



CABS Spring Report 2026

Anti-poaching operations in the Mediterranean



Spring operations:
97 poachers
apprehended

Decline in bird
trapping in Italy and
Cyprus

Lebanon: Spring
campaigns in the
war zone

Etsy: Bird smuggling
at the click of a
mouse

Spring operations 2026



Editorial



Dear CABS Friends and Supporters,

The bird migration is now complete – millions of migratory birds have returned from their African wintering grounds and have turned their attention to rearing young in their European breeding grounds. This is a good opportunity for us to summarise the results of our spring bird protection campaigns and anti-poaching operations in 2026.

Since February, around 100 volunteers have taken part in our bird protection camps in Malta, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon and Germany. In total, our teams have caught 97 poachers; the authorities have seized 58 mist-nets, 43 pairs of clap-nets, 362 limesticks, 107 other traps, 29 electronic decoys, 16 shotguns, 564 rounds of ammunition and nearly 400 live birds!

At first glance, these figures may sound alarming, but in fact they demonstrate a significant decline in bird poaching during the spring. Whilst we still have our hands full in the autumn, our work against poaching in the spring months is now in the home stretch. Particularly striking is the decline in bird trapping on the islands of southern Italy and in Cyprus; the shooting of protected species in Malta is also undoubtedly on the wane.

A special operation this spring was the bird protection camp in Lebanon. We deliberated at length over whether to risk the operation in a war zone, but our intrepid staff on the ground made it clear that giving up was not an option for them. And so, in March and April, despite the heavy fighting, we carried out our operations in the less affected north of the country, though this time largely without international participation.

And as always, once one mission is over, the next one is already on the horizon – in June we are already planning our late-summer and autumn campaigns, which will begin as early as mid-August in Malta and northern Italy.

I would like to once again extend my heartfelt thanks to all members and donors for their generous and continued support.

Best regards

Yours,

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

Karl-Heinz Kreutzer

1st Chairman



Hunting weapons and illegally shot teals and wigeons seized by the police near Pavia.

ITALY

Waterfowl hunting in northern Italy

Along the northern Italian river system of the Po and its delta in the Adriatic Sea, there are repeated cases of poaching. In early spring 2026, we carried out several checks in the region in close cooperation with WWF wardens, the provincial police and the Carabinieri. During operations in the Po Delta organised and planned by CABS, over 20 hunters were caught using illegal decoy callers. Three hunters were caught on a river island near Pavia: they had used electronic decoys to shoot wintering ducks. Officers from the Lombardy provincial police seized the hunting weapons, a mobile phone, the Bluetooth speaker and the freshly killed birds – 17 teals and 3 wigeons.

Winter operation in Sardinia

In February and March 2026, several CABS teams were deployed in Sardinia, in some cases supporting the authorities' "Free Wings" campaign as expert advisers. Our reports led to 18 arrests: six of the offenders were using snap traps and cage traps to catch songbirds; they were caught red-handed by the authorities following our tip-offs. The same applies to two men who had set wire snares to catch wild boar. In addition, ten animal traders and bird keepers were found to be in possession of illegally caught wild birds or offering them for sale. During the action, over 130 songbirds with an estimated black-market value of around 26,000 euros were seized and taken to a specialist rescue centre. Southern Sardinia remains one of the main hotspots for poaching in Italy. Our next operation will take place there in the winter of 2026/2027.



In addition to finches and larks, genuine rarities were also found among the bird traders in Sardinia – such as this Corsican siskin, an endemic bird species.

Northern Italy: Bird trappers and bird hunters caught



Hideout of a poacher caught near Cremona with a freshly shot serin.

We caught two poachers in northern Italy right at the start of spring: since mid-February, we had been monitoring several trapping sites in Lombardy and had made initial reports to the authorities. One man had set up two nets, primarily to catch thrushes and other migratory birds. In a second case north of Cremona, a team managed to catch a persistent repeat offender. The man arrested had already been detained twice in previous years for possession of an illegal firearm and, as a result, no longer held a hunting licence. In addition to his weapon, officers also seized ammunition, electronic decoys and freshly shot birds. In total, the police seized over 100 birds during the operations, including chaffinches, bramblings, siskins and goldfinches.

