

National Report on Hunting

Country:
Syrian Arab Republic

2005

**BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE HUNTING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IN
MEDITERRANEAN THIRD COUNTRIES**

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Hunting and its activities

Syria's geographical location, its diverse landscape of valleys, mountains and plateaus and its location on many of the passageways for migratory birds has made it become a very suitable location for a lot of organisms who are living in harmony. The fast rate of human development has a clear effect on this balance. Hunting can be considered a hobby or a profession that man has loved but he was unfair in practicing it. This has caused the extinction of several animals and birds. There are several important hunting locations in Syria especially in valleys, plateaus and water bodies including the water bodies along the Euphrates which is considered one of the major hunting locations in the country. Below is a list of all these major locations in the country:

Site	Location	Species hunted
Al-Malkiyya	37.10N, 42.09E	Turtle Dove, Black Francolin, Chukar
Ras El-Ain	36.50N, 40.05E	Turtle Dove, Black Francolin, Chukar, Sandgrouse
Jarabless	36.48N, 38.00E	Turtle Dove
Wadi El-Rad	36.39N, 41.39E	Ducks
Manbaj	36.32N, 37.57E	Turtle Dove, Geese, Ducks
Howeijat El-Sandala	36.28N, 38.14E	Ducks
Ali Bajleez	36.27N, 38.30E	Ducks, Sandgrouse
Al-Khatouniyeh Lake	36.25N, 41.15E	Ducks
Jebel Abdel-Aziz	36.25N, 40.20E	Great Bustard, Houbara Bustard
Twal Al-Aba	36.25N, 39.27E	Geese, Great Bustard
Abu Qalqal	36.25N, 38.07E	Turtle Dove (overnight)
Ain Issa	36.23N, 38.52E	Sandgrouse
Tishreen Dam	36.23N, 38.12E	Ducks, Geese
Al-Khafseh	36.14N, 38.01E	Geese
Al-Jerniyyeh	36.09N, 38.18E	Geese
Salkeen	36.07N, 36.26E	Mistle Thrush
Sabkhet El-Jabboul	36.00N, 37.37E	Ducks, Geese
Euphrates Dam	35.55N, 38.35E	Ducks, Geese
Al-Ba'th Dam	35.53N, 38.50E	Ducks, Geese
Hwaijet El-Tibni	35.37N, 39.50E	Turtle Dove
Wadi Al-Azeb	35.26N, 37.20E	Houbara Bustard
Sabkhet El-Rawda	35.18N, 41.06E	Ducks, Geese
Jebel El-Bishri	35.18N, 39.30E	Houbara Bustard, Chukar
Al-Koum	35.12N, 38.51E	Houbara Bustard, Thick-billed Lark
Faydet Qabajeb	35.03N, 39.39E	Turtle Dove, Blackcap, Golden Oriole
Qdaim	35.03N, 38.27E	Houbara Bustard, Thick-billed Lark
Jebel El-Bil'as	34.55N, 37.35E	Chukar, Houbara Bustard
Hwaijet Abu-Hardoub	34.51N, 40.49E	Turtle Dove
Safeeta	34.49N, 36.07E	Quail, Mistle Thrush
Wadi Abiad Dam	34.41N, 38.15E	Ducks
Quttainah Lake	34.38N, 36.32E	Ducks, Common Snipe

Building Capacity for Sustainable Hunting of Migratory Birds in Mediterranean Third Countries (SHP)

