



المركز الوطني
لتنمية الحياة الفطرية
National Center for Wildlife
المملكة العربية السعودية



1st MEETING OF THE SOUTH-WEST ASIA ILLEGAL TAKING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS INTERGOVERNMENTAL TASK FORCE

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 20-21 May 2025

UNEP/CMS/SWAITB1/Outcome 2

PREFINAL ACTION PLAN TO ERADICATE THE ILLEGAL TAKING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IN SOUTH-WEST ASIA 2024-2032

(Considered and amended by SWA ITB Task Force)

(As of 11th August 2025)

1. At COP14, Parties agreed through the amendment of Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) the launching of a South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force and agreed Decision 14.126 encouraging Parties and inviting non-Parties to:
 - a) *investigate current levels of illegal taking of migratory birds in this region and to actively contribute to the establishment and operation of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force;*
 - b) *set up the structures required, for example through the elaboration of national action plans against the illegal taking of migratory birds, to ensure active collaboration between stakeholders to address this threat; and*
 - c) *support the establishment, operations and coordination of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force.*
2. COP14, through Decision 14.127, also invited intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others to engage, as members or observers, in the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force and to contribute with relevant data and tools on the illegal taking of migratory birds in the South-West Asia region.
3. The Action Plan vision, goals and objectives presented in Annex 1 were agreed during [a meeting](#) of the South-West Asia Working Group on illegal taking of migratory birds, on 15-16 January 2024 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

4. The Activities presented in Annex 2 were discussed at the 1st Meeting of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force on 20-21 May 2025, in Riyadh.
5. The resulting Draft Action Plan was distributed for comments to all the participants of the 1st Meeting of the Task Force, as well as to all Task Force Range States. Once comments were received and incorporated, the Action Plan was finalized and approved by the Task Force using silent procedure.

Annex 1:

Action Plan to eradicate the illegal taking of migratory birds in South-West Asia 2024 – 2032

(20 September 2025)

Geographic scope: Bahrain, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen

Milestones in the production of this action plan

- February 2020: initial information gathering by online questionnaire to inform stakeholder workshop (postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic)
- October 2021: stakeholder workshop held on the shores of the Dead Sea, Jordan
- November 2021: draft Action Plan was circulated for comment
- February 2022: online stakeholder workshop
- June 2022: updated draft Action Plan circulated for comment
- January 2024: discussion and comments at Working Group Meeting in Riyadh
- May 2025: discussion and agreement at 1st Meeting of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Task Force

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, bird populations have been experiencing a dramatic and unprecedented decline. For wild birds, illegal taking and trade, is a main driver of global extinctions, and it is the most significant threat, after habitat loss, to migratory birds. The illegal hunting, taking and trade of birds occurs worldwide, e.g., poisoning of vultures in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ogada 2014), shooting of raptors in Europe (Selås et al. 2017) and North America (Finkelstein et al. 2014), trapping of songbirds in Asia (Kamp et al. 2015) and capture for the bird trade in South America (Alves et al. 2013). Illegal killing and taking poses a global threat to biodiversity and has attracted international attention. For example, in 2014, the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) adopted a Resolution later revised in COP14 [CMS Resolution 11.16 \(Rev. COP14\) The Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds](#).

In the Middle East, high levels of illegal hunting, taking and trade of birds were reported in Mediterranean countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, as well as in nearby Cyprus in a study by BirdLife International (Brochet et al. 2016). This study estimated that between 11– 36 million birds/year may be illegally killed or taken in the whole Mediterranean region, including 6–22 million in the Mediterranean Middle Eastern countries (i.e., Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Turkey) and Cyprus. Global action plans for globally threatened species, such as White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* (Endangered; Sheldon et al. 2018), Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* (Endangered; Kovács et al. 2014), Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (Near Threatened; Robinson & Hughes 2006) and Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* (Critically Endangered; Sheldon et al. 2012) and the Vulture Multi-species Action Plan (Botha et al. 2017) all highlight illegal killing and trapping as an important threat.

The definition of illegal taking of birds

To simplify the text throughout the Action Plan we refer to illegal taking of birds, however this does include hunting, trapping, trade and other types of illegality. When referring to illegal taking we are following the definition adopted by CMS Resolution 11.16 Rev COP14, which is as follows:

“Activities which are illegal under national or regional law/regulations and involve the deliberate pursuit, killing, injuring or catching alive of wild birds or are aimed at illegal marketing live or dead specimens of wild birds, including their parts and derivatives.

Such activities include but are not limited to: killing/trapping in closed periods, in areas with prohibitions in force, by unauthorised persons and/or protected species; use of prohibited means and substances; breach of bag limits; possession, donation, use, movement, transfer, offer for sale, advertisement, consumption, import, introduction from the sea, transit or export, of specimens.”

