

# Committee against the murder of birds e. V. Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)



[Hunting tracks in Europe](#) [1]

## Firing numbers in bird hunting in Europe

This text is a heavily abridged version of the original article by the authors Axel Hirschfeld and Geraldine Attard, published in the journal "Berichte zur Vogelschutz" (BzV, issue 53/54, 2017) in April 2018. There are also listed all citations and the methods for the estimation of species-specific collective statements such as "wild ducks" listed.

Information on the purchase of the BzV can be found here: [German Council for Bird Protection](#) [2] 

### 1 Introduction

The hunt for birds, especially migratory birds, is a widespread pastime, sometimes with very long traditions, and is still practiced today by millions of hunters and bird catchers in Europe (see Table 1). The framework for hunting legislation in each EU Member State is set by the provisions of the European Birds Directive (VRL) adopted in 1979, which classifies 82 bird species as "hunnable" for the European Union (EU) area in Annex II, including many endangered species in the meantime. Against the background of the massive decline of many migratory species such as lapwing, turtle dove or skylark, there are frequent discussions as to whether and to what extent legal bird hunting is responsible and whether further hunting, given its unfavorable conservation status, can be sustained or banned. In order to be able to make appropriate assessments for individual species or populations, in addition to figures on population size and reproduction, data on killings over the entire annual habitat must also be evaluated. The last, and so far the only, work that provides an overview of firing numbers and corresponding estimates for all 82 species of Annex II of the VRL in Europe, appeared in issue 42 of the Bird Protection Reports in 2005 (HIRSCHFELD & HEYD 2005) [3]. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the current hunting pressure on these species in Europe and to compare the results with those of the older study. The data will then be discussed in terms of their importance for bird protection in Germany, in particular for all species listed in the current Red List of breeding birds in Germany (GRÜNEBERG et al., 2015).



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### 2. Material and methods

On initiative and with the financial support of the Golden plover - huntable in 10 member states of the EU German Council for Bird Protection (DRV), members of the committee against the bird murder in the year 2016 systematically collected and contained all available national hunting statistics from the EU, Switzerland and Norway Data for the 82 species of birds listed in Annex II of the VRL. For this purpose, in a first working phase (June to October 2016), all publicly available hunting statistics were recorded and from this the data for the bird species studied entered into a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel). In order to get the most up-to-date overview possible, the hunting tracks of the hunting year 2014/15 or the calendar year 2014 were evaluated - if possible - for each country. In countries where these were not available, the most up-to-date data were used (see Table 1). In a second step (November and December 2016), hunting authorities and associations as well as bird protection organizations of countries whose statistics are not publicly available were contacted and requested to provide the relevant data.



### 3. Results

In total, 633 individual lines were determined or estimated from the available sources, which corresponds to about 83% of all possible 761 data points. The total of all firing numbers determined in detail, combined collection lines and the projected Italian hunting range totals approximately 53 million individuals per year of the 82 species tested. Table 1 provides information on area, number of hunters, the number of huntable bird species, as well as the estimated or estimated overall kill and data quality in all 30 countries studied.

