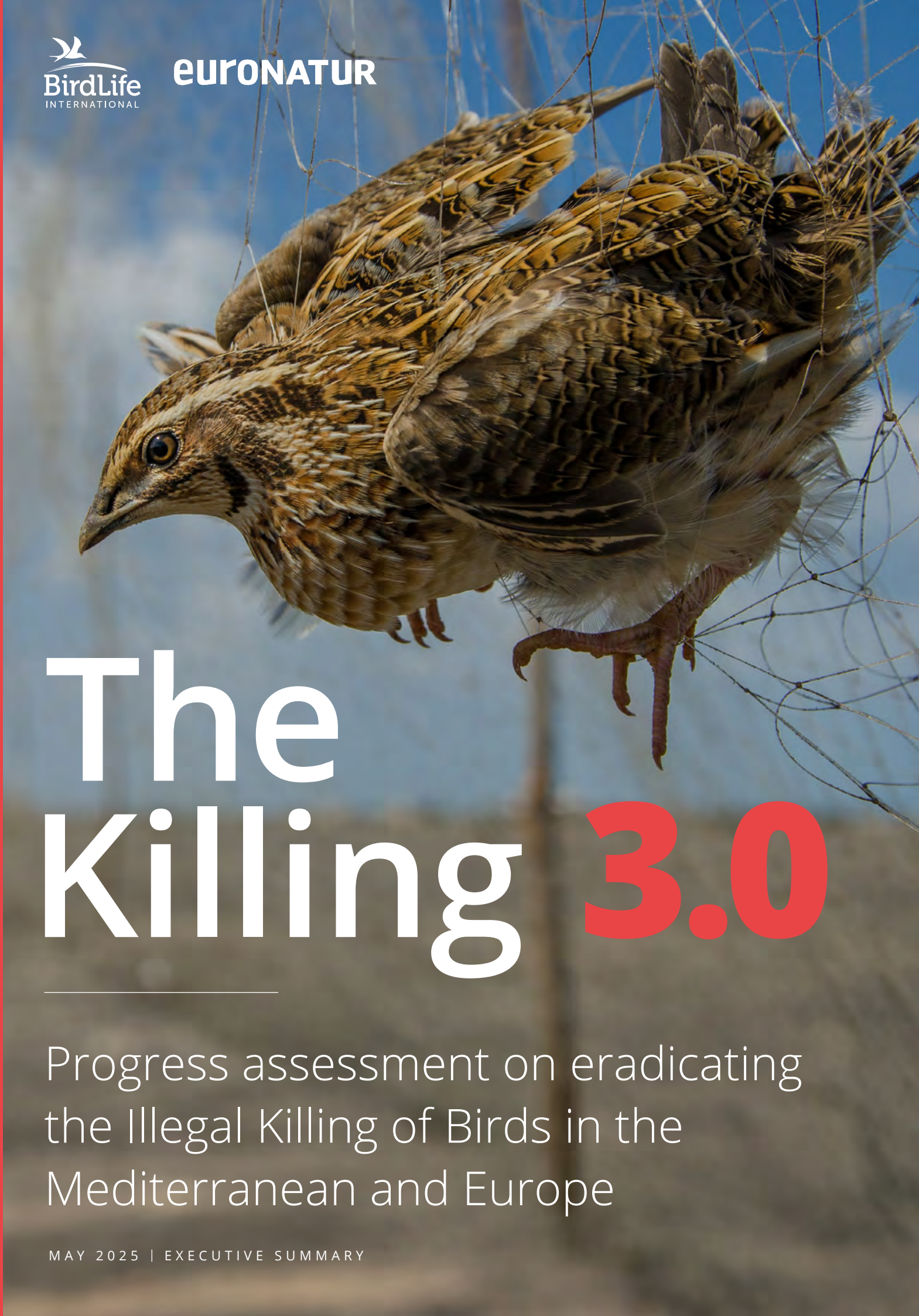

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The Killing 3.0

Progress assessment on eradicating the Illegal Killing of Birds in the Mediterranean and Europe

MAY 2025 | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Image © RSPB

Progress assessment on eradicating the Illegal Killing of Birds in the Mediterranean and Europe

Cover image: Trapped Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) © Watter AlBahry

Overview

In 2019, countries in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East committed to the Rome Strategic Plan (RSP), adopting a zero-tolerance approach and aiming to reduce illegal killing of birds (IKB) by at least 50% by 2030. With five years remaining, this report assesses whether governments are on track towards meeting the RSP goal and makes recommendations on where to focus efforts for the greatest impact in the remaining five years.

