Migration Miracle: The Long-Distance Flier, Rufa Red Knot

A PERILOUS JOURNEY

The red knot faces threats across the Western Hemisphere. Many are driven by climate change, which is raising sea levels, increasing storms and changing food and habitat availability. Additional threats include development, human disturbance, predation and hunting, among others.

Arctic

PREDATION

Arctic predators turn to red knot eggs and chicks when other prey isn't available. When this happens, most chicks do not survive. This pressure may increase with climate change.

2,700 miles

2,000 miles

HABITAT LOSS & DISTURBANCE

In the U.S. and abroad, coastal areas continue to be lost to sea level rise, shoreline projects and development. Human disturbance can keep the red knot from effectively preparing for its long journey.

1,200 miles

Delaware Bay

3,500 miles

Texas

1,300 miles

FOOD

Along their range, red knots feed on small clams and mussels. In Delaware Bay, they rely on horseshoe crab eggs. Red knot declines in the 2000s are linked to commercial crab harvest. With a scientific management framework now in place, harvest is no longer a threat. However, other threats to their food supplies are emerging.

HUNTING

Shorebird hunting in the Caribbean and South America may contribute to red knot declines.

Brazil

LONG-DISTANCE FLIER

The red knot B95, named for his leg band number, has been nicknamed "Moonbird," as researchers calculate this long-lived bird has flown enough miles to journey to the moon and at least halfway back.

4,250 miles

OIL SPILLS

Oil-related activities occur from Argentina to Canada, and depending on location, size and timing, a spill could kill red knots or affect migration. An event in key areas (Tierra del Fuego, Patagonia, the Gulf of Mexico, Delaware Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence) would be particularly problematic.

Tierra del Fuego

Created by Debra Reynolds, USFWS; Photos courtesy of USFWS, NASA and Brad Winn, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences