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# Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)

## ANNUAL REPORT - 2018

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

As the year is now drawing to a close, it is time to take stock and look back on our work and achievements in 2018. The results of which give us plenty of reason to be optimistic and look forward to the future. Whether in Italy, Spain, Malta or Germany – our campaigns against illegal bird hunting in these countries has been extremely successful. Every year, thousands of birds are rescued by our operations and bird protection camps and poaching continues to be pushed back at every opportunity possible.

In addition to our members and donors, the backbone of these successes are all thanks to our volunteers who come together from all corners of the world to take part in often unsafe missions in the Mediterranean each spring and autumn.

In 2019, we want to considerably expand our presence in Lebanon; where each year millions of birds use narrow migratory corridors, which are often just a few kilometres wide and where hundreds of thousands of birds are being shot down or trapped. Amongst the species affected by poaching are many species of conservation concern such as the Lesser Spotted Eagle, for which almost their entire global population cross the country twice each year, including the 90 breeding pairs remaining in Germany. Hence, we are planning to extend our autumn campaign to have ground teams present in the main 'bottleneck' areas at the beginning of October during the peak migration period for Lesser Spotted Eagles. In addition, the previously successful education campaign for hunters will be continued with the Middle Eastern Sustainable Hunting Centre (MESHC) and our cooperation with the Internal Security Forces (ISF) will be intensified.

Even here we are starting to see some glimmers of light. This autumn, as a direct result of our bird protection camp, our field investigations resulted in the arrest of 15 poachers – after our teams recorded them killing protected species. Furthermore, there is a growing movement amongst the public, other local NGOs and pro-regulation hunting groups who have supported our field operations. Together with these new friends and allies, we hope to continue and expand our campaign over the next few years – so that the skies over Lebanon may eventually become a safer route for migratory birds.

Thanks

The CABS Team.

## January

- CABS lead the main centralised database for recording and reporting raptor persecution and wildlife crime in Germany, otherwise known as 'EDGAR'. In January, we published our first report for 2005 -2015. A total of 998 cases of illegal shooting, trapping, poisoning and other offences were confirmed and recorded for this period. There were 1,445 victims registered, including 805 buzzards, 156 red kites and 136 hawks. The vast majority of cases were found in North Rhine-Westphalia, Brandenburg and Bavaria.



- Winter camp on Cyprus: Our volunteers were out in the field in search of illegal trapping sites for most of January. Together with police, 137 nets and 118 limesticks were collected and four poachers arrested and fined between €500 and €8000. More than 500 birds were released from the traps!



CABS President Heinz Schwarze - at our Raisdorfer Teichlandschaft in Northern Germany.

- A CABS reserve!?! Yes, in Germany's northernmost state Schleswig-Holstein - CABS own a protected wetland area known as "Raisdorfer Teichlandschaft". The site was originally acquired in 1984 and is home to numerous endangered flora and fauna. Early in the year, several measures were put in place. Pastures and trees were trimmed and one of the smaller ponds was dredged to ensure the site is 'fit' for the upcoming breeding season.

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- **Raid against the illegal finch trade in southern Italy:** Following a report from CABS, local police conducted a raid at the notorious 'Ballaró' bird market in Palermo, Sicily against two bird traders. A total of 61 wild-caught finches were seized and the traders will later receive hefty fines. 22 Serin, 21 Goldfinch (photo below), 16 Siskin and two Chaffinch were released a few days later.



## February

- **Great result from our bird protection camp in Sardinia:** Within just 1 week in the south of the Italian Mediterranean island, CABS members and officials from the Carabinieri (Forest Police) cleared more than 180 illegal trapping nets – with a total length of more than 2 kilometres! Furthermore, more than a dozen snap traps and several cage traps were found and dismantled. 26 birds were set free unharmed and 7 poachers were convicted.
- **Migratory bird hunting and trapping seen where it belongs – in a museum!** In February, the Natural History Museum in Erfurt hosted an exhibition on the history of bird hunting in Europe. Amongst other things the current work of CABS in the Mediterranean was presented. Several illegal traps seized during our bird protection camps on Cyprus and Italy were put on display.

