



World Migratory Bird Day



World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) was initiated in 2006 and is an annual awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. Each year, on the second weekend in May.

Why migratory birds?

Avian migration is a natural miracle. Migratory birds fly hundreds and thousands of kilometres to find the best ecological conditions and habitats for feeding, breeding and raising their young. When conditions at breeding sites become unfavourable, it is time to fly to regions where conditions are better.

There are many different migration patterns. The majority of birds migrate from northern breeding areas to southern wintering grounds. However, some birds breed in southern parts of Africa and migrate to northern wintering grounds, or horizontally, to enjoy the milder coastal climates in winter. Other birds reside on lowlands during the winter months and move up a mountain for the summer.

Migratory birds have the perfect morphology and physiology to fly fast and across long distances. Often, their journey is an exhausting one, during which they go to their limits. The Red Knot has one of the longest total migration routes of any bird, travelling up to 16,000 kilometres twice a year. It breeds in Siberia and overwinters on the west coast of Africa, some even going down to the tip of South Africa.

It is truly amazing how migratory birds can navigate with pin-point accuracy. Exactly how migrating birds find their flyways is not fully understood. It has been shown that they are able to orientate by the sun during the day, by the stars at night, and by the geomagnetic field at any time. Some species can even detect polarized light, which many migrating birds may use for navigation at night.

Why Migratory Birds Need Protection

Migration is a perilous journey and involves a wide range of threats, often caused by human activities. And as diverse as people and their habits in different countries are, so are threats the birds face. As migratory birds depend on a range of sites along their distribution area, the loss of wintering and stopover sites could have a dramatic impact on the birds' chances of survival.

Flying long distances involves crossing many borders between countries with differing environmental politics, legislation and conservation measures. It is evident that international cooperation among governments, NGOs and other stakeholders is required along the entire flyway of a species in order to share knowledge and to coordinate conservation efforts. The legal framework and coordinating instruments necessary for such cooperation is provided by multilateral environmental agreements such as [CMS](#) and [AEWA](#).

World Migratory Bird Day has a global outreach and is an effective tool to help raise global awareness of the threats faced by migratory birds, their ecological importance, and the need for international cooperation to conserve them.

The 2016 World Migratory Bird Day Theme

.... and when the skies fall silent? Stop the illegal killing, taking and trade!

So that future generations also benefit from natural resources, governments have passed laws – both domestic and international – to ensure sustainability, protecting wild animals including migratory birds by restricting or prohibiting their exploitation. The protection of migratory birds has been coordinated at the international level since the beginning of the twentieth century. Migratory birds were once synonymous with abundance, and seen as a gift coming from the sky. Historically, people have hunted wildlife for a variety of reasons – food and sport – and in the past, such activities were conducted at a scale that was sustainable. In many cases, however, this is no longer true.

Nets along the north coast of Africa kill millions of birds every year – and it is only one example amongst many. The methods used and the numbers taken have changed beyond measure, and the survival of the targeted species which have to face many other pressures such as loss or deterioration of habitats is in doubt. In many countries, robust legislation exists and mechanisms are in place to enforce it; in others, the rules are not followed and the authorities lack the resources or the will to implement them properly on the ground. If once common

migratory birds are to be prevented from disappearing, such as the Linnet that has lost 50% of its population since 1980, or the farmland birds with a loss of 300 million individuals in Europe over the same period, the public has to be made aware of the urgency of the threat posed by illegal hunting, taking and trade. Attitudes must change and we can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to those who flout the law and endanger our shared natural heritage.

There is a wide range of reasons for the illegal killing, taking and trade of birds – subsistence uses, recreational activities, organized crime, traditional practice and so on. They vary from one country to another, from one region of the world to another, according to what has been defined as legal or illegal – if at all. Indeed in some countries there is clearly no regulation, while in others regulations do exist but enforcement needs to be improved. Illegal activities not only affect birds' populations, but they also harm society in general, our very existence and our natural resources.

Conservation, agriculture and the tourism sector all suffer from their negative impacts. Legal hunting is affected by these illegal activities as well: despite the role that hunters play in ensuring the sustainability of livelihoods and habitats, they see their reputation jeopardized by illegal killing. While at the same time, elsewhere in the world, these illegal activities are widely socially accepted and therefore persist. Both at the national and the local level, law enforcement is the key driver to help protecting migratory birds, not only in one place but along their entire flyway.

Cooperation and awareness-raising have to be strengthened in order to fight illegal killing. The Task Force set up by the CMS Secretariat is a first concrete answer to the issue in the Mediterranean region. Further actions are needed – and this shared issue should involve and bring together international organizations, governments and civil society. Indeed decisions taken by the international community or by governments will not meet any success if they are not respected or implemented on the ground. That is where civil society has a role to play, at the local level. Let us work together to protect migratory birds from illegal killing, taking and trade!

(Source 03-05-2015 World Migratory Bird Day
<http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org/>)

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