How many birds are illegally killed and taken in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq? Using a diverse range of data sources and incorporating expert knowledge, BirdLife International estimated in 2019, that at least 1.7–4.6 million (best estimate: 3.2 million) birds are illegally taken each year across the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq (Brochet et al. 2019). Worryingly, it is likely that these figures are underestimates, as data were not available for some parts of the region. A wide range of birds are likely to be affected with evidence suggesting that at least 413 different species are illegally killed and/or trapped, many of them during their perilous migratory journeys from breeding to wintering grounds and back. Several species of global conservation concern were reported as illegally taken, including Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* and European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur* (all classified as Vulnerable on the global IUCN Red List). Of even greater concern, the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was reported to be known or likely to be taken illegally each year. This is particularly worrying given the small population size and recent rapid decline of the species (Sheldon et al. 2013). Birds were reported to be illegally killed or taken primarily for sport, but also for food, sold mainly as a delicacy. In most countries, a much stronger focus on monitoring, effective legislation, enforcement, justice and prevention, particularly through awareness raising should be key priorities to tackle the illegal killing and taking of birds.

International flyway context

The countries of the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding region—Bahrain, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen—occupy a strategically important position along the Central Asian and East African-West Asian flyways, which are critical migratory routes for millions of birds, including waterbirds, raptors, and passerines. These routes connect breeding grounds in northern Eurasia with wintering sites in Africa and southern Asia, making the region a key stopover and wintering area. Several of these countries host internationally important wetlands, coastal habitats, and desert oases that are essential for migratory species’ survival, especially in light of increasing habitat degradation, hunting pressures, and the impacts of climate change.

Within the framework of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), most of these countries are recognized as important Range States for numerous Appendix I and II species. Table 1 offers a summary of the applicability of CMS instruments within the Task Force Range States. The launch of a new Task Force against the Illegal Taking of Birds represents a major step forward to tackle and prioritise efforts against one of the top threats to migratory birds in this region.

Synergies with other CMS instruments such as the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) Initiative and the CMS Raptors MoU and AEWA (Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds)—could significantly enhance the conservation impact across this critical flyway corridor.

Table 1. Summary of applicability of major international conservation instruments by country within the geographic scope of this Action Plan.

| Country | Party to CMS | Party to AEWA | Signatory to Raptors MoU | Party to CBD | Party to Ramsar |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Bahrain | √ | | | √ | √ |
| Iran (Islamic Republic of) | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| Iraq | √ | | | √ | √ |
| Jordan | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Kuwait | | | | √ | √ |
| Oman | | | | √ | √ |
| Qatar | | | | √ | |
| Saudi Arabia | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| United Arab Emirates | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| Yemen | √ | | √ | √ | √ |

Long-term vision:

South-West Asia will be a safe haven for all wild birds and their illegal hunting and taking are eradicated.

Overarching long-term goal:

To eliminate the illegal taking of migratory (ITB) birds in South-West Asia, through international cooperation and effective national action.

High-level objective of this action plan (up to 2032):

By 2032 there will be at least a 30% reduction in the numbers of birds illegally hunted and taken compared to the agreed baseline, in the region.

Objectives:

- Objective 1:** Enhance our understanding of the importance, scope, scale, geography and motivations behind illegal taking of migratory birds at national and regional level.
- Objective 2:** Each range state to develop, endorse and implement a National ITB Action Plan, or equivalent policy document, and in line with this regional plan.
- Objective 3:** To ensure that the illegal taking of migratory birds is addressed effectively and efficiently in national legislation that follows common principles across the region.
- Objective 4:** Each range state to ensure effective and efficient enforcement of relevant legislation is undertaken, through the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.
- Objective 5:** To undertake education, outreach programmes and capacity building to improve awareness on ITB within and beyond the region.
- Objective 6:** To ensure cooperation and participation in international fora, ensuring and benefiting from exchange of experience and best practice.
- Objective 7:** To address socio economic issues and circumstances driving ITB in the region.

