



Media *briefing*

PL/hunters' agreement point-by-point analysis

1. "A derogation will be correctly applied for hunters and trappers to be given "the satisfactory solution due to them" according to the directive of the European Court of Justice about quail and turtle dove hunting in spring,..."
 - a. The Birds Directive prohibits spring hunting of birds
 - b. Autumn hunting is already a satisfactory solution to spring hunting, but the European Court of Justice based its decision on the inaccurate Carnet De Chasse data declared by hunters and misrepresented as being reliable by the Maltese government.
 - c. The EU guidance document on sustainable hunting under the Birds Directives states that no derogation can be applied to allow hunting of species of unfavourable conservation status
 - d. The most recent EU management plans for turtle dove and quail identify these species as having unfavourable conservation status in Europe
 - e. The continued hunting of turtle dove and quail; two birds of conservation concern, which are also hunted in the autumn, would result in a continued and unacceptable impact on their numbers and further damage to their conservation status
 - f. Without a wildlife crime unit it would also facilitate the illegal hunting of other bird species including protected species
 - g. Spring hunting on public land will limit public access and safe enjoyment of the countryside at this time of year
 - h. There is no system for verifying hunters' self-declared bag counts and past seasons have shown that mis (under)-reporting of 'catches' has been common
2. "...and about the capture of the two species in the open season"
 - a. Trapping of turtle doves and quail in spring has not been allowed since 2003 - this would be a backward step.
 - b. Turtle doves are a bird of conservation concern and are already under threat from spring and autumn hunting - trapping is simply going to put further pressure on this already threatened species
 - c. Trapping of these birds in spring, even more so than shooting, would have a huge impact on the wild populations, due to the efficiency of this method of removing birds from the wild.
 - d. The lack of a wildlife crime unit means that any resumption of trapping would be unenforceable and it would be impossible to control numbers and species taken
 - e. The EU have already issued warnings to Malta about trapping of other bird species such as song thrush and golden plover, because of the abuse of the system by trappers and the widespread trapping of finches

- f. The 'Letter of Formal Notice' (first warning in EC infringement procedures) Malta received in July 2011 for trapping, acknowledged the poor conservation status of Turtle Dove and Quail. This is why subsequent trapping seasons have not included these species.
- g. Also since both 'trapping' and 'hunting birds' in spring are practices both banned by the Birds Directive – PL seems to be here seeking a double derogation?!

3. "Ornis committee given its due importance in decision-making."

We would happily agree to this as long as the Ornis Committee does not continue to be a proxy for government/hunting lobbying collaboration to create legislation and regulations in favour of hunters' demands without consideration for wildlife and habitat conservation and fair use of the countryside by all.

The Ornis Committee should not exist solely to discuss ways and means of derogating EU wildlife protection regulations in order to facilitate the recreational shooting and trapping of wild birds, but should be a forum for working towards improving legislation and bird conservation measures with the aim of making hunting in Malta genuinely sustainable at the local, as well as the European level.

4. "There would also be no additional payment for special hunting licenses."

- a. This would encourage more people to get involved in hunting and result in a greater impact on the numbers of birds and hunted
- b. A 'free-for-all' spring hunting season defies one of the conditions of a derogation of the Birds Directive: 'strict control'.
- c. It would also remove a source of revenue which should be put towards enforcing wildlife protection laws during the open season: paying for extra police, trainging, equipment and so on (it has been conclusively demonstrated that the opening of a legal hunting season results in increased levels of illegal killing of protected species and that hunters' reported bag counts are unreliable and therefore need to be checked by enforcement officers)

5. "A derogation would also be properly applied with regard to the trapping of song birds (including finches) and other birds as specified by regulations."

It is largely due to the impact of songbird (finch) trapping on wild bird populations that to date, Malta still lacks established breeding populations of these birds, which are present on other nearby islands with similar local situations to Malta, bar the absence of hunting and trapping. Every year a small number of finches attempt to breed in the Maltese Islands, but as long as illegal finch trapping continues at its current level it will be impossible for these birds to enrich Malta's breeding avifauna.