- Sting against hawk-killer in Rhineland-Palatinate: CABS staff discovered a dead hawk and a buzzard next to an active hawk trap baited with live pigeons at the property of a pigeon keeper in Bingen. Police seized the trap and initiated criminal proceedings. The prosecution was subsequently taken over by the state's criminal investigation office.



[Left] Assad Serhal CEO Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), [Centre] Mark Constantine CEO LUSH, [Right] Axel Hirschfeld Operations Officer CABS.

- Live at LUSH: CABS staff presented our ongoing Cyprus and Lebanon campaigns at the LUSH Summit 2018 in London. The conference is described as a 'hotbed of discussion, debate, activism and action, from campaigners and grassroots voices around the globe'. We were also joined by Assad Serhal from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL). LUSH supports many environmental projects including our work in Spain.
- Illegal bird trade in Berlin: following a tip-off from CABS, officials from the state office for criminal investigations seized six wild-caught goldfinches during a raid at an apartment in the district of Neukölln. The pristine birds had been offered for sale online for €100 each. The trader was later summoned to court and received a hefty fine.

## March

- During two operations in Italy, our employees, together with the police successfully caught four bird trappers. On the Mediterranean island of Ponza, a poacher is caught with several cage traps for finches. In the mountains north of the city of Brescia, three large sites with nets were found and reported to the police. The authorities managed to catch three of the poachers red-handed. In total, around a dozen songbirds, Blackbirds, Greenfinches and Serins were released.
- Action in Lebanon: On the outskirts of Beirut, a CABS team documented a massacre of migrating swallows and swifts. The incident involved more than two dozen people, including several children, using shotguns to kill hundreds of birds as they passed along the coast, near a built-up residential area. After about an hour, the police intervened and arrested several people.



- In addition, this Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) was shot by Lebanese poachers in mid-March and simply left for dead. Hikers found the bird and took it to a private rescue sanctuary where our team (pictured CABS biologist Axel Hirschfeld) visited and examined it. Unfortunately, its chances of ever making a full recovery and flying again are zero. CABS first spring operation in The Lebanon has ended today - however, teams from our partners will continue to patrol and monitor any illegal spring hunting taking place. Most of the participants of the operation, will now migrate directly to Malta to support our ongoing efforts against illegal finch trapping.



- Goshawk trapper number 2!  
Following a report from a member of public, a CABS team discovered an active hawk trap right next to a dovecote and baited with two live pigeons in a small garden in Köngen (east of Stuttgart). Police seized the trap and launched an investigation against the landowner. The two live decoys were handed over to a local rescue centre.

- Police operation against bird trapper in North Rhine-Westphalia: A CABS team discovered two illegal 'ladder traps' for birds of prey and crows whilst investigating a hunting area in Espelkamp (Minden-Lübbecke). The traps were baited with food and plastic crows. The police were called to seize both traps and initiate criminal proceedings.



Images taken during aerial survey of Malta and Gozo showing numerous active trapping sites clustered together.

- Bird's eye view on Malta: To document the extent of illegal bird trapping in spring, CABS chartered a light aircraft and flew over Malta and Gozo to make a detailed map analysis of illegal trapping sites. A total of 182 active trapped sites using large clap nets were documented and mapped out. Compared to the previous year, this represents an increase of more than 30%. The locations of the trapping sites were then systematically reported to the police.

## April

- In the renowned German journal 'Vogel-schutz' (Reports on Bird Protection) an analysis of the official bird hunting statistics from the EU is published by CABS in cooperation with the German Council for Bird Protection (DVR). The results of the report are alarming: despite ever decreasing populations millions of Skylark, Turtle Dove, Lapwing and Woodcock continue to be shot in many countries. The results of the study were picked up and discussed by prolific German media such as 'Spiegel' as well as numerous ornithological journals. An English version of the paper will also be published in due course.



