



WILDLIFE CRIME CONFERENCE

International Conference on Achievements and Challenges in wildlife crime

22 – 24 May 2024
Limassol, Cyprus



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Outcomes of the International conference on achievements and challenges in wildlife crime

Introduction

The European Union has recognized the illegal killing of birds as a main threat to birds and other biodiversity, consequently, prioritising the increase in measures and their effectiveness to combat illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds.

The illegal use of poison is widely recognized as one of the most severe issues related to illegal killing of birds and is confirmed to be among the top direct threats to protected species in Europe. The Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP), which was adopted by the CMS in 2017, also recognises measures against electrocution and collision with energy infrastructures a high priority to vulture conservation.

The International Conference on achievements and challenges of wildlife crime that took place in Limassol between 22-24 May 2024, focused on three main threats and steps towards their solution: illegal use of poison, trapping and killing as well as electrocutions and collisions on energy infrastructure. Increasing the efforts against wildlife crime, on both EU and national level, can have a significant impact on reducing mortality rates of species and in combination with conservation actions this can lead to recovery of populations, such as the Griffon Vulture and other raptor species.

The Conference brought together experts that work in the area of wildlife crime for a networking get-together to exchange best-practices around this topic. The Conference provided an opportunity to share up-to-date achievements and challenges across the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions and enhance collaboration between LIFE projects.

The Conference was organised by BirdLife Cyprus and the Vulture Conservation Foundation under the framework of the LIFE project “LIFE with Vultures CY” (LIFE18 NAT/CY/001018) implemented in Cyprus, and the BalkanDetox LIFE project (LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016). It covered three major aspects of wildlife crime, common throughout the Mediterranean and Balkan regions; trapping, poisoning, electrocution & collision. The Conference also supported the closing actions of the LIFE with Vultures CY project and the shaping of future actions in Cyprus against wildlife crime.

The challenges associated with investigation and prosecution of wildlife crimes were presented by relevant competent authorities across the region, giving them the opportunity to share their experience and expertise in overcoming these challenges. With such discussions, the conference aimed to contribute to regional connectivity between the relevant law enforcement authorities for combating wildlife crime, which is also one of the priorities of the BalkanDetox LIFE project.

One of the main pillars of the BalkanDetox LIFE project is reinforcement of institutional capacities regarding investigation and management of poisoning incidents through the provision of specialised training for law enforcement agents. To this end, the Vulture Conservation

Foundation has established with the support of the MAVA Foundation and Junta de Andalucía, the Wildlife Crime Academy (WCA) in Spain. The WCA is an educational programme that combines a number of key elements in which the participants are given the opportunity to learn about all important aspects related to investigation and management of incidents associated to wildlife crime. This Conference provided an opportunity to share the impact that the WCA experience has had on practices in investigation of wildlife crime across several regions, sharing success stories as well as learning opportunities.

Main conclusions

Crime against wildlife is a major threat to biodiversity, and is a set as a **priority** to be addressed by NGOs, enforcement agencies (Europol, national police forces) and international conventions (Convention for Migratory Species).

When adequate resources and investment are spent, it works – illegal poisoning of wildlife, for example, has been decreasing in Spain and in the Balkans, while illegal trapping of song birds has also decreased significantly in Cyprus.

Three areas are key to see progress in the fight against wildlife crime

- 1) there should be **adequate legislation** (sufficient in most of Europe),
- 2) there should be **adequate enforcement** and enforcement agencies should be equipped and motivated to investigate wildlife crime, which is often difficult to investigate, and, most importantly,
- 3) **prosecutors and judges** should be aware of the impact and dimension of wildlife crime and should take far more cases to court to restrict the current impunity.

Joining forces and coordinating between all these stakeholders is a must, as is communication focussing on prevention of wildlife crime.

The 80 participants in the conference - members of biodiversity conservation NGOs, the judiciary, police and the government, representing over 10 countries, have agreed to keep working together to solve wildlife crime, implementing some of the above solutions.

Illegal trapping and poisoning:

In concrete forms, the participants agreed that:

- the Vulture Conservation Foundation's **Wildlife Crime Academy** is a great conduit for the above which fosters collaboration, and so it should continue. The EU's LIFE funding programme has just decided to continue to fund it, and further financing should be sought after.
- the establishment of formal or informal **national working groups and/or forums** on wildlife crime is often a good way to progress on this issue, as coordination among national authorities is key. Often the development of **national action plans** help achieve concrete goals.

