



FIELD REPORT
CABS OPERATION IN SANTORINI
AUTUMN 2024



Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)

1. INTRODUCTION

In this report, we present the data collected during the first CABS investigation on illegal trapping in Santorini. We describe the type of traps used on the island and the main species caught. Following this, a discussion about the problems related to enforcement, which need addressing to solve the issue.

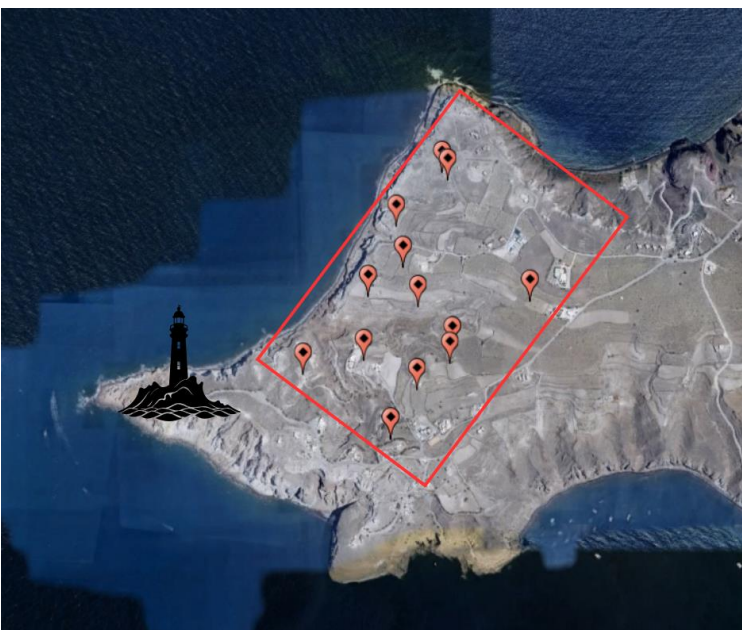
2. CABS OPERATION IN SANTORINI

The Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) is a non-governmental organisation established in 1975 in Germany to protect migratory birds from illegal poaching and over exploitation. CABS run anti-poaching operations in major poaching hotspots in the Mediterranean. In 2023, CABS started working in Greece, where illegal hunting, trapping and trafficking of wild birds remains widespread. In Autumn 2024, was organised the first operation to investigate illegal trapping on the island of Santorini: over 9 days one CABS team monitored the territory and recorded the scale of the illegalities.

3. TRAPPING IN SANTORINI

Finch trapping is widespread across Santorini. During the 9-days investigation, part of the island was monitored and in total 107 trapping sites were found with nets and 7 cage traps. Considering that we scouted less than 50% of the island, we estimate the total amount of active trapping sites to be around 220.

From information acquired from different sources the main trapping season is from the 20th of October till the 20th of November, at least with regards to net trapping.



Picture 1: Map of the south-west end of Santorini with the trapping sites found. Most of them are visible from the touristic road to the lighthouse.

The main method of trapping finches on the island is with large clap-nets. These are set on clean ground and are activated manually through a rope by the trappers, who wait in a small

hide a few metres away. To attract the finches, the site is surrounded by small dead trees and in the middle a water pond is created, surrounded by seeds and small plants. Several cages with birds as live decoys are typically set all around the site. Locally the sites are known as 'limni' ('λίμνη' in greek, meaning 'lake') for the constant presence of the water pond is used to attract the birds.

Trapping sites with nets are set in different environments, from private and fenced gardens to cultivated fields and open areas on beaches and unused land.



Picture 2: Typical trapping site with clap-net used to catch migrating finches on Santorini (Photo: CABS)

3.2. CAGE TRAPS

Finches are trapped also with cage traps, where they are lured with food and live decoys kept in attached cages. Cage traps have been found in gardens, on houses walls, and regularly in trapping sites with nets. To note that the number of cage traps found was low given that most of the time monitoring was spent investigating sites with clap-nets.



Pictures 3-4: Cage traps used to catch migrating finches on Santorini with greenfinch, goldfinch and chaffinch as live decoy (Photos: CABS)

4. SPECIES

The main target species, according to the live decoys used and the birds found in the aviaries by trapping sites, are greenfinch, goldfinch and chaffinch. To a lesser extent, also

given the non-selective nature of the traps used, also other species of finches are trapped as well as other non-finch species, such as thrushes, larks and buntings.

European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>



Picture 5: Greenfinches and corn bunting in a small cage on Santorini (Photo: CABS)

5. ENFORCEMENT

In Greece there are two national Services responsible for the regulation and enforcement of wildlife law, The Game Service (Ομοσπονδιακής Θηροφυλακής) and Forest Service (Δασοφυλακή).

From information acquired in the field and with meetings with the enforcement bodies, in Santorini there is only one warden of the Game Service and he is responsible for the whole archipelago. This is composed of 5 islands, of which Thira (Santorini) and Therasia are inhabited and illegal trapping sites are found on both islands. No unit of the Forest Service is present, and police do not typically respond to wildlife crime reports as there is a specialised unit – the Game Service – which they can support during incidents involving threats or danger.

Police support is likely to be needed, given the difficult situation: trappers feel legitimate and constitute a powerful group that is opposing to the enforcement of the law. It is plainly evident that one person is not enough to deal with an estimated 220 active trapping sites and the safety risks involved.

Nevertheless, during the CABS operation, the environmentalists reported active trapping sites to both the game warden and police. The game warden and the police patrol attended the sites, reported the people trapping and seized the illegal trapping equipment. In total 3 trappers were charged, 3 trapping installations with nets were seized, approximately 40 wild birds were freed, and 2 greenfinches were brought to the rescue centre of Naxos as they were unable to fly.

6. DISCUSSION

Illegal finch trapping is widespread all over Santorini and is completely tolerated.

Despite it being illegal since 1980s in all Greece, in Santorini it is still considered an accepted tradition and is transferred from generation to generation. Indeed, during the monitoring, it was easy to see children activating traps, even in the absence of adults. It seems that poaching has never been seriously challenged, as trapping happens daily, in the open, and cage traps and birds are even found in pet shops. The same applies for caged birds: in Greece it is illegal to keep in cage or sell wild birds, but in Santorini it is common to see wild finches in cages in private houses, gardens and tourist accommodation.

It is estimated that several thousand migratory finches are illegally trapped during their late autumn passage through the island, in more than a hundred trapping sites. However, enforcement is critically lacking, with police busy with other duties and **only one game warden responsible for the whole archipelago**. Despite the island being a poaching hotspot, the Forest Service is absent. It is clear that one person alone cannot deal with the whole phenomenon and high number of illegalities. Also considering that in previous years strong opposition was made to any effort to enforce the law and that after CABS reported some illegal trapping sites, a group of trappers started gathering near the police station to complain and - feeling legitimised in their illegal traditions – state that finch trapping will continue in any case. One person alone cannot be expected to moderate such a difficult and hostile environment.

Even if illegal trapping in Santorini happens away from the international spotlight, as nets are used mainly during low season for tourism, it remains a duty of the Greek state to protect migratory birds and enforce national laws for bird protection. By tolerating finch trapping in Santorini, **Greece is violating the European and International laws for the protection of wildlife.**

CABS will continue working on the island during peak season for trapping, to record and report the illegalities to local enforcement and report the situation to Greek administration and European and international institutions.

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