



Annual Report 2023

Dear CABS Friends and Supporters,

The year is coming to an end and we are pleased to be able to present you with a successful overview of our work over the past 12 months with this latest annual report. Here you can find out what bird protection campaigns and anti-poaching operations the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) carried out in 2023 with your donations.

As always, by far the largest part of the funds supported our missions against migratory bird poaching in the Mediterranean, where we are now regularly active in six countries. Particularly noteworthy is the dangerous work of our teams in Lebanon, who were deployed for a full three months for the first time this year. The focus was on the documentation of stork shooting in spring as well as safeguarding the roosting sites of Central and Eastern European lesser spotted eagles in autumn, which were determined by means of GPS data. The result is alarming: At almost all the roosting sites we visited, we found the remains of hundreds of shot birds of prey, including dozens of lesser spotted eagles. Although these finds are only the tip of a huge iceberg, they prove once again how important conservation measures in Lebanon are for the survival of many migratory birds breeding in Germany and eastern Europe.

The same applies, of course, to our work along the central and western migratory flyways where we have carried out actions against bird trapping and illegal hunting in Spain, Italy, France, Malta and Cyprus. The operations were particularly effective in Cyprus, where our teams, with the support of game wardens and police, were able to dismantle >1,500 limesticks and rescue 761 freshly caught birds this autumn. At the same time, we observed a massive decrease in illegal bird trapping on the island in winter and spring. Just five years ago, our teams found more than 40 active trapping sites with 137 nets between January and February.



A male blackcap rescued from an illegal trapping net in Cyprus.

Despite an expansion of the search area, only two active sites with a total of four large nets were discovered this year. A great success, which is almost exclusively due to the many years of commitment of our courageous 'Bird Guards'.

Overall, a total of 268 poachers were convicted in 2023 and more than 2,000 captive migratory birds were rescued and released. The total number of nets seized is 382, in addition to 3,976 limesticks, 1,363 other bird traps and snares, as well as 74 confiscated firearms.

In Germany, too, we were able to achieve a number of remarkable successes this year. In addition to winning several cases against brutal animal cruelty and raptor persecution, this also includes a number of cases against the illegal trade in wild birds. Particularly serious was the case of a trader from Lower Saxony, where the police seized more than 100 live, frozen and stuffed protected birds at the beginning of the year following a CABS report. In addition, a hunter from Bavaria was sentenced to 14 months in prison on probation in October. This procedure was also set in motion by a complaint by CABS staff.

As you can see, your donations make a big difference in many places for the benefit of our bird life. We would therefore like to thank you very much for your continued support!

Best regards from all the team at CABS HQ in Bonn



Donation accounts

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JANUARY

Bird trapping like in the Stone Age: Despite the threat of proceedings before the European Court of Justice, France once again allowed the capture and killing of wintering thrushes with stone crush traps (tendelles) in central France. In January, a small CABS team spent two weeks in the two departments of Aveyron and Lozère documenting the scale of the brutal and cruel hunt. The resulting material served as the basis for legal action against France for infringement of the Birds Directive.



Stone-crush trap in Cevennes, France.

During a house search in the district of Schaumburg (Lower Saxony), the police seized around 50 live bluethroats, redstarts and other songbirds as well as equipment for bird trapping from an alleged breeder. In addition, numerous frozen and stuffed birds and two weapons were confiscated. The case followed a report from CABS, after we collected extensive evidence of illegal trapping and trafficking by the accused and handed it over to the public prosecutor's office.



CABS activist saving a song thrush from trapping net in Cyprus.

Winter operations: Our teams are taking action against the illegal hunting of over-wintering songbirds in Cyprus. A total of 62 cases of poaching were documented within just three weeks. Eleven hunters and bird trappers were subsequently convicted by the authorities. The charges included: shooting of protected species, illegal bird trapping with nets and the use of prohibited electronic decoys.

