



CABS report

Anti-poaching operations in the Mediterranean 2024



Poacher gang
caught on the island
of Sardinia

Bird Protection
Camp on Zakynthos,
Greece

37 trappers and
poachers convicted
in Malta

Action against
stork hunting
in Lebanon

Spring operations 2024



Editorial



Dear CABS Friends and Supporters,

Migratory birds are exposed to many dangers during migration and in their wintering grounds. As a result, far fewer birds return to us in spring than left in the autumn. Some species – swallows, for example – are able to compensate for losses during migration relatively quickly through high reproduction rates (e.g. by producing several annual broods). At the other end of the scale are species like the lesser spotted eagle, which is acutely endangered in Germany and has one of the slowest reproduction rates of all bird species, with an average reproduction rate of less than 0.5 fledglings per pair per year; and because lesser spotted eagles don't reach breeding maturity until four years, they have to fly over Lebanon at least 14 times before they have produced enough young just to „replace“ themselves for the next generation! The entire global population migrate over the Middle Eastern country twice a year, where thousands are illegally shot. As a result, many eagles simply do not live long enough to raise enough offspring to maintain the population. This example clearly shows the extent of the damage that ignorant hunters and poachers can cause.

As always, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) is working to improve the protection of migratory birds with our carefully coordinated bird protection camps in the poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean region. In the first half of 2024, we carried out missions in eastern Spain, northern and southern Italy, Sardinia, Malta, on the Greek island of Zakynthos, in Cyprus and in Lebanon with over **70 volunteers** from all corners of Europe. As a result of our fieldwork, the police have convicted 122 poachers and seized **249 traps, 153 nets, 19 hunting weapons**, over **1.200 rounds of ammunition** and **53 electronic decoys** and released more than **400 live birds**. You can read more about this on the following pages.

I think the results are quite impressive. These successes would not have been possible without the constant support of our members, donors and activists – so I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your fantastic support!

A blue ink handwritten signature, appearing to read 'KH', on a light blue rectangular background.

Best regards
Karl-Heinz Kreutzer (1st Chairman)



ITALY

Winter operations in northern Italy

The northern Italian province of Brescia is also one of the main hotspots of migratory bird poaching in the Mediterranean region. Bird trapping and bird hunting are particularly widespread here in late summer and autumn, but traps and nets are also set illegally in winter. This late winter, CABS teams carried out numerous checks in the mountains between Lake Iseo and Lake Garda, during which three poachers were caught. Two of the men had set several huge nets on mountain slopes, while a third person was caught not only using a net but also hunting outside the authorised hunting season with an electronic decoy caller and targeting protected species. In total, the police were able to confiscate 19 nets, a decoy, several snap traps and several live and freshly dead finches.



Active snap trap in the Italian Alps, baited with a small larva.



Snap trap with a freshly caught whinchat and electronic decoy on the island of Ischia (Italy).

Spring operation on Ischia

As usual, between April and May, we also conducted our joint mission together with game wardens from the Italian WWF on the southern Italian island of Ischia. Over the course of four weeks, two teams monitored bird migration and searched for illegal trapping sites. Three poachers were convicted together with the police (Carabinieri): A man had set up seven whinchat traps in a garden near Barano. His trapping equipment and an electronic lure were seized. Two poachers were caught illegally spring hunting near Forio in the west of the island. Two shotguns and over 400 rounds of ammunition were confiscated from the perpetrators, as well as another electronic decoy device. Because one of the hunters caught threatened the police officers, he was arrested and later placed under house arrest. A sniffer dog and hidden cameras were also used during the police operation. Poaching on Ischia has fallen sharply thanks to our work, which have been in place since 1993. Thirty years ago, we collected over 2000 whinchat traps over the same time period – there have never been as few traps as this year!

