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# Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)

## ANNUAL REPORT - 2020

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

Direct and effective action against the trapping, trade and shooting of our migratory birds in the Mediterranean - this is the mission and at the same time the "trademark" of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS). Despite the difficult circumstances, our operations and bird protection camps in the migratory bird poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean remained the focus of our work in 2020. Although the pandemic and the associated restrictions meant that we had to reschedule and shorten some actions, we still managed to be present with several teams in all operational areas. For example, we were able to maintain the solid field presence we have built up over many years against the bird trappers in Northern Italy and Cyprus and to monitor bird migration during the hunting season in Malta as planned. In these three countries alone, more than 120 poachers were caught and around 400 wild birds were released alive from traps in 2020. Without doubt, thousands of migratory birds were able to complete their journey as a direct result of our operations!

The effectiveness of our work is also shown by the bans on hunting turtle doves and bird trapping with limesticks in Provence, which were passed by the French State Council this year. Both are important successes for the protection of migratory birds, which would be unthinkable without the years of action, research and formal evidence-based complaints by CABS and our local partners.

Another focus of our work this year has been (and still is) our project ORPHEUS (Online Research on Poaching Hotspots in the European Union States), which was launched in spring and in which 207 volunteers from all over Europe participated. The project involves the systematic search for bird-trapping sites hidden on private property in Spain using satellite imagery from Google Earth. Co-ordinated by the Bonn and UK offices, so far, an impressive 48,500 square kilometres have been searched in the regions of Catalonia, Castellon, Valencia, Murcia and Alicante, identifying a total of 223 previously unknown trapping sites. In October, 27 installations were raided and shut down together with the police. Further major operations are planned in Spain for 2021.

The successes and results described in this report would not have been possible without the longstanding and generous help of our supporters, donors and volunteers. Together, we all represent a growing community of direct action for bird protection. On behalf of the CABS board we would like to thank you all very much and hope that you will continue to support the Committee and our migratory birds in the coming year.

## The CABS Team January

- In the south of Italy, CABS teams, together with a special unit of the Carabinieri (police), carried out an operation against the illegal hunting of wintering migratory birds. During this operation, nine hunters and bird-trappers were prosecuted in Calabria within a week. The charges include shooting protected finches, the use of electronic decoy callers, possession of unregistered firearms and the capture of greenfinches and goldfinches with nets.



Campaign against migratory bird hunting 'safaris': CABS publicly denounced the sale of hunting trips at the Dortmund "Hunter and Hound" Game Fair. The finger was mainly pointed firmly at eight exhibitors who openly advertise international hunting holidays to shoot songbirds and turtle doves - the German bird of the year 2020. The 'Landesjagdverband NRW', which is the "ethical sponsor" of the fair also came under criticism for supporting the sale of hunting trips for endangered migratory birds.



- Violence against CABS member in Cyprus: On 14 January, two poachers attacked a CABS member as he was leading policemen to an illegal trapping facility near the town of Paralimni. During the surprise attack, our volunteer was punched in the face before the officials' present could intervene and prevent anything worse from happening. The perpetrators initially managed to escape. After all the national media report on the case, they eventually turned themselves in to the police a week later.

- To document the night trapping of golden plovers in Malta, our CABS team made fine use of a donated thermal imaging video camera for the first time. This will make it possible to film how trappers lure the nocturnally migrating birds at night into their nets during the closed season. In total, 35 cases of illegal bird trapping were reported to the police by mid-January. All major Maltese media outlets report on the action and publish the evidence filmed by CABS.

## February



- Growth for our wetland reserves in Schleswig-Holstein: Yes, CABS actually own and maintain our own reserves in northern Germany! In February we also took over responsibility for the "Plesenteich" nature reserve in the Plön district. The water is a breeding ground for little grebes, nightingales and reed warblers. Cranes and white-tailed eagles are daily food guests, as well as hundreds of ducks and other wintering water birds. The 25,000 square metre area is being taken over by the Schleswig-Holstein Nature Conservation Foundation.

