



Flight for survival

A mission to save
25 million birds every year



INTRODUCTION

Across the Mediterranean, an average of 25,000,000 birds are unlawfully shot, trapped or poisoned annually, from the smallest songbirds to the most powerful birds of prey. A shocking number that has been exposed and investigated in the previous reports of this series, *The Killing* (2015) and *The Killing 2.0* (2017). Endangered species, already hit hard by habitat loss and climate change, are being pushed closer to extinction every day. Their conservation has become a global concern, requiring urgent and coordinated international action.

BirdLife has been instrumental in pushing the agenda of the illegal killing of birds in international fora. In the summer of 2020, a new joint strategy to eradicate the poaching of birds in the Mediterranean region was agreed, including a commitment to reduce the illegal killing of birds by at least 50% by 2030. The Rome Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030 was approved by all governments – including some of the worst offenders of bird poaching, such as Greece, France, Italy, Malta, and Cyprus. As a part of this plan, governments agreed to the principle of 'zero tolerance' of illegal killing, trapping and trade in the long term. This means that every illegal activity, must get the right response, be it in terms of prevention, prosecution, or education, regardless of the bird species or the impact it has on conservation numbers.

Birds know no borders and neither do we. Together with our national Partners, we spare no effort to ensure that the 50% reduction target will be met within the given timeframe. Across the BirdLife Partnership, we have an unmatched ability to share best practices and extrapolate national achievements to other areas that face similar issues across the Mediterranean. And while there is still work to be done, there is also hope. In this report, we celebrate the achievements of the BirdLife Partnership to make the Mediterranean a safer place for migratory birds. Every single action makes a difference and every life saved matters.



Release of rehabilitated Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
Photo: Adrien Alos



Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
Photo: Ondrej Prosicky

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TOO MANY WAYS TO DIE

The threats birds face across the Mediterranean are countless; from being caught in limesticks and mist nests to being lured to a spot of danger by electronic calling devices. Ending up on a plate in a restaurant or most often, being hunted just for the sport of it, is sadly still the reality for countless birds today.

FATE OF BIRDS



SONGBIRDS

Trapping and trafficking nationally and internationally



WATERBIRDS, BIRDS OF PREY, SONGBIRDS

Shooting



BIRD OF PREY, SONGBIRDS

Keeping in cages



BIRDS OF PREY

Poisoning

ILLEGAL BIRD KILLINGS

- 0 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 20,000
- 20,001 - 60,000
- 60,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 1 million
- 1 million - 6 million

MOST AFFECTED SPECIES OF BIRDS (MILLIONS PER YEAR)

4.7M per year



HOUSE SPARROW
(Passer domesticus)

2.9M per year



COMMON CHAFFINCH
(Fringilla coelebs)

1.8M per year



EURASIAN BLACKCAP
(Sylvia atricapilla)

1.7M per year



COMMON QUAIL
(Coturnix coturnix)

1.2M per year



SONG THRUSH
(Turdus philomelos)

NOTE All numbers in the maps are rounded, mean estimates. For non-rounded, mean numbers and minimum/maximum estimates, see the scientific papers: Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean (Brochet et al., 2016) and Illegal killing and taking of birds in Europe outside the Mediterranean: assessing the scope and scale of a complex issue (Brochet et al., 2017).



Trapped Common Quail
(*Coturnix coturnix*) in mist net.
Photo: Watter AlBahry



Rooted in "tradition"

Trapped Eurasian Blackcap
(*Sylvia atricapilla*) on limestick
Photo: Birdlife Europe

In many Mediterranean countries, hunting is rooted in tradition that has been passed on for generations. But can it still be called "tradition" when electronic bird callers are used to mass kill birds?

In Malta, hunting is so deeply ingrained in the culture that nine months of the year it is legal to trap or hunt. In comparison, the hunting season in other European countries lasts 3 to 4 months. The hunting lobby in Malta is incredibly powerful and has strong political backing. In March 2022, the spring hunting ban on the European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) was lifted despite it being the migration and breeding season of the bird. The population of the Turtle-dove is already in severe decline, and lifting this ban can be particularly disastrous for this bird. Sadly, the Turtle-dove's perils do not end in Malta. On the Greek Ionian Islands, spring poaching of this species is considered to be a "tradition", although it has been illegal for several decades now. Almost every man on the Ionian

Islands participates, even policemen and local authorities. Locals even make profit by renting out "posta", places from where poachers can shoot, to hunters that come from all over Greece to shoot the dove.

