

Layman's report

LIFE Against Bird Crime 2018-2022



Delivering the EU Biodiversity Strategy:
Awareness and Capacity Building against
Bird Crime in Priority Flyway Countries

LIFE17/GIE/NL/000599



THE DATA OF THE PROJECT

Title: Delivering the EU Biodiversity Strategy: Awareness and Capacity Building against Bird Crime in Priority Flyway

Project acronym: LIFE Against Bird Crime

Start date: 01/09/2018 End date: 31/10/2022

LIST OF BENEFICIARIES

Coordinating beneficiary:



Associated beneficiaries:



Co-financers:



Total project budget: 1,827,689 Euro

Total eligible project budget: 1,817,614 Euro

EU financial contribution requested: 1,088,026 Euro (= 59.86% of total eligible budget)



flightforsurvival.org/life-against-bird-crimes

THE LIFE PROGRAMME



LIFE stands for L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement [Financial Instrument for the Environment] of the European Union. It was created in 1992 to promote community interest in nature conservation and environmental projects. During this period, the LIFE programme has co-financed over 4,600 projects with a total contribution of approximately €6.5 billion euros.

The LIFE "Environmental Governance & Information" priority area - under the "Environment" sub-program - co-finances action grants for information, awareness, and dissemination projects to support communication, management, and dissemination of information in the field of the environment, and to facilitate knowledge sharing on successful environmental solutions and practice.

FOREWORD

This publication summarises the four-year work of the LIFE Against Bird Crime project. This project fits into a broader strategy that the BirdLife partnership has started decades before, and as such these results feed into and build on the wider efforts to reduce the illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds (IKB).

IKB has been recognised as a significant threat to our migratory birds. BirdLife International and its partners on the ground, have been leading the charge on IKB in the Mediterranean region for many years. In 2016, BirdLife International published the first scientific assessment of the scope, scale and species affected by IKB in the Mediterranean. It estimated that 11–36 million birds are illegally killed or taken in the region every year!¹

BirdLife partnership has worked tirelessly to get to the position we are in today in the Mediterranean. The international community now recognises that IKB is a serious crime and governments have demonstrated their commitment in the agreement of the Convention on Migratory Species and the Bern Convention to reduce this threat in the region by 50% between 2020 and 2030.

In line with BirdLife's zero tolerance policy against IKB, the goal of the project supported this commitment and aimed to sustainably reduce IKB on the project sites. While effective legislation and law enforcement are key to eradicating this illegal practice, enforcement alone will not change the people's hearts and minds. Besides monitoring and detection, the project partners therefore focused on advocacy, communications, and education.



European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)
Photo: Birdlife Cyprus



¹ Brochet *et al.* (2016). Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean. Bird Conservation International, 26(1), 1–28. doi:10.1017/S0959270915000416

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bird-conservation-international/article/preliminary-assessment-of-the-scope-and-scale-of-illegal-killing-and-taking-of-birds-in-the-mediterranean/34A06A94874DB94BE2BBAC4F96C3B5F>



Eurasian Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)
Photo: BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

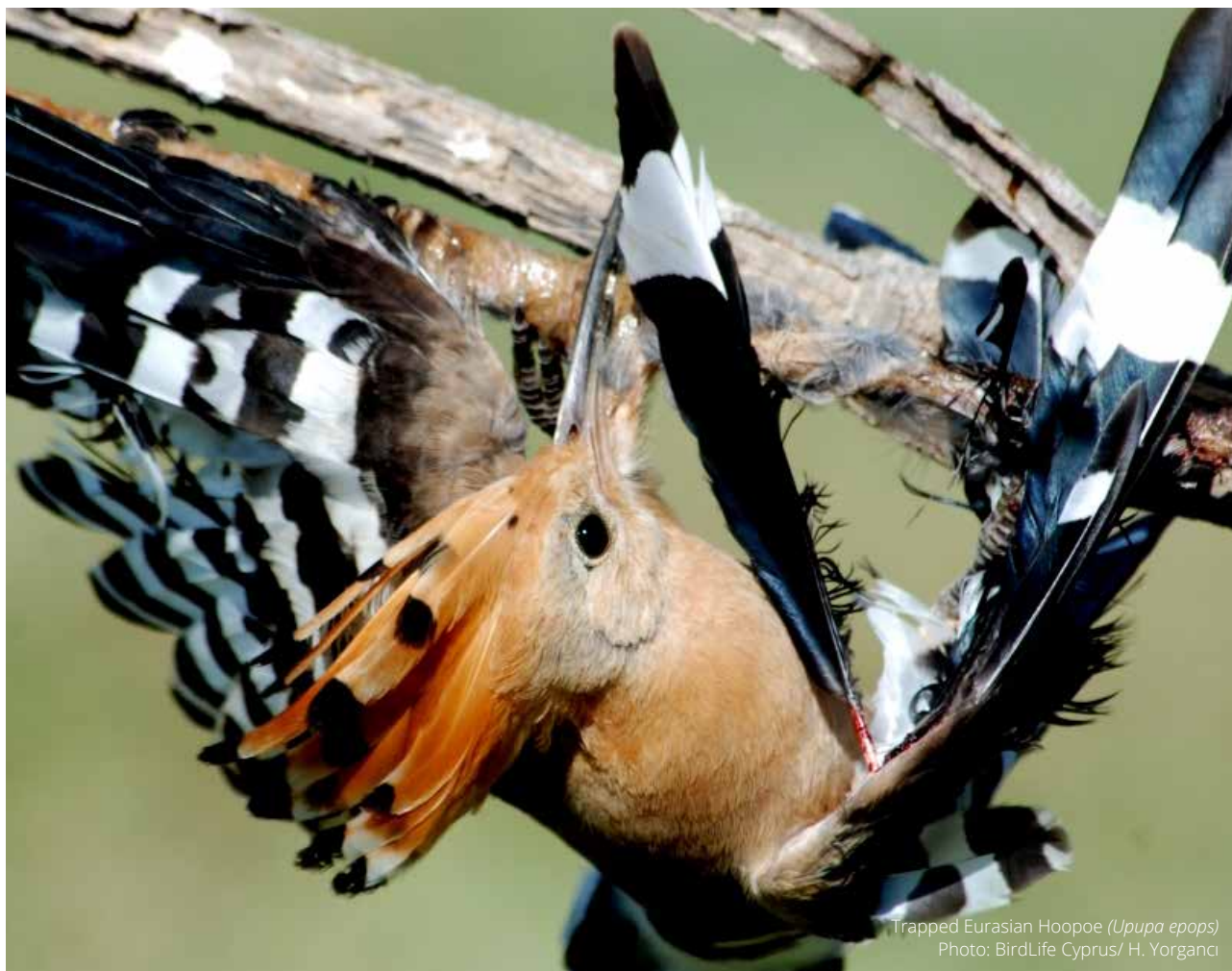


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THE THREAT

The illegal killing of birds



The illegal killing, trapping, or trade of wild birds (also referred to as IKB) is defined as any form of deliberate action that results in the death of an individual bird, or its removal from the wild, that is prohibited under national legislation. IKB still occurs in many EU countries with some areas identified as particular hotspots. In addition, widespread occurrence outside the EU directly impacts migratory species within the EU.

