# 704,000 birds killed/year (mean average)

On average, more than 5 birds killed/km2 are reported to be illegally killed each year in Greece. Presently, of the 345 species of birds assessed in Greece, 32% of species are being killed illegally in significant numbers.

“Greece is among the three worst countries for the illegal killing of European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*). Moreover, European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), European Serin (*Serinus serinus*), European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*) and Greater Short-Toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) are caught in large numbers to be illegally sold as cagebirds. Greece is also among the top three countries that illegally kill Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*).” – BirdLife International

A significant percentage of the European population of this species is present in Greece, and the species is listed as ‘Vulnerable’ on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List – although their populations are now recovering. In comparison with other countries, fewer birds are killed illegally in Greece for food, with greater numbers killed for ‘sport’ or trapped to be caged.

Information is a critical resource in order to estimate the magnitude of the problem of illegal kill of birds in Greece. Timely availability of relevant information is vital for effective accomplishment of talking reduction of illegal killing in a time and space, the drivers of illegal kill of birds are varied and the phenomena tend to fall somewhere on a continuum, from that done to obtain meat for direct consumption to community trade such as caged birds for commercial trade in urban centres or even international markets. There are indications that trapping is increasingly commercial in many areas in response to increasing financial decadence and lack of the specific knowledge.

Data on the scale and economic value of the bird’s trade in Greece are scarce (partly due to the covert nature of the trade). It is clear that the business of trapping/killing contribute significantly black market in rural areas, from the illegally rent of best spot (up to 3,000 euros for one season) during the three weeks of spring shooting to the continues supply of life birds sold in open market as caged birds. However, due to the unsustain­able nature of poaching, those social and economic benefits are unlikely to be sustainable. Furthermore, most forms of IKB represent an extremely wasteful and inefficient form of wildlife use which captures a tiny fraction of the value of the resource it destroys.

The illegal prosecution of birds of particular concern in Greece are:

● Heavy shooting in wetlands even during statutory bans in harsh weather. This is made worse by easier access to wetlands using off-road vehicles

● Use of poison

● Targeted hunting of protected species

● Bird trapping is still practiced in several places.

● Hunting out of the hunting season (spring migration)

## Spring shooting (Zakynthos and Paxoi-Antipaxoi)

Illegal shooting of the declining **Turtle Dove** during spring migration has taken place for decades in protected areas of the Ionian Islands, more intensely on Zakynthos and Paxoi-Antipaxoi, as part of a deeply engrained local tradition. This tradition is however not so “idyllic”. Firstly, the rapid and alarming 70% decline of this farmland species makes this tradition, where 130,000 Turtle Doves are killed annually, no longer acceptable. Secondly, the activity represents an economic benefit for the local community. Land in the best “spots” is rented out illegally and expensively (up to 3,000 euros for one season) during the three weeks of spring shooting, hampering access to the protected areas and creating a sizable economic black market.

Greece is the third worst crossing of the Mediterranean for the Turtle Dove. The species crosses an extremely long stretch on its way to Northern Europe to breed: the Sahara desert, then the Mediterranean Sea. It arrives in Zakynthos and Paxi-Antipaxi completely depleted, only to be met by gunshots.

The Ionian Islands particularly Zakynthos are favourite hunting grounds, especially in spring and autumn. Much of the headlands, forests, and olive groves swarm with camouflaged hunters sporting an alarming array of weapons, and automatic rifles. Many of the huntsmen specially mark their territory, and hold out for days in specially constructed hides, many equipped with generators, fridges and televisions. As a consequence much of the forest interior is littered with their rubbish, & lead shot adding to the risk of summer fires.

The hunting of migratory birds in the breeding season is strictly forbidden by European law, EU wild birds directive 79/409 EEC and yet the enforcement of such laws is poorly managed. Ornithologists visiting the islands in April or May are often alarmed to find birds such as the Golden Oriole, buzzards and falcons shot for trophys by the relentless huntsmen. The Turtle dove has been hunted for years in these parts and is now in decline.

## Mass trapping (Santorini, Anafi and Folegandros)

Each autumn, tens of thousands of migrant songbirds are illegally trapped, particularly on Santorini but also on other Cyclades islands, such as Anafi and Folegandros by luring birds to so-called limnes – man-made drinking pools baited with live captive birds.

Mass trapping in the Aegean islands takes place mainly for the purpose of illegal trading as cagebirds in urban markets in Athens and Thessaloniki (increasingly via the internet) and less for food, females are often fried and served with ouzo.

650,000 birds of 59 different species are trapped, 60% of the species targeted are the residents or short distance migrants; European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), European Serin (*Serinus serinus*), European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*), Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*). However, trapping methods being indiscriminate, result in mass killings for sensitive migratory species which do not last very long, mainly Garden warbler (*Sylvia borin)*, Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis),* Willow Warbler *(Phylloscopus trochilus*) Chaffinch (*Fringilla* coelebs)*.*

This activity is in breach of Directive 79/409/EEC(1) on the conservation of wild birds and, in particular, Articles 1, 5, 6 and 8 thereof. Moreover, infringement proceedings are pending against Greece in the Court of Justice (Case C‑293/07) for failure to implement Article 4 of that directive. A local pressure group estimates there are between 200 and 500 limnes on the island of Santorini and an estimated 50 birds are trapped at each every autumn.

On 10 November 2005, using information provided by HOS, rangers from the Forestry Department of Cyclades and game wardens from the regional Hunting Federation found and destroyed dozens of limnes, although nobody was arrested during the operation.

Currently, there are only six forest rangers to cover the 24 inhabited islands of the Cyclades archipelago.

## Illegal Trading (Athens and Thessaloniki)

Illegal trading in Greece is extensive and takes place both in licensed and illegal pet-shops and open-air markets (mainly Schisto and Oropos, outskirts of Athens). It is estimated that in urban centers more than 50% of the pet shops trade European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), European Serin (*Serinus serinus*), European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*). The internet is also a new place where illegal trade safely takes place, away from the enforcement authorities’ jurisdiction. Facebook pages and advertisements in legal websites are common. Economic benefit is the main driver for trapping in Greece, which drives migratory birds to death.

# The law

Greek law protects all wild birds except those classed as game. Trapping, luring and falconry are illegal. The Ministry of Agriculture publishes annual regulations, with details of hunting seasons and quarry lists, after consultation with the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS - BirdLife in Greece), among others.

Hunting can be restricted in harsh weather but whenever this is put into practice, there is controversy. The competent authorities are usually reluctant because of local protests.

Enforcement of the hunting regulations is carried out by the forestry authority and a number of guards employed by the Regional Hunters' Federations, 250 in total, and another 70 employed by local hunting societies usually for short term periods. The effectiveness of the guards varies locally, but is generally inadequate as there are too few in relation to the size of the areas they are required to cover.

<https://youtu.be/guKWESc5UZc>

<https://youtu.be/rkdLEuR_t6o>