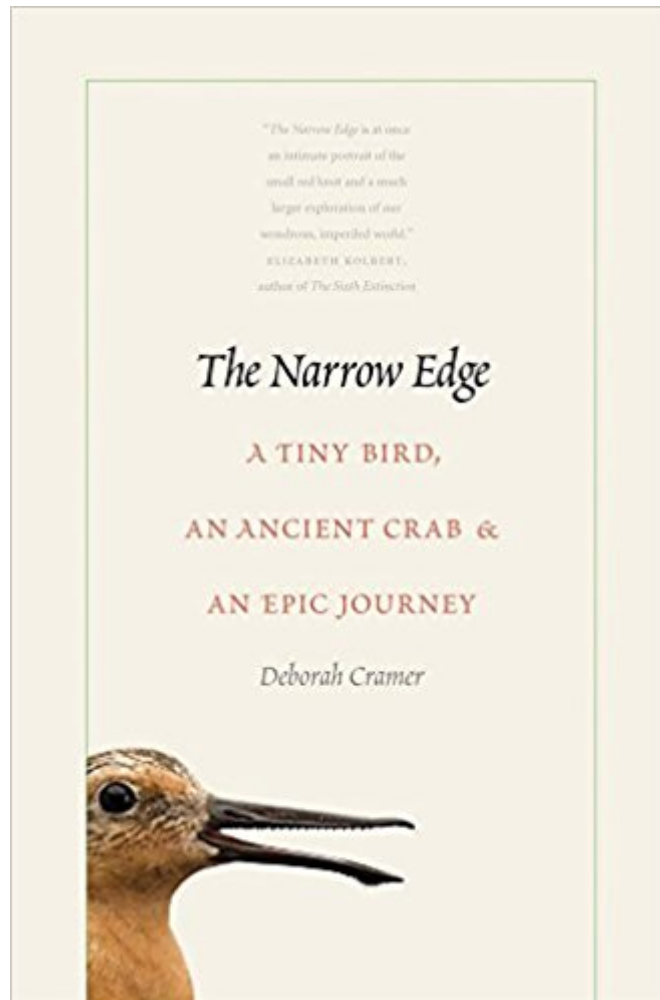




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# The Narrow Edge: A Tiny Bird, An Ancient Crab, And An Epic Journey



## Synopsis

In a volume as urgent and eloquent as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, this book--winner of the Southern Environmental Law Center's 2016 Reed Environmental Writing Award in the book category--reveals how the health and well-being of a tiny bird and an ancient crab mirrors our own \*\* Winner of the 2016 Rachel Carson Environment Book Award given by the Society of Environmental Journalists \*\*

Each year, red knots, sandpipers weighing no more than a coffee cup, fly a near-miraculous 19,000 miles from the tip of South America to their nesting grounds in the Arctic and back. Along the way, they double their weight by gorging on millions of tiny horseshoe crab eggs. Horseshoe crabs, ancient animals that come ashore but once a year, are vital to humans, too: their blue blood safeguards our health. Now, the rufa red knot, newly listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, will likely face extinction in the foreseeable future across its entire range, 40 states and 27 countries. The first United States bird listed because global warming imperils its existence, it will not be the last: the red knot is the twenty-first century's "canary in the coal mine."

