

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

The Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT)

Joint action against a key threat for birds in the Mediterranean



Cover image: Bee-eater



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The Threat

Migratory birds cross continents and depend on safe conditions along their flyways, regardless of borders. The Mediterranean is a crucial passage for these birds, offering both a significant natural challenge and essential places to rest and feed. Each spring and autumn, millions of birds – including warblers, waterbirds, game birds, and raptors – migrate between Europe, Asia, and Africa, relying on wetlands, coasts, and forests as stopover sites.

Many migratory birds crossing the Mediterranean are illegally killed or trapped, mainly for food, as pets, or for sale. According to BirdLife International's 2016 study¹, up to 25 million birds may be killed each year in this region. This illegal activity is a major concern for the conservation of those species, undermining species protection and hindering population recovery.

Birds are killed, taken and trapped with many different illegal methods. The most prevalent are:

Illegal shooting

Can include, shooting protected species, like raptors on migration or shooting a huntable species outside its hunting season, e.g. spring hunting of Turtle dove.



Mist nets

These fine, almost invisible nets are becoming more common in the Mediterranean. They are stretched between trees or bushes so that birds flying through get caught. Mist nets are legally used for scientific research and bird ringing, but they are often misused. When combined with loudspeakers that play bird songs, they can attract up to ten times more birds, making trapping even more damaging.

Other nets

While mist nets are the most common, other types of nets are also used. Clap nets are set on the ground, and the trapper manually triggers them when birds are lured into the area – often using decoys. Trammel nets, which are usually made for fishing, can also be misused to trap birds, especially larger species.

Decoys

Trappers often use live birds that have been previously trapped in the wild. They are placed in small cages and left outside to attract different species such as finches and buntings. When wild birds approach the decoy, trappers capture them.

Bird callers

These devices play recorded bird songs to attract wild birds, increasing the number of individuals caught. They have become very easily available these days, because they can be mobile phones with battery powered speakers.

Lime sticks

These are sticks covered with a sticky substance and placed in bushes and trees where birds are likely to perch. When a bird perches on them, it becomes trapped – and the more it struggles to free itself, the more firmly it gets stuck. Apart from illegal, it is also a particularly cruel trapping method.

Traps

A large number of different traps are used across the Mediterranean for catching birds. Snap traps are baited and snap shut when a bird steps on them, killing it. Stone traps use a large slab of stone supported by sticks that drops when the bird steps on them, crushing the bird.



C Poisoned Golden eagle, Greece

Poisoning

This method refers to the use of banned and non-banned substances that violate national or international laws or regulations on their use (e.g. applying a substance above ground when it is permitted only in-ground) and end up killing birds. Poisons are often placed in nature to target animals like wolves, foxes or stray dogs. However, scavenging birds frequently eat the poisoned bait or the poisoned animals and die as a result. This makes poisoning a widespread and highly dangerous threat to many bird species.

Snares

Although not very common, snares can be set along a branch in some regions for trapping small birds (passerines).

Nest poaching

This involves taking young birds directly from their nests so they can be raised in captivity. Trappers will usually target chicks, and it is mostly used for raptors and finches.



D Flycatcher caught in snap trap, Italy

Map of the Mediterranean Region

- 1 SLOVENIA
- 2 CROATIA
- 3 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
- 4 MONTENEGRO
- 5 ALBANIA
- # OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

► The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

* Non-Self-Governing Territory

UNITED NATIONS Geospatial Map
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E Red-backed Shrike.



What motivates illegal taking of birds?

Research into the socio-economic drivers of IKB is limited, but evidence points to financial gain as a major motivator. Other reasons include hobbies, cultural practices, food provision, social status, subsistence, or crop protection. MIKT is conducting a survey to better understand the key factors that drive, enable or motivate individuals to engage in IKB.

One more factor pushing species to decline

Wild birds are threatened by habitat loss and degradation from agriculture, urban expansion, infrastructure development, fires, climate change, and invasive species. Overexploitation, including illegal killing, taking and trade (IKB), further endangers vulnerable migratory species. BirdLife International (2016) found about 65% of Mediterranean bird species are affected by IKB, with waterbirds and birds of prey especially at risk.

Internet trade and influencers

Much of the illegal bird trade has shifted online, making it easier to buy and sell birds and trapping equipment like mist nets. Online platforms enable cross-border transactions and higher profits. Social media trends, such as posing with raptors or rare birds for 'likes,' have fueled increased trapping and trading, particularly of large species like eagles and falcons.

The Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT)

CMS adopted Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) *The Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds* in 2014 in order to encourage an international multi-stakeholder process leading to a common approach to tackle IKB within a complex political and socio-economic landscape. The adoption of Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) led to the creation of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT). MIKT had its first meeting in Egypt (Cairo, 2016) and adopted a declaration to "a zero tolerance approach to any deliberate IKB which contravenes national law and the commitments under international conventions and MEAs".

The work of MIKT is currently guided by the [Rome Strategic Plan 2020-2030: Eradicating Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade in Wild Birds in Europe and the Mediterranean region](#) (RSP), the common strategic framework of the MIKT and the Council of Europe's Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).



The Rome Strategic Plan

The Rome Strategic Plan was jointly developed by MIKT and the Bern Convention. The overarching long-term goal of the Rome Strategic Plan is the eradication of IKB within the geographic scope of the Bern Convention and MIKT.

Eradicating illegal killing, taking, and trade of migratory birds is complex. The Rome Strategic Plan addresses this by encouraging multistakeholder development of National IKB Action Plans (IKB NAPs) as a key national strategy. Thus, elaborating these plans is considered a Process Oriented Objective.

F

Song thrush trapped in mist net, Cyprus.



The goal of the Rome Strategic Plan for 2030 is a **50% reduction** of the scale and scope of IKB compared to a 2020 baseline.



There are five Result Oriented Objectives:

1

To understand the scope, scale and motivations behind illegal killing, taking and trade of birds

Illegal activities are difficult to monitor due to a lack of reliable data and unwillingness of perpetrators to report them. Effective monitoring is essential to determine the scope of the issue and inform appropriate action within a country.

Monitoring the level of illegal taking is central to deciding if, who, what, where, how, and when action should be taken.

Monitoring illegal taking can provide a good, common understanding of:

- Which types of illegal taking are most common in a country;
- Which species are affected and in what numbers;
- Where are the hotspots of illegal activity;
- What time of year the activity is taking place;
- What are the motivations for illegal taking.

Understanding the motivations for the illegal taking is crucial for planning action, providing or encouraging alternatives and targeting the right audience.

To help countries conduct socio-economic research, the MIKT members endorsed Methodology and Guidance².





Poison detection dog unit on patrol, Greece.

2

To establish an active prevention of the illegal killing, taking and trade of birds

Preventing illegal bird taking is more effective than prosecuting offenders afterwards. Key prevention methods include raising awareness, building capacity among the public or targeted groups, increasing patrols (such as with poison-detection dogs), and using technology to monitor activity.

Raising awareness helps shift attitudes, influence political action, and reduce demand for illegally caught birds. NGOs play a major role in these efforts across the Mediterranean by educating communities, supporting authorities, and monitoring illegal practices. Examples of successful strategies can be found in a Good Practices guide developed by the European Commission.³

3

To ensure that the illegal killing of birds is addressed effectively and efficiently in national legislation

Clear national legislation is vital for effective law enforcement and prosecution, while unclear laws create loopholes. The Rome Strategic Plan urges countries to assess their laws.

In 2022, MIKT produced two resources to aid this: [Legislative Guidance Materials](#) and [Model Law Provisions on Illegal Killing, Taking, and Trade of Wild Birds](#).

4

To ensure that effective and efficient enforcement of relevant legislation is undertaken

This objective focuses on training specialised units for national IKB enforcement, supporting effective investigations and evidence collection for prosecution. It also promotes cross-border collaboration and prioritises IKB crime investigation.

The [Wildlife Crime Academy](#), supported by the Vulture Conservation Foundation and Spanish authorities, exemplifies how quality training leads to successful convictions and has already benefited many government officials in MIKT countries.

5

To ensure effective and efficient justice for IKB-related offences

This objective focuses on ensuring the justice system imposes effective penalties to deter crime and emphasizes the importance of training prosecutors and judges. Despite connections to other criminal activities, wildlife crime is often a low priority for legal professionals who handle diverse cases.

Capacity building and experience sharing among prosecutors and judges can increase awareness of wildlife crimes and the need for stricter penalties. Specialised training helps develop prosecutors with deeper expertise in wildlife issues. In 2018, MIKT and ENPE held a joint training for prosecutors, with more such activities planned.

European Turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur*

The European Turtle dove is a widespread species, breeding across much of Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and wintering mainly in the Sahel zone of Africa. It is listed in CMS Appendix II. The species has undergone significant declines across its range and is now listed as Vulnerable⁴ under the IUCN Red List. The population decline led to the adoption of an International Single Species Action Plan (SSAP)⁵ in 2018. The Turtle dove is a very popular huntable species across the Mediterranean. According to the SSAP **illegal killing was assessed as a Critical threat** for the species. According to the SSAP, it was estimated that large numbers of the species are illegally killed each year in Greece, Libya, Syria and Egypt. **Being a favoured game species the species is also traded illegally**, both in markets, e.g. in Egypt, but also online.

In parallel, ‘Unsustainable hunting pressure on turtle doves’ the quantities of birds hunted legally, has been methodically addressed at EU level with some notable successes in the Western Flyway.



H Shot Turtle dove, Malta.

The Blackcap and the Goldfinch: popular victims of take

The Eurasian Blackcap⁶ (*Sylvia atricapilla*) is a widespread European species with varied migration behaviors, many of which cross the Mediterranean during migration or to spend the winter. Listed in CMS Appendix II, Blackcaps face extensive illegal trapping across the region, especially in Cyprus, where they are caught for food and sold as the delicacy ‘ampelopoulia.’ BirdLife International estimates up to 1.8 million are killed each year, mainly in Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria.

The European Goldfinch⁷ (*Carduelis carduelis*) is a popular cagebird in the Mediterranean, often trapped or bred from stolen chicks for sale. High demand in the Maghreb, especially Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, has led to a 56% range reduction in North Africa, mainly in Algeria.



I Eurasian Blackcap.



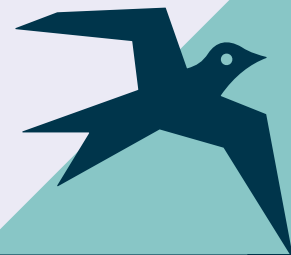
Numbers impacted

NGO BirdLife International estimated in 2016 that among the species impacted there could be on average:

1.02 million waterbirds
(ducks, geese, rails, snipes and sandpipers)

19.85 million passerines

(buntings, thrushes, crows, warblers, flycatchers, swallows, larks, sparrows, etc)



710,000 doves and pigeons

80,000 raptors
(eagles, falcons, harriers and buzzards)

Lesser Spotted eagle *Clanga pomarina*

Illegal taking can represent a serious threat to the conservation status of a species

The Lesser Spotted eagle⁸ breeds in the northern hemisphere and migrates to eastern Africa, depending on thermals over dry land. Protected by several international agreements, it faces major threats from illegal shooting along its migration route over the Middle Eastern Mediterranean coast, especially in Egypt, Lebanon, and Türkiye. With 46,800–63,300 mature individuals globally, up to 7% may be shot each year crossing the Mediterranean⁹, compounding risks from habitat loss and other human activities. Improved enforcement and surveillance are crucial in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye to ensure safe migration.



Illegally shot Lesser Spotted eagles, Lebanon.



K

MIKT and Bern Convention Joint meeting participants in June 2022, Valencia, Spain.

The Task Force membership

The Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT) membership was agreed as part of the MIKT [modus operandi](#) and comprises of:

Nominated EU and Mediterranean region Party representatives¹⁰ from environment, game management, law enforcement, and judiciary bodies;

Representatives from other African-Eurasian Flyway Parties supporting the Task Force;

Observers from Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), represented by their Secretariats and international organisations such as European Network for Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE), the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE), and others;

Observers from international conservation and hunting NGOs;

Observers from CMS Scientific Council, AEWA Technical Committee, Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group, and the Bern Convention Expert Group on Birds;

Independent experts in migratory bird ecology, policy, illegal bird killing, taking, trade, and prevention.

CMS Initiatives on the Prevention of Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds

Tackling illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds is challenging and differs by region. Contributing factors include unclear laws, weak enforcement, cultural practices, poverty, profit motives, and low awareness. Solutions require varied approaches and strong collaboration among stakeholders.

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](#) in 2016, the [Asia Pacific Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force \(ITTEA\)](#) in 2023, and the [Task Force for Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds in South-West Asia](#) in 2025.

MIKT and Bern Convention Joint meeting participants in May 2025, Bonn, Germany.



Endnotes

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- 10 Members of MIKT: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Kingdom, and the European Union.

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What is CMS?

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is a legally binding international treaty under the United Nations. CMS is one of the most important global frameworks for wildlife conservation and plays a vital role in addressing the global biodiversity crisis. By fostering international collaboration, supporting research, and developing conservation agreements and actions among the Range States in which these species are found, CMS ensures the long-term survival of migratory species of wild animals and their habitats, and the vital benefits they provide.

Download this brochure



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.