- With the end of bird migration, after 8 weeks of continuous operations our spring bird protection camp in Cyprus is now complete. Since the beginning of March, CABS teams have been deployed on the Mediterranean island and found and collected a total of 305 limesticks and 9 nets – the smallest figure ever! By comparison, in 2017 we found 1,834 limesticks and 19 nets over the same time period – it seems our persistence is slowly paying off!
- During our large bird protection camp on Malta, our teams caught and filmed 13 finch trappers and two Turtle Dove poachers within 3 weeks of field investigations. 10 suspects were later identified by the authorities based on our video footage. They face four-figure fines and lifelong revocation of their hunting licenses.
- During a week-long action on Malta's sister island of Gozo, together with police support our teams discovered and reported nine huge Turtle Dove cage traps and several quail and finch trapping sites. Since most traps were on private land, investigations are being initiated against the landowners. A total of 14 freshly caught Turtle Dove, eight Starling, two Quail and about 30 finches were seized and released.



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- Also during April, our raptor persecution database for Germany (EDGAR) received numerous reports of illegal killing. In Bocholt (North Rhine-Westphalia) a peregrine falcon was reported shot and from Diepholz (Lower Saxony) a live trap for hawks was also reported. A buzzard was killed with an air rifle in Bonn and a red kite was deliberately poisoned in the Borken district. All cases are being investigated by the authorities.

## May

- Bird protection camp on Ischia: As part of our annual campaign against the illegal spring hunting on the Mediterranean island, five illegal trapping sites with a total of 52 snap traps for passing Whinchat and Wheatear are deactivated. In addition, our teams discover two shotguns hidden by poachers and 300 rounds of ammunition that were subsequently confiscated by the police. A masked poacher is later convicted and charged. Bird trapping on Ischia has significantly declined over the past 20 years as a direct result of our field operations.



Masked poacher on Ischia

- In Calabria and Sicily, our teams working against bird of prey slaughter catch three poachers shooting Honey Buzzards. Following a CABS report, two more freshly shot buzzards and several mammal snares were found and seized during house searches and confiscated as evidence. The suspects are awaiting trial.



Freshly shot Honey Buzzard in Calabria, Italy.



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- After almost a year of research, CABS staff in Italy has filed a complaint against a gang of illegal songbird traders in Calabria. Subsequently, multiple raids were conducted, and the authorities seized extensive evidence including more than 300 live birds. 7 men aged between 27 and 70 were arrested and face prosecution.
  - Action in South Tyrol, Italy: between 19 -27 May CABS teams and local police monitored the huge apple orchards in South Tyrol. Hundreds of thousands of thrushes breed there, and unfortunately the nests are repeatedly looted. The chick thieves are bird traders from Northern Italy who sell the birds on as live decoys to thrush hunters. During the action, three poachers were caught and more than 60 chicks were rescued.



- In Protaras, Cyprus a CABS team found this bee-eater with a gunshot wound and a broken wing. A vet tried in vain to save the animal (photo of the operation) – but unfortunately the injuries were simply too severe. In addition to the use of limesticks and nets, illegal hunting is a major problem in Cyprus. Alongside warblers, bee-eaters are one of the most common victims of poaching with a shotgun!