- Our winter bird protection camp in Cyprus comes to an end after 78 days of operation. Since mid-December 2019, 299 limesticks and 21 nets for illegal bird-trapping were found and dismantled during the operation. 77 birds were saved and released alive. In addition, 56 hunting offences have been documented and reported, including hunting in protected areas and the shooting of strictly protected bird species. 14 poachers were convicted by the police in response to our case reports. Particularly encouraging is the decrease in poaching with nets in the British military areas in Cyprus - here, following lengthy protests, the authorities have significantly increased penalties and delegated more man-power.







- Poisoning of birds of prey: Following reports from the public, CABS staff recovered five dead buzzards and a hawk in a nature reserve in Wegberg (Heinsberg district). The birds were sent for toxicology analysis at the Chemical and Veterinary Investigation Office (CVUA) in Krefeld, where they were subsequently confirmed to have been poisoned by a banned pesticide. Following a criminal complaint, the police launched a full investigation and appeal for information.



- Flamingos die from lead poisoning: Dozens of dead flamingos were found at the Great Salt Lake in the south of the city of Larnaca (Cyprus). CABS staff based in Cyprus also took part in the search, discovering several weakened and one dead animal. Laboratory investigations revealed that the bird ingested lead shot during feeding, which was released into the lake by years of intensive waterfowl hunting.



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## March



- Our project 'ORPHEUS' (Online Research on Poaching Hotspots in European States): Following a call for proposals, 207 volunteers from all over Europe participated in the project to systematically search Google Earth satellite images for hidden bird-trapping sites in Spain. By mid-June, around 48,500 square kilometres were covered, and 223 previously unknown trapping sites identified. The results will be verified on site in autumn and operations planned for 2021. The main focus is on the regions of Valencia and Castellon.

- Successful operation against illegal spring hunting in Malta: Between 12 and 30 March, our 'Bird Guards' reported a total of 18 cases of illegal bird trapping and five cases of hunting of protected migratory birds to the authorities. As a result of our field investigations, the police managed to catch nine perpetrators in the act. Four more poachers were later identified and charged as a result of the video evidence we produced. Three firearms, a dozen clap-nets and six electronic decoys were confiscated.



- Bonelli's eagle nest protection in Sicily: In order to protect the few remaining broods of the endangered Bonelli's eagle from egg thieves, our Italian members and partners participated - as they do every year - in the project to monitor the nests of Bonelli's eagles in Sicily. For the first time, there were no incidents during the

entire breeding season! In order to be able to watch the nests daily during the strict lockdown, the CABS members had been granted an exceptional permission by the Sicilian regional government.

- Protection of migratory birds in Lebanon: Although the operations took place without international participation due to the Corona pandemic this spring, our partners from the Society for Nature Conservation (SPNL), Middle Eastern Sustainable Hunting Centre (MESHC) and the Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon (ABCL) are taking action against the shooting of white storks and other protected migratory birds. Together with the police, two hunters can be caught in the act and arrested. In addition, four men were arrested for illegal bird trading and 34 freshly caught goldfinches were freed.



## April

- In action for Turtle doves: In Malta, a CABS team monitored bird migration in the poaching hotspots of the islands. Despite the closed season, numerous shot turtle doves, marsh harriers and falcons were observed, and some caught on film. With the help of our footage, the police identified two suspects as perpetrators. They are threatened with heavy fines and the loss of their hunting license. Turtle doves have been protected on Malta since 2017 and may not be hunted in spring.



- Success in the fight against the songbird trapping as a delicacy: According to information from our partners at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), the Lebanese army was able to shut down several huge trapping facilities on the coast south of Beirut used to catch migrating blackcap and other warblers. During the operation, around 120 metres of mist net and numerous loudspeakers for playing decoy calls were seized. More than 30 birds were released, including reed warblers, blackcaps and garden warblers.







