

Bird Stewards to the Rescue: Volunteers Increase Effectiveness of Protected Beach

By *Anna Sanders*
Created 02/21/2012 - 3:46pm



Birds like the Red Knot benefit from stewards on duty at protected bird areas. (Photo: Greg Breese for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Every year during the spring migration, the Red Knot ^[1] travels a staggering 9,300 miles between its wintering grounds in the south to Delaware Bay and the Arctic. Though North America's largest "peep" ^[2] will usually spend the winter months along the coasts of southern Chile and Argentina, a small portion of Red Knots wait out the cold in Florida, where they must rest before the long journey north. In light of this shorebird's declining numbers ^[3], one Florida professor studied whether symbolic fencing, signs, and designating beaches as "protected" helped birds like the Red Knot by decreasing human disturbance. Turns out Red Knots not only prefer protected beaches, but bird stewards—volunteers with a passion for our feathered friends ^[4]—increase the effectiveness of these areas to the benefit of all birds.

Beth Forys, professor of environmental science and biology at Eckerd College, found that more Red Knots settled in the Ft. DeSoto Protected Beach ^[5] compared with unguarded areas with the same resources. "It seems like those birds were cueing in on the idea of a 'protected area,'" Forys says.

Almost a thousand more Red Knots were counted in the protected area during the study than those found on the three other surveyed shorelines combined. The birds were probably attracted to the area's relative privacy: Along with signs and

posts, volunteers deterred human visitors from disturbing Red Knots on the protected beach. But without these bird stewards, Forsy's survey also found that more intruders ventured into the bird's protected domain.

"We compared how often intruders people walked into the bird area with bird stewards there versus not," Forsy says. "When you have nobody there, it's just symbolic fencing and signs, so more people would disturb the birds."

Forsy conducted the two-year study in a report to the National Fish & Wildlife Federation. During 28 four-hour surveys of the protected beach, Forsy and her team found that nine times more intruders ventured into the protected area without a volunteer present compared to when a steward was on duty.

"I think it shows that it's worth it. Being a bird steward can be fun, but it's hard. It's hot and uncomfortable. This is good data to show people what they're doing does work," Forsy says.

While these volunteers have no enforcement ability, Forsy explains bird stewards educate the public while asking them not to enter a protected area.



Red Knot (Photo: Greg Breese for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

"People will often walk up and say, 'Why is that closed off?'" Forsy says. "Almost always when people hear about why an area is protected they are really supportive."

[Birds](#) [Nature](#) [Wildlife](#)

//> //>

```
var gaJsHost = (("https:" == document.location.protocol) ? "https://ssl." : "http://www.");
document.write(unescape("%3Cscript src=" + gaJsHost + "google-analytics.com/ga.js'
type='text/javascript'%3E%3C/script%3E")); var pageTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-
6149536-1"); pageTracker._trackPageview();
```

[The Perch](#) | [About](#) | [Archive](#) | [Get the Magazine](#) | [Audubon.org](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Source URL: <http://magblog.audubon.org/bird-stewards-rescue-volunteers-increase-effectiveness-protected-beach>

Links:

- [1] <http://birds.audubon.org/species/redknot>
- [2] http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/red_knot/lifehistory/ac
- [3] <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/redknot/>
- [4] <http://www.stpeteaudubon.org/bird-stewards>
- [5] http://www.pinellascounty.org/park/05_Ft_DeSoto.htm