Snares in Sardinia

In February, a CABS team was deployed on the Italian island of Sardinia to take action against the illegal trapping of birds and mammals with snares. Countless numbers of thrushes and warblers are caught using brutal 'horsehair snares' in which the panicked birds strangle themselves. Wire snares are also set up to catch Sardinian deer (a subspecies of red deer) and wild boar. Our international team worked closely with the police to convict a gang of poachers over the course of several weeks. A total of 35 wire snares for mammals, 55 snares for songbirds and 2 nets were confiscated. Trapping with snares has largely come to a standstill as a result of our repeated operations. Where we used to routinely find more than 20,000 snares, today there are often fewer than 500!



Horsehair snares in Sardinia, collected during a CABS field operation.

Mountain passes in Lombardy become hunting-free!

For decades, together with our Italian partner organisation Lega per l'Abolizione della Caccia (LAC), we have been fighting for the implementation of an EU regulation that requires important routes for migratory birds to be protected. This undoubtedly includes many mountain passes in the Alps. As long as 20 years ago, a court ruled that 42 of these passes must be hunting-free following a complaint by the LAC. Since then, the pro-hunting government of Lombardy has been delaying the implementation of this ruling with ever new excuses, despite numerous other proceedings and rulings in favour of migratory birds. Finally, in spring 2024, the administrative court in Milan imposed



Success for migratory bird protection in Italy: mountain passes in Lombardy become hunting-free zones!

a special representative with far-reaching powers on the Lombardy government due to years of inactivity. He is now enforcing the protection of the 42 Alpine passes – dozens of hunting lodges will have to be demolished or abandoned for this purpose and thousands of hunters will lose their hunting grounds. Special thanks to the LAC for their tireless and often dangerous work!

SPAIN

Anti-poaching operation in eastern Spain

At the beginning of March 2024, a CABS team carried out several inspections of trapping sites in the eastern Spanish province of Alicante. The region is notorious for bird trapping with clap-nets in autumn – finches such as goldfinches, chaffinches and linnets are popular cage birds and are illegally caught for sale on the black market. We knew relatively little about the scale of bird trapping in early spring, so we made room on the CABS diary this year and

sent a team to assess the situation. CABS staff checked more than 50 known trapping sites. We found trapping nets and fresh decoys at five active sites. At two of these sites, officers from the Alicante regional police caught two bird trappers red-handed and confiscated their nets following our tip-offs. The good news is that the vast majority of trapping sites remained deserted this late winter – a positive development for bird conservation in the region!



Anti-poaching action against illegal trapping with clap nets in eastern Spain (Spring 2024).



Goldfinches are sought-after pet birds and achieve high prices on the black market.

Bird Protection Camp on the island of Zakynthos



The Greek island of Zakynthos is a hotspot for tourism and migratory birds – and poaching!



Shot turtle dove on Zakynthos found during a CABS bird protection camp.

The island of Zakynthos lies on the western side of Greece in the Adriatic Sea and is therefore on another major migration route. Millions of birds migrating northwards along the Greek, Albanian and Croatian coasts in spring pass through here. As almost everywhere along such important migration routes, hunting traditions have developed, but on Zakynthos the extent is particularly dramatic. Although hunting must be suspended everywhere in the EU in spring, hunters on Zakynthos go bird stalking as if there were no international nature conservation law. Hunting is also strictly prohibited in Greece in spring. Until the first CABS operation in 2023, the perpetrators were able to hunt endangered and protected migratory birds completely undisturbed, but that has now changed.

During the four-week operation in April and May 2024, the CABS teams monitored a large part of the island. A special focus was on two peninsulas in the south, where illegal hunting is particularly prevalent. We found 139 active shooting shelters from which poachers were targeting turtle doves, orioles, birds of prey, cuckoos and swifts. As a result of our information, the police and hunting supervisors have convicted a total of 9 perpetrators – further criminal proceedings against at least 10 persons reported by us are still ongoing. 9 hunting weapons, nearly 200 rounds of ammunition and half a dozen freshly shot birds were found and seized from the perpetrators.