At the midpoint of the RSP, a survey of national NGOs and experts – coordinated by BirdLife International and EuroNatur – reveals that despite positive advances in some countries, the majority (83%) are not currently on track to meet the RSP goal. To change course in the remaining five years, a significant and sustained increase in political will, investment, and enforcement is needed from many national governments.

The study assessed 46 countries, including a more detailed assessment of 22 Mediterranean nations estimated to have the highest levels of IKB. Information was collected via a two-part questionnaire answered by experts of national conservation NGOs and academic institutions working on IKB. The first part scored national progress against six key thematic strategies to reduce IKB (Political will and co-operation, Monitoring, Legislation, Enforcement, Prosecution and sentencing, Communication and prevention), while the second part gathered narrative responses on the main challenges and recommendations for tackling IKB in the specific countries. Our analysis compared the progress between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024, identifying trends and challenges for different types of IKB (shooting, trapping, and poisoning) and across geographical regions.

The detailed assessment report and national level information is available online here

Key findings

Of the 46 assessed countries, only eight (17.4%) are assessed to be on track (i.e. half-way towards the goal of minimum 50% reduction in IKB by 2030) or have managed to keep IKB at a very low level. Twelve countries (26.1%) have seen slight reductions (reduction of 5-24%), seventeen countries (37%) report stable or fluctuating levels of IKB, and nine countries (19.6%) have experienced worsening trends, according to the experts.[1]

	Increase in IKB				Reduction in IKB			
	Large increase in IKB	Moderate increase in IKB	Slight increase in IKB	No significant change in IKB	Slight reduction in IKB	Moderate reduction in IKB	Large reduction in IKB	Very low level of IKB maintained
Range	+75%	+50%	+25%	+5%	-5%	-25%	-50%	-75%
Countries	0	0	9	17	12	2	1	5

Among the region's ten countries with highest levels of IKB (responsible for an estimated 90% of all IKB in the Mediterranean and Europe), two showed a slight improvement, four had no indication of significant change and four showed worsening trends for IKB activity.