|                | <b>Number of hunters</b> | <b>hunter density</b> | <b>Shooting birds per year</b> | <b>hunting season</b> | <b>Species with hunting season</b> | <b>examined hunting tracks</b> |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Austria        | 123283                   | 1.47                  | 154114                         | 2014/15               | 26                                 | 24                             |
| Belgium        | 23,000                   | 0.75                  | 1019701                        | 2014                  | 13                                 | 13                             |
| Bulgaria       | 120000                   | 1.08                  | 548062                         | 2013/14               | 25                                 | 9                              |
| Croatia        | 56327                    | 0.99                  | 150191                         | 2014/15               | 21                                 | 21                             |
| Cyprus         | 42215                    | 4.56                  | 3700711                        | 2015                  | 34                                 | 12                             |
| Czech Republic | 92247                    | 1.17                  | 783265                         | 2014                  | 14                                 | 14                             |
| Denmark        | 178000                   | 4.15                  | 2062054                        | 2014/15               | 30                                 | 30                             |
| Estonia        | 15,000                   | 0.33                  | 17252                          | 2014/15               | 32                                 | 32                             |
| Finland        | 207000                   | 0.61                  | 1265700                        | 2014                  | 30                                 | 29                             |
| France         | 1250000                  | 1.94                  | 17624996                       | 2013/14               | 63                                 | 43                             |
| Germany        | 374084                   | 1.05                  | 1156149                        | 2014/15               | 30                                 | 27                             |
| Greece         | 174500                   | 1.32                  | ?                              | -                     | 32                                 | 0                              |
| Hungary        | 59053                    | 0.63                  | 548392                         | 2013/14               | 14                                 | 14                             |
| Ireland        | 350000                   | 4.98                  | ?                              | -                     | 19                                 | 0                              |
| Italy          | 689000                   | 2.29                  | 3702797 *                      | 2014/14               | 34                                 | 34                             |
| Latvia         | 25,000                   | 0.39                  | 21507                          | 2014/15               | 28                                 | 27                             |
| Lithuania      | 32,000                   | 0.49                  | 13116                          | 2014                  | 16                                 | 15                             |
| Luxembourg     | 2080                     | 0.8                   | 1948                           | 2014/15               | 3                                  | 3                              |
| Malta          | 11076                    | 35,05                 | 121496                         | 2014                  | 32                                 | 31                             |
| Netherlands    | 27,000                   | 0.65                  | ?                              | -                     | 10                                 | 0                              |
| Norway         | 142850                   | 0.37                  | 449920                         | 2014/15               | 29                                 | 26                             |
| Poland         | 118362                   | 0.38                  | 211096                         | 2014/15               | 13                                 | 13                             |
| Portugal       | 120000                   | 1.3                   | 1562224                        | 2013/14               | 30                                 | 29                             |
| Romania        | 60,000                   | 0.25                  | 1256876                        | 2014/15               | 39                                 | 39                             |
| Slovakia       | 38719                    | 1.02                  | 113748                         | 2014/15               | 20                                 | 20                             |
| Slovenia       | 22,000                   | 1.1                   | 32456                          | 2014                  | 6                                  | 6                              |
| Spain          | 906437                   | 1.79                  | 11933963                       | 2014/15               | 32                                 | 32                             |
| Sweden         | 300000                   | 0.67                  | 549585                         | 2014/15               | 33                                 | 33                             |
| Switzerland    | 29864                    | 0.72                  | 27513                          | 2014                  | 22                                 | 22                             |
| United Kingdom | 800000                   | 3.04                  | ?                              | -                     | 0                                  | 0                              |

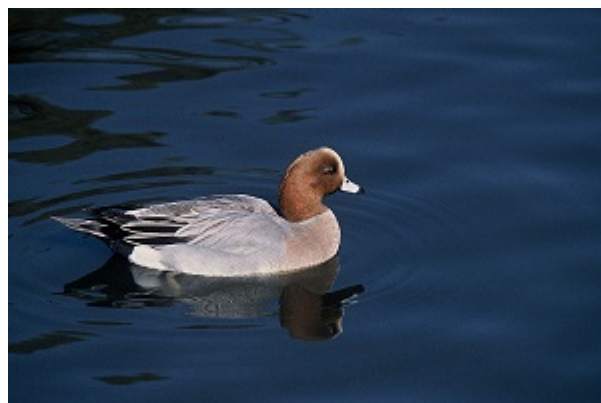
**Key to the table** : Number of hunters = number of officially registered hunters according to FACE (2010), hunter density = number of registered hunters per square kilometer, shooting birds per year = number of individuals of bird species listed in Annex II of the VRL at least per year, hunting season = period, in which the evaluated hunting lanes were collected, species with hunting time = number of bird species that may be legally hunted, examined hunting lanes = number of evaluated individual lines, \* = hunting lane extrapolated on the basis of regional data

The determined firing numbers and trends provide for each species an overall picture of the hunting pressure in the study area. Of particular interest to nature conservation is the data on species that are classified as endangered throughout Europe or in a particular member state. Therefore, in the following section, the results for all migratory species of the Red List of breeding birds of Germany (RLD, GRÜNEBERG et al., 2015) are summarized as representative of all 82 species of Annex II.