The reactions of the hunters show that we touched a few nerves with our operations: our staff and volunteers

were insulted and threatened almost every day in the field, and on one day we even needed a police escort to accompany us unharmed from an official appointment to our accommodation. In the early hours of 24th April, one of our rental vehicles was badly damaged – all the windows, headlights and rear-view mirrors were smashed by an unknown person. The perpetrator(s) escaped on a motorbike. The damage amounts to €3200.

Of course, we will not let these attempts at intimidation get us down – the next bird protection camp on Zakynthos is already planned!



Rear window of a CABS vehicle smashed by hunters on Zakynthos, Greece.



Egyptian fruit bats rescued from mist nets in Cyprus.



Female blackcap caught on a limestick in Cyprus (Spring 2024).

CYPRUS

Winter bird protection camp in Cyprus

In January and February, CABS once again organised a winter bird protection camp in Cyprus. In addition to working against the trapping of wintering thrushes with huge mist-nets, the programme also included the monitoring of illegal hunting, which often involves the targeting of protected species and the use of illegal electronic decoys. Following our reports, game wardens and police were able to catch 22 poachers in the act (7 bird trappers and 15 hunters who had either shot protected species or used forbidden decoys). A total of 36 nets and 35 calling machines were confiscated by the officers. 47 freshly caught birds were released from the nets by our teams.

Working against ground nets



Ground nets in Cyprus are installed to keep snakes away from properties but pose a high risk to birds and hedgehogs.

When searching for trapping sites, our teams in Cyprus also repeatedly find ground nets that are laid out on walls and fences to keep snakes away from properties. The results of our mission in April show that they can be dangerous not only to snakes but also to other wildlife. We found strangled birds, hedgehogs, starred agamas, snakes and chameleons on some of the nets we checked. Fortunately, our team was able to free a sparrow and a wryneck from the nets in time.

Illegal bird trapping in Cyprus in spring decreases drastically!

Our spring operation in Cyprus took place between the end of March to mid-April. Our teams discovered just 11 active trapping sites, where two poachers were convicted by the authorities and 57 limesticks were collected. In accordance with national law, both men now face a high fine in the four-figure range – around €9200 for trapping birds in spring. As recently as 2021, our teams found 43 active trapping sites in the same area over the same duration. The high penalties (introduced in 2017) in conjunction with close monitoring by CABS teams now appear to have led to a dramatic decline in bird trapping with limesticks. The next logical step is to adjust the penalties for bird trapping in autumn and winter. These are significantly lower and amount to barely €200!

MALTA

37 poachers convicted in Malta

The island of Malta is an important stepping stone for migratory birds flying along the central Mediterranean flyway between North Africa across to Italy in spring. There are few places in the EU where bird-trapping and illegal hunting are as persistent as here. At the same time, in no other European country are hunters so heavily subsidised and courted by a government as in Malta. Contrary to the EU's Birds Directive, Malta allows the trapping of plovers and songbirds with nets in autumn and the shooting of returning quail and turtle doves in spring. The government in Valletta is thus showing no willingness to consistently

CABS team on Malta (Spring 2024).



Red-throated pipits seized from an illegal trapping site in Siggiewi (Malta).

protect birds – no wonder that this opens the door to abuse, as we discovered again this spring.

A total of 20 volunteers led by a small team of CABS staff were deployed in Malta between March and April, covering almost the entire migration period. In March, they focussed on illegal bird-trapping with clap-nets, while in April our teams mainly monitored the roosting sites of migrating birds of prey such as marsh harriers and Montagu's harriers.

In total, 37 poachers who had either targeted, trapped or hunted protected species were convicted by the police during the eight-week operation following our tip-offs. The officers confiscated a total of 39 nets and 11 electronic decoys during the operations. Around 300 live birds, including golden plovers and dotterels, red-throated pipits and various species of finch and bunting, for which no proof of origin was available, were also confiscated.

