

Synthesis Report

**THE USE OF LEAD SHOT FOR BIRD
HUNTING IN WETLANDS IN
MEDITERANIAN THIRD COUNTRIES**



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THE USE OF LEAD SHOT FOR BIRD HUNTING IN WETLANDS IN THE MTCS

Facilitated by

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Project partners



Project Background

BirdLife International, in partnership with Association "Les Amis des Oiseaux" (AAO Tunisia) in Tunisia, Society for Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) and African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Secretariat, with financial support from the European Union's LIFE Third Countries fund, Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Global Environment Fund (GEF) has launched a 3-year initiative to tackle migratory birds hunting issues in the Mediterranean Third Countries (MTCs): 8 countries in North Africa and in the Middle East region. The countries involved in this project are: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The overall project goal is to *"strengthen the management of bird hunting in selected North African and Middle East countries of the Mediterranean region to reduce excessive, indiscriminate and illegal hunting of migratory birds, promote more sustainable hunting practices and enhance the compliance with international and regional agreements on the conservation of migratory birds"*.

1 Project Area and Focus

The Project operates through a series of regional initiatives and model collaborative activities involving government, hunting and conservation groups. Tunisia and Lebanon are focal or "hub" countries in North Africa and in the Middle East respectively for demonstration of activities aimed at achieving sustainable hunting which can be replicated in the other project countries. Even though the scale of impact is different between both countries, hunting of migrants is of socio-economic importance to both of them and also raises management and conservation issues (e.g. illegal or unregulated hunting). Both countries also have "bottlenecks" and wintering sites of crucial conservation importance for migratory birds, as well as good stakeholder collaboration on hunting issues.

2 Methodology

The synthesis report is based on data collected from the MTCs, review of the country national reports and AEWA reports. A questionnaire was developed by AEWA and adopted by the Sustainable Hunting Project to collect information from the government and concerned authorities within MTCs of relevance to the subject matter. Six countries: Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Algeria responded to the questionnaire.

3 Introduction

Lead poisoning in waterbirds through the ingestion of spent lead shot is serious problem arising from current hunting practices in many countries. Cartridges for hunting waterfowl each contain around 30 grams of lead. Only a few of all fired pellets actually hit the bird, the rest fall to the ground or into the water. Waterbirds often pick the pellets from the bottom and ingest them, mistaking them for food items

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or grit which is retained in the gizzard to facilitate the grinding of food. Lead is a highly poisonous metal, causing severe anemia and affecting the nervous and circulatory systems, liver and kidneys. Depending on the amount of pellets swallowed, birds could die within a few days or weeks. If a bird swallows only one pellet, it usually survives, although its immune system and fertility are likely to be affected. Also, even low concentrations of lead have a negative impact on energy storage, which affects the ability to prepare for migration. Conservation and hunting organizations therefore agree that the use of lead shot for hunting in wetlands should be phased out. The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) addresses this issue directly in its Action Plan:

According to Paragraph 4.1.4 of the AEWA Action Plan *Parties shall endeavor to phase out the use of lead shot for hunting in wetlands by the year 2000.*

In Resolution 2.2 on “Phasing out lead shot for hunting in wetlands” the Second Meeting of the Parties to AEWA, 25 – 27 September 2002, Bonn, Germany, called upon Contracting Parties “to enhance their efforts to phase out the use of lead shot in wetlands as soon as possible, in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Technical Committee in its lead poisoning review – namely, to promote communication between, and awareness within, authorities and the hunting community; to allocate resources for the enforcement of relevant laws; and to stimulate and facilitate the production and availability of non-toxic shot – and to actively inform themselves on the issue and its solutions.

4 General Situation

The majority of the MTCs work towards satisfying their obligations towards international treaties and conventions through the implementation of various projects and programs, in addition to the inclusion of these obligations in their national environmental policies, strategies, and enacting national laws.

Lead shot for bird hunting in wetlands is still being used by hunters in all MTCs to date. However, water bird hunting is not practiced on as large a scale in the MTCs as some other countries since hunting is strictly banned in the majority of wetlands, notably those classified as natural reserves and surely Ramsar declared sites, with the exception of Palestine and Algeria.

In Palestine, hunting using lead shot in wetlands is still carried out on a large scale due to the fact that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) does not have full control over the land, as well as the lack of law enforcement in the country, and the inability to take active measures with regards to the subject as a result of the Israeli Occupation.

In Algeria, lead shots are being used in hunting on a large scale in wetlands since it is the only ammunition available in the country and is used by the guards of the State.

5 Policy and Legislation

Although many MTCs have recently revised or are in the process of revising their environmental legislation, no country has addressed the use of lead shot in hunting in an adequate manner. There are no bans, either statutory or voluntary, on the use of lead shot for hunting in wetlands, and in addition, there are no bans on the commercial sale or possession of lead shot in the MTCs.

In the case of Morocco, the law of 31 March 1937 regulates the import, sale, carrying, possession, and registration of ammunition. It also includes the conditions for sale of gun powder and munitions for hunting guns. In effect, the purchase of munitions, obtain a permit to carry and possession must be approved by local authorities.

In Palestine, and due to the difficult circumstances in the country, law enforcement is hard to ensure. Moreover, the implementation and enforcement of the Environment Law of 1999 are not yet active.

