UN environment programme CMS

# Fact Sheet

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

# ILLEGAL TAKING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS
## *CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS*

Red Backed Shrike caught on lime stick © Mindy El Bashir/Nature Conservation Egypt

## The Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds is Threatening Their Survival

The overexploitation of birds, i.e., removing and using more individuals from a population than what it can sustain, e.g., **for food or as pets**, is one of the most important threats to wild birds globally. According to the State of the World's Birds (BirdLife International 2022[1]), overexploitation is the most geographically widespread threat to birds, affecting up to 45% of species. Illegal taking of birds is a subcategory of overexploitation and is defined as any action involving hunting, capturing, deliberate killing or trapping that is not allowed according to the national legislation of the country in question and/or under the commitments undertaken by that country through international conventions and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) it has signed up to. Inevitably, what constitutes illegal taking depends on what is allowed by national or regional legislation or more often, what is not clearly defined as prohibited.

A non-exhaustive list of examples of illegal taking of birds includes killing or trapping birds for food, trapping or stealing from nests for trading as pets, food or for other uses. Taking is done with various methods, including with mist nets, lime sticks, shotguns, air guns, intentional poisoning, and traps that either kill the birds or catch them alive.

### HOTSPOTS FOR ILLEGAL TAKING OF BIRDS

- Mediterranean – 25 Million of birds annually killed estimated by NGO[2] (shooting, trapping)
- West Africa - catastrophic poisoning incidents affecting vultures for belief-based use[3]
- Indo-Burma - unsustainable hunting and high incidental mortality from trapping threaten even common species

### CATEGORIES OF SPECIES AFFECTED

1. Passerines (songbirds) (e.g., Chaffinch, Warblers)
2. Waterbirds (e.g., Marbled Teal)
3. Gamebirds (e.g., Common Quail)
4. Raptors (e.g., Hooded Vultures *(Necrosyrtes monachus)*
5. Others (e.g., European Bee-eaters)

Illegal taking of birds is difficult to detect, and because of its illegal character, very difficult to monitor accurately. Governments, NGOs and researchers have tried to assess the scale of illegal killing and taking in some parts of the world, but the global scale of the problem is still largely unknown and probably underestimated.

[1] BirdLife International (2022) State of the World's Birds 2022: Insights and solutions for the biodiversity crisis. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International

[2] Brochet, et al. (2016) Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean, Bird Conservation International, 26:1–28.

[3] Ogada, D. et al. (2016) Another Continental Vulture Crisis: Africa's Vultures Collapsing toward Extinction Conserv. Lett. 9(2): 89-97

# ILLEGAL TAKING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS
## *CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS*

## CMS Initiatives on the Prevention of Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds

Tackling illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds is usually a complex issue, dependent on national and local circumstances. Unclear and insufficient legislation, insufficient resources for law enforcement, traditions and cultural beliefs, poverty, profit making and lack of awareness of the significance and massive impact of wildlife crime at the enforcement or judicial level are common examples of why it is continuing to happen. Best practices on dealing with illegal taking of birds involve a multitude of measures and multi stakeholder groups. The Convention on Migratory Species adopted in 2014 Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) on *The Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds*. Based on the mandate of this Resolution, the CMS Secretariat convened the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT) in 2016 and the Asia Pacific Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force (ITTEA) in 2022. A new Task Force for Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds in South-West Asia is expected to be convened in 2025 and a West African Vulture Conservation Action Plan 2023-2043 was presented at COP14 in 2024. Other regions of interest for assessing the impact of illegal taking include Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO ADDRESS ILLEGAL TAKING OF BIRDS

Although there have been many national and regional concerns on the impact of the illegal killing and taking of migratory birds for decades, very few regions have performed accurate assessments of the scale of this threat. As an example, since 2011 in the Mediterranean region, various national and international initiatives have put together plans of action to address this wildlife crime. All those plans recommend the elaboration of a national Action Plan through convening a multi-stakeholder committee to engage as wide a group of interested parties as possible, and to monitor and evaluate its implementation. Additionally, they recommend five main pillars of action: 1) Monitoring the scale and scope of the problem and the motivations for why people take part in it; 2) Working on prevention through raising awareness, training and examining alternative livelihoods in areas where poverty is an important motivation; 3) Ensuring that national legislation is clear and efficient, respecting international agreements and obligations; 4) Ensuring enforcement agencies are well staffed and treat illegal taking as priority; and 5) Ensuring justice treats illegal taking as priority and impose penalties that act as disincentives. Another vital factor is the need to mobilise funds for combating illegal taking and to create national and international networks for sharing knowledge and promoting best practice.

Photos: Chaffinch © Canva.com; Participants of MIKT-Meeting, Valencia, Spain 2022 © Iván Ramírez/CMS Secretariat

## About CMS

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. It has 133 Parties (as of 1 January 2023).

CMS engages all relevant stakeholders in addressing threats to migratory species in concert with all other aspects of wildlife conservation and management.

## CMS Instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing on its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans.

For more Fact Sheets please visit: http://www.cms.int/en/publications/factsheets

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