

Secret X-37B mini space shuttle could land today

June 14 2012, by Nancy Atkinson



The first X-37B landing in 2010. Credit: Vandenberg Air Force Base.

After more than a year in orbit, the US Air Force's clandestine mini-space shuttle will likely land at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California sometime this week, with some reports saying it could land as early as today, Wednesday, June 13, 2012. It has been in orbit since March 5, 2011, but like the first X-37B mission that flew in 2010 and spent 224 days in space, the Air Force has not issued any information of what the craft is doing or where it is orbiting. However, amateur skywatchers and amateur satellite trackers have been keeping an eye on where the OTV-2 has been.

After launch it had a 331 km (206-mile) orbit inclined 42.8 degrees to the equator, but in the summer of 2011 the [orbit](#) was raised slightly to

337 km (209 miles).

The craft looks like a miniature [space](#) shuttle, and is 8.8 meters (29 feet) long with a wing span of 4.2 meters (14 feet). It can weigh up to about 5,000 kg (11,000 pounds) fueled for launch. The reported in-space design life is 270 days, but sources say that good performance on this mission enabled ground controllers to keep it aloft significantly longer.

Jeremy Eggers, a spokesman for the 30th Space Wing at Vandenberg was quoted by [ABC News](#) that the spacecraft's first available landing opportunity will be Wednesday, depending on weather and technical conditions. The landing window extends through June 18, but Eggers says any landing is a “day-by-day situation based on the conditions.”

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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