



# Annual Report 2024

## Dear CABS Friends and Supporters,

Once again, twelve months of intense work lies behind us, which we have summarised for you in this report. With your donations and the support of our dedicated volunteers, we successfully conducted numerous bird protection campaigns and anti-poaching operations across seven different countries in 2024.

One highlight of our work this year was a special operation in Italy, where Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) staff were able to disrupt the black-market business of numerous bird dealers and alleged 'breeders'. During joint inspections with the authorities, more than 900 wild-caught songbirds were confiscated across several regions. The dealer's intention was to fit the birds with manipulated fake breeding rings and sell them on as though they had been legally bred in captivity. Meanwhile, dozens of bird trappers were caught red-handed during our bird protection camps in northern Italy and hundreds of trapping facilities were shut down. The good news is that in our main area of operation – the subalpine mountains in the province of Brescia – the downward trend in bird trapping observed in recent years has continued. Nevertheless, together with police support our teams were still able to catch and arrest 32 bird poachers in October and dismantled hundreds of illegal traps. A nice success, which hopefully contributes to further declines in bird poaching along this internationally important migration corridor.

Speaking of improvements: In Cyprus, too, we are once again seeing a significant decline in illegal bird trapping during spring. Unfortunately, the situation in autumn – when the birds move back to their wintering areas in higher numbers – remains completely out of control and no doubt costs the lives of millions of migratory songbirds every season. The Cypriot authorities are simply overwhelmed by the sheer scale of illegal trapping and hardly able to carry out their own proactive investigations. It should also be added that we have developed a great cooperation



Committee (CABS) team in Malta.

with the British Military Police in the Sovereign Base Areas. Investigations led by CABS teams ensured that 86 bird trappers were caught and convicted in Cyprus.

While we have been working closely with the respective environmental units of the police in Cyprus, Italy and Malta for years, our cooperation with the authorities in Greece is only just beginning. On the island of Zakynthos, we carried out our second successful bird protection camp against the shooting of protected turtle doves and other endangered species this spring. Even though the local police were initially hesitant to respond to our reports, we have now built up a good working relationship and are also planning a bird protection camp on Zakynthos for spring 2025 lasting several weeks!

In addition to our anti-poaching operations in the Mediterranean region, we also uncovered and reported numerous cases of illegal raptor persecution throughout Germany in 2024. The authorities initiated more than 30 criminal proceedings, although at the time of writing most of which have not yet been concluded. Among them are several cases of illegal poisoning, trapping, possession and trade of taxidermy including owls and birds of prey.

But whether it's owls, swallows, eagles or robins – we are fighting for our bird life and thanks to your support, thousands of migratory birds could be freed or saved from illegal shooting, trapping or poisoning in 2024. Thanks to your support for enabling our work to continue!

Best Regards from all the team at CABS HQ in Bonn

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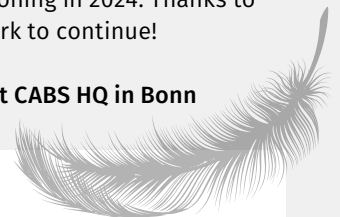
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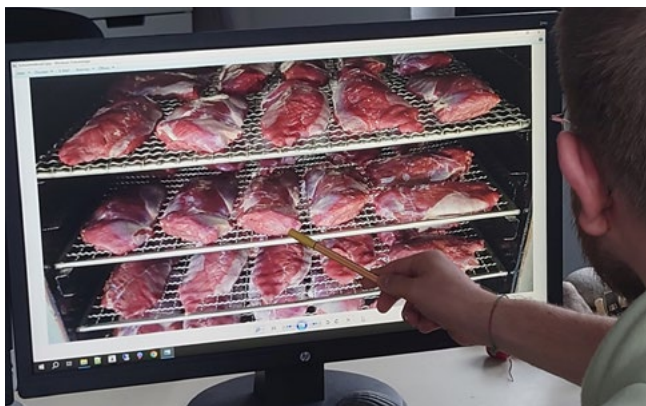
## JANUARY

Winter camp in Cyprus: From the beginning of December to the end of January, CABS teams took action against illegal hunting and trapping of wintering migratory birds on the eastern Mediterranean island. As a result of our field investigations, game wardens and the police were able to convict 22 poachers. A total of 36 nets and 35 decoys were confiscated by the officers. 47 freshly caught birds were freed unharmed from the nets by our teams.



Blackbird rescued from a trapping net in Cyprus.

