

The war against wildlife comes to an end in Southern Europe

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This is an electrocuted bird. Credit: Photo: Juan Antonio Gómez/ Center of Recovery of Wild Fauna ' La Granja of El Saler ' / SINC

This is the conclusion of a study which has analyzed the persecution of birds as a result of hunting in Spain over 14 years. The decrease in this activity and the fall in the number of animals admitted to recovery centres (by a yearly 10%) are the reasons why the "war", in the sense of direct persecution, is drawing to a close in southern Europe.

Researchers from the Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies (IMEDEA-CSIC) focussed on the period from 1994 to 2007 to study the persecution of the ten species of [birds](#) most often admitted to the recovery centres. The abandonment of rural life and the decrease in hunting are the reasons for the end to the war against wildlife.

Alejandro Martínez-Abraín is the main author and a researcher at the IMEDEA. "The concentration of the human population in large cities means that we no longer perceive countryside animals as enemies; the hunting of birds has also fallen as a result of the increase in awareness of the urban population through the media", he indicated to SINC.

In the study, recently published in the Zoological Society of London's [Animal Conservation](#), 1,050 birds admitted to the La Granja de El Saler rehabilitation centre in Valencia were analyzed (55% diurnal birds of prey, 25% nocturnal birds of prey and 20% aquatic birds) in order to verify whether there has been a fall in the number of animals admitted as a result of direct persecution. The centre is dependent on the Regional Government of Valencia and is one of the largest in Spain.

This phenomenon is directly connected to the decrease in [hunting](#). "The number of licences has fallen by 33% between 1991 and 2000 in the Autonomous Community of Valencia and the markedly downward trend is continuing", indicated Daniel Gold, who has also participated in the study.

According to Martínez-Abraín, "this is a historic moment, as the whole history of humanity has been a history of a fight against nature to survive". The separation between industrialized human beings and nature, due to urban development, means that we no longer perceive wildlife as a problem.

New threats appear

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the fight against animals is reaching its end in southern Europe, "we still affect wildlife in a significant manner. The fauna continues to suffer, in equal or greater measure, the indirect consequences of economic development. The collateral damage now causes more harm than the objectives of war

themselves, as the metaphor goes", declared the researcher.

As for direct persecution, the illegal use of poison has increased in recent years in some autonomous communities. "But economic development is the latest and main threat to animals", declared Martínez-Abraín. Collisions and electrocutions on electricity cables, animals getting killed in wind turbines and run over on roads and the tremendous development of infrastructures fragment the territory, with serious demographic consequences in the mid and long terms.

According to Martínez-Abraín, in order to reduce the negative impact on wild [animals](#), it is necessary "to continue increasing our ethical valuation of the conservation of biodiversity. There still remains a lot to do, and it must be done soon because we are losing our genetic heritage (the result of millions of years of evolution along an unrepeatable course) at breakneck speed", concluded the scientist.

More information: Martínez-Abraín, A.; Crespo, J.; Jiménez, J.; Gómez, J.A.; Oro, D. "Is the historical war against wildlife over in southern [Europe](#)?" *Animal Conservation* 12(3): 204-208 junio de 2009.

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