



Committee Against
Bird Slaughter - CABS
Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.

BIRD PROTECTION CAMP ZAKYNTHOS

Analysis on the lack of enforcement



Photo on the cover: hunting hide in the “hunting village” in Keri (Photo: CABS)

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication in February 2023 of the report, “Acoustic Monitoring Confirms Significant Poaching Pressure of European Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) during Spring Migration across the Ionian Islands, Greece” by Astaras and alii, the common practice of shooting Turtle Doves in Greece during Spring migration has not only been widely acknowledged as a major issue, but has also been given a size and a number.

According to the study in five islands only at least 57,000 Turtle Doves were killed or injured by hunters, an estimate extracted thanks to the number of gunshots registered in April and May. The study triggered CABS to start a bird protection camp in the island of Zakynthos in 2023 (after a failed attempt in 2022 in Kerkyra, where only 3 gunshots were heard along 10 days), after considering how little results previous conservation campaigns had brought to the protection of the species.

Thanks to the continuous acoustic monitoring of illegal shots, for the first time ever it was possible to have yearly feedback on the effects that CABS bird protection camp had on the activity in Zakynthos, namely a decrease in 4 years which ranges from 25% up to 75% of the shots, according to the different areas.

This decrease has carried social and personal costs for CABS organisation and staff, including a car being smashed by unknown people in the night, a violent mass aggression in Keri by a gang of illegal hunters in 2025, which caused the fracture of a nose, wounds, stitches, bruises, loss of belongings, and offensive public statements disseminated by the local hunting association against CABS.

In this short report though we would like to focus on another aspect of the illegal hunting, namely the context of enforcement, which has allowed it to thrive since 1985.

As the study writes in chapter 3.4 “in 2021, the Zakynthos and Corfu Forest Services conducted a total of 48 (9 April to 15 May; 15 locations) and 52 (24 April to 20 May; 9 locations) patrols, respectively, specifically aimed at reducing the illegal poaching of birds during spring migration. Except for 10 patrols by the Corfu based forest guards, who reported “isolated gunshots at a long distance”; none of the patrols reported any other evidence of poaching, and no arrests, further investigations, or confiscations of killed birds and/or hunting equipment were made”.

While the shot counters were recording dozens of thousands of shots, the enforcement agents did not record any sign of illegal activity, nor managed to catch anyone red-handed. For those who have experience in tackling illegal bird killing on the ground in different Mediterranean countries this sentence doesn't sound weird, it rather points exactly in the direction of the main failure of Turtle Dove (like all other "quarry species") conservation: the very poor quality of law enforcement.

If we consider that catching offenders red-handed and punishment/imposing fines are the only way to deter illegal hunting, as different examples in conservation show, also in Zakynthos the positive aspects and trends observed between 2023 and 2026 are due only to CABS commitment, whereas the local administration has rather boycotted conservation efforts, rather than supporting them.

THE PROBLEM WITH ENFORCEMENT IN ZAKYNTHOS

In Zakynthos, National Police have orders not to proactively engage on illegal killing of birds and not to respond to citizens' report on this issue, unless the Forest Department or the Game Department ask for support or have no personnel available. In 2026 CABS managed to involve the Police in 3 cases, 2 of which ended up with a prosecution in flagranti. (See table below)

TAB 1: Operations with Police

Date	WHERE	seized equipment and birds	Police prosecution	Fine	police response time	Notes
13-apr	Pantokratoras	3 shotguns	2		30 min	2 hunters filmed and reported for hunting. Police seized 3 guns
14-apr	Vasilikos	1 shotguns, 2 birds	1	€ 1400	30 min	2 shot turtle doves
14-apr	Kalipado		0			when we came to the location at 9:30, hunter was not there anymore

Police agents and officers are in the majority people coming from the mainland and with little connections with the locals. They can use unmarked cars and move without being observed.