The Lebanese sky is an equally dangerous place to fly. Hunters who have been leisure hunting for decades, shoot anything that moves, regardless of the species, the season, or time of day. The hunting ban issued in 1995 has not deterred hunters from using tools such as mist nets, projectors and electronic calling devices, and results in an annual massacre that costs 2.6 million birds their lives, as reported by a BirdLife study done in 2015.

A deadly dish

Birds of prey, such as the rapidly declining Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), die from eating poisoned carcasses laid out as bait for wolves, foxes, and lynxes. Although leaving out poisoned bait is illegal, this practice is not uncommon in countries such as Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, and Albania to protect their livestock and crops, or boost the populations of game animals. Poison can also be directly targeted at eagles and other raptor species as some of them eat hunting game.

Wild bird trade

Wild birds that are trapped with nets or limesticks, are often smuggled and traded in national and international black markets to meet the demands of the pet trade, collectors (taxidermy), restaurants, belief-based use, and even bird fighting. In Cyprus alone, the illegal wild bird trade is estimated to generate more than ten million euros annually, making profit a key driver for selling trapped bird. A dozen of songbirds, such as Eurasian Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and Lesser Whitethroats (*Curruca curruca*), could be sold from 60 to 80 euros. In Slovenia, an estimated 34,000-172,000 birds are smuggled across its borders every year, mostly to Italy and Malta. Spain, where illegal trapping affects almost 200 bird species, is a major place of passage for the trafficking of species between Latin America or Africa and Europe.

Your life for mine?

In the north of Egypt, trammel nets are literally covering almost every square meter of the coast. Tradition, poverty and lack of job opportunities are the main driver of the illegal killing of birds in Egypt. Here, hunters do not hesitate to use calling devices to attract the birds, as for some families of local communities, hunting is their only means of income. Through hunting they both feed their families and make money to provide for their basic needs, especially during the hunting season taking place in September and October.

In Croatia, up to 50,000 coots are illegally shot every year and sold to local people, either as a main or supplementary income. Until the 1960s, the Neretva Delta in Croatia was a vast wetland with sea lagoons, lakes, extensive reedbeds and delta, where mallards and coots were traditionally hunted for food. Despite 75% of the area being turned into agricultural lands over the years, the local demand for wild waterbirds, and more specifically Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*), is still big today. To meet the high demand, hunters use illegal methods such as electronic calling devices and do not hesitate to hunt at night in ornithological reserves.



Hunting coots from the boat in Shkodra lake
Photo: AOS

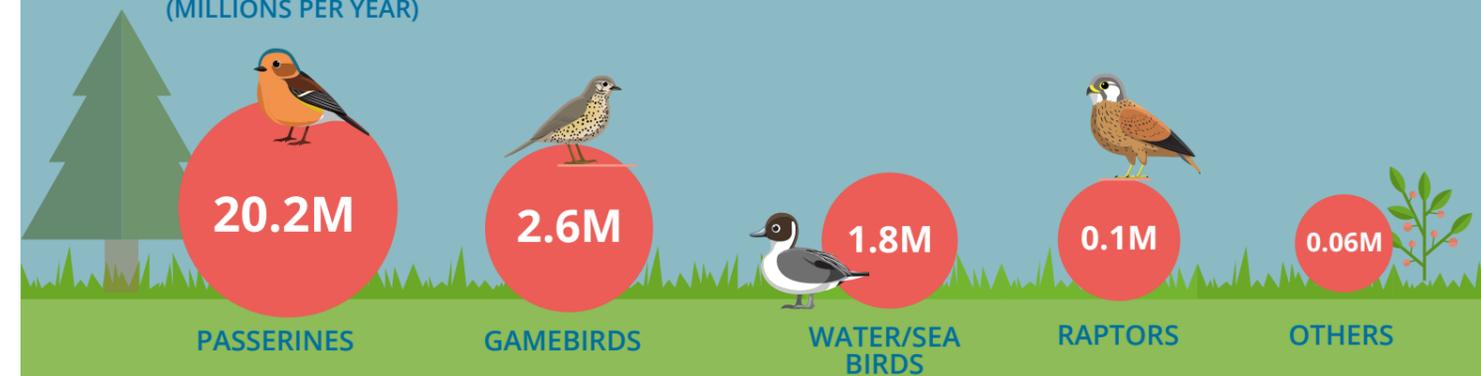
5 countries with highest killing intensity

(MEAN NO. OF BIRDS ILLEGALLY KILLED PER KM²)



Birds illegally killed by group

(MILLIONS PER YEAR)



5 countries with highest number of birds illegally killed

(MILLIONS PER YEAR)



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE



ALBANIA

The illegal killing of birds was reduced by **50%** in the Tërbufi plain, a black spot for the Common Quail.