In the lagoons south of Venice, one of the most important wintering areas for waterfowl in Europe, experts from CABS and our Italian partner LIPU documented evidence of illegal hunting practices. As a result of our reports, the police opened casefiles against eleven suspects for the use of illegal decoys, the shooting of protected species as well as the use of lead ammunition and unauthorised weapons. All defendants face high fines.



Butchered Swan meat sold in Germany.

Research by staff at CABS HQ shed light on extensive illegal trade in mute swan meat across Germany: Within a few years, a hunter from Saxony had butchered more than 100 mute swans he had shot and sold them to 'gourmets' from

an online forum. The marketing and acquisition of wild swans is strictly prohibited according to § 2 of the Federal Wildlife Protection Ordinance. The police initiated criminal proceedings against the man.

Following a CABS report, police officers in the municipality of Stemwede (Minden-Lübbecke district, North Rhine-Westphalia) dismantled and illegal bird of prey trap. Inside the 'ladder trap', which was about five cubic metres in size, there was a dead chicken and kilos of slaughterhouse waste as bait. As the investigations revealed, the trap was operated by a hunter. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the man who faces a fine and the withdrawal of his hunting licence.

## FEBRUARY

Decrease in bird trapping in Spain: When checking about 50 known trapping sites in the province of Alicante, our members found just five active clap-nets, which were immediately seized by the police. Two trappers were caught red-handed and sentenced to fines of several hundred euros each. The downward trend in poaching in the region continues. This is an important success for migratory bird conservation and proof of the effectiveness of our anti-poaching operations on the ground!

Snares in Sardinia: During a three-week operation on the Mediterranean island, our international team, together with the police, found 35 wire snares for mammals, 55 'horsehair snares' for songbirds and two large nets for bird trapping. All traps were dismantled and seized. The police initiated criminal proceedings against four suspects.



Songbird snares in Sardinia.



Mountain passes in Brescia, northern Italy.

eBay ends the sale of bird of prey traps: Hawk traps may no longer be sold on the online platform eBay. The company responded to a complaint from CABS Head Office, where following a lengthy investigation we proved evidence relating to the sale of more than 1,232 birds of prey trapping baskets via the platform. The vast majority of suppliers were dealers for hunting equipment as well as for pigeon and poultry breeding supplies.

Success in Italy: Important bird migration corridors will finally be hunting free! After a ruling by the Administrative Court of Milan, the government of Lombardy finally enforced a hunting ban for 42 Alpine passes that are important for bird migration, a ruling which was initially decided 20 years ago! CABS, which filed the lawsuit together with our Italian partners at Lega Abolizione Caccia (LAC), welcomed the decision and announced that the ban would be monitored closely during the autumn.

## MARCH

Raid on Malta: After a report from CABS, the police searched the property of a notorious 'bird collector' in the town of Siggiewi on 19 March 2024. In the complex, surrounded by high walls, aviaries containing a total of 107 live birds were discovered, including ortolans, yellow-hammers, red-throated pipits, golden plovers and dotterel, as well as a rare wood bunting. Since they were all taken from the wild, all animals were confiscated and released. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the owner.



Red-throated pipit seized from a bird trapper in Malta.

In Lebanon, our staff recover a wounded white stork with an ornithological ring from Lower Saxony. It is the female of a breeding pair that has been raising young in the Lüchow-Dannenberg district for many years. The bird was nursed back to health in an aviary built especially for it and was able to fly again after a few months thanks to regular vet visits. On 07.09. – shortly before the start of the war – the bird was released in an undisclosed protected area.



German ringed white stork rescued in Lebanon.

Controls in Sicily: In the city centre of Palermo is the "Ballarò" – a notorious market where illegally caught birds, but also many other prohibited goods, are sold under the counters; Italian forest police convicted four people selling freshly caught goldfinches and siskins at the market following a tip from the "Gruppo Adorno", which are financed supported by CABS. More than 20 birds were seized and later released!

Large-scale operation against illegal bird trapping in Malta: Between mid-March and mid-April, CABS staff and volunteers took action against the trapping of finches with clap-nets across the Maltese archipelago. As a direct result of video evidence produced by our teams, 32 bird trappers were arrested by police! Trapping equipment worth thousands of euros and more than 300 live birds – mainly finches – were seized.



Turtle dove shot during closed season in Zakynthos.

## APRIL

**Bird protection camp in Greece:** To combat the shooting of protected migratory birds on Zakynthos, CABS organised a large-scale operation on the island between mid-April to early May. More than 140 newly built hunting hides were found and documented. Despite the total hunting ban in force during spring, numerous poachers were active; nine were arrested by the police and their weapons and 140 rounds of ammunition were confiscated.