### Selected species in detail:

**Wigeon** (*Anas penelope*, RLD) © US Fish and Wildlife Service

R): Hunting bar in a total of 21 EU countries, of which 12 species-specific kill numbers total 236,219 killed individuals (Table 2). From Austria, Germany and Spain, only summarized routes are available for "wild ducks" or "waterfowl" (Spain) (Table 3). The number of Wigeons shot in Italy is estimated at 11,252 individuals. The number of wigeons reported as shot in seven sample countries has fallen in recent years from 100,525 to 75,937 (Table 4). Data from the Netherlands, Great Britain, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus, where the species may also be hunted, are missing.



**Bergente** (*Aythya marila*, RLD R): Hunting bar in a total of seven EU countries, of which there are three species-specific shooting numbers totaling 659 killed individuals (Table 2). The authors of the management plan of the EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2009d) estimate that fewer than 1,000 penguins are released each year in Europe.

**Pintail** (*Anas acuta*, RLD 3): Hunting bar in a total of 18 EU countries, of which nine species-specific kill numbers total 54,064 killed individuals (Table 2). From Germany, Austria and Spain, there are only summarized routes for wild ducks and waterfowl (Table 3). The number of pintails shot in Italy is estimated at 4111 individuals. Current data from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Greece and Bulgaria were not available. The number of pint-nests reported as shot in five sample countries has decreased in recent years from 17,019 to 12,035 animals (Table 4).

**Shoveler** (*Anas clypeata*, RLD 3): Hunttable in a total of 16 EU countries, nine of which have nine species-specific kill numbers totaling 121,103 individuals killed (Table 2). From Germany and Austria, there are only summarized routes for "wild ducks" (Table 3). The number of shovels shot in Italy is estimated at a total of 5,783 individuals. Current data from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus and Greece were not available. The number of shovels reported as shot in five sample countries has fallen in recent years from 8,750 to 6,843 (Table 4).

**Knäkente** (*Anas querquedula*, RLD 2) © Hans Glader

Hunting bar in a total of 17 EU countries, of which there are 10 species-specific shooting numbers totaling 42,616 individuals killed (Table 2). There are only summarized routes from three states for "wild ducks" (Austria), "waterfowl" (Spain) and "crickets and snags" (Finland) (Table 3). The number of snares shot in Italy is estimated at 3,387 individuals. Data from Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus, where the species may also be hunted, are missing. In recent years, the number of reported snares in five sample countries has fallen from 1,584 to 509 (Table 4).



**Teal** (*Anas crecca*, RLD 3): Hunting bar in a total of 24 EU countries, of which 13 are accurate firing numbers totaling 522,253 killed individuals (Table 2). From Germany, Austria, Finland, Spain and Poland, only summarized route information is available for wild ducks, crickets and gargoyles or waterfowl (Table 3). The number of teals shot in Italy is estimated at 54,491 individuals. Current data from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Greece and Bulgaria were not available. The number of teals reported as shot in eight sample countries has risen in recent years from 414,417 to 481,430 (Table 4).

**Goosander** (*Mergus merganser*, RLD V): Hunttable species in Finland, Sweden and Norway. The current kill numbers of Sweden and Finland add up to a total of 2,826 killed individuals, which corresponds to a decline in hunting distance of



more than 75% (Table 2 and Tab. 4).

**Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*, RLD V): Hunting ban in a total of 7 EU countries, of which 4 species-specific kill numbers total 18,921 killed individuals (Table 2). The number of moorhatchers shot in Italy is estimated at 24,951 individuals. The species is also hutable in Greece and the United Kingdom, but there are no up-to-date information on shooting in these countries. The number of moorhens registered as shot in France and Malta has decreased in recent years from 76,282 to 16,440 by about 78% (Table 4).

**Water rail** (*Rallus aquaticus*, RLD V): Hunting ban in three EU countries. For France and Malta, detailed data from the 2014/2015 hunting season are available, listing a total of 3,896 birds shot down (Table 2). The total shoot in Italy is estimated at 1,420 individuals. The number of water rams reported shot in France and Malta has fallen in recent years from 30,305 to 3,896 by about 87% (Table 4).