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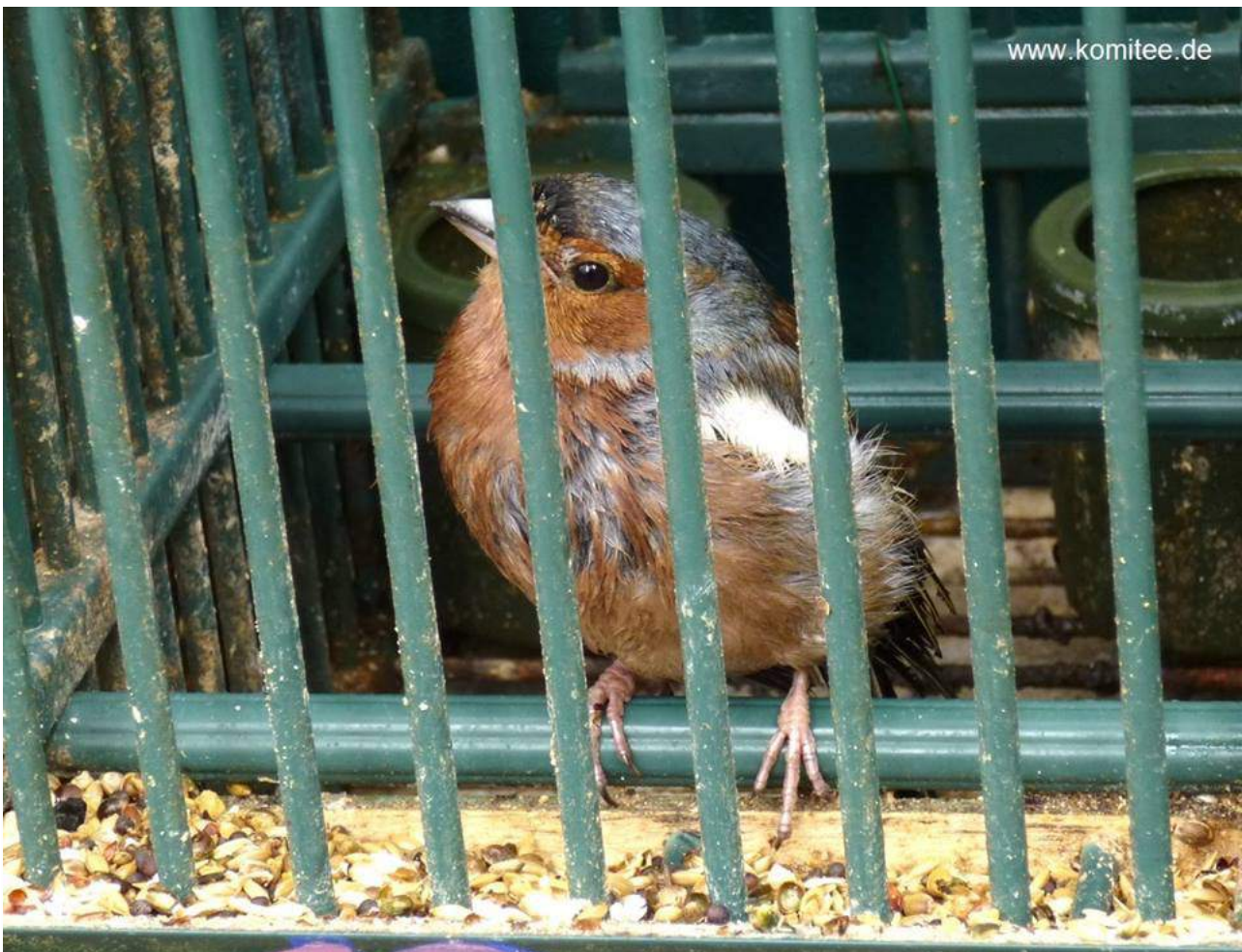
## June

- Bred - released - shot! CABS is launching a local campaign against the planned lifting of the suspension ban for farmed ducks and pheasants by the new state government in North Rhine-Westphalia. In addition to the shooting of animals from breeding farms, the Ministry of Agriculture also plans to set up a hunting season for previously protected species.
- Despite being closed season, CABS receive several reports of illegal massacres of migrant and locally breeding birds all across Lebanon. Including many protected species such as white storks (photo), herons, birds of prey, swallows, bee-eaters and golden orioles (photo). Poachers frequently post pictures of their trophy kills online and it is clear that these violations are continuing to occur unperturbed. In cooperation with several local NGOs and partner groups, CABS collate and report these incidents; and want to ensure the hunting law is applied in order to deter poaching and increase awareness of the importance of conservation and wild bird protection.