Species are illegally killed or taken for a variety of reasons: to eat, for trade, for sports, for “entertainment”, to have as pets, and to use as decoys to attract more birds to hunt. Often the reasons overlap, meaning that a bird killed primarily for recreational “sport” may well be traded or eaten. The methods of these illegal activities also vary: the most common forms are illegal shooting, trapping, poisoning, and nest robbing.

The importance of fighting the illegal killing of birds

The data gathered by BirdLife partners and experts during 2014-2015 about the scale of IKB in the Mediterranean shocked the world. This situation analysis revealed that on average 25 million birds were being illegally killed or removed from the wild every year in the Mediterranean region alone². Endangered species, already hit hard by other threats like habitat loss and climate change, are being pushed closer to extinction – and all in open defiance of the law.

The project countries (Cyprus, Croatia, Greece & Italy) have the highest estimated rate of IKB in the European part of the Mediterranean. These four countries combined are responsible for the unlawful death of over nine million individual birds annually.



² BirdLife International (2015) The Killing. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International
https://www.birdlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The_Killing_01-28_low.pdf

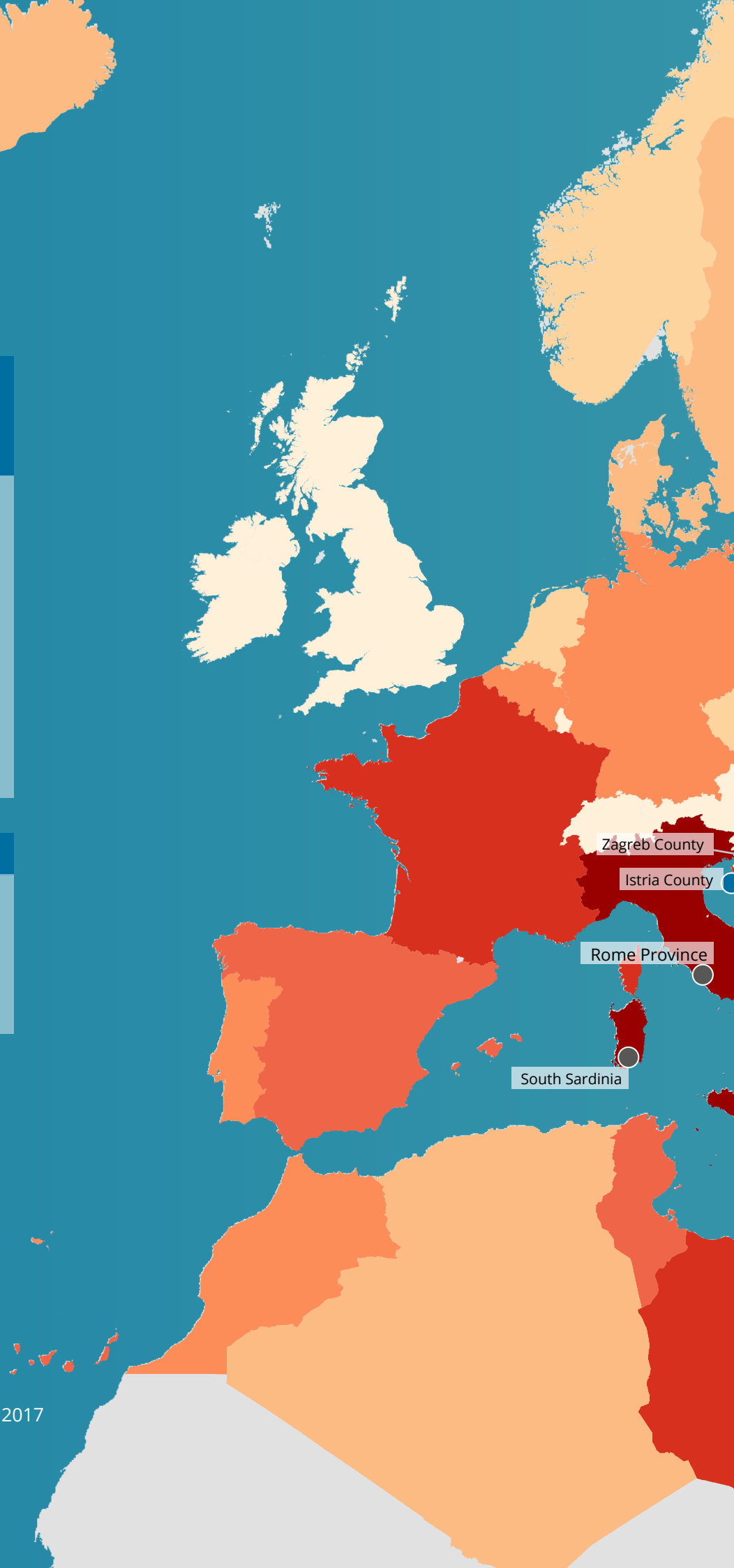
WHERE DO WE WORK?

