



**THE KILLING 2.0**  
**A VIEW TO A KILL**

# Together we are BirdLife International



The global Partnership for **nature** and **people**

[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)

## INTRODUCTION

# A VIEW TO A KILL

The BirdLife Partnership presents **THE KILLING 2.0** – the second installment in our ongoing series of scientific reviews led by BirdLife exposing the scale and scope of the illegal killing of birds across critical regions. The first installment, published in August 2015, shocked many by revealing the brutal extent of the bird crime taking place in the Mediterranean. To those results, we now also add the results compiled from Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Caucasus. Next year, we will be extending our eagle eye towards the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf.

**Beyond the Mediterranean**, birds are primarily killed illegally for sport in the Caucasus and for both sport and predator or 'pest' control in Northern Europe and Central Europe. In Azerbaijan alone, hundreds of thousands of waterbirds (between 160,000 and 900,000) are thought to perish each year. Illegal killing by 'tourist-hunters' is rampant across Central Europe. In Romania, for example, Eurasian Skylarks are not traditionally hunted and are protected by law, yet thousands of these delicate passerines are killed each year within its borders by foreign hunters.

**The toll imposed** by illegal killing in each country may for some species, like Little Bustard or White-headed Duck, be too great for the population to bear. For some migratory species, illegal killing in each country along their route, alongside mortality from legal hunting and more diffuse threats like habitat loss, may add up to a significant impact.

**Predators have become the prey**, with the review identifying raptors as the bird group with the highest percentage of species affected by illegal killing. Sadly, all but one of the 52 species present in the surveyed regions are being affected by this threat. The protection and provisions of the Birds Directive, CMS and Bern are not currently being implemented in many countries where the reality is un-checked persecution through poisoning, shooting and trapping at the hands of some land managers and those who target them for 'sport'.

**Like the piercing cry of the raven**, our study issues an anxious warning call and establishes a baseline – going forward, there is an urgent and inescapable need for better monitoring of this scourge. We can clearly see that illegal killing *is* happening – and that it is happening on an epic flyway scale. We arrive, therefore, at a troubling conclusion: the scale of the killing may be massively underestimated.

**Despite legal protections** enshrined in the Council of Europe and European Union law, the illegal killing of birds continues largely unabated across the old continent, all the way from the Atlantic to the Caspian Sea.

**There is hope** – the governments of the Mediterranean and Europe are starting to work together in international forums to face this difficult issue head on and share information and ideas on how to tackle it. In some cases, as in Cyprus, action plans are drawing together all national stakeholders to help. Efforts to tackle illegal killing on the ground are starting to bear fruit when this happens.

**Success will require** much greater political commitment, much greater investment in enforcement, stronger penalties and better monitoring of the issue from governments, zero tolerance of illegal killing among hunting and the communities at large and greater awareness and a stronger voice from civil society. A cultural sea change is required if we want these protected birds to be seen as an incredible view to be marvelled at and not 'a view to a kill' down the barrel of a gun.

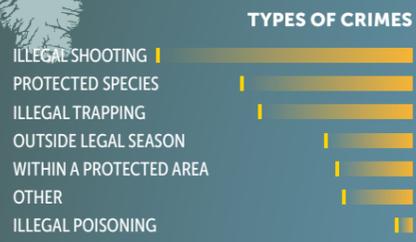
**Better monitoring and increased surveillance** of this issue is urgently needed in most countries to increase detection of crimes, help identify priorities for action and to measure progress.

**BirdLife International** is the global champion for safe flyways. We are committed to continue to use science to underpin conservation action and to work with all stakeholders to **stop illegal killing**.

