

Governor Jack Markell  
Carvel State Office Building  
820 N. French Street  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Governor Markell,

I am concerned about the Red Knot rufa subspecies (*Calidris canutus rufa*) which may soon become extinct due to the over fishing of horseshoe crabs (HSCs). I am asking you to ensure that Delaware does its part to help save this amazing bird by issuing an executive order to ban horseshoe crab harvesting in Delaware.

Every spring this small, plump, reddish shorebird migrates over 9,000 miles from Tierra del Fuego to the Canadian Arctic. Its last stop is on the Delaware Bay shores, where it feeds on horseshoe crab eggs. Each Red Knot must eat enough horseshoe crab eggs to double its weight in order to survive the last part of its journey to the Arctic and successfully breed. Unfortunately, the harvesting of horseshoe crabs increased in the 1990's, as horseshoe crabs became a popular source of bait for the commercial fishing industry. As a result, the Delaware Bay population of horseshoe crabs declined by 90% between 1990 and 2006. The number of horseshoe crab eggs on Delaware Bay shores also dropped from 40,000 eggs per square meter in the 1990's to only 1,500 eggs per square meter in 2005. With fewer eggs to feed on, up to 75% of Red Knots surveyed on the Delaware Bay have suffered a year-on-year decline in their rate of weight gain between 1990 and 2006. Lower weight birds have been shown to have lower survival rates. An annual count shows that the number of Red Knots stopping at Delaware Bay dropped from 95,000 in 1989 to only 12,375 in 2007. Furthermore, the entire wintering population of Red Knots has dropped 33% in 4 years, from 27,728 in 2004/5 to only 18,350 in 2007/8. Scientific models predict that the Red Knot may become extinct by 2010.

Due in part to the fact that it takes 10 years for a horseshoe crab to reach sexual maturity, the current restrictions on horseshoe crab harvesting imposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) have not been successful in reversing the downward trend of the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population. Between 1999 and 2007, there have been no increases in the number of female horseshoe crabs spawning in the Delaware Bay, or in horseshoe crab egg density. Though the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population seems to have stabilized, the number of crabs must return to the levels of the early 1990's in order to support the recovery of the Red Knot. To achieve this large increase in the number of horseshoe crabs, the harvesting of all Delaware Bay horseshoe crabs must be banned.

The Red Knot is also not the only bird that is sounding the alarm. Populations of other shorebird species that share the Delaware Bay stopover, such as Ruddy Turnstones, Short-Billed Dowitchers, Sanderlings and Semipalmated Sandpipers, have also declined drastically. Between 1998 and 2007, these and other shorebird species declined by approximately 64%. This spells doom for one of Delaware's greatest tourist attractions. The spring shorebird migration attracts birders and other nature enthusiasts to Delaware Bay every spring. But each year, migration brings fewer and less healthy birds. Taking action to save the Red Knot will also help to protect these other Delaware Bay shorebirds, and strengthen Delaware's ecotourism industry.

The very best scenario for the Red Knot would be immediate listing under the ESA, which would require federal protection of the birds, their habitat and their food supply. In addition, states that allow harvesting of Delaware Bay horseshoe crabs have a responsibility to do what they can to help the Red Knot survive. New Jersey led the way in 2008 with its horseshoe crab harvesting ban. Delaware must now do its part to save the Red Knot by banning horseshoe crab harvesting in its waters. Therefore, I ask you to act quickly to save the Red Knot by issuing an executive order to ban horseshoe crab harvesting in Delaware. The actions of humans have threatened this beautiful bird with extinction, and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to save it. Extinct means forever.

Sincerely,

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_