

# Correspondence

## Stop slaughter of migrating songbirds

A new strategy is needed to stop the illegal trapping and killing of millions of songbirds every year in the Mediterranean region, where gigantic vertical nets intercept major migration flyways (see also *Nature* 529, 452–455; 2016). In the western Mahgreb in North Africa, this carnage is collateral damage to the area's cultural fancy for pet goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*), which dates back to around AD 700 and the Umayyad dynasty.

The goldfinch has only recently been officially protected in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, where populations have been declining rapidly over the past two decades. The price of a single live bird (**pictured**) is now US\$50–500, equivalent to 25–250% of the typical local monthly salary. This has caused trapping and by-catch to escalate. Many of the captured goldfinches perish under poor transport conditions.

I suggest that local people should be taught to divert their admiration for the goldfinch's charms into ensuring its protection. Netting would stop if instead the goldfinch became an emblematic conservation symbol of the region, and a 'safety umbrella' for other migrating Palaearctic songbirds (see J.-M. Roberge and P. Angelstam *Conserv. Biol.* 18, 76–85; 2004).

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Goldfinches for sale in an Algerian market despite being officially protected.