Together with the 'Gruppo Adorno', CABS staff put a stop to two professional poachers in Calabria – a bird dealer in whose house the forest police discovered more than 500 live finches, numerous nets and traps as well as a freezer containing a further 400 dead songbirds. In the case of a second suspect, in addition to frozen birds, two unregistered hunting weapons and a dozen ready-to-cook songbirds were found.

FEBRUARY

Snare traps in Sardinia: The hills of the Mediterranean island are an important wintering area for thrushes and other migratory birds. Unfortunately, every year countless animals die in a horrible death caught in horsehair snares set up by poachers. During a two-week search operation, a CABS team around the capital Cagliari was able to track down 480 of these snares and large net trapping site and dismantle them together with the authorities. Two bird trappers were convicted on the basis of our case materials and 49 dead birds were seized.



Dismantling 'horsehair snares' in Sardinia.

Mute swans on the menu: CABS filed a complaint against a hunter offering mute swans shot by himself as a delicacy in his restaurant in the district of Waldshut (Baden-Württemberg). In doing so, he either overlooked or ignored the fact that wild swans or parts of them may not be sold or offered for sale in Germany. The man is facing a fine for violating the Federal Wildlife Protection Act.



Pollarding trees in Schwentinal wetland reserves.

Bird protection with a chainsaw: In the winter months, extensive maintenance measures take place in our protected area 'Schwentinal wetland reserves' in northern Germany (Schleswig-Holstein). An old hedge was cut back over a length of 700 metres and a total of 12 old pollarded willows were 'trimmed' on a wet meadow in the west of our land. All work is carried out together with our friends from the Schwentinal Nature Conservation Group.

Repeat offender: A pigeon fancier from Rheinberg (North Rhine-Westphalia) was sentenced to a fine of 4,000 euros by the district court of Kleve. The Chamber considered it proven beyond doubt that the man had poisoned a buzzard with parathion (E 605). The defendant is no stranger to the judiciary, as he was already sentenced to pay 2,000 euros by the same court in 2010 after a CABS report for setting up a hawk trap.

MARCH

Anti-poaching operation in Lazio and Campania (Italy): As a direct result of CABS field investigations, the Italian police arrested a total of nine people for bird trapping or illegal spring hunting. In the process, 71 songbird traps, a large gillnet, five rifles and four dead whinchats were confiscated. A short time later, one of the accused was sentenced to a suspended prison sentence and to pay a fine of 2,300 euros.

In Lebanon, an international team from CABS and our Lebanese partners from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) took action against the illegal shooting of white storks. In the mountains east of the city of Tripoli, a total of 18 stork shootings were documented within a week. In cooperation with the police and the military, five poachers were arrested. In the coastal town of Arida, along the border with Syria, several storks kept as live decoys are discovered and freed during a raid with the Internal Security Forces (ISF).



White stork with severe gunshot injuries in Lebanon.

Illegal songbird trapping in Malta: Within three weeks, our teams caught 16 people catching or shooting protected migratory birds during operations with the Maltese Environmental Police (EPU). A total of 105 live decoys, 37 nets, 12 electronic decoys and two shotguns were seized. The birds – mainly greenfinches, linnets, hawfinches, siskins and some robins – were later released into a nature reserve with support from BirdLife Malta.



CABS with live finch decoy in Malta.



Spring actions in northern Italy: Towards the end of the month, a CABS team, together with the forest police, convicted the first bird trappers of the season. A man had set up a net near Lake Como, as well as several cages for trapping birds and two mammal traps. A second poacher was caught east of Milan with 26 snap traps and a huge net about 20 meters long. Around 30 birds were rescued alive – including goldfinches, robins and several thrushes.