15 pet shops have been regularly monitored for songbirds.

10 restaurants that trade wild meat have been reported.

40 poaching hides were destroyed.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The pre-draft of a hunting law now allows the hunting of **25** species instead of **119** species listed in the hunting law of 2006.

CROATIA

The hunting season for the Common Quail was shortened by **3 weeks** in 2022.

CYPRUS

The use of mist nets for illegal trapping has decreased by **84%** between 2002 and 2021.

GREECE

30% increase in the reporting of trapping, trading and imprisonment of wild birds in the first quarter of 2022, thanks to a campaign by HOS that reached 2.5 million people nation-wide.

ITALY

112 people were reported

112 rifles were seized

61 electronic decoys were seized

204 fines were issued in the province of Rome from 2016 to 2021.

SPAIN

+1,500 police officers were provided with specialized training to investigate wildlife crimes.

TUNISIA

Collaboration with the national hunting unit resulted in the **release of hundreds of illegally kept birds**

LEBANON

The anti-poaching unit removed over **1 km** of mist nets from various black spots.

PORTUGAL

Public pressure resulted in a law alteration to ban not only the use of, but also trading of, **non-selective traps** in 2020.

+10,000 children were reached through educational activities organized by BirdLife Cyprus, BIOM, LIPU, SPNL and HOS

SLOVENIA

+600 articles about the illegal killing of birds were published in the past four years.

72 birds that were illegally kept in cages have successfully released back into nature.

TURKEY

3 protected wetlands crucial for birds (Tuz Lake, Gediz Delta, Marmara Lake) and the Urfa steppes were closed for hunting in 2021 and 2022.

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT



Common crane (*Grus grus*)
Photo: Vilda

Despite the numerous threats birds face, there is still hope that, one day, they will be able to fly without fear in the Mediterranean skies. Our Partners are moving heaven and earth to combat crimes, and not without results.

Monitoring

Given the alarming and large-scale decline of bird populations, monitoring the illegal killing of birds is more essential than ever to generate robust quantitative data to help focus efforts, track trends, and track the effectiveness of actions to address poaching.

BirdLife Cyprus has been carrying out a surveillance programme on illegal bird trapping since 2002, making it the longest anti-trapping campaign on record. The illegal trapping of birds has since long been a contributor to the large-scale killing of hundreds of thousands of migratory and wintering birds in Cyprus, affecting at least 157 bird species. The monitoring protocol that was co-developed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife's Partner in the UK) has been instrumental in confirming the industrial scale of this horrifying activity and has helped raise awareness about the problem and to address it through politics.

After successfully monitoring shooting activities in Zante, Greece, the Hellenic Society for Birds (HOS, BirdLife's Greek Partner) expanded their monitoring network of automated recording units to other Ionian Islands. Thanks to the systematic monitoring, every spring, local action plans are implemented, and HOS uses the results to push the government to take more drastic measures against spring poaching. It also enables them to support people who report cases of bird poaching and raise public awareness, of both locals and tourists, by for example placing sign boards in the poaching hotspots detected by the monitoring activities.



Sign board Zante. Photo: HOS

“BirdLife Cyprus has been carrying out a surveillance programme on illegal bird trapping since 2002, making it the longest anti-trapping campaign on record.”

Education and awareness raising



Bird watching activity
Photo: The Ornithological Society Nese ptice

Educating people about the importance of preserving nature and the ecological impacts of the illegal killing of birds is crucial to change the way people treat and care for nature and birds. If from a young age, children are taught about nature's wonders, they will learn to protect and conserve it while growing up. Many of our Partners have education outreach programmes targeting children. BirdLife Cyprus reaches out to 2000 school children annually, and in Sardinia, Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli (LIPU, Birdlife's Italian Partner) has to date met with over 50 classes of school children. Association Biom (BirdLife's Croatian Partner in Croatia) organised 37 comprehensive educational and volunteering events for children and adults, with a total of 639 participants in the past 5 years. Through its programme 'School with no Walls', the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL, BirdLife's Lebanese Partner) reaches around 2000 school students annually, promoting a positive attitude and behaviour towards birds. While Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE, Birdlife's Egyptian Partner) targets local communities, they also invite university students to include them in finding solutions to end the illegal killing of birds.