8 countries on track to 50% reduction in IKB by 2030

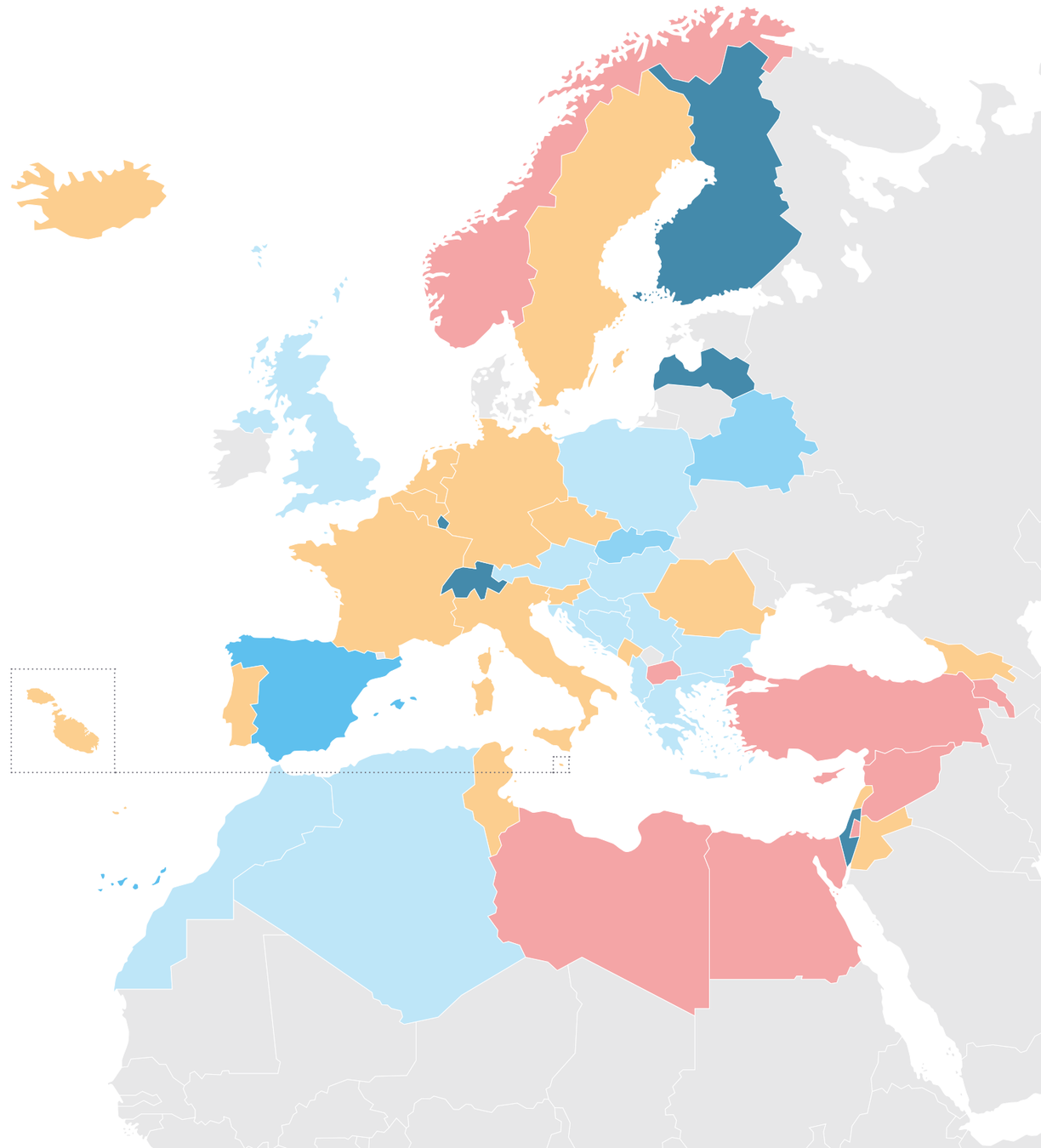
9 are experiencing worsening trends in IKB

12 countries reporting slight improvement in levels of IKB

17 countries reporting stable or fluctuating levels of IKB

[1]Figures are rounded. Rounding to one decimal place may result in totals differing slightly from 100%.

Progress toward implementing the Rome Strategic Plan showing the countries/territories coloured by their IKB trend during the period 2020-2024.



Recommendations for Government Action

1 Increase political will, develop and implement a National Action Plan

Efforts to address IKB face numerous challenges that hinder progress in mitigating this serious issue. To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive strategy must be developed and implemented at national level that combines legislative reform, enhanced enforcement, improved data collection, public awareness campaigns, international co-operation, and support for alternative livelihoods.

One major challenge is the lack of political will to prioritise IKB reduction. Only a limited number of countries have developed comprehensive national action plans to combat IKB, and even fewer have fully implemented them. To address this, governments need to demonstrate stronger commitment, develop National IKB Action Plans (an objective within the RSP) and ensure their implementation, guided by a multi-stakeholder NAP committee. Guidance is available for the development and implementation of national action plans against the illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds (IKB NAPs).[2]

Removing mist nets with the Internal Security forces © SPNL
Bottom: Training on life saving for injured birds © SPNL