APRIL

Illegal raptor persecution in Germany: In the first four months of the year, our wildlife crime and registration and documentation centre 'EDGAR' recorded more than 20 confirmed cases, including the shooting of a white-tailed eagle in the district of Coesfeld (North Rhine-Westphalia), a white-tailed eagle killed with carbofuran near Peine (Lower Saxony), poisoned buzzards and red kites in Bavaria, a shot eagle owl in Kelheim (Rhineland-Palatinate), the trapping and maiming of a bird of prey with a leghold trap in Münster as well as the illegal sale of a sparrowhawk on the internet.



A buzzard found with gunshot injuries in Northrhine-Westphalia.

With support from the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF), our staff in Lebanon coordinated several operations to shut down several large-scale trapping facilities for the trapping of migratory songbirds. More than 70 nets and 650 limesticks were destroyed. In total, 110 birds were rescued and released from the traps – including warblers, finches and even a beautiful Palestinian Sunbird. Six bird trappers were arrested and faced prosecution.



CABS team monitoring the migration across Malta.

Despite the threat of a lawsuit from the EU, Malta once again allowed the spring hunting of turtle dove, which is highly endangered throughout Europe. CABS teams were active on the ground and gathered evidence to confirm that the hunters do not adhere to the government's quota of 1,500 birds. In addition, numerous shootings of protected species such as little egrets, Eleonora's falcons, marsh harriers and marsh harriers were also recorded and reported to the police.

High fines for bird trappers in Cyprus: Due to the pressure that we have built up in recent years, bird trapping in Cyprus is declining significantly in winter and spring. Despite intensive field searches, our teams were only able to find two active bird trapping sites with limesticks in March and April. Both perpetrators were convicted by the police and sentenced to high fines of around 8,000 euros each.

MAY

First bird protection camp in Greece: During an expedition to the island of Zakynthos, located off the west coast of the Peloponnese region, CABS activists documented the rampant shooting of protected turtle doves, bee-eaters, swallows and birds of prey. The local authorities, who seem to have ignored the problem for years, initially refuse to do anything. Only after the local media reported on our finds, three hunters were arrested during joint patrols.



Golden orioles shot dead during spring migration in Zakynthos.

Detecting, combating and preventing: CABS presented a new, 44-page guideline document on how to deal with illegal persecution of birds of prey in Germany. The brochure, which was produced with the support of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMUV), is aimed specifically at employees of public authorities and anyone who witnesses this form of wildlife crime. Printed copies can be requested from us free of charge.

A hunter from the Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (Saxony-Anhalt) was sentenced to a fine of 1,800 euros for killing a strictly protected white-tailed eagle. In addition, the man's hunting license and several weapons were also confiscated. The decisive piece of evidence was a GPS transmitter from the LIFE EUROKITE project, who helped to trace the dead eagle to the defendant's home. CABS and LIFE EUROKITE made the case public in spring 2022 and filed a complaint against the hunter.



Photo: Hans Gläßer

White-tailed eagle in Germany.

Vanity does not protect against punishment: In Lebanon, our teams are taking action against hunters who show off on social media with photos of themselves and freshly shot storks, cranes and birds of prey. Since the beginning of the year, more than 40 cases, including evidence, were collated and forwarded to the intelligence division of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). In at least two cases, house searches are carried out afterwards, during which a dead white stork and four hunting rifles are seized.

JUNE

An animal abuser from Emsland (Lower Saxony) was sentenced to a fine of 3,500 euros by the district court of Lingen for catching and killing a strictly protected goshawk. In addition, the man's hunting license was also confiscated. The proceedings were initiated following a CABS report, whose staff caught the farmer red-handed with a camera in December 2022 and called in the police.



Song thrush chicks used as live decoys for hunting in Italy.

International bird smuggling: Following another CABS investigation by our staff in Italy, a special unit of the Italian Carabinieri (SOARDA) arrested a bird smuggling gang in Friuli and seized a total of 576 live song thrushes! The birds were illegally caught in Poland and were supposed to be sold to hunters in the Milan area as alleged 'captive-bred birds'. The majority of the birds could be released after a few weeks in a foster home. Criminal proceedings were initiated against four people – two Poles and two Italians.