- in terms of the enforcement agencies, improving **wildlife crime investigation techniques** and **capacity** is a must. This often involves setting up **specialized police units on wildlife**, including the establishment of **anti-poison dog units**, and understanding well the **motives and drivers of wildlife crime**. Progress in the fight against the illegal killing of song birds can be significantly boosted from accurate evaluations of socioeconomic drivers (following examples from Cyprus)
- Having adequate **capacity to detect poison and other toxic substances** (central reference labs with toxicological capacity) is necessary. This goes hand in hand with the establishment of **operational protocols** defining modus operandi, which respects the chain of custody and allows for evidence to be present to the justice
- Poisoning of wildlife has also a **human health dimension**, as substance used can be lethal to mankind
- **Monitoring progress** in the fight against wildlife crime is also important. The establishment of centralised databases, and baselines, is fundamental for efficient and effective monitoring. Tracking wildlife with GPS tags often provides a quick method to identify wildlife crime, sometimes proving crucial in enforcement procedures.
- **Prevention of wildlife crime** is also key, so information campaigns and awareness programmes are a must, including public recognition of wildlife crime, as long as these campaigns are conducted in a rural development context, with empathy to the needs of local communities, and always valuing the primary sector.
- **Judiciary and public prosecutors** play a vital role, and need to be more involved, as currently there seems to be a generalised sense of impunity due to lack of legal consequences. We need more solid cases to reach the (criminal or administrative) courts and end up with a penal/administrative sanction. Best practice of Spain where specialized unit of environmental prosecutors push the interest of the public and the country in terms of environmental law, while work should also focus on updating the programme of the judiciary academy to enhance the focus on this type of crime.
- Continued **awareness** raising is a key aspect of the anti-poison and anti-trapping effort, especially in rural areas.
- **National action plans against poisoning** with measurable targets are needed to ensure efforts and commitment by all stakeholders in the long-term.

Electrocution & Collision on energy infrastructure:

The participants of the Conference also presented and discussed the issue of mortality due to **collision and electrocution on the energy infrastructure**. The main conclusions were:

- **Electrical infrastructure does cause mortality** and threatens endangered species all over the world. **This is going to get worse** in the future with increasing need for energy and the need to make the transition to climate-friendly energy production
- **Mapping of high-risk areas** absolutely essential to plan development of energy infrastructure and mitigate impacts on biodiversity
- Guiding principles should be to **avoid increasing threats through adequate planning** of new energy infrastructure, and **mitigation measures to be established on existing infrastructure**
- Changing the pylon designs and burying cables should be promoted for all future expansion of electric network. Changing wire in sensitive areas, i.e. installation of XLPE wire, should be promoted. These provide permanent solutions while retrofitting and marking powerlines are not considered a long-term solution and have high maintenance needs.

- All stakeholders must work and collaborate for resolving issues more efficiently
- **Legislation should evolve** to include liability and obligation to mitigate impacts (like in Spain)
- It is necessary to undertake monitoring impact of mitigation and overall progress. Tagging of wildlife is a cost-effective method.
- **Funding will be needed** to continue to mitigate impacts of existing network. Green taxing and income from new infrastructure should be used to mitigate impacts
- **Technical guidelines** (white papers) aid electricity agencies and companies to adopt correct mitigation measures against electrocution and collisions on infrastructure.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all participants for attending the International Conference on Achievements and Challenges in Wildlife Crime and for contributing to its outcomes with engaging discussions. We would also like to thank presenters for sharing their challenges, successes, experiences and expertise. Finally, we are grateful for everyone who contributed to the organisation of the conference.

Σύνοψη

Η παράνομη χρήση δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων και η παράνομη παγίδευση αναγνωρίζονται ευρέως ως οι κύριες μέθοδοι παράνομης θανάτωσης άγριων πουλιών, ενώ αποτελούν επίσης σημαντική απειλή για προστατευόμενα είδη άγριας ζωής στην Ευρώπη. Μέτρα πρόληψης για τη μείωση περιστατικών πρόσκρουσης και ηλεκτροπληξίας άγριων πουλιών στο δίκτυο ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας αναγνωρίζονται επίσης ως σημαντικά βήματα για την προστασία των γυπών της Αφρικής και της Ευρασίας.

