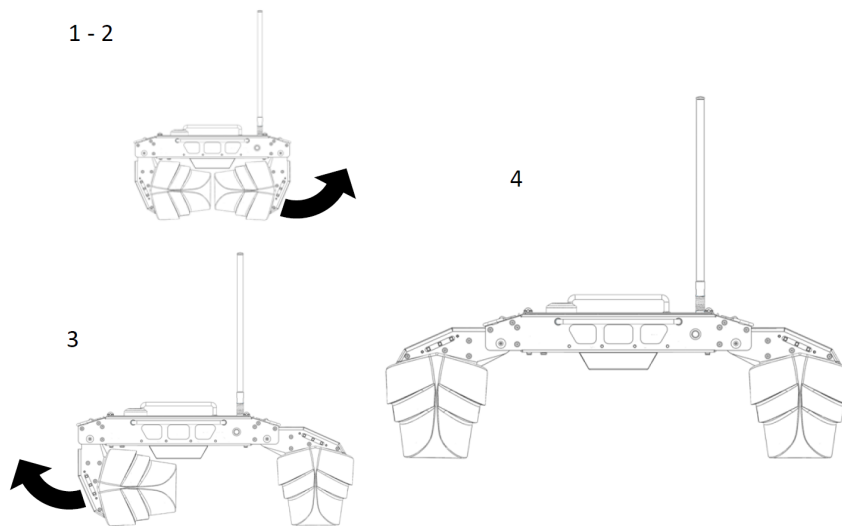


Figure 5: Pontoon Deployment

1. Place stowed Heron right-side-up on the ground.
2. Pull up a stowed hull to the deployment position, setting Heron back down afterward.
3. Repeat this operation for the opposite hull.
4. Heron is ready for battery installation and pre-launch check.

## 5.2 Battery Pack Installation

Heron comes with a Battery Pack that is discharged and disconnected for safety during shipping. Charge the battery prior to first time use. To reconnect the Battery Pack, please see Figure 6 and the steps following.

Do not lift the vehicle from the battery pack handle! This may damage the battery retention inserts in the electronics enclosure

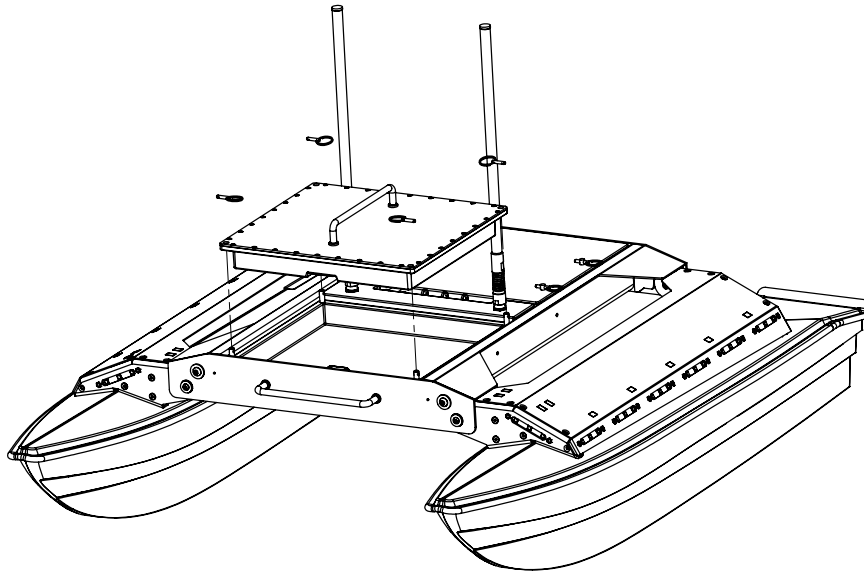


Figure 6: Battery Pack Insertion

1. Ensure Heron's main power button is in the outer "off" position.
2. Carefully lower the Battery Pack so that the plug is inserted into the mating connector in the Battery Bay. Ensure that it is firmly seated.
3. Slide in the fast-pins into the battery retainers. It is OK if the battery retainers rotate, but do not allow them to unthread from their mounts.

