



Montenegro
Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development
and Northern Development

WORKSHOP ON NATIONAL IKB ACTION PLANS

2-4 September 2024, Podgorica, Montenegro

UNEP/CMS/IKB-NAP/Inf.6.3

ITALIAN ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT WILD BIRD CRIME



The European Union was recognized as Champion Plus for their generous support and commitment towards addressing Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean for the period 2015 - 2028.





MINISTERO DELL'AMBIENTE
E DELLA TUTELA DEL TERRITORIO E DEL MARE



ISPRA

Istituto Superiore per la Protezione
e la Ricerca Ambientale

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT WILD BIRD CRIME

MARCH 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
Purpose of the Action Plan.....	3
Overview of the phenomenon.....	3
The regulatory framework	4
Sources of information used	4
The most common wildlife crimes in Italy	5
1) <i>Trapping of small birds, mostly for commercial purposes, using bow traps, snares, birdlime, traps, nets</i>	6
2) <i>Illegal taking of waterfowl</i>	8
3) <i>Killing of birds of prey and other protected birds with firearms, mostly due to local traditions or vandalism</i>	8
4) <i>Illegal killing of species protected by current legislation but considered “pests” or “problematic”, such as cormorants, gulls, herons or birds of prey, through the use of firearms, poisoned bait or other prohibited means</i>	9
5) <i>Taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of birds of prey for commercial purposes</i>	10
6) <i>Trapping of adult birds using traps or nets and taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of ornamental species, including for commercial purposes</i>	11
7) <i>Import of and trade in wildlife from abroad to supply restaurants or the live bird market</i>	11
8) <i>Non-compliance with hunting regulations</i>	12
Links with cultural/culinary traditions	13
The relationship with the hunting world.....	14
The connections with crime and economic activity	15
Black spots	16
Estimated impact of illegal taking on the conservation status of species	17
Action to combat illegal acts against wildlife in Italy.....	18
ACTIONS.....	19
GENERAL OBJECTIVE 1 – STRENGTHENING DIRECT LAW ENFORCEMENT	19
GENERAL OBJECTIVE 2 – STRENGTHENING INDIRECT LAW ENFORCEMENT	23
GENERAL OBJECTIVE 3 – PREVENTION	26
GENERAL OBJECTIVE 4 – MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN	28
GENERAL OBJECTIVE 5 – NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE	29
ANNEX 1 – TYPES OF OFFENCES.....	31
ANNEX 2 – KEY INDICATORS ON HUNTING (ISTAT DATA 2007).....	33

Purpose of the action plan

This action plan is designed to combat illegal activities, commonly referred to as “poaching”, against wild birds. These activities include any act aimed at killing, capturing or trafficking in live or dead wildlife, or parts thereof, in violation of the provisions in force.

The action plan has five general objectives: (1) strengthening direct law enforcement of illegal activities against wild birds, (2) strengthening indirect enforcement, (3) prevention, (4) monitoring the implementation of the plan and (5) setting up a national steering committee. Within each general objective, several specific objectives are listed, each of which is to be pursued through specific actions.

The actions are described in summary form as follows:

Priority: high, medium or low, depending on the relevance of the action in pursuing the purposes of the plan

Timeframe: implementation timeframe (from the date of approval of the plan) Responsible body: body/ies responsible for promoting the implementation of the action

Programme: indication of the main contents of the action

The plan aims, among other things, to implement in Italy the Tunis Action Plan, promoted by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, and the European Roadmap towards eliminating illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds.

A review of the results achieved through this plan is foreseen in 2020, in conjunction with the revision of the Tunis Action Plan.

Overview of the phenomenon

Due to its distinctive geography, Italy has an extremely diverse territory. From the highest peaks in Europe, in the heart of the continent, to the southernmost latitudes, equivalent to those of Tunisia, we cross a series of different environments. This means that there is a great variety of wild species in our country, linked to very different habitats.

To make the situation even more complex, Italy is crossed by important bird migration routes that are followed by millions of birds, often resulting in large concentrations of birds in relatively short periods and in relatively localised areas (e.g. at particular points such as straits, headlands, small islands or mountain passes).

These two factors alone would be sufficient to explain the existence of different forms of capture from region to region. However, in order to fully understand the complexity of the phenomenon, it is necessary to consider how Italy's considerable environmental heterogeneity corresponds to an equally extensive variety of traditional forms of capture that have changed over the course of history.

It should also be noted that until the introduction of Law No. 968/77, there were few restrictions on the killing, capture and trade of wild birds in Italy¹. Many practices that are now illegal were permitted and widespread throughout much of the country.

It should therefore come as no surprise that wildlife crime in Italy takes many different forms. These include: the trapping of small songbirds with bow traps in Alpine valleys, the killing of migrating birds of prey on the Strait of Messina, the capture of passerines for hobby purposes or for use as live decoys, and the illegal killing of waterfowl in the Caserta wetlands during the spring months. Nor should it come as a surprise that some of these forms of capture are difficult to combat, as they are deeply rooted in local traditions.

The wide range of wildlife crimes makes it very difficult to describe the phenomenon, to

¹ Cassola F. (1979) – Shooting in Italy: the present situation and future perspectives. *Biological Conservation* 16(2): 85-106

quantify the number of people involved and the number of birds taken each year, and to take effective action against it through crime suppression and awareness campaigns.

Italy is called upon to curb this phenomenon, both in response to a Pilot programme (5283/13/ENVI) on the “Illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds”, initiated by the European Commission in 2013, and to honour the international commitments undertaken under multilateral agreements; these include, for example, the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species, the AEWA Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds and the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife. Under the Bern Convention, the Tunis Action Plan for the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds in the Mediterranean Basin has been adopted (<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2138467&Site=&direct=true>). The plan foresees that each country will carry out a series of activities to assess the extent of the phenomenon, identify its causes and define the areas most affected, including the drafting of national action plans. The drafting of a national action plan is also required by the “*Roadmap towards eliminating illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds*”, drawn up by the European Commission to define priorities at international level and monitor the progress made by member states (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/docs/Roadmap%20illegal%20killing.pdf>).

Italy is also called upon to take action to combat wild bird crime following its accession to IMPEL (*European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law*), an international organisation set up to promote compliance with environmental legislation. For IMPEL, combatting the illegal killing of birds is one of the key issues for compliance with nature conservation legislation (<http://www.impel.eu/topics/nature-protection/>).

The regulatory framework

In Italy, the relevant legislation for the protection of wild birds is Framework Law No. 157/1992 (and subsequent amendments) “Rules on the protection of warm-blooded wild animals and on hunting”, which transposes Directive No. 2009/147/EC, better known as the Birds Directive.

Law No. 157/1992 regulates the ways in which hunting may be practised, details a series of prohibited activities (Art. 21) and defines criminal (Art. 30), administrative (Art. 31) and additional (Art. 32) sanctions for those who infringe the provisions of the above articles. The text of the law also indicates the bodies responsible for hunting surveillance (Art. 27) and provides for annual reports on surveillance activities (Art. 33).

Other relevant legislation for the protection of wild birds is Law No. 394/1991 “Framework Law on Protected Areas” and Decree No. 184/2007 of the Ministry of Ecological Transition (MiTE), formerly Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea on “Minimum uniform criteria for establishing conservation measures in relation to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)”. These regulations introduce a number of prohibitions to protect wild birds within protected areas and Natura 2000 sites, the latter established in accordance with Directives 92/43/EEC and 2007/147/EC. As national legislation has left room for discretion to regional administrations on certain aspects, some of the regulations and bans introduced at national level have been supplemented by regional legislation, which should therefore be referred to in order to gain a full picture of the situation in the country.

Sources of information used

The phenomenon of the illegal killing, capture and trade of birds in Italy was the subject of an in-depth investigation carried out in 2002 by Esposito and Mamone Capria, who

published a book entirely devoted to this phenomenon².

Other bibliographical sources were used to expand and update the information framework on the phenomenon; notably, a volume on the conservation of birds in Italy³, an article published in a nature journal detailing the illegal capture of thrushes in southern Sardinia⁴ and a more recent article published by BirdLife International⁵.

Additional information was acquired through the periodic reports on surveillance and enforcement activities submitted by the Regions to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry pursuant to Article 33(2) of Law No. 157/92.