But for most of the cases CABS had to liaise and cooperate with wardens from the Game and/or Forest Departments. Looking at the table below it is possible to notice how less effective this cooperation works. CABS engaged them 15 times (only when we already had

enough evidence of the offender and from his behaviour we could rely on his presence on the spot for a longer time):

- In 10 cases hunters aborted the legal activity and left shortly before the wardens arrived on spot
- In 3 cases hunters left by foot but were reached by CABS members, while wardens just walked behind, making no attempt to stop the hunters
- In 1 case hunters left, but weapons were found by CABS members with the support of intel collected with the drone
- In 1 case, despite the group left ahead of the wardens, one hunter was casually found driving in the area with cartridges in the car (unclear case)

TAB 2: Operations with Forest and Game Wardens

Database Number	Date	WHERE	Seized weapons	prosecution	prosecution despite hunters escaping	nothing found	CABS based evidence prosecution
162	15-apr	Kalipado				1	
143	16-apr	Kalipado				1	1
86	16-apr	Alikanas				1	
38	16-apr	Vasilikos				1	1
168	17-apr	Kalipado			1		1
161	18-apr	Vasilikos	5 shotguns, 484 cartridges	5			1
16	18-apr	Kalipado	1 shotgun	1			
60	19-apr	Keri				1	
162	19-apr	Kalipado				1	

165	20-apr	Kalipado				1	
202	26-apr	Alikanas	30 cartridges	?			
106	28-apr	Keri				1	
60	29-apr	Keri				1	
170	01-mag	Kalipado				1	
203	03-mag	Kalipado			1		1

The comparison between the number of hunters located by two CABS team (37, see table below) and the results achieved thanks to the cooperation with the wardens, show that the cooperation does not work: out of 37 cases witnessed by CABS, 3 were handled by the Police with 66% success (2 cases), 15 were handled by the Wardens with 27% success (4 cases), and only because CABS lead the investigation and the chase. Without CABS this success rate would have been ZERO!

TAB 3: Assessment of illegalities during the Bird Protection Camp

	Number of locations with shots heard	Number of locations with hunters seen	Number of all active hunting locations (gunshots heard or hunters seen on these locations)	Total number of shots heard
13-apr	9	3	12	12

14-apr	3	2	5	8
15-apr	3	2	5	6
16-apr	6	4	10	17
17-apr	6	2	8	42
18-apr	3	2	5	19
19-apr	8	7	15	48
20-apr	3	3	6	6
21-apr	6	1	7	10
22-apr	6	1	7	12
23-apr	4	0	4	4
24-apr	6	2	8	17
25-apr	4	0	4	12
26-apr	2	1	3	9
27-apr	2	0	2	9
28-apr	5	1	6	26
29-apr	7	2	9	39
30-apr	2	0	2	2
01-mag	4	1	5	8
02-mag	3	1	4	8
03-mag	0	2	2	1
TOTAL	92	37	129	315

Numbers give an objective idea of the poor performance of the Game Service and Forest wardens, but the observation on the ground reveals more: during occasional conversations wardens never made a mystery of their willingness NOT to prosecute any hunter. This willingness is clear when even a hunter leaving the scene wearing slippers (!!!) is never reached by wardens, who simply do not engage in any chase. It is impossible to reach someone running, if you decide to only walk.

Another coincidence which left puzzled our teams on the ground is the fact that hunters coincidentally and repeatedly left the scenes shortly before the arrival of the patrol, like the knew in advance the patrol was going to that area. We are aware that hunters have a network of contacts and observers on key points: around Keri we have witnessed observers on crossroads and camera traps set up to warn hunters of the presence of intruders in the hunting area, but in bigger inhabited areas the presence of enforcement should be less blatant. Nevertheless, hunters in most of the cases seemed to know that it was time to leave the area.

Although we cannot be sure that the same wardens are in most cases warning the hunters about their position (or that a hunter has been reported by CABS in a specific area), in one occasion we managed to record evidence of a boycotting action performed by the wardens to avoid a prosecution.

