



HORSESHOE CRAB RECOVERY COALITION

COALITION ANNOUNCES ACTION MONTH TO HELP SAVE THE AMERICAN HORSESHOE CRAB

May 3, 2021 – The Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition (HCRC) a group of 35 organizations concerned about the survival of this iconic species, today announced the start of Horseshoe Crab Action Month, a four-week series of events and initiatives designed to call attention to the continuing plight of American horseshoe crabs, including the continued use of a substance in their blood for biomedical testing.

The group also announced the launch of a science and stewardship program designed to map horseshoe crab habitats throughout the Atlantic Coast so that appropriate conservation measures can be put in place to protect them.

“Since launching the coalition in 2020 we have been very successful in raising awareness about the threats facing horseshoe crabs, including the harsh and outdated practice of bleeding them for biomedical purposes,” said Larry Niles, Ph.D., wildlife biologist with Wildlife Restoration Partnerships and co-founder of the coalition.

“It is time to move beyond awareness to action, keeping up our advocacy for the adoption of a proven synthetic alternative to the blood of a living animal, and conserving the habitats these crabs need for long-term survival.”

The coalition seeks full restoration of horseshoe crabs by end of this decade and has four primary goals:

- Manage horseshoe crab bait fisheries to ensure that populations are large enough to support the needs of other species like the Red Knot and weakfish that depend on horseshoe crab eggs as an essential food source.

- Institute policies that reform the horseshoe crab bleeding industry to reduce mortality and other impacts.
- Encourage pharmaceutical companies to adopt the use of rFC, the synthetic alternative to horseshoe crab-derived LAL, in their testing procedures.
- Raise awareness of the importance of the horseshoe crab by engaging volunteers in efforts to conserve crabs along the Atlantic coast.

David Mizrahi, Ph.D., co-leader of the coalition and vice president, research and monitoring, New Jersey Audubon, outlined the beginning of a science and stewardship program designed to map breeding locations for horseshoe crabs along the Atlantic Coast. Over time the group intends to measure whether horseshoe crabs are increasing or decreasing at these locations so that appropriate conservation measures can be implemented.

Said Dr. Mizrahi: “While Delaware Bay continues to be the epicenter of biological activity for horseshoe crabs and the species that depend on them, more work is needed to understand where crabs may be living and breeding along the Atlantic Coast in order to develop an overarching strategy to better protect them.”

As a first step in the science and stewardship initiative, the coalition will launch a coastwide survey of horseshoe crabs that will rely primarily on volunteers guided by conservation group or state agency staff. In this first year of the survey, teams guided by digital mapping will fan out to beaches suitable for horseshoe crab breeding to estimate how much is currently occupied. While there, they will collect basic site data to confirm suitability. In subsequent years, survey goals will expand to include counting the number of crabs using a predetermined and simple method. In some locations, known to be important to migratory shorebirds, volunteers will help count horseshoe crab egg clusters.

Overall, the goal is to establish a benchmark for efforts aimed at restoring horseshoe crabs to their natural abundance and providing feedback on the progress towards restoration.

“As horseshoe crabs begin their annual return to beaches across the country to reproduce, we see an awe-inspiring example of the nature: a 450 million year old creature’s eggs nourish shorebirds stopping over on migrations that are thousands of miles long,” said Zach Cockrum, Northeast Director of Conservation Projects for the National Wildlife Federation. “But this intersection of events faces

multiple threats and also calls us to action – to protect and restore horseshoe crabs so they can continue to support the ecosystems and numerous other wildlife that depend on them for millennia to come. This new action month comes at a critical crossroads for the future of horseshoe crabs.”

“It is high time to steward—not deplete—the horseshoe crab for the diverse array of services it provides to our coastal ecosystem,” said Anna Weinstein, director of marine conservation for the National Audubon Society. “Threatened Red Knots and other shorebirds depend on the energy-rich eggs of the crabs on their arduous journeys between hemispheres. We must restore horseshoe crabs, an essential food source for birds.”

HCRC’s diverse membership includes the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Audubon state organizations along the eastern seaboard, Defenders of Wildlife, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, Revive & Restore, American Bird Conservancy, American Littoral Society and Wildlife Restoration Partnerships. A full list of coalition partners is available at hscrabrecovery.org.

If you are interested in learning more about horseshoe crab survey efforts, please email info@hscrabrecovery.org.

Media Contact:

John Bloomfield

john.bloomfield@hscrabrecovery.org