Several Partners organise anti-poaching camps to teach citizens and volunteers what to do when they encounter wildlife crime and what their rights are in the countryside. BirdLife Malta holds two wildlife crime monitoring camps every spring and autumn, where international and resident volunteers help monitor the countryside for wildlife crime. During these camps, crimes are recorded and reported, and some hunters get fined or are sent to court. LIPU organises two anti-poaching camps: one on the Straits of Messina, the other in southern Sardinia. At the former, surveillance for deterrence purposes is carried out to provide information to the Carabinieri, the Italian gendarmerie. Since the end of the 1980s until today, this camp has helped reduce the numbers of poached birds of prey from more than a thousand every spring to just a hundred between their spring and autumn migration. The anti-poaching camps also help communicate crimes to the public.



Training on saving injured birds
Photo: SPNL

“Since the end of the 1980s, this camp has helped reduce the numbers of poached birds of prey from more than a thousand every spring to just a hundred between their spring and autumn migration.”

Legislation



Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)
Photo: Daniele Occhiato

Strong legislation for wild flora and fauna is necessary to ensure their protection. To achieve the 50% reduction target of the illegal killing of birds by 2030 in the Mediterranean, our Partners play a vital role to push for better regulations at a national level.

In 2019, the Albanian Ornithological Society managed to change the legislation regarding the use of poisoned baits in the wild, defining it for the first time as an administrative violation punished by a fine of 100,000-200,000 ALL or 1,000-2,000 euros. Following this great achievement, AOS with its partners, drafted the National Anti-poisoning Road Map for Albania 2022-2030, which was approved by the Minister of Tourism and Environment in March 2022.

This marks the beginning of further legislative and policy changes to have an efficient anti-poisoning system in place for Albanian wildlife.

In Lebanon, the hunting season was opened in September 2017 for the first time after 22 years. This seemingly counterintuitive policy could help conserve bird populations by narrowing and controlling the window of opportunity available for hunters. To support its enforcement, SPNL developed an online interactive map to highlight all potential areas that are suitable for responsible hunting. Restricting the hunting to these areas, managed in collaboration with municipalities, could help the internal security forces focus their efforts more efficiently.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the pre-draft of a hunting law was composed, and the number of species listed as game was reduced from 119 species listed in the hunting law from 2006, to 25 in 2019. Fortunately, the list does not include the Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) which is deeply impacted by poaching. The Ornithological Society "Naše ptice" (BirdLife's Bosnian affiliate) provided the Federal ministry of the Environment and Tourism and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water management with a list of the species that had to be removed after a careful analysis of the precedent law.

Issued in 1970, the Syrian hunting law is even more outdated than the Bosnian one. Since 2012, the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW, BirdLife's Syrian Partner) has been working on giving the law a much necessary update, with small, but steady steps. SSCW drafted a new version of the law with clearer descriptions of violations, an updated list of game species and stricter penalties for hunting crimes. Following a meeting in Jordan on tackling the illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula in the autumn of 2021, SSCW met the

chair of the Higher Council for Hunting and the Deputy Minister. To the great excitement of SSCW, all the proposed changes for the law were accepted. A major breakthrough! They are now waiting for the Prime Minister's green light to present the draft to the Parliament for its final approval. Once the law is issued, SSCW will focus their efforts on its proper enforcement.

"SSCW drafted a new version of the law with clearer descriptions of violations, an updated list of game species and stricter penalties for hunting crimes. To their great excitement, all the proposed changes for the law were accepted."

Collaboration



Biom Association removed 18 poaching hides from ornithological reserves in the Neretva Delta in cooperation with local police and rangers.
Photo: Biom Association

Creating alliances with local authorities, police, and other organisations as well as establishing volunteering networks, makes it easier to enforce legislation concerning the illegal killing of birds and enables upscaling the projects and activities of our Partners.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, local police stations, hunting and nature inspectors, and local NGOs began a collabo-

ration. The Ornithological Society "Naše ptice" frequently organises joint monitoring activities to foster this relationship. This resulted in several confiscations of weapons and reports to the court in Hutovo blato. Several calling devices were confiscated in Livanjsko polje as well. The cooperation with hunting associations has been strengthened, and now even their members report cases of bird poaching, which is an exemplary achievement. Naše ptice also

organised a series of workshops around wildlife crime for the local police. To make it easier for locals to report illegal activities, leaflets with information regarding the number and locations of the police stations, border police and park rangers were distributed. DOPPS (BirdLife's Slovenian Partner) also has a successful collaboration with police; 95 cases of illegal bird killing were reported in the last four years, of which 70% were solved.

"In Slovenia, 95 cases of illegal bird killing were reported in the last four years, of which 70% were successfully solved."



