The LIFE SWiPE project has produced the most comprehensive picture to date about wildlife crimes in Europe, with national reports for 11 European countries.

87 different regional and national institutions were contacted, showing the lack of a centralised database on wildlife crimes across Europe.

**THE CRIMES**

LIFE SWiPE considers as wildlife crimes the following actions:

- Illegal wildlife trade
- Trapping, harming
- Illegal catching/capturing
- Illegal collection of eggs
- Non-selective catching and killing
- Poaching and illegal killing for sport, predators or pest control and retaliation
- Possession, supply and sale, export/import, illegal fishing

But there is no official definition of wildlife crime applied by institutions at a national or European level. That prevents organizations and researchers from exploring the phenomenon and assessing its actual scope.

The most common wildlife crimes in the LIFE SWiPE countries, for the time period 2016-2020:

- Illegal killing/hunting: 27%
- Poisoning: 16%
- Use of prohibited hunting methods or equipment: 14%
- Illegal wildlife trade/smuggling/CITES violation: 13%

*Wildlife crime is not a petty crime. It is devastating for biodiversity in Europe and beyond. We have lost 69% of the populations of vertebrate wild animals since 1970. It poses a growing risk to the economic development and security of our societies.*
Europe is a key crossroads for the trafficking of protected species. But wildlife crimes also happen within the EU borders and threaten European species.

- **Poland**: Between 2016 and 2020 alone, Polish customs officers seized more than 420,000 specimens of protected plant and animal species.

- **Slovakia**: The State claimed no damage in civil proceedings in any of the recorded wildlife crime cases, losing hundreds of thousands of euros.

- **Hungary**: Based on the data available for this research, 84% of detected wildlife crime cases did not get prosecuted in 2016–2020.

- **Serbia**: The average fine for administrative offences was 385 € (45,000 dinars).

- **Ukraine**: Most wildlife offences were qualified as administrative cases. From the total number of reported criminal offences for 2016–2020, the share of criminal environmental offences was less than 1% (on average only 0.72% per year).

- **Romania**: 1281 specimens were involved in criminal activity in 2016–2020, the most affected being: brown bear, weatherfish, sea fox, sterlet, dolphins and the picked dogfish.

- **Croatia**: Songbirds are the most affected species by wildlife crime in Croatia, in particular goldfinch, being subject to hunting tourism, sport and recreation hunting, trophy hunting and sold killed and alive to be held in captivity.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**: Environmental crimes were the third most frequently reported criminal offence during the period of 2011–2017.

- **Italy**: Annual sanctions for illegal fishing ranged from 7 to over 12 million €.

- **Spain**: 5 regions of Spain (out of 17) have canine units specialised in poison detection.

Wildlife crimes in Europe - national facts
The most targeted species in wildlife crimes for the period 2016-2020 were birds. Finches were mentioned as one of the most targeted animals in 7 out of the 11 project countries.

- **Ukraine:** Illegal wildlife trade towards Middle East
- **Italy:** Illegal Killing
- **Serbia:** Poaching tourism by foreigners / Illegal Killing
- **Spain:** Illegal capture as pets / Use of illegal hunting equipment
- **Croatia:** Illegal capture as pets
- **Slovakia:** Illegal capture as pets

**WILDLIFE CRIMES ARE INVISIBLE CRIMES**

**ITALY**

410

Poaching cases of passerines recorded in the whole country (2016-2020)

**BULGARIA**

8

Known cases of dead bears.

80

Bear population decline over the same period (from 411 to 329)

**MOST WILDLIFE CRIMES GO UNREPORTED OR UNDETECTED.**
MOST WILDLIFE CRIMES GO UNPUNISHED

The revision of the EU Environmental Crime Directive and more collaborative bilateral and multilateral meetings between representatives of national and international law enforcement, prosecution, and investigation units can change this deeply established practice in Europe.

A CRUCIAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY:
The revision of the EU Environmental Crime Directive

This legislation, currently under negotiations, may address important legal issues identified by the SWiPE project, such as inadequate sanctioning or the unclear differentiation between administrative and criminal wildlife cases.

KEY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE SWiPE SUMMARY REPORT:

1. Close legal loopholes at the national level that allow the purchase of illegal hunting gear.
2. National institutions could form wildlife crime hubs, create specialised units, and take responsibility for the implementation of protocols for joint work on wildlife crime cases.
3. Create a centralised, uniform and structured database on crimes against nature across Europe.
4. Invest more resources into better cooperation to increase detection, reporting and investigation, taking external experts into account.
5. Need for specialisation in the enforcement and judicial sector.
6. The use of Non-governmental organisations as experts in court proceedings and to allow the participation of the public concerned.
7. The punishments must fit the proportionate and dissuasive actions are needed to reduce the number of wildlife crimes in Europe.
8. Improve the limited financial resources available to fight wildlife crimes, particularly concerning staff, equipment and facilities, and prioritize their enforcement and prosecution.

On average, 60% of wildlife crime complaints received by the prosecution did not result in indictments that led to court proceedings.

SWiPE
Successful Wildlife Crime Prosecution in Europe.