

After LIFE Communication Plan

LIFE11 INF/IT/000253

*Safe haven for Wild Birds: changing attitudes towards illegal killing in
North Mediterranean for European biodiversity*





What was the project about

Migratory birds are very important for the conservation of Mediterranean and European biodiversity, as they function as seed dispersers and control insect pests and contribute to the bird species diversity we enjoy. The illegal killing of wild birds is still widespread across Europe. Recent estimate indicate over 27 million the number of birds illegally killed every year in the Mediterranean. In the three countries involved in this project, Italy, Spain and Greece, the yearly toll is estimated at about 7 million birds. The mortality caused by it constitutes a significant threat to the conservation of bird populations and hence European biodiversity as a whole. The project aimed to protect this natural heritage through the means of raising environmental awareness.

Although poaching is widespread, illegal activities are particularly intense in some areas where the birds concentrate during migration or wintering. For this reason the project identified three hotspots where activities were focused on: Sulcis (Sardinia, Italy), Ionian Islands (Greece) and Mediterranean Coast (Spain). In all these sites, despite the differences in methods and timing, the common trait was the fact that local communities and authorities considered the illegal killing of birds as a 'tradition' and therefore a minor crime despite international and national legislations.

The specific objectives of the project were:

1. Raising awareness of key stakeholder groups through a series of targeted communication tools organised into national campaigns for each one of the three involved countries, under the original title "Leaving is Living". The campaign targeted national audiences, the local authorities, the hunting community, the poachers/trappers and local residents along the migratory flyways of the species affected, informing them about the impacts of illegal killing. ;
2. Change of socio-cultural attitudes towards illegal killing in the younger generation through environmental education;
3. Improve law enforcement, through increased awareness and better coordination among law enforcement authorities;
4. Demonstration through the international campaign of the added value created by the collaboration of three countries across the Mediterranean to raise awareness on illegal killing.

The results achieved

The project started in August 2012 and was completed by the end of September 2015 and implemented a three tier approach:

- A common communication campaign aimed at informing a changing attitude toward the illegal killing of migratory birds. The campaign reached through newspaper, magazine, radio, TV and the web some 60 million people.
- Environmental education campaign were developed and implemented in the three hotspots in order to inform and raise awareness among the students and pupils and therefore avoiding them becoming poachers in the years to come. Almost 15,000 students were educated in the three countries.
- Raising awareness among decision makers and law enforcement agencies and local communities by means of public events, technical workshops, conferences and face-to-face meeting regarding the





seriousness of the impact of illegal bird killing at local, national and international level. As a result the level of law enforcement increased in all three countries.

Challenges encountered

Developing a campaign that would work in three countries with different languages and cultures

The cultural and legal differences between the countries required a significant amount of work for finding the appropriate approach and visual material that would have worked in all countries as in different cultures, i.e. bird migration is represented by different species. Also we had to make sure the campaign message could not be misunderstood or misinterpreted: the campaign aims at fighting illegal killing, not the hunting of migratory species (which is legal under certain rules).

Developing a campaign that could fit with the national NGO's corporate image and style

Each NGO involved in the project has its own communication style and look. The beneficiaries agreed on a main message and the campaign logo, but the graphic of the campaign material had to be nationally adapted to much the 'look and feel' of each project partner. In both Spain and Greece the 'Leaving is leaving' was translated in the national language. In Greece it maintained the winged logo (with Greek wording, in Spain the Logo was accompanied to the 'Vivir, volar, viajar' Spanish motto. In all cases the campaign was clearly linked to the LIFE project and the common message.

Access to free space on Media

In general the availability of free space and air time has significantly declined compared to the time the proposal was written, reducing the success rate of the approached for free-of-charge services from the media. This was largely due to the financial crisis. The problem was largely overcome by extra work in convincing the media and creating news worth publishing and by the Social media.