Operation against poaching on Ponza

The small island of Ponza and the completely uninhabited Palmarola – located off the coast of Lazio (southern Italy) – have long been hotspots for poaching. Snap traps and nets for songbirds, as well as the illegal spring hunting of quails and turtle doves, used to be widespread here. The results of our operation this April demonstrate just how effective our actions are: over the course of a week, only one active trapping site was found. The perpetrator was caught red-handed by the police, whom we had alerted – four snap traps were seized. Unfortunately, two birds had already been caught; a whinchat was already dead, but a red-headed shrike was lucky and could be freed unharmed. Fourteen birds were found in the man's freezer (4 pied flycatchers, 2 garden redstarts, 2 common redstarts, 3 robins, 1 red-headed shrike, 1 red-backed shrike and 1 yellow-breasted bunting) – all ringed with rings from a nearby bird migration research station!

On the Italian Mediterranean island of Ponza, a poacher was caught in April 2026 – he had set up snap traps for whinchats.



Ischia: Campaign against bird trapping and spring hunting

The holiday island of Ischia in the Gulf of Naples is not only known for its fine cuisine, thermal springs and lush vegetation, but also as a hotspot for migratory bird poaching.



Wild birds (goldfinches and greenfinches) seized from a poacher on the island of Ischia in spring.

For 33 years now, we have been regularly monitoring compliance with the ban on spring hunting here in April and May. This operation is another fine example of a successful campaign, for whereas we used to record hundreds of illegal shots at quails and turtle doves every day and collect dozens of bird traps, things have now become much quieter: at the start of April, a CABS team caught two bird trappers here.

One had set up six snap traps and used them to catch wheatears – we had been tracking this offender since 2011! A second poacher was keeping wild caught finches in cages; a goldfinch and three greenfinches were seized from him. The WWF wardens, funded by us, heard just eight shots during their patrol at the turn of April and May and did not find a single active trapping site. An important stopover for migratory birds off the southern Italian coast is finally becoming a safe haven!

Two participants from the CABS bird protection camp in action on the neighbouring Maltese island of Gozo.



MALTA

Finch trapping on Malta and Gozo

March is the time of our major bird protection camp against illegal finch trapping in Malta. The trapping of these birds, which are protected throughout the EU, using clap-nets is an 'old tradition' and is still permitted by the government in autumn – contrary to EU law. In spring, the trapping of these birds – which end up as cage birds – is strictly prohibited, though this is of little concern to many trappers.

Following our investigations and reports, the Maltese police caught twelve trappers red-handed on Malta and Gozo; we reported a further seven to the police, although they were not found by officers at the trapping sites. The officers seized 38 pairs of clap-nets and 12 illegal electronic decoys. They also seized 57 live birds, mainly finches, which had been used as live decoys. The brutal killing of a kestrel on Gozo caused a stir; a CABS team had filmed the incident and

reported it. The police were able to arrest the perpetrator at the scene.



Police arrest bird trapper in Malta.

Protecting migration routes in April

Once the finch migration has concluded in Malta in early April, poachers turn to shooting protected species and illegally trapping late-arriving songbirds. By early May, a further nine poachers had been caught during our operations: six of them were using clap-nets and bird traps, primarily to catch ortolans, short-toed larks, tree pipits, quails and turtle doves.

Three were reported for illegal hunting. They had shot turtle doves and waders; one was caught in a no-hunting conservation area. The police once again seized two fire-arms, five clap-nets and a cage trap. The confiscated birds – a total of 13 – were released. Our work in Malta continues with the campaign against illegal wader trapping in August.



The CABS team at the bird protection camp in April 2026 in Malta.