2 Establish specific IKB enforcement agencies with sufficient resources

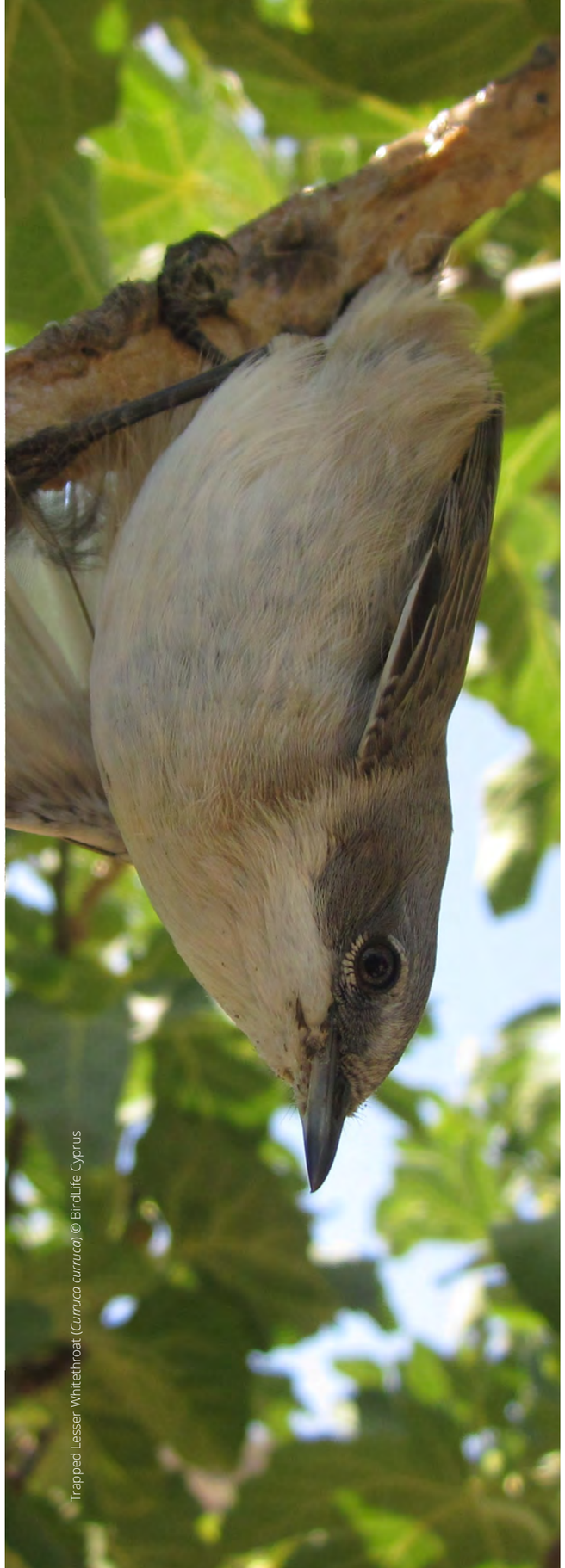
To strengthen enforcement, governments should create specialised enforcement units focused on wildlife crimes, improve co-ordination between agencies, and provide targeted training and protocols to law enforcement officers. Law enforcement agencies frequently lack the necessary resources and specialised training to detect and address wildlife crimes effectively. Although co-operation between agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has improved in recent years, it remains inadequate in many regions. Governments should enhance co-ordination between agencies and NGOs and ensure that enforcement units have the necessary resources to address IKB effectively.[3,4]

Useful resources

[2]CMS Secretariat. (2022). Guidance for the development and implementation of national action plans against the illegal killing, taking and trade of birds (Reference No. T-PVS/INF(2022)23-rev). Bern Convention Secretariat. https://rm.coe.int/inf23e-rev-guidance-for-the-development-and-implementation-of-ikb-naps/1680a8dd6a

[3]Junta de Andalucía/SEO/BirdLife (2022) Police investigation manual of offences against biodiversity.Madrid, Proyecto LIFE Guardianes de la Naturaleza Police investigation manual of offences against biodiversity https://guardianes.seo.org/download/police-investigation-manual-of-offences-against-biodiversity/

[4]Herrero Cangas, B. et al. (2021). The Enforcement Chain: can it effectively address the Illegal Killing of Birds in four Mediterranean countries? [Policy recommendation report]. LIFE Against Bird Crime project. https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LIFE-B3-Policy-Recommendation-Report.pdf The Enforcement Chain: can it effectively address the Illegal Killing of Birds in four Mediterranean countries?



Trapped Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*) © BirdLife Cyprus

3 Strengthen forensic evidence in IKB investigations

Governments should establish clear recommendations for the handling of forensic evidence in IKB cases, and must allocate the necessary technical and financial resources to support toxicological analyses and expert reports, which are essential for providing solid evidence in legal proceedings.