**Ensure that the battery is oriented correctly before lowering it into the Battery Bay.**

Remove the battery by lifting above the connector at the front of the battery pack towards the bow of the boat. When this has disengaged, remove the battery vertically along the battery retention posts.

The polarity of the battery pins for each of the two strings of NiMH cells is shown in Figure 7

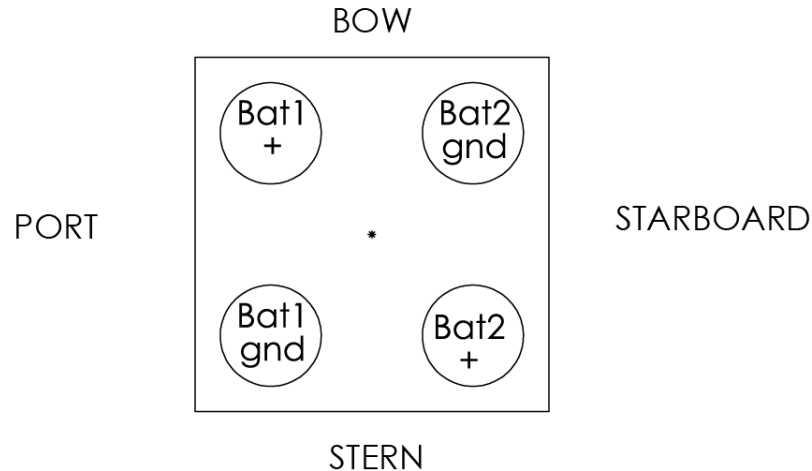


Figure 7: Battery Pack Pinout

## 5.3 Powering On

To power on Heron firmly press the main power button. The power button light will illuminate, and a moment later, the running lights will come on solid for a few seconds before flashing. The motors will play a series of startup chirps to indicate ready status.

For R/C-only operation, the base station is unnecessary. However, if PC operation is required, set up and power-on the base station as well: Connect the battery to the power supply pigtail, and firmly press the button located on the side of the base station module. A blue LED in the power button will come on, and the radio inside the base station box will light up.

It may take Heron as long as five minutes to find the base station, but when it does, the flashing status indicator should move from Wireless Error (Slow Double Pulse) to No Command (Slow Single Pulse).

Before deploying into water, briefly test the activation of the Heron thrusters with the R/C controller and check wireless connectivity (if required). Do not run the thrusters out of water for more than a few seconds.

## 5.4 Backup R/C Operation

Power-on the R/C controller. Flip the enable switch, top left corner (SW2), down toward the user, which puts Heron in manual override mode. This should be indicated by the Heron's running lights moving to short, Fast Single Pulses. Flipping the switch away from the user restores control to the onboard PC.

When operation of the thrusters has been verified on land, deploy Heron into the water and drive it around!

## 6 ROS OPERATION

This section provides an overview of how to use ROS on Heron.

### 6.1 PC Setup

To set up your workstation or laptop (hereafter “development machine”) to work with Heron, begin by following the setup instructions for ROS Hydro: <http://wiki.ros.org/hydro/Installation>.

Then, install the Heron ROS stacks: (Note that many of the existing ROS packages, internet tutorials and support retain the Kingfisher nomenclature of the M200, these may be later updated to replace “kingfisher” with “Heron”)

```
$ sudo apt-get install ros-hydro-kingfisher-desktop
```

Please contact Clearpath Robotics support if you have questions about upcoming functionality.

For the most up-to-date version of these instructions, see: <http://ros.org/wiki/Robots/Kingfisher>.

### 6.2 SSH Connection

**Note:** If you purchased a Basestation with your Heron USV, please refer to the accompanying Robotsmith Memo for instructions on how to connect to the embedded PC.

The embedded PC in Heron may be accessed directly, with a wired Ethernet cable, or over the wireless network created by the base station.