ILLEGAL BIRD KILLINGS

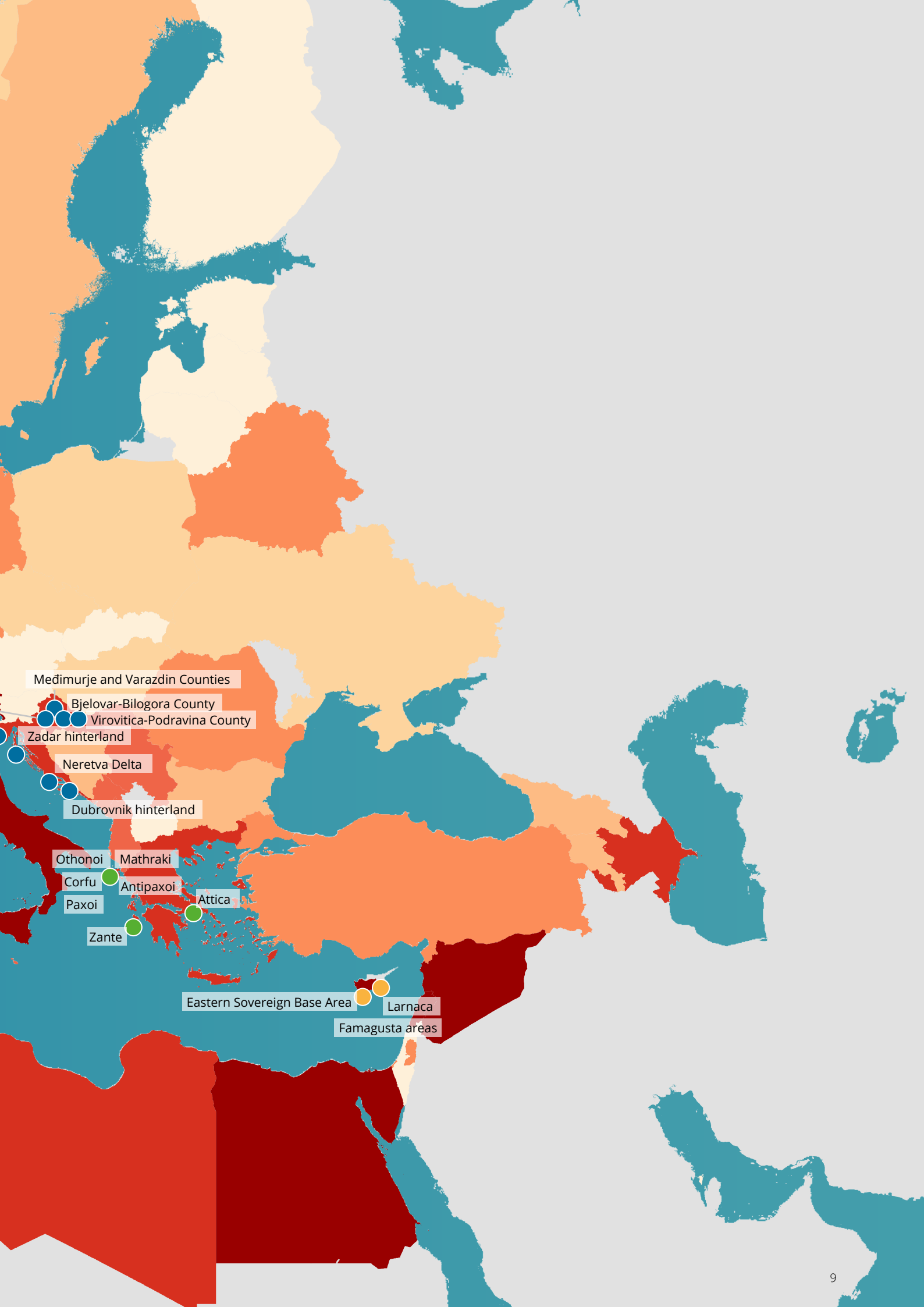
Estimated number of individual birds illegally killed/taken per year per country



OUR PROJECT SITES



Data from Brochet et al. 2016, 2017



Medimurje and Varazdin Counties

Bjelovar-Bilogora County

Virovitica-Podravina County

Zadar hinterland

Neretva Delta

Dubrovnik hinterland

Othonoi

Mathraki

Corfu

Antipaxoi

Paxoi

Attica

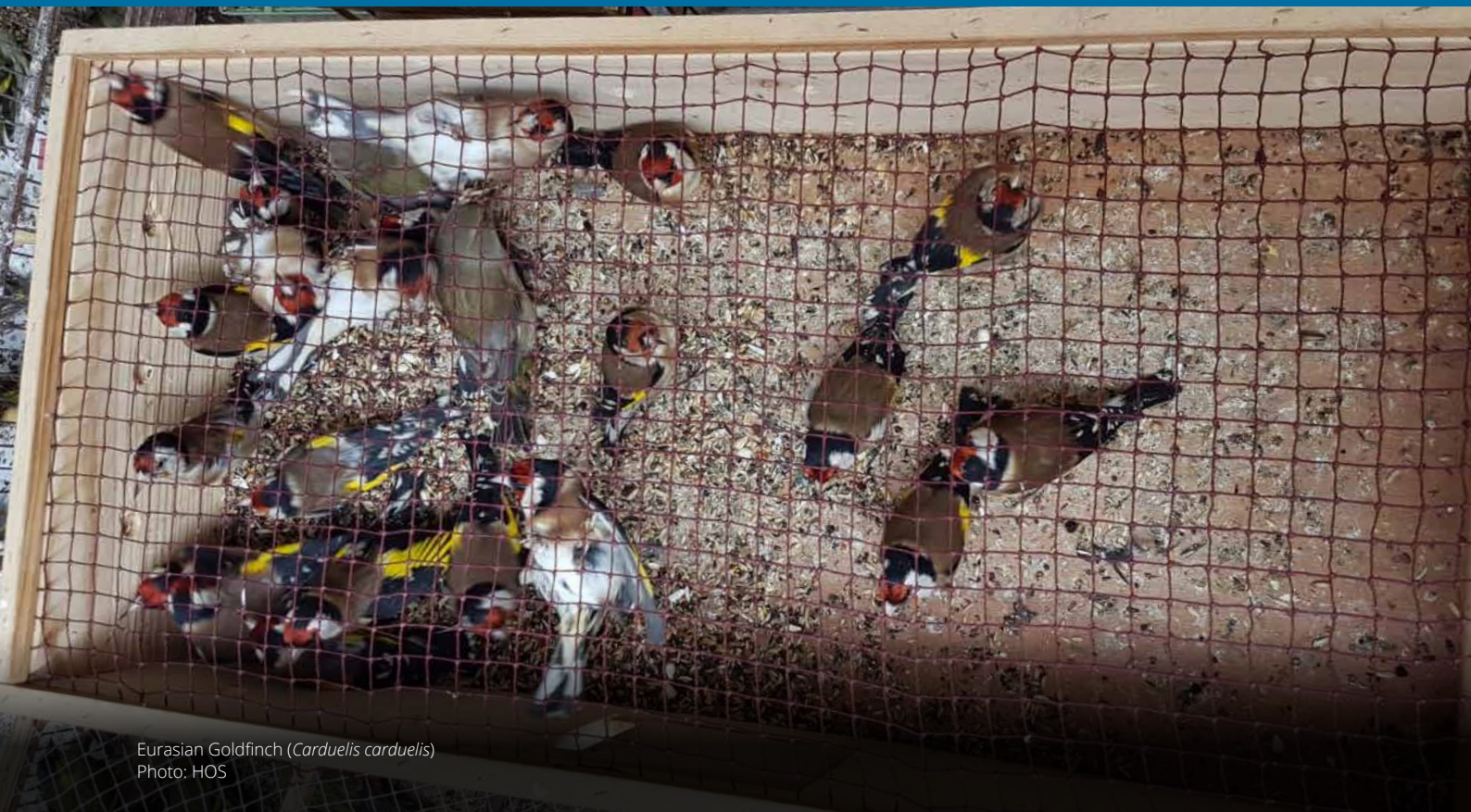
Zante

Eastern Sovereign Base Area

Larnaca

Famagusta areas

OUR APPROACH



Eurasian Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
Photo: HOS

The long-term goal of the project is to prevent and reduce IKB in the priority flyway countries, focusing on ensuring effective law enforcement on the ground at key sites, building capacity of regulatory and enforcement institutions nationally, and improving legislation and ensuring compliance. To ensure law enforcement and effective legislation, we work directly with governments, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary through trainings, joint operations and providing technical support, information, and resources. We enable the adoption and ensure the implementation of strategic National Action Plans in conjunction with relevant stakeholders nationally and internationally, as well as forming strategic alliances with relevant international actors.