Logging thousands of miles following the knots, shivering with the birds out on the snowy tundra, tracking them down in bug-infested marshes, Cramer vividly portrays what's at stake for millions of shorebirds and hundreds of millions of people living at the sea edge. The *Narrow Edge* offers an uplifting portrait of the tenacity of tiny birds and of the many people who, on the sea edge we all share, keep knots flying and offer them safe harbor. \*\* Winner of the 2016 National Academies Communications Award for best book that honors the best in science communications. Sponsored by the Keck Futures Initiative -- a program of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, with the support of the W.M. Keck Foundation \*\*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A scientific page-turner, full of intricacies and astonishment. Exhaustively researched and elegantly written, *The Narrow Edge* is a must for anyone interested in the natural world, our relationship to it, and our stewardship of it." [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) "[Cramer] writes . . . &#39;By the end of this journey I am more in awe than when I began.&#39; Follow her graceful writing for the full 9,500 miles and you will share in that awe." [Laurence A. Marschall, Natural History](#) "Her writing is vivid, novelistic . . . The resulting book is everything a natural history should be." [Living Bird](#) "The *Narrow Edge* is not just another lament for a world wrecked by human shortsightedness, though. It is, first and foremost, a deeply moving declaration of love for one particular bird, a love for which the author will spare no effort . . . When Cramer pays tribute to the people who give a voice to the birds and crabs that cannot speak for themselves, her book soars." [Christopher Irmischer, Weekly Standard](#) "Brilliantly describes the life of a migratory shorebird called a red knot, as it journeys annually from the bottom to the top of the world and back again." [Gary Clark, Houston Chronicle](#) "Deborah Cramer has crafted a remarkable tale of science, nature, and humanity. She takes us on a sweeping adventure as she paints the portrait of an unimaginably hardy yet threatened bird." [Susan Solomon, author of The Coldest March](#) "The *Narrow Edge* is at once an intimate portrait of the small red knot and a much larger exploration of our wondrous, imperiled world." [Elizabeth Kolbert, author of The Sixth Extinction](#) "In the face of global warming, is our big brain connected to a big enough heart that we might do something to preserve the beauty of the earth? Heart is no problem for the red knot." [20,000 miles on the wing demonstrates that. The finely told story of this bird will, hopefully, help summon greater affection for our home planet.](#) [Bill McKibben, author of Eearth](#) "This book is for anyone who loves adventure: an interwoven tale of humanity and nature in which nature never fails to surprise and delight." [Thomas E. Lovejoy, University Professor of Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University, and National Geographic Conservation Fellow](#) "A plaintive cry from deep within, an elegy to epic lives lived at full burn, and a warning of the great unraveling that humans are inflicting on this planet." [cs co-voyagers. A book so multidimensional, yet somehow so admirably succinct, I wish I](#) [d written it](#) [but it](#) [s written as only Deborah Cramer could. Thank goodness for that.](#) [Carl Safina, author of Beyond Words:](#)

What Animals Think and Feel Selected as a 2016 Massachusetts Must Read Book in the Nonfiction category. This recognition is given by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. (Must Read Book Massachusetts Center for the Book 2016-10-17) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Deborah Cramer is the author of *Great Waters: An Atlantic Passage* and *Smithsonian Ocean: Our Water, Our World*. She lives in Gloucester, MA.

The natural world is full of so many many wondrous things, and the amazing seasonal journeys of the Red Knot from the southern tip of South America along the eastern seaboard of the United States to the high Arctic is surely one of them. These birds and many other shore birds like them travel many, many miles on the wing, often only stopping a few times to refuel as they continue on their journey to their nesting grounds. These travels as well as the intricate connection the Red Knot has with the Horseshoe Crab, whose eggs in May are a prime food source, are chronicled beautifully in this wonderful book by Deborah Cramer. Ms. Cramer is an extremely skilled nature writer and her description of the landscapes, the birds, and the intricate ways the various ecological webs she discusses are intertwined and their inherent fragility should one integral piece be removed made for a wonderful reading experience. Cramer also writes of the various people she encounters in her quest to follow the trail of the Red Knot on its lengthy migration route, from biologists, native peoples, farmers, birders, and conservationists, all fascinating individuals with a true connection in one way or another to the land and the birds they share it with. It is not all the rapture of nature and the wonderful humans that care about it though. Some very distressing issues are brought to the fore throughout the book, including the practice of the bleeding of Horseshoe Crabs by the bio-pharmaceutical industry (the blood is used to test for biological impurities in various medical products) which as well meaning as it is and critical to the health of every human being who has ever received an intravenous injection or even a needle, is also very detrimental to the species and is definitely having an effect on its population numbers, the increasing use of wind power, which has an impact on birds and other flying wildlife, the loss of beaches and habitat along the east coast, and the effects of global warming on our oceans, both in the rising of the seas and the increased acidity of the ocean ecosystem. With all this bad news, I was still left with hope and wonder after reading this book; hope that we as a species can still understand and appreciate the intricate ways the natural world works and how important it is to protect it as much as we are still able and even help to rebuild some of what has been lost in both habitat and species, and wonder