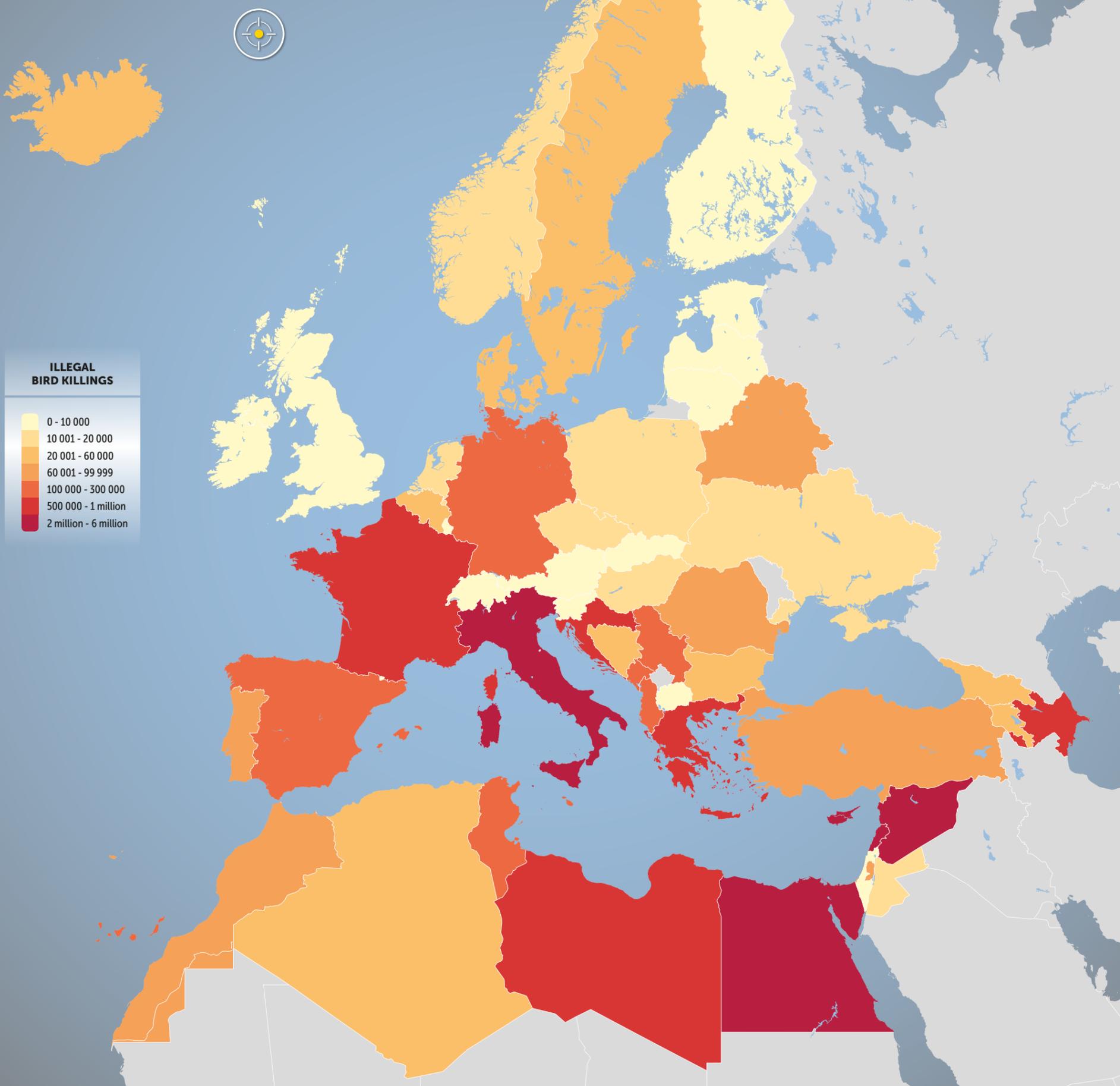
Find out how you can help at  
[www.birdlife.org/illegal-killing](http://www.birdlife.org/illegal-killing)



**Patricia Zurita**  
BirdLife International, CEO



**MAP OF ILLEGAL KILLING IN EUROPE, THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE CAUCASUS**



**MOST AFFECTED SPECIES**

-  **HOUSE SPARROW**  
*Passer domesticus*  
4.7 MILLION
-  **COMMON CHAFFINCH**  
*Fringilla coelebs*  
2.9 MILLION
-  **EURASIAN BLACKCAP**  
*Sylvia atricapilla*  
1.8 MILLION
-  **COMMON QUAIL**  
*Coturnix coturnix*  
1.7 MILLION
-  **SONG THRUSH**  
*Turdus philomelos*  
1.2 MILLION
-  **CALANDRA LARK**  
*Melanocorypha calandra*  
0.9 MILLION
-  **EURASIAN SKYLARK**  
*Alda arvensis*  
0.8 MILLION