- Bird trapper caught on Ischia: Following a tip from CABS, police found several illegal snap traps in the garden of a bird-trapper used to target whinchats and wheatears. The suspect received a fine of several hundred euros. In another case, a hunter was charged with carrying shotgun shells in the middle of the closed season. Although the gun that went with it was not found, he is accused of poaching. The action has a clear effect - after the police intervention, poaching ground to a halt!

- Action against illegal bird hunting in southern Italy: During our spring actions in Calabria, four poachers were caught by our teams and reported to the police. One man was filmed illegal hunting turtle dove, two perpetrators had set up nets for goldfinches and in one case a peregrine falcon stolen from the wild was freed.

## May

- Forbidden trapping in Lower Saxony: In the case of barley (district of Emsland), the police shut down two illegal animal traps on the property of a poultry farmer following a report by CABS. These are a live trap for birds of prey baited with a dead duck and a trap for foxes and martens. Proceedings will be initiated against the owner of the breeding facility for violation of the Federal Nature Conservation and Hunting Act.
- Huge bird trap discovered on Gozo: On Malta's sister island, our team discovers a 40 square metre gillnet in a public park with several dead warblers, Spotted Flycatcher and spanish sparrows. In order to construct the huge complex, the trappers had felled a several hundred-year-old protected carob tree. The police confiscated all the material and initiated a search for the perpetrators.





• Operation against bird-trappers in Berlin: Following a tip-off, together with the police, CABS members deactivated an illegal live trap for songbirds in the Neukölln district of Berlin. The trap was mounted on the facade of a house and contained a live goldfinch as a decoy lure. During a search of the offender's flat, the officers found a second bird trap and fake breeding rings. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the man.

• Bird of prey trapper caught in Schleswig-Holstein: Following a tip-off from a member of public, CABS members lead the police to an illegally placed hawk trap next to a pigeon loft in Burg (Dithmarschen district). The trap is seized as a means of committing the crime. When questioned by the police, the pigeon fancier admitted to wanting to catch birds of prey with the trap. He is now facing criminal proceedings.



## June

• Police action against bird-trapping in Friuli, Northeast Italy: in a private garden in northern Italian Friuli, CABS teams discovered more than a dozen gill-nets and numerous cages containing over 100 freshly caught birds, including bearded tits, yellowhammer, hawfinch, goldfinch, goldfinch, goldfinch, nightingales and bullfinches. Following a report to police, the carabinieri confiscated the nets and released all birds. The owner of the garden was taken to court for poaching.





- An EU planned ban on leaded ammunition for waterfowl hunting was being blocked by a German veto. Together with our partner associations, CABS and many of our members take part in a nationwide protest action. The aim is to persuade the minister responsible, Julia Klöckner, to give up her unilateral support for the arms and hunting lobby and to support the ban in a renewed vote in July.