In addition, unpublished information was collected directly from the State Forestry Department, now the Carabinieri Command of Units for Forestry Environmental and Agri-food Protection (CUFAA), from provincial police forces engaged in combatting wildlife crime and from NGOs.

To obtain further information on the situation in Italy, a questionnaire was sent at the end of July 2015 to the Hunting and Game Services of provincial administrations, as well as to environmental and hunting associations. A total of 51 questionnaires were returned, of which 29 came from the provincial administrations, nine from the hunting associations, eight from the WWF and five from the CABS (Committee Against Bird Slaughter), giving a territorial coverage of more than 50%.

The most common wildlife crimes in Italy

In summary, there are eight main types of offences against wild birds:

- 1) the trapping of small birds, mostly for commercial purposes, using bow traps, snares, birdlime, traps, nets;
- 2) the illegal taking of waterfowl;
- 3) the killing of birds of prey and other protected birds with firearms, mostly due to local traditions, hunting malpractice or vandalism;
- 4) the killing of species protected by current legislation but considered “pests” or “problematic”, such as cormorants, herons, gulls or birds of prey, through the use of firearms, poisoned bait or other prohibited means;
- 5) the taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of birds of prey for commercial purposes
- 6) the trapping of adult birds using traps or nets and taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of ornamental species, including for commercial purposes;
- 7) the import of and trade in wildlife from abroad to supply restaurants or the live bird market;
- 8) non-compliance with hunting regulations.

² Esposito R., Mamone Capria F. (2002) – *Volo Libero. La lotta al bracconaggio in Italia*. Alberto Perdisa Editore, Bologna.

³ Gariboldi A., Andreotti A., Bogliani G. (2004) – *La conservazione degli Uccelli in Italia. Strategie e azioni*. Alberto Perdisa Editore, Bologna.

⁴ Cauli F. (2009) – *Delitti di gola. Bracconaggio in Sardegna. Uccelli in Natura*, 13: 18-30.

⁵ Brochet A.-L. et al. (2016) – *Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean*. Bird Conservation International.

The illegal taking of eggs and taxidermied specimens for museum zoological collections is not dealt with in this report, as interest in such collections seems to have declined considerably in recent years.

1) Trapping of small birds, mostly for commercial purposes, using bow traps, snares, birdlime, traps, nets

Illegal acts against small migratory birds occur in a number of geographical areas; depending on the local circumstances, crimes are committed in different ways. In the Lombard Pre-Alps (especially in the Brescia and Bergamo areas), illegal trapping is widespread in autumn, through the use of bow traps, traps, nets and birdlime. Similar activities, conducted mainly with nets and decoys, are practised in the Venetian Prealps and in Friuli. The main victims are robins, chaffinches and meadow pipits, but many species can be trapped because the means of capture are not selective (Fig. 1). Along the Adriatic coast, meanwhile, trapping is carried out with vertical nets at night; migratory birds arriving from the Balkans (mainly thrushes) are attracted by electronic beeps and artificial lighting. Often the birds are caught for sale in the restaurant trade and, more rarely, for direct consumption of the meat by the catcher.



Fig. 1 – Illegal trapping in the Lombard Prealps. On the left, a robin killed by a snap trap or “sep” trap (from the CUFAA Archive). On the right, a row of bow traps positioned for capture (from <http://www.komitee.de>).

In the Pontine Islands and the Campanian Archipelago, trapping is carried out during the return migration, starting in March and continuing until the end of May. Campaigns carried out by CABS volunteers in Ponza to combat illegal trapping have made it possible to curb these crimes to a great extent, especially in the months when the migratory flow is most intense. Highly effective traditional hand-made systems (such as the one illustrated in Fig. 2) have been used for centuries in these islands, but these have recently been replaced by the use of metal snap traps.



Fig. 2 – Traditional trapping method in the Pontine Islands using a prickly pear cactus (photo F. Spina).

A form of illegal thrush trapping is widespread in Sardinia, mainly practised between November and February, in southern Sulcis and in Sarrabus. Here, the traditional means of capture are horsehair arranged on a twig in amongst the vegetation to form a noose for roosting birds (Fig. 3). Today, nylon thread is often used instead of horsehair, and nets and traps are also used. Another technique used is a snare anchored to the ground with wire, on which a berry is planted as bait. Thrushes are killed for commercial purposes: they are sold to private individuals and local restaurateurs for the preparation of a traditional dish, “grive” (Sardinian for thrushes) with myrtle. Here too, since the means of capture are not selective, many other species of birds are killed as well as thrushes: robins, Sardinian warblers, Barbary partridges, chaffinches and hawfinches are among the most frequent victims.



Fig. 3 – Snares used in Sardinia for the illegal trapping of thrushes (from the website <http://www.komitee.de>).

Another type of offence that is particularly widespread in central and northern Italy is the trapping of birds to supply the trade in live decoys used in hunting from hides⁶. In this case, fully-grown adult birds can be caught, mostly during the autumn migration, or young birds can be taken from their nests. The latter is especially common in the Alps, where there are thriving breeding populations of song thrushes and fieldfares. In order to sell illegally trapped birds on the live decoy market, counterfeit tags and rings are often used. In some cases, the use of rings similar to those used for chicks born in captivity has been observed; in others, the use of numbered plastic bands used for birds caught in facilities managed by the Provinces under Law No. 157/1992. In recent years, on numerous occasions, the fight against unlawful acts against wild birds carried out by hunting surveillance staff has revealed the existence of illegal trafficking linked to the management of provincial facilities for the capture of live decoys. These facilities, which were authorised from 1994 in certain regions of central and northern Italy, operated under Article 4(3) and (4) of Law No. 157/1992: using nets and live decoys, they captured birds, which were then given to hunters free of charge. The offences were committed by the staff in charge of managing the facilities, who used this activity as a cover for the illegal trapping and trade in live decoys. Since 2014, the competent provincial administrations have stopped authorising these facilities following the launch of infringement procedure No. 2014/2006 by the European Commission.

2) *Illegal taking of waterfowl*

Illegal taking of waterfowl is widespread in some areas; illegal activities are often carried out at night, using prohibited means of hunting (such as electroacoustic decoys), even in protected areas and out of the hunting season, to the detriment of both huntable and protected species. Among the areas most affected by these illegal practices are the Litorale Domizio, in Campania, and the wetlands of Capitanata, in Apulia. There are, however, reports of troubling situations in other areas too, especially in some parts of Sicily and the Po Delta. In some areas, combatting these illegal activities is extremely complex, due to the difficulty of enforcing checks in restricted, private valley areas. This issue is particularly evident in the Po Delta and in the lagoons of the northern Adriatic (Venice, Caorle, Grado and Marano). A specific case of unlawful conduct against waterfowl is the capture of ducks for use as live decoys at hunting hides.

3) *Killing of birds of prey and other protected birds with firearms, mostly due to local traditions or vandalism*

The killing of birds of prey with firearms is a practice that is still widespread throughout most of Italy, as shown by the data collected by wildlife rehabilitation centres⁷⁸.

⁶ The use of live decoys for hunting from hides is permitted provided they have been legally acquired or come from authorised farms or captured in compliance with current legislation.

⁷ Cianchetti-Benedetti M., Manzia F., Fraticelli F., Cecere J. G. (2016) – Shooting is still a main threat for raptors inhabiting urban and suburban areas of Rome, Italy. *Italian Journal of Zoology* doi:10.1080/11250003.2016.1189611.

⁸ Gustin M. (2005) – I centri di recupero come indicatori dell'impatto dell'attività venatoria sulle specie protette: il caso dei Ciconiformi, dei rapaci diurni e notturni. *Avocetta* 29: 113.

The incidence of the phenomenon is underestimated, as not all affected birds are recovered; furthermore, a proportion of non-seriously injured birds of prey retain their ability to fly and are therefore not found and recovered. A further factor contributing to an underestimation of the frequency of these unlawful acts is the fact that gunshot wounds can often only be detected by X-ray (Fig. 4); unfortunately, many rehabilitation centres do not have the means to carry out this diagnostic test on all birds admitted.



Fig. 4 – X-ray of an adult female lanner falcon found on 22 January 2009 in the municipality of Castenaso (BO). Nine pellets of different diameters can be seen in the image.

The discovery of animals with gunshot wounds occurs mainly during the hunting season and there are two reasons for this: poachers mostly operate when the hunting season is open, as otherwise gunshots would attract attention, and a fraction of hunters carry out illegal acts during the course of their hunting.