Annex 2:Activities previously discussed¹.

| Objective 1: Enhance our understanding of the importance, scope, scale, geography and motivation of migratory birds at national and regional level | | |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Activity | Priority | Timescale |
| 1.1. Develop guidelines for carrying monitoring of ITB for the definition of the baseline | High | Q4 2025 |
| 1.2. Collate national baseline, and develop a baseline of the scale of ITB in the region so that progress towards the Action Plan vision and goals can be quantified and measured | High | Q4 2026 |
| 1.3. Develop guidelines for undertaking national socio-economic assessments to understand motivations behind ITB | High | Q4 2025 |
| 1.4. Carry out socio-economic studies and assessments of the ITB situations in each country describing ITB forms, distribution and impact. | High | Q4 2026 |
| 1.5. Carry out an analysis (synthesis report) on the understanding of types, scope, scale, geography and drivers of ITB at regional level based on national level | High | Q4 2027 |
| | | |

| Objective 2: Each range state to develop, endorse and implement a National ITB Action Plan, or equivalent, and in line with this regional plan | | |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Activity | Priority | Timescale |
| 2.1. Develop regional guidelines for the development and implementation of National ITB Action Plans and relevant policy documents | High | Q4 2025 |

¹ Column headings are indicative and can be amended or additional columns can be inserted to include 'Target', 'Indicators', e.t.c., depending on preferences.

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|---|------|-----------|--|
| 2.2. Organise Regional Workshops to endorse the guidelines on National ITB Action Plans and encourage and support development of National ITB plans | High | Q3 2026 | Coordinator and Range States for funding |
| 2.3. Develop and implement National ITB Action Plans through a consultative process or equivalent | High | 2026-2030 | Coordinator and Range States |

Objective 3: To ensure that the illegal taking of migratory birds is addressed effectively and efficiently in national legislation, that follows common principles across the region

| Activity | Priority | Timescale | Responsibility |
|--|----------|-----------|--|
| 3.1. Develop regional best practice guidance document for national regulations on taking (including hunting tourism) | High | Q3 2027 | Coordinator with Range States funding permitting |
| 3.2. Develop a synthesis report for regional national regulations on taking-including national recommendations | High | Q3 2027 | Coordinator funding permitting |
| 3.3. Organize Regional workshop to promote regional best practice guidance | Medium | Q1 2028 | Coordinator with Range States (host state) |
| 3.4. If necessary, Range States to amend national regulations in line with best practice guidance | High | 2030 | Range States |

Objective 4: Each range state to ensure effective and efficient enforcement of relevant legislation is undertaken, through the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary

| Activity | Priority | Timescale | Responsibility |
|---|----------|-----------|----------------|
| 4.1. Conduct situation analysis of the enforcement of relevant legislation (based on existing tools (e. g. ICCWC Analytic Toolkit ²)) | High | Q3 2027 | Range States |
| 4.2. Assign agencies dedicated to law enforcement and prosecution | High | By 2029 | Range States |

² https://cites.org/sites/default/files/common/resources/pub/ICCWC_Toolkit_v2_english.pdf

| | | | |
|---|--------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| 4.3. Build technical capacity of law enforcement agencies and judiciary through training courses and exchange visits. | Medium | Ongoing (2032) | Range States and CMS Secretariat |
| 4.4. Allocate to law enforcement agencies sufficient resources to properly enforce legislation. | Medium | Ongoing (2032) | Range States |
| | | | |

Objective 5: To undertake education, outreach programmes and capacity building to improve awareness on ITB within and beyond the region

| Activity | Priority | Timescale | Responsibility |
|--|----------|----------------|--|
| 5.1. Promote the wonder of the phenomenon of migration, the value of birds and the need of protection to a wide audience, especially schools and local communities, respecting cultural norms and using modern methods, including social media | High | Ongoing (2032) | Range States, with support from Coordinator and other stakeholders |
| 5.2. Consider engaging local communities in citizen science and bird protection, as appropriate | High | Ongoing (2032) | Range States and stakeholders |
| 5.3. Develop national and regional multistakeholder working groups to develop and support programmes on education, outreach and capacity building | High | 2027 | Range States and Coordinator |

Objective 6: To ensure cooperation and participation in international fora, ensuring and benefiting from exchange of experience and best practice

| Activity | Priority | Timescale | Responsibility |
|---|----------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| 6.1. Contribute to international flyway initiatives (Central Asian Flyway Initiative, AEWA) | Low | Ongoing (2032) | Range States and Coordinator |
| 6.2. Participate and contribute to meetings of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Task Force, and other CMS initiatives that promote cooperation and exchange of best practice | High | Ongoing (2032) | Range States and CMS Secretariat |

Objective 7: To address socio economic issues and circumstances driving ITB in the region

| Activity | Priority | Timescale | Responsibility |
|---|----------|----------------|----------------|
| 7.1. Establish national socio-economic programs at identified hotspot areas / pilot project | Medium | Ongoing (2032) | Range States |
| 7.2. Explore alternative livelihood options, such as bird watching | Medium | Ongoing (2032) | Range States |
| 7.3. Utilize sociological approaches for behavioral change, such as local championship programs | Medium | Ongoing (2032) | Range States |

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