

WHICH GAME BIRDS FROM ROMANIA ARE PREFERRED BY THE FOREIGN HUNTERS?

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Abstract: *In Romania, hunting is regulated by Law no 407/2006 on hunting and the protection of hunting fund, with subsequent modifications. Specific information regarding the hunting season and hunting quota for the species of interest is provided every year by the ministry responsible with the management of the wildlife species. According to the latest statistics, the area of the national hunting fund is 21.9 million hectares, being managed by 592 hunting associations, branches of National Forest Administration ROMSILVA and forestry research and educational universities. The purpose of the study was to analyze the statistics provided by the central public authority responsible for hunting activity for the timeframe 2015-2017 as concerns the approved annual quotas for game birds. Special attention was given to the preferences of the foreign hunters. Out of the total number of birds for which the hunting is permitted, the foreigners preferred to hunt twelve species. These include the Eurasian skylark, common quail and fieldfare. The approved quotas for the hunting season 2016/2017 for the Eurasian skylark and common quail were achieved in the proportion of 56.4% and 59.0%, respectively, out of which 59.5% in the case of Eurasian skylark and 31.5% for common quail were bagged by foreigner hunters.*

Keywords: *common quail, Eurasian skylark, game birds, hunting, quota*

INTRODUCTION

Across European countries it was recently reported that the populations of wild birds (both rare species and common and widespread species) are in decline (GROSS, 2015). Nowadays, it seems that the hunting gains more and more attention and year by year the number of the hunters is increasing. For example, in total, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia it is estimated that there are more than 200.000 hunters who are shooting every year more than 2 million birds (SCHNEIDER-JACOBY AND SPANGENBERG, 2010). Another example is Andalusia, where approximately one quarter of a million hunting licenses were issued annually in recent years (DELIBES-MATEOS ET AL., 2009). But perhaps that more surprising is the situation from Malta, where according to statistics there are around 13,000 licensed hunters that means 75 hunters per square kilometer of land (FALZON, 2008).

According to some specialists, hunting must constitute the main way of ensuring the ecological equilibrium and an important component of an integrated management of wild fauna (MICU, 2003), but, unfortunately, it is regarded as one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss (ARIZAGA AND LASO, 2015; BENÍTEZ-LÓPEZ ET AL., 2017), especially the illegal one which became an international issue since the 19th century (RAINE ET AL., 2015; BROCHET ET AL., 2017). One decade ago, it was estimated that the trade of the illegally hunted birds accounted for 2-3 million EURO per year (PAPP, 2008). Across Europe, a significant driver of decreasing

the waterbird species population is represented by the lead poisoning induced by ingestion of spent lead gunshot (ANDREOTTI ET AL., 2018).

In Romania, the hunting is regulated by Law no. 407/2006 and specific information and instructions are provided by ministerial orders for the approval of quotas and hunting seasons of the fauna of hunting interest. Across the country there are several regions with a high diversity of bird species, such as the Northern Dobrogea, where more than 300 species of birds were reported (RÉKÁSI AND KISS, 2006). Another hotspot is the Danube Delta, where according to the statistics the effective of bird population decreased from 7 million individuals to less than 1 million in the last decades (NAVODARU ET AL., 2004). The total area of the hunting fund in Romania is 21.9 million hectares, of which 85.9% is managed by various hunting associations, 12.4% by the National Forest Administration - Romsilva and 1.7 % of forestry education and research units. The national hunting fund is divided into 2,151 hunting funds, of which 1,874 are managed by various hunting associations, 254 by Romsilva and 23 by forestry education and research institutions (MAP, 2018).

In total, at national level, there are 592 managers of the hunting funds, 40 of them being the forestry directorates of Romsilva (with the exception of Braşov Forestry Directorate). The most important stakeholder is the General Association of Hunters and Sports Fishermen from Romania (ro. Asociația Generală a Vânătorilor și Pescarilor Sportivi din România) which includes more than 40.000 hunters (AGVPS, 2018).

As regards the distribution of the managers of hunting funds at the county level, the ratio between the county with the highest number of managers (Mureş), except Bucharest, and the county with the lowest number (Galați) is 33: 1.