A distinctive form of illegal trapping of birds of prey is practised in the Strait of Messina. In this case, the birds are killed while they are in active migration. The motivations that drive poachers to such illegal acts are linked to local traditions (see section “Links with cultural/culinary traditions”). The number of birds killed each year in the strait was very high in the recent past, but this phenomenon has now been reduced thanks to the long-term commitment of the State Forestry Department (now CUFAA) and NGOs. The crackdown has prompted poachers to be more active during the autumn migration rather than the spring migration, taking advantage of the simultaneous presence of hunters in the area, which makes it more difficult to identify those who commit illegal acts. As an indication, CABS estimates that 200-300 birds of prey are currently killed in spring and 400-600 in autumn on the strait. Illegal killing of small migratory birds is frequent in autumn in the Lombard and Venetian Prealps.

4) *Illegal killing of species protected by current legislation but considered “pests” or “problematic”, such as cormorants, gulls, herons or birds of prey, through the use of firearms, poisoned bait or other prohibited means*

The fight against so-called “pests” is a legacy of the past, when many species were considered harmful because they were predators. The last version of the Consolidated Law on Hunting (No. 1016 of 5 June 1939), dated 15 September 1967, still considered “eagles, kites, goshawks, sparrowhawks and eagle-owls” as “pests”; it also added to this list of species all other diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey “in no-hunting zones, reserves and

restocking and trapping zones". Ichthyophagous (fish-eating) birds, such as herons, were also considered damaging and could be killed by any means, even outside the hunting season. The ban on hunting and killing birds of prey was only introduced by Law No. 968 of 27 December 1977, which also established the status of "eagles, vultures and eagle-owls" as specially protected species. The perception of birds of prey as pests is still deeply rooted in many local areas and this leads some hunters to shoot protected species during hunting when the opportunity arises. For example, the killing of birds of prey has been observed at wood pigeon hunting sites using so-called "volantini" ("flyers") – pigeons trained to fly over the hunting site to attract actively migrating flocks. The pigeons are often attacked by the birds of prey as they are easy pickings. This generates conflict between the hunter trying to save their decoy and the bird of prey trying to predate it. Persecution occurs more systematically in areas where there are commercial activities that may be damaged by predation. This primarily occurs near fishing valleys and fish farms, mainly to the detriment of herons, grebes, cormorants and gulls. Most of the killing takes place with firearms, but in some cases the birds die trapped in improperly placed nets to protect the breeding ponds. Besides ichthyophagous birds, illegal culling to prevent actual or suspected damage to human activities may also concern birds of prey (to protect animals released for "restocking" purposes), woodpeckers (for damage to joinery and other man-made structures), eider ducks (to protect mussel farming), herring gulls and corvids (for various reasons)⁹. In many parts of Italy, predator control is carried out using poisoned bait. Although the aim of poachers is often to kill dogs, wolves and foxes, in many cases, diurnal birds of prey, especially kites and vultures, fall victim to the bait. The use of poisons is the main cause of the disappearance of the griffon vulture from Sicily and much of Sardinia, as well as the decline of species such as the Egyptian vulture and the red kite.

5) Taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of birds of prey for commercial purposes

The commercial value of many species of birds of prey is extremely high, due to the high demand for birds of prey used for falconry or kept in captivity for hobby purposes. The value of various species is influenced by the international market, especially the strong demand from the Persian Gulf States, where the use of falcons for hunting is a traditional practice and a *status symbol*.

The high value of certain species makes the removal of young from nests a particularly lucrative activity and prompts many people to commit egg and chick theft, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. Apart from the powerful economic incentive, theft from nests is encouraged by the fact that security officials struggle to exercise genuinely effective forms of monitoring: to ensure proper surveillance, it would be necessary to patrol large areas for several weeks of the year, often in inaccessible areas that are difficult to reach by car.

In recent years in Sicily, an extensive criminal network engaged in the systematic pillaging of the nests of numerous species of birds of prey, especially the lanner falcon and the Bonelli's eagle, has been discovered. Investigations are still ongoing and reports of the crimes found are classified so as not to jeopardise investigative activities. What has emerged, however, is the vast scale of the phenomenon: numerous people were operating in the field, coordinated by a central organisation that was able to place the stolen animals on the national and international market.

⁹ Legal forms of wildlife control may be permitted, at certain times and under certain conditions, only in compliance with Directive No 2009/147/EC, Art. 9, and Law No. 157/1992, Art. 19.

Thefts from the nests of birds of prey have also been discovered in other regions, although the existence of such extensive organisations has not been established.

6) *Trapping of adult birds using traps or nets and taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of ornamental species, including for commercial purposes*

The trapping of adult birds with nets or traps for sale on the amateur bird-breeding market is widespread throughout Italy. In this case, the species most likely to be taken are finches (notably, goldfinch, serin, siskin, chaffinch, brambling, bullfinch, greenfinch, hawfinch, citril finch, redpoll and linnet) and other species of songbird (nightingale, blackcap, redstart, redwing, song thrush and blackbird), or species valued for their plumage (crossbill, great tit, blue tit, black redstart, rock thrush, blue rock thrush, European roller and Eurasian golden oriole). The most common ornamental species are also the subject of intense and widespread taking of nestlings for sale because they are more domesticated and easier to breed than individuals captured as adults. In particular, the nestlings of finches are in high demand because of the ease with which they interbreed with canaries in captivity as adults. Although the breeding and captive breeding of legally sourced specimens has decreased the demand for wild specimens, the taking of nestlings remains a widespread practice that is difficult to control. The nestlings can be fitted with the irremovable rings provided by the Italian Ornithological Federation (FOI), which are formally used to guarantee that the birds come from authorised breeders. However, it is difficult to envisage genetic paternity analyses on such common and widespread species in order to detect possible offences.

7) *Import of and trade in wildlife from abroad to supply restaurants or the live bird market*

Investigations carried out by the State Forestry Department (now CUFAA) have uncovered large-scale commercial trafficking between certain non-European countries and Italy, intended to supply the restaurant trade or live birds kept for hobby purposes or for use as live decoys for hunting. The countries from which the birds are imported generally do not have adequate legislation against the indiscriminate killing or capture of wild birds; they also tend to have low labour costs. These two factors encourage the proliferation of illegal trafficking.

In the case of birds destined for the restaurant trade (especially passerines, woodcocks and other waterfowl), the birds are often plucked and decapitated before importation, which makes identification of the species concerned problematic and often requires genetic analysis. A particularly significant operation, which became known as “Balkan Birds”, was carried out by the State Forestry Department in 2001; investigations were launched after a lorry from Serbia was stopped and was found to contain 12 tonnes of frozen birds, stored in cardboard boxes. More recently, it was discovered that large numbers of passerines were being illegally imported from Tunisia for restaurants in north-eastern Italy; in this case, the birds – mainly starlings and Spanish sparrows – were caught with nets in reed beds, where thousands of birds gather in large roosts at night.

In the case of birds destined to be used as live decoys for hunting, the birds are fitted with counterfeit rings and certificates attesting to their farmed origin before being imported into Italy. In recent years, large quantities of skylarks from China have been placed on the Italian market, fitted with rings of a diameter that complied neither with the FOI specifications nor with those considered suitable for breeding skylarks by ISPRA (Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research).

8) *Non-compliance with hunting regulations*

If a hunter with a licence to carry a firearm for hunting purposes kills an animal belonging to a huntable species in breach of the regulations, this constitutes a wildlife crime. The infringement may concern various restrictions: the hunter may not have respected the daily or seasonal game limit, may have used prohibited means (e.g. electroacoustic decoys, automatic rifles with magazines holding more than two shots), or may have used prohibited hunting techniques (e.g. hunting of woodcock or snipe from hides). Failure to comply with certain regulations may not result in the killing of an animal, but may still lead to its death, such as when using lead ammunition in areas where it is prohibited, or when training dogs outside the areas and periods in which this activity is permitted. The frequency with which hunting regulations are breached varies greatly from area to area. These illegal practices persist where there has been a lack of decisive action on the part of the authorities responsible for managing hunting and hunting organisations, aimed at stigmatising misconduct and rewarding law-abiding hunters.

A summary outline of illegal activities against wild birds is given in Annex 1.

