

**Testimony on H.898, An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait
American Bird Conservancy**

**Before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senate and House Members of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Hearing on “Animals, Hunting, Fishing, Wildlife”
October 21, 2025**

Chairs Christine Barber and Rebecca Rausch, and members of the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural History, thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.898, *An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait*. American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. With an emphasis on achieving results and working in partnership, we take on the greatest problems facing birds today.

Right now, Massachusetts has the opportunity to be a leader in horseshoe crab conservation. H.898, *An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait*, would ban the harvest of horseshoe crabs for bait. Horseshoe crabs are harvested for bait and biomedical purposes. Reducing harvest pressure by ending the bait harvest is a meaningful step to conserve horseshoe crabs, a beloved native species in Massachusetts.

Horseshoe crabs support wildlife across the Atlantic Coast, including many migratory shorebirds. Shorebirds, such as the threatened Red Knot, feed on horseshoe crab eggs during their migratory journeys. These eggs are nutrient dense, allowing the Red Knot to survive a flight that can be thousands of miles long. The Red Knot is a federally threatened species and populations have not increased. One of the limiting factors in their recovery is availability of horseshoe crab eggs on beaches where Red Knots stopover during migration. Increased coastwide efforts to conserve horseshoe crabs are needed to preserve this keystone species, help maintain their egg densities, and recover Red Knot populations.

H.898 currently before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources would build on action taken last year in Massachusetts to prohibit the taking of horseshoe crabs from April 15 – June 7, spawning season. While this was an encouraging step, it only delays harvest. Further action is required to decrease overall harvest of horseshoe crabs. Presently, the bait harvest quota in Massachusetts is 140,000 horseshoe crabs and the biomedical is 200,000 horseshoe crabs. By banning bait harvest, Massachusetts can save hundreds of thousands of individual horseshoe crabs annually, conserving the species and other wildlife.

In passing this bill, Massachusetts would be following the lead of neighboring Connecticut and nearby New Jersey, states that have enacted harvest restrictions. Connecticut’s law enacted in 2023, bans hand-harvesting of horseshoe crabs or the eggs of horseshoe crabs from state

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waters. New Jersey acted in 2008, banning harvest of horseshoe crabs in state waters. Now Massachusetts can be the third state to advance protections for horseshoe crabs.

The ban on bait harvest in Massachusetts would be especially impactful because of the state's distinct rent-a-crab practice. This program allows bait dealers to lend their catch to biomedical bleeders, who bleed the horseshoe crabs for their blue blood which is used in medical safety tests. The program intends to maximize the utility of each horseshoe crab harvested. However, there is concern that the program incentivizes bait harvest that might otherwise not have an incentive.

There are bait alternatives to horseshoe crabs and synthetically-derived medical safety tests that do not require the harvest and bleeding of horseshoe crabs. Synthetically-derived medical safety test alternatives are proven safe and effective and have been successfully adopted by companies, such as Eli Lilly. Continuing to harvest horseshoe crabs, when its not necessary, places undue ecological pressure on Atlantic Coast ecosystems.

In conclusion, the Joint Committee has the opportunity to safeguard an iconic native species by advancing H.898, *An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait*. This bill would contribute to a more wildlife-friendly and resilient Atlantic Coast ecosystem.

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