Most of the hunting funds (41.7%) are located in plain area, 37.4% in the hilly region and only 20.8% in the mountainous areas (MAP, 2018). According to the legislation, in Romania, the hunting is organized in hunting groups and only under the supervision of a hunting ranger (MOMIR ET AL., 2015).

Even if the diversity of the bird species is high and the hunting is permitted to more than thirty bird species, from the perspective of the yearly contribution of the game meat (mammals and birds) to the turnover of the forestry districts across Romania, the values are very low, usually less than 1% (ENESCU AND HĂLĂLIŞAN, 2017).

The aim of this study was to highlight the most preferred bird species of hunting interests by the foreign hunters.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Data available on the websites of the Ministry of Environment (MM, 2016) and the Ministry of Waters and Forests (MAP, 2018) regarding the approved quotas, realized quotas and realized quotas by foreigners for 36 bird species for the hunting sessions 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 (*i.e.* Ministerial Orders no. 359/2014, no. 818/2015 and no. 951/2016 on the approval of harvesting quotas for certain species of hunting interest, for which hunting is permitted) were taken into consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The most preferred game bird species by the foreign hunters were the Eurasian skylark (*Alauda arvensis* L.), more than 200.000 individuals being hunted in 2015 by the foreigners (*i.e.* almost 60% of the approved yearly quota) and the common quail (*Coturnix coturnix* L.), with almost 50.000 individuals being hunted in 2017 (*i.e.* 31% of the yearly approved quota), respectively (Figure 1).

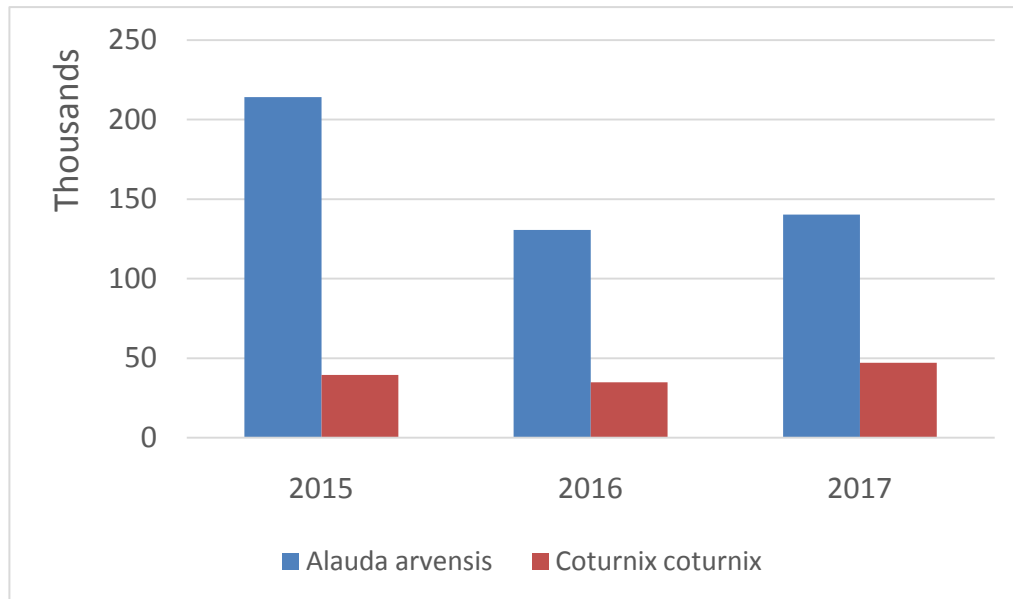


Figure 1. Quotas realized by foreign hunters in the case of Eurasian skylark and common quail

The number of the hunted birds by foreign hunters for the Eurasian skylark decreased in the hunting season 2015/2016, from over 200,000, achieved in the 2014/2015 season to approximately 130,000, with an increase of about 10,000 individuals in the hunting season 2016/2017. Out of the total number of Eurasian skylark individuals hunted by the foreigners in the hunting season 2016/2017, more than 135,000 birds (representing over 96% of the quota made with foreigners) were harvested from hunting funds managed by hunting organizations. From the hunting funds managed by the National Forest Administration - Romsilva, through the forest directorates, around 4,600 individuals were harvested.