LEBANON

Results of our bird protection camp in Lebanon

During this year's spring migration, a CABS team was active in Lebanon, where we were able to carry out several successful campaigns with international support despite the tense situation in the country. In spring, the main focus was on the illegal hunting of storks and birds of prey in the mountain 'bottleneck' areas of migration. Another focus was on the dismantling of nets and limesticks, which are particularly widespread along coastal areas and pose a serious threat to songbirds. During our operations,

11 hunters who had shot protected large birds were either convicted directly in the field by the security force officers or subsequently reported by us after they had published trophy photos of themselves with the freshly shot birds online. We were able to catch a total of 7 bird trappers while investigating trapping sites – 12 nets and almost 100 limesticks were confiscated and dismantled by the security forces.



One of the storks found shot in Lebanon was marked with a German bird ring.



Examination of a white stork shot in Lebanon.

During the documentation of stork shootings, our team was able to recover two ringed white storks alive. A stork found south of Beirut at the end of February was ringed on 21 June 2021 in the Polish province of Mazowieckie, 75km east of Warsaw. The bird had spent the last 2 years in Africa and was on its first migration back to Poland. Unfortunately, the bird had to be euthanised 2400km from its destination due to the severity of its injuries. The second white stork was also reported to our team

in the Bekaa Valley at the end of February. It comes from northern Germany and was ringed on 10 June 2016 in Prignitz, Brandenburg. The female has bred every year a few kilometres away from her birthplace and has produced offspring since 2021. This year, however, her partner is waiting in vain. The bird is currently at a rescue centre supported by our partner MESHC and is being prepared for release.

GERMANY

Raptor persecution in Germany

CABS operate a leading national monitoring project for tracking cases of illegal raptor persecution in Germany, which was set up with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment. Since the beginning of the year, our

Goshawk trap in Germany



headquarters in Bonn have received a total of 60 suspected cases, 18 of which have been confirmed. These include 8 cases of poisoning, 4 active bird of prey traps, 3 shootings and 3 cases of animal cruelty in connection with the illegal keeping of birds of prey. The perpetrators used both air rifles and shotguns for the shootings. In addition to the frequently used carbofuran, substances such as mevinphos, aldicarb or parathion were also used in the poisonings. Hawk traps, ladder traps and leghold traps were used to catch birds of prey. A total of 23 buzzards, red kites, goshawks, sparrowhawks and white-tailed eagles were victims of criminal offences. According to our information, a hunter who had set up and activated an illegal ladder trap in the east of North Rhine-Westphalia was found at the trap by a camera crew from a regional TV station. He admitted to operating the trap in front of the camera. Criminal proceedings against the man, which we have reported, are currently being conducted by the police.



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Wood warblers often get caught on limesticks. With your support, we search for the treacherous traps, collect them and, together with the authorities, ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

**DONATE
FOR MIGRATORY
BIRDS**

Help us protect migratory birds!

Every year, we organise over 30 bird protection camps and operations in eight different countries to protect our migratory friends from illegal shooting or trapping. Led by a small staff team, more than 250 volunteer bird conservationists travel to the bird poaching hotspots in the Mediterranean region to prevent illegal killing. We search and collect illegal trapping equipment and help the police and law enforcement agencies in their work against illegal bird trapping, shooting and trade. As a result of our field-work, hundreds of poachers are convicted each year, tens of thousands of traps are collected, and several thousand birds are freed from traps and nets!

Get active in migratory bird conservation

At the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), this means packing your bags and travelling to the Mediterranean. If you are physically fit, have courage and knowledge of ornithology and can speak English, you can take part in our bird protection camps and become part of the team.

Many of our operations are not without risk and require a certain amount of practice and skill in finding traps and nets. Dealing with armed poachers and law enforcement authorities is also a necessary skill. If this is not for you, you can also look out for illegal traps or trapping devices on your own doorstep or while on holiday. If you suspect poaching, please contact our office – we will process your report immediately.

Your donation makes all the difference!

You can also directly help us protect migratory birds from home. Our efforts to improve the protection of wild birds in Europe are mainly funded by tax-deductible donations. With your support, we organise our bird protection camps and campaigns against poaching and bird-trapping. You also have the opportunity to become a supporting member and receive regular reports on our missions. Every amount counts!

Donation accounts

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