



THE TRACKS YOU LEAVE BEHIND

Tide Turning for Horseshoe Crabs



HORSESHOE CRABS | © ARIANE MUELLER



RED KNOT | © HANS HILLEWAERT



BABY LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE | FWS

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An early summer ritual nearly as old as life itself unfolds each year on beaches from Florida to Maine: the emergence of horseshoe crabs from the ocean depths to lay their eggs. The eggs of these “living fossils” are rich in nutrients, and red knots and other migratory shorebirds enroute to Arctic breeding grounds descend by the thousands to feed on this fuel for the second leg of their journey.

Hungry shorebirds aren't the only ones counting on horseshoe crabs coming ashore. For decades, commercial harvesters in South Carolina have been collecting crabs from the remote islands, salt marshes and tidal creeks of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge—one of the most important shorebird migration areas on the Atlantic Coast—and transporting them to bleeding facilities under contract to Charles River Laboratories. There, an estimated 150,000 crabs per year are drained of a third of their blood to extract a substance used to test medical instruments and devices for

bacteria—despite the availability of a synthetic alternative. If the crabs don't die in the process, they're returned to the water, but many of them are still too lethargic to survive.

Hundreds of thousands of crabs and countless eggs for shorebirds have been lost to this unregulated and often illegal harvest that threatens the existence of both the horseshoe crab and shorebirds, especially the red knot, a federally listed threatened species.

Litigation brought by Defenders of Wildlife and the Southern Environmental Law Center has finally halted the harvest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service deemed harvesting



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Tide Turning

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an “inappropriate” activity that disturbs roosting and nesting birds, deprives red knots of calories and undermines the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

In another win for horseshoe crabs and red knots, the state of South Carolina rejected the opening of nearby ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve, despite massive pressure from Charles River to allow harvesting. The horseshoe crab can now safely spawn on the refuge and the reserve and fulfill its role as a keystone species critical



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to the survival of not only red knots and other shorebirds but also loggerhead sea turtles, sharks and many other species. 🐾



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New Hope for Red Wolves

The red wolf is the world’s most endangered canid and the only wolf native to the southeast U.S. Reestablished in eastern North Carolina through a captive breeding and reintroduction program, the wild population is now down to the single digits and limited to the Albemarle Peninsula as a result of mismanagement, vehicle strikes and poaching.

However, there have been some incredible wins for this critically endangered species in the past year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released four adult

wolves in the wild and placed four pups with a wild female wolf for cross fostering in 2021 and so far in 2022 has released 11 more wolves, tripling the number of breeding pairs in the wild.

In April, Red Wolf Recovery Program staff confirmed the birth of a litter of six red wolf pups, the first born in the wild since 2018. The pups—four females and two males found in Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge—represent new hope for the recovery program. 🐾

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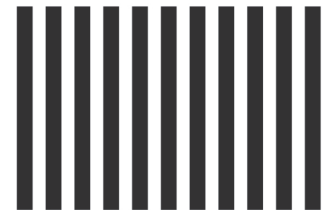
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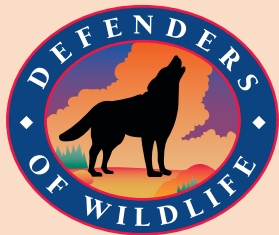


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FALL 2022

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RED WOLF PUPS | RYAN NORDSVEN/FWS