Links with cultural/culinary traditions

A large proportion of wildlife crime has its origins in traditional activities typical of certain regional contexts. In northern Italy, the trapping and keeping of small songbirds has been practised since ancient times, as evidenced by the Sagra Dei Osei (Bird Festival) in Sacile (province of Pordenone), which celebrated its 742nd anniversary in 2015. This festival is held annually in the second half of August and hosts a singing competition for birds subjected to the “chiusa” regime¹⁰, a particular procedure that alters the life cycle of the birds, causing them to sing in late summer/autumn instead of spring, so that they can be used as live decoys during hunting, which takes place during the autumn migration (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – The Sagra Dei Osei di Sacile. Right: Redwing during the singing competition. Left: the bird market fair (photo A. Andreotti).

By attending events such as the Sagra di Sacile, you become aware that there is still a strong link in some local communities with the bird hunting practices that were once widespread in many central and northern regions. The capture of small migratory birds is linked to cultural and gastronomic traditions, which still today fuel illegal taking of and trade in wild birds for captivity or for the preparation of traditional local dishes such as “polenta e osei”¹¹.

In southern regions too, especially in Campania and Sicily, the custom of keeping goldfinches and other finches in cages is widespread. In this case, the birds are captured to be kept in people’s homes for hobby purposes. This tradition has left its mark most notably in popular songs and paintings. Today, following the introduction of legislation prohibiting the capture and possession of wild birds, many people prefer to keep canaries and other

¹⁰ Today, the use of timers that artificially change exposure to light is widespread to induce birds to sing outside the breeding season.

¹¹ These traditional dishes may still be prepared in accordance with current legislation, provided that the birds have been legally slaughtered and not traded.

captive-bred birds in cages, but the tradition of keeping goldfinches is still deep-rooted and fuels illegal taking and trafficking, in part managed by organised crime.

Another example of illegal taking that has its roots in the past concerns the killing of migrating birds of prey. The most infamous practice is the so-called “caccia all’adorno” (European honey buzzard hunt), practised on either side of the Strait of Messina (Fig. 6). Birds of prey are shot down with firearms as they pass through the strait during migration. In the past, most of the birds were killed in the spring because of the different ways in which the return migration takes place; currently, illegal taking is more intense in the autumn as a result of the crackdown by the State Forestry Department (now CUFAA) in the spring months. The most affected species is the European honey buzzard (locally called “adorno”), but all passing soaring birds (such as eagles and storks), including rare or very rare species, can be killed. The killing of European honey buzzards is said to be linked to a local belief that any man who shoots down at least one honey buzzard will ensure that his wife remains faithful to him in the coming year.



Fig. 6 – View of the Strait of Messina, taken from the Sicilian shore. It is estimated that several tens of thousands of birds of prey pass through the strait each year.

In order to succeed in eradicating forms of illegal taking that are so intimately linked to the traditions of some local communities, we need to devote a lot of resources not only to combatting crime, but also to educating and raising awareness among the younger generations, so as to bring about a radical change in mentality.

The relationship with the hunting world

Hunting associations are combatting unlawful acts against wild birds on several fronts, to the benefit of law-abiding hunters, including through the deployment of volunteer guards in various areas. In some situations, however, they do not seem to have full control over their members, where incidents of dubious legality or even hunting practices contrary to the regulations in force occur. A significant proportion of illegal taking is carried out by holders of hunting licences and occurs during the hunting season. In such cases, a firm condemnation from the leadership of the hunting organisations would be appropriate. As an example, consider the case of electronic decoys, which are prohibited by European and

national legislation. According to the CABS, the use of these devices is the most common offence (21% of cases), to the extent that the NGO estimates that at least one in four hunters hunting migratory birds uses these prohibited means. Electroacoustic decoys are widely advertised on hunting websites, since their use for hunting is prohibited, but not their sale or possession, unlike trapping devices (nets and traps).

More incisive, decisive and effective involvement of the hunting community is therefore essential to undertake truly effective action against wild bird crime and to influence the behaviour of hunters (especially those hunting migratory birds).

The connections with crime and economic activity

The links between wildlife crime and criminality have not yet been sufficiently investigated. Illegal acts against wildlife find a fertile breeding ground where the “sense of state” is weakest and where lawlessness is widespread. This is why, in parts of the country where criminal organisations are powerful and deeply rooted, the fight against crime is more difficult.

Beyond this general picture, in some cases it has been possible to ascertain the existence of direct links between the illegal taking of wild birds and the world of organised crime. In the Caserta area, for example, the illegal taking of waterfowl is carried out on land controlled by families linked to Camorra clans. A striking example is the “Volo Libero” operation, which in 2005 led to the seizure by the Carabinieri’s Ecological Operations Unit of 100 hectares of land and 20 bunkers in the province of Caserta (Villa Literno) and the arrest of 11 people. Furthermore, the seizures of illegal contraband weapons with abraded licence plates, carried out by the Carabinieri and State Police, especially in southern Italy, testify to the strong involvement of organised crime in certain criminal activities against wild birds. Poachers use these weapons because they can quickly dispose of them without fear of being traced in the event of a check by the authorities. These guns are often stolen from hunters and circulate on the black market, which is usually run by criminal organisations or related groups.

It is highly likely that the illegal bird trade is also, to a large extent, controlled by the mafia: international investigations have shown that wildlife trafficking is one of the main sources of funding for criminal organisations, along with prostitution and trafficking in arms and drugs. Some forms of illegal taking of wild birds, not managed by organised crime, are also particularly lucrative. Easy money has become the main reason for the capture of large numbers of small migratory birds in the Bergamasque and Brescia Prealps and in southern Sardinia. These birds are taken quickly and with little effort, and are sold to restaurateurs for very high prices. As a result, people who are out of work turn to this activity as a fallback, as it allows them to earn a lot of money in a short period of time.

The capture of birds for use as live decoys is also profitable. In this case, the geographical pattern of offences is more complex: the illegal capture and sale of live decoys has been detected in several regions, especially in north-central Italy. Along the northern Adriatic coast, it has recently been discovered that numerous poachers are catching thrushes at night using nets and decoys. The catches are made in autumn, when migratory birds coming from the north-east arrive on the mainland from the sea. Up to 100 thrushes can be caught in a single night on days when migration is most intense; each freshly caught thrush can be sold for several dozen euros. In the Foggia area, a recent operation by the Anti-Poaching Operational Unit uncovered massive catches of skylarks made using horizontal nets, destined to supply the illegal trade in hunting decoys.

Trade in young birds of prey taken from nests is also highly lucrative, especially when the

species looted are very rare and prized on the falconry market (see subsection “*Taking of eggs/chicks from the nests of birds of prey for commercial purposes*”).

Black spots

The results of investigations carried out over the years have shown that crimes against wild birds do not occur with the same frequency throughout the country. In some areas, the phenomenon is particularly intense; these areas are called *black spots*, according to internationally recognised terminology. In Italy, at least seven *black spots* can be identified: the Lombardy-Venetia Prealps, the Po Delta, the Pontine and Campanian coasts, the Apulian coasts and wetlands, southern Sardinia, western Sicily and the Strait of Messina (Fig. 7). In addition to these hotspots, there are other areas where the illegal taking of wild birds, although not as intense as in the *black spots*, appears to be more frequent than in other parts of the country. These include areas with a high density of hunters (such as Liguria and the coast of Tuscany, Romagna and Le Marche) or where traditional hunting practices are no longer permitted by current legislation (such as Friuli-Venezia Giulia and part of Veneto, where bird trapping was once widespread).



Fig. 7 – *Black spots* where illegal activity against birds is most intense.

Estimated impact of illegal taking on the conservation status of species

The estimated impact of wildlife crime on biodiversity is extremely difficult to assess on the basis of currently available information. Certain incidents can undoubtedly have a devastating effect on species with a poor conservation status. A case in point is the poisoning of the three bearded vultures released in Sardinia in 2008 as part of an international reintroduction project. The bearded vultures died shortly after their release due to the ingestion of poisoned bait; as a result of this serious incident, the reintroduction project was halted, precluding the possibility of the species returning to the island. In this case, the damage done was enormous, far greater than the (already) considerable costs of rearing and releasing the animals.