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Site	Location	Species hunted
Sabkhet El-Mouh	34.29N, 38.21E	Ducks
El-Kamkoum (Karyatain)	34.20N, 37.20E	Ducks, Houbara Bustard
Khabret El-Thlajeh	33.47N, 38.25E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Houbara Bustard
Khabret El-Shahmeh	33.41N, 38.04E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Sandgrouse, Hares (at night)
Bahr Saikel	33.41N, 37.07E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse
Bahret El-'Ataibah	33.30N, 36.37E	Ducks, Turtle Dove
Al-Tinif	33.29N, 38.40E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse, hares (at night)
Khabrat Al-Zwairiyeh	33.25N, 38.52E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Ducks, Houbara Bustard
Mazra'et Bait El-Jin	33.19N, 35.57E	Summan, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Corn Bunting
Sees Mountain and Lake	33.18N, 37.22E	Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Sandgrouse
Beer Al-Qasab	33.18N, 36.48E	Hume's Short-toed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Hares (at night)
Bahrat El-Hajjaneh	33.18N, 36.37E	Hume's Short-toed Lark
Sa'sa'	33.18N, 36.02E	Turtle Dove, Mistle Thrush
Shakhab	33.16N, 35.11E	Hume's Short-toed Lark, Turtle Dove
Ghabagheb	33.13N, 36.15E	Turtle Dove, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Thick-billed Lark
Widian Al-Rabee'	33.05N, 36.42E	Hume's Short-toed Lark, Quail, Thick-billed Lark, Hares, Houbara Bustard
Nabe' El-Sakhr	33.05N, 35.57E	Hume's Short-toed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Chukar
Jasem	33.00N, 36.04E	Hume's Short-toed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Chukar
Al-Fuqai'	32.57N, 36.10E	Hume's short-toed Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Chukar
Al-Milh	32.32N, 36.50E	Houbara Bustard, Chukar

Migrant species:

Geese, Ducks, Turtle Dove, Quail, Sandgrouse, Mistle Thrush, Woodcock, Common Snipe, Crane, Blackcap, Calandra Lark, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Desert Lark, Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail, Cream-coloured Courser and Black Francolin that is considered as a resident species but with some birds that come from Iraq and Turkey. As for the locations of these species, it can be found in almost all parts of the country along the migration flyways.

The number of huntable migrant species is very high. It might reach up to 250 species but they are hunted on different levels. Some of these species are globally threatened such as the following:

- Ferruginous Duck and White-headed Duck, which are recorded in Sabkhet El-Jabboul near Aleppo.

- Little Bustard, which used to be abundant near Palmyra and southern Syria, Milh Area, near the Jordanian borders.
- Great Bustard, which used to arrive to northern Syria in large numbers with flocks counted in hundreds.

Hunting methods

Hunting methods have varied from the past until the present time.

- Hunting with traps and nets:

In Palmyra, trappers still use nets and traps in order to catch Sand Partridge. Recently, nets have been used to catch Blackcaps for trade. These nets also catch other threatened species along with the targeted species.

- Hunting with guns:

Large birds are hunted by automatic shotguns (12mm) or the two-holed shotguns. These are mainly used by “regular” hunters. There are also some locally made guns which are used to hunt songbirds. These common guns usually have small holes and have various sizes. Some of these sizes are not found internationally since they are locally made. Some other guns are made in Russia and Italy and they are smuggled into Syria from Lebanon.

- The Hyena skin with nets are used to catch Sand Partridge. And songbirds where a songbird is put in a cage and when it starts calling, it attracts other birds. Mistle Thrush and songbirds are also caught by using sticky bars.
- Playbacks using tapes is also common to attract songbirds. These are common and they are usually used in areas where these birds roost or pass by on migration. When these birds start to land, they are usually flown into a net.
- Hunting close to machinery is also common most birds do not fear them and so there would be a good chance of getting close to these birds and catching them.
- Hunting with spotlights at night is also common especially in moonless nights when birds usually stay close to spotlights and sometimes “freeze”.

Most hunting ammunition for shotguns are lead shots and very few are made of Tin or Chromium. As for smaller shots, some of them are tinned. These mainly come from two companies which are the French FOB and the American Federal. In general, most of the shots are locally made and they are made of lead. In some cases, the gun powder is also made locally where it is called ‘Ormot. There is national gunshots factory under the Ministry of Defense that used to manufacture large amounts of gunshots but after banning hunting in Syria the factory has lowered its manufacturing level and

the amount produced have become insufficient. As a result, most of the gunshots used in Syria is being imported from Lebanon where there are several big Lebanese companies that have most of their product being used in Syria. These include 'Ifaish Co., MECC and Al-Asi Co. The numbers of gunshots being sold in Syria cannot be estimated but it is known that the amounts coming from Lebanon are huge and they are estimated to be in millions. All gunshots brought from Lebanon follow the international measures for hunting gunshots and has different measurements (12, 16, 20, 36).