METHODS

Monitoring and detection: how many birds are still illegally killed in the project areas?

Gathering reliable information about illegal activities requires continuous data collection. By following standardized protocols, we can monitor the extent of IKB in the region and assess the trends. This is the most direct measure of the impact of the work that conservationists and law enforcement officers are doing against poaching.

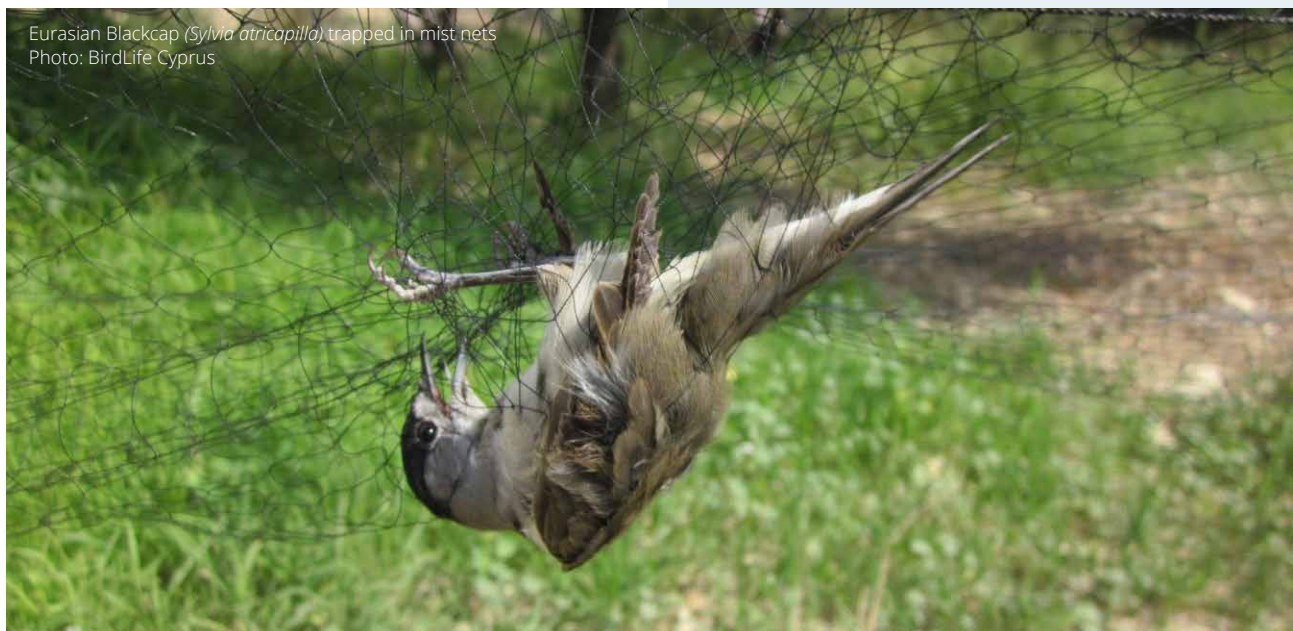
In June 2019, the project co-organised an international workshop on the methodology of monitoring IKB. We supplemented and updated the 2015 BirdLife International publication "[A best practice guide for monitoring illegal killing and taking of birds](#)"³ with new techniques and case studies several times during the project period).

In terms of the illegal killing of birds, the worst areas are identified as worst locations. We focused the monitoring activities and on-the-ground evidence collection on a selection of these "blackspots".

CYPRUS



In Cyprus, BirdLife Cyprus with the help of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife in the UK) and in consultation with the competent authorities, have been running a surveillance programme on illegal bird trapping since 2002. Thanks to this monitoring programme, BirdLife Cyprus has the longest continuous record of field data in the Mediterranean which provides a reliable overview of the bird trapping situation in the country.



³ https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Guidelines-for-IKB-monitoring_UPDATED_2022.pdf

ITALY



Lipu – BirdLife’s Italian partner has on-going, long-term monitoring activities in place. Thanks to a successful cooperation with the Corpo Forestale dello Stato (State Forestry Corps) and with the Carabinieri (national gendarmerie of Italy), volunteers of Lipu take part in anti-poaching operations every year since 2016. These activities are implemented by those Lipu volunteers who have been appointed by the provincial government as “voluntary game wardens”. The so-called “Operation Recall” fights the use of electronic calling devices and recorders which, despite being prohibited, are commonly used while hunting larks and thrushes. (Read more information on page 19).



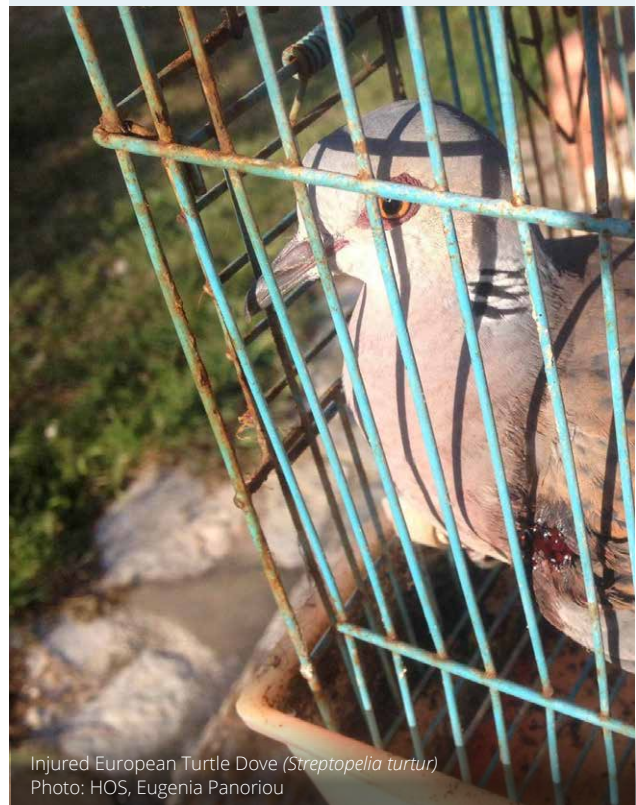
White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)
Photo: Lipu

GREECE



In Greece, the Greek BirdLife partner, the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) has developed a monitoring procedure and protocols for monitoring illegal trade in pet shops and open markets, which is being used by its volunteers. This has resulted in dozens of reports being made to the authorities, which in turn has resulted in less illegal activity in the large open market of Shistos, west from Athens, where hundreds of songbirds were illegally traded every Sunday.

HOS started systematic monitoring of illegal spring shooting in the Ionian Islands from the spring of 2019. The spring hunting of birds in general is banned in the EU by the Birds Directive and forbidden by national law. However, illegal spring hunting of the European turtle doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) is widely practiced on the Ionian islands as a long-established tradition. With the use of automated sound recorders, HOS was able to record and count gunshots during the spring hunting period, when all hunting is illegal. (Read more information on page 14).