**NOTE**  
All numbers in the maps are rounded, mean estimates. For non-rounded, mean numbers and minimum/maximum estimates, see the scientific papers: *Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean* (Brochet et al., 2016) and *Illegal killing and taking of birds in Europe outside the Mediterranean: assessing the scope and scale of a complex issue* (Brochet et al., in revision).



CHAPTER

1

## ARE THEIR DAYS NUMBERED?

**The death toll** for birds killed illegally across Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Caucasus is estimated at 0.4-2.1 million individual birds per year. The killing comes despite the fact that 28 of the countries recently assessed are parties to the legally binding Bern Convention (on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats), and 19 are also Member States of the European Union, obliged to implement its benchmark nature laws, the Birds and Habitats Directives.

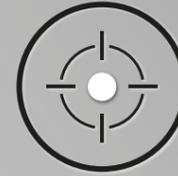
**A staggering 66%** of the 457 species of native birds assessed were reported to be known to be killed (or likely to be killed) illegally in significant figures each year. The bird groups most seriously affected (in terms of absolute numbers) are waterbirds and seabirds, followed by passerines. Raptors, as well as pigeons and doves are also badly affected. Alarmingly, all the native species of auk, heron, rail, gallinule, coot, pigeon, dove and thrush regularly found in all three regions are affected by illegal killing in significant numbers. For example, the Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Near Threatened in Europe, has a mean estimate of more than 100,000 individuals illegally killed each year.

**The population impacts** of illegal killing are particularly worrying when threatened species are concerned. For example, the globally Near Threatened Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* loses potentially on average 10% of their entire global population to illegal killing in Northern and Central Europe and the Caucasus each year.



**MALLARD**  
*Anas platyrhynchos*  
Photo John Fox





CHAPTER

2

## IN FOR THE KILL

**For the sport of it.** In both Central Europe and the Caucasus, the lead driver behind illegal bird killing is sport. Hunting tourism is notably problematic; though parts of this industry operate within legal limits, there are still widespread infringements. Indeed, many travel expressly to countries such as Hungary, Poland and other Eastern European states — where hunting legislation is not effectively implemented — so they can illegally shoot birds upon arrival with impunity.

**Controlling factors.** In Northern Europe, the main motivation behind illegal bird killing is predator and so-called 'pest' control. Small passerines are targeted as 'pests' because they feed on agricultural crops. The powerful raptors of the skies, however, are targeted because they are perceived as being in direct competition with man for game species such as grouse and pheasants.

**Food for thought?** The taste for culinary delicacies continues to play a major role in illegal bird killing across the continent. In both Northern Europe and Central Europe, birds shot or trapped for food purposes are generally consumed as a delicacy. Whereas, in the Caucasus, birds are seen as a free source of meat and income. In Azerbaijan, for example, illegally shot bird species are openly sold along the roads bordering protected wetlands and reserves under the guise of being 'chickens', 'geese' or 'domestic ducks'.

**A case of mistaken identity.** A significant number of illegally killed birds are killed by accident in cases where protected species have been mistaken for a species that is legal to hunt.



**EURASIAN SKYLARK**  
*Alauda arvensis*  
Photo Thomas McDonnell





CHAPTER

3

## THE KILL ZONES

**The killing is widespread.** The illegal killing of birds is notoriously associated with the countries of the Mediterranean. While this problem is indeed rife in that region, the new data shows that illegal killing is also taking place across the wider continent, from the Atlantic to the Caspian Sea.

**The 20 worst locations** reported for the illegal killing of individual birds in Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Caucasus are found in six 'hotspot' countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Germany and the Netherlands.