Finch trapping was phased out over a five-year period for Malta's accession to the EU. In one breath PL say they will not re-open anything that was agreed upon Malta's accession to the EU, then in the next it says completely the opposite!

If a PL government derogates from the Birds Directive to open a finch-trapping season it will be nigh impossible to control the numbers and species taken. This reckless move should be of grave concern, as it will inevitably land Malta right back in the European Courts.

Other species the FKNK have asked to be allowed to trap in autumn/winter include: Golden Plover, Quail, all species of huntable thrushes, Starling, Sky Larks and Northern Lapwing.

- a. Trapping is not a required alternative for those species which may already be hunted (shot) and so cannot be justified under the Birds Directive.
- b. Larks have not been trapped in Malta since 1936, when the Short-toed Lark was added to the list of protected birds (Skylarks were never traditionally trapped); Lapwings have never traditionally been trapped and of thrushes only the Songthrush was ever traditionally trapped in Malta, and then in very small numbers.
- c. The Northern Lapwing is listed as 'vulnerable' at the EU level and the global population is concentrated in Europe. Allowing trapping of this species goes completely against conservation of wild birds and EU Birds Directive and would certainly result in EC action against Malta.
- d. The Skylark has an 'unfavourable conservation status in Europe, and trapping would further threaten this status by contributing to continued decline in the wild population.
- e. Trappers are already allowed to trap song thrush and golden plover so this would significantly increase the number of wild bird species that can be trapped
- f. The lack of a wildlife crime unit means that any resumption of trapping would be unenforceable and it would be impossible to control numbers and species taken
- g. The EU have already issued warnings to Malta about trapping of bird species such as song thrush and golden plover, because of the abuse of the system by trappers and the widespread trapping of finches

6. "A plan would be drawn up for the hunters and trappers to assist in strengthening biodiversity."

Given the preceding

By far the best thing the hunters and trappers could do to 'assist in strengthening biodiversity' would be to cease hunting species of conservation concern in spring and to stop trapping altogether. The negative impacts of these activities on Malta's biodiversity far outweigh the 'benefits' of planting a few non-native, invasive Acacia and Eucalyptus trees (which species cause serious harm to natural habitats and native plant species) in Mizieb and calling it 'habitat management'.

Why haven't PL been in discussion with environmental NGOs who have the necessary expertise and experience to properly undertake projects to increase Malta's biodiversity and reached agreements with them in order to truly safeguard Malta's unique biodiversity and natural heritage?

7. "More serious action would be taken on law enforcement and illegalities would not be tolerated. The FKNK was committing itself to help in this

process."

What action?

Will PL create an adequately resourced, trained and staffed wildlife crime unit to enforce wildlife protection law, especially in order to tackle illegal killing and trapping of protected species?

How would the cost of such a unit be met if PL propose to remove fee for special spring hunting license? **Consider that:** there is a demonstrable correlation between the opening of legal hunting seasons and increased illegal shooting and trapping of protected species.

By making non-hunting tax-payers cover the cost of sufficient enforcement to stop illegal hunting and trapping?

Is there even a glimmer of hope for Malta's wild birds and habitats?

At no point in the past two years, during which the Labour Party have been holding 'technical meetings' with representatives of the hunting lobby, has any PL official sought to meet and consult with BirdLife about wildlife conservation issues.

The implementation of the above proposals would be a disaster for Malta's wild birds and their habitats, as well as jeopardizing Malta's position with regards to its commitments to protect wild birds under EU legislation and the Bern Convention.

While the agreement does not explicitly mention the removal of the ban on hunting after 3pm between 15th and 30th September- an essential measure for protecting birds of prey during the peak migration period- it does state that 'the laws, legal notices and relevant policies are revised, so that uncertainties and ambiguities in local regulations are removed', which could be taken to allude to just such regulations.

The removal of the 3pm hunting ban, taken together with the implementation of the above proposals, would be an unmitigated disaster for the conservation of wild birds in Malta.

Ends