To enhance the effectiveness of investigations, governments should develop standardised action protocols for law enforcement officers, wildlife recovery centres, and toxicology laboratories. These protocols should outline best practices for evidence collection, chain of custody procedures, and forensic analysis, ensuring that investigations meet the legal standards required to establish responsibility and secure convictions.

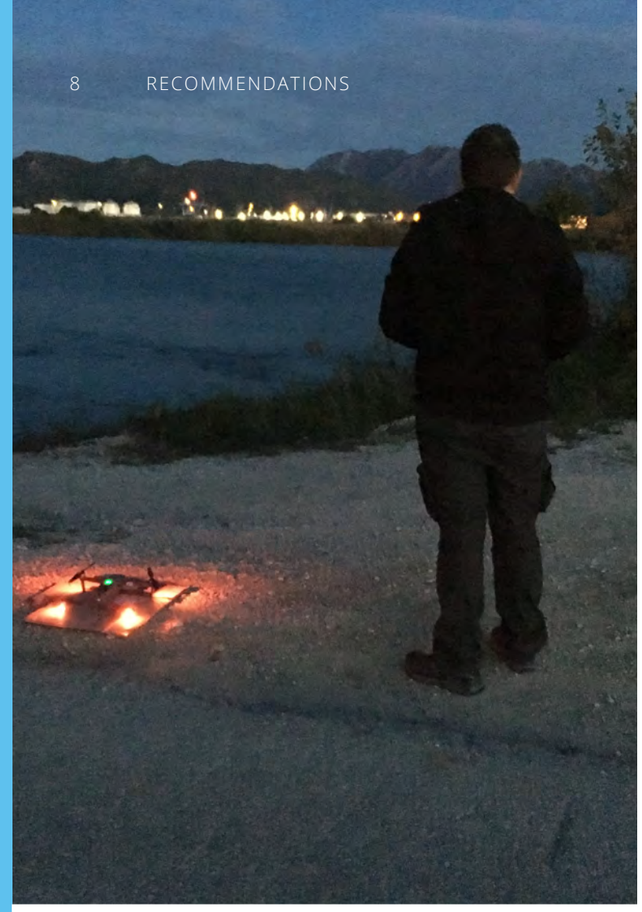
4 Ensure effective penalties

While most countries have adequate legal frameworks, existing laws frequently contain penalties that are too low and therefore insufficient to deter offenders. It is also important to consider civil liability for wildlife offences, ensuring that offenders are held accountable for the damage caused. Establishing appropriate and harmonised wildlife valuation mechanisms would help quantify the impact of illegal activities and guide the reparation of damage. In this context, accessory penalties—such as bans on hunting, trade restrictions, or mandatory conservation contributions—should be integrated into enforcement frameworks to strengthen the overall effectiveness of penalties.[5,6]

Useful resources

[5]CMS Secretariat - prepared by the Global Law Alliance for Animals and the Environment of the Lewis & Clark Law School on behalf of CMS Secretariat). (2022). Legislative guidance for the implementation of national measures to combat illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds (Document No. CMS/MIKT5/Doc.5.1/Rev.1). https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_mikt5_doc.5.1_rev.1_legislative-guidance_e.pdf

[6]C. Naves, D. de la Bodega, S. Cabezas-Díaz, N. López et al. (2020) Report: Methodology and regulatory proposal about the economic valuation of crimes against protected animal species. LIFE Guardianes de la Naturaleza. SEO/BirdLife. Madrid https://guardianes.seo.org/download/report-methodology-and-regulatory-proposal-about-the-economic-valuation-of-crimes-against-protected-animal-species/



