



A social media campaign is launched by the Bern Convention to raise awareness on illegal bird killing

- The campaign “**The Last Tweet**” is launched on Twitter on the 24th of October, involving fictional stories of four birds from the most affected species.
- On the same day, a full report will be presented by the BirdLife Partnership showing the extent of this environmental crisis.
- An estimated 36 million birds are illegally killed every year while they migrate in the Mediterranean region, causing some species to decline by up to 30%; and even disappear completely from some regions.

Strasbourg, 24 October 2017 - The Bern Convention presents **The Last Tweet**, a creative campaign to inform the public about illegal bird killing. This kind of wildlife crime has become one of the largest transnational organised illicit activities, alongside trafficking in drugs, arms, and human beings. This profitable, well set-up, environmental crime has devastating effects on birds and on biodiversity as a whole. Killed or trapped in huge numbers, some species are being driven to extinction.

On the same date, the BirdLife Partnership, composed by dozens of conservation organisations is presenting a report in the COP12 conference organized by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) in Manila (Philippines). According to the report, which demonstrates staggering numbers of birds illegally killed every year, most European countries have conservation laws, but “despite this strong legal protection, a number of illegal activities continue to threaten birds in Europe, including trapping of passerines for food consumption, shooting of protected species for ‘sport’ and poisoning raptors for ‘predator control’”.

In spite of the magnitude of this threat to wildlife, most indicators demonstrate that public awareness is relatively low amongst Europeans. To target large population sectors with little appreciation of this issue, **The Last Tweet** uses a social media trend that has always existed, but is just now gaining traction: fiction. Four different birds tell their migration stories from four different Twitter accounts, sometimes funny and sometimes poignant, up until their death in the hands of illegal bird killers. In this way, the name of the campaign is a play on words referring both to their last tweet (the equivalent of the human last sigh, or last words) and the last post on their Twitter stories. Since the last words someone says before they die have always held great importance socially, these birds use their last tweet to send their message: stop illegal bird killing.

Through fiction and anthropomorphism, the users establish an emotional connection with the birds, who behave in distinctively human ways: they sightsee, take selfies, get drunk, miss



their loved ones. This makes the audience feel closer to the animal, so the message is more likely to stay with them.

According to Eladio Fernández-Galiano, Head of Culture, Nature and Heritage Department at the Council of Europe, “illegal bird killing, exacerbated by the involvement of criminal organisations, has now grown even bigger and spread widely, touching more European countries than ever before. Building on our past efforts, we advocate for a zero-tolerance approach on the issue, call for a pro-active attitude by national authorities, pursue raising public awareness and strive to contribute to their efforts through international cooperation and target setting”.

The Last Tweet involves a media and social media campaign with the release of Twitter stories of four different birds, which direct towards a website (www.thelasttweet.eu, which will go online when the embargo is lifted) where all the information is centralised. The campaign uses the hashtags #illegalbirdkilling and #thelasttweet.

Additional information to editors

Some information and figures on illegal bird killing in Europe

It is estimated that 36 million birds are being illegally killed annually during their migration, usually in the coastal regions of Mediterranean countries or in the Caucasus. They are shot, glued, or trapped; for food, sport, or tradition. Populations of 40 different migratory species that were once abundant in Europe are in severe decline, many having already disappeared from some areas. The European Turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), for instance, has declined by 30% throughout Europe since the year 2000, and in some countries even by 90%.

According to the new report by the BirdLife Partnership, out of the 28 countries assessed for illegal bird killing, 19 of them are part of the EU, and all of them are members of the Bern Convention. Accordingly, they all have legislation or policy instruments to tackle this threat; yet illegal bird killing remains an issue.

Fiction on social media

Narrative form has always had a place in social media, since the interactive videoblog series *lonelygirl15*, in 2006, which had its audience wondering whether it was real or fictional for months; until this day, with viral Twitter threads narrating stories such as “Dear David”, by writer and illustrator Adam Ellis, or “#TheStory”, by Zola Wells. Although it hasn’t always been as popular as now, these past few years have seen these kinds of stories incorporated into the



mainstream, not just by aspiring or amateur writers but by professional ones, like the collaborative horror Twitter thread by authors Sam Sykes and Chuck Wendig.

Twitter lends itself to a special sort of storytelling: very condensed, but elongated in time; with implicit space for action and character development, but with much of the story suggested to the reader, rather than explicitly told.

The Last Tweet leverages these advantages to tell engaging first-person stories of four birds who try to migrate to different climates only to have their migration brutally brought to an end by illegal bird killers.

Recent regulation on illegal bird killing

The issue of illegal killing, trapping, and trading of birds (IKB) has regularly been on the Agenda of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention over the past twenty years. The Bern Convention promoted the organisation of the first European Conference on illegal killing of birds, held in Larnaca, Cyprus, in 2011. A second Conference took place in Tunis in 2013. This resulted in adoption of the Tunis Action Plan for the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds, 2013-2020 to ensure concrete action.

Three examples of wide ranging action have been demonstrated by France, Malta, and Italy. Significant steps were taken in France, where a new biodiversity law was adopted in August 2016, which introduced a tenfold increase in penalties for illegal activities regarding protected species, i.e. killing: including prison sentences (up to two years) and fines up from €150,000 to 300,000 and trade: prison sentences (up to seven years) and fines from €150,000 to 750,000. In Malta, analysis of national legislation and administrative measures were carried out along with an assessment of the scale of IKB. Enforcement capacity in the field was strengthened and there was a tenfold increase in penalties. In Italy, a new national action plan on IKB was approved in March 2017. It contains 5 targets and 31 actions, and it foresees the establishment of dedicated police units, improved coordination, and enhanced law enforcement.

Birds used in the campaign

European Turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*): from Western Sudan to Lybia, to the Ionian Islands, and onwards to Czech Republic, these birds often get killed while or just after crossing the Mediterranean. Under the handle @Ninja_Dove, a turtle dove migrates, braving predators and bad weather, and even meeting a friend; only to have her migration cut short by a bullet.

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*): robins get trapped in clamp traps in northern Italy in their migration route from Finland. As @Red_theRobin, this young bird flies with his friends, part migration, part tourism; trying traditional food at every stop. After losing one of his friends, he falls into a trap whilst looking for him.



European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*): on their trip from the UK to the south of Spain, via western France, these birds are trapped with ground nets. Under the username @albertgoldfinch, an English bird hoping to be reunited with his partner, Hannah, migrates with his friends until he's trapped in a net just before arriving to his destination.

Eurasian Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*): on a migration route from Norway to Cyprus, blackcaps get caught, often with glue traps, to sell to restaurants. As @sylviablackcap, a young bird migrates for the first time without her parents. Aware of the dangers of migration, she is constantly afraid of getting killed by humans.

The Bern Convention

The Bern Convention is the European treaty for the conservation of, wild species and habitats on the continent. For more than 30 years the Convention has contributed to the sustainable development of life on our planet. It was signed under the auspices of the Council of Europe in 1979, and has since been ratified by 50 countries and the European Union itself. One of the main lines of action of the Convention is the fight against illegal bird killing, which is an increasing threat to European biodiversity. To carry out this campaign they have relied on Scienseed, a science communication agency based in Madrid (Spain).

Video of the Bern convention: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVpN2_u7gms

Graphic material

Poster/banner: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3JQN-72omHYUFJuTIFtVXcxejA/view>

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