

Assessing the scale of hunting of birds based on the available data and reports across Georgia with a focus on Batumi Bottleneck



Prepared by: Society for Nature Conservation SABUKO

Partner of Birdlife International in Georgia

TBILISI

2019

Assessing the scale of illegal killing based on the available data and reports across Georgia with a focus on Batumi Bottleneck

Illegal killing is one of the main risks for the birds becoming extinct globally. Poaching birds became one of the major threats for bird migrating between Europe and Africa. Every autumn more than 1,000,000+ birds of prey migrate through the Batumi Bottleneck. Batumi Raptor Count (BRC) along with SABUKO work on monitoring and conserve birds which migrate through the Batumi Bottleneck.

Raptor populations are particularly sensitive to any changes. Shooting is still a major concern. Raptor populations are in general rather small and in combination with a low reproductive rate makes illegal killing one of the most dangerous threats.

The Eastern Black Sea migration route is one of the major routes on the Black Sea/ Mediterranean flyway. At least 35 different species of raptors have been observed migrating through the region. Migratory raptors are persecuted by hunters and falconers at the bottleneck. Falconry is a deeply rooted tradition in the rural communities and has a long history. Although, shooting migratory raptors is a more recent activity and it seems to be caused by multiple socio-economical and governance issues.

(Pics of map of bottleneck)

The first data on the shooting and trapping of birds of prey in Ajara were collected by Abuladze (Abuladze 1997, 2012; Abuladze et al. 2011) and van Maanen et al. (2001), which was followed by a study on the geographical extent, the scale, and the drivers and motivations of hunters in 2011 (Jansen, 2013) repeated in a similar fashion in 2014 (Sándor et al., in review).

In 2014 BRC and SABUKO started to collect data and identify the drivers behind the hunting. At the same year a team of four field researchers evaluated the extent of the hunting during a 45 day period. To be able to identify the trend of hunting and to obtain yearly estimation of the killed birds, a monitoring standardized scheme was developed. The main goal of this scheme every year is to provide an accurate estimate for the current year of birds of prey killed

by hunting and trapping; identify the motivation and profile of raptor hunters; set up a standardized protocol for following years to monitor hunting pressure.

In 2015 monitoring (collection data for hunting report) was done over **49** days. A total of **6661** shots were tallied on **both** stations, with **4518** shots in Sakhalvasho (on average **92** shots/day). There were 19 days when more than **100** shots were fired (with a maximum of **468** shots on 30 August, when Station 1 counted 12,000 birds). Reports for raptors counting of each year can be found on the website www.batimiraptorcount.org .

Those willing to hunt on migrant birds should have a document confirming the payment (10 GEL) and another paper confirming the right of hunting and carrying of the hunting gun issued by the relevant body of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

It does not require any test of *species knowledge, shooting skills or hunting regulations*. The latest list of species of migratory birds allowed for hunt was published on 14th of August, 2018, on the website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia. It includes hunting deadlines and daily limits according to hunt places, excluding protected areas and national reserves. For **waterfowl** birds hunting is permitted during a specific time frame with daily limits, except for Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Tsalka and Dmanisi municipalities. Prohibited hunting methods are also listed. Across Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Ninotsminda, Tsalka, Dmanisi, Dusheti and Tianeti municipalities it is allowed to hunt from September 1st to February 15th.

Below are the lists of birds, which can be hunted, in specified terms , time and daily limits

| Species | Time Frame | Number |
|--------------------|---------------|--------|
| Anser anser | 01.11 - 01.03 | 5 |
| Anas strepera | 01.11 - 01.03 | 3 |
| Anas crecca | 01.11 - 01.03 | 5 |
| Anas platyrhynchos | 01.11 - 01.03 | 6 |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|----|
| Anas querquedula | 01.11 - 01.03 | 3 |
| Anas Clypeata | 01.11 - 01.03 | 3 |
| Fulica atra | 01.11 - 01.03 | 6 |
| Anas acuta | 01.11 - 01.03 | 3 |
| Anas penelope | 01.11 - 01.03 | 6 |
| Anser albifrons | 01.11 - 01.03 | 5 |
| Aythya ferina | 01.11 - 01.03 | 3 |
| Aythya fuligula | 01.11 - 01.03 | 5 |
| Scolopax rusticola | 15.10 - 01.03 | 5 |
| Gallinago gallinago | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 5 |
| Coturnix coturnix | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 20 |
| Columba palumbus | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 10 |
| Columba livia | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 10 |
| Columba oenas | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 10 |
| Streptopelia turtur | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 10 |
| Crex crex | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 5 |
| Lymnocyrtus minimus | From the third Saturday of August till 15th of February | 5 |
| Anser anser | 10.09 - 31.12 | 3 |
| Anas strepera | 10.09 - 31.12 | 2 |
| Anas crecca | 10.09 - 31.12 | 3 |

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|---|
| Anas platyrhynchos | 10.09 - 31.12 | 5 |
| Anas querquedula | 10.09 - 31.12 | 2 |
| Anas clypeata | 10.09 - 31.12 | 2 |
| Fulica atra | 10.09 - 31.12 | 5 |
| Anas acuta | 10.09 - 31.12 | 2 |
| Anas penelope | 10.09 - 31.12 | 3 |
| Anser albifrons | 10.09 - 31.12 | 3 |
| Aythya ferina | 10.09 - 31.12 | 2 |
| Aythya fuligula | 10.09 - 31.12 | 3 |

However, it remains unclear, how the daily numbers of hunted birds are monitored. According to the hotline of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia there is a group of people in every region, who should check the hunting places and issue fines, if the hunted birds exceed the daily quote. Falconry is popular in Georgia. However there is no existing law on hunting and especially for Falconry. Only bill where some regulations are mentioned of specific terms and conditions. Trapping is forbidden by law.