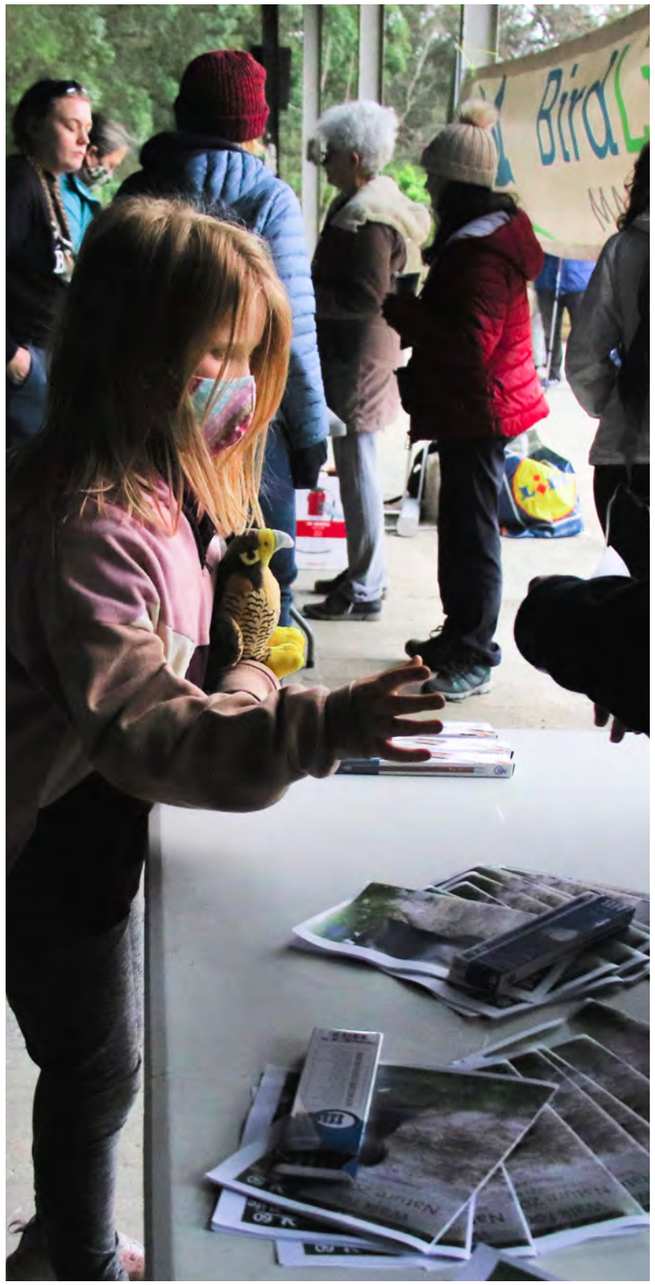
Top: IKB monitoring with drone in the Neretva river mouth reserve © Biom
Bottom: Training on life saving for injured birds © SPNL
Right: Walk for Nature 2022 © Ilaria Marchiori

5 Support monitoring and set up national IKB databases

Another significant obstacle is the scarcity of reliable data on IKB. Government-funded monitoring programmes are rare, and publicly available crime statistics on wildlife offences are often non-existent. This lack of data hampers the ability to assess the scale of the problem and develop targeted interventions. To improve the situation, governments should establish national IKB databases, ensure data transparency, and fund regular monitoring programmes to facilitate evidence-based policymaking and resource allocation.[7,8]

6 Provide training for prosecutors and judges

Our analysis shows that commercial gain is the number one driver behind IKB across the whole region. However, deterrent penalties are rarely enforced in countries with the highest level of IKB, and judges and prosecutors often lack the specialised knowledge needed to handle wildlife crime cases in a way that reflects the significance of these issues. To address this, governments should provide specialised training for judges and prosecutors to ensure that offenders are held accountable and receive appropriate penalties.[9]



7 Raise public awareness

Governments have done little to raise public awareness about IKB, leaving NGOs to lead such campaigns. These efforts require stronger government support to achieve widespread behavioural change. Governments must take the lead in launching awareness campaigns to reduce public tolerance for IKB and to promote alternative lifestyles and livelihoods. Partnering with NGOs can amplify the reach and impact of these initiatives, promoting a cultural shift toward bird conservation. A well-structured communication approach is vital to fostering long-term changes in public attitudes and behaviours toward IKB.[10]

8 Facilitate greater co-operation (between organisations and internationally)

Given the cross-border nature of some types of IKB, particularly in regions with significant hunting tourism, international co-operation is essential. Governments should foster more cross-border collaboration, share intelligence, and adopt best practices to enhance enforcement efforts and reduce illegal bird killing.