In Lebanon, hunting has been banned since 1995 to date, until the new hunting law is passed. So, current hunting practices are done illegally in Lebanon.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Ministry of Interior Affairs is the only body responsible for hunting management and usage of guns. However, hunting legislation falls exclusively under the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture under Hunting Law No.152 dated 23/07/1970. Currently, there are no legal measures against the use of lead shots. However, the new Hunting Law that is under review by the Higher Council for Wildlife Hunting includes some articles related to the ban of the use of lead shots, and is expected to be ready by 2007 and enacted during 2007-2008.

In general, no measures have been taken within the MTCs to promote the use of lead-free shot in hunting in wetlands; and no monitoring system exists. There are efforts in few MTCs to tackle this issue. For example Algeria is preparing some text (regulations) with regards to the subject matter, being prepared pursuant to the Hunting Law promulgated in 2004; Palestine is in the process of developing a monitoring program and formulating the measures needed for that; and Syria is planning to start the process during 2007-2008. However, to date, progress is slow and uncoordinated.

Lead-free shots are not used by hunters in the MTCs mainly due to the lack of availability, the higher prices of lead-free shot, security concerns (for the PNA), and the fact that lead-free shot is believed by hunters to be less efficient and need new equipment. It is worth noting that Syrian Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MLAE) is leading a special campaign on the ban of the use of lead shot. The new Hunting Law gives the responsibility of the use of lead shots to MLAE in cooperation with other government concerned institutions including the Ministry of Commercial Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Health.

6 Awareness

Generally, there is a very low level of awareness about the problem of lead poisoning of water birds amongst decision makers and hunters in the MTCs. Moreover, there are no activities or programs taking place to enhance the communication between concerned authorities and the Hunting community, with the exception of minimal and limited efforts done in Palestine where a committee comprised of some stakeholders and hunters was formed in 2006 in cooperation with the NGO sector, mainly Palestine Wild Life Society (PWS) to tackle this issue. However, this committee has limited responsibilities and authority to take any decisions. Furthermore, the Palestinian policy makers understand the volume of the problem, but can not do much about it because of the difficult situation in the country due to the denied access of specialists and stakeholders and prevention of free movement to hunting sites and to the hunters by the Israelis, in addition to the problem of weapons use permissions imposed by the Israelis.

Overall there is no exchange of information and communication on the problem between hunting community and concerned authorities. And there are no current or planned media/ education campaigns about the lead poisoning issue. Furthermore, there is no or very little informational material about this problem in the MTCs that is adequate for use for media or education purposes.

It is worth mentioning that there are few awareness initiatives within MTCs. In Palestine several campaigns have been conducted in schools. Also, the Syrian Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MLAE) has planned to implement a national campaign in 2007 about this problem in coordination with other concerned entities. In addition, the Syrian Society for Conservation of Wild Life (SSCW), a Syrian NGO, has planned in its 2007-2008 action plans to implement some awareness activities related to the threats of the use of lead shots. However, again, this issue does not receive large attention for awareness raising.

Progress in education has been achieved in Lebanon due to the “Guidelines for Sustainable Hunting of Migratory Birds in Mediterranean Third Countries” developed by the project “Building capacity for sustainable hunting of migratory birds in Mediterranean countries of North Africa and Middle East” executed by BirdLife Middle East in partnership with SPNL in Lebanon (a national NGO) and in coordination with the Ministry of Environment. Recommendations here included the phasing out of lead shot in cartridges and its replacement by alternatives encouraged through tax incentives. In addition according to the “Code of Practice for Responsible hunting of Migratory birds “ developed by the same project mentioned above, it is recommended to avoid the use of lead shot especially within 200 meters of wetlands and to pick up spent cartridges.

7 Research and Development

With regards to research and development in the MTCs, there is no specific regional research done on the biological/ecological impact of lead poisoning on water birds. In addition, nothing has been done concerning the development of lead-free shot, or to stimulate and facilitate the manufacture and availability of lead-free shots in the market. Unfortunately, there are no national publications on the issue of the use of lead shots in hunting in wetlands. These area all areas that need attention.

8 Coordination

With regards to national coordination in the MTCs, there is next to no coordination effort between concerned authorities and the different stakeholders to tackle the lead poisoning issue on national level. No working groups or committees have been established to tackle the lead poisoning issue, in the exception of Syria where the MLAЕ has initiated communication with concerned national institutions to form a special committee to address the issue of the use of lead shots by hunters in wetlands. MLAЕ is also expected to implement the national campaign mentioned above in coordination and collaboration with concerned entities. The hunters and related NGOs will be involved in all activities related to the subject matter and the implementation of the new Hunting Law. National and regional coordination efforts therefore need to be significantly improved.

9 Conclusion

Although many MTCs have recently revised or are in the process of revising their environmental legislation, no country has addressed the use of lead shot in hunting in an adequate manner. There are no bans, either statutory or voluntary, on the use of lead shot for hunting in the wetlands, and there are no ban on the commercial sale or possession of lead shot in the MTCs. There are also no advances in making non-toxic shot available to hunters in the region.

It is also clear that all MTCs have low levels of awareness among decision makers and the hunting community about the impacts of lead shot in wetlands. There is a therefore a definite need to work to increase awareness.

Finally, there is next to no coordination effort between concerned authorities and the different stakeholders to tackle the lead poisoning issue on national level and this is something that needs to be urgently addressed to bring about changes to the current hunting practices and use of lead shot.