

Joint BirdLife & CABS Press Release

Open spring season means more protected birds shot



6th May 2011, Malta - BirdLife Malta and CABS today released initial results from their respective conservation camps that covered this year's spring hunting period. The results confirm that this year's open hunting season resulted in a dramatic increase in the illegal shooting of protected birds.

Through the camps BirdLife Malta and CABS recorded nearly 950 shots outside hunting hours, 61 protected birds being shot at, and 52 protected birds with gunshot injuries in flight.

During the hunting season alone BirdLife Malta received 22 shot protected birds.

More protected birds were seen shot at, and more shot protected birds were received by BirdLife Malta alone, than during the same periods of the past three years combined, when the hunting season was either closed or boycotted.

The organisations also recorded other illegalities such as the use of cage traps, shotguns capable of firing more than three rounds, and hunters not wearing the obligatory armband. BirdLife Malta recorded illegalities in 89% of locations visited.

This data is gathered solely by the camp participants – reports by local members and members of the public will be analysed at a latter stage.

MEPA recently announced only 1,842 Turtle Dove and 366 Quail were reported killed by around 5,600 hunters during this spring's 15 day season. Amid accusations that this declared catch is very low, the hunting lobby has blamed this low catch on a poor migration. BirdLife Malta and CABS however recorded a good migration in general.

Referring to both these statements, BirdLife Malta Executive Director Paul Debono said “The SMS system has been widely criticised – even by the hunters themselves. It is clear to us that once again self regulation by hunters has failed as shown by the low figures recorded by MEPA. How is the Commission to take these figures seriously?”

BirdLife Malta and CABS also highlight the apprehension of two hunters with more shot Quail than legally permissible following BirdLife Malta reports and the recording of 37 illegal electronic tape lures in the countryside.

CABS President Heinz Schwarze said “These devices are used for large scale hunting and they are therefore banned by the European Commission. Their widespread use in the Maltese countryside this spring clearly shows that many hunters were out to hunt more many more birds than the legally permissible 1 bird per day.”

BirdLife Malta’s Spring Watch ran from the 10th to the 24th April while CABS operations ran from 22nd April to 2nd May. BirdLife Malta had a maximum of 6 teams while CABS had a maximum of 4 teams in the field at any time, therefore only a small part of Malta and Gozo were covered.

The two organizations will be presenting the European Commission with a joint report on the illegalities observed during this open hunting season in the coming weeks.