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# New report: Millions of birds still illegally killed – and most countries failing to stop it

Only 8 out of 46 countries on track to meet anti-poaching pledge by 2030

Despite bold promises to protect migratory birds, most countries are alarmingly off course, a new study reveals. BirdLife International and EuroNatur’s latest study ‘*The Killing 3.0: Progress on Eradicating Illegal Killing of Birds in the Mediterranean and Europe’* paints a stark picture: the vast majority of countries bordering the Mediterranean across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East are failing to deliver on their pledge to halve the illegal killing, taking, and trade of birds (IKB) by 2030.

Bird populations have plummeted at shocking rates in recent decades. Overexploitation, including IKB, is a leading driver of global bird extinctions, second only to habitat loss.[1] Every year, millions of birds are illegally shot, trapped, or poisoned across Europe and the Mediterranean, undermining conservation efforts along the flyway. [2]

Recognising the scale of this crisis, governments pledged coordinated action under the Bern Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species’ (CMS) [Rome Strategic Plan 2020–2030](https://www.cms.int/en/taskforce/mikt/rome-strategic-plan-2020-2023). With just five years left to reach the goal of the Rome Strategic Plan to halve IKB by 2030, progress is severely lagging. Urgent action is needed, or devastating losses to bird populations will be inevitable, some species could even be wiped out forever.

* **European Turtle Dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*): Currently listed as ‘Vulnerable’ on the IUCN Red List, tens of thousands are illegally shot each spring on the Ionian Islands in western Greece.
* **Egyptian Vulture** (*Neophron percnopterus*): Classified as ‘Endangered’, the Balkan breeding population is under severe threat from poisoning, often linked to the illegal use of poisoned bait targeting other wildlife.
* **European Goldfinch** (*Carduelis carduelis*): Although still listed as ‘Least Concern’, this once-common songbird is declining in many regions. It is widely trapped across North Africa and the Mediterranean for the illegal cage bird trade.

*‘The Killing 3.0’* assessed 46 countries, with a deep dive into 22 Mediterranean nations where illegal killing is particularly rampant. The findings are sobering: 38 countries are not on track to meet their 2030 commitments, profit appearing to be the biggest driver of IKB. In many of the worst-affected countries, responsible for around 90% of illegal killings, little to no progress has been made – and in some cases, the situation has worsened. [3]

**Dr. Barend van Gemerden, Global Flyways Programme Coordinator at BirdLife International***: “*The illegal killing of birds is not just a crime, it’s a tragedy that continues to threaten birds across entire migratory routes. High levels of illegal killing in one country can wipe out conservation successes in another. We urgently need stronger, coordinated, cross-border action across the full flyway. Reaching the 2030 goal is a tough challenge, but not an impossible one.”

Yet, there is cause for hope. Places like Spain and the Sovereign Base Areas of Cyprus, show that real progress is possible with strong political will, coordinated planning, and proper resourcing. [4]

**Dr. Justine Vansynghel, Project Manager at EuroNatur:**   
“The number of birds killed illegally each year remains unacceptably high. For many migratory birds, it spells death before they can even reach their breeding grounds. During the first half of the Rome Strategic Plan’s 10-year lifespan plenty of tools and guidance were developed to support national authorities. Now, it’s time to use them decisively to prevent further devastation.”

As governments [meet](https://www.cms.int/en/meeting/joint-meeting-bern-convention-network-special-focal-points-eradication-illegal-killing) this week to review their commitments, *The Killing 3.0* sends a clear message: the time for promises is over. Without urgent action, millions more birds will pay the price.

**ENDS.**

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**Notes to editor**

1. Overexploitation refers to the unsustainable use of biodiversity for purposes such as food, pets, sports, medicine, and ornamentation (e.g., taxidermy), whether through legal or illegal means, and is a major driver of species decline, including birds.
2. There is a wide array of different migratory strategies and a lot of variability in routes taken between species, and between individuals within a species or population. Amid that complexity emerge some broad patterns, which have led to the recognition of four “flyway systems” in the terrestrial realm. Some of these flyway systems are further split into recognised ‘flyways’. BirdLife International currently recognises eight flyways in the terrestrial realm (used by land and waterbird species) and six flyways in the marine realm (used by seabird species). More information: <https://datazone.birdlife.org/about-our-science/flyways>
3. The study compared progress between 2015–2019 and 2020–2024, identifying trends and challenges across different types of IKB, such as shooting, trapping, and poisoning, and across geographical regions. Our assessment shows that since 2020, the situation has improved in 2 of the top 10 highest IKB countries (Croatia and Greece), but the progress (5-24% reduction) is not enough to be on track to meet the RSP target. In 4 of the top 10 high IKB countries (Azerbaijan, Italy, France, Lebanon) there has been no indication of significant change in IKB in the past 5 years. In 4 of these countries (Egypt, Syria, Cyprus and Libya) the IKB situation has worsened during the 2020-2024 period.
4. The BirdLife Partnership works to support national authorities to address IKB. ‘The Killing 3.0’ provides recommendations for national and international action.