Local 'Celebrities' and media

Engaging local celebrities (e.g. the Football and Rugby teams, local 'trend setters') has been a challenge and often could not be achieved. The role of 'tradition' in shaping the attitude of 'famous people was stronger than expected as many preferred not to take a side in what was considered a controversial issue. Same attitude has found among many media (local TVs and radios) so much so that the project had to buy space on the local newspapers to publish the campaign adv on local newspaper in Sardinia.

The need of communicating vs. the need of fighting

The decision to be non – confrontational in our approach to the poaching problem (which locally is considered a 'tradition' or a 'minor misdemeanour'), it was not possible not to engage in a legal and media fight with local authorities when the Valencia regional government tried to authorize (against national legislation) the activities of some paranyas. This raised a lot of media attention, bringing the issue to a large audience, but also hampered, to a certain extent, the work aimed and cooperating with the regional Law Enforcement Agencies.

Engagement with hunting associations

The engagement with the hunting community has been lower than expected and different in each country. In Spain the Paranyers have their own associations, thus the hunters' associations have (or claim to have) limited leverage on them. In Greece the National hunting association was more vocal in public setting to distance its self from the local poachers. In Italy only one national hunting associations supported the project





and spoke publicly against poaching, while the other association as well as the local associations/branches failed to reply to LIPU's invitations to workshops and local and national public events.

Attacks

In a few but crucial events project partners staff were physically or verbally attacked by poachers. In Greece the Crew filming the documentary was attached, luckily without serious outcomes. In Spain paranyers disrupted local events and failed to comply with the rules agreed through the mediation company regarding the public meetings. The risk of attacks to information panels lead the beneficiaries to carefully select their locations (inside the city halls and schools, well policed places) or ways of displaying (as part of the travelling exhibitions).

Lessons Learnt

Communications strategy

In the proposal a general timetable and list of communication activities was proposed. This original list was review and updated by the Communication Strategy developed by JWT following the input from all project Beneficiaries. The changes in the timetable and list of deliverables was communicated in the Inception Report and the Mid-Term Report to the EC and the success of the project indicates the crucial role of a properly developed Communication Strategy.

Adapt to reach your targets

The communication campaigns in the tree countries were carefully adapted to reach the specific national targets. Also the Education package in Greece and in Spain, in order to fit to the needs of the students and the national regulations, were developed including extensive consultation with teachers of the hotspots. This resulted of the endorsement of the Environmental Education Centres in the Greek hotspot and the development of the Spanish Educational Kit in two languages: Castellano and Valenciano.

Monitoring the results of each communication tool

Many are the communication tools currently available and the internet seems to be the easiest tool: anybody can use to deliver its message. Furthermore the reach of the online messages can be measured easily (e.g. Google analytics) but reading and interpreting correctly the results requires professional knowledge that can provide insights on the results and precious guidance on how to use the different tools.

Each internet tool requires its own specific post

At the beginning of the project, with the purpose of being more efficient and effective, any news item and update on the Campaign website was automatically generating a post on the specific partners' FB wall. In due course it has noted that those automatic posts had a smaller redemption than the posts created specifically for the FB public. It was therefore decided to adapt manually the website news for the specific target of FB profile

Confrontation is not communication

Since the very beginning it was decided that the communication campaign and the educational activities were not going to be confrontational toward the poachers and their supporters. This approach was rigorously maintained even where the supporters of the illegal activities (i. e. The paranyers in Spain) acted to build a (verbal and almost physical) confrontation. Even the engagement of a mediations company (not foreseen in the project) failed to work in some 'hard core' villages and the project partner decided to work to





strengthen their social support on the villages and towns surrounding the 'extremists' avoiding fostering tensions. Attacks by poachers to the project staff were also registered in Greece.

Locals often do not realize the importance of the nature around them

What you see around you is 'the normality' even when this is far from the 'average' environment. Appreciating the uniqueness of the biodiversity of the hotspot and the importance of the migrating birds being slaughtered is the first challenge when trying to bring about a social change. The educational activities and the local events aimed successfully at building this awareness among local communities.

