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Imperiled red knot focus of new children's book

Red Knot: A Shorebird's Incredible Journey, by Nancy Carol Willis, chronicles the 20,000-mile annual migration of one red knot, a robin-sized shorebird whose population has declined 80 percent over the past 10 years. The fully illustrated, nonfiction picture book is scheduled for release in May 2006, when red knots arrive in Delaware Bay.

At the heart of the story is a conservation message for children. Red knots make only a few stops as they travel and always in the same coastal areas. Habitat loss and dwindling food supplies have caused their numbers to plummet from 100,000 two decades ago to 13,315 in 2004. Recent population models have some scientists predicting the birds' extinction as early as 2010.

The plight of red knots captured national media attention last August when leading conservation groups filed an emergency petition with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the red knot under the Endangered Species Act. This May, scientists and bird experts from around the globe will converge on Delaware and New Jersey beaches to help save red knots from extinction.

Delaware Bay is the critical stopover site in the red knots' migration from the tip of South America to their Arctic nesting grounds. They arrive barely more than bones and feathers after a 4,000-mile nonstop flight over the Atlantic Ocean. Their survival depends upon the availability of horseshoe crab eggs, which they can consume at a rate of 18,000 a day.

But 25 years of over-fishing have reduced the population of spawning horseshoe crabs by 75 percent. These prehistoric creatures are sold as bait for conch and eel traps, and their copper-blue blood is used in the medical industry to detect pathogens.

Willis' book will hit the bookstores as efforts to save one of the world's longest distance migrants peaks. The dramatic migration story is narrated in journal entries from the point of view of one red knot. It depicts in stunningly-detailed colored pencil illustrations the flight over the Atlantic Ocean, arrival in Delaware Bay, the Arctic nesting grounds, chicks feeding on insects, a close call with an arctic fox, and the return home.

Science concepts such as animal life cycles, extinction, the food chain, and migration are introduced by information about how bird banding and protection of the horseshoe crabs can help red knots survive. Leading red knot scientist, Brian A. Harrington, states: "Willis has taken decades of research of such a wondrous animal and reduced it to an illustrated, simple and straightforward story of migration wonder with a conservation bent for children."

Red Knot: A Shorebird's Incredible Journey may be ordered from Independent Publishers Group or online at www.BirdsongBooks.com. For additional information, contact Birdsong Books at 302 378-7274.

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