**Quail** (*Coturnix coturnix*, RLD V): Hutable in a total of ten EU countries, of which six are accurate firing numbers totaling 1,607,964 killed individuals (Table 2). The total shoot in Italy is estimated at 76,064 individuals. From Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal and Austria (Burgenland) no current shooting numbers could be evaluated. In the EU Management Plan for Quail (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009b), the annual launch in Greece is estimated at 72,000 and in Bulgaria between 250,000 and 300,000 quail. The number of quails reported as shot in three sample countries has fallen in recent years from 363,000 to 215,230 (Table 4).

**Turtle Dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*, RLD 2): Hunting ban in a total of ten EU countries, of which eight are accurate numbers of shoots or estimates totaling 1,455,208 killed individuals (Table 2). For Greece, current information is missing. The EU Management Plan for the Turtle Dove (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2007b) specifies a range of 300,000 to 600,000 birds for the annual launch of lovebirds in Greece. However, this is an estimate based on older data. In view of the progressive decline in the species throughout its range and the decline in the numbers of other countries, the current turtle dove range in Greece is likely to have fallen below this estimate. In Austria, the turtle dove is hutable in the provinces of Lower Austria, Burgenland and Vienna. The Austrian total distance is given as "less than 7,800" in the current revision of the EU Management Plan for the Turtle Dove (FISHER et al., 2016). This value should now be well below. For Slovakia, FISHER et al. (2016) 3,089 birds shot, although the country is not listed in the species in Annex II Part B of the VRL. Malta has until spring 2016 been the only country in the study area to allow this kind of species to be hunted in spring, but since 2017, a hunting ban has also been applied here in spring. The number of lovebirds declared shot in eight sample countries has fallen in recent years from 323,933 to 208,133 (Tab. 4).



**Woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*, RLD V): The species is currently legally hunted in the study area in 26 states. There are exactly 973,414 individuals per year from 21 countries (Table 2). The launch in Italy is estimated at 144,099 individuals. In addition, there are killings of woodcock in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Bulgaria and Greece. Older figures estimate the killings for Great Britain at 125,000 (AEBISCHER et al., 2003) and 150,000 (FERRAND & GOSSMANN 2001) birds, for Ireland at around 125,000 (HIRSCHFELD & HEYD 2005, according to data from O HULLACHAIN & HENDERSON 2004) and for Greece to 450,000-550,000 (FERRAND & GOSSMANN 2001) and about one million animals shot each year (HIRSCHFELD & HEYD 2005). In view of the development of the number of routes in other countries, however, a corresponding decline in kills is also to be expected there. A comparison of the data from 16 countries, from which data series are available from both reference periods, shows a reduction in the numbers of casualties from 1,277,606 to 819,210 birds (Table 4).



**Curlew** (*Numenius arquata*, RLD 1): According to Part B of Annex II, the species may be released for hunting in France, Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom. The only country to use it during the investigation period is France, where 6,858 specimens were shot on coastal areas after a five-year launch moratorium in the 2013/14 hunting season (AUBRY et al., 2016). In the French interior the species is provisionally protected until July 2018 (THE N2K GROUP 2014).

**Golden plover** (*Pluvialis apricaria*, RLD 1): Annex II Part B allows a total of ten EU countries to release this species for launch, of which only six EU countries plus Norway actually set up a hunting season. Precise route numbers are available only from France, Portugal and Malta and add up to a total of 19,821 birds killed per year (Table 2). The number of golden plover reported as shot in France and Malta decreased by more than 80% during the investigation period (Table 4). The

Maltese numbers include both the launch and the 2014 allowed again with large nets. Current data from Great Britain, Ireland, Greece and Norway, where the species is currently still shot in some parts of the country are missing.

**Common snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*, RLD 1): Currently being hunted out of the study area in 16 countries. Current, species-specific route numbers are available from eight countries and add up to a total of 205,577 birds (Table 2). For Italy, the total shoot is estimated at 49,021 copies per year. Depending on the projection method, the percentage of common snipe on the Spanish waterfowl hunting range is between 4,738 and 15,996 (see Table 3). In addition there are the kills of the countries Cyprus, Bulgaria, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Austria (only Burgenland), from which no recent data are available for the shooting of the snipe. According to older data, the United Kingdom has 30,000 snipe and about 205,000 snipe shot annually for Ireland (HIRSCHFELD & HEYD 2005). The number of snipes reported as shot in five sample countries has fallen in recent years from 294,031 to 189,922 (Table 4).

**Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*, RLD 1): The species is listed on the list of huntable species in France. Since 2007, however, there has been a launch moratorium in place (ROBIN et al., 2012, THE N2K GROUP 2014). The number of legal kills in the study area is therefore zero.

**Redshank** (*Tringa totanus*, RLD 3): The species is only huntable in France. In the 2013/14 season, about 7,882 redshanks were shot there (Table 2, AUBRY et al., 2016).

**Ruff** (*Philomachus pugnax*, RLD 1): Shot in France, Malta and some Italian regions. For the hunting season 2013/14 from France 932 copies and from Malta 13 birds (season 2014/15) reported as shot. (Tab. 2). The total annual shoot in Italy is estimated at 77 pieces.

**Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*, RLD 2): Lapwings are currently being hunted in five EU states, of which France, Malta and Spain have exact numbers of 107.802 birds shot (Table 2). The total shoot in Italy is estimated at 7,489 individuals. Latest data from Greece are missing. The EU Management Plan (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009c) gives an estimate of 100,000 lapwings per year in Greece. The French hunting range has decreased by about 78% compared to the hunting season 1998 (Table 4).



**Skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*, RLD 3): Hunting bar in six EU countries, of which there are four species-specific kill numbers of 898,958 birds (Table 2). In addition there are the skylarks shot down in Italy, whose number is estimated at about 451,671 other birds. Current figures from Greece, where the species is a popular game, are missing. The EU Management Plan (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2007<sup>a</sup>) states that "180,000-400,000" skylarks are shot annually for Greece, but given the development of firing numbers in other states, a corresponding decline is also expected. The firing in the sample countries France and Malta has fallen in recent years from 684,135 to 194,229 birds, which corresponds to a decline of around 71% (Table 4). In addition to hunting with the rifle, skylarks in the French department of Landes may be caught with pantens nets (pantes) and wire traps (matoles) from October to November. In the 2014 hunting season, the French Ministry of the Environment set a maximum fishing quota of 260,000 birds (MINISTÈRE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT, DU DELLVIPEMENT DURABLE ET DE L'ÉNERGIE 2014)

**Star** (*Sturnus vulgaris*, RLD 3): Hunting bar in eight EU countries, of which there are five species-specific track charges totaling 647,938 birds (Table 2). For lack of data, the launch of starlings in Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus can not be estimated.

#### 4. Significance of the data

When assessing the observed numbers of firing in the study area, it has to be taken into account that for most species this is only a part of the total losses due to hunting and bird trapping. So missing the complete statistics from Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and Greece. As these four countries together account for approximately 20% of all hunters reported in the study area (see Table 1, FACE 2010 data), a corresponding "unreported figure" must be expected for most of the species huntable in these countries (see Table 2) become. In addition, there are numerous other missing individual routes, which are not included in the statistics of the countries examined for various reasons. In addition, no source contains data on birds that are merely killed in the hunt and later die undetected or that are capable of limited reproduction due to hunting-related injuries. Since almost all species treated here are shot with shotgun and targeted especially in migratory birds in flocks, further losses in the millions are to be expected (see MOOIJ 1995, MADSEN & NOER 1996, ALISON 2001). Also not included are losses due to illegal hunting and bird trapping, which are a massive additional cause of mortality in the study area and beyond for some species. Examples include the illegal spring hunt for lovebirds and quails in southern Italy, Greece and some Balkan states, and the annual illegal capture of hundreds of thousands of



bluebirds in Cyprus and Italy (COMMITTEE AGAINST THE BIRD MURDER 2013<sup>a</sup>, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2011, BROCHET et al 2016, DEBERSEK & RUTIGLIANO 2016).