- More cases of targeting killing of birds of prey in Germany: victims include an Eagle Owl from the district of Soest (North Rhine-Westphalia) and a Goshawk from the Wiesbadener Stadwald (Hesse), - analysis of the birds' stomach contents revealed traces of carbofuran – a pesticide which has been banned for several years. In the Burgenlandkreis (Saxony-Anhalt), the authorities are investigating local poultry keepers after a hawk was found caught in a leg-hold trap.
- Bird trader sentenced: a man from Oberhausen is sentenced to four months' probation and a fine of €500 after he offered at least 25 goldfinches for sale online. The authorities became aware of the case following a report from CABS. The birds were all released unharmed.





After year of campaigning and complaints the European Court of Justice forces the Maltese government to ban finch trapping or face sanctions.

- Finch trapping on Malta violates EU law: The European Court of Justice finally condemns Malta for allowing finch trapping with clap nets. For years, Malta had overruled EU law and approved thousands of trapping licenses every year. CABS and our colleagues at BirdLife Malta sharply criticized this practice and documented the impact of mass trapping for the European Commission. The final verdict marks one of the biggest achievements in European migratory bird protection in recent years.

## July

- The stream of reports of illegal bird of prey persecution in Germany does not stop: a female Goshawk was shot dead whilst brooding the nest in Hesse, a Buzzard is confirmed as being poisoned with a prohibited insecticide in North Rhine-Westphalia, four Peregrine Falcons (poisoned in Rhineland-Palatinate) as well as five Red Kites, which were found poisoned in Schleswig-Holsten and Saxony.
- Legal bird trapping in Spain on the verge of extinction: After a ruling by the European Court of Justice has become final, the regions of Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla-Leon, Murcia and Valencia will no longer issue bird-trapping permits. CABS announce that we will monitor the new trapping ban with several experts in the autumn.



- A Tern for the better: Each year, the staff at our Tern project in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt install more than 90 artificial nest rafts in suitable wetland scrapes to help breeding Black Terns, a species which are threatened with extinction in Germany. The result of this year's breeding season shows just how much this effort helps. A total of 41 Black Terns and 10 Black-Headed Gulls successfully raise and fledge young.

- 'Skull poacher' in court: In Malta, a criminal court sentences three bird trappers each with a fine of €1600 and revokes their hunting licenses. In March 2017, CABS members filmed the men illegally trapping finches near Bahrija. In an effort to hide their identity the poachers wore masks – one of them used a skull mask – but was subsequently identified anyway!



- The CABS office in Milan has been converted into a rescue station for alpine and common swifts. Andrea Rutigliano – CABS team leader for Italy and Cyprus (photo) - took on several chicks from a bird sanctuary in Como, northern Italy. The chicks had fallen out of nests or were victims of improper renovations. The complex round-the-clock care finally come to an end successfully: earlier this morning, the 14 Alpine swifts and 7 common swifts were set free into the skies!

## August

- Operation against flycatcher trapping: In the mountains around Lake Garda, CABS teams set about on a two-week mission against the trapping of Pied Flycatchers and other early migratory songbird species. During the operation, which was carried out in close cooperation with the Carabinieri, 191 snap traps, 22 nets and 26 bow traps were found and destroyed. 11 poachers were caught in-situ and arrested by police officers.
- Wader trapping in Malta: Despite the overwhelming heat of 40+ degrees, a team of CABS volunteers spent a week on Malta in search of active trapping sites for protected Plovers, Sandpipers and other wading species. Four large trapping installations were discovered each with up to 40m of clap nets. Following our CABS reports, the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) department seized all nets and other trapping equipment and initiated proceedings against the landowners.



Pied-flycatcher killed by illegal snap trap in Brescia, Italy.



