

# Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean

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## Summary

Illegal killing/taking of birds is a growing concern across the Mediterranean. However, there are few quantitative data on the species and countries involved. We assessed numbers of individual birds of each species killed/taken illegally in each Mediterranean country per year, using a diverse range of data sources and incorporating expert knowledge. We estimated that 11–36 million individuals per year may be killed/taken illegally in the region, many of them on migration. In each of Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Lebanon and Syria, more than two million birds may be killed/taken on average each year. For species such as Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, more than one million individuals of each species are estimated to be killed/ taken illegally on average every year. Several species of global conservation concern are also reported to be killed/taken illegally in substantial numbers: Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca*. Birds in the Mediterranean are illegally killed/taken primarily for food, sport and for use as cage-birds or decoys. At the 20 worst locations with the highest reported numbers, 7.9 million individuals may be illegally killed/ taken per year, representing 34% of the mean estimated annual regional total number of birds illegally killed/taken for all species combined. Our study highlighted the paucity of data on illegal killing/taking of birds. Monitoring schemes which use systematic sampling protocols are needed to generate increasingly robust data on trends in illegal killing/taking over time and help stakeholders prioritise conservation actions to address this international conservation problem. Large numbers of birds are also hunted legally in the region, but specific totals are generally unavailable. Such data, in combination with improved estimates for illegal killing/taking, are needed for robustly assessing the sustainability of exploitation of birds.