Στα πλαίσια των έργων LIFE «Ζωή με τους Γύπες» (LIFE18 NAT/CY/001018) και «LIFE BalkanDetox» (LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016), το BirdLife Cyprus και το Vulture Conservation Foundation διοργάνωσαν ένα διεθνές συνέδριο με τίτλο «Έγκλημα κατά της άγριας ζωής: Επιτεύγματα και Προκλήσεις», όπου παρευρέθηκαν 80 άτομα από 12 χώρες. Το συνέδριο αυτό πραγματοποιήθηκε στη Λεμεσό στις 22 – 24 Μαΐου 2024 και επικεντρώθηκε σε τρεις κύριες απειλές και στους τρόπους επίλυσής τους: παράνομη χρήση δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων, παράνομη παγίδευση και θανάτωση, και ηλεκτροπληξίες και προσκρούσεις στο δίκτυο ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας. Σκοπός του συνεδρίου ήταν η ανταλλαγή βέλτιστων πρακτικών για την αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης θανάτωσης και τη μείωση των επιπτώσεων του δικτύου ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας στην άγρια ζωή, αλλά και η δικτύωση μεταξύ οργανισμών και έργων για πιο στενές συνεργασίες.

Οι συμμετέχοντες αναγνώρισαν ότι το έγκλημα κατά της άγριας ζωής αποτελεί μία από τις κύριες απειλές για τη βιοποικιλότητα, και ότι η επίλυση του προβλήματος πρέπει να είναι προτεραιότητα για ΜΚΟ, σχετικές αρμόδιες αρχές και διεθνείς συμβάσεις. Ακολουθώντας τα παραδείγματα της Ισπανίας και των Βαλκανίων όπου παρατηρείται σημαντική μείωση στα επίπεδα δηλητηρίασης άγριας ζωής, καθώς και το παράδειγμα της Κύπρου όπου τα επίπεδα παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών έχουν μειωθεί, είναι εμφανές ότι με επαρκείς πόρους και προσπάθειες, η θετική αλλαγή είναι εφικτή. Συγκεκριμένα, οι επαρκείς νομοθεσίες, η επιβολή τους, η ευαισθητοποίηση εισαγγελέων και δικαστών σχετικά με τις επιπτώσεις του εγκλήματος κατά της άγριας ζωής, αλλά και η συνεργασία μεταξύ σχετικών φορέων, αποτελούν απαραίτητη βάση για την αποτελεσματική αντιμετώπιση του προβλήματος.

Η συμβολή των εκπαιδευτικών σεμιναρίων του Wildlife Crime Academy που παρέχει το Vulture Conservation Foundation στην καταπολέμηση του εγκλήματος κατά της άγριας ζωής ήταν εμφανής, αφού καταγράφηκε σημαντική βελτίωση στις διαδικασίες διερεύνησης και δίωξης σε αρκετές χώρες από τις οποίες φορείς έλαβαν μέρος στα σεμινάρια αυτά. Η χρηματοδότηση των σεμιναρίων αυτών συνεχίζεται, με σκοπό να βελτιωθούν περαιτέρω οι πρακτικές σε διεθνές επίπεδο και να ενημερωθούν περισσότεροι οργανισμοί από διαφορετικές περιοχές.

Η δημιουργία εθνικών σχεδίων και ομάδων δράσης για την καταπολέμηση της παράνομης θανάτωσης άγριας ζωής μπορεί να καθοδηγήσει τις προσπάθειες για την επίλυση του προβλήματος και την επίτευξη συγκεκριμένων στόχων. Επίσης, η δημιουργία πρωτοκόλλων ενεργειών τα οποία περιγράφουν την αλληλουχία και πορεία των δράσεων μεταξύ των φορέων που εμπλέκονται στη διερεύνηση εγκλημάτων κατά της άγριας ζωής προωθεί τη συνεργασία και τη σωστή διαχείριση περιστατικών. Σημαντικοί παράγοντες για τη βελτίωση της διερεύνησης περιστατικών είναι η δημιουργία εξειδικευμένων αστυνομικών μονάδων για την άγρια ζωή, συμπεριλαμβανομένων και των Ομάδων Σκύλων Ανίχνευσης Δηλητηριασμένων Δολωμάτων, καθώς και η χρηματοδότηση για τη διεξαγωγή εξειδικευμένων τοξικολογικών

αναλύσεων για την ανίχνευση και ταυτοποίηση ουσιών σε περιστατικά χρήσης δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων.