On the 19th of April, in the afternoon, while a CABS team was waiting for the wardens at the agreed meeting point, after communicating the presence of a hunter nearby, CABS spotter managed to film the wardens approaching the hunter by car, waving him to immediately leave and then reaching the meeting point. Then they pretended in front of CABS team not to have been in the area before, clearly betraying their intention to boycott the prosecution. CABS has officially reported the offence and the wardens to the Greek Police and the Prosecutor of Zakynthos, based on the evidence collected.



Pic. 1-4: Wardens' car approaches the hunter and they yell at him. While he is running away, the patrol car keeps driving in another direction and joins CABS team, who is waiting to report this hunter.

On the 20th of April in the morning, CABS team spotted a hunter but decided to give the meeting point to wardens away from the real location. The wardens reached the point, saying they were ready to go to the hunting site, but when they realised, after 10 minutes'

drive, that the real location was some km away, suddenly they were unwilling to walk, asked for police back up and waited 1.5 hours more until they eventually started walking towards the location of the hunter, who at that time had already left.

On the 18th of April, in the afternoon, CABS spotted a hunter and drove with the wardens in the area. They correctly approached by foot the hunter and caught him red-handed after he had just fired two shots to Turtle Doves (he tried to outrun the wardens but was stopped by CABS members). At this point the warden intervened not to prosecute him, but to defend him – to everyone’s surprise - by discharging the shotgun in front of everybody and claiming he was not seen hunting and that he was only training the dog. The warden and the hunter together begged CABS members (!!!) NOT to proceed with the prosecution.



Pic. 5-7: 3 CABS volunteers (right) are approaching the hunter with dog (left), while the wardens' car is still on the road (although they drove together). CABS volunteer joins the hunter and asks him to stop and wait for the wardens. The hunter has the time to store the gun, get the dog in the car and start driving, while CABS volunteer tries to stop him. Only in the last frame the warden (on the right with white jumper) shows up in the field.

In our analysis Police are more accountable in their action and more independent from political and local interests. The fact that the personnel come from different locations within Greece makes it less vulnerable to contacts with locals. Wardens are instead locals and often embedded in local hunting associations, with little sensibility towards biodiversity and no specific training. They clearly are a impediment to enforcement, rather than enforcement itself.

To challenge illegal hunting in Keri area (see also our report: https://www.komitee.de/media/illegalities_on_keri_peninsula_1.pdf), where a surveillance system has been adopted by illegal hunters consisting on watch over points and remote cameras, who inform the hunters where and when enforcement is heading to and allow hunters to hide the equipment ahead of any check and resort to hunting immediately after its departure, a serious enforcement unit would arrange ambushes, consisting in entering the area before the arrival of hunters, hiding in strategic position and intervening after the first shots on the closest target. This is how forest police work in Italy, for example. In Zakynthos, despite multiple requests from CABS, not a single ambush has ever been attempted and the Head of the Forest Service has specifically declared: “we do not do ambushes”, making once again impossible to achieve any prosecution, i.e. any deterrence, in professional hunting areas.

A statement (Annex 1) published by the Forest Department of Zakynthos on the 6th of May proves the lack of enforcement: the department lists all cases of prosecutions which took place during the illegal hunting season, referring uniquely to cases CABS provided and solved. No case was produced by the wardens.

Up to now CABS, on top of providing cases for the Police and the Wardens asking for direct action, in the last 4 years has recorded evidence for 49 additional cases, namely footages of people shooting or holding guns, with recognisable faces and, in most cases, linked with their vehicle with registration number. Despite the evidence been handled over to the wardens and the prosecutor’s office, up to this date nobody has been prosecuted and according to the last information available, the authorities are still trying to connect the faces with the registration numbers of the vehicles!!

THE GENERAL ISSUE WITH HUNTING ENFORCEMENT

Situations like these are not an exception but must be read as the tips of an iceberg, which consists in a structural failure in enforcement system when it comes to hunting.

If we consider that Greece has an official Action Plan for the protection of Turtle Doves, as newly mentioned by the Forest Department in its press release, and that, even under these specific circumstances, there is no proactive effort, nor any result brought by the authorities, but rather continuous attempts to boycott the results of the investigations carried by CABS, the only conclusion is that hunting is an activity which shall not be checked.