GREECE

Illegal spring hunting on Zakynthos

In April 2026, our members spent four weeks monitoring the ban on spring hunting on the Greek island of Zakynthos. Working in cooperation with the police and game wardens, we caught a total of 11 poachers in the act, whilst a further 10 were reported to the authorities on the basis of our video evidence. The officers seized 10 hunting rifles and 514 rounds of shotgun ammunition from the offenders. All in all, we were far more successful than in 2025: we were able to catch three times as many offenders

and – unlike last year – there were no incidents of aggression against the participants of the bird protection camp.

We are observing a slight overall decline in poaching and the perpetrators are clearly frightened, but in remote areas of the holiday island, dozens of hunters still go out illegally every morning to hunt turtle doves and orioles. Reason enough for us to be back on the ground with a large contingent in spring 2027!



Turtle doves are among the most poached bird species in the Mediterranean region. They are now endangered throughout Europe as a result.



Hunting weapons and ammunition seized from turtle dove hunters on the Greek island of Zakynthos.

Monitoring bird trapping on Santorini

During a short mission on the Greek Aegean island of Santorini, we inspected the known trapping sites for songbirds. The birds are traditionally caught here for the pet trade. Whilst we have good information from the autumn regarding

bird trapping using nets, limesticks and cage traps, there have never been CABS inspections in the spring.

Due to poor weather conditions with strong winds and rain, it was only possible to check a small number of the locations known to us.

Most trapping sites were inactive, but three were in operation, including some using illegal cage traps. All sites were reported to the authorities and will continue to be monitored by us. The next mission to Santorini is planned for late autumn 2026.



On the island of Santorini in April 2026, several illegal cage traps, amongst other things, were found among bird trappers.



Limesticks remain among the most commonly used bird traps in Cyprus. This one was seized by wardens from the Game & Fauna Service in spring 2026.

CYPRUS

Winter anti-poaching campaign

At the end of February 2026, our winter campaign in Cyprus came to an end after five weeks. During the cold season, poachers there mainly target overwintering thrushes, warblers and larks, which are eaten. Our teams had their work cut out for them, particularly in the second half of the camp.

Following our reports, the relevant authorities caught a total of 10 poachers in the act. During the raids, officers seized over 100 limesticks, 13 mist-nets and 12 electronic decoys. Our volunteers were able to free two dozen birds from traps and nets.

Decline in spring bird trapping in Cyprus

One of our greatest achievements in recent years has been the decline in spring bird trapping in Cyprus. This is due to the heavy fines and our rigorous monitoring. Consequently, it has now become increasingly difficult for our members to find any active trapping sites at all.

In the United Nations (UN)-controlled buffer zone near Paralimni, we managed to catch a 'big fish': at his trapping site, which had been identified in 2011, we observed a man setting up limesticks. Following our report, officials from the Game Warden Service and the UN police arrested the offender – 184 limesticks, 16 nets and 34 other animal traps were seized. This is the largest spring case of illegal bird trapping in years. Based on the evidence and the time of the offence, the fine amounts to around 9,000 euros.

In a second case, an abandoned net was found; the poacher had given up on it and simply left it there. A good three dozen birds had already perished in the 15-metre-long trap; only one blackcap was lucky enough that we were in the right place at the right time and was freed unharmed.



This blackcap was lucky in its misfortune – it was found in April 2026 by a CABS team in an abandoned net and was able to be freed.

Birds know no borders and no wars. Despite the ongoing war, bird poachers remain active in Lebanon, albeit to a lesser extent than usual. Rising prices – including for ammunition – and the general security situation in the country have also unsettled the hunters. Even though attention was rightly focused on the humanitarian disaster, we ran our bird protection camp in Lebanon in March and April together with our partner MECSHAP Anti-Poaching Unit.



CABS staff with a shot Great-white Pelican near Amshit, Lebanon.

LEBANON

Stork and eagle hunting in the Land of the Cedars

The breast meat of white storks is considered a delicacy in some parts of Lebanon. Despite strict bans, the hunting of these protected migratory birds remains widespread in spring. Due to persistent rainfall, many storks had migrated across the Bekaa Valley in March 2026 and remained largely undisturbed there. Nevertheless, our teams have documented numerous cases of poaching in the mountainous region in the north-west of the country, not far from the port city of Tripoli. For instance, in the vicinity of Terbol, we counted the remains of 24 white storks and reported them to the police.