Eagle population soaring: The project to save the Bonelli's eagle in Sicily, which is financially supported by CABS, celebrated the best results since its launch! Partners from the bird protection group 'Gruppo Tutela Rapaci' counted 52 occupied nests this year, from which a total of 53 young eagles fledged. To protect against nest robbers or disturbances, the nests of the Bonelli's eagles have been guarded by volunteers around the clock since 2012.



JULY

Trial marathon: Within just a few weeks, as a direct result of our staff and volunteer field investigations, 15 poachers were summoned to court and convicted in Malta. These were people who were filmed trapping or shooting protected species in the spring of 2022 and were subsequently arrested by the police. After

hearing all witnesses and reviewing the evidence, the chamber sentenced all defendants to fines ranging between 1,200 and 2,800 euros. In addition, the confiscated trapping equipment worth tens of thousands of euros was also confiscated to be subsequently destroyed.

In Oakham (England), CABS staff and volunteers presented the work of the association at the 'Global BirdFair' for three days. This year, the focus of our very well-attended information stand will be on our campaigns against bird

hunting in Cyprus and Lebanon. With several thousand visitors and hundreds of exhibitors from numerous sectors within conservation and birdwatching, the event is by far the largest bird protection trade fair in the world.



The CABS stand at the Global BirdFair, Rutland, UK.

Saved from the combine harvesters: In the Zülpicher Börde (North Rhine-Westphalia), CABS staff were busy using drones to search for nests of harriers in the grain fields. Four broods of the marsh harrier and four nests of montagu's harriers were discovered, around which protection zones were established which the farmers agreed to refrain from harvesting. The farmers are compensated by the responsible districts for the loss of harvest. A total of four young marsh harriers and 12 marsh harriers fledged from the nests we protected!



Marsh harrier chicks found in the grain fields.



AUGUST

Action in southern Italy: Around the coastal city of Reggio Calabria, CABS teams collected evidence against the late summer hunting of garden warblers that is widespread in the region. The animals are considered a delicacy because of their food on the draught – sweet fruits such as figs and ripe plums. The carabinieri (police) were able to convict a total of four hunters following tip-offs from our teams. During subsequent searches, 24 freshly shot garden warblers and 18 unregistered hunting weapons were also found and seized.



Shot warblers in Reggio Calabria.

Raptor persecution in Lower Saxony: The district court of Papenburg sentenced a hunter and farmer to a fine of 900 euros for aiding and abetting the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The case concerns the operation of an illegal live trap for birds of prey and crows, which was discovered by CABS staff in May 2022 in a field grove in the municipality of Rhede (Ems) and subsequently monitored with a trail camera.

In the Italian Alps, teams of CABS activists were busy combing the mountains for illegal traps targeting tree pipits, pied flycatchers and other early-migrating species. In the province of Brescia, thanks to the good cooperation with the police, five bird trappers were caught. The police confiscated 225 dead and 31 live birds as well as a total of 60 snap traps. In at least one case, there was also indications that the animals were intended to be sold on a large scale to restaurants and butchers.

Wader raid on Malta: Right at the beginning of the bird migration season, CABS staff discovered a huge trapping facility for the capture and shooting of plovers and other waterfowl during a search operation. The police arrested the trapper and confiscated four clap-nets, a large cage trap, a shotgun and two freshly caught ringed plovers and wood sandpipers.



Police dismantling a clap-net in Malta.

SEPTEMBER

In Lebanon, CABS together with our partner associations from the Society for Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) and our joint Anti-Poaching Unit (APU), were very busy fighting against the illegal shooting of lesser spotted eagles, honey buzzards and other birds of prey. For the first time, mass slaughter sites were documented in the border area with Syria. In the districts of Keserwan, Akkar and northern Lebanon, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) arrested a total of 37 poachers during our actions. Their weapons, including two machine guns, were confiscated, as well as ten nets and 317 limesticks used to trap songbirds.