Despite international criticism, Malta once again reopened turtle dove hunting in spring. CABS teams of staff and volunteers were active for three weeks in April and documented the illegal shooting of hundreds of turtle doves even before the start of the official season on 10<sup>th</sup> April. In addition, it was possible to film a hunter shooting protected redshanks. The poacher, who has a criminal record, faces a fine of no less than 5,000 euros and the lifelong withdrawal of his hunting licence.



**Action against bird trapping in Cyprus:** During field investigations by CABS teams in the southeast of the island, two poachers were caught catching songbirds with limesticks. The police were called in and confiscated 56 limesticks and initiated charges against the men. In two other cases, illegal ground nets in which whole manner of wildlife often get caught were also dismantled. The nets are used to keep snakes away from garden plots.

Wood warbler found caught on a limestick in Cyprus.

In Lebanon, the Anti-Poaching Unit (APU), who are trained and financed by CABS and our partners at SPNL, conducted several successful operations against illegal songbird trapping. In the northern Bekaa Valley, a huge trapping facility with a total of eleven funnel-shaped mist-nets was found and dismantled with the police. On the coast near Beirut, a trapping site with 92 limesticks was also shut down. During the inspection of a market, another 800 freshly made limesticks were also confiscated.



Seizing a trapping net in Lebanon.

## MAY

**Deployment in the Gulf of Naples:** During a joint operation with the game wardens from the Italian WWF, a CABS team documented the extent of illegal spring hunting on the island of Ischia. Two hunters and a bird trapper were caught targeting protected migratory birds and reported to the police. The Carabinieri

police confiscated two shotguns, 400 rounds of ammunition and seven snap traps used for catching whinchats.



Confiscated weapons and ammunition in Ischia.

A dead red kite was found in the district of Neustadt/Aisch-Bad Windsheim (Bavaria). This is a bird associated with the EU-funded LIFE EUROKITE project, in which CABS participates as a German cooperative partner. A toxicological analysis revealed that the bird had been poisoned with the insecticide carbofuran, which is banned throughout Europe. CABS and LIFE-EUROKITE filed a criminal complaint against unknown persons.

**Successful work for Ortolan protection in France:** CABS published an evaluation of the data we have collected in recent years on bird trapping in the southwest of France. The most important result: The illegal trapping of Ortolans has decreased significantly since the beginning of our actions in 2011 and now poses only a minor threat. The study was published in the journal 'Vogelwarte' of the German Ornithological Society (DO-G).



## JUNE

**Illegal sale of herons in Bavaria:** A hunter from the district of Unterallgäu had to pay a fine for selling grey herons and corvids online despite a marketing ban. The responsible hunting authority – which were made aware following a report from CABS – confirmed that a fine had been imposed on the man. It is not yet known how high the penalty was and whether the man will be allowed to continue hunting.

**Birds would vote for Europe:** The European Birds Directive is the central basis for migratory bird protection throughout the European Union. It contains important hunting, trapping and marketing bans that must be implemented by all Member States. However, some political parties regard these measures as an overprotective ruling by a Nanny State and advocate for the abolition of these protective regulations. In the run-up to the European elections, CABS therefore called on people to vote for European-friendly and thus bird-friendly parties.

In Schwentinental (Schleswig-Holstein), CABS General Assembly took place as scheduled. The program included excursions to our protected reserves in the Plön district, the report of the board members, changes to the statutes and a by-election to the board. The conservationist and long-standing CABS associate Lloyd Scott from the UK was nominated as treasurer and unanimously elected by the assembly.



Poisoned peregrines in Germany.

**Attacks on peregrine falcons in Germany:** In the cities of Lünen, Lengerich, and Hagen in North Rhine-Westphalia, three entire peregrine falcon families were wiped out by persons unknown. The birds were found dead at their breeding sites alongside remains of a bait, toxicological analysis confirmed the banned pesticide carbofuran as the cause of death. CABS and the Working Group for the Protection of Peregrine Falcons (AGW) filed a criminal complaint with the State Criminal Police

Office and also offered a reward of 5000 euros for information leading to identification of the perpetrators.

## JULY

**Successful breeding season for harriers:** In the Zülpicher Börde (North Rhine-Westphalia), CABS members identified 12 marsh harrier and three montagu's harrier nests in grain fields. In order to prevent the broods from being killed by the combine harvesters, an area around the nests were fenced off and the farmers compensated for the loss of harvest. In the nest protection zones we monitored, 23 young marsh harriers and six montagu's harriers successfully fledged – more than ever before in our annual harrier protection project!