According to witness statements, a massacre took place near Kfar Hazir three weeks prior – where poachers from Tripoli shot over 300 storks in a single morning. At this location, we were able to identify four animals that were already in an advanced state of decomposition. The illegal



In March, CABS staff and our partners MECSHAP Anti-Poaching Unit found a total of 24 illegally shot white storks.

hunting of birds of prey such as lesser spotted eagle, short-toed eagle, booted eagle, honey buzzard and Levant sparrowhawk was not particularly noticeable this spring.

Songbird hunting – rare species in a hail of gunfire



These plucked warblers were found with a poacher in Anfeh.

Although songbird hunting is strictly prohibited in Lebanon in spring, it is nonetheless a popular pastime. Even in peacetime, it is almost impossible to persuade the police to intervene against the hunting of swallows, warblers, bee-eaters, pipits, buntings and wagtails. During this spring of war, it was completely out of the question. Without support from the authorities, we had no choice but to try to talk to the people. Contrary to what one might expect, we did not encounter only incomprehension and ignorance.

Many hunters simply do not give a second thought to the law; nature conservation and animal welfare play no role for them anyway. Almost all the offenders we confronted stopped hunting, and many will not have returned, as we always give them a proper fright.

Bird trapping – using nets to catching passing songbirds

Bird trapping using nets and limesticks is widespread in Lebanon, but the public and the authorities show little sympathy for this 'tradition' – unlike in the case of illegal hunting. In this respect, we were also able to rely on some police support in the spring of 2026. In early April, we caught three men near Anfeh who had set out limesticks. Although the perpetrators managed to flee, the video footage we had recorded was sufficient to identify them. Two of the individuals are known to the police, and criminal proceedings have been initiated. The officers seized a total of 178 limesticks, three electronic decoys and 76 birds, some of which had already been plucked (mainly Eurasian blackcaps and whitethroats). At the turn of April/May, we also dismantled two net trapping sites in the north of the country – four nets, two electronic decoy devices and eight live warblers were confiscated.

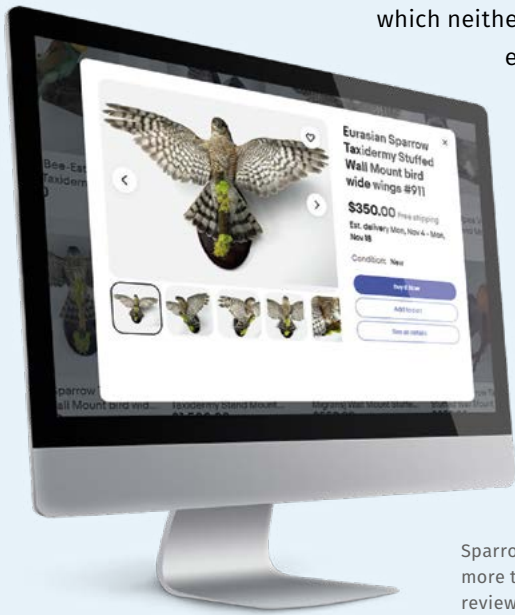


A police officer and a CABS member with nets and decoys seized from a bird trapper.

MISCELLANEOUS

Etsy: Bird smuggling at the click of a mouse

Etsy has developed into a multi-billion-pound online sales platform. The company specifically promotes itself as being particularly socially responsible and sustainable. CABS has discovered that, unfortunately, this is far from the truth: dozens of sellers offer countless specimens of protected bird species, for which neither import nor



export documents are available. The trade in these coveted trophies takes place worldwide. We monitored the sellers' profiles for more than six months.

A total of 1,744 sales from the last five years were analysed; more than three-quarters of these were shipped abroad via traders in Ukraine. Most of the 'products' recorded were whole specimens, whilst skulls, feathers and salted skins were also on offer. A total of 130 bird species were involved, all of which were protected either in the seller's or the recipient's country. Around 70 per cent of all birds sold were birds of prey or owls. By far the "most popular" bird species among the network's customers was the long-eared owl, with well over 300 confirmed sales. Average price: around 600 euros.

