

Building Capacity for Sustainable Hunting of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean countries of North Africa and the Middle East



The problem

Hunters kill hundreds of millions of birds as they migrate through the Mediterranean region each year. Many of these are killed in southern Europe, but a significant proportion are shot or trapped in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East that border the Mediterranean, particularly in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. Most are from species and populations that breed in Europe and winter in Africa and many of those killed are internationally threatened species or listed on Annex 1 of the European Union's 'Birds Directive'. Consequently, the protection of migratory birds is a shared responsibility and requires a coordinated multinational approach.

Hunting, which includes shooting, trapping using nets, snares, lime sticks, traps and decoys, use of poisons and other methods to catch and kill birds, is an important socio-economic activity in the region, particularly in rural areas, involving hundreds of thousands of people and hectares, and supporting a variety of groups, including subsistence hunters and trappers, weapon and ammunition manufacturers, bird-trap makers, caged bird sellers and restaurant owners. 'Sport hunting' has become particularly widespread in the region in recent years. For instance, Lebanon has 20,000 officially registered shooters but the true number is thought to be far higher well above 10% of the Lebanese population (compared with 6% in Finland, 3.4% in Ireland and 2.6% in France).

New hunting methods and equipment, increased availability of guns and cheap ammunition, easier access to remote areas using 4-wheel drive vehicles, combined with higher disposable incomes and increased leisure time and diminishing populations of native game species, have meant that the number of migratory birds being killed has increased to an almost industrial scale in some countries. The killing is often indiscriminate - for instance, many trappers kill all the birds they catch but discard the less edible species, and those trapping for the falconry trade frequently catch (and damage or kill) species that have no value to the falconers. In addition to direct killing and crippling of birds, and disturbance from shooters at hunting sites, the poisoning of birds and pollution of their habitats from lead shot, particularly at wetlands, is also a serious environmental threat in some countries. In Lebanon, for instance, some 20-25 million cartridges are sold annually, equivalent to 640-800 tonnes of lead.

Current management of bird hunting in the North African and Middle Eastern countries of the Mediterranean

This is a complex issue, characterised by often poor legal regulation and law enforcement, lack of resources and capacity among government institutions and NGOs concerned with hunting and migratory birds in some countries, poorly developed communication and data-sharing systems, poor public and hunter awareness of the impact of hunting, past conflicts between hunters and conservationists and lack of regional agreement on action to better protect migratory birds. In addition, much of the debate on the management of bird hunting has taken place at the national level with relatively little local community input. Consequently, there is a need for a fresh dialogue to develop collaborative efforts and partnerships between all groups concerned with the hunting of wild birds in the region.

In response to the above, BirdLife, in partnership with the Association "Les Amis des Oiseaux" (AAO) in Tunisia, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), and with additional financial support from the European Union's LIFE Third Countries (in the southern and eastern Mediterranean these are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria) fund, the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds (Vogelbescherming Nederland) and UNDP-GEF, has launched a new 3-year initiative to tackle these issues in the Mediterranean countries of North Africa and the Middle East. BirdLife, through its national partners, is already actively addressing unsustainable hunting in many other Mediterranean countries, including Italy and Malta, and there will be exchange of experience and information with these initiatives.

Project Funders



Project aims

The overall goal is to strengthen the management of bird hunting in selected North African and Middle Eastern countries of the Mediterranean region to reduce excessive, indiscriminate and illegal hunting of migratory birds, promote more sustainable hunting practices and enhance the compliance of international and regional agreements on the conservation of migratory birds. The Project will achieve these through a series of regional initiatives and 'model' collaborative projects between government, hunting and conservation groups in Tunisia and Lebanon, which will act as a focus or 'hub' for projects that can be replicated in other countries in their region (French-speaking North Africa and the Arabic Middle East, respectively). Tunisia and Lebanon have been chosen because hunting is a major conservation and socio-economic issue for each country, both possess important 'bottlenecks' that are of crucial conservation importance for migrant birds, and good working relationships exist between the national authorities (the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources in Tunisia (MAERH), and the Ministry of Environment (MoE) in Lebanon), hunting groups, conservation organisations and other stakeholders. The project will run from November 2004 to October 2007.