For wired access, use a standard Ethernet cable to connect from a laptop to the round Ethernet connector in the User Payload Area. Use your computer’s network configuration utilities to give your Ethernet port an IP in the 192.168.1.x subnet. For example, from the Ubuntu commandline:

```
$ sudo ifconfig eth0 192.168.1.10 up
```

Now attempt to ping the onboard computer at its standard IP:

```
$ ping 192.168.1.11
```

If successful, you should be ready to connect:

```
$ ssh administrator@192.168.1.11
```

The default password is clearpath.

**For wireless access**, connect to the base station’s LAN port with an Ethernet cable, or simply join the wireless network (use the credentials included with your shipment). The base station’s administration panel will tell you which IP it assigned to the Heron, or you can use arp or nmap to locate it.



To configure the wireless network settings, first connect via SSH using the wired method above, and then use the WICD network manager. To launch the curses-based interactive text client to WICD, execute:

```
$ wicd-curses
```

To give Heron access to the Internet, connect the base station's WAN port to a wired network connection, or use WICD to temporarily connect Heron to a wireless network with Internet access (such as a wireless hotspot).

## 6.3 Developing with the Onboard PC

When connected to the onboard PC via SSH, be aware of the following locations:

- **/opt/ros/hydro** is where ROS packages from apt live, including Kingfisher's core packages. You should not need to modify the contents of this directory.
- **/etc/ros/hydro/kingfisher-core.d** is a directory of roslaunch files which are launched on startup of Heron's computer.

When you are ready to develop additional software to add to Heron, the recommended path is to add your source repo to a new `~/catkin_ws` overlay. When you roslaunch your software, it will seamlessly connect to the already-running background ROS network.

When you're ready to launch some of your software on boat startup, you can add launchfiles to the `kingfisher-core.d` path, but you will also need to change the workspace sourced by the background job. To do this, edit the final line of the `/etc/ros/setup.bash` file, and set it to source the `setup.bash` of the workspace containing the packages which your startup launch file will require.

For more information on using Overlays, see the ROS wiki: [http://wiki.ros.org/catkin/Tutorials/workspace\\_overlaying](http://wiki.ros.org/catkin/Tutorials/workspace_overlaying)

## 6.4 ROS Remote Setup

Connecting with SSH provides a first approach to connecting with the vehicle, however, users often want to be able to run ROS nodes on their development machine and have them able to communicate with the vehicle. This is especially the case with nodes which have a desktop visualization component, such as `rviz` or `image_view`, or when you want to interface with a locally-connected peripheral, such as the game controller.

The nodes which are launched on startup of Heron have the following environment set:

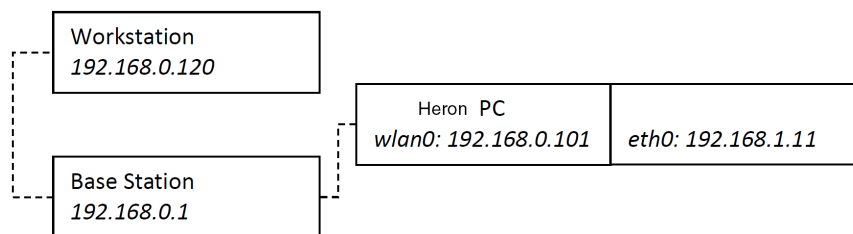
```
export ROS_IP=192.168.1.11
export ROS_MASTER_URI=http://$ROS_IP:11311
```

When connecting to Heron via the wired Ethernet port, with an IP such as 192.168.1.10 (as instructed above), the setup of the environment on your workstation is indeed simple:

```
export ROS_IP=192.168.1.10
export ROS_MASTER_URI=http://192.168.1.11:11311
```

Once these two commands have been executed on your workstation, it should be possible to run `rostopic list`, `rostopic echo`, etc. to verify that you are communicating with the onboard roscore.

**What about connecting over wireless?** To get the remote ROS connection over wireless an additional step is required. Say that your development machine is connected to the base station and receives an IP of 192.168.0.120, while the Heron you'd like to communicate with has an IP of 192.168.0.101.