The future

The project developed several tools and material which are still available and will be used in the years to come. Furthermore the project partners have learnt lessons and build experience and know-how that will be useful for the continuation of the activities in the three countries.

LIPU, SEO and HOS have been engaged with fighting against illegal killing of birds for several years even before the project and indeed this activity will continue to be part of their actions; the project offered them the opportunity to develop a new integrated approach and build locally local volunteers and a more receptive environment for their plight.

Italy

The lessons learnt and the new needs identified or emerged during the project life have been assessed by LIPU. Fundraising have already started with some success; this will ensure the continuation of the anti-poaching activities and the expansion of the geographical scope of the campaign.

The project activities in the Sulcis area will certainly not stop. Schools are continuously asking for LIPU's educators to continue their educational work in the Sulcis area and LIPU is committed to respond to those requests as much as possible investing its own resources to do so. This will further reduce the likelihood of the recruitment of new poachers. The volunteers camp, thank to the improved cooperation with the Sardinian Forestry Department fostered by the project, will continue and will expand to cover also late January and early February. This will ensure the long lasting effects of the campaign and educational activities at in the Sulcis and indeed in the entire Sardinia, as local volunteers groups in Sardinia will be able to use the educational activities and build on the improved relationship with the regional Forestry department. Finally the Cagliari Airport authority has decided to keep on display the information panel, informing more and more people about the problems and the LIFE project.

The integrated approach, which proved to be so effective in the project (education, on-the-ground anti-poaching actions and awareness raising), will be implemented also in other areas in Italy thus expanding the reach of the project well beyond the Sulcis hotspot. Thanks to successful fund-raising LIPU will expand its actions in Palermo (Sicily) where thousands of illegally trapped birds (mainly finches) are openly (and illegally) sold on street markets.

Also the educational package will continue to be used in all part of Italy as it is already available for all LIPU local groups nationally. Furthermore it will be publicised through LIPU's Facebook profile (60,000 followers) and will be sent upon request. This will ensure further dissemination and more students educated.





The documentary about illegal bird killing in Sardinia will be used both at national and local level to promote LIPU's anti-poaching campaign and will continue endure that national and local TV stations will talk about the issue in the future.

Also at national level the campaign message will continue to be broadcasted through the Facebook page and the project website which will stay on line and for at least the next 5 years.

LIPU will also continue lobby against the proposed dismantling of the Corpo Forestale dello Stato, which is the only national law enforcement agency specifically devoted to fight environmental and wildlife crimes. If this will not be stopped LIPU will lobby to ensure that the expertise, tools and commitment of the agents will not be washed down by their absorption into other law enforcement forces.

Greece

Several initiatives have been taken by HOS in order to continue the legacy of the project beyond its end date. A significant amount of work has been concentrated on preventing a new generation of poachers; therefore, environmental education after-LIFE plans are coherent and substantial.

Ensuring the long-term educative process started by the campaign, the Environmental Education Centres of Lithakia in Zakynthos and Lafkimmi in Corfu incorporated the "Winged Travellers" Kit in their annual educational programs. As a result, for at least the next 5 years, schools that visit the Centres will implement the activities of the "Winged Travellers" Kit, reaching a foreseen number of 2,500 children annually. Furthermore, in the beginning of each school year, the Ministry of Education Officers in Zante and Corfu Prefectures will officially encourage the local school units to implement the Kit in the school environment, thus demonstrating governmental support for the campaign. HOS also plans to implement the project educational Kit during the "Eurobirdwatch" events around Greece in the next two years, thus reaching children beyond the target areas of the project. Finally, HOS has incorporated the 2-hour program "Winged Visitors" in its annual programme of school-based visits in Athens and Thessaloniki for the next 3 years.

The documentary "Leaving is Living" will be promoted beyond the end of this Project via film viewings that HOS will organise during the next 2 years in various film festivals and locations around Europe. The documentary is available online on YouTube since the end of the Project (24/9/2015), thus ensuring the continuation of the project's raising awareness objectives. The project's webpage of HOS website will continue to operate after the end of the Project and will be managed by the HOS Communication Officer. Most importantly, HOS has decided to continue the update and promotion of the project's Facebook page as a "digital haven" for illegal killing issues and migratory birds, after the end of the Project.