Στο συνέδριο επίσης παρουσιάστηκαν και συζητήθηκαν θέματα αυξημένης θνησιμότητας άγριων πουλιών λόγω προσκρούσεων και ηλεκτροπληξιών στο δίκτυο ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας. Η συνεχής αυξανόμενη ανάγκη ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας, αλλά και η μετάβαση στην πράσινη ενέργεια οδηγεί στην επέκταση του δικτύου μεταφοράς ηλεκτρικής ενέργειας και ως αποτέλεσμα στην επιδείνωση των επιπτώσεων στην άγρια ζωή. Η καταγραφή των επιπτώσεων του δικτύου μεταφοράς στην πτηνοπανίδα, ιδίως μέσω πομπών, είναι σημαντική στην αναγνώριση περιοχών υψηλού κινδύνου.

Η χαρτογράφηση των περιοχών υψηλού κινδύνου πρόσκρουσης και ηλεκτροπληξίας είναι απαραίτητη για την αειφόρο ανάπτυξη των ενεργειακών υποδομών και τον μετριασμό των επιπτώσεων στα είδη που επηρεάζονται. Με αυτό τον τρόπο μπορούν να αποφευχθούν οι επιπρόσθετες απειλές από νέα έργα ανάπτυξης σε ευαίσθητες περιοχές και να εφαρμοστούν μέτρα μετριασμού στις υφιστάμενες γραμμές για την πρόληψη και ελαχιστοποίηση περιστατικών πρόσκρουσης και ηλεκτροπληξίας. Ωστόσο, υπάρχουν μόνιμες λύσεις που πρέπει να προωθηθούν σε κάθε μελλοντική επέκταση του ηλεκτρικού δικτύου όπως υπόγεια δίκτυα μεταφοράς ενέργειας και αλλαγές στους τύπους πασσάλων και καλωδίων, σε αντίθεση με τη μόνωση και τη σήμανση καλωδίων οι οποίες αποτελούν προσωρινή λύση.

Appendix:

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Conference Agenda

International conference on achievements and challenges in wildlife crime PROGRAMME		
DAY 1, 22 MAY 2024		
Time	Speaker	Title of presentation
09.00 – 09.30	Welcome coffee and registration	
SETTING THE SCENE	09.30 – 09.45	Opening ceremony
	09.45 – 10.00	Melpo Apostolidou, BirdLife Cyprus Achievements & challenges over the last 4 years for the conservation of Griffon Vultures in Cyprus
	10.00 – 10.10	Uroš Pantović, Vulture Conservation Foundation Balkan Detox LIFE project achievements
	10.10 – 10.25	Jovan Andevski, Vulture Conservation Foundation Wildlife Crime Academy: lessons learned across Europe and the Balkans
	10.25 – 10.45	Jose-Antonio Alfaro, Europol Wildlife Crime and Europol – How is Europol involved, what can countries do on a local level.
	10.45 – 11.00	Clairie (Foteini) Papazoglou, CMS Secretariat Priorities of the Convention on Migratory Species under the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean
	11.00 – 11.15	Ruben Moreno-Opo, Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition Spanish experience in the fight against wildlife crime (video)
	11.15 – 11.35	Coffee break
CYPRUS' EFFORTS AGAINST WILDLIFE CRIME	11.35 – 11:50	Haris Hadjistyllis, Game and Fauna Service Wildlife Crime and Cyprus – learning through case studies
	11.50 – 12.05	Vyronas Vyronos, Cyprus Police Difficulties in investigating poisoning and ways forward
	12.05 – 12.20	Katerina Liveri, State General Laboratory, Cyprus Challenges in Toxicological Analysis of wildlife samples at the Forensic Chemistry and Toxicology Lab , of the SGL
	12.20 – 12.35	Martha Petrou, BirdLife Cyprus & Terra Cypria What have we learned from the first Anti-poison Dog Units for Cyprus
	12.35 – 12.50	Tassos Shialis, BirdLife Cyprus Illegal trapping of birds: achievements and challenges in Cyprus
	12.50 – 13.05	Yiannis Louca, Inspector, Sovereign Base Area Police Effective tackling of Bird Trapping - Poaching in the ESBAs
	13.05 – 13.30	Discussion
	13.30 – 15.00	Lunch break and coffee (at hotel)