The `ROS_MASTER_URI` is still the same, but your workstation doesn't know anything about 192.168.1.1 or where to find it until you give it a little help using the `route` command. Execute the following three commands to set up your environment to talk to Heron over the wireless (modify the address of your development machine and the Heron as appropriate, of course):

```
route add -net 192.168.1.1 netmask 255.255.255.255 gw 192.168.0.101
export ROS_IP=192.168.0.120
export ROS_MASTER_URI=http://192.168.1.1:11311
```

The route tells your workstation to send packets destined for 192.168.1.1 instead to 192.168.0.101, which is the Heron. Once they've made it that far, the Linux networking system will be able to take it from there.

The custom route will not persist between reboots. At any time, you can view the Linux kernel routing table by simply executing:

```
Route
```

## 6.5 ROS Remote Teleoperation

When the developer machine has been correctly configured for remote ROS, it will be possible to install the ROS teleop twist joy package, plug in a standard USB joystick and launch Heron teleoperation:

```
roslaunch teleop_twist_joy teleop.launch
```

This will launch, locally on the development machine, the standard ROS joystick driver, and a translation node which converts joystick messages into velocity command messages. Hold button 1 on your joystick to enable command messages to be sent.



Note that this package is currently being transitioned from legacy Kingfisher packages. Please contact Clearpath support if any issues arise.

## 6.6 Key Topics

Heron ships with a rich suite of standard hardware. Each included peripheral is set up from the get-go with appropriate driver software on the onboard PC. This section details how to find the various topics related to each device.

When connected via SSH, or by setting up remote ROS (as detailed above), list available topics with:

```
$ rostopic list
```

The **drive system** publishes information about battery voltage and motor current on the `/sense` topic. It listens for commands on `/cmd_vel` (`geometry_msgs/Twist`) and `/cmd_drive` (`kingfisher_msgs/Drive`).

The **IMU** publishes data on the `/imu/data` topic.

The **GPS** publishes fixes on the `/gps/fix` topic.

## 7 PAYLOAD INTEGRATION

The User Payload Area of Heron includes a standard Ethernet connector, 2 USB connectors and 2 custom RS232 + 12V power connectors. These may be used to power and communicate with payloads such as sonar-based instruments, LiDARs and cameras.

**When the mating connectors are not being used the supplied plug connector and dust cap must be installed to ensure that the Heron electronics remain sealed.**

The waterproof Ethernet panel connector on the Heron electronic enclosure is part number **RR-125300-30** available from [www.USBfirewire.com](http://www.USBfirewire.com). The mating connector can be either part number **RR-125330-00** - RJ45 Field Installable Connector or **RR-125320-01-116** RJ45 Waterproof Cable, also available from [www.USBfirewire.com](http://www.USBfirewire.com)



Figure 8: Electronics Enclosure Ethernet Connection options RR-125330-00 and RR-125320-01-116

The mating connector for the waterproof USB panel mount connectors on the Heron electronics enclosure bay is part number **RR-116370-00** -field installable connector from [USBfirewire.com](http://USBfirewire.com). Please review other mating options for the screw-lock type USB connectors available on [usbfirewire.com](http://usbfirewire.com) such as **RR-116320-06-39** - Waterproof USB Cable - A Extension.



Figure 9: Electronics Enclosure USB connector RR-116370-00

RS232 and 12V power are supplied via two female panel mount Chogori Standard Series 6-pin connectors on the Heron electronics enclosure (part number **22006615-01**). The mating connector is a Chogori 6-pin male cord plug, part number **22006111-01**. Please review the data sheets of each connector prior to assembly.

The pin-out for the mating Chogori cord connector is given in Figure 7 and Figure 7. Note that Figure 7 should be interpreted as viewed from the solder end of the field installable connector.

