



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

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DRAFT ACTION PLAN TO ERADICATE THE ILLEGAL HUNTING, TAKING AND TRADE OF BIRDS IN SOUTH-WEST ASIA 2024-2032

(Prepared by SWA Working Group)

(As of 7 January 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 Draft Action Plan vision, goals and objectives presented in Annex 1 is the resulting document after discussion of an earlier draft during a meeting of the South-West Asia Working Group on illegal hunting, taking and trade of migratory birds, on 15-16 January 2024 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
4. The changes agreed at the working group meeting in January 2024 are shown in the document. Text deletions in ~~strike through~~ and text additions in underlined text.

5. The Activities presented in Annex 2 serve as a reference of past work on the action plan that could serve as the basis for discussion for this meeting with the goal of agreeing on a final Draft Action Plan, including a list of specific activities.
6. The history of the document is as follows: In February 2020, an online questionnaire aiming at gathering initial information and perspectives from a broad range of stakeholders was circulated. The valuable data collected was used to inform a stakeholder workshop planned for later in that year. The Covid-19 pandemic caused the postponement of the workshop, prompting a strategic reshaping of the development process.
7. In October 2021 stakeholders met at a workshop held on the shores of the Dead Sea in Jordan. This in-person gathering provided a critical platform for focused discussion, debate, and collaborative vision-building. Building on the information gathered from the online questionnaire and the workshop in October 2021, a draft Action Plan was formulated and circulated for comment in November 2021.
8. The feedback received during that consultation phase proved invaluable in further refining the Action Plan, paving the way for the second online workshop in February 2022. That online workshop served as a further opportunity to solicit inputs and ensure broad ownership of the Action Plan.
9. Following the workshop in February 2022, the draft Action Plan was once again updated and recirculated for comment in June 2022, incorporating the final round of feedback to produce an advanced draft for consideration by a working group meeting which took place in January 2024 in Riyadh, KSA hosted by KSA's National Wildlife Center. At that working group meeting the draft Action Plan was discussed again and further amendments and improvements were agreed.
10. The robust development process outlined above testifies to the commitment to ensure the Action Plan reflects the diverse perspectives and priorities of all stakeholders involved.

Participants are requested to:

- a) Agree on the Vision, Goals and Objectives of the Draft Action Plan.
- b) Comment and agree on the Draft Action Plan, activities, priorities, timescale and responsible partners, using the previous work as a reference, and taking into account the relevant Decisions agreed at COP14.
- c) Agree on the way forward with regards to the adoption of the Action Plan at the next TF meeting.

Annex 1:

Action Plan to eradicate the illegal hunting, and taking, and trade of birds in South-West Asia 2024 – 2030 (Draft)

(16 January 2024)

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

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, bird populations have been experiencing a dramatic and unprecedented decline. For wild birds, illegal hunting, 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 and 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 COP134 [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 hunting of birds

To simply the text throughout the Action Plan we refer to illegal hunting and taking of birds, however this does include trapping, trade and other types of illegality. However, when referring to illegal hunting and trapping we are following the legal definition adopted by CMS Resolution 11.13 Rev CoP13, 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.

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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, it has been estimated that at least 1.7–4.6 million (best estimate: 3.2 million) birds are illegally killed or 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 killed or 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 killed 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 obligations and flyway context

[Introductory text to be inserted]

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 killing and taking are eradicated.

Overarching long-term goal:

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

High-level objective of this action plan (up to 2030):

By 2030 there will be a 50% significant reduction in the numbers of birds illegally hunted killed and taken compared to the agreed baseline, in the region all countries.

Objectives:

Objective 1: Each range state to develop, endorse and implement a National ITB Action Plan, or equivalent policy document, ~~where necessary~~, and in line with this regional plan.

Objective 2: Enhance our understanding of the ~~hotspots~~, importance, scope, scale, geography and motivations behind illegal hunting, ~~and taking and trade~~ of migratory birds at national and ~~at the~~ regional level.

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

Objective 4: To ensure effective and efficient enforcement of relevant legislation is

undertaken, through the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.

Objective 5: To undertake education, ~~and outreach programmes~~ and capacity building to improve awareness on ~~the prevention of illegal hunting and taking of ITB wild migratory birds~~ within and beyond the region.

Objective 6: ~~To enhance capacity building in the region, including through sharing experience and best practice within and beyond the region to eliminate illegal hunting and taking of wild migratory birds.~~

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 2₁: Enhance our understanding of the importance, scope, scale, <u>geography</u> and motivations behind illegal hunting, <u>taking trapping</u>, and trade of birds at the regional level			
Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
<u>Develop guidelines for carrying monitoring of ITB for the definition of the baseline</u>			
Develop a baseline estimate at national level			
<u>Collate national baseline, and Ddevelop a baseline estimate of the scale of ITB in the region so that progress towards the Action Plan vision and goals can be quantified and measured</u>			
Develop a baseline estimate of the scale of ITB in the region so that progress towards the Action Plan vision and goals can be quantified and measured			
Develop guidelines for undertaking national socio-economic assessments to understand motivations behind ITB			
Carry out socio-economic studies and assessments of the ITB situations in each country describing ITB forms, and distribution and impact.			
<u>Carry out an analysis on the understanding of types, scope, scale, geography and drivers of ITB at regional level</u>			

Objective 4₂: Each range state to develop, endorse and implement a National ITB Action Plan, or equivalent, where necessary			
Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility

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

Provide regional guidelines for the development and implementation of National ITB Action Plans and relevant policies			
<u>Organise Regional Workshops to promote the guidelines on National ITB Action Plans and encourage and support development of National ITB plans</u>			
Develop the guidelines for the development and implementation of National ITB Action Plans <u>through a consultative process</u>			
Need for National ITB Action Plan identified			
National ITB Action Plan developed through a consultative process			

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

Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
Organize Regional workshop on hunting legislation.			
Develop common standards for national hunting legislation.			

Objective 4: To ensure effective and efficient enforcement of relevant legislation is undertaken, through the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary

Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
Conduct situation analysis of the enforcement of relevant legislation (based on existing tools (e. g. ICCWC Analytic Toolkit ²))			
Build technical capacity of law enforcement agencies through training courses and exchange visits.			
Allocate to law enforcement agencies sufficient resources to properly enforce legislation.			

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

Objective 5: To undertake education and outreach programmes to improve awareness on the prevention of illegal killing, trapping, taking and trade of wild birds To undertake education, outreach programmes and capacity building to improve awareness on ITB within and beyond the region

Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
Promote the wonder of migration to a wide audience			
<u>Consider engaging local communities in citizen science, as appropriate</u>			
Contribute to international flyway initiatives (Central Asian Flyway Initiative/AEWA)			

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

Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility

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

Activity	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility

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Proposed Annex: Country profiles for each country

[Feedback is that this would be useful and should include an outline on which species are illegally killed (not numbers) and the key types of illegal killing. It could also include information on bird species present, protected areas, current legislation etc]

Proposed Annex: Examples of best practice in tackling ITB?

[Use MIKT as an example and provide links to the relevant documentation]