We have repeatedly drawn Etsy's attention to the massive violations of international species protection law, so far without success. In Germany, at least, the first criminal proceedings are already underway – here, the public prosecutor's office has confirmed that a penalty order has been sought against a buyer for more than 40 violations of the Federal Nature Conservation Act and one case of animal cruelty.

Sparrowhawk sold as a trophy for 350 dollars. In total, reviews relating to more than 1,700 illegal transactions were recorded. As not all buyers leave reviews, the actual number of offences is likely to be significantly higher.

Removal of traps using a crane truck!

Germany is one of the main hotspots for illegal raptor persecution in Europe. The perpetrators view these protected birds as competition for small game, poultry and pigeons. CABS has been campaigning against this form of environmental crime for decades, and we have been maintaining a nationwide database on the issue since 2005. Between January and May, we investigated nearly 100 reports and confirmed a total of 18 cases of persecution – including 6 instances of shooting, 1 instance of poisoning, 7 instances of trapping and 4 other methods of persecution.

The most sensational case was that of a ladder trap in Rendsburg, northern Germany. The enormous trap was baited with a badly decomposed roe deer, a dead greylag goose and three live carrion crows. The police were called in and were able to identify a suspect – a hunter – after a short time. Due to its size (almost 12 cubic metres), the trap was seized using a crane truck!



A ladder trap found by CABS in northern Germany was so large that the police had to call in a crane truck to remove it.

Songbird trapper caught in Germany

In the Bavarian municipality of Ascha (Straubing-Bogen district), CABS discovered an illegal trapping site with two large nets for songbirds in March 2026 and shut it down in collaboration with the police. It was a professional setup, much like those used by poachers in Italy or Cyprus. We assume that it was set up to catch migrating goldfinches and other finch species. In addition to the nets that had been set up, the officers found cages containing songbird feed and further inactive nets. Numerous other bird traps were also discovered in the immediate vicinity, including two trapping cages for songbirds, three live traps for



In March 2026, a songbird trapper was caught in Bavaria – he had set up two large nets.

corvids and a wire mesh trap, which was possibly intended to catch birds of prey. Criminal proceedings have been initiated against the suspect.

CABS at Europe's largest hunting fair

This late winter, CABS hosted a stand at the 'Jagd und Hund' (Hunter and Hound) fair in Germany. Around 70,000 visitors gather here to browse, buy weapons and hunting equipment, or book a hunting trip. At our stand, they found the only alternative: information on the consequences of irresponsible hunting trips for endangered migratory birds and details on the illegal persecution of birds of prey. Over the six day event, we held several hundred conversations.

The mere fact that we had the courage to engage in the debate from such a prominent position earned us the respect of many hunters. The exchanges with one or two hunting officials were also more open and honest than expected. Most passers-by, however, did not seek contact, and quite a few shook their heads or made less well-considered comments.



In the Lion's den: In February 2026, CABS provided information at Europe's largest hunting fair in Dortmund (Germany) on the illegal persecution of birds of prey and hunting trips targeting endangered migratory birds.



Wrens are secretive inhabitants of our gardens and, weighing around nine grams, are among the smallest European bird species. This does not stop poachers across the Mediterranean region from catching these tiny birds with traps and nets, only to eat them as seasonal food. With your support, we monitor hunters and bird trappers, bring poachers to justice and dismantle traps and nets. So that the wren has a chance to breed in your garden too.



Your Gift, Their Flight: help to 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 fieldwork, 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 fuels the fight against bird poaching!

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

German account \ \ SozialBank Köln \ \ IBAN DE61 3702 0500 0008 1255 00 \ \ BIC BFSWDE33XXX

Swiss account \ \ PostFinance AG \ \ IBAN CH20 0900 0000 6102 8944 8 \ \ BIC POFICHBEXX



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