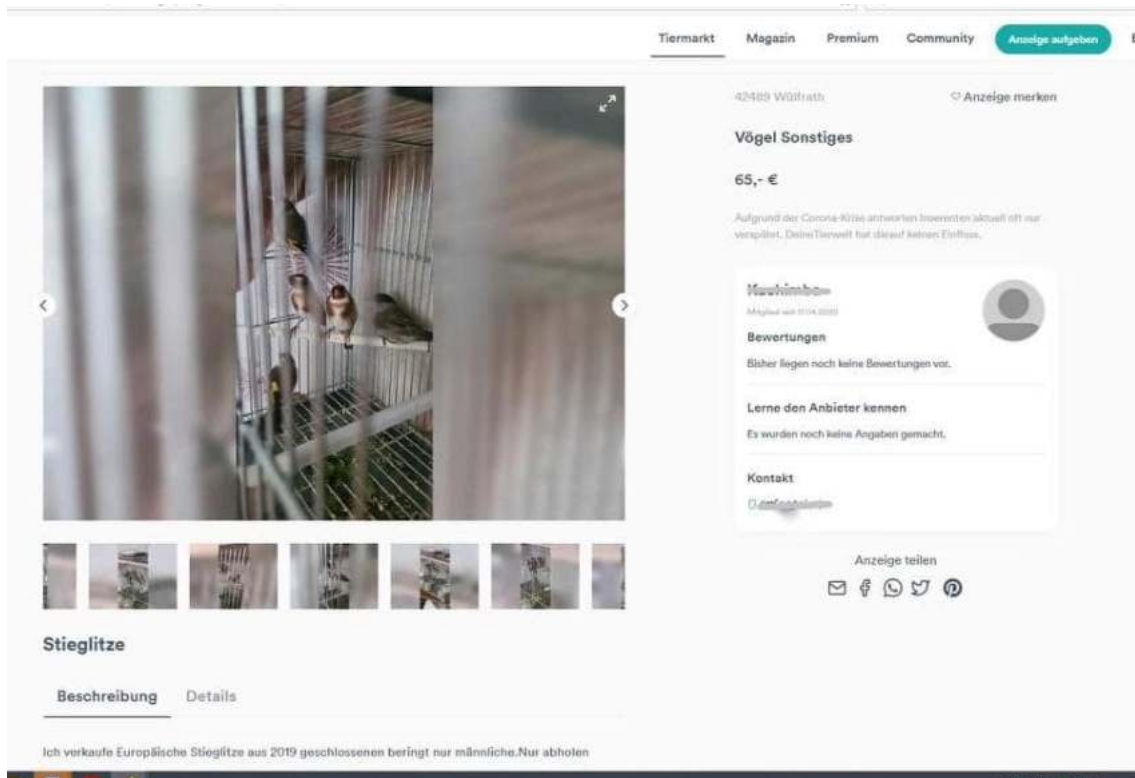
- Raptor persecution in Germany: In the first half of the year, our nationwide database registered a total of 30 illegal killings - an increase of 25% over the previous year. A total of 26 districts in 9 German states are affected. The methods used range from poisoning and shooting down hawks and peregrine falcons to the use of illegal traps and the felling of nesting trees.

- Mixed results of the project to protect the Black Tern in the Havelland region: before the start of the breeding season, CABS staff installed 74 artificial breeding rafts for the endangered Black Tern in Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg. Despite a record occupancy of 46 nests, numerous broods unfortunately failed or were predated; at the end of the breeding season "only" 14 young birds successfully fledged the nest.

## July

- Raising awareness of the illegal hunting of birds in Lebanon. CABS and our partner association in Lebanon – the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) organised two full-day workshops on the importance of conservation and migratory bird protection in the face of illegal poaching in the regions of Western Bekaa and Keserwan. Among the approximately 90 participants are numerous mayors, police officers, local government employees and representatives of hunting associations working to protect endangered migratory birds.





- Small successes in the fight against songbird trade and bird traps on the Internet: The German online sales platforms Ebay-Kleinanzeigen and Quoka.de put the term "goldfinch" on their blacklists. Prior to this are numerous cases uncovered by CABS in which wild-caught birds were offered for sale as captive-bred birds.



- And once again success on eBay & Co: In Italy - unlike in Germany - the sale and possession of bird traps is also prohibited. Nevertheless, it was still possible to buy them on the internet. CABS staff documented numerous offers of forbidden bird traps and trapping nets on various Italian internet platforms and ensured that the companies delete the advertisements and keep an eye on the sellers.





- Bird dealers in NRW, Germany busted: During an online search, CABS staff noticed an offer to sell allegedly captive-bred goldfinches and blackcaps. The case is reported to the authorities in the district of Mettmann, who, during a check in the suspect's home, seize 12 illegally kept linnets, siskins and serins as well as fake breeding rings. The seller is threatened with a fine for illegal trade in wild birds.