at the incredible tenacity and pluck of these little birds as they struggle to survive in an ever changing ecological landscape. A well written, poignant, at times depressing but overall enlightening and uplifting book which I can wholeheartedly recommend to any nature lover and especially to those interested in birds.

I liked and disliked the same thing - the painstaking, granular detail. I admire Ms. Cramer for the depth of her research and for the crisp language she uses to convey the information. I'd recommend this to anyone who is genuinely interested in the almost unfathomable intricacies that bind so many different strands of the web of life. I chose this rating because I felt like I got smarter every time I read this book. And if you enjoy elite quality non-fiction, that alone is sufficient reason to read a book like this one.

I am thrilled to have found a book that speaks so beautifully and movingly to new students in environmental public health classes. And beyond the classroom, the book is a *must read* for everyone for all who love the natural world and for all who need to understand how to love it. It is packed with the latest science and weaves it with thoughtful prose from the heart. It tells the story of a small shore bird that is capable of feats about which humans can only dream and of how the horseshoe crab nourishes the small bird while literally saving thousands of human lives each year. It follows the bird all along its astounding global flyway and tells the story of scientists and, most importantly, of average citizens who are working to create safe harbor and home for the bird, the crab, and for all of us. So often we hear that human health and well-being are inextricably linked to our environment, yet we don't have the stories to help us grasp the larger truth of so many scientific facts, stories that help us understand exactly what the webs of life look like and how we are a part of them. "The Narrow Edge" and especially the chapter "Does losing one more bird matter?" do this and more. Have we humans lost our way in terms of sustainable living on Earth? As the book about this small bird, a global traveler, suggests: "As we lose our own bearings, their long flights offer a compass."

Fascinating and meticulously researched, Deborah Cramer's latest should be required reading. As a former coast dweller, I was captivated by the rich descriptions, but also deeply concerned at the precarious condition of life dependent on the shore. Through her first person observations and investigations, Cramer brings into sharp focus the interconnectedness of humans and tiny birds

spanning two continents.

An extraordinary story, almost impossible to believe, but clearly documented by a fine writer.

Deborah Cramer explores the very close relationship between the lives of the horseshoe crab and a species of shore bird, the red knot. One of the oldest species on earth, the horseshoe crab is being slowly decimated by both medical research needs and by poaching for bait. The red knot, which migrates around 9500 miles twice a year, from Patagonia to the Canadian Arctic and back again, is highly dependent on horseshoe crab eggs for food on its migration. Too few people are aware of this symbiotic dependence, and as a result the numbers of both the crab and the bird are slowly but surely decreasing. A cautionary story which anyone interested in nature and its infinite variety of species should ponder.

Ms. Cramer writes with such power, realism, and human sensitivity, that you feel you are beside her on her entire journey from Patagonia to the Arctic . Along the way you are not only taken to places, geographically and passionately, that you never imagined, but given a fascinating historical context every step of the way. Her Red Knot metaphor is as magnificent but even more serious clarion call to us to stop the dire impacts from climate change and pollution as the anguished cries of Rachel Carson in Silent Spring were to stop the toxic chemicals from destroying life in the 60's when DDT was the enemy to shorebirds. Hopefully this author's haunting voice in her entrancing and poetic book will inspire even more people to action because this time the stakes are so much higher. Read this book and you will never be the same!!!

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