Although the EU has prohibited the capture of wild songbirds, the European goldfinch remains a popular target for finch trappers in Spain.

PHOTO: JUAN JOSE NEGRO

Misusing research to trap songbirds in Spain

The European Union (EU) Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) (*1*) strictly prohibits the capture and keeping of wild songbirds in member states such as Spain, except under narrowly defined scientific circumstances. However, between 2013 and 2018, about 1.7 million finches were trapped (*2*) in Spain using hunting permits issued by regional governments that turned a blind eye to European law. In 2018, after long-standing disputes with hunting associations that defended the practice as an ancestral right (*3*), all regional governments in Spain finally abided by European Union (EU) rules and suspended the trapping of seven finch species, including bullfinches and linnets, whose populations are declining (*4*). Because hunting is no longer a legal option, trapping has reemerged under the guise of scientific research.

Since 2018 and 2024, respectively, the regional governments of Madrid (*5*) and Andalusia (*6*) have authorized scientific banding permits for bird trappers, valid for 1 year and applicable even within protected areas. This strategy mirrors an earlier attempt in Malta (also an EU member state) to invoke scientific research as a legal pretext for recreational trapping, which prompted infringement proceedings by the European Commission (*7*). In Madrid and Andalusia, hundreds of authorized trappers are enrolled as citizen scientists in "scientific projects" (*8*), yet they use live decoys in cages and clap traps, in violation of EU regulations (*1*). The declared goal of these projects (*3*)—to evaluate whether finch populations could sustain future "sustainable" harvesting by the same volunteers—creates an inherent conflict of interest that is incompatible with credible scientific practice and conservation objectives.

Legitimate ornithological research conducted by accredited institutions is subject to strict ethical review, standardized protocols, and oversight by national ringing schemes coordinated across Europe through EURING (*9*). By contrast, both the Andalusian (*5*) and Madrid's governmental initiatives (*6*) authorize the capture of potentially large numbers of birds without meeting essential scientific or ethical standards. These actions lack methodological transparency, independent oversight, and open data reporting, all core requirements for reproducible and trustworthy science.

The appropriation of scientific language to legitimize traditional or recreational trapping, which is the apparent objective of the authorized "scientific projects" (*10*), risks eroding public trust in conservation science and jeopardizes compliance with EU law. Spanish national and regional authorities should ensure that any research involving wildlife capture adheres to transparent, peer-reviewed, and scientifically validated protocols. Permits should be issued exclusively to qualified researchers and licensed banders operating under institutional ethical supervision. Spain should safeguard the integrity of both scientific research and conservation policy.

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Canada's dismantled safeguards threaten salmon

In June 2025, Canada's federal government passed the One Canadian Economy Act (Bill C-5), which enables rapid approval of industrial projects deemed "in the national interest" (*1*).

Meanwhile, the most recent federal budget includes cuts of CA$544 million over 4 years to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the federal agency responsible for safeguarding Canada's waters and conducting environmental monitoring (*2*). Such decisions widen the gap between Canada's pace of development and its capacity to evaluate the consequences on species such as wild Pacific salmon and the communities who depend on them.

The salmon life cycle begins in freshwater. Young salmon then migrate to ocean waters, where they remain for several years before returning to their natal rivers to spawn (*3*). The reliable return of adult salmon to the freshwaters of British Columbia sustains ecosystems, cultures, and economies by transporting marine nutrients into forests and rivers (*4*), by supporting Indigenous cultures and traditional harvests (*5*), and by underpinning fisheries that generate billions of dollars annually (*6*).

Canada's 2005 Wild Salmon Policy promised a "conservation-first" approach grounded in science (*7*), yet salmon monitoring has declined by one-third in the past 20 years (*8*). Lack of sufficient data now impedes the assessment of nearly half of Canada's salmon populations (*8*). Without reliable baseline information, managers cannot detect emerging declines or recognize when populations disappear.

Northwest British Columbia, which is home to some of Canada's most valuable salmon habitat as well as habitat that is growing in value as a result of climate change (*9*), is a focal area for multiple industrial projects that are eligible for fast-tracking under Bill C-5 (*10*). One of those projects, Red Chris Mine, has already caused persistent environmental problems that were enabled by regulatory failures (*11*). Accelerated approvals and reduced monitoring increase the risk of further environmental harm.

On 27 November 2025, Canada's prime minister announced a memorandum of understanding with Alberta to advance a new oil-pipeline corridor across British Columbia and lift an oil-tanker moratorium (*12*). This initiative would fall under the streamlined approval pathways enabled by Bill C-5, increasing the likelihood that such projects could proceed through sensitive salmon habitats with reduced environmental oversight, despite their potential for catastrophic spills.

Proceeding rapidly with industrial projects while reducing oversight heightens the risk of irreversible harm to salmon, ecosystems, and the Indigenous Peoples that rely on them. Establishing limits on cumulative disturbance, strengthening regional planning with Indigenous Nations, and safeguarding core monitoring programs would better align with Canada's "national interest" in long-term ecological and cultural resilience.

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Climate-change extremes threaten Iraq

Iraq is highly affected by climate change and its consequences (*1*), with rising temperatures surpassing the global average (*2*). As a result, the country is facing both droughts and flash floods, a devastating combination that threatens its water, food, and social security. To address the challenges associated with climate extremes, Iraq needs an urgent strategic plan.

Iraq endured a persistent drought from 2020 to 2025, with water stocks falling from more than 18 billion m^3 in 2024 to roughly 10 billion m^3 in 2025 (*3*). Water surface area for the Tigris and Euphrates rivers fell by about 36% between 2014 and 2022 (*4*). The year 2025 was the driest since 1933 (*5*).

Meanwhile, an increase in extreme precipitation frequency has led to catastrophic floods that sweep away dry soil that is unable to absorb water (*6*). In December 2025, two people were killed, five were injured, and numerous vehicles and homes were destroyed when flash floods struck the Sulaymaniyah province (*7*). Damage was particularly severe in the Chamchamal district, which is situated in a low-lying location surrounded by hills and valleys that sped up the accumulation of water (*8*). The damage caused by flash floods in turn leads to heavy losses in agriculture and livestock sectors (*9*). Flooding also puts pressure on Iraq's dilapidated infrastructure of water and electricity networks and exacerbates the health risks associated with water pollution (*10*).

At the local level, Iraq must invest in modernizing irrigation systems and adopting climate-smart farming technologies. Also, the ministry of water resources should establish dams and reservoirs for water harvesting and should initiate an early warning system for floods and droughts (*11*). At the regional level, Iraq should engage in water diplomacy to reach binding and equitable water-sharing agreements with Turkey and Iran (*12*). Taking decisive actions on water and disaster management is essential to securing the future of Iraq's people and environment.

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