Harrier chicks in barley field.

Between 12–14<sup>th</sup> July, CABS staff and volunteers promoted our work at the 'Global Birdfair' in Rutland (England). Members of our teams met and greeted hundreds of visitors, talked to journalists, gave lectures and recruited volunteers for future assignments! The main focus of our stand this year was bird trapping in Cyprus and bird hunting in Greece.



CABS teams at the Global Birdfair in Rutland, UK.

**The Audubon magazine pays tribute to our work:** In the summer issue of National Audubon Society's member magazine – the largest conservation association in the USA with two million members – a 12-page report featured our work in Cyprus. Under the title 'Poaching Birds is Big Money for the Mafia in Cyprus – But a Brave Few are Fighting Back!' it documents the extent of poaching, the political entanglements and the work on the ground and our partners are reported in great detail.



Schwentinental wetlands in northern Germany.

**Milestone birthday:** Since 1984, CABS has owned, protected and maintained the 25-hectare protected area ‘Schwentinental Wetlands’ in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the Schwentinental nature conservation group and numerous volunteers, the former fishponds have now become a safe haven for numerous endangered animal and plant species. In this ‘anniversary year’, numerous events took place at the reserve, including information stands, lectures and guided tours.

## AUGUST

**Blow against the bird mafia in Italy:** CABS experts supported the police during inspections of alleged ‘captive bird breeders’. During the searches, in which 141 forest police were involved, more than 1,000 wild-caught thrushes, €140,000 in cash and extensive equipment used for bird trapping and manipulating breeding rings were discovered. The money, the birds as well as 2,400 rings, 48 trapping nets, 6 decoys, a rifle and 3,200 shotgun cartridges were seized. A total of 14 suspects were investigated and face prosecution.



Wild birds seized from mafia in Italy.

**Goldfinch trappers caught in Lebanon:** Near the city of Baalbek, members of our Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) filmed two men trapping goldfinches and called in the police. Both poachers were arrested by officers from the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and later sentenced to fines. Two net traps and seven live decoys were confiscated.



Flycatcher killed in a snap trap in northern Italy.

**Actions against songbird hunting across Italy:** After weeks of monitoring their trapping grounds by the CABS, four bird trappers were convicted by police in Lombardy. The men had set up dozens of traps to catch pied flycatchers. In Calabria, four hunters were filmed and reported for shooting garden warblers, spectacled warblers as well as a marsh harrier.

**In Malta,** CABS teams conducted an operation against illegal wader trapping of early migrating plovers, stilts and other waders. The trappers create artificial ponds in harvested fields and place decoys and large clap-nets there. A total of six huge active trapping installations were identified by our teams and shut down together with the police. Two men are reported and will have to answer later in court.



## SEPTEMBER



Barn owls rescued in Cyprus.

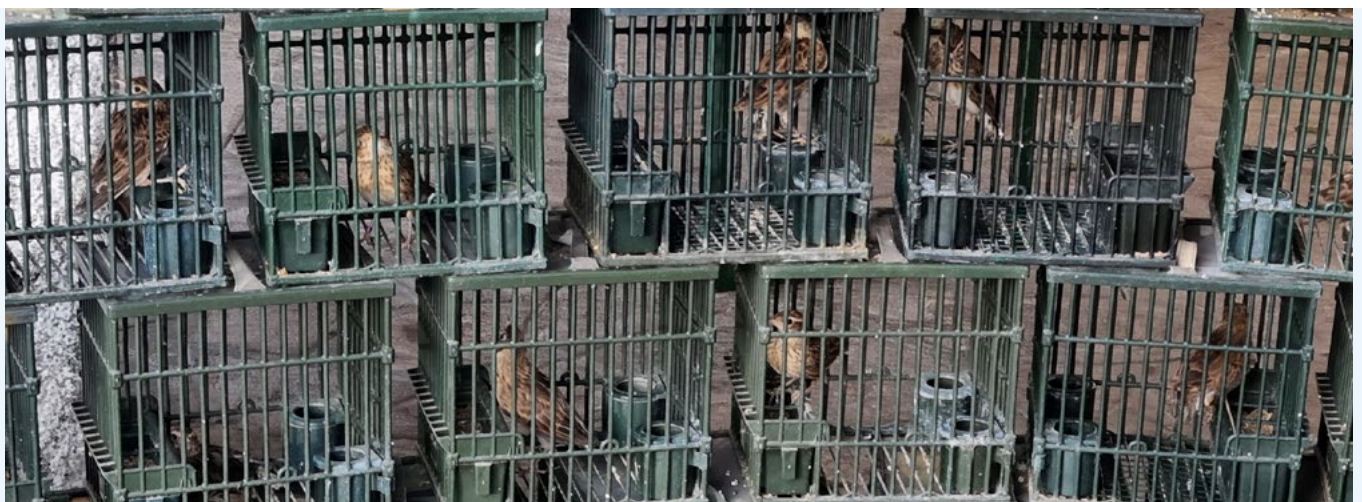
At our autumn bird protection camp in Cyprus, 71 active trapping sites were found. Together with the police, our teams collected and dismantled 882 limesticks, 51 mist-nets and 40 electronic decoys. In addition, 552 freshly caught birds were rescued and released, including numerous owls, nightingales, red-backed shrikes and warblers. 25 poachers were filmed in the act or caught by the police directly at the traps.



