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## **Red Knot Proposed for Endangered Species Act Protection**

### ***Shorebird That Migrates Along Eastern Seaboard Has Declined by 75 Percent, Partly Because of Overharvest of Horseshoe Crab in Delaware Bay***

*Bristol, Pa.*— The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed Endangered Species Act protection today for the red knot, a shorebird that migrates more than 9,000 miles between the North and South Poles, from its South American wintering grounds in Tierra del Fuego to its Arctic breeding grounds in northern Canada. The proposed protection for the attractive, reddish-brown shorebird is the result of a landmark legal settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity that requires the agency to make protection decisions for 757 species.

“The red knot is a testament to tenacity, but right now it really needs our help,” said **Noah Greenwald, endangered species director with the Center**. “With massive overharvest of the horseshoe crabs these birds need to fuel their spectacular migration, protection can’t wait any longer.”

Red knots that migrate along the Eastern seaboard have declined by 75 percent or more since the 1980s, in part because of dramatic declines in horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay, which the birds rely on for food along their 9,300-mile journey from the southern tip of South America to the Arctic. Red knots that do not put on enough weight at the Delaware Bay staging grounds perish on the final push North to the breeding grounds, or may be too weak to nest successfully once there.

The scarcity of horseshoe crabs is being caused by major harvest increases, since the 1990s, for bait in the eel- and conch-fishing industries and for biomedical use. Red knots may also be particularly susceptible to global climate change, which is already causing pronounced changes at the high latitudes where the bird breeds and winters.

**Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper**, said, “Today’s agreement gives the red knot hope for the protection it needs to halt its decline and begin the climb back to recovery. It would be a terrible tragedy if we lost this beautiful and remarkable bird.”

The red knot is a large sandpiper with a wingspan of 20 inches and a ruddy head and breast that it displays during breeding season. It migrates in larger flocks than most shorebirds and is highly faithful to the same stopover sites on its annual migration journeys. Scientists have estimated that nearly 90% of the entire population can be

present on the Delaware Bay in a single day. Moving in large flocks is probably an adaptation against predation, but also makes the red knot vulnerable to habitat change and loss of site-specific food sources, like the horseshoe crab.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network and other groups sent a petition to the Fish and Wildlife Service for emergency listing of the red knot in 2005. A year later the Service determined the birds warranted protection, but did not provide that protection due to lack of resources.

To date, the Center's 757 species agreement with the Service has resulted in final protection for 111 species and proposed protection for 62 species, including the knot.

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 625,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.*