

Governor Martin O'Malley
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Dear Governor O'Malley,

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 Maryland does its part to help save this amazing bird by issuing an executive order to ban horseshoe crab harvesting in Maryland.

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 HSC eggs. Each Red Knot must eat enough HSC 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 HSCs increased in the 1990's, as HSCs became a popular source of bait for the commercial fishing industry. As a result, the Delaware Bay population of HSCs declined by 90% between 1990 and 2006. The number of HSC 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 has dropped from 95,000 in 1989 to only 12,375 in 2007. 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 HSC to reach sexual maturity, current restrictions on HSC harvesting imposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) have not been successful in reversing the downward trend of the Delaware Bay HSC population. Between 1999 and 2007, there have been no increases in the number of female HSCs spawning in the Delaware Bay, or in HSC egg density. Though the Delaware Bay HSC 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 HSCs, the harvesting of all Delaware Bay HSCs must be banned.

Recently, the state legislature of New Jersey passed a bill to ban HSC harvesting in that state. Harvesting of HSCs from Maryland waters also must be further restricted. It is estimated that 40% of the HSCs harvested in Maryland belong to the Delaware Bay spawning population. The ASMFC regulations allow a yearly harvest in Maryland of 170,653 HSCs, including the harvesting of female as well as male crabs. In 2007, 60% of the HSCs harvested in Maryland were female.

The very best scenario for the Red Knot would be immediate listing under the Endangered Species Act. In addition, states that allow harvesting of Delaware Bay HSCs have a responsibility to do what they can to help the Red Knot survive. New Jersey has led the way with its recent harvesting ban. Now is the time for Maryland to take action to save the Red Knot by banning HSC harvesting in its waters. Therefore, I request that you act quickly to save the Red Knot by issuing an executive order to ban HSC harvesting in Maryland. 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 _____