According to the surveys of illegal killing, there are two most trendy places (Sakhalvasho and Kvirike - by shot numbers) in Georgia, where 50-90% of total number of individual birds are illegally killed each year in the south western part of Georgia.

In 2018, **248** fact of usage of prohibited weapons for illegal hunting have been detected during the hunting season by employees of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

From August **18th** until September **18th**, **201** voiced signals of the so called electronic device "**Manok**" were removed, which was used by **poachers** to attract migratory birds. Hunting

on electronic devices is prohibited, since "Manok" is a means of mass destruction of birds. The Environmental Supervision Department calls on hunters not to use prohibited weapons.

Limitations haven't changed throughout these years. Whether it is still a key factor for hunters, as there should be certain conditions for birds to come over ridges at an altitude within shooting range; wind direction and intensity is another factor of the weather, which needs to be considered, as it impacts on the number of shots heard.

Other difficulties in counting the shots is the legal hunting of other birds, for example quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), therefore monitoring of shots can't be precise. The shooting sites are mostly fragmented by ridges with dense vegetation which limits the process of observation. As a result observer have difficulties in calculating shooting & hunting & retrieval rates, which are essential factors for the evaluation of hunting pressure. This aspect is also influencing the identification of any particular species, as an injured bird can still soar far until it falls. Based on many year observation experience, 20% of the birds stay unfound, as some can be hanging on trees or laying on the ground since poachers rarely send their dogs to pick the birds.

Despite existing legislation, increased efforts and actions are needed in order to get adequate implementation as the current situation and the previous years' data showed that illegal killing is still occurring with the same portion over year to year. Combination of the results of drivers behind the hunting are considerably the same and stands in need of effective, enforceable law, awareness-raising actions and strategies.

The problem of illegal killing in Georgia especially concerns *migratory birds of prey* (Abuladze et al 2011). Due to limitations of counting, calculations are difficult to be clear with exact numbers. However, we have several studies, which have been handled throughout years on shooting raptors in Georgia (Abuladze 1997, 2012, Abuladze et al 2011). More than **10 000** individual raptors are killed every Autumn in the Ajara region (van Maanen et al 2001, Jansen 2013) and more than **37 000** individual birds might be killed each year in Georgia (BirdLife International,2017). To understand the scale, the 11th Batumi Raptor Count has finished this year and more than a million raptors counted with record numbers of Imperial Eagles, Short-toed Eagles and Black Storks. The majority of the species getting shot are honey buzzards, Eurasian sparrow hawks, steppe buzzards, common quail, white and black storks, golden orioles, bee-eaters. However, restriction in the monitoring timing of the hunting should be taken into

consideration, as many other species have less percentage of getting killed, given in reports, does not intend to be valid.

Involvement to field studies and many hours of observation made an impression that hunting generally is not only vestiges of the past of the old generation, but it is also popular and has growing interest apparently amongst all ages of the male population. What is more concerning is that very young children are also taking part in an illegitimate process; they are in addition unselective in shooting regardless of species. Global rapid change of natural environments, political, economic and cultural, led to lack of local knowledge of legal/illegal legislation and requirements. Unemployment is another aspect influencing widespread presence of illegal hunting. About 80% of poachers represent families with limited economic sources. Based on surveys (BCR Hunting Monitoring report, 2016; Sandor A. et al., 2017) most of the poachers hunt for fun and sports, especially youngsters, who are killing everything that moves, and 51% eat prey.

Unfortunately, illegal hunting continues to be a challenge for biodiversity conservation. There are many cases of poaching on birds and mammals. Just recently, Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), which is an endangered species in Georgia, has been killed by the poachers. The most disgraceful fact is that, according to the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, these poachers are rangers of National Forest Agency.

In order to attain justified solutions for migrant birds in the Batumi Bottleneck, key factor should be based on mutual cooperation of not only governmental institutions, but involve all stakeholders to negotiate and fill in the legislation gaps, awareness-raising, ecotourism and capacity development and all necessary steps for the future of the raptors (and not only) migrating in the Batumi bottleneck.

References

BirdLife International (2015) Assessing the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean, and establishing a basis for systematic monitoring. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

Birdlife International (2004). Birds in Europe: Populaton Estmates, Trends and Conservaton Status. (BirdLife Conservaton Series No.12). Birdlife International, Cambridge.

BirdLife International (2015b). The Killing. BirdLife International, Cambridge.

BirdLife International (2017) Review of illegal killing and taking of birds in Northern and Central Europe and the Caucasus. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

BRC (2015). Migraton count data. Batumi Raptor Count. <http://www.batumiraptorcount.org/research/monitoring/raptor-count-results> Accessed on 02 March 2015.

BRC (2016). Monitoring of illegal shootng. Batumi Raptor Count. <http://www.batumiraptorcount.org/conservation/monitoring-illegal-shootng> Accessed on 06 April 2016.

Sándor, A., J. Jansen & W.M. Vansteelant (2017). Understanding hunters' habits and motvatons for shootng raptors in the Batumi Raptor-migraton bottleneck, Black Sea coast Georgia.

Verhelst, B., J. Jansen & W. Vansteelant (2011). South West Georgia: an important bottleneck for raptor migraton during autumn.

