

Researchers turn to cannons to save elusive birds

September 20 2013, by Rodrique Ngowi



A researcher uses a clothes hanger to secure a geo-locator in place on the leg of a Red Knot shore bird while the glue dries on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. On a 20 inch wingspans Red Knots migrate as much as 9,300 miles from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America in the fall and will fly a return migration each spring. Red Knots are one of the longest-distance migrants in the animal kingdom. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)

Wildlife researchers on Cape Cod are tagging some of the elusive

shorebirds known as red knots.

The robin-size birds are on New Jersey's [endangered species list](#) and have been proposed for inclusion on the federal list.

Researchers are collecting feather samples and measuring, weighing and tagging the birds. Their legs are being fit with tiny geolocators.

Biologists hope the geolocators will use ambient light to calculate and record the locations of the birds, helping conservation workers who recapture them to determine their migration routes.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says the red knot population has dropped by up to 75 percent since the 1980s in some areas. The decrease is partly fueled by a drastic decline in the horseshoe [crab population](#) in the Delaware Bay, a key refueling stop.



Kaiti Titherington, an employee of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, releases a

Red Knot on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. Six Red Knots were caught, tagged, measured and had a wing clipping taken before being release to continue their long migration from the Arctic to the southern United States, the Caribbean and South America. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Stephanie Koch, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist for Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge, places a Red Knot shore bird into a roosting box on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. Six Red Knots were captured, tagged and measured for research purposes before being released to continue their 9,300 mile migration from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



One of six Red Knot shore birds captured on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., is held by a researcher Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The Red Knots will be tagged, measured, have a clipping taken from their 20 inch wingspans and then released to continue their 9,300 mile migration from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America. Red Knots are one of the longest-distance migrants in the animal kingdom. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Shot into the air by cannons, propelled by black powder charges, a large bird net soars over a flock of shore birds on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. Researchers are attempting to capture Red Knots so they may tag, measure, and take clippings from their 20 inch wingspans before releasing the birds to continue their 9,300 mile migration from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America. Red Knots are one of the longest-distance migrants in the animal kingdom. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Kate Iaquinto, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge stands among a flock of shore birds, including Red

Knots, while "twinkling" on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. Twinkling is a process by which bird researchers approach a flock of birds very, very slowly in an effort to direct the flock in ways required by researchers to capture and study the flighted animals. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Larry Niles, a biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, holds the bird net cannon firing box as he describes to Ellison Orcutt, with MassAudubon, and Kate Iaquinto, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, the sequence of events that will transpire on the north end of Nauset Beach once Niles gives Orcutt the order to fire in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. Niles and his research team are hoping to capture Red Knot shore birds. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Ellison Orcutt, with MassAudubon, digs a firing blind on the north end of Nauset Beach from where he will ignite the bird net cannons in and attempt to capture Red Knot shore birds in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The Red Knots will be tagged, measured, have a clipping taken from their 20 inch wingspans and then released to continue their 9,300 mile migration from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America. Red Knots are one of the longest-distance migrants in the animal kingdom. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Kate Iaquinto, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge on Cape Cod, right, and Ellison Orcutt, with MassAudubon, lay out electrical wire which will be used to ignite the bird net cannons in an attempt to capture Red Knot shore birds on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Larry Niles, a biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, directs members of his research crew as he untangles a large bird net being attached to cannons which will launch the net through the air in an attempt to capture Red Knot shore birds on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The Red Knots will be tagged, measured, have a clipping taken from their 20 inch wingspans and then released to continue their 9,300 mile migration from the Arctic south to the Caribbean and South America. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Members of a joint research team roll up a large bird net before it is attached to cannons which when ignited will send the net through the air in an attempt to capture Red Knot shore birds for research purposes on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The birds will be tagged, measured, have a wing clipping taken and then released. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Larry Niles, a biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, left, guides Yianni Laskaris, right, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as he aligns a net cannon placed in a hole dug in the sand on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The cannon carries a black powder charge that when ignited will push a projectile tethered to a net into the air in an effort to capture Red Knot shore birds for research purposes. Other members of the projects research team, center, lay out the large bird net in hopes of catching birds that will be tagged, measured, have a wing clipping taken and then released. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)



Larry Niles, a biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, digs a hole in the sand on the north end of Nauset Beach in Eastham, Mass., as Yianni Laskaris of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lifts a net cannon to place in the hole Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2013. The cannon carries a black powder charge that when ignited will push a projectile tethered to a large net into the air in an effort to capture Red Knot shore birds for research purposes. The birds will be tagged, measured, have a wing clipping taken and then released. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)

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