

Collection of horseshoe crabs as bait for eel and conch fishing is a bigger problem than pharmaceutical use, but still a good story.

Dirk's dodo

Interior Secretary Kempthorne gets award for record refusal to protect endangered species

Posted by [Glenn Hurowitz](#) 28 Aug 2007



The Center for Biological Diversity yesterday [presented](#) Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne with its first ever "Rubber Dodo" award, in honor of going a record one year and 90 days without listing a new species as endangered or threatened.

The previous record holder was Ronald Reagan's notorious Interior Secretary James Watt, who went a comparatively wimpy 376 days without listing a new species. Meanwhile, the Fish and Wildlife Service has classified 279 species as "candidates" for listing, because they're in danger of extinction, but haven't yet been given protection by Secretary Kempthorne.

"That waiting list could turn into a 'too-late' list without government action, as species in dire need of protection go extinct," the Center said in an email to its supporters.

According to the Center's Kieran Suckling, some of the endangered species waiting for Dirk to stay the hand of permanent annihilation are the [elfin wood warbler](#) of Puerto Rico, the [Pacific fisher](#) (a wolverine-like animal that prowls the sylvan coasts of the Northwest), and the [red knot](#), an extraordinary bird whose tale of decline is one of the saddest and weirdest.

The red knot migrates from Alaska, Greenland, and Russia all the way to South America; along the way, it stops in Delaware Bay at just the right time of year to gorge on horseshoe crab eggs. Unfortunately for the red knot, Big Pharma also has its designs on horseshoe

crabs; the blood of the horseshoe crab is used to test almost every intravenous drug in development, leading to a drastic decline in population for this once-plentiful species -- and a corresponding decline in the red knot. Fortunately, just talk of putting the red knot on the endangered species list has prompted some states to put tight limits on Big Pharma's bloodsucking ways.

The other good news: in the wake of the award, Suckling reports, Interior Department officials have invited the Center of Biological Diversity in for a meeting, which could lead to a settlement requiring the Interior Department to protect at least some of the species in question.

That hasn't stopped Interior officials from blaming everyone under the sun except themselves for the failure to list endangered species. During an interview with Grist, Interior spokesman Hugh Vickery variously blamed the Clinton administration, environmentalists, and Congress for inundating the Department with lawsuits trying to get them to list more species under the act or protect habitat needed by endangered species without providing sufficient funding or time to do it.

"We've been paralyzed by litigation, much of it by environmentalists like the Center for Biological Diversity," Vickery said. "There's a limited amount of resources and staff and we have to do medical triage on species when they come in."

But with that triage taking more than a year, species like the red knot better hope they don't die in the waiting room.

You can contact Secretary Kempthorne about this issue by clicking [here](#).