Secretary Ken Salazar
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

I am concerned about the problems facing the Red Knot rufa subspecies (*Calidris canutus rufa).* The priority number for listing the Red Knot under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) was recently changed from 6 to 3 because scientific evidence shows that threats to this subspecies are imminent. However, this does not guarantee that the Red Knot will be listed. As the Red Knot waits for ESA protection (along with 250 other species), its population continues to decline toward extinction. We are asking you to use your emergency authorities to immediately list the Red Knot rufa as endangered under the ESA.

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 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.

Current efforts to restrict over fishing of horseshoe crabs are insufficient and inconsistent from state to state. State imposed restrictions are being successfully challenged and overturned by the commercial fishing industry. Restrictions imposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission are not adequate to allow recovery of the 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. We know that the current horseshoe crab population is not large enough to provide for the nutritional needs of the migrating Red Knots because Red Knot numbers continue to decline. The number of Red Knots wintering in Tierra del Fuego has decreased from 17,653 in 2004/5 to 14,800 in 2007/8. Furthermore, the entire wintering population of Red Knots has dropped 33% over the past 4 winters, from 27,728 in 2004/5 to only 18,350 in 2007/8.

Listing the Red Knot under the ESA will allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ban or restrict horseshoe crab harvesting in the 4 states (New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia) where the Delaware Bay crabs are typically caught. Without this increased protection of their food source, the Red Knot population will continue to drop to a point where management measures are not able to reverse the decline. Therefore, I request that you act quickly to place the Red Knot rufa subspecies on the Endangered Species List. 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_____

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Date_____