

THE SAFE HAVEN FOR WILD BIRDS PROJECT IN SPAIN.

Conservationist, charities, municipalities and schools “stick” together against Illegal Killing of Birds

Despite the popular idea of the Spanish Mediterranean Villages as a holiday destination, it is worthy to remember that the Mediterranean isn't just sun, beaches and a paradise for tourism. Beyond that, the environment that holds all that richness is under threat by the lack of awareness. Only in Spain, every year an average of 120,000 to 430,000 wild birds are illegally killed.

The background

One of the most widespread illegal activities is the “parany”, a method of trapping birds when they land in trees specially pruned and impregnated with lime. The species affected are mainly Thrushes but also many other species are caught (such as Robins, Hawfinches, Chiffchaffs and even Eagle-owl or Little Owls); it is estimated that up to 30% of the bird species caught are protected by law.

Each autumn, hundreds of thousands of protected birds are trapped and killed in more than 2,000 illegal “paranys” distributed throughout the regions of Castellon, north of Valencia, Tarragona south and southeast of Aragon involving 3-6,000 people. In these regions up to 1.5 million birds are killed in just over one month.

Throughout the past two years there has been an increase in the number of “paranys”, and this illegal hunting activity in Spain has experienced a rise of public support. In villages where the “parany” is practised has increased the feeling that they're developing a tradition that should be legalized, point of view that has been backed by local and regional Governments. So that explains why the penalties for illegal trappers have declined and local authorities do not intervene.

The Safe Haven Wild Birds in Spain: the breaking point.



Needless to say that Illegal killing of birds is broad practice that needs a common approach among Mediterranean organizations, with shared goals to reduce illegal killing. SEO/BirdLife, the Spanish partner of the Life + project, aims to empower people to tackle illegal killing, changing socio-cultural attitudes among teenagers and a works for a better coordination of law enforcement agencies that leads to the end of the practice of “parany”.

Thanks to the Life project and the previous work developed on this issue, SEO/BirdLife stopped the release of permits on 2013. Few days before the launching of the Spanish campaign of the SHWB project (on the 29th October 2013) the regional Government of the Valencia Autonomous Community released more than 150 permits to hunters to hunt with “parany” as part of a scientific study on the migration of the species more frequently killed with “parany”. As a reaction to that decision SEO/BirdLife has produced a manifesto supported by several Spanish universities and by SEO/BirdLife's Scientific Board

(composed by several outstanding researchers on bird biology and ecology). The manifesto rejects the claim that parany can be a tool for studying bird migration.

SEO/BirdLife presented as well an appeal against the resolution and we hold several meeting with local government that lead to the cancelation of the permits. Furthermore, the Commission bakes us and on his decision reminded poachers and local government about the illegality of the use of lime as a hunting method providing its non selectivity. Furthermore, the Commission establishes mist netting as the method used for studying the bird migration rather than lime stick. On this regard, there's no room for any doubt: they're breaking the law.

Due to the facts explained above, this target is one of the most difficult of the project in Spain, nevertheless, our workshops has been shown as a helpful tool for discussion among law enforcement agents, reaching the agreement that more coordinated efforts have to be done to tackle illegal killing.

They just don't know they love migratory birds, and what I do is helping them to discover that...



That's what the Spanish local communicator officer always says when coming back from a school or an event, doesn't matter if they are adults, teenagers or children, they do love migratory birds and the stories they carry on their wings.

Safe Haven of Wild Birds staff in Spain applies the quote of Baba Dioum *"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."* SEO/BirdLife talks in High schools are backed by the teaching kit unit that pupils have been filling for some weeks, showing them the why's and how's of bird migration.

Despite of all the difficulties and the social support that poacher's have, at the half way of the project we've gone to 15 different schools (although we contacted more than 300), raising awareness on the issue with an overall of 1294 teenagers. Amongst local population, we've developed all kind of events from interpretation of the travel exhibition to talks and children activities. In seven hot spots we've reach more than 1500 people.

The most important aspect at this point is not how many people have we reached but what has been the impact we've get on them; and we proud ourselves of having several articles in local schools journals explaining how satisfactory has been their experience participating in the project. Even better is that whether the schools and villages that have participated have recommended the activity to neighbourhood villages and schools and we hope the demand will rise shortly.

In order to solve the hostile environment SEO/BridLife has hired a mediation agency. This mediation approach, would allow the opening of a structured debate involving the public where all parties (i.e., hunting organizations and nature conservation organizations, scientists, etc.) could present their position and reasons on the issue of the use of "parany".

A project that takes advantages of social network

SEO/BirdLife has been using social media to reach the most of the people possible. We have written Press releases, posts in their blogs and we have shown a short documentary in the Madrid's Underground Channel. Twitter and Facebook have become our allies on the campaign with 26.472 fans in Facebook and 24.300 followers in Twitter, therefore the latest news of the project are easily on the front page.

From the launching of the campaign in Spain we have generated 17 press releases that have produced 186 articles and have generated good media interest as described in the Media report reaching an estimated 28.825.500 million people. We use posts in SEO/BirdLife's blog as another way to spread the progresses made on the project having great audience success

Our aim is to reach the widest range of audiences therefore, in our magazine for kids we published a comic and a poster that explained the issue in an ease way easily understood for kids.

What's next?



We reckon schools and events are working as expected despite the setbacks or difficulties because of the hostile environment in the local villages.

What we have to work harder in is trying to raise awareness in Law enforcement agencies, ensuring the participation of the Regional Government, Prosecutors, Hunter's Associations, etc.

However we are confident that, as migratory birds do in their flyways, we'll reach our aim of reducing illegal killing of birds and next hunting season no permits will be released.

Still guessing what the parany is and what species are trapped? Have a look on the SEO/BirdLife's video <http://youtu.be/SSOAMZ5gJqE>, we are sure it will enlighten you.