**The top 6 kill zones** all fall within Azerbaijan. At the Greater and Lesser Gizilagach Bays, on the country's south-east coast, the number of birds killed each year represents a staggering 18% of the mean estimated annual total of birds illegally killed across the region, and for all species combined.

**The illegal killing hotspots** in the Caucasus countries tend to be small sites at specific lakes, bays and deltas. While in Northern European countries like Germany and the Netherlands, the problem tends to be more regional.



**LITTLE BUSTARD**  
*Tetrax tetrax*  
Photo J. G. Gutierrez/Shutterstock





CHAPTER

4

## PREY FOR OUR SINS

**When predators become the prey.** The bird group with the highest percentage of species affected by illegal killing in Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Caucasus are the raptors. Some 15,100-68,500 individuals are estimated to be killed here each year, and all but one (Black-winged kite *Elanus caeruleus*) of the 52 raptor species found across the three regions are affected by this threat.

**In absolute numbers,** Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo* are reportedly the most affected (mean estimate of >10,000) followed by European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (mean estimate of >5,000). Of pressing concern is the plight of the globally Near Threatened Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* with potentially as much as 10% of its European population (and a staggering 20% of its EU population) illegally killed annually.

**The raptors of the skies,** from the great eagles and falcons to the hawks, kites and ospreys — have captured our imaginations for centuries. But these awe-inspiring creatures have also long been persecuted by man, falling victim to illegal shooting and poisoning. 'Predator Control' is the most important reason given for illegal killing of birds of prey across Northern Europe and Central Europe. Historically, some species have even been persecuted to extinction in certain countries. In many cases, expensive reintroduction programmes have been seriously jeopardised by continued persecution and inappropriate 'predator control'.



**EURASIAN BUZZARD**  
*Buteo buteo*  
Photo Martin Hesko/Shutterstock





CHAPTER

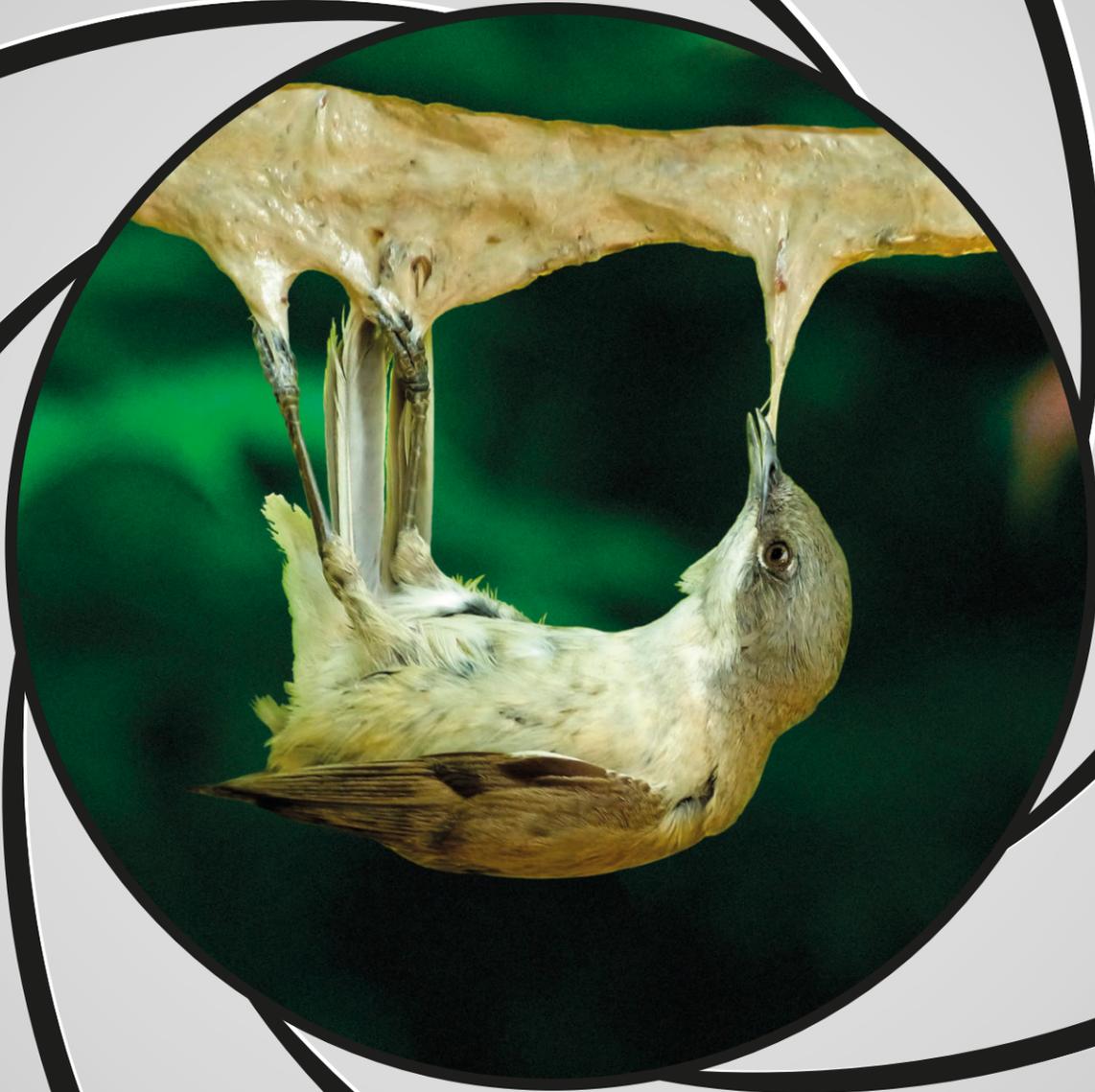
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## SETTLING THE SCORE