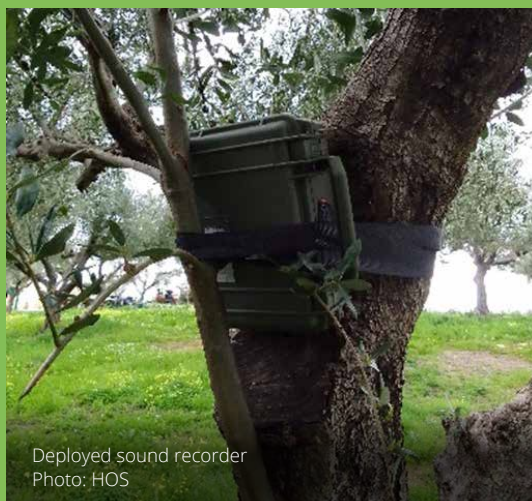
Injured European Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)
Photo: HOS, Eugenia Panoriou

BirdLife's Croatian partner, the Association BIOM, in collaboration with the rangers from the Protected Areas Management Authority "Međimurje Nature" developed a protocol for the removal of poaching hides from protected areas and Natura2000 sites. The protocol was shared with the Nature Protection Directorate and all ranger services in Croatia. Poaching hides are rampant, especially in wetlands, for waterfowl poaching. In collaboration with local authorities, Association BIOM successfully removed 25 illegal poaching hides in several regions of the country within the frame of the project. (Read more information on page 20).



Poaching hide removal at the Drava river
Photo: BIOM

Using Acoustic Recording Units to detect gunshots in Greece



There are several advantages to use passive methods to monitor illegal shooting in Greece. Firstly, passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) makes it possible to record the total number of gunshots over an entire season instead of a smaller sample of days. Moreover, climate conditions do not affect the sensors, which can record around the clock, rain or sunshine. Also, PAM data analysis is transparent. The results are available for review post-hoc by all interested parties. Acoustic sensors require little effort during the data collection stage. Once installed, researchers can dedicate their time to other project activities.

In establishing the passive acoustic monitoring grid, HOS used (semi-)autonomous acoustic recording units (ARUs), hence referred simply as “acoustic sensors”. The sensors were deployed outside the legal hunting season, hence all shots recorded indicate illegal hunting.

For the analysis, HOS used an acoustic software program, scanning the data with purpose-designed detection algorithms, which flag sections of the data with putative gunshots, to remove false positive from true positive detections. In addition, there are also false negatives - gunshots that occurred but were not detected by the algorithms. For this reason, a small, but representative sample of the data must be manually examined to estimate what proportion of the true (manually counted gunshots) were detected by the algorithm. This step is important, as we adjust the final number of detected gunshots by those estimated to have been missed. Finally, we end up with files that show the location (sensor), date and time of each gunshot. This can be used to estimate the peak of the illegal hunting period, the daily patterns and to compare the poaching pressure across sites and/or years.

One of the challenges of PAM is to convert gunshots into estimated number of animals killed or injured and to identify the species. To achieve this, we used a conservative educated guess, based on field observations, discussions with locals, and kill rates reported for similar species in international bibliography. The acoustic sensors on spring 2021 detected 20,905 illegal shots within the survey area- which means 32,613 estimated gunshots, if we take into consideration the algorithm's call rate. This number can result in about 8,153 killed birds within survey area, on the islands of Zante, Corfu, Paxoi, Antipaxoi, Mathraki and Othonoi.

Covert surveillance to catch and to sentence trappers in Cyprus

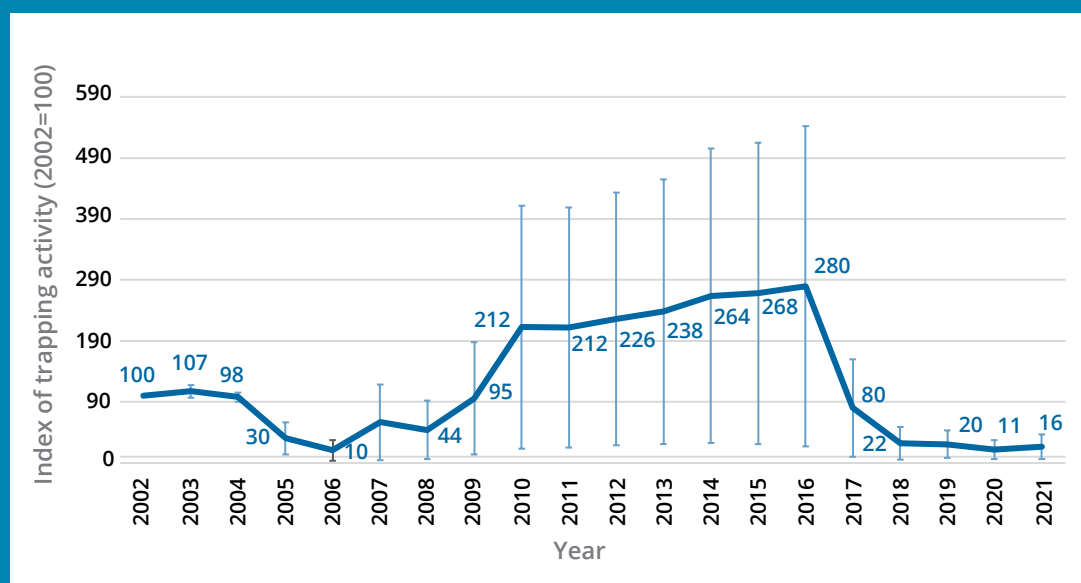
A unique and fruitful cooperation has helped make a big difference in trapping at the worst IKB blackspot of the country: the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area. The turning point was achieved when the Sovereign Base Area Police started to work together with specialist investigations staff of the RSPB, BirdLife's Partner in the UK, and BirdLife Cyprus. This cooperation began in 2016, when the investigation team installed covert cameras at several key illegal trapping hotspots on the Eastern Sovereign Base Area in Cyprus for the first time.

Permission from the police was granted before installing the cameras to collect the evidence. The shocking footage showed individuals removing struggling birds from mist nets and killing them with knives before tossing the bodies into buckets. The footage was submitted to the court as evidence, and the perpetrators caught on camera were prosecuted and successfully convicted with a range of fines, including suspended jail sentences.

The use of covert surveillance methods continued throughout the subsequent years and has shown how modern technology can support and improve enforcement against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus. Moreover, it provides the court with substantial evidence to hand out deterrent sentences, a key element in stopping wildlife crime. As a result, the illegal bird trapping activities at the Sovereign Base Areas have dropped dramatically, as shown in the graph below.



Trends of autumns mist-netting activities in the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus as shown in the Autumn 2021 trapping report of BirdLife Cyprus



Managing data: the database concept

While the extent of the illegal killing of birds is monitored at various sites, it remains a challenge to collect these data internationally. A comprehensive, European database on bird crime cases would allow us to track the magnitude, types, and enforcement at a continental level. This would then help us to better shape policies, tighten any legislative or enforcement gaps and build better transnational cooperation where needed.

