

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BEST PRACTICES TO TACKLE THE ILLEGAL KILLING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Zakynthos, 26-27 June 2014



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The **International Conference on Best Practices to tackle the illegal killing of migratory birds** took place in Zakynthos on the 26-27 June 2014. It brought together environmental NGOs, MEAs (CMS, Bonn Convention for Migratory Species) and law enforcement authorities from Malta, Italy, Spain, Greece and Cyprus, together with the hunting community and more specifically, FACE and the Hellenic Hunters Confederation. The Mediterranean focus of the Conference provided a specific field of discussion with similar problems and social attitudes, which facilitated the finding of best practices and desired future actions.

Below is a summary of results of the Conference.

General issues raised regarding the tackling of Illegal Killing of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean

- There is a common responsibility amongst countries which share the same birds and are along the same flyway. It is therefore important to establish correct, coherent and updated data on the connectivity between Mediterranean illegal killing “black-spots” and the areas of origin and destination of birds impacted at these sites.
- Climate change has an impact at the migratory bird’s population/flyway level. The alarming effects of climate change require countries along flyways to invest in understanding and protecting migratory birds during their challenging crossing of the ecological barriers represented by the Mediterranean and Sahara.
- When addressing the illegal killing of birds, there is an increasing need to focus on common species that are declining/potentially declining (eg. Turtle Dove) and not just on threatened species.
- There is a need for better and more reliable data in order to estimate the extent of illegal killing and its effects on bird populations.

- When addressing the illegal killing of birds, it is of outmost importance to involve *all stakeholders*. Law enforcement agencies are a top priority.
- It is of outmost importance to establish and develop common agreements with the hunting community in the Mediterranean countries, in order to work together on the illegal killing of birds, while, in parallel, accepting the differences that exist on other topics.
- It is important to recognise the efforts of each stakeholder aimed to find common grounds.
- Every effort should be made to distinguish and separate legal sustainable hunting activities from Illegal bird killing.
- Hunters can play an important role in managing wildlife, in the eradication of illegal killing of birds, the sharing of data and their ability to affect poachers by marginalising them (eg. by excluding from membership)
- Understanding and addressing the different national and local circumstances of illegal killing and trapping is essential
- Concerns were expressed on the derogation currently applied for spring hunting and its legality, especially taking into consideration the unjustified lack of consistency among member states.

Awareness and education

A number of campaigns raising awareness about the existence and impact of illegal killing of birds are currently being implemented in Europe. However, the awareness level is still insufficient at the local level, as well as in countries where migratory birds winter and breed. Communication efforts should be coordinated better and can be more efficient if communication targets are clearer and the campaigns are implemented in collaboration with all stakeholders.

Best practices

- Develop and implement International (or along the flyways) campaigns, but adapt them to the local practices and culture.
- Avoid confrontational language and utilise ‘positive messages’, such as nature appreciation.
- Emphasise how environmental protection can yield economic benefits (eg. eco-tourism and ecosystem services) and how, in the contrary, illegal activities may detract from the economic value of an area.
- Collect, use and clearly interpret *scientific* data on illegal killing of birds.
- Engage with local communities at the “black-spots”, clearly explaining *why* an activity is illegal
- Use clear terminology: avoid confusion between hunting and illegal killing at all times.
- Build trust with all stakeholders.
- Raise awareness of illegal killing of birds in cities and in counties where the birds breed or winter.

Future actions

- Establish an international forum of stakeholders which will implement an *international campaign* locally in the Mediterranean.

- Organise an international event, which will be implemented locally, to promote awareness about illegal killing of birds, endorsed by the Bern Convention and the EU Roadmap Initiative.
- Involve existing international networks (eg. Ramsar, Med PAN, WWF Med Po, Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory).
- Organise capacity building events amongst environmental educators and campaigners.

Monitoring the illegal killing of migratory birds

Monitoring illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean at the moment takes place through various methods, depending on the type of illegal practice and the country's prioritisation of the issue. Today, monitoring takes place:

- via the number of active 'parany' traps monitored by volunteers in Spain,
- via the recovery/rehabilitation centers' data on shot and trapped birds in Spain, Italy etc.,
- via specific protocols developed by RSPB and BirdLife Cyprus for the monitoring of mist netting activity, where samples of 1km² squares are randomly selected and checked for trapping every season in Cyprus,
- by monitoring the number of traps, snares and nets removed by volunteers in cooperation with LEAs in Italy,
- via bag checks by Hellenic hunters' associations guards which are being registered in the state's enforcement authorities databases (place, time, species, number of controls, number of prosecutions and number of sentencing decisions),
- via planes and patrol from the ground for trapping, as well as number of gun-shots for spring killing in Malta.