Hunters in Syria could be divided into several categories, which are:

- Amateur hunters: they hunt anything but it is believed that with some awareness and if hunting clubs are established for them, their effect would be minimal.
- Professional hunters: they go out hunting only in defined seasons. It is believed that they do not cause any harm. They are mainly elderly people who practice hunting as a hobby where they also go for shooting clubs where they practice disc shooting. It is believed that sportsmen who practice disc-shooting also practice bird and animal hunting. This is a unique case for Syria since in other countries these sportsmen would not be hunters except in hunting reserves and clubs.
- "Mercenary@ professional hunters: this type of hunters has taken hunting as a source of income. They are considered to be the cause for the main threat on birds (migrant and resident) and mammals in the country. They are known to hunt anything since they believe that everything has a value, being little or big. They are believed to be the main threat for birds in the country.
- Falcon hunters: They are known to be limited in number and they hunt in certain seasons. On the other hand, they are considered as a threat to other birds of prey since they shoot it down so that it won't cause them any disturbances while they catch falcons. Most hunted birds of prey include eagles and buzzard.
- Trap and net hunters: they use traps, nets and other tools in catching birds. These are known to be mainly traders.

The number of hunters in Syria is very high especially if the Lebanese and Gulf hunters that hunt in Syria are added. Hunters from Gulf countries used to be mainly falconers who would come to Syria to hunt with their falcons. As for now, there is a new generation of hunters from the Gulf that travel to Syria in order to hunt with guns. The number of hunters in Syria is estimated to be 500,000 where 300,000 of them are registered hunters. There are also a high number of gun owners but are not considered as hunters such as the peasant hunters.

There are neither hunting associations nor unions in Syria being national or international. The Ministry of Interior Affairs is the only body that is responsible for managing hunting and use of guns. Hunting legislations falls

exclusively under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Higher Council for Wildlife Hunting whose president is the Minister of Agriculture and its members include the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Environment. Lately, another member was added and that is the Syrian Wildlife Conservation Society whom some of its members are hunters. These members include:

- Eng. Ma'en Ka'dan - specialized in renewable energy where he is trying to use his experience in conserving the propagating birds in Syria.
- Mr. Samir El-Safadi – interested in hunting regulation.
- Mr. Walid Attar – Member of the Higher Council of Wildlife Hunting as a member of the Syrian Wildlife Conservation Society (SWCS).

SWCS has helped through its member in setting the regulations for wildlife hunting in Syria through reviewing the hunting laws.

The number of foreign hunters who come to Syria is very high. They are limited to hunters from the gulf countries and Lebanon as mentioned before. They have a great effect on the wildlife and hunting in the country since they hunt anything. They mainly come to Syria in spring during the bird breeding seasons. Their hunting covers all types of night and day hunting. They are mostly interested in hunting Sandgrouse and Hares. As for the Lebanese hunters, they are committed to coming only in hunting seasons. The main target species they hunt include Turtle Dove, Mistle Thrush, geese and ducks.

No bird ringing activities have taken place in Syria yet. SWCS is aiming to reach this level of research since the society believes that this would elevate the level of research and experience exchange with other countries. There are very few personal efforts of bird ringing in Syria. On the other hand, hunters sometimes report hunting birds who were ringed from some country.

Old research go back to 1928 where there were rough numbers of birds. These studies were limited to bird records without number estimations. Kumerleove has summarised in 1967-1969 the status of bird species in mid sixties. In 1974, Derek Scott has carried out studies in Syria and Iran. Areas covered in Syria included Sabkhet El-Jabboul and the Euphrates but results of these studies have not been obtained. Macfarlane has collected bird data in 1978 covering the period until 1977. In 1986, Baumgart and Stephan worked on data covering the year 1983. In 1994, Important Bird Areas of the Middle East by Mike Evans has covered these areas in Syria in collaboration with national researchers including Walid Attar from the SWCS but numbers in this book were not correct. The latest studies were carried out by Derek Scott and Richard Porter through the wetlands project which was carried out by BirdLife International.

Guidelines and legislations related to hunting of migratory birds

The Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture are the exclusive governmental bodies that are responsible for managing hunting in the country.

Hunting legislations in Syria is represented by the hunting law which is comprehensive. It bans hunting in breeding season and only allows hunting in the period from the 1st of September until the 15th of February that is when breeding is known to start.

The Law No. T41 was issued on 1994 where it bans hunting in the country for five years. This law is still applied until now. It was extended several times where the latest extension was in November 2004 for two years. This means that hunting is still banned in Syria until November 2006 or at least until the new hunting law is issued. The new hunting law is under review in the President's Office in order to be passed and then accepted by the Parliament.