Indeed, identical situations have been witnessed and recorded by CABS in Santorini, where a single warden is left alone by the administration in front of some hundreds of illegal trapping sites for finches located on two islands: his main goal is not to enforce the law, but rather to avoid witnessing the criminal offences. In Cyprus a similar situation involves the Game and Fauna Service, where wardens were recorded in the past years giving suggestions to trappers on how to avoid prosecutions, where part of the evidence disappeared from the files, or where entire prosecution files disappeared. Both in Cyprus and Spain the timetable of the agents was and is designed to avoid the best trapping times: the *Agentes Medioambientales* in the Valencian community used to undergo a prohibition to patrol in the night, when illegal trapping with parany was in full swing. The Wardens in Cyprus have a change in the shift between 2 a.m and 5 a.m., which is detrimental for the enforcement, considering that professional trappers are active in the night and early morning (from midnight to 6 a.m.). In Italy, as a rule, the Province Police units, when still in charge of checking on hunting activity, isolate and punish those agents who prosecute hunters. Recent examples can be found in the Province Police corps active in Varese, Vicenza, Brescia, Rovigo. The story of Sergeant of SEPRONA, Gloria Moreno, who managed to catch in flagranti a group of hunters illegally killing Shearwater in the island of Alegranza, close to Lanzarote, and was later accused in 8 different disciplinary proceedings within 2 years, is another testimony of how enforcement against illegal hunting is boycotted and tied up by politics and the administrations.

As stated by CABS during the MIKT meeting in Valencia in 2022 the reason which explains why hunting laws are so poorly enforced in EU countries is that on one side wildlife is still broadly perceived by the administrations as *res nullius*, no one's property; on the other side hunters and hunting organisations hold big political and economic power and are able to influence the administrations (whom they are often part of), demanding loose enforcement and a *laissez faire* police.

NO FUTURE FOR CONSERVATION IN ZAKYNTHOS

Although in Zakynthos the presence of two CABS teams has already managed to make the difference within 4 years, there is little hope for further improvement: the ground is not fertile, and all successes are achieved against the will of the administration and not thanks to their cooperation.

A request made by CABS for a meeting with the Game and Forest Departments in 2025 in Athens to discuss future operations has remained unanswered. The local major in 2026 has refused to meet representatives of CABS and HOS-BirdLife Greece handing over signatures collected by the organisations to ask for a zero-tolerance policy against spring hunting.

Those hunters who have spontaneously not given up with spring hunting are unlikely to do it in the next future, having now learnt how accommodating the attitude of wardens is. Some groups now hunt in fenced in properties (simple rotten fences around woodlands), which are enough to keep law enforcement officers outside: they refuse to enter, creating niches of full impunity. Other hunters have instead created their own citadels, like in Keri peninsula, illegally fencing forest and building shacks and hides, cutting mature trees to create open areas to target migrating birds, and operate without being challenged by the authorities.

In the meantime CABS is constantly receiving new reports on other locations where spring hunting is widespread in Greece, an information shared with HOS, which has spread the range of its acoustic investigation already in 2025, recording gunshot in the closed season in many new different locations, not only on the islands, but in the Peloponnese as well.