9 Change behaviours (through awareness raising and alternative livelihoods)

Finally, in the small number of areas where IKB is primarily driven by poverty, governments should invest in alternative livelihood opportunities. Providing communities with sustainable income options can address the root causes of IKB and contribute to long-lasting conservation outcomes. Understanding motivations and behaviour is essential to formulating effective responses and further research is needed to understand what is driving IKB to inform targeted, evidence-based interventions.[11,12]

Useful resources

[7] BirdLife International (2022). A best practice guide for monitoring illegal killing and taking of birds, 3rd Edition. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Guidelines-for-IKB-monitoring_UPDATED_2022.pdf

[8] SEO/BirdLife. (2022). Methodology for the development of an environmental crime database. Proyecto LIFE Guardianes de la Naturaleza https://guardianes.seo.org/download/methodology-for-the-development-of-an-environmental-crime-database/

[9] LIFE SWiPE project (2023). Training materials: https://stopwildlifecrime.eu/training-materials/

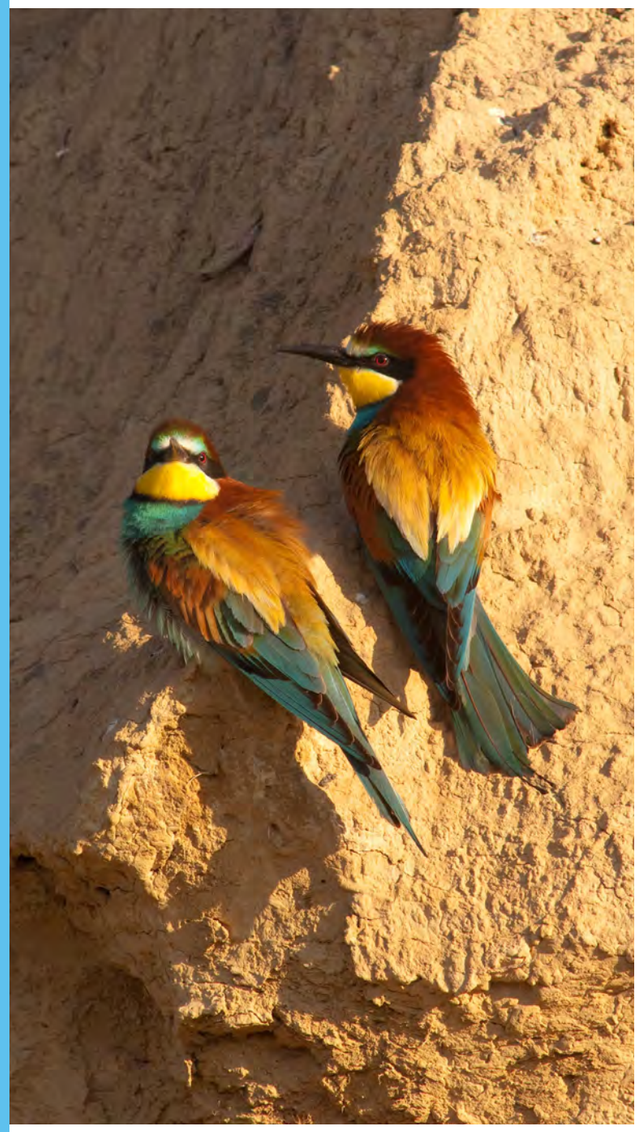
Useful resources

[10] European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment & Arvela, M. A. (2023). Combatting the illegal killing, taking of and trade in birds in the EU: review of good practices on prevention, Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/101838

[11] BirdLife International. (2023). Suggested methodology and guidance for conducting socio-economic research into the motivations behind illegal killing, taking and trade of birds [Report prepared for the CMS Secretariat]. https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/uploads/cms_mikt_CMS_Suggested_Methodology_and_Guidance_on_Motivations_Sep2023_0.pdf

[12] SEO/BirdLife (2023) Study on the origin and motivation of environmental crime LIFE Nature GuardianS, Madrid. https://guardianes.seo.org/download/study-on-the-origin-and-motivation-of-environmental-crime/

Recommendations for International Action



1 Strengthen political will and coordination across regions

Addressing IKB requires a unified international approach to ensure consistent political commitment across all affected countries. The Mediterranean, despite being one of the regions most impacted by IKB, often shows low political prioritisation of the issue. To counteract this, international bodies such as the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT) via the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) should work towards increasing political engagement, urging governments to develop and implement National Action Plans (NAPs). Additionally, greater political pressure must be applied to ensure that all countries comply with international commitments, such as those under the EU Birds Directive, Bern Convention, and CMS guidelines. Politicians and decision-makers must be strongly encouraged to set clear milestones, targets, timelines, and compliance indicators for IKB reduction, and to incorporate these elements into their National Action Plans, to ensure effective progress and accountability in addressing IKB. More frequent communication is needed in the period between the expensive, international meetings for maintaining momentum and support for national governments.