Just as relevant as the losses in the study area are in most species also the kills or the catch outside of Europe, as for example in the Balkans, the Middle East and in Africa. Due to their popularity and their status as "bread and butter species" of



many migrant bird hunters, especially for quails and lovebirds, a particularly high additional hunting pressure outside the study area can be assumed. Thus, both species are released in almost all countries of southern Europe, the Balkans, the Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb countries (see EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009b, FISHER et al., 2016), in many places allowing the return of returning birds in spring, BROCHET et al. (2016) estimate that more than one million quail and songbirds are illegally caught and shot every year across the Mediterranean, in addition to legal animals. OMER (2015) reports that quail is an important staple food for many residents of the Gaza Strip during migration. In Lebanon, hundreds of thousands of European migratory birds are shot every spring and autumn, including numerous quails, thrushes, lovebirds and waterbirds (KOMITEE AGAINST VOGELMORD 2013b).

## 5. Conclusion and demands from the perspective of bird protection

Depending on the species, the proportion of birds breeding in the EU at the respective hunting range is between 0% (eg pale goose) up to 100% (eg capercaillie). For most migratory species, however, this proportion of the so-called flyway population (ROSE 1998) is still unknown, making it difficult to estimate the exact consequences of hunting (MADSEN et al., 2015). Comparing the estimated annual kill numbers for the study area with the European hatcheries (EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY 2016) calculated from the data in the country reports in accordance with Article 12 of the VRL, a whole range of migratory birds is found, of which animals already exist in countries with accurate statistics in an order of magnitude of more than half of the total breeding population in Europe (spring stock). In addition to these losses, the species illegally harvested in the study area and birds harvested in Italy and in countries with collection routes for these species (see Tables 3 and 4) are also found in the countries



with missing data (see Table 2). as well as being shot outside of Europe. Example miniature snipes: From France, Portugal, Malta and Romania there are artificially detailed route data in total of 45,716 shot animals, to which still the hunting stretches from Italy (estimate: 3,880 individuals) and Spain (estimate between 1,233 and 3,477 individuals, see Tab. 3), Cyprus, Ireland and the United Kingdom (no actual data available). But even without the missing data, the total yield in the countries with complete statistics is approximately equal to the maximum European breeding population of 23,100 couples (EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY 2016). It has to be taken into account that among the birds shot in the EU there are also numerous migrant birds from Russia and Eastern Europe, whose death does not directly affect the stocks in the EU. The same applies to many other species such as the turtledove. For this species, for the years 1980 to 2002, the annual minimum kill of 2.3 million birds per year calculated by HIRSCHFELD & HEYD (2005) and for the period 2003-2013, the annual kill of 1.5 million animals calculated in this study is taken as the basis, for the period 1980-2013, there are at least 65 million lovebirds shot in the EU. Taking into account that the data from Greece are missing and that the shooting numbers in the 80s and 90s were still significantly higher everywhere, more than 100 million lovebirds were killed, killed by hunters in the EU in the years 1980 to 2013 alone were. In the same period, the European stock of turtledoves has decreased by 78% (EUROPEAN BIRD CENSUS COUNCIL 2015).

Article 7, Section 1 of the VRL states literally: "Member States shall ensure that the hunting of these species does not undermine the efforts made in their habitat to conserve them", However, countries that continue to release endangered

species for release are willing to end up destroying or jeopardizing protection efforts in other Member States. Against the backdrop of the high losses caused by hunting and the simultaneously shrinking stocks of many species favored by hunters, there is no doubt that such intense persecution in their entirety has little to do with sustainable use but, on the contrary, accelerates the decline in many species. The hunting of endangered species is therefore ethically and politically unjustifiable, especially since it is all about a hobby of a minority and not about stock regulation of common species in the public interest - such as for reasons of air safety. Even though hunting is not the main cause of decline for most European or German "endangered" species, it does not seem reasonable to justify further kills as "sustainable skimming over of surplus" or "tradition" given the current stock situation. The nature conservation associations should face such a unilaterally motivated justification attempts a clear counter-design and campaign aggressively for hunting in endangered species in the individual countries. Should these efforts fail, the European Commission must be persuaded to put pressure on the respective governments and, if necessary, bring proceedings before the European Court of Justice for violations of the VRL.



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