- Turnaround in the dispute over "lead-free" hunting. The protests from CABS and other associations against Germany's blockade of the Europe-wide ban on leaded ammunition are having an effect. Shortly before the second vote of the EU countries, Agriculture Minister Julia Klöckner withdraws her veto and the ban is passed in Brussels. Scientists estimate that around one million waterfowl die each year in the EU from lead poisoning.

## August

- Success for turtle dove protection in France: Shortly after the opening of the hunting season, the Supreme Administrative Court in Paris stopped the hunting of turtle doves throughout France. The judges base their decision on the Europe-wide decline of the species. Until 2019, approximately 100,000 turtle doves per year could be legally shot in France. CABS and our French partners at LPO had filed a complaint with the EU Commission against this.





- Bird protection camp in Italy: In the mountains around Lake Garda, four hunters were caught and reported by a small CABS team during a first operation to safeguard early migrant Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts which are targeted as a seasonal delicacy. Another poacher, who had set up 25 forbidden snap traps for songbirds, was brought to justice by the police after days of covert surveillance of his trapping site.

- Wader trapping in Malta: Our CABS team on Malta reported eight cases of poaching to the Maltese police. The cases involve the large-scale trapping of protected curlews, sandpipers and plovers, which are caught in artificial ponds with large folding nets. In order to find the ponds hidden in fields, we chartered a light aircraft to conduct an aerial survey and map out active sites for follow field investigations on the ground.



- Summer mission against songbird hunting in southern Italy. Together with the Carabinieri Forestale (forest police), CABS staff in Calabria convicted two poachers with a total of 26 shot garden warblers. Three shotguns and two electronic decoys were also confiscated. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the men for hunting protected bird species.



## September

- Bird protection camp on Malta: In the first weeks of the official hunting season, our teams documented the shooting down of numerous honey buzzards, marsh harriers, night herons and a European Roller in the south of the island near the airport. Three perpetrators were caught by the police and provisionally arrested. At the end of September, a further three poachers were convicted, who were previously filmed by us trapping ortolans and quails or hunting in the middle of a protected area.



- Sting against bird trapping in Cyprus: The participants of our bird protection camp in Cyprus have their hands full this autumn. Between the beginning of September until the end of the operation in mid-November, 114 active trapping sites were discovered during our field investigations and a total of 1,929 limesticks, 50 nets and 102 electronic callers were dismantled. Some 329 caught birds were released, including nightingales, redstarts, warblers and several long-eared owls. During joint operations with wardens from the Game and Fauna Service, 44 poachers were convicted and fined for either illegal trapping or hunting.



- In Lebanon, members of the anti-poaching unit of our partner SPNL, who have been trained by CABS over the past three years, conduct independent filed investigations against illegal bird poaching in the north of the country. Numerous illegal shootings, including lesser spotted eagles, pelicans and an internationally threatened Egyptian vulture are documented. In a joint operation with the police, two large songbird trapping sites with a dozen huge nets were also

shut down on the coast south of Beirut.

- Migratory bird cemetery discovered in Cyprus: Participants in the autumn bird protection camp in Cyprus found hundreds of illegally shot migratory birds on the coast south of Larnaca. In addition to almost 100 bee-eaters and swallows, a dead kestrel, a hoopoe, a night heron and a European Roller were also found. Because the police initially refuse to investigate the case, CABS made the case public and formally called on the government to act.



## October

- Large-scale deployment in northern Italy: Despite the restrictions imposed by Corona, a total of 28 volunteers took part in our large bird protection camp in the province of Brescia. In close cooperation with the Carabinieri Forestale (forest police), 21 bird trappers were caught in-situ at their trapping sites in the mountains and a total of 57 mist nets, 78 bow traps and 169 snap traps were seized. In addition, 15 hunters were reported for shooting protected species.
- In Malta, CABS teams monitored the controversial finch trapping season, which has been approved by the government as a "scientific research project". Even before the controversial project began, more than 50 unregistered finches were discovered during an aerial survey and reported to the authorities. During an operation near Selmun, a trapping site for hawfinches was found and subsequently shut down by the police.