Similarly, thefts of eggs and chicks from nests have had a considerable effect on the population dynamics of endangered species such as the Bonelli's eagle and the lanner falcon. If not detected promptly, intensive and widespread depredations, such as those recently discovered in Sicily, can rapidly drive entire populations to extinction. The mechanism that is created tends to trigger a vicious circle: birds are taken from the nests of the rarest species precisely because they have a high market value. The greater the impact of theft on the population, the rarer the species; the higher the value, the greater the motivation to commit theft.

The impact of other forms of illegal taking, which are more widespread and affect less rare species, is much more difficult to assess. Moreover, it is often difficult to distinguish the effects of illegal taking from those caused by hunting. A case in point is the illegal trapping of huntable species: for example, the shooting of woodcock from hides, or the hunting of quail using electroacoustic decoys.

In many cases, assessing the damage is also problematic because the illegal acts are carried out against migrating birds, which means that breeding populations in areas far from Italy are affected. For example, the migratory birds shot down over the Messina Strait come mainly from central-northern and eastern Europe (Fig. 8).

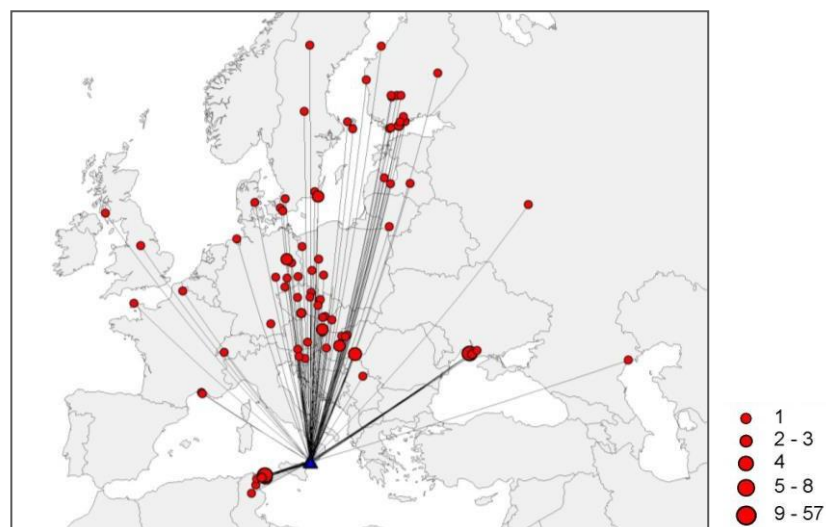


Fig. 8 – Ringing locations of birds ringed abroad and shot down in the Strait of Messina (Source: ISPRA database).

Action to combat illegal acts against wildlife in Italy

In Italy, law enforcement against wildlife crime is essentially handled by three different bodies: the State Forestry Department (now CUFAA), provincial police forces and voluntary game wardens.

The **Carabinieri Command of Units for Forestry Environmental and Agri-food Protection (CUFAA)** has a centralised structure and manages a network of command stations widely distributed throughout the country; the CUFAA is also responsible for surveillance within most of Italy's National Parks.

In the autonomous regions, surveillance is not carried out by CUFAA, but by **Regional Forestry Departments**. The number of personnel in these departments varies: 1,400 in Sardinia, 800 in Sicily, 250 in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and 150 in Valle d'Aosta. Similarly, in the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano, Provincial Forestry Departments are in operation.

According to the most recent data provided by ISTAT (see Annex 2), in 2007, the **provincial police forces** employed 2,890 officers, distributed unevenly between the various Italian provinces. As of today, this figure has decreased significantly as a result of the freeze on recruitment turnover imposed by financial legislation. According to a census carried out by the trade association (Association of Provincial Police Officers – AIPP), there were 2,700 officers in 2013, falling further to 2,500 in 2015.

In 2007, there were 15,367 **voluntary game wardens** throughout the country according to ISTAT (Annex 2). As regards the Italian Hunting Federation (FIDC), the number of game wardens fell from 3,881 in 2007 to 2,712 in 2015. Voluntary wardens are part of surveillance units belonging to hunting, environmental or zoological associations, although in the vast majority of cases, they operate directly under the control of provincial police forces. Only some voluntary game wardens are allowed to carry out judicial policing duties, thus operating autonomously; in many cases, they can only perform a supporting role, and have to be accompanied by provincial police, carabinieri or forestry officials.

According to the latest ISTAT report, which contains data for 2007, the average national density of provincial police officers and voluntary wardens was one officer for every 1,000 hectares of agroforestry land (one officer for every 260 hunters). The data contained in the report show a wide variation from region to region (from 0.1 to 4.3 agents per 1,000 hectares). In actual fact, these data for hunting surveillance must be overestimated, as not all provincial agents are responsible for monitoring hunting and the work of voluntary wardens may not be carried out on a continuous and regular basis. Moreover, the patrols work in shifts and usually consist of two people, which inevitably leads to a reduced presence on the ground.

Furthermore, the hunting and wildlife control personnel historically stationed in the provinces – particularly the provincial police forces and services – is being progressively thinned out, as shown by the census carried out in 2013 by the AIPP. Provincial officers numbered 2,890 in 2007 and 2,700 in 2013; however, in late 2015, there was a further haemorrhaging of units, following the redundancy of 744 personnel (in implementation of Law 56/2014 and Paragraph 421 of the Stability Law 190/2014) and the retirement of several hundred. It is reasonable to estimate that by 2018, provincial hunting surveillance will have halved compared to 2013, due to a continuing recruitment freeze and the gradual retirement of many officers.

ACTIONS

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 1 – STRENGTHENING DIRECT LAW ENFORCEMENT

In recent years, there has been a significant reduction in the number of personnel responsible for prosecuting wildlife offences. The transitional phase of the provincial police forces and the transfer of the CFS to the Carabinieri require concrete initiatives to ensure that law enforcement against wildlife crime is strengthened in the near future. In addition, it is essential to take targeted action to promote synergy between the various surveillance bodies, including voluntary warden units. Actions to achieve these objectives are currently the top priority at national level for tackling wild bird crime.

Specific objective 1.1: strengthening the central structures responsible for prosecuting offences against wild birds – CUFAA and CITES need more resources, in both economic and personnel terms, so that they can take direct action against illegal activity against birds at all *black spots* in Italy, coordinate supra-regional action and intervene effectively to stop illegal trade. It is also necessary to put in place centralised coordination to improve effectiveness in combatting poisoned bait, reiterating the need for carcasses to be submitted to the competent regional Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institutes in cases of suspected poisoning.

Action 1.1.1: Strengthening of CUFAA

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: Increase the number of personnel assigned to CUFAA to at least 10 and to increase the financial resources allocated annually for the performance of its operations to €300,000, to enable this body to directly carry out or coordinate enforcement action at all *black spots*, manage nationally important operations, assist in the management of databases of wildlife offences and support the work carried out by surveillance bodies throughout the country. Additional resources must be provided for the purchase of durable equipment such as all-terrain vehicles, telescopes, drones, night-vision goggles and technical clothing to enable personnel to work at night and in rural and mountainous areas.

Action 1.1.2: Strengthening of the CITES Unit

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: Ensure sufficient resources so that the CITES unit can also carry out checks on wild birds when inspecting CITES species held in captivity, in order to report any offences to CUFAA or other relevant police forces. The CITES unit should also be entrusted with the task of monitoring the online trade in wild birds.

Action 1.1.3: Coordination of Poison Control Unit

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: create national coordination of poison control units active in the territory and prepare an annual report on the law enforcement activities carried out and on the offences detected.

Action 1.1.4: Centralisation of data from carcass analyses in cases of suspected poisoning

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: Directorate-General for Animal Health and Veterinary Medicine at the Ministry of Health

Programme: Based on data from carcass analyses carried out by the experimental zooprophyllactic institutes, the National Centre for Veterinary Forensic Medicine at the Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institute of Lazio and Tuscany will have to maintain an updated list of substances that have been used for poisoning birds of prey, to be transmitted to the national coordination of anti-poison units.

Specific objective 1.2: Maintenance, expansion and creation of law enforcement structures located throughout the territory (CUFAA, Regional Forestry Departments, provincial police, voluntary wardens, anti-poison units) - The reduction of the duties assigned to the provincial administrations, institutions that have always been responsible for carrying out hunting surveillance activities through specific provincial police forces, has had a disruptive effect on the fight against the illegal taking of wild birds. The fate of the provincial police forces has varied from region to region, but in general, the units have been weakened or even abolished. It is therefore necessary to take urgent action to guarantee the effectiveness of hunting surveillance bodies, ensuring the maintenance of the judicial police and auxiliary public security functions already provided for by Law No. 157/1992 and Law No. 65/1986, as well as by Art. 57 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Similarly, it is important to ensure that the enforcement of wildlife offences – historically assigned to the Forestry Department – is maintained and carried out by specific specialised bodies even after the transfer of the CFS to the Carabinieri. In particular, it must be ensured that outlying CUFAA stations, distributed throughout the country, provide territorial protection.