CABS collecting a shot honey buzzard in Lebanon.

In order to monitor the hunting season in Malta, several teams from CABS and BirdLife Malta were on duty on the Mediterranean island for four weeks. Thanks to round-the-clock surveillance of the main roosting areas, most birds were able to leave the island unharmed. Despite this, cases of illegal hunting were still recorded on a daily basis, including the shooting of two ospreys, a black stork, a black kite, as well as several honey buzzards and bee-eaters.



In Cyprus, our teams, with the support of the Pro Biodiversity Foundation (SPA), spend a very busy eight weeks searching for illegal trapping sites for songbirds. With the help of the police and wardens from the Game and Fauna Service (GFS), we were able to dismantle a total of 1,476 limesticks, 57 nets and 80 electronic decoys across 78 active trapping sites. 761 birds, including warblers, nightingales, orioles and many other species, were rescued and released from the traps. Fines are being initiated against 43 people for violations of the Hunting Act.



Long-eared owl saved from limesticks in Cyprus.



Vehicle damaged by poachers in Cyprus.

Violence against bird conservationists: Within just a few days, there is a series of serious attacks against our teams in Cyprus. Three members were slightly injured, two vehicles were damaged, and several cameras and mobile phones were destroyed or stolen. The perpetrators are poachers who, spurred on by a campaign by the hunting lobby, do not want to be filmed in their illegal activities. The police are investigating assault, coercion and damage to property.

OCTOBER

Large-scale operation in northern Italy: At our large bird protection camp in the province of Brescia, 38 volunteers from six countries were busy working for four weeks against illegal bird poaching. Together with a special unit of the carabinieri (police), 48 poachers will be summoned to court, including 30 bird trappers and 18 hunters caught with protected species. The police confiscated several rifles, 52 trapping nets, 230 bow traps and 378 snap traps. The penalty range is between 1,000 and 5,000 euros depending on the scope of the offences.



Too late to help these robins in Brescia, Italy.

A hunter and taxidermist from Bavaria were sentenced to 14 months in prison by the Eggenfelden Court of Aldermen. The proceedings had been initiated by CABS which had presented the prosecution with evidence of extensive illegal animal trafficking by the accused. During a subsequent inspection, hundreds of protected birds were found in several cooling chambers. In addition, the police confiscated weapons, ammunition and explosives that the man was not authorized to possess.

Two CABS teams deployed in Spain, together with the environmental unit of the police SEPRONA in Valencia, put a stop to 13 poachers. 19 gillnets, 4 clap-nets, 14 electronic decoys and 1,550 limesticks were found in their possession – we were able to free 13 linnets, a blackcap, a song thrush and a greenfinch.

NOVEMBER

In Malta, despite a Europe-wide ban, over 3,000 trapping sites for finches and song thrushes are back in operation. In order to document this massive violation of



Live finch decoys seized from trapping sites in Malta.

EU law, CABS teams were active on the ground between October and November. Together with the police, we managed to shut down 26 trapping sites due to various violations. In the process, 217 live birds and a truckload of trapping equipment was confiscated. 19 bird trappers were caught red-handed or later identified from our video evidence.



Shot eagle owl found in Bonn/Germany.

High number of unreported cases: Less than five percent of all incidents of raptor persecution actually committed in Germany are registered by the police. This is the alarming result of a data analysis carried out by CABS, which will be published at the end of the year in the journal 'Reports on Bird Protection'. In view of the high number of unreported cases, CABS call on the

federal states to finally devote more resources to the fight against wildlife crime.

Maintenance work in the protected area: On the CABS owned 'Schwentinental Wetland Reserves' (Plön district, Schleswig-Holstein), the cold season is used for maintenance measures. Among other things, two of the old fish ponds will be drained on a regular basis and around 100 tench and several thousand protected musty fish will be moved beforehand. At the same time, the thinning of overgrown shore areas is on the agenda.