In the case of quail, the realized quota decreased in the hunting season 2015/2016, from over 39,300 individuals recorded in the hunting season 2014/2015 by approximately 4,500 birds, while in the hunting season 2016/2017 an increase of about 12,300 of birds was recorded. Out of the total number of birds hunted by foreign hunters, in the case of quails, in the hunting season 2016/2017, more than 44,000 birds (representing over 93% of the quota realized by foreigners) were collected from the hunting funds managed by to hunting organizations. From the hunting funds managed by the National Forest Administration - Romsilva, through the forest directorates, around 3,100 birds were harvested.

Other preferred game bird species by the foreign hunters were the following ones: the common wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus* L.), fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris* L.), redwing (*Turdus iliacus* L.), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos* L.), common teal (*Anas crecca* L.), collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto* L.), common starling (*Sturnus vulgaris* L.), European turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur* L.), mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus* L.) and greater white-front goose (*Anser albifrons* Scopoli), respectively (Figure 2).

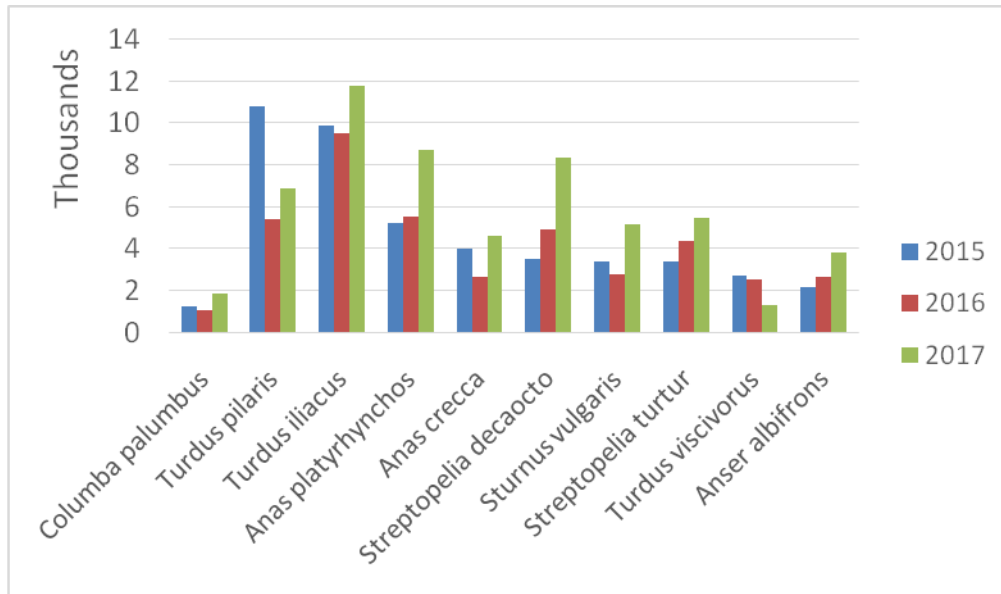


Figure 2. Quotas realized by foreign hunters in the case of ten bird species

The approved quotas for the hunting season 2016/2017 for the Eurasian skylark and common quail were achieved in the proportion of 56.4% and 59.0%, respectively, out of which 59.5% in the case of Eurasian skylark and 31.5% for common quail were bagged by foreigner hunters.

As regards the distribution of the number of birds collected from the hunting funds, the ratio between the county with the highest realized quota (Călărași) and the county with the smallest number (Brăila), in the case of the field whiskers, was 2:1. The same ratio was valid also in the case of the quail, the county with the highest number of hunted individuals being Călărași, while the county with the smallest number, in the preferences of foreigners, was Olt.

CONCLUSIONS

Out of the total of 36 game bird species for which the hunting is permitted in Romania, the foreign hunters prefer to hunt the Eurasian skylark and the common quail.

In most of the cases the foreign hunters prefer the hunting funds from Călărași and Buzău counties in the case of the Eurasian skylark and the ones from Tulcea and Călărași in the case of the common quail, respectively.

In our opinion, these results could be useful for the managers of the hunting funds in order to develop other activities related to the hunting of the most preferred game bird species by the foreign hunters.

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