Release of rehabilitated Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
Photo: BirdLife Malta

In Spain, a specialised environmental prosecutors office has been established in all 51 provinces to ensure the enforcement of rules regarding the use of poison, the illegal trafficking of species and sanctions against the illegal killing of birds. Each of Spain's 17 autonomous communities have a corps of forestry agents, totalling some 6,000 agents throughout Spain. On top of that, the national environmental police, called Seprona, counts around 2,000 agents. Many of these police forces have canine units that have played an important role in detecting a bird poaching. For poison cases alone, over 150 convictions have been handed down in the last 25 years, some with hefty fines. SEO/BirdLife has provided specialised training on how to investigate wildlife crimes to more than 1,500 of these agents. Additionally, our Partner contributed to the creation of specialised units such as the poison investigation unit in Castilla-La Mancha or the National Central Office, the first environmental intelligence unit that was established in Europe.

In addition, Spain has a network of Fauna Recovery Centres that have played an essential role in detecting illegal bird killings and generating evidence for legal proceedings.

SPNL established an anti-poaching unit in 2018, which conducts patrolling activities, communication actions and works on partnerships with the government and the internal security forces. Through this partnership, they discuss the Lebanese hunting law and its implementation on the ground, with the plan to increase efforts among the various parties to reduce IKB.

“Our Partner SEO/Birdlife contributed to the creation of the first environmental intelligence unit that was established in Europe.”



Removing mist nets with the internal security forces
Photo: SPNL



AOS works together with state police to stop the poaching of Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in the Terbufi plain.
Photo: AOS

BirdLife Israel operates a team of determined professionals and volunteers, in collaboration with Israel Nature and parks authorities, to protect the Critically Endangered Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*). The team, called the 'Falcon Guardians', uses multiple methods, including under-cover surveillance, to prevent falcon poaching when the bird winters in the steppes of the northern Negev. Since 2019, several gangs of poachers were caught red-handed and were arrested by law enforcement officers.

The Association Les Amis des Oiseaux (AAO, BirdLife's Tunisian Partner) regularly organises bird monitoring activities and visits to wildlife crime black spots with the national hunting control unit. This collaboration allows for the immediate intervention in hunting law violations and has resulted in the confiscation of hunting rifles, the release of hundreds of illegally kept birds and the legal prosecution of crimes. Together with the national authorities, AAO has created an accessible internet platform where people can easily report cases of bird poaching, giving more visibility to the problem in Tunisia.

In the Mersin regions, 35 shepherds belong to the network of Doğa (BirdLife's Turkish Partner). Our Partner regularly visits them to increase awareness about bird poaching, with a special focus on vultures. Thanks to the network, DOGA receives instant information from the field regarding the presence of the bird, the occurrence of illegal practices, and potential changes of habitat.

“Together with the national authorities, AAO has created an accessible internet platform where people can easily report cases of bird poaching, giving more visibility to the problem in Tunisia.”

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Despite the hard work of our Partners, challenges remain. Some governments continue to disregard the illegal killing of birds, with some not even considering it as a problem – despite the numbers saying otherwise. With continuous monitoring, we can continue to shine the light on the seriousness of the issue. In many countries, the fines and punishments for bird poaching, if any, are not severe enough to discourage people from committing crimes. In some places, they're even being reduced. In December 2020, a law amendment was passed by the Cypriot Parliament, reducing the fines for the illegal killing of up to 50 songbirds with the use of limesticks or shooting from 2,000 euros to 200 euros. BirdLife Cyprus has already recorded an increase in bird trapping levels due to the weakening of this law.

From paper to action

But adequate legislation alone will not save the lives of birds. Enforcement is crucial to ensure that any law has an impact. Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies and rangers will not have enough capacity to dedicate to everything requiring their attention, and unless special units are created for it, wildlife crime often falls to the bottom of their list. By further educating the public to change their perception of hunting and encourage them to report cases of poaching, the situation can improve. Also, policemen and public prosecutors must be better informed about wildlife and conservation to understand the law from an environmental perspective. Even hunters can benefit from understanding the impact of their actions. Illegal activities can be further reduced by strengthening penalties, standardising implementation of legislation, increasing controls in the field, and maintaining facilities such as recovery centres.

Our Partners work daily on these issues to protect and ensure a brighter future for birds. The BirdLife Partnership is hopeful and optimistic that the Mediterranean will once again be safe for migrating birds and will continue its work at a national and international level to eliminate the illegal killing of our common natural heritage.



Act now!



act-now.flightforsurvival.org

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Photos in page 7: House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) - Photo: Padraig Kavanagh; Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) - Photo: Vink Lars Soerink - Eurasian Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) - Photo: Birdlife Europe; Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) - Photo: Birdlife Europe; Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) - Photo: John Carey.

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