In the lagoons around the Delta of the Po River (Italy), CABS teams are using drones and rubber dinghies to document the illegal hunting of wintering waterfowl. In addition to the shooting of protected geese and ducks, the extensive use of electronic decoys by hunters is documented. Criminal proceedings are being initiated against at least two hunters.



CABS staff discussing anti-poaching work in Lebanese TV.

DECEMBER

Successful press work: Over the course of the year, more than one hundred articles and reports on the CABS work have appeared in the daily press in Germany, UK, Malta, Cyprus and Italy. In addition to local media such as the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the Riffreporter, BILD, GEO and the German Press Agency (dpa), internationally renowned magazines such as 'Birdwatch' or the American 'Earth Island Magazine' and the Daily Mirror also reported on our actions and campaigns.

Use in the moonlight: Because golden plovers are also active at night, they are illegally caught in Malta under the cover of darkness. With the help of thermal imaging cameras, we manage to collect clear evidence against the poachers at two trapping sites. The environmental police EPU then confiscated several nets with a total length of around 150 metres as well as an electronic decoy caller. A bird catcher is caught and later charged.

One of the central aspects of our work is to document grievances and make them public. Social media is playing an increasingly important role in this. In addition to our long-standing channels on Facebook and YouTube, we were able to expand our reach on Instagram and 'X' (formerly Twitter) platforms in 2023. The most successful contribution was a report on our work in Lebanon, which reached more than 550,000 people in September! Thanks to all for liking and sharing our work!

The rescue centres for injured or helpless wild animals supported by CABS in Italy, Spain and Germany have had their hands full in 2023: our Spanish colleagues rescued almost 3,000 swifts. The rescue centre in Modena in northern Italy had taken in around 4,600 animals by the time this report went to press, including almost 1,900 songbirds, 320 birds of prey and over 400 ducklings, as well as more than 1,300 mammals (mainly hedgehogs and deer). In Germany, too, the centres we support have collectively taken in more than 800 birds.



SUPPORT US IN 2024

➔ In 2023 – the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) successfully coordinated 29 bird protection camps with more than 220 volunteers in eight countries in the migratory bird poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean basin.

5,559 traps, 382 nets, 156 electronic decoys were collected, 268 poachers were convicted (new record) and over 2,500 birds were rescued and released from illegal traps. Countless other birds avoided harm and were able to migrate without persecution.

All of our operations are funded entirely by supporter donations and cost around 400,000 euros per year. We are the only organisation on the frontline against migratory bird poaching and its more important than ever that we ramp up our efforts in 2024.

Please help us to continue and expand our work with a donation – every cent and penny is used to put boots on the ground and deliver direct action to protect migratory birds from illegal poaching.

VISIT

www.komitee.de/en/donate

or use these bank account details



Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. (CABS)

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(IZW, Berlin), the German Avifaunist Association (DDA), the Association for the Ecology and Monitoring of Birds of Prey and Owl Species (Halle), Sea Shepherd Germany, the State Association for the Protection of Birds (LBV) in Bavaria, Pro Wildlife, NABU and its regional associations, the German Animal Welfare Association, the North Rhine-Westphalian Ornithologists' Society (NWO), the Ornithological Working Group Helgoland, the Institute for Bird Research – Ornithological Institute Helgoland, the German Council for the Protection of Birds (DRV), the Working Group Peregrine Falcon Protection (AGW), the Association of Berlin-Brandenburg Ornithologists (ABBO), the Association Aquila e.V., the Reef Reporters, the Bergische Birds of Prey Aid, the Paasmühle Bird Sanctuary, the Düren, Euskirchen and Bonn/Rhein-Erft Biological Stations, the municipality of Schwentinal, the district of Euskirchen, the Rhein-Erft district, the Schwentinal nature conservation group and of course all our members, sponsors, sponsors and activists.

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