In the case of voluntary hunting wardens, differences between regions in terms of powers and responsibilities must be overcome. Finally, in order to combat the use of poisoned bait, anti-poison dog units are to be set up in areas where poisoning is most widespread.

Action 1.2.1: Strengthening and reorganisation of provincial hunting surveillance bodies

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible bodies: Regional Administrations, Provinces and Metropolitan Cities

Programme: Ensure the maintenance of operations carried out by the hunting police forces, previously managed by the Provinces, by restoring the number of surveillance personnel to the same level as in 2007, when the last ISTAT survey was undertaken. To ensure that the expertise built up over the years is not lost, operators assigned to other duties following transfers or redeployment to other Authorities as a result of the Prime Ministerial Decree of 14/9/2015 should be able to be called back to the new competent bodies.

Action 1.2.2: Removal of legal obstacles to the regionalisation of provincial hunting authorities

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible bodies: Regional Administrations

Programme: Remove the legal obstacles preventing the regionalisation of the Provincial and Metropolitan Police Departments/Services responsible for fishing/hunting surveillance, so as to allow, where necessary, employees with judicial police and public security duties to be transferred from the Provinces to the Regions while maintaining the same duties. The Regions should also be able to grant the status of Judicial Authority or Public Security Police to regional fishing/hunting surveillance operators, or maintain the allocated powers.

Action 1.2.3: Safeguarding the hunting supervisory functions of the personnel of outlying CUFAA stations

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: Following the transfer of the CFS to the Carabinieri, guarantee the hunting surveillance activities carried out by the CFS through its network of stations throughout the territory. The number of operators responsible for wildlife crime surveillance must be kept stable at the current level.

Action 1.2.4: Creation of anti-poison dog units

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible bodies: Regions and Autonomous Provinces, in collaboration with CUFAA, Regional Forestry Departments and Protected Areas

Programme: Building on the experience gained in Italy in the LIFE ANTIDOTO and LIFE PLUTO projects, create at least one anti-poison unit for each area (including supra-regional in scale) where poisoned bait is used, in order to cover high-risk areas more effectively; these units should be equipped with dogs trained to detect poisoned bait.

Specific objective 1.3: Strengthen synergies between the surveillance bodies - In order to optimise the available resources, it is important to promote synergies between CUFAA, regional forestry departments, provincial environmental surveillance bodies, voluntary wardens and other police bodies that may, in some situations, be involved in combatting wildlife crime (e.g. the customs police for the import of protected wildlife from abroad or the financial police for the trade in animals destined for the restaurant trade). In particular, there is a need to promote cooperation between different actors at national, regional and local level, to encourage information sharing and to foster exchange of expertise. At the international level, a constant flow of information should be ensured with the coordinating bodies for law enforcement and environmental crime (INTERPOL, Europol, IMPEL).

Action 1.3.1: Creation of a national operational coordinator

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: Create a centralised structure designed to link the different surveillance bodies. This structure should ensure the exchange of information at national level between the actors involved in combatting wildlife crime, promote coordination in carrying out prevention and crackdown activities and encourage the training of personnel involved. It should also encourage the establishment of similar coordinators on a regional basis.

Action 1.3.2: Creation of a local operational coordinator in each black spot

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: At each *black spot*, create a coordinator between the different surveillance bodies to ensure optimal use of the available forces. Coordination should also be aimed at facilitating the exchange of information and the optimal use of personnel involved in the prosecution of wildlife offences.

Action 1.3.3: Strengthening cooperation with international crime-fighting bodies

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: steering committee

Programme: Through existing international organisations (INTERPOL, Europol, IMPEL), foster the exchange of information with other countries to strengthen the effectiveness of the fight against illegal trafficking and the dissemination of best practices in combatting wildlife crime.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 2 – STRENGTHENING INDIRECT LAW ENFORCEMENT

In addition to stepping up direct action to combat wild bird crime, initiatives should be taken to make the activities of the surveillance and monitoring bodies more effective. Furthermore, it is essential to address the drivers that lead people to commit these types of offences, in order to tackle the roots of the phenomenon. Finally, it is important to promote the participation of citizens in the comprehensive surveillance of the territory, making it easier for ordinary people to report wildlife offences. **Specific objective 2.1: Improving the effectiveness of activities to directly combat wildlife crime.** Through targeted interventions, the performance of surveillance activities should be facilitated; furthermore, the effectiveness of law enforcement actions should be improved and their deterrent effect increased. The sanctions framework for wildlife offences is outdated and should therefore be updated, including by taking into account the changing socio-economic situation in the country. In implementing this update, penalties should be commensurate with the amount of illegal income that can be gained and the damage caused to biodiversity. Finally, as highlighted by the Tunis Action Plan, it is important to improve the efficiency of prosecution by promoting specific training activities for magistrates.

Action 2.1.1: Adaptation of the national regulatory framework

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible body: MiTE

Programme: Make legislative changes to improve the effectiveness of surveillance and monitoring activities. The steering committee shall, within one year of its establishment, formulate a proposal for amending the regulatory framework. The amendments to be prepared include:

- include the regions among the bodies responsible for fisheries and hunting surveillance
- provide for the applicability of the additional penalty of definitive exclusion from the granting of a licence to carry a rifle for hunting purposes to all cases that fall within the criminal sanctions regime
- provide for the applicability of the additional penalty of suspension or revocation of a licence to carry a rifle for hunting purposes to all cases of greater gravity that fall within the administrative sanctions regime.
- the introduction of a ban on the possession of electroacoustic decoys during hunting activities and in all the preparatory stages of hunting, including dog training;
- the introduction of a ban on the possession of lead ammunition in hunting grounds where such ammunition cannot be used¹²
- the updating of the sanctions framework for wildlife offences, commensurate with the amount of illegal income that can be derived from the illegal activity and the damage caused to biodiversity, based on pre-established criteria (gravity factor), considering the opportunity to restructure the penalties provided for in Art. 30 of Law No. 157/1992 and to transform the most serious cases into criminal offences (e.g. letters a), b), c), d) and e), paragraph 1, of Article 30 of Law No. 157/1992).

¹² The introduction of this ban will improve the effectiveness of monitoring, thereby facilitating the enforcement of the ban on lead ammunition; this will significantly reduce bird mortality due to lead poisoning.

Action 2.1.2: Training of magistrates

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible body: Ministry of Justice

Programme: Through the coordination of the General Prosecutor's Office at the Court of Cassation and the General Prosecutors' Offices of the individual Districts, as well as through the training activities of the Scuola Superiore della Magistratura, promote greater awareness among prosecutors and judges of wildlife crime, with particular reference to the various illegal practices and the repercussions they may have on the state of conservation of the ornithological species involved.

Action 2.1.3: Standardisation of the powers of voluntary hunting wardens

Priority: low

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible body: State-Regions Conference

Programme: Standardise admission procedures for voluntary wardens by defining requirements and skills at national level.

Specific objective 2.2: Addressing the motivations for committing wildlife offences -

Many illegal activities are committed for profit, fuelled by illegal trade in wild birds to be used in the preparation of traditional dishes, or to be kept as pets or live decoys. Stricter checks on the restaurant trade and breeding farms can help to combat this illegal trade and reduce the illegal demand for wild birds. Other useful actions to prevent illegal acts against wild birds concern the control of stray dogs and the prevention of damage caused by wildlife to agriculture and fisheries.

Action 2.2.1: Standardisation of regional regulations on hunting, breeding, keeping and trading of bird species

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible body: ISPRA – MiTE

Programme: Through a technical circular, promote the standardisation of regional regulations on the tagging, breeding, keeping and trading of birds and the use of live decoys during hunting; provide specific instructions on how to tag and register captive birds.

Action 2.2.2: Reinforcing the traceability of captive animals

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible bodies: Regional Administrations

Programme: Improve the efficiency of the unique identifier system for captive animals by combining ringing with DNA analysis. Priority should be given to species of major conservation interest and to those that are subject to more extensive illegal trade.