Best practices

- Monitoring data should be kept within or validated by a state authority and be reported to the European Commission
- It is more efficient to apply common national monitoring protocols with law enforcement agencies, NGOs and hunters' associations, so as to avoid many and different estimates of the illegal killing activity
- Law enforcement authorities should have an appropriate budget dedicated to the monitoring of illegal killing of birds
- Use new technologies (e.g. drones, satellite images) for monitoring, as well as GIS mapping
- To monitor the effectiveness of law enforcement/control the use of number of controls over the number of accusations over time is an effective indicator
- To monitor the effectiveness of court procedures use the ratio: numbers of cases taken to court over the total successful prosecutions.
- Use the number of shots/cartridges in the closed season as an indicator of human disturbance

Future actions

- Create a *common standard database* with scientific and reliable data, using common fields in order to collate all information about sites (fixed or not, small or large areas, etc.) where illegal killing and trapping takes place. This database should have open information for hunters and law enforcement authorities.
- Develop a protocol to monitor the activity of police enforcement and its effectiveness (e.g. numbers of poachers/number of police patrols). In Malta, the European Commission has

accepted a figure of 7 police officers per 1000 licensed hunters as a measure of strict supervision.

- Analyse data from bird ringing, through the central European EURING Data Bank, as conditions and circumstances of recovery are available and coded. This data will allow defining connectivity at “black-spots”.
- Collect and analyse data from rehabilitation centres in order to centralise data through a web tool to report cases of illegal killing (where, when, which species, etc.) and causes of death or injuries (shot, poisoned, etc.).
- Prioritise areas of action by looking at bird population status and the “black-spot’s” illegal killing intensity.
- Next steps of a coordination of monitoring effort can be discussed during the BirdLife International workshop for the review of illegal killing in the Mediterranean, in February 2015.

Law enforcement

Effective law enforcement is where communication, education and monitoring efforts aim at. The levels of appropriate and effective law enforcement in the Mediterranean countries vary considerably.

Best practices

- Establish clearly that all involved parties share the responsibility for a sustainable future of bird populations and recognize that the Birds Directive is an appropriate legal instrument for the conservation of migratory wild birds
- Create National Action Plans for Eradicating Illegal Killing and Trapping by the central responsible authority. This will provide a framework to establish priorities of black spots within a country and coordination between authorities.
- Intense patrolling campaigns have reached high values of success, showing that government surveillance in conjunction with gamekeepers and NGO volunteers is an effective approach in reducing poaching. Mixed patrols are implemented at the moment in Mediterranean countries (eg. LIFE Lesser white-fronted Goose project, Strofadia islands and Malta camp patrols).
- The Hellenic hunters' associations guards have developed numerous best practices and effective interventions regarding the prevention and prosecution of illegal killing which should be taken into account.
- Emphasise deterrence measures to assist law enforcement: establish substantial penalties as a deterrence measure for illegal killing (eg. high financial penalty or seizure of car and gun). Penalties may also have alternatives, such as community service. Indirect penalties may also be used, such as the obligation to sit hunting exams again.
- The time between the offence and the execution of the penalty should be minimized.
- Legal training of gamekeepers in order to “tie a case” with a strong burden of proof is essential.

Future Actions

- Establish a platform on eliminating illegal killing of migratory birds on a national level, which will include all stakeholders, in order to discuss:
 - coordination of authorities on national level,
 - national/regional/local priorities,
 - the exchange of evidence on illegal killing of migratory birds,

- create uniform system for (internet/web based/app based) reporting,
 - publish statistics and reports,
 - explore funding possibilities between Member States and within EU,
 - capacity-building, roles, responsibilities,
 - gravity factors influencing prosecution and sentencing decisions
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- Training and information workshops for police, marine and forest authorities, as well as gamekeepers should be organized on a national level. These workshops will focus on practical issues. Workshops on a regional level may focus on exchange of knowledge and best practices between countries based on 'real life' cases could be a good format.
 - The Ministries together with forest authorities should take initiative or play an important role implement the above.

List of participants

International Conference on Best Practices to tackle the Illegal Killing of Migratory Birds 26-27 June 2014 , Zakynthos

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Safe Haven for Wild Birds: Changing attitudes towards illegal killing in Northern Mediterranean for European Biodiversity