To help achieve this goal, the project carried out an overview study on existing European databases which collect data on IKB cases. We built a contact list with over 140 stakeholders and collected information on the structure and limitations of these already functioning databases, that could potentially be the input source for the international database. Then we developed a detailed [recommendation report](https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/DBrecommendations_report.pdf)⁴ for a European Bird Crime database, including technical specifications for the requirements, structure and format, and budget analysis for the development and maintenance of such a database.

Legislation and policy

International cooperation

Due to the massive extent of bird species being driven to extinction, their conservation has become a global concern, requiring urgent and coordinated international action. There are a number of interlinked and approved plans of action to address the illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds in the EU and wider Europe, such as the

former [Tunis Action Plan 2013-2020](#) and the [EU Roadmap to eradicate IKB](#). As a continuation, the Bern Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), their Contracting Parties and observers, together with partners and relevant stakeholders have developed the [Rome Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030: Eradicating Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade in Wild Birds in Europe and the Mediterranean region](#). The implementation of this plan of action will ensure that continued progress is made, provided that Member States adopt and implement the plan – in addition to civil society and international agency commitments.

The work of this project has been widely disseminated through these bodies and to Member State level through the network of National Focal Points and through contacts identified through this and other projects. The consortium has actively participated at the joint meetings of the Bern Convention Network of Special Focal Points on Eradication of Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade in Wild Birds and the CMS Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean. Our contribution was crucial in supporting the adoption of an ambitious Rome Strategic Plan and to hold governments accountable for these commitments.

The Rome Strategic Plan calls for maintaining and strengthening the zero-tolerance approach to IKB, and its vision is the eradication of illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds. The immediate goal for the duration of the Plan is the reduction of the scale and scope of illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds by at least 50% by 2030. To achieve this target, it is clear that Member States must significantly step up their efforts to fight IKB. BirdLife Partners have proven to be their strongest allies in this fight.



Bird identification course for stakeholders
Photo: BIOM



⁴ https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/DBrecommendations_report.pdf

National action plans

A National Action Plan (NAP) template to address the illegal killing, trapping, taking, of wild birds will be developed by the CMS and Bern Convention within the framework of the Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030. The NAP is a strategic document, which should be developed by and officially approved by the national competent authorities, that outlines appropriate activities to address the illegal killing, taking, and trade of wild birds. In the development of a NAP, each country must identify actions that are the most relevant to their national situation in order to tackle the problem efficiently. The development and implementation of a NAP is a government-led process, however the involve-

ment of all relevant national authorities and stakeholders is key to the successful operation of this type of action plan. The NAP is then monitored, evaluated, and reviewed regularly in order to achieve the agreed objectives.

As stated above, the government or competent authorities are the main actors leading this process, however the project partner NGOs have provided important support to their governments in this process. A [proposed format](https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IKB-National-Action-Plan-format-and-guidance.pdf)⁵ was developed as an output of an online workshop on National Action Plans to fight against IKB, which took place on March 8-9, 2021, and was organised by BirdLife Cyprus, EuroNatur, Birdlife Europe & Central Asia and BirdLife International as a joint effort of the “LIFE against Bird Crime”, “Safe Flyways” and “Adriatic Flyway 4” projects.



European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
Photo: BirdLife Cyprus



⁵ <https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IKB-National-Action-Plan-format-and-guidance.pdf>

Law relaxation in Cyprus: a setback to a 20-year conservation effort to protect migratory birds

In December 2020, the Cypriot government passed an amendment to the national 'Wild Birds and Game species law' to reduce the on-the-spot fines for the offence of illegal killing (using limesticks or a shotgun) of up to 50 songbirds from €2000 down to only €200. The 14 species of songbird this applies to coincidentally happen to be the target-species of trappers and poachers to sell to restaurants for a popular, and illegal, dish called "ambelopoulia".

This development undermines a 20-year effort to protect migratory songbirds from being illegally killed in Cyprus. BirdLife Cyprus has already recorded an increase in trapping levels, both with the use of mist nets and limesticks, for the autumn 2021 within the Republic of Cyprus areas.

Despite BirdLife Cyprus' gargantuan effort to prevent this law from passing, stressing that such low fines are neither deterrent nor punitive to those involved in the illegal killing of protected

species, the law was approved. Following the passing of this catastrophic law, BirdLife Cyprus launched a petition in January 2021, calling for the annulment of these relaxations, successfully gathering 13,700 signatures. Furthermore, BirdLife Cyprus mobilised the BirdLife EU partners to sign a joint letter – in total 22 partners endorsed the letter – expressing their concerns for this setback in the protection of migratory species. Both the petition signatures and the BirdLife letter were handed over to the President of the Cypriot Parliament, calling on her to take action to protect our common natural heritage.

BirdLife Cyprus also took the issue to the EU-level, which resulted in the EU Commissioner for the Environment, Virginijus Sinkevičius calling for the annulment of this law amendment in a letter dated 12 October 2021. We hope and expect that the EU Commission will continue to put pressure on Cyprus to annul these law relaxations.

Enforcement for law compliance

The governments in the Mediterranean region have identified that law enforcement is the weakest element in the eradication of IKB. The project's partnership has supported local law enforcement authorities with reporting bird crimes, collecting evidence, developing capacity through civilian guards, and providing enforcement officers with specialised trainings and educational materials.

This type of field work is very demanding, therefore the project partners developed specialised volunteer networks

to help support law enforcement authorities in their field work. The organisations created their own protocols to recruit, train, and motivate their volunteers. Thanks to this approach, the engagement of volunteers has been highly beneficial in all countries and yielded extra capacity to monitor IKB activities.

In early 2021, the project published its comprehensive Recommendation [Report on the enforcement chain](https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LIFE-B3-Policy-Recommendation-Report.pdf)⁶ that addresses the major challenges when tackling the IKB in practise within the four project countries.



⁶ <https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LIFE-B3-Policy-Recommendation-Report.pdf>

Operation Recall: how civilian volunteers stand up against poaching

In Italy, the national hunting framework law grants environmental NGOs, farming or hunting associations the right to appoint voluntary hunting guards. The regional authorities organise the training courses and exams for the acquisition of the voluntary hunting guard title. Upon passing the exam, these volunteers become certified public officials with limited power: the voluntary hunting guards can check the documents of hunters and their gamebags; they can impose administrative sanctions and they can report any ascertained crimes to the judicial authorities or the police. In case of crimes, the guards cannot proceed with the seizure of weapons, or the means used for killing the fauna, this can only be done by the police forces.