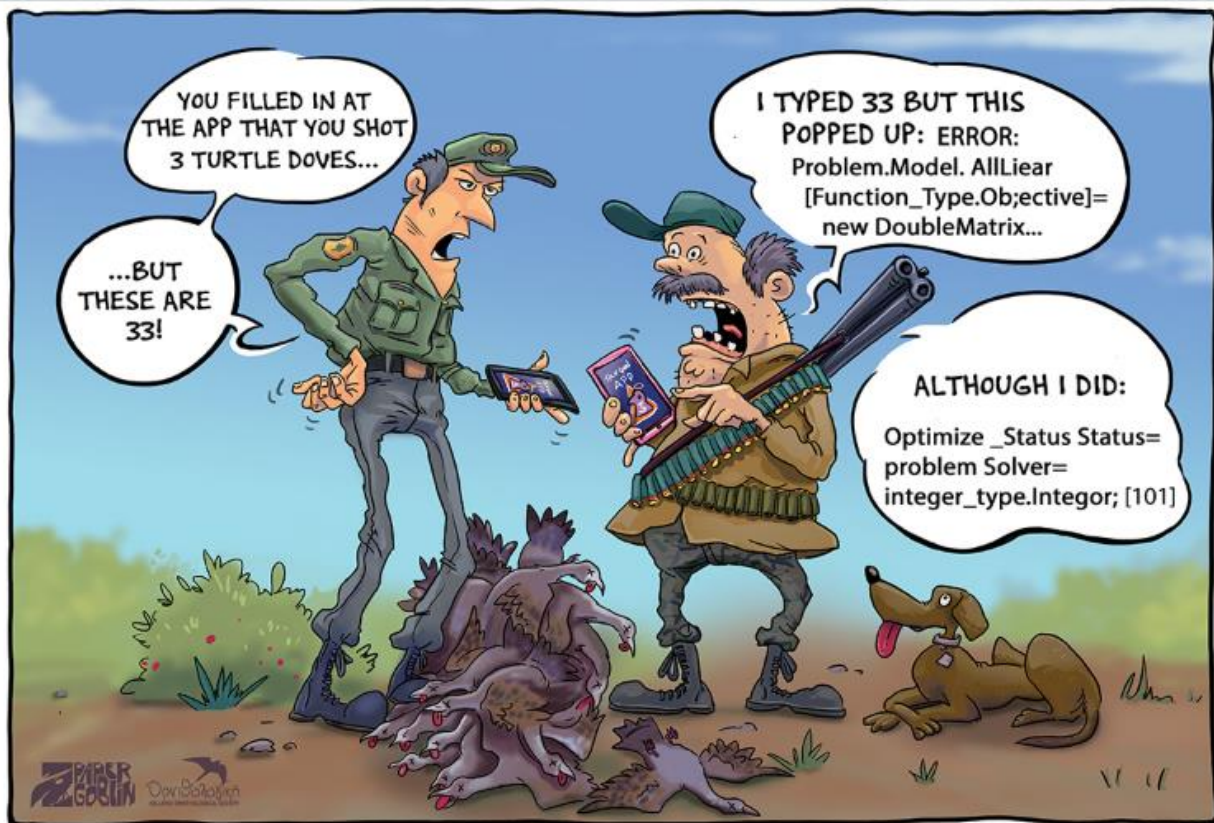
RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that without an intervention from international authorities, the policy of Greece will not change. The Action Plan means one single patrol for some 200 illegal hunters in Zakynthos and zero patrols for other islands (to the best of our knowledge we have seen zero hunting enforcement in Paxoi, Antipaxoi, Mathraki and Othonoi) and this patrol is not meant to prosecute any hunter.

International bodies should make pressure on the Greek authorities asking to:

- 1) Have dedicated units from the mainland (not locals) with the specific task to achieve as many prosecutions against illegal hunting as needed.

- 2) The number of units must be proportionate to the numbers of hunters/shots recorded in spring.
- 3) National Police should be equally and proactively involved in antipoaching operations during spring season.
- 4) Fines should be higher to have bigger deterrence.
- 5) Fenced properties, in front of such offences – when observed - shouldn't be considered a no-go area for enforcement offices.
- 6) Turtle Doves should enjoy a hunting moratorium until the population is fully recovered to at least the levels of the first known population monitoring schemes on the Central-eastern flyway.



SMOOTH ADAPTATION OF THE GREEK HUNTERS TO THE TURTLE-APP

Pic. 8: funny but “misleading” comic showing how the app to keep track of the killed Turtle Doves does not provide any accountability in the monitoring of killed birds (from HOS website). “Misleading” because it is very unlikely that any such check is performed. For instance in Cyprus when we asked in 2022 the Game and Fauna Service how many infringements in the use of the app for Turtle Doves were detected, the reply was “zero”, which is statistically impossible, unless no such checks were ever performed.

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