Action 2.2.3: Stepping up checks on imports and sales of wild birds destined for human consumption

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible body: CUFAA

Programme: In collaboration with the national unit responsible for monitoring online trade in wild birds (action 1.1.2), increase checks on imports and sales of wild birds for human consumption.

Action 2.2.4: Stepping up checks on restaurant businesses in black spots where consumption of wild birds is widespread

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible bodies: Anti-poaching operational coordinators in *black spots* in the Lombardy-Venetia Prealps, Southern Sardinia and the Pontine-Campanian coasts (action 1.3.2) *Programme:* Carry out widespread checks on restaurants located in areas where the tradition of eating wild bird dishes is most deeply rooted. This action is to be carried out with the support of the national unit in responsible for monitoring the online trade in wild birds (action 1.1.2).

Action 2.2.5: Prevention of and compensation for damage caused by wildlife

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible bodies: Regional Administrations

Programme: In line with EU state aid rules, set up and implement regional development programmes for the prevention of damage caused by wildlife; improve the procedures for paying compensation to farmers and fish farmers in an efficient and timely manner.

Specific objective 2.3: Raise public awareness of wildlife offences - The work of surveillance bodies can be facilitated by the collaboration of ordinary members of the public, who can carry out local surveillance. It would therefore be advisable to set up freephone numbers or websites through which anyone can report illegal acts against wild birds, as is the case for reporting forest fires.

Action 2.3.1: Creation of a website on combating wild bird crime

Priority: low

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible body: steering committee

Programme: creation of a *website* on the issue of wildlife crime, highlighting the operations carried out by the various surveillance bodies and providing useful information for users to actively contribute to law enforcement actions. The steering committee identifies an entity to be entrusted with the implementation and management of the website.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 3 – PREVENTION

Awareness-raising and information campaigns usually only produce results in the medium to long term, but their implementation is crucial to tackling unlawful conduct against wild birds. It is therefore considered necessary to launch regular long-term initiatives aimed at specific social groups, schools and, more broadly, the general public. Important prevention work should also be carried out by promoting forms of organisation of hunting based on the principle of sustainability and hunter participation in the management and monitoring of the territory. Lastly, the development of eco-friendly economic activities linked to the presence of wild birds should be promoted in *black spots* in order to encourage a gradual change in the attitudes of local populations towards wildlife.

Specific objective 3.1: Launch awareness and information campaigns - Awareness campaigns are especially important when conducted at *black spots* and in local areas where hunting malpractice is most widespread. Interventions in schools are essential, to educate young people and prevent illegal practices from being passed on to new generations. Equally important are initiatives to combat specific behaviours, such as the use of poisoned bait. Nationwide information campaigns can prove useful in raising awareness of certain issues, for example to discourage the consumption of traditional local dishes, such as “polenta e osei” or “le grive al mirto”, or the keeping of wild birds caught in breach of regulations. Finally, the contents of the action plan should be disseminated to both institutional actors and the public and its implementation promoted.

Action 3.1.1: Awareness-raising campaigns at black spots

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible bodies: Environmental and hunting associations

Programme: Carry out targeted public awareness campaigns, including in schools, at black spots to *stigmatise* illegal behaviour and the damage caused to the environment and the community.

Action 3.1.2: Targeted awareness-raising campaigns

Priority: low

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible body: Presidency of the Council of Ministers

Programme: By disseminating the contents of the action plan to both institutional actors and the public, carry out information and awareness-raising campaigns at national level on specific issues, such as the use of poisoned bait, trafficking in birds destined for the preparation of traditional local dishes, illegal trade in birds for falconry or captivity for hobby purposes, stray animals.

Specific objective 3.2: Improvement of hunting management at regional and provincial level - In order to effectively combat the most frequent hunting offences, hunting management authorities should pursue a policy of encouraging good behaviour, rewarding hunters who abide by the rules and actively participate in active management (e.g. by being voluntary wardens). With this in mind, ways of strengthening the link between hunters and the territory should be promoted, to encourage the hunters' sense of responsibility and facilitate surveillance activities.

Action 3.2.1: Improvement of hunting regulations

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible body: ISPRA

Programme: Through technical documents, provide guidance to the Regions and Autonomous Provinces for the drafting of regional and/or provincial regulations that foster the hunter-territory link, make hunters responsible for the sustainable management of wildlife and the environment and reward virtuous behaviour.

Action 3.2.2: Raising awareness among hunters

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible bodies: Regional administrations, provincial administrations, hunting associations

Programme: Through targeted campaigns, raise awareness among hunters of the harmfulness of certain widespread behaviours (use of electro-acoustic decoys, exceeding of game limits, hunting outside permitted hours); raise awareness of the need to comply with the rules to ensure sustainable forms of management

Specific objective 3.3: Promotion of eco-friendly economic activities linked to the presence of wild birds - At *black spots*, significant concentrations of birds can be found during migration or overwintering; these concentrations are often spectacular, as in the case of the transit of birds of prey over the Strait of Messina. In such cases, the promotion of eco-tourism could lead to a change in the attitude of local populations towards birds, and illegal taking would lose some of its current social acceptance.

Action 3.3.1: Incentives for environmentally friendly economic activities

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 36 months

Responsible bodies: MiTE, Regional Administrations

Programme: provide economic incentives and/or tax breaks for eco-compatible economic activities linked to the presence of wild birds in *black spots*, potentially providing an alternative to illegal taking

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 4 – MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

To optimise the use of available resources, it is important to implement data collection on offences committed in our country. At the same time, regular reports should be drawn up to outline national and local trends in illegal activity and assess the effectiveness and level of implementation of the actions taken.

Specific objective 4.1: create and/or implement databases on wild bird crime and law enforcement - In order to monitor the situation in Italy and assess the effectiveness of the actions implemented, it is essential to have databases that make it possible to characterise and quantify the offences carried out. As there are several sources from which information on illegal acts against wild birds can be obtained, provision should be made for the management of several complementary databases. Particular attention should be paid to gathering information from wildlife rehabilitation centres (CRAS), to which thousands of birds, some of which are the victims of illegal acts, are brought every year. The gathering of information on law enforcement activities is also important for assessing the effectiveness of enforcement actions.

Action 4.1.1: Implementation of the CUFAA database on wildlife crime

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA, with the support of ISPRA

Programme: Increase the information content of the database currently managed by CUFAA by including more detailed data (e.g. on the type of offence detected, species and number of birds involved, location).

Action 4.1.2: Creation of a national database on birds handed over to wildlife rehabilitation centres (CRAS)

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 24 months

Responsible body: ISPRA

Programme: set up a centralised database on a web platform where data can be entered on birds arriving at CRAS centres in Italy; provide guidance to CRAS on methods of data collection and entry

Action 4.1.3: Standardisation of regional databases on wildlife crime

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: MIPAAF, with the support of CUFAA and ISPRA

Programme: provide guidance to the Regional Authorities on the collection of information on wildlife crime and the drafting of the periodic report referred to in Article 33 of Law No. 157/92.

Action 4.1.4: Standardisation of databases at CUFAA headquarters

Priority: medium

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible body: CUFAA, with the support of ISPRA

Programme: to provide guidance to local commands on the collection of information on wildlife crime.

Specific objective 4.2: Prepare reports to assess trends in illegal activities, the effectiveness and degree of implementation of the actions taken and improve law enforcement activities - The preparation of a periodic report carried out by analysing in a systematic and standardised way the information contained in the databases allows to monitor the situation in different contexts and to assess the level of implementation of actions. This report should describe the situation regarding particular types of offences (e.g. trade in protected wildlife) and within *black spots*.

Action 4.2.1: Preparation of annual reports

Timeframe: within 12 months

Responsible bodies: ISPRA – CUFAA

Programme: Prepare an annual report on the degree of implementation of the actions foreseen in the plan, as well as an assessment of the trends of illegal activities on the basis of the information contained in the databases referred to in the actions of Specific Objective 4.1 and in the reports referred to in Law No. 157/92, Art. 33.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 5 – NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

The implementation of the actions in the plan requires the synergy of numerous institutional actors and NGOs. It is therefore considered necessary to establish a steering committee to stimulate and standardise the contributions of the various actors, ensuring the exchange of information and the necessary cooperation.