Left: European Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) are often illegally persecuted by bee-keepers © Lars Soerink
Right: Destroying an illegal hunting hide with the National Inspectorate for the Control of Territory (IKMT), Albania © Joni Vorpsi, PPNEA

2 Support monitoring and international reporting

A major barrier to effective IKB mitigation is the lack of reliable and consistent data. Government-funded monitoring programmes should be encouraged, and international bodies must push for transparent reporting on wildlife crime. Additionally, international funding mechanisms should be developed to support capacity-building for IKB data collection in countries with limited resources. To ensure consistency and effectiveness in reporting, guidelines have been developed on the minimum content that reports should include, outlining essential information to be collected.[13,14]

3 Ensure effective penalties and legal harmonization

Regardless of the strength of national legislation, lenient penalties may fail to deter offenders. International bodies could set minimum penalty standards, ensuring fines and sentences reflect the severity of the crime. Penalties should be inflation-adjusted and regularly reviewed for effectiveness. Stricter hunting regulations should be extended to countries where key conservation measures—such as bans on spring hunting, lead ammunition in wetlands, and electronic calling devices—are still not in place, preventing the displacement of illegal activities to regions with weaker laws.

4 Strengthen international cooperation to tackle transboundary Illegal killing of birds

Many IKB cases involve cross-border elements such as smuggling or illegalities by foreign tourist hunters. International agreements should facilitate intelligence-sharing, joint investigations, and co-ordinated responses between national enforcement agencies. Encouraging countries to exchange best practices and engage in bilateral or regional anti-illegal killing of birds (anti-IKB) initiatives would enhance overall effectiveness. Existing structures—including the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL), the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE), and the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE)—as well as joint enforcement operations or international peer-learning programmes, such as the Wildlife Crime Academy and IMPEL's Green Review Initiative, should be promoted to national governments.

In addition to enforcement co-operation, engagement with the hunting sector and agricultural organisations is essential. Collaborating with hunting associations can help build dialogue and find common ground in promoting sustainable hunting practices and eliminating illegal activities. Likewise, working with agricultural organisations can foster agreements that improve rural conditions and promote environmentally responsible land-use practices.

Useful resources

[13] BirdLife International (2022) prepared by Strix for BirdLife Europe and Central Asia. Towards the development of a European IKB database – Recommendations report [Technical report]. LIFE against Bird Crime project. https://flightforsurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/DBrecommendations_report.pdf

[14] SEO/BirdLife (2022) Methodology for the Development of an Environmental Crime Database. Proyecto LIFE Guardianes de la Naturaleza. Madrid LIFE Nature Guardians. https://guardianes.seo.org/download/methodology-for-the-development-of-an-environmental-crime-database/

Rehabilitated Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) © BirdLife Malta

Conclusion

Achieving a 50% reduction in illegal bird killing in the geographical scope of the Rome Strategic Plan by 2030 is ambitious, but remains within reach of every country in the region. It requires sustained political commitment, improved data collection, and stronger enforcement measures. Governments must act now to prioritise IKB reduction, enforce existing laws, and support cross-border collaboration to protect migratory birds and biodiversity across the region.

The detailed assessment report and national level information is available online here

The Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) is a true beneficiary of anti-poisoning conservation measures © Agamu Photo Agency

Acknowledgement

Our sincere thanks go to the data contributors who provided essential national information on the illegal killing and taking of birds, and the organisations that supported their efforts (with a full list available in the detailed report). This work was supported by the Hans Wilsdorf Foundation through the BirdLife International Safe Flyways IKB project, by Oak Foundation, and by the European Union.

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With thanks

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