**Death under the sun.** In 2016, BirdLife published the first scientific review to quantify the true extent of the illegal killing of birds throughout the Mediterranean region. With that review, and now this new publication 'The Killing 2.0' highlighting the rest of Europe and the Caucasus, we show that more than 25 million birds are being illegally slaughtered in the region as a whole each year. The CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species) and the Bern Convention have acknowledged that the results from our first review have already catalysed government efforts either directly or indirectly to address this problem. The EU has also taken a number of legal actions against Member States for failure to enforce bird protection.

**Taking 'The Killing' to task.** CMS has also formed an Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT) region. Several governments have also developed national strategies or action plans to tackle the problem at country level.

**Keeping score.** In a strong show of commitment to ending this problem, governments have worked together to set up a 'scoreboard' tool, developed under MIKT and the Bern Convention, to assess and grade progress of all European and Mediterranean countries towards ending the illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory wild birds. The scoreboard shall be presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> CMS Conference of Parties, scheduled for 22 to 28 October 2017, in Manila, the Philippines.



**LESSER WHITETHROAT**

*Sylvia curruca*

Photo Committee against Bird Slaughter (CABS)





CHAPTER

6

## FLYING INTO THE FACE OF DANGER

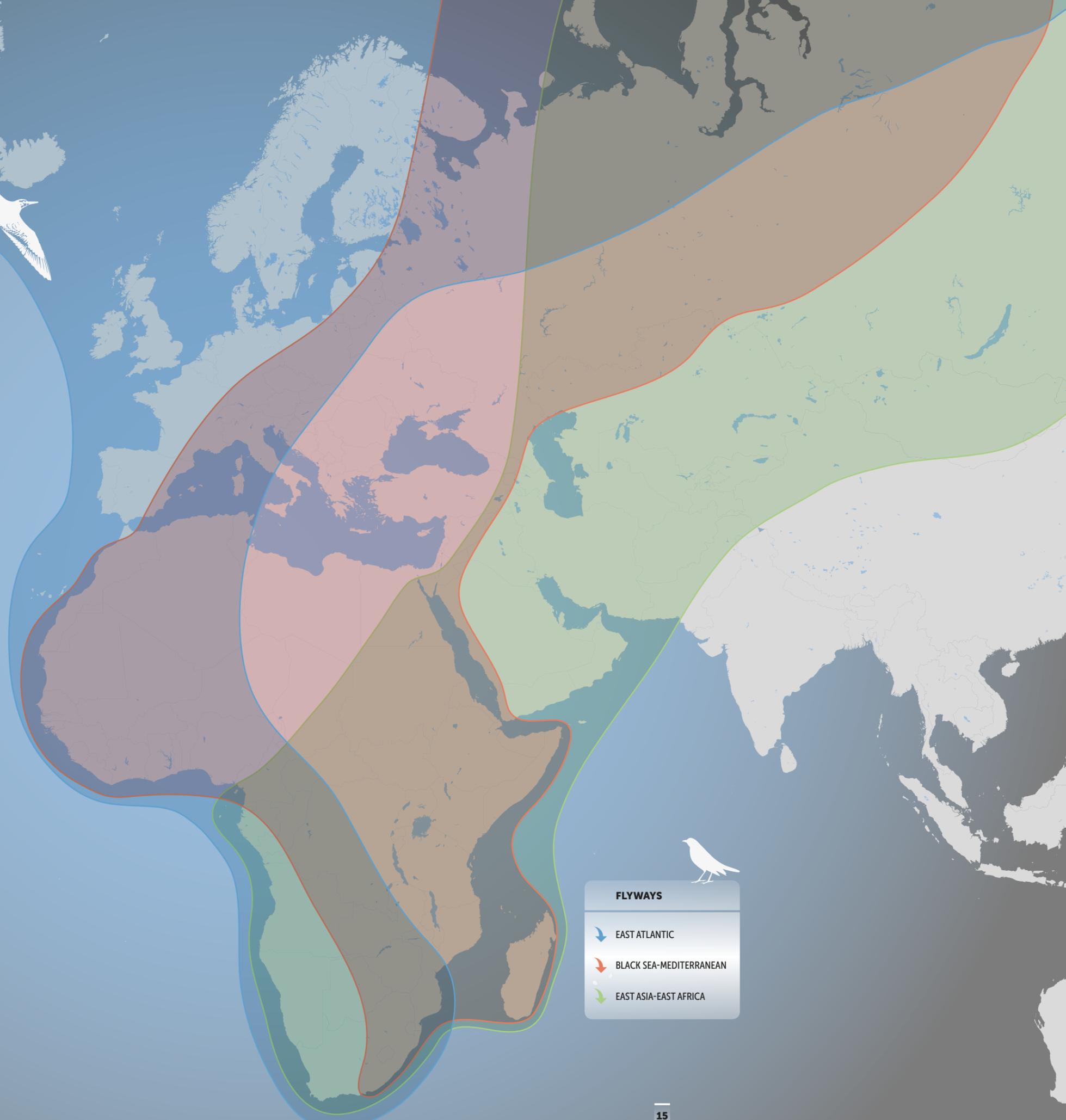
**The Africa-Eurasia flyway** connects the breeding grounds of Europe and North-West Asia with the wintering grounds in Africa, and includes vital stop-over sites in the Middle-East and Mediterranean.

**The latest data** on illegal bird killing from Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Caucasus — combined with data from BirdLife's 2016 review of illegal killing in the Mediterranean — provides a vivid picture of the dangers faced by migratory birds as they make their perilous journeys along the flyway.

**The flyways** are one long obstacle course: the threat of illegal killing in each country along a species' route — and on top of other threats such as habitat loss — may just be too much for some species to bear. This is especially true in cases where the species is Near Threatened, like the Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* or the White-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*.

**More data and monitoring** is desperately needed to track progress on the issue and make flyways the safe routes our birds deserve. Together, we must act decisively — and soon. The alarming data in our reviews beg the question — for how much longer can our birds afford to continue flying into the face of danger?

**Despite the national legislation** and international obligations designed to protect birds along the length and breadth of the flyways, inadequate enforcement and implementation — as well as poor public awareness — plague the survival of these vulnerable migrants.



### FLYWAYS

-  EAST ATLANTIC
-  BLACK SEA-MEDITERRANEAN
-  EAST ASIA-EAST AFRICA



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COVER PHOTO  
EURASIAN BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*  
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