The campaign's messages will be continually communicated in the next 2 years at least, via the Zakynthos local advocates of the campaign who followed, assisted and promoted the aims of the campaign with great enthusiasm throughout the implementation of the project. The local anti-spring-killing group that formed in spring 2015 after a call from HOS has 11 active resident members and will meet before and during the spring season in order to discuss their approach to local enforcement authorities and the communication actions they will carry out next season.

Finally, the project's communication tools and will be promoted via a new project. In September 2015, during the UK BirdFair, it was announced that the 3rd Champions of the Flyway Race run by SPNI (BirdLife Israel) that take place on March 29th 2016 in Eilat, Israel, will raise money and awareness against the spring illegal





killing of birds in Greece. This financial contribution will significantly boost the extent of the After-LIFE campaign outreach and effectiveness. HOS will promote the already produced communication material of the campaign to foreign and national visitors and will continue ensuring the radio spot and videos are disseminated in travel hubs of the islands.

SEO

The local communities' commitment with poachers drove SEO to effectively address the work having always in mind changing attitudes in the long run.

In this sense, very hard work has been done with the younger generations in hotspots to avoid generational replacement of poachers. This work will widespread and have its continuity through a collaboration agreement signed with the Environmental Education Centre from Valencia Region Government (Centro de Educación Ambiental de la Comunidad Valenciana –CEACV-) initiated in 2013, being renewable every two years. The CEACV have incorporated the project educational activities and the “Volar, Viajar, Vivir” Teaching Kit, working the migratory subject and the poaching issue at least two weeks every year during the autumn migration.

In parallel another collaboration agreement was signed in 2015 with “Fundación Caja Castellón”, a private non-profit institution that works with Castellón society developing Environmental Education in summer camps and educational week along the year. The life project activities will be implemented every year from March to September, estimating an overall of 1,000 children, mainly from Castellón region.

Furthermore, schools that have already participated in the project are continuously asking for SEO to continue their educational work to new pupils and SEO is committed to respond to those requests as much as possible investing its own resources to do so.

The workshops for the law enforcement agencies proved to be so effective in the project in terms of building ties and coordinating the research of new active parany, and led SEO to reach an agreement with SEPRONA to hold timely workshops, at least until no more active parany are found.

SEO will continue the cooperation with other local groups in the autumn campaign against illegal killing of birds, locating and denouncing active parany and feeding the “[ParanyMaps website](#)”. Thanks to the improved cooperation with SEPRONA, we can expand and cover more territory; therefore SEO will activate volunteers to cover areas where there are fewer records of prosecution but where we positively know poachers have been moving to avoid the more frequented areas by law enforcement agents.

The Educational and informative materials will be distributed while stock last in Environmental Education Centres, Fairs and SEO activities. Furthermore, the Teaching kit will remain available in SEO website. This will ensure the long lasting effects of the campaign and its educational activities as educators from CEACV and Fundación Caja Castellón will be able to use the educational activities and engage new local schools to the Project and campaign's messages.

The video “Caza ilegal de aves: Parany” will remain available in YouTube SEO's channel and in Vimeo, and will be available as well via the project's webpage of SEO website that will continue to operate after the end of the Project. Lasts updates on the legal battle will be curate in the website too as a “digital haven” for illegal killing issues after the end of the Project.





Finally, SEO will continue with the legal battle against the legalization of “parany” as a methodology for studying migratory birds both having timely interviews with the Regional Government and, if necessary, denouncing every potential “parany” authorization given. In this regard, the European Network Against Environmental Crime (ENEC), in whose creation SEO had a fundamental role, may help to tackle and incorporate a holistic vision to the issue. Furthermore, as was proposed in the Greek International Conference, we are working with General and Territorial Prosecutors on standardize the treatment and streamline procedures.