Although, as mentioned before, the ministry of Interior Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture are the bodies responsible for hunting management but it is only the ministry of Interior Affairs and the Police who are responsible for issuing hunting licenses.

There is only one hunting reserve in Syria and it is still under establishment. It is located in an area called Widyān Al-Rabee' which is known to be a location for high numbers of migratory birds.

Illegal hunting in Syria had a negative effect on some of the protected areas in the country. There are no figures for the effects of hunting in these areas since there have not been any monitoring studies or any studies that were carried out previously in these government-managed protected areas.

There are no hunting agencies in Syria since hunting is banned by law.

Selling hunting ammunition and shotguns is exclusively the responsibility of the government. It is restricted to one free shop area to sell guns. In order to sell hunting guns, a permission by the Public Security is needed.

Although there are no figures that prove that, the economic value for illegal hunting is thought to be decreased due to the law that bans hunting and after Syria has ratified CITES. Still, all bird types, large and songbirds are still sold openly in markets all over the country.

Hunting refuges are usually concentrated in wetlands such as Al-Ba'th Dam, which is a hunting-free area by law. It should be mentioned that this hunting banning in dams is not aiming to conserve wildlife or birds but in order to protect the dam itself.

Hunting is banned in the country but it is being carried out explicitly especially by rich visiting hunters who become able to hunt anywhere even close to reserves. There is no monitoring programmes for birds in protected areas and there is no way to assess the effect of hunting on the reserves.

There are no training courses for hunters in the country. Awareness is only limited to interesting documentaries which are shown on the national tv where it shows the rich biodiversity that the country hosts.

The cultural, social and economic values for hunting of migratory birds

Selling migratory birds is being applied on a large scale in the country. The prices are considered to be cheap if compared to neighboring countries which attracts huge numbers of birds such as Lebanon, which exports huge number of birds to the gulf countries and also to Europe through the black market. These huge numbers of birds are thought to reach up to millions of songbirds, especially Blackcaps which opened the door for songbirds trade rather than being limited to raptors and falcons trade. On the other hand, falcons trade is getting bigger in Syria. Birds are bought for taxidermy or for raising and training for hunting. The market has enlarged due to the fact that falconers from gulf countries would prefer to buy falcons from the Syrian market since it has a relatively lower prices if compared to other countries. Markets for stuffed birds can be found in all markets in Syria and especially in the famous old ones which are visited by tourists and visitors from Gulf countries. In addition to selling stuffed birds and animals, large number of other materials could be found in these markets including hyenas, wolves and foxes skins which are shown in markets that sell sheep skins. All these items are usually shown to be sold openly and sometimes in large amounts.

As for falcons, there are no figures or estimates, being official or unofficial, for the numbers that are being sold but it is thought that this market has started to decrease since many falconers now tend to buy falcon from ex-Soviet Union countries such as Kazakhstan.

In Syria, more than a thousand eagle and thousands of other raptors are being sold in the stuffed birds market. Another market that has started to flourish recently is the market for selling Gerbils and Jerboas which are thought to be good in strengthening the feathers of Lanners and Sakers. This market is very popular in the gulf countries.

Small hunting guns are being manufactured locally. These guns are used to hunt songbirds such Blackcap, Short-toed Lark, Desert Lark and Corn Bunting. This industry used to be huge until Russian-made small guns started to be imported through Lebanon since these guns are cheaper than locally manufactured guns. There are no official figures for the number of small hunting guns but they are estimated to be in hundreds of thousands in the country.

Imported hunting guns is not present in Syria since these are considered to be luxurious and of no economic benefit especially if it is taken into consideration that hunting licensing generates a high income for the government.

There are no statistics for the numbers of guns and ammunition that is being used in hunting in the country since there is no official importing of hunting guns in Syria and the local factory that belongs to the Ministry of Defense has been not been functioning on a steady level since the banning of hunting.

There are no canning factories in the country but there are some workshops that work on preparing the birds for sale. These workshops clean the birds and remove the feathers in order to get them ready for sale. There are vary famous people in Syria who work in taxidermy where they stuff birds and sell them in black markets in Lebanon and the gulf countries. As for restaurants, there are very few in the country that offer hunted birds and the numbers used are incomparable to the numbers that are smuggled. In general, there is no economic effect for bird trade but it is known that there are some people who became rich through hunting trade but they are not declared since this type of trade is banned.