- CABS at Birdfair 2018: In Rutland waterpark in the UK, the largest nature and bird protection fair in the world takes place between 17 – 19 August with around 40,000 visitors in attendance. More than 400 organisations and artists from all over the world exhibit their work here. Both staff and volunteers alike manned our stand and talked about our wider work. We also show cased our work in Lebanon and Cyprus.



- In Malta, together with our colleagues from Birdlife Malta, we documented the shooting of at least five white storks. Despite organizing round-the-clock monitoring of the rest of the flock, the birds repeatedly came under fire. After all the adults were killed, the younger birds became disorientated and kept returning to the island each time they attempted to head out to sea. Not a single one of the 18 storks survived the cruel massacre, which caused a stir both in Malta and internationally. Based on testimonies later two hunters were charged.

## September

- In Lebanon, between 9 – 21 September, CABS held our third major mission against illegal bird poaching in the Cedar state. The focus of the campaign is to maintain a presence in the sensitive ‘bottleneck’ areas in the mountain corridors and the Bekaa Valley during peak migration. Our teams documented unimaginable massacres of migratory birds. However, as a small glimmer of light, for the first time it is also possible to ensure the arrest of 15 poachers. During an operation in the north, we also shut down a large-scale trapping site for songbirds.



CABS member with one of thousands of Honey Buzzards shot dead in the mountains of Lebanon.

- In Malta, CABS volunteers and Maltese ornithologists monitor the beginning of the official hunting season. Between 1 Sept – Mid November, more than 60 incidents involving the killing of protected bird species are documented, including numerous honey buzzards, harriers, hobby, short-eared owl, heron and flamingo. For the first time in many years, a slight increase in poaching has been noticeable.



- Night operation against illegal Quail hunting in Southern Italy: In Puglia – the ‘heel’ of the Italian boot – CABS conducted an operation against the large-scale illegal use of electronic decoys to attract huge number of Quail for shooting. Over the course of a week nine systems were identified and shut down. A similar CABS action also occurs in Serbia – here 23 callers are shut down and two hunters caught.

- 359,000 songbirds saved in Northern Italy: The right-wing populist group ‘Lega Nord’ fails in the regional parliament with a plan to bring in a derogation to allow the shooting of chaffinches and brambling and the trapping of 19,000 Song Thrushes in Lombardy. Together with a number of other NGOs and nature protection organisations, CABS formed an alliance campaign causing a huge wave of protests in the parliament, which voted against the project by a narrow majority.



## October

- Fight against bird trappers in Northern Italy: From 29th September to 28th October, a total of 52 international volunteers are working for us in Brescia to find illegal trapping sites and to stop the poachers together with a special unit of the Carabinieri. Forty-four poachers were convicted, and 170 live birds set



free unharmed. The seizure includes 392 bow traps, 279 snap traps, 109 mist nets, 11 unregistered shotguns, and about 2,100 plucked and frozen songbirds.

- Following the groundbreaking ruling by the European Court of Justice in June, CABS members are monitoring compliance with the newly adopted trapping ban on finches in Malta. By the end of the month, 43 illegal trapping sites were found and reported to the police. Our teams filmed trappers at 12 of these sites and they were later identified by the authorities. In total, the action resulted in the seizure of 20 large nets, two cage traps and 81 live decoys.





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- Bird catching in Germany: Near Edewecht (district Ammerland / Lower Saxony) a CABS member found an illegal cage trap for catching corvids and other predatory species. The police, contacted by our wildlife crime detection bureau (EDGAR), are investigating the case and initiating a case to identify the culprit.
  - To raise awareness about the illegal shooting endangered migratory birds in Lebanon, CABS released three new campaign videos documenting the massive slaughter of endangered migratory birds in Lebanon this autumn. The films reach more than a million viewers within a few days, parts of which are shown in prime time on the Lebanese TV news. Check our videos on our Youtube channel: **CABS - Vogelschutz**

## November

- CABS bird protection camp in Eastern Spain: during a ten-day mission in the province of Valencia, a CABS team was deployed to investigate illegal songbird trapping with nets and limesticks. Eight poachers were convicted as a result of our findings. Five large trapping installations were shut down and 14 mist nets, 400 limesticks and a handful of small live traps used to target migratory thrushes were seized.