Key activities include:

1. Review of information on hunting of migratory birds. The Project will review current bird hunting, its management and impact, socio-economic and cultural importance, potential alternatives (e.g. bird watching and ecotourism) and 'best practice' for hunting of migratory birds in region. A series of Position Papers will be published that will act as a resource for national governments, and be used in the development of other Project activities.

2. Guidelines for Sustainable Hunting of Migratory Birds. The Project will develop a 'model' for a more responsible, sustainable approach to the hunting of migratory birds in the southern and eastern Mediterranean in a partnership between government institutions, conservation and national hunting groups and other stakeholders and will include joint development of a 'Code of Practice' and accreditation system for hunters. This activity will compliment the European Commission's Sustainable Hunting Initiative (SHI) launched in 2001, which stresses the role of education, training and awareness raising in promoting wise use among hunters and the general public, and indeed the results and experiences from one will enrich the other.

3. Promotion of sustainable hunting behaviour. The Project, building on the results of the previous two activities, will seek to make hunters and national and local government staff more aware of the impact of hunting on migratory bird populations, legal rights and responsibilities and promote good hunting practices and 'stewardship' of natural resources to reduce indiscriminate and unnecessary killing in Tunisia and Lebanon. This will be achieved through the development of educational materials, including an identification guide to rare species, and 'hunter awareness days' for hunting groups and government staff.

4. Improving public awareness. The Project will develop educational materials and programmes on bird conservation and responsible hunting practices for specific target audiences, such as local governments and teenage males (the next generation of hunters) as well as the general public in Tunisia and Lebanon. The programmes in the two focal countries will design materials with a view to extending their use throughout the region, e.g. posters and leaflets produced in French or Arabic will be appropriate for Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Syria.

5. Development and enforcement of hunting legislation. The Project will address some of the inadequacies of hunting legislation and enforcement in Lebanon and Tunisia through a review of current legislation, drafting of amendments and design of hunting permit systems, in a partnership between government, conservation and hunting groups. In addition, a database and inventory of priority species and sites in need of legal protection will be produced to meet government needs, and 'awareness days' on hunting legislation and identification of protected bird species will be arranged for law enforcement officials responsible for policing hunting and the trade in wild birds, enabling them to undertake more effective action.

6. Resolving conflict and building partnerships. The Project will improve communication and understanding between government, conservation and hunting groups through a series of training workshops on conflict-resolution, consensus building, advocacy and networking for national and local governments and selected NGOs, to provide the tools for resolving conflicts over hunting in Tunisia and Lebanon. Emphasis will be on 'training the trainers' enabling participants to run similar events upon return to their home bases. Representatives from neighbouring countries will be invited to attend ensuring a wider, more regional impact.

7. Strengthening co-operation and compliance with international agreements. The Project will seek to generate greater political awareness of the Convention on Migratory Species and AEWA - the principal agreements covering migratory birds in the Mediterranean - and create the enabling environment for increased membership through participation of key members of selected governments at international events. These will include an AEWA meeting in 2005 to discuss alternatives to the use of lead shot.

8. Project Sustainability. A single 3-year project can only begin to address the huge problem of unsustainable hunting in the region. Therefore the Project will identify essential follow up activities through the development of a Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Hunting and Conservation of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean countries of North Africa and the Middle East, using the Position Papers, Guidelines, other Project materials, national experiences and specific national government input.

How you can help

The Project invites all hunters, hunting groups, conservationists and other stakeholders in the region to participate as partners in the project, and is particularly keen to hear of any case studies or local 'best practice' hunting models, published or unpublished information on hunting, useful contacts or other relevant experience you would like to share. For more information on the BirdLife project and details on how you can contribute, please contact:

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