The fight against wildlife crime in Europe	15.00 – 15.10	Jovan Andevski, Vulture Conservation Foundation	Evaluation of national capacities in the fight against wildlife crime
	15.10 – 15.25	Klea Duro, AOS & Ledi Selgjakaj, PPNEA	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Albania: challenges and achievements
	15.25 – 15.40	Tarik Dervovic, Nase Ptice	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina: challenges and achievements
	15.40 – 15.55	Marija Martinko, BIOM	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Croatia: challenges and achievements
	15.55 – 16.10	Robert Straughan, LPO	Overview of wildlife crime situation in France: challenges and best practices
	16.10 – 16.25	Nadia Sideri, HOS	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Greece: challenges and best practices
	16.25 – 16.40	Arta Starova, MES	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Republic of North Macedonia: challenges and achievements
	16.40 - 16.55	Milene Matos, VCF	Overview on wildlife crime situation in Portugal: challenges and best practices
	16.55 – 17.10	Milan Ružić, BPPPS Serbia	Overview of wildlife crime situation in Serbia: challenges and best practices
	17.10 – 17.30	Discussion and conclusions	
	17.30 – 19.30	Networking & time off	
	19.30	Dinner (at Karatello Tavern, old town)	

DAY 2, 23 MAY 2024			
	Time	Speaker	Title of presentation
	08.30 – 09.00	Registration for day 2 and welcome coffee	
Thematic session	09.00 – 09.15	Michalis Promponas, Natural History Museum of Crete	Wildlife Crime in Greece: Cases and experiences from LIFE Natura Themis & LIFE Bonelli eastMed projects
	09.15 – 09.30	Nikos Kassinis, Game and Fauna Service	Impact of energy infrastructure on protected species Bonelli's eagle and Griffon Vulture in Cyprus
	09.30 – 09.45	Carlota Viada Sauleda, GREFA, Spain	White paper on electrocution in Spain: solution strategies & ways forward
	09.45 – 10.00	Rubén Moreno-Opo, Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition	Practices on powerline retrofitting and regulation in Spain (video_
	10.00 – 10.15	Fiammetta Berlinguer, University of Sassari	Mitigating threats for the Griffon Vulture in Sardinia: Poisoning and impact of energy infrastructure
	10.15 – 10.30	Hristo Peshev, FWFF	Early warning system for preventing mass poisoning of vultures
	10.30 – 11.00	Coffee break	

Case studies across Europe & Balkans	11.00 – 11.20	Carlos Toledano Zapater, SEPRONA, Guardia Civil - Spain	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case - Spanish example
	11.20 – 11.40	Fjoralba Tota, National Inspectorate for the Protection of the Territory (IKMT) Albania	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case - Albania example
	11.40 – 12.00	Dejan Radošević, State Institute for conservation of cultural, historical and natural heritage of Republika Srpska	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case – B&H example
	12.00 – 12.20	Mara Gerovac, Croatian Police; Zagreb PD, Criminal police Sector	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case – Croatia example
	12.20 – 12.40	Konstantinos Zormpas, Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (N.E.C.C.A.), Greece	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case - Greek example
	12.40 – 13.00	Darko Blinkov & Marina Malish, State Environmental Inspectorate, Department for support, analytics and international cooperation	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case – North Macedonia example
	13.00 – 13.20	Slobodan Marković, Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia	Case study on investigates wildlife crime case – Serbia example
	13.20 – 13.40	Discussion	
	13.20 – 14.50	Lunch break and coffee (at hotel)	
Break-out sessions	14.50 - 15.00	Intro to sessions	
	15.00 – 16.30	Break-out sessions: Split in 3 groups with facilitators to list priorities 1. Powerlines 2. Poisoning 3. Trapping	
	16.30 – 17.00	Present results of break-out sessions & next steps	
	17.00 – 17.10	Final words and conclusions	
	17.10 – 19.30	Networking	
	19.30	Dinner (at Syrian Restaurant, 10mins walk from conference venue)	
	End of Conference		
DAY 3, 24 MAY 2024			
EXCURSION		DEPART FROM ATLANTICA MIRAMARE BEACH AT 08.00	
		BACK TO HOTEL AT 16.20	