- Growth in the CABS family: CABS has a new full-time employee and Environmental expert Lloyd Scott from the UK. Lloyd has previously worked for NGOs such as the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB. He has also worked in enforcement and regulation for the UK Environment Agency and is an experienced investigator and ornithologist. His main areas of work are our campaigns in Lebanon and Malta as well as helping expand our presence in the UK.
- In a first late autumn operation on the Italian Mediterranean island of Sardinia, CABS teams find barely 400 horsehair slings. 10 years ago, we would typically find well over 10,000 of these brutal songbird traps on the island. A great success of our many years of work! Another CABS bird protection camp in Sardinia will follow at the turn of the year.



- Our bird protection camp in Cyprus has never been so long: it started at the end of August and runs until mid-November. The total of 30 participants from all over Europe have found a total of 2,411 limesticks, 50 nets and 115 electronic decoys, 15 poachers were convicted as a result of our field work. 519 birds were released unharmed from the traps. While cooperation with the British police on the large British military bases is developing relatively well, the Cypriot Anti-Poaching Unit have almost completely ceased their support. The government in Nicosia apparently fears the displeasure of the poachers - their constituents!



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## December

- On Malta and Gozo, a CABS team is conducting night surveys to document the nocturnal trapping of golden plover with clap nets. Eight cases have been reported to the authorities, three electronic callers and numerous nets have been seized. Unfortunately, so far without exception, the trappers have been able to escape in the dark.
- Each year, around 5,000 Lesser Spotted Eagles are killed by poachers in Lebanon as they migrate to their wintering areas. This shocking estimate is the result of joint research by CABS and the German journal 'Der Falke'. Virtually the entire global population of Lesser Spotted Eagles cross the narrow coastline of Lebanon - through corridors as narrow as just 20km wide! Now, documented for the first time, the extent of illegal poaching threatens to destroy the conservation efforts being made in the breeding areas of Germany and Eastern Europe and is jeopardising the future survival of the species as a whole. The results of our research will be published in the December issue of the journal.



- New ponds for Northern Germany: Our staff overseeing the "Frogland Project" did a great job again in 2018: 40 new waters were created in Greater Kiel - Schleswig-Holstein where 100% financed the project, Target species include amphibians such as tree frog, moor frog and red-bellied toad, of course, also dragonflies and waterfowl. As part of the project, 359 ponds have been newly created since 2009, focusing on the districts of Rendsburg-Eckernförde, Plön and Segeberg.

- The "Il Pettiroso" Wildlife Conservation Centre in Modena, which is financially supported by the CABS, is growing and thriving. The centre which is already the largest of its kind in Italy will be further developed - an additional 70,000 square metres will be used as enclosures for injured animals such as boars and deer. In total, more than 3,900 animals were recorded in 2018, among them 960 songbirds (of which 520 were decoys seized by hunters), 420 birds of prey, 310 small carnivores (stone marten, badgers, foxes, etc.), 620 hoofed animals (deer, wild boar, red deer) , 590 hedgehogs and more than 300 small mammals (bats, dormice, etc.).



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## SUPPORT US 2019:

In 2018 - Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) brought together more than 250 volunteers from Europe and the Middle East to conduct a total of 26 bird protection camps across 7 countries in the poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean basin.

4532 traps, 569 nets, 147 electronic decoys were collected, 146 poachers were convicted and over 4000 birds were liberated from illegal traps. A countless number of other birds had their fate changed for the better by our presence and field work.

All of our operations are funded entirely by supporter donations and cost around €200,000 per year. Please help us to continue and expand our work with a donation - every cent is used to put boots on the ground and protect migratory birds from illegal poaching.

visit: [www.paypal.me/forbirds](http://www.paypal.me/forbirds)

Or

### **Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. / Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)**

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