There are employees in protected areas in the country but there are not any in the hunting reserve since its under establishment.

The indirect economic benefit is thought to be huge in some parts of the country where Lebanese hunters used to come to hunt in some areas while bringing with them all they need. Nowadays, some of these villages such as Manbaj village to the northeast of Aleppo has become a market for hunters where Lebanese hunters can find anything they need. Shops in this village can now provide everything the hunter needs. Peasant houses are now bring used as hostels for hunters where it is well furnished in order to provide the hunters needs. Other customers that are being served in these villages are the young hunters from gulf countries who hunt with shotguns instead hunting with falcons. The major benefits have retured to the peasants and villagers.

The cultural value in the country can be mainly referred to the large number of documentaries that the national tv shows. There are no subjects in the national education curricula that mention the subject of hunting in any way. There are serious endeavors and plans to include such subjects in the future referring to the fact of explaining how religion stands towards hunting being allowed or forbidden.

The fact is that there is no media coverage or awareness programmes that aim at raising the awareness towards threatened birds. It was only until last year and this year that some activities have taken place but were mainly focused on the conservation of the Bald Ibis being a critically endangered species that breeds in Syria. A special booklet was published in order to be distributed in schools in Palmyra where the Bald Ibis breeds.

Alternatives for hunting of migratory species

Resident bird species in the country are facing a huge hunting pressure all through the year but there are some areas which are inaccessible due to the area's topography or for it being part of a reserve. Some other areas are being protected being on the national borders with Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan.

Until now, breeding and reintroduction of resident bird species is limited to studies and did not materialize. There is only one captive breeding and reintroduction reserve in Syria that is Al-Tlailah reserve which has captive breeding programmes for gazelles and oryx. As for birds, there is only Widian Al-Rabee' reserve which is a hunting reserve that is under establishment.

As for non-native species, there are no programmes taking place but there are studies to assess that.

There are several plans to publicize the knowledge and value of birds by the ministry of Agriculture but nothing has materialized yet.

Alternative economic models for hunting

There are studies lately in order to establish an eco-tourism programme in Sabkhet El-Jabboul for birdwatching. This project is funded by the Swiss Embassy and works on encouraging birdwatching activities in the area. Another study aims at establishing an ecotourism activity in the area of the Bald Ibis near Palmyra. SWCS is also working on establishing an observatory in the area of Widian Al-Rabee'.

The new hunting law to be issued soon has in its regulations some items that are related to economic alleviation in order to encourage sustainable hunting.

Most of bird traders own certified shops that work on fixing hunting shotguns and hunting accessories. They also sell hunting ammunition in these shops but most of them are known to have other sources of income. As for hunters that depends mainly on hunting as a source of income, they have other work to do in non-hunting seasons. This implies that jobs can be found for them in hunting seasons too.

Best practice models and guidelines for responsible hunting and conservation of migratory birds

Migratory birds work as a link all around the globe and any threats affecting these birds in any part of the world would have its effect on the global level. It is recommended introduce this concept to communities in the country in order to gain appreciation.

There are several recently-established environmental organizations in Syria. Responsible hunting is an issue that is going to be one of the issues to be discussed as soon as the new hunting law is issued. This law would aim to protect valuable hunting areas.

In Syria, there is only one factory for lead gunshots. Also, all gunshots imported are made of lead.

Presently, there are no models for best practices in the country but the best model would be to establish special reserves where captive bred birds can be released and excess of these birds could go back to nature.

The Higher Council for Wildlife Hunting holds regular meetings and there are some recommendations that mention inviting hunting experts to the country in order to evaluate the situation in the country.

An increasing number of international conservation organizations have established contacts with the Syrian government due to the continuous loss of wildlife, including birds, in the country. The country has enforced hunting banning for many continuous years now in order to conserve birds. The strict enforcement during last year has shown that the number of birds has started to increase and they can be observed easily in some areas. During the recent effort by BirdLife International in order to protect the Bald Ibis through an RSPB-funded project and during the field visits carried out by experts, there were new recommendations to include programmes that show the importance of migratory birds.

Public awareness campaigns has started in Palmyra during the campaign for the conservation of the Bald Ibis campaign. There are other campaigns that are going to take place in Damascus under the same major campaign for the Bald Ibis and the other migratory birds. There is also another campaign that is being planned for that focuses on soaring birds.