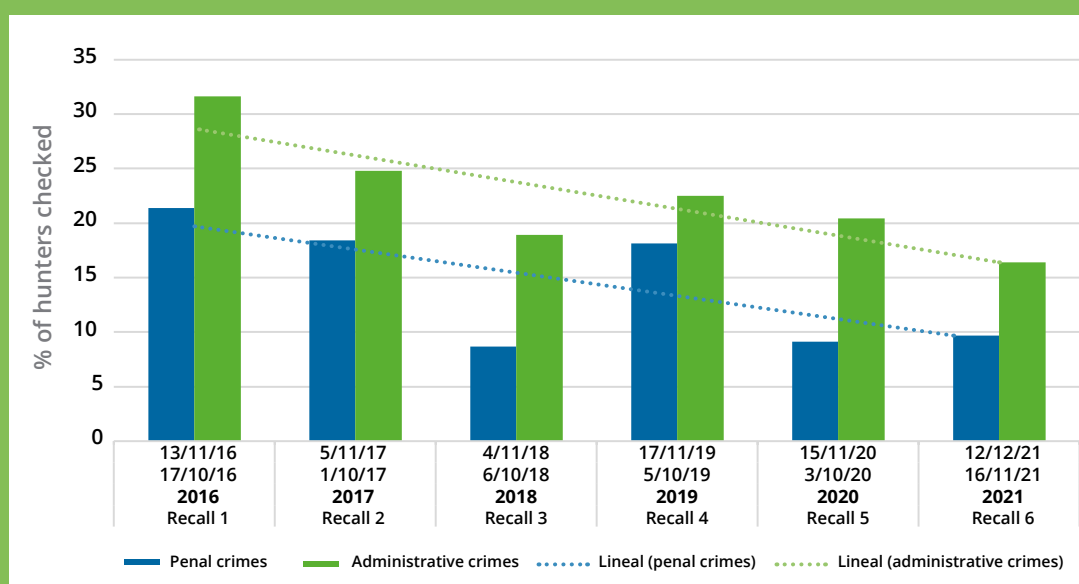
Operation Recall aims at fighting the use of electronic callers (tape recorders), which are prohibited, but unfortunately commonly used during the hunting of larks and thrushes. Operation Recall was started by Lipu volunteer guards and involves the provincial command of the CUFA (the special Branch of Carabinieri dealing with wildlife crimes). Each field visit is

performed by at least two Lipu guards alongside one member of staff from CUFA.

The checks are not random. They target hunters suspected of using electronic lures. The visits are more concentrated in areas with high density of hunters. The guards in plain clothes approach on foot to hear whether electronic devices are being used or not. These can be identified by the fact that the calls are repetitive, sustained and particularly loud. Consequently, poachers are also detected during this activity, which usually target protected species and/or takes place in protected areas.

The effectiveness (measured as number of fines raised and crime reports filed by the police), clearly indicated that the phenomenon still exists but, due to the widespread control of the territory and the formal complaints made over the years, the trend is significantly decreasing. From 2016 to 2021, the observed frequency of penal crimes has decreased from 21,4% to 9,7%, while that of the administrative sanctions from 31,6% to 16,4%.

Frequency of IKB detected



Removing illegal infrastructure to protect waterbirds in Croatia



Since 2017, BirdLife's Partner in Croatia, Association BIOM, in cooperation with government institutions, has removed 25 illegal structures used for waterbird poaching at the Neretva Delta and Donja Dubrava hydroelectric reservoir. The government institutions, primarily public institutions managing the protected areas, have also engaged a range of other institutions to support the removal of illegal hides, including the nature protection inspection, fire departments, police and even the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service.

In the field, BIOM first recorded the exact locations of the structures and photographed them, as well as the evidence of poaching (e.g. used cartridges, lures). Since both sites are protected areas, BIOM contacted the local protected area rangers, who checked the legal status of a structure – if it is not recorded in the game management plan it is an illegal and unlicensed hunting hide. During these past operations, all the structures that were recorded were found to be illegally constructed. The rangers then submitted a report to the State Inspectorate to get approval for the demolition of the structures. An illegally built structure can also be reported to the local authority, i.e. the respon-

sible enforcement officer who is authorized to order removals of basic structures that had been unlawfully erected.

After authorization, BIOM started the joint removal of the structures. In the Neretva Delta, BIOM, the Protected Area Management Authority of Dubrovnik-Neretva County, firefighters and police were involved. On the Donja Dubrava, the Protected Area Management Authority "Međimurje Nature", the Protected Area Management Authority of Varaždin County, the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service, one local utilities company and BIOM were involved. Depending on the position and complexity of the structure, it was necessary to carefully plan the equipment and capacities for its removal.

During these operations, police protection is desirable in order to prevent potential attacks on the people removing the structure. As a positive outcome, the materials from the illegal infrastructures can be reused. At Neretva Delta, BIOM, together with local children, made bird feeders from the remains of the illegal shooting stands.

Awareness raising and education

Our joint 'Flight for Survival' campaign – featured in the highlights – reached approximately 15 million people during the project period. Interaction with the campaign was highest during the spring and autumn migration seasons – supported by local public events organised in all four project countries and beyond. Between 2020 and 2021 the Covid-19 pandemic caused a major disruption in holding in-person public events, resulting in many of the activities being replaced by online webinars and workshops. Despite this disruption, the project partnership succeeded in organising a wide range of IKB-themed awareness raising events, including simulation games and lectures at an educational bird ringing camp, drama improvisations, travelling exhibition, a wildlife photo exhibition and an information stand at a national bird race, to name a few. Information materials targeting different audiences were created and printed, including comic books, information brochures, bird identification booklets, cartoons, and signboards. (Read page 23 for more information).

In addition to the international campaign, the partnership created several nationally tailored campaigns:

CYPRUS

In Cyprus, an artistic mural depicting a trapped blackcap was painted on a school wall.

Photo: BirdLife Cyprus



CROATIA

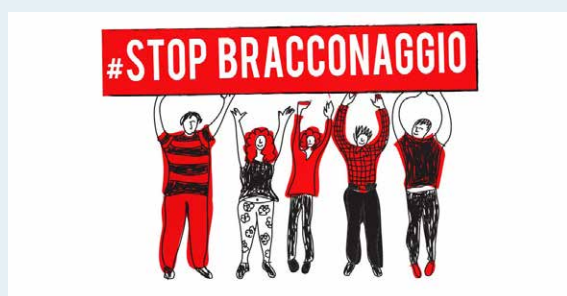
In Croatia, during summer of 2019, BIOM ran a campaign against a proposed change to increase the length of hunting seasons, which goes against the provision of the Birds Directive that protects the species during their breeding season. BIOM campaigned to shorten the hunting season for the declining Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*). The campaign strongly contributed to the decision in shortening the hunting season by three weeks. In September 2021, BIOM ran a guerrilla radio campaign in 44 radio stations all around the country against the poaching of Common Quails with the use of calling devices. Thanks to this, BIOM saw an increase in the calls received from hunters, farmers and other citizens to report calling devices.