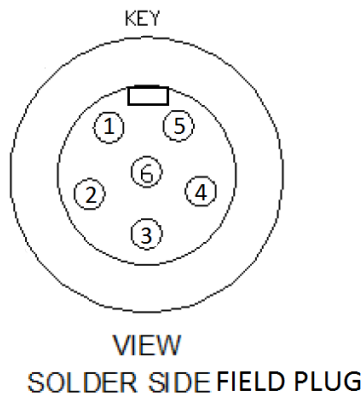


Figure 10: Chogori Field Installable Connector pin numbering

The pinout for this connector is as follows:

Pin number	Function
1	GND
2	TX
3	RTS
4	12V Supply
5	RX
6	CTS

Table 3: EN3 Pin Function

## 8 MAINTENANCE

Kingfisher is built for rugged, long-term use. However, there are steps that can be taken to maintain and extend the life of the platform even further.

### 8.1 Charging

The Battery Pack which ships with Heron can be charged with the following steps:

1. Remove Battery Pack from platform.
2. Connect the DC output cable from the charger to the Battery Pack terminal connector.
3. Plug the charger power cord into the charger, and then into a wall receptacle.
4. When the Battery Pack is fully charged, the LED will turn green. Unplug the charger from the wall, and then disconnect it from the Battery Pack.

Charging at a lower current will require more time, but will ensure that all cells within the Battery Pack are properly balanced, yielding longer runtimes and better overall battery health. It is recommended that each Battery Pack is charged at 0.9A after every 5 charge-discharge cycles.

### 8.2 Battery Pack

Heron's power supply is a sealed 14.4 V nickel metal hydride (NiMH) battery, providing 29 ampere-hours of charge. To maximize the lifetime of the Battery Pack, recharge immediately after use, and keep charged to prevent loss in capacity.

The Battery Pack should never be used or stored in an environment exceeding 40 degrees Celsius (104 °F), and should always be charged at temperatures above freezing.

### 8.3 Electronics Bay

Heron's electronics are enclosed in a sealed compartment. These do not require maintenance, and the bay should only be opened by, or under the supervision of, Clearpath Robotics.

## 9 TIPS AND TROUBLESHOOTING

This section lists a few possible issues which may be encountered in the course of using Heron.

Observation	Issue & Resolution
No power LED	<b>System is unpowered.</b> Ensure power button is pressed, and check that battery is properly seated in battery bay. It is unlikely that the battery would be so discharged as to be unable to illuminate the LED, but you could also confirm with a multimeter that the battery has a terminal voltage of at least 14V.
Running lights indicate error status	<b>System is in error.</b> Please refer to Status Indicators on page 7 to determine the status being indicated, and contact support for further assistance.
Can't ping onboard PC	<b>Network problem.</b> Ensure that Heron is indicating successful connection to the base station, and that the user laptop is also successfully connected (ie, able to ping 192.168.0.1).
Unable to list ROS topics	<b>ROS network problem.</b> Ensure that the user laptop has a working ROS installation, including the Kingfisher workspace. Ensure that ROS_MASTER_URI is correctly pointing to the Heron IP, and that ROS_IP is set to the user laptop's IP.
Unable to echo ROS topics	<b>ROS environment problem.</b> Ensure that the user laptop is able to ping Heron, and that ROS_MASTER_URI and ROS_IP are set correctly.

If you're having some trouble that you don't see here, or the suggested solution isn't working out, please get in touch so we can help you with it (see next page for contact details).

For more details on setting up multiple machines to work together in ROS, please see the following pages on the ROS wiki:

- <http://www.ros.org/wiki/ROS/NetworkSetup>
- <http://www.ros.org/wiki/ROS/Tutorials/MultipleMachines>



## 10 SERVICE AND SUPPORT

Clearpath is committed to your success with Heron. Please get in touch with us and we'll do our best to get you rolling again quickly: [support@clearpathrobotics.com](mailto:support@clearpathrobotics.com) or visit our knowledge base for at [support.clearpathrobotics.com](http://support.clearpathrobotics.com)

To get in touch with our sales team regarding Heron or other Clearpath Robotics products, please email [sales@clearpathrobotics.com](mailto:sales@clearpathrobotics.com).

If you have an issue that is specifically about ROS and is something which may be of interest to the broader community, consider asking it on [answers.ros.org](http://answers.ros.org). If you don't get a satisfactory response, please ping us and include a link to your question as posted there. If appropriate, we'll answer in the ROS Answers context for the benefit of the community.