Beat: News

Final Public Appearance of Snowbirds

Flying The Iconic CT-114 Tutor Jets

Grey Cup, Calgary, Alberta , 16.11.2026, 23:30 Time

Brian MacKenzie Teepell/USPA 24 News - The Snowbirds as we know them flew their last pass ever.

Nine red and white CT-114 Tutors flew over McMahon Stadium just before the 5 pm, Grey Cup kickoff, as Sarah McLachlan finished singing the Canadian national anthem.

It was the team's final public flight in the Tutor CT-114, and the last time they will fly these jets for a scheduled public spectacle.
The Tutors retire at year-end. The team stays grounded until the early 2030s, when the CT-157 Siskin II takes over.
The Snowbirds have flown the Tutor since 1971, performing about 2,700 demonstrations for more than 140 million people.

The following is
An Open Letter to the Government of Canada from the Canadian Forces Snowbirds, Royal Canadian Air Force
"Don't Ground Our Snowbirds for a Decade."

For generations, the unmistakable sound of the CT-114 Tutor has been part of the Canadian experience. From coast to coast, the Snowbirds have taken to the skies, displaying the skill, precision and professionalism of our Canadian Armed Forces. They have inspired millions of Canadians, introduced countless young people to the possibilities of aviation, and proudly represented Canada to audiences around the world.

The Snowbirds are more than an aerobatic team. They are a national symbol. They are a source of pride for Canadians, a connection between our communities and our military, and an inspiration to the next generation of pilots, engineers and aviation enthusiasts.

The government has announced its intention to replace the aging CT-114 Tutor with the CT-157 Siskin II, based on the Pilatus PC-21. It is encouraging to see a replacement identified and a commitment made to preserving the future of the Snowbirds. However, a commitment and an announcement are not the same as having aircraft on order and a firm plan to get them into service.

The current expectation is that the new capability will not be operational until the early 2030s. That is simply too long.

If the 2026 season marks the end of the Tutor's service with the Snowbirds, Canadians could be looking at years without the team performing its traditional role at airshows and community events. We are talking about the better part of a decade without one of Canada's most recognizable national institutions.

Think about the children who attend airshows today, sitting on their parents' shoulders, watching those red and white aircraft soar overhead. For some, that experience will plant the seed of a lifelong interest in aviation. For others, it may be the first time they feel a connection to the Canadian Armed Forces. Those experiences matter. I can tell you from
experience growing up around the airplanes and being a parent now; the Snowbirds matter, enough that both the young and the old had tears in their eyes watching the 2026 Grey Cup fly past and tribute video.

We cannot simply put this legacy on hold for years and expect it to pick up where it left off.

I am not suggesting that the government compromise aircraft safety or rush a procurement decision without proper consideration. The safety of our pilots and support crews must always come first. But surely there is room for greater urgency. If the replacement aircraft has already been selected, the government should be doing everything possible to accelerate procurement, secure an order and bring forward the delivery and operational timeline.

I would also encourage the government to work with current and former members of the Snowbirds, particularly those who understand the operational requirements of the team, to examine every safe and practical option for maintaining an air demonstration presence

during the transition. A smaller formation or modified demonstration program may be worth considering if it allows the Snowbirds to remain visible to Canadians while the new aircraft are introduced.

We should not accept years of silence in the skies as an inevitable consequence of replacing an aging aircraft.

The Snowbirds have performed thousands of displays for millions of people. They have represented Canada across North America and have become ambassadors for our country in a way few other organizations can match. Their impact extends well beyond aviation. They bring communities together, inspire young Canadians and showcase the dedication and professionalism of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

This is also an investment in the future. The next generation of Canadian pilots deserves the opportunity to be inspired by the Snowbirds just as generations before them have been. We should be encouraging young Canadians to look to the skies, not giving them a decade in which one of our most visible symbols of Canadian aviation is absent.

The government has recognized that the Snowbirds deserve a future. Now it needs to demonstrate that commitment through action.

Place the aircraft order. Accelerate the delivery schedule. Explore every safe and practical option to bridge the gap.

Canada cannot afford to let one of its proudest traditions disappear from our skies for the better part of a decade simply because the replacement process takes too long.

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Replace the Tutor. Preserve the legacy. Keep the Snowbirds flying.

Respectfully,

Canadian Forces Snowbirds, Royal Canadian Air Force

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