- Bird protection in Spain: From mid-October to the end of November, a CABS team inspected several dozen trapping sites near Valencia and Vinaros, including those discovered on satellite images as part of our "ORPHEUS" project. Together with the police, 27 bird trappers were reported and around 30 clap-nets and 1,300 limesticks were seized. For this operation, the authorities made our employees exempt from the Corona curfew.

- Crane poachers convicted in Lebanon: After CABS and our Lebanese partners published pictures of the shooting of several dozen cranes in the south of the country, leading to international condemnation, three of the shooters were identified and arrested by the Internal Security Forces (ISF). The men, aged 26, 34 and 40, belong to a group of poachers from Tyros, which specialises in poaching protected migratory birds.

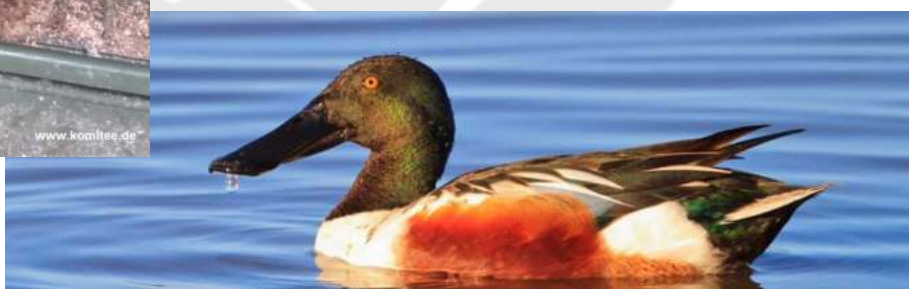


## November

- The CABS HQ office in Bonn received indications of illegal hunting of birds of prey in Saxony, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, including three cases in which two hawks and a buzzard were killed by poultry farmers. In another case from Hattingen (North Rhine-Westphalia), a pigeon bait suspected of being poisoned is being sent to the University of Munich for toxicological analysis.
- Dredging for nature conservation: As part of the "Frogland" project, CABS is laying out a total of 41 new small water bodies in Schleswig-Holstein in the course of the year. The work is being financed by the state, which has provided a total of 1.6 million euros since 2009. Since the start of the project, more than 400 ponds have been newly created or silted up water bodies and wetland habitats have been revived or enlarged.



- In Malta, joint teams from CABS and Birdlife Malta spent a week searching for sites for the illegal capture of finches and other songbirds. A total of six unregistered net trapping sites and two cage traps were reported to the police. 31 finches (chaffinches, linnets, serins and hawfinches) and two quails will be seized and released.



- CABS stop illegal duck hunting in Calabria: CABS investigation shows that in a Natura2000 protected area on the Mediterranean coast, hunters regularly shoot waterfowl despite an absolute ban on hunting. The police, alerted by us, were on site



within a short time and caught two of the perpetrators in their hunting huts. Two freshly shot spoonbills as well as one gadwall and one wigeon were confiscated.



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## December

- In the "corona year" 2020, despite the restrictions, we have managed to organise a winter operation on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia. With a significantly reduced number of participants, the campaign will start at the beginning of December and last until January. The aim of the campaign is to work against the bird trappers who prey on the wintering thrushes with nets and horsehair snares during the cold season.

- For 20 years, CABS has been supporting the largest wildlife rescue sanctuary in Italy - "Il Pettiroso" in Modena. In 2020 more than 5,100 animals were brought in - in addition to 3,600 small birds and 340 birds of prey, there were 580 ungulates (including more than 200 deer), 450 hedgehogs, 80 bats, 25 porcupines and almost 1,000 martens and badgers. In addition to injured wild animals, the authorities are also nurturing animals seized from animal traders and hunters and preparing them for later release - this year among others 4 wolves!