Education on bird identification
Photo: BIOM

ITALY

In Italy, Lipu launched a campaign called #StopBracconaggio (meaning #StopPoaching) and delivered a petition with over 180,000 signatures to the government to adopt stricter penalties and fines against poachers. In the south of Sardinia, where poaching is rife, they created a mural, which got the attention of popular science magazine Focus and its social media accounts. Lipu also promoted the campaign at Cagliari airport and across bus stops in the city.



Bus stop
Photo: LIPU

GREECE

In Greece, HOS created a [video spot](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SKEVEB_Cow)⁷ against illegal pet trade of songbird, that reached more than 2.5 million people via a nation-wide awareness campaign. The campaign ran simultaneously through TV and radio channels, as well as social media. This campaign resulted in HOS seeing a 30% increase in the reporting of trapping/trading/caging of wild birds, in the first quarter of the year 2022 (compared to the last quarter of 2021). HOS' educational activities focused on encouraging the younger generation to reject the "tradition" of bird poaching. This was done with environmental educators who used a variety of methods, including games, storytelling, and role-playing to grab the attention of children of different ages. HOS' educational activities in the project reached over 3,500 school children.



Environmental education
Photo: HOS



⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SKEVEB_Cow

Flight for Survival: a flyway campaign to end the illegal killing of birds



Flight for Survival is a joint BirdLife campaign that raises awareness about the illegal killing of birds along the African-Eurasian flyway and the conservation activities taking place to fight this deplorable phenomenon. Every year, our audience can follow the spectacular journeys of some iconic migratory birds, while we also expose the different dangers, they face at some of the worst illegal killing blackspots along the African-Eurasian flyway.

The campaign is coordinated by BirdLife Europe, but the stories are authored by different BirdLife partners along the entire flyway. The most important feature is its inclusiveness: it hosts and amplifies the voice of any flyway partners fighting

the illegal killing of birds. BirdLife shares the articles with an intensive social media presence during the peak migration periods.

During the project period, the campaign reached over 15 million people and helped to strengthen the moral unacceptance of illegal bird killing in a broad, general audience.

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Assessing the socio-economic impact

Socio-economic issues are an important driver of illegal killing and taking of birds, whether it is for the restaurant trade, hunting tourism, sport shooting or the pet bird market. Therefore, our project analysed the socio-economic drivers that have been identified as important factors shaping IKB in the relevant project countries.

However, it was beyond the scope of this project to carry out a large-scale, in-depth economic analysis over such a wide geographical area. Therefore, we focused on a small-scale, qualitative review of the perceived impacts on a selection of stakeholder groups and target-areas with the support from academics and a team of external experts in public opinion poll surveys.

There is no one-size-fits-all protocol for studying the motivations and profiles of those undertaking the different techniques of IKB in the different project sites. However, the obtained results have helped to better tailor the project's actions and communication and gain better insight into the motivations.

Here are some of the conclusions we gained through these socio-economic studies:



ITALY

In Italy, Lipu carried out a study to evaluate the social acceptability of IKB among youth (18-30) in Sardinia. The results show how important it is to keep the focus on the problem of poaching. It also shows that more and more young people perceive poaching in a negative way. A second study provided an accurate description of the consumers of illegal killed thrushes in Sardinia. Results showed that 30% of the respondents ate illegally killed thrushes; the consumers are typically over the age of 55 and they consume such illegal meals once a year on average.



CROATIA

In Croatia, less than half of the respondents to the study said they would report a bird crime in 2022. It seems that while the overwhelming majority condemn such an unlawful act, people's general attitude would still be to avoid active reporting of bird crime to the authorities.



CYPRUS

In Cyprus, respondents were asked about eating songbirds, 17% replied that they have eaten songbirds, while the remaining 83% replied that they have not. Eating songbirds was predominantly reported by men (80%), and most of them are also hunters. Most of those that indicated they do eat songbirds consume birds at home with friends and family (65%), compared to restaurants (30%). The reasons given for consuming songbirds were: the taste, socialising with people and that it is tradition.



GREECE

In Greece, HOS carried out a socio-economic impact study on the trapping and trading of wild birds. The research method focused on analysing views, attitudes, and behaviours of perpetrators, competent authorities and the public through in-depth interviews and available data processing. The economic impact was estimated through the available prices in pet shops, open markets, and on the internet. Based on actual confiscations at marketplaces in the country, the profit on the birds that are illegally traded is estimated to be from 13,000 to 82,000 euros per year, given the fact that the price of each bird can vary according to the seller.

RESULTS: HOW MANY BIRDS DID THE PROJECT SAVE?



Illegally shot Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)
Photo: LIPU

Quantifying the impact of our work is difficult because changing behaviour is a slow process. Most of the educational and awareness raising activities of today will yield benefits only several years later, when the next generation will see hunting with limesticks as barbaric, and ambelopoulia consumption as repugnant. However, we know that in the long-term, removing illegal mist nets will not put an end to IKB, instead it is through changing the hearts and minds of people.

Our data on the level of IKB from our monitored blackspot sites during the project's period shows an average reduction of 25-30% in IKB normalized by the monitoring efforts. The decrease in IKB, however, cannot be solely attributed to the project's efforts. For example, the travel restriction due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on IKB levels: it impacted hunting tourism, availability of local enforcement and people's livelihood.

With these factors in mind, our conservative estimation is that the reduction in IKB can be translated to around 450,000-750,000 individual birds (measured with relevant indicators e.g. numbers of shots, nets, and casualties) saved in year 2022 (the project's final year) when compared to the project's starting year (2018). This also translates to over one million saved birds over the full project period between 2018-2022!

Although, it is also possible that poachers have moved to other, less controlled areas and continue the illegal catching of birds. The partnership will therefore continue its public campaign and awareness raising at entire country levels and beyond, to make sure that the illegal businesses are not exported into areas outside of our scope.

CONCLUSION

Our project achievements prove that IKB can be significantly reduced through targeted actions. However, changing societal norms and tackling illegal activities on the long-term requires sustained effort by civil society and government institutions. This continued focus is needed at all organizational and political levels to consolidate our successes in the region.

For permanent results, we must change behaviour and attitude toward long-held traditions of local communities. Lipu started its educational work many years ago and we are now seeing the results. This approach therefore has been transferred to other locations with significant IKB problems. Combining our activities with the similar efforts of other projects and partner organizations, we have already succeeded to extend the scope of our impact beyond the partnership of the LIFE Against Bird Crime project, by

transferring best practice conservation measures, such as: IKB monitoring schemes, educational methods, involvement of volunteers, joint patrolling, and covert surveillance work, just to name a few. The project has a good potential to be replicated at EU level and beyond, especially in EU candidate countries, as well as in the Middle East and North Africa, where IKB is also a big problem.

The strong cooperation among the project consortium, but also within the wider BirdLife partnership, the involvement of governmental institutions and other stakeholders provide a strengthened capacity. There is an increased awareness amongst nature-loving people, a political momentum, and an actionable knowledge, which together offer a unique opportunity to continue substantially reducing IKB in the Mediterranean through further implementation of our strategies.

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