CABS bird guards in Malta.

Despite the outbreak of war, our staff based in Lebanon continue working to protect migratory birds. In the district of Akkar, the remains of several hundred shot honey buzzards, lesser spotted eagles and other birds of prey were found in the mountain passes. Along the coast, two bird trappers were convicted together with the police and two dozen goldfinches are confiscated. A number of rescues have also taken place including rescuing a shot lesser spotted eagle which is currently being rehabilitated.

Monitoring the hunting season on Malta: On the islands of Malta and Gozo, our teams kept check that migratory bird hunters are following the rules during open season. However, the shooting of protected kestrels, honey buzzards, bee-eaters and curlews was also documented. In three cases, following reports from CABS teams the police succeeded in locating and arresting the poachers. Their hunting weapons and two prohibited electronic decoys were seized as evidence.



Skylarks seized from bird markets in Italy.

During inspections of bird markets and 'singing competitions' in the Italian regions Tuscany and Veneto, CABS teams documented numerous violations. Together with the police, 22 exhibitors were inspected. A total of 94 'alleged' captive-bred offspring – including redstarts, tree pipits and blackcaps – were revealed to be wild-caught and confiscated for later release. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the owners and sellers. Several singing competitions were subsequently cancelled completely by the organisers.



## OCTOBER



Redwing in Italy.

Successful bird protection camp in Brescia, northern Italy: In the mountains of the Southern Alps, 38 bird conservationists from across Europe joined forces to help scour the mountains in the search of active trapping sites! Together with the police and game wardens, 32 poachers were convicted – the officers seized 393 snap traps, 13 net traps, 63 bow traps, 8 traps, 1 limestick, 76 mist-nets, 23 hunting weapons, around 500 rounds of ammunition and 316 dead birds from the perpetrators. The numbers reported are lower than ever before, a positive sign of the success of our work!

Despite a new condemnation by the European Court of Justice, the Maltese government continued authorised a controversial trapping 'project' for finches. From 20th October, tens of thousands of birds may be caught, supposedly for 'research' purposes. CABS described the project as 'poaching under the guise of science' from the beginning. We deployed several teams to identify unregistered sites and called on the government to end the project immediately.



Hawfinches used as live decoys in Malta.

Scandal in Malta: One day before the official opening of the 'research' season, our teams filmed David Briffa – a board member of the Maltese hunters' association FKNK illegally catching hawfinches. The case confirmed once again that the organisers of the alleged research project are not interested in science, but in being able to take protected species. All Maltese media reported on the case. According to the Times of Malta, the FKNK has since reacted by removing Briffa from office.

Migratory bird protection in Spain: CABS began working with several teams together with the police to combat the illegal trapping of migrating songbirds on the east coast of Spain. During the three-week operation, nine poachers were convicted in the regions of Catalonia and Valencia and 2,000 limesticks, 32 cage traps, 13 nets and seven electronic decoys were seized. Around 30 freshly caught thrushes and blackcaps were rescued and released!

## NOVEMBER

Blow against poaching in Piedmont: CABS teams were also active in north-western Italy, collecting evidence against illegal bird hunting. From mid-October to mid-November, 17 hunters were caught violating protective regulations in joint actions with WWF game wardens. The police confiscated a total of 16 firearms and 15 electronic decoys and initiated criminal proceedings against the accused.



Seized items in Piedmont, Italy.