- In our nature reserve in Schwentental, a dilapidated building dating from 1987 will be completely renovated during the course of the year. It is not only used to store the equipment needed to maintain the large pond landscape, it is also the meeting place for the active local CABS members and the "Naturschutzgruppe Schwentental" (Schwentental Nature Conservation Group), which will not be reunited until 2021.
- Public relations: In 2020, our website [www.komitee.de](http://www.komitee.de) has been completely renewed and expanded to include numerous topics and background information. We also have further expanded our coverage on social media. On our Facebook pages in four different languages as well as on Instagram and Twitter (@CABS\_REPORTS) we now have 96,000 "followers" - in 2020 we will be able to reach more interested people than ever before with more than 600 messages. The number of reports of poaching and illegal bird trade that we receive through our website and social media has also reached a record level of almost 300.

**SUPPORT US in 2021:**

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In 2020 - Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) managed to coordinate anti-poaching operations with more than **110** volunteers from Europe and the Middle East, across a total of **27** bird protection camps in **7** countries in the poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean basin. **3.942** traps, **238** nets, **177** electronic decoys were collected, **171** poachers were convicted and over **800** birds were liberated from illegal traps. A countless number of other birds had their fate changed for the better by our presence and field work. All of our operations are funded entirely by supporter donations and cost around **€400,000** per year. Given the set backs we've had this year and the free reign migratory bird poachers have been given it's more important than ever that we ramp up our efforts in 2021. Please help us to continue and expand our work with a donation - every cent is used to put boots on the ground and deliver direct action to protect migratory birds from illegal poaching.

visit: [www.komitee.de/donations](http://www.komitee.de/donations)

Or

**Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. / Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)**

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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the Pro Species Diversity Foundation (Bielefeld), the Karl Kaus Foundation for Animal and Nature (Bremen), the Minara Nature Foundation (Switzerland), the Environmental Police of Malta (ALE), the Carabinieri Forests in Italy and their anti-poaching unit SOARDA for their support and good cooperation, the Guardia Civil in Spain (SEPRONA), the Anti-Poaching Squad (GSP) of the Cyprus Police, the UN Blue Helmets in Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot organisation KUSKOR, the military police in the British military base of Dhekelia (Cyprus), the Game Fund (Cyprus) Game Rangers, the Secretariat of the Bern Convention for the Protection of European Wildlife (Strasbourg), the Secretariat of the Bonn Convention for the Protection of Migratory Species (CMS, Bonn), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL), the German embassies in Beirut and Valletta, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, the organisers of the Rutland Birdfair (Great Britain), the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, Paris), the hunting supervisors of the Italian WWF, Lega Abolizione Caccia (LAC) in Milan, Ente Nazionale Protezione Animali (ENPA) in Ischia, Il Pettiroso Wildlife Sanctuary in Modena, Society for the Protection of Nature in the Lebanon (SPNL), Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon (ABCL), the Middle Eastern Sustainable Hunting Center (MESHHC), the organisation "Lebanese Wildlife" (Beirut), our friends from BirdLife Malta, the Spanish conservation groups GECEN and AE-Agró (Valencia), the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW, Berlin), the umbrella organisation of German avifaunists, the Förderverein für Ökologie und Monitoring von Greifvogel- und Eulenarten (Halle), the Landesbund für Vogelschutz in Bayern, the NABU and its regional associations, the Deutscher Tierschutzbund, the Nordrhein-Westfälischen Ornithologengesellschaft (NWO), the Ornithologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Helgoland, the Institute for Bird Research - Vogelwarte Helgoland, the German Council for the Protection of Birds, the Working Group for the Protection of Peregrine Falcons, the Association of Saxon Ornithologists, the Association of Berlin-Brandenburg Ornithologists (ABBO), the Association Aquila e.V., the magazine "Der Falke" and the Aula-Verlag, the Bergische Greifvogelhilfe, the bird care station Paasmühle, the biological stations Düren, Euskirchen and Bonn/Rhein-Erft, the municipality Schwentinal and of course all our members, sponsors and activists.