

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of 30 birdwatching and bird habitat conservation organizations, we urge you to permanently protect one of New England's ocean treasures: the incredible underwater mountain range and kelp forest around Cashes Ledge. Protecting Cashes Ledge will enable seabirds that feed in the area to sustain themselves.

As birdwatchers and enthusiasts, birds of all kinds are important to us. They excite us, bring us together, and remind us of our country's beauty. We want nothing more than to see them thrive.

But tragically, populations of American seabirds are in severe decline. Over half of all seabird species found in the U.S. are either of high conservation concern, federally endangered, or are at a tipping point - meaning that 50% of the species population has disappeared since 1970 and another 50% will disappear by 2050.¹ Human activities, like pollution, habitat destruction, and commercial-scale fishing, have contributed to these declines.² If an ocean ecosystem is in trouble, seabirds will be among the first wildlife to signal it as well - and seabirds in the Northern Hemisphere have been struggling to feed themselves. A 2021 study concluded that seabirds will struggle to breed in the Northern hemisphere unless there is an increase in the availability of local food resources.³

Cashes Ledge provides a shining respite for seabirds from these grim trends. Cashes Ledge is an underwater mountain range home to the deepest, densest and healthiest kelp forest in the Gulf of Maine and possibly the Northwest Atlantic. This area is a biodiversity hotspot and hosts all of the types of seafloor environment that can be found in the Gulf of Maine.⁴ Thanks to unique ocean currents, its nutrient rich waters provide the basis for an abundant ecosystem, known to be a hotspot for humpback whales, a feeding ground for seabirds, and for being one of the last best places to find North Atlantic cod in New England.⁵

The prohibition of commercial fishing at Cashes Ledge is another reason why the wildlife is so abundant there. A study has even found the biomass of the fish at Cashes Ledge to be 305 times greater than that of marine areas at Maine's coast.⁶ These strong numbers can help Cashes' seabirds thrive. These seabirds include the Storm Water-Petrel, the Sooty Shearwater, and the

¹ *State of the Birds Report, 2022*, available at <https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2022/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/state-of-the-birds-2022-spreads.pdf>.

² NOAA, *What threats do seabirds face?*, accessed at <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/seabird-threats.html#:~:text=Over%20time%2C%20these%20populations%20have,introduced%20predators%2C%20and%20human%20disturbance>, 10/23.

³ W.J. Sydeman et al., "Hemispheric asymmetry in ocean change and the productivity of ecosystem sentinels," *Science*, 372(6545): 980-983, DOI: 10.1126/science.abf1772, May 2021.

⁴ Kraus, Scott & Auster, Peter & Witman, Jon & Hodge, Brooke & Mckee, Michael & Lamb, Robert. (2016). Scientific Assessment of a Proposed Marine National Monument off the Northeast United States. 10.13140/RG.2.1.1268.1360.

⁵ Witman JD, Lamb RW (2018) "Persistent differences between coastal and offshore kelp forest communities in a warming Gulf of Maine." *PLOS ONE* 13(1): e0189388. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189388>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Great Shearwater among others.⁷ These birds circle Cashes Ledge and dive for the steady numbers of fish swimming in the waters.

However, the protections behind this ecosystem could easily be rolled back. Without these protections, the area could lose the abundance that helps sustain seabirds and all the other ocean life that right now call Cashes Ledge home. A return to more intense fishing efforts could mean seabirds will also be at greater risk of becoming bycatch, perhaps the biggest contemporary contributor to their declines.⁸

To keep this ecosystem a vibrant haven for seabirds and other marine life, we ask you to implement permanent protections for Cashes Ledge. Like national parks on land, when we set ocean places aside from human activities for the conservation of nature, we see ocean life flourish and become more resilient.

Mr. President, in a time of massive species loss, your leadership could make a difference for the seabirds that feed at Cashes Ledge. Permanently protecting this ocean treasure will be an excellent addition to your ocean conservation legacy and is aligned with your commitment to protect the environment. As birders we pride ourselves on being good stewards of the birds that we search for, and the environment they depend on. We hope you join us in our effort to conserve their habitats and allow us to continue our passion.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue – we hope that we can move forward together to ensure a healthy and abundant future for the seabirds at Cashes Ledge.

Sincerely,

Allen Bird Club, Massachusetts
Allston-Brighton Birders, Massachusetts
American Birding Association, National
Amherst College Bird Club, Massachusetts
Anti-racist Collective of Avid Birders, Massachusetts
Athol Bird & Nature Club, Massachusetts
Boxborough Birders, Massachusetts
Brookline Bird Club, Massachusetts
BrownU Birding Club, Rhode Island
Cape Cod Bird Club, Massachusetts
Connecticut Ornithological Association, Connecticut
Eastern Mass Hawk Watch, Massachusetts
Essex County Ornithological Club, Massachusetts
Feminist Bird Club, Inc., Massachusetts
Forbush Bird Club, Massachusetts

Hampshire Bird Club, Massachusetts
Hoffmann Bird Club, Massachusetts
Martha's Vineyard Bird Club, Massachusetts
Menotomy Bird Club, Massachusetts
Merrimack Valley Bird Club, Massachusetts
Northern New York Audubon, New York
Onagada Bird Club, New York
Pacific Seabird Group, International
Paskamansett Bird Club, Massachusetts
Queer Flockers, Portland, Oregon
South Shore Bird Club, Massachusetts
Special Bird Service, Canada
The Downeast Chapter of Maine Audubon, Maine
Ware River Nature Club, Massachusetts
Waterbird Society, International

⁷ eBird, "Cashes Ledge," accessed at <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L668693?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>, 10/23.

⁸NOAA, *Seabirds: Threats to Seabirds*, accessed at <https://www.noaa.gov/gc-international-section/seabirds-threats-to-seabirds>, 10/23.