

## RUFA RED KNOT

*Calidris canutus rufa*

The Endangered Species Act, enacted in 1973, serves to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. It is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Gregory Breese - USFWS

Threatened - A Federally Protected Species

Imagine making a 3,000 mile grocery trip, twice a year. Though seemingly impossible for us, the red knot, a small shorebird with a 23-inch wingspan, makes this journey in just three days.

### IDENTIFICATION

Red knots are most easily identified when in their late spring and summer breeding plumage. During this time, the bird earns its name with its rusty head, neck and belly. The back is mottled gray, black and brown and the tail and wings are pale gray. In the fall, this sandpiper molts and turns pale gray with white flanks. Red knots have dull yellow or olive-green legs and a straight, dark bill. The sturdy bill is used to probe mudflats for mollusks, insects and seeds.



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The *rufa* red knot is one of the longest distance migrants known to the animal kingdom.

### ADAPTATIONS FOR SURVIVAL

Most knots winter along the Chilean Coast and migrate to the Canadian Arctic breeding grounds by way of the Atlantic Coast. Some of these birds travel 18,000 miles a year! These birds often use Delaware and New Jersey's Delaware Bay area as a stopover, refueling on Horseshoe Crab eggs. But a small red knot population winters along the coast of Texas and migrates to the breeding grounds by way of the Great Plains. Even though this population passes over Oklahoma, these birds are often flying thousands of feet above the ground, seldom making landfall in our state. To date, only 40 birds have been reported in Oklahoma. Of those birds, 85% have been reported during the fall migration. It is suspected inclement weather, inexperience of younger birds or weakened physical condition forces these birds to land during migration.

Red knots have experienced severe population declines, with reduced food availability cited as the primary cause. These declines triggered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's listing of the rufa red knot (the North American subspecies of red knot) as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This decision was announced December 11, 2014.

The Wildlife Diversity Program, a program of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation manages, monitors and promotes rare, declining and threatened species as well as those common species not hunted or fished. This program receives no state or federal tax appropriations and is primarily funded through the sale of publications, specialty license plates, the income tax check-off program and voluntary contributions.