In Malta, the CABS took further action against bird trapping in autumn, which has been relabelled as a 'research project'. Thanks to months of meticulous work, our teams were able to present evidence of numerous violations to the police by the end of November. Officials from the EPU environmental unit then searched all reported trapping sites and confiscated 18 huge clap-nets and more than 250 finches that had been recently caught or kept as live decoys. Criminal proceedings were initiated against six bird trappers for poaching.

Project Frogland: This year, CABS staff once again created numerous small bodies of water in Schleswig-Holstein. In November, the 'ground-breaking' ceremony took place for what is now the 500th pond, which was created as part of the project funded by the state government. Together, this extensive network of small wetlands represents an important biotope for numerous endangered birds, amphibians and insects across northern Germany.





**DECEMBER**



Manipulated breeding rings being inspected in Italy.

Fraud with manipulated breeding rings in Italy: Together with the authorities, CABS led an investigation involving 13 large-scale inspections of alleged 'bird breeders' in Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna in 2024. A total of 310 skylarks and thrushes with manipulated or fake breeding rings were discovered, confiscated and released. The birds were intended to be sold for more than €100 each on the black market.

Bird trappers on trial: In Malta, CABS members are busy all year round testifying in court against bird trappers caught by our teams. A total of eight poachers were sentenced to fines ranging between a few hundred to few thousand euros between January and November. In two cases, the lifelong withdrawal of the hunting license of the accused was also ordered. More than 20 proceedings in which CABS staff and volunteers have been summoned as witnesses have not yet been concluded at the time of writing.

Bird protection mission in southern Spain: In the autonomous region of Andalusia, CABS is organising a bird protection camp for the third time since autumn 2022. Numerous bird trapping sites were found, particularly around the harbour city of Cadiz, but most of them are not active due to bad weather and have to be checked again later in the winter. Together with the UPROMA police unit, three poacher were caught red-handed in the act of illegally hunting song thrushes – a mist net, two calp nets, a decoy and two illegal hunting weapons are confiscated during the operation.



CABS bird guard in Spain.

Raptor persecution in Germany: In 2024, our wildlife crime recording and documentation centre (EDGAR) processed more than 40 cases, including the shooting of a red kite in the district of Minden-Lübbecke (NRW), a white-tailed eagle killed with carbofuran in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, poisoned or shot buzzards and red kites in Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate and Lower Saxony, several tree felling's with active nests, plus several cases of illegal marketing and animal cruelty.

Police inspecting a ladder trap in Germany.





## SUPPORT US IN 2025!

➔ In 2024, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) successfully coordinated 31 bird protection camps involving 216 volunteers across 7 countries in and around the Mediterranean basin.

4,604 traps, 477 nets, 190 electronic decoys were seized and dismantled in close cooperation with the authorities. 337 poachers were convicted and over 2,800 birds were rescued and released from illegal traps or recovered injured in the field and taken for veterinary care and rehabilitation.

All of our anti-poaching operations are funded entirely by supporter donations and cost around €900,000 to coordinate and deliver each year. We are the only international organisation on the frontline against migratory bird poaching and it is more important than ever that we boost and continue our efforts going forward into 2025!



Please help us to continue and expand our work with a donation – every single cent and penny is directly put to good use on the ground and helps deliver direct action to protect our migratory birds from illegal poaching.

**Thank you all for your continued support!**

### VISIT

[www.komitee.de/en/donate](http://www.komitee.de/en/donate)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW, Berlin), the Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten (DDA), the Förderverein für Ökologie und Monitoring von Greifvogel- und Eulenarten (Halle), the Landesbund für Vogelschutz (LBV) in Bavaria, Pro Wildlife, NABU and its state associations, the German Animal Welfare Association, the North Rhine-Westphalian Ornithological Society (NWO), the Ornithological Working Group Helgoland, the Institute for Bird Research – Ornithological Institute Helgoland, the German Council for the Protection of Birds (DRV), the Working Group for the Protection of Peregrine Falcons (AGW), the Working Group of Berlin-Brandenburg Ornithologists (ABBO), the Working Group for Biological Environmental Protection (ABU, Soest), the Bergische Birds of Prey Aid, the Paasmühle Bird Care Station, the Biological Stations Düren, Euskirchen and Bonn/Rhein-Erft, the Municipality of Schwentental, the District of Euskirchen, the Rhein-Erft District, the Lower Saxony State Agency for Water Management, Coastal and Nature Conservation (NLWKN), the Schwentental Nature Conservation Group and, of course, all our members, sponsors and activists.

### Komitee gegen den Vogelermord Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)



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