In particular, the following functions are to be attributed to the steering committee:

1. liaison with international actors (Bern and Bonn Conventions, CITES, European Union, IMPEL, Europol, INTERPOL);
2. coordination of the institutional actors involved in the different aspects of crackdown and monitoring;
3. formulation of proposals for the adaptation of the regulatory and sanctioning framework;
4. national coordination of surveillance and monitoring activities;
5. supervision for the creation and management of databases;
6. promotion of information exchange and training of the different actors involved in enforcement action;
7. regular monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the action plan;
8. regular updating of the action plan.

Given the heterogeneity of the issues to be addressed by the steering committee, it is

appropriate to work on two levels; namely, political-institutional and technical-operational. Furthermore, adequate representation of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the various actions of the plan must be ensured.

Political-institutional level

Coordinator: Ministry of Ecological Transition-MiTE

Members: Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of the Interior; Ministry of Education, University and Research; Regions; Autonomous Provinces

Technical-operational level

Coordinator: CUFAA

Members: CITES, Regional Forestry Departments, 1 representative of each Region and Autonomous Province, 1 representative of environmental associations, 1 representative of hunting associations, ISPRA, IZSLT, representation of EUROPOL and INTERPOL, Scuola Superiore della Magistratura + technical structure of MIUR for school curricula

Specific objective 5.1: Operationalise the steering committee for combatting wild bird crime - In order to ensure that the steering committee is operational, the structure must be formally established, the representatives of the various stakeholders appointed and a secretariat set up to support its work.

Action 5.1.1: *Establishment of the steering committee*

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 3 months

Responsible body: MiTE

Programme: Formalise the establishment of the steering committee and create a technical support secretariat; instruct the members of the two steering committee structures to designate formal representatives.

Action 5.1.2: *Planning and start of the work of the steering committee*

Priority: high

Timeframe: within 6 months

Responsible body: MiTE

Programme: Convene the first meeting of the steering committee, approve rules for the conduct of proceedings and define a timetable.

ANNEX 1 – TYPES OF OFFENCES

PROHIBITED MEANS/ OFFENCES	TARGET SPECIES	PERIOD	AREA	MOTIVATION
Capture				
Snap traps ¹³ , birdlime, stone crush traps, bow traps, nets, snares	migratory birds	September–January/April–May	Lombardy-Venetian Prealps, Friuli, Tuscany, Pontine Islands, Campania, Apulia (residual), Cagliariaritano	gastronomy keeping hobby profit
Nets, live decoys	finches	July–October	Southern Lazio, Campania, Sicily	profit keeping hobby
Nets, acoustic decoys	thrushes	October–January	Lombardy-Venetian Prealps, Friuli, Romagna, Campania, Foggiano	profit hunting decoys
Taking from nests				
	ornamental species	spring / early summer	Campania	keeping hobby profit
	birds of prey	spring/summer	Tuscany, other Apennine sites (?), Apulia (?), Sicily	profit keeping hobby falconry
	thrushes	spring / early summer	Trentino-Alto Adige, Lombardy, Tuscany	profit hunting decoys

¹³ Metal snap traps.

PROHIBITED MEANS/ OFFENCES	TARGET SPECIES	PERIOD	AREA	MOTIVATION
Killing with a firearm				
	birds of prey	hunting season, late spring (Strait of Messina)	most of Italy, Strait of Messina	“pest” control traditional practices
	migratory birds	hunting season	Lombardy-Venetian Prealps	traditional practices gastronomy
	cormorants, herons	hunting season, spring	Po Delta, Tuscany, Apulia, Oristanese	“pest” control
Prohibited means and periods of hunting Exceeding game limits	waterfowl	September–January, March	Po Delta, Casertano, Foggiano, Sicily	increase in game limits profit
Prohibited means and periods of hunting Exceeding game limits	Passerines (including non-huntable species)	October–January	Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Tuscany, Le Marche, Umbria, Campania, Apulia, Calabria, Sardinia, Sicily	increase in game limits profit
	birds of prey, ibis, storks	September–January	widespread in many areas, but infrequent	Profit (taxidermy)
Poisoning				
Poisoned bait	birds of prey	all year round	Apennines, Sardinia, Sicily	control of land carnivores “pest” control
Import				
Violation of transport regulations	huntable species abroad	August-March		Personal “use”
Violation of trade regulations	Species of gastronomic interest, hobby or for falconry	all year round		profit

ANNEX 2 – KEY INDICATORS ON HUNTING (ISTAT DATA 2007)



home consultazioni dati documentazione
link utili | mappa | contatti | english version

Agricoltura e zootecnia

Sei qui Home : consultazioni dati : navigazione tra i dati : caccia : Tav. K01

Nuova selezione

Documentazione

ITALIA - dettaglio per ripartizione geografica



Anni:

2001 2002 2003
2004 2005 2006

2007

Tutte le tavole dello stesso tema, territorio e anno:

K01 K02 K03 K04

Tavola K01 - Principali indicatori sulla caccia . Dettaglio per regione - Anno 2007 ^(a)

Regioni	Superficie territoriale ^(b)	Superficie aziendale agro - forestale ^(c)	Cacciatori	Densità venatoria per 1000 ha ^(d)	Agenti venatori ^(e)	Guardie volontarie ^(f)	Vigilanza venatoria: numero agenti e/o guardie per 1000 ha ^(g)
Piemonte	2.540.246	1.472.655	30.802	21	137	1.506	1,1
Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	326.324	176.314	1.525	9	143	3	0,8
Lombardia	2.386.280	1.277.032	85.013	67	360	936	1,0
Liguria	542.155	151.069	23.888	158	105	552	4,3
Trentino-Alto Adige	1.360.682	1.040.351	13.286	13	368	118	0,5
<i> Bolzano/Bozen</i>	739.992	584.736	6.226	11	7	73	0,1
<i> Trento</i>	620.690	455.615	7.060	15	361	45	0,9
Veneto	1.839.885	1.157.187	57.319	50	212	662	0,8
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	785.839	413.036	10.913	26	59	93	0,4
Emilia-Romagna	2.211.734	1.386.298	51.797	37	156	1.492	1,2
Toscana	2.299.351	1.508.889	104.719	69	204	1.197	0,9
Umbria	845.604	597.769	40.607	68	97	660	1,3
Marche	969.406	707.136	31.416	44	91	1.001	1,5
Lazio	1.723.597	980.053	67.981	69	287	1.576	1,9
Abruzzo	1.076.271	664.620	14.136	21	71	789	1,3
Molise	443.768	283.396	4.176	15	20	183	0,7
Campania	1.359.024	804.390	46.382	58	124	1.573	2,1
Puglia	1.935.790	1.339.997	29.661	22	142	161	0,2
Basilicata	999.461	736.175	7.973	11	43	720	1,0
Calabria	1.508.055	824.780	32.383	39	68	1.006	1,3
Sicilia	2.571.140	1.488.782	47.799	32	203	987	0,8
Sardegna	2.408.989	1.674.827	50.100	30	-	152	0,1
ITALIA	30.133.601	18.684.757	751.876	40	2.890	15.367	1,0

Fonte: Istat, aziende faunistiche, zone di ripopolamento, oasi di protezione, caccia

- a) In Sardegna le funzioni di guardie volontarie sono svolte dai funzionari del Corpo Forestale regionale. Negli anni precedenti tale funzione era stata stimata in 953 unità
- b) Le variazioni territoriali dei comuni sono aggiornate al 31 dicembre 2003. I valori in ettari della superficie sono basati sulle misurazioni degli uffici provinciali dell'Agenzia del territorio al 31 dicembre 2002
- c) La superficie aziendale agro - forestale è quella della SPA 2007
- d) Rapporto tra il numero dei cacciatori e la superficie agraria e forestale espressa in migliaia di ettari
- e) Agenti di polizia giudiziaria e di pubblica sicurezza, dipendenti dagli Enti locali delegati dalle Regioni, ai sensi dell'art. 27 c.1-a L.157/92
- f) Guardie volontarie giurate ai sensi del testo unico leggi di pubblica sicurezza ex R.D. 773/31, come previsto dall'art. 27 c.1-b L. 157/92
- g) Rapporto tra la somma del numero degli agenti venatori e delle guardie volontarie e la superficie agro-forestale in migliaia di ettari

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Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica
Via Cesare Balbo 16 00184 - Roma tel. +39 06 46731