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Bird Hunting in Croatia
A Call for urgent improvement

Dear Sir,

Croatia is a globally important country for bird preservation. Migrating birds follow the Adriatic Flyway across the East Adriatic Coast towards the Dinarids and need resting and feeding sites during spring and autumn when migrating. Croatia offers several valuable resting and feedings sites, e.g. Neretva Delta, the Karst Poljes and the alluvial wetlands of Danube, Sava and Drava.

The country is also an important wintering area. For example Cranes, especially in the course of the recent climate changes, tend to stay in Europe rather than migrating to Africa. Consequently, they need rescue areas during cold snaps at the warm Adriatic coast. Croatia also offers several of such places, the most important is the Neretva Delta.

Unfortunately though, within our analysis of the current situation concerning bird hunting along the Adriatic Flyway, Croatia was ranked insufficient. In our opinion, your country has failed to implement even the minimum European standards in bird preservation and hunting due to many reasons (see below).

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As the current situation in your country is impacting bird populations especially from Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, as well as the breeding populations of numerous species in your country, we urgently ask you to implement the following measures to improve the situation. Bird species such as the Slender-billed Curlew are near to extinction worldwide and therefore in need of urgent changes in hunting laws and nature conservation policies in Croatia.

Hunting during the rearing season and the various stages of reproduction

According to the EU Birds Directive, hunting during the rearing season and the various stages of reproduction as still practised in Croatia is not allowed. Therefore, please stop bird hunting in August and September.

Hunting during the return to the rearing grounds

Birds start to migrate back to their breeding areas early in the year. According to the EU Birds Directive, hunting during the birds' return to their breeding grounds is not allowed.

Therefore, please stop bird hunting after the January 15th latest.

Number of Birds Species open for Hunting

In Croatia, a number of birds are hunted which are already nearly extinct in your country (see Red List 2003). Please remove birds species such as Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* (less than 50 males displaying) and Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (only estimate 10 pairs) from the list of species open for hunting.

Please stop the hunting of all species of waders (Charadriiformes) immediately. Not only the fate of the Slender-billed Curlew depends on Croatia's action, but also other waders are decreasing as for example Black-tailed Godwit (*L. limosa*). Also hunting of Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* endangers the Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, for which your country has a global responsibility.

Number of Birds Hunted

There are no figures on how many birds are hunted each year in Croatia.

An annual report will help to prove that hunting in your country does not endanger any bird species in their survival. Therefore, please publish the data and improve the monitoring of bird hunting.



Hunting Ban Areas

The number of secure stop over sites and resting sites is insufficient in Croatia. There are only very few good examples such as Vransko Jezero, partly Kopacki Rit, partly Lonjsko Polje and Crna Mlaka.

Please also note that according to the new Hunting Law of Montenegro, the whole coastal estate (morskodobro) is claimed a hunting ban area. Please follow this positive example and stop hunting in all important bird areas of national and international importance.

Illegal Hunting

Illegal bird hunting is a huge problem in your country! The implementation of the existing hunting law is poor as there are hardly any inspections whether the law is actually being followed. Many hunters ignore any regulations related to bird hunting and even inside natural reserves and strict protected core areas, hunters are shooting regularly.

The situation needs urgent improvement! Therefore, please initiate a broad campaign in your country addressing hunters, police, all kinds of inspection agencies and NGOs to inform them about the high conservation status of many bird species.

Croatia is an important country to hold the worldwide loss of biodiversity. We therefore urgently ask you to base your decisions concerning laws and regulations for hunting and protection of birds on the European environmental policy and the agreed standards of bird conservation in Europe to help to preserve the biodiversity in your country and in Europe.

EuroNatur is monitoring the improvements of bird hunting in different countries along the Adriatic Flyway including Croatia. We would be pleased to support you in the improvement of the current situation and in the implementation of all measures necessary for the improvement bird hunting.

Yours sincerely,

