Title

Following electoral pledges designed to woo hunters' votes the new Maltese government has further relaxed the hunting legislation in a country sadly famed for its rampant illegal killing of birds.

As a result, hunters will not have to pay a special fee for a spring hunting licence and they will not have to wear armbands to identify themselves in the countryside. This worsens the situation created by the issuing of yet another derogation that allows a spring hunting season, even longer this year, in violation with the EU Birds Directive.

BirdLife Europe believes that the spring shooting of turtle dove and quail is unlawful and in violation of the European Court of Justice's judgement of Malta. However, an even bigger problem is that the presence of thousands of hunters at the height of spring migration season will inevitably bring with it a spike in the killing of raptors and other protected species.

This will make BirdLife Malta's international annual events Spring Watch in Spring and Raptor Camps in Autumn even more important in 2013 to increase monitoring efforts in the countryside during the migration, to make sure illegal hunting is both deterred and reported.

The enforcement of the new government's first spring hunting derogation is in disarray and has so many problems that it could become a 'free for all' with little sign of the much touted promise of 'zero-tolerance' of illegal bird hunting. It has emerged that about 9,500 license applications have been received by the authorities following the removal of the special spring hunting registration fee, which had served the purpose of reducing the number of registered hunters in the field. At this point hunters are supposed to be shooting no more than one or two birds each during the whole of the three-week season if they are to stay within the quota declared by the government.

BirdLife Malta is now seeking financial support for its camps and campaigning against illegal hunting. Funding is needed to replace old video cameras, continue to hire police and security officers to ensure the safety of our volunteers and maintain strong communication with law enforcement units so that illegal hunting is dealt with effectively.

Last year, BirdLife Malta raised serious concerns about the number of police officers deployed in the field, after noting that on average only four police cars had been patrolling the 6,110 licensed hunters in spring, despite the law requiring a minimum of 42 officers according to the set ratio.

"With over 3,000 more hunters licensed to hunt this spring compared to last year, and no equivalent plausible commitment to increase effective enforcement, this spring hunting season promises to be the worst since 2007," Steve Micklewright, Executive Director, BirdLife Malta commented, referring to the increase in illegal hunting incidents BirdLife Malta.

BirdLife Malta also seeks to profile illegal hunting in the media and with politicians to continue campaigning to end the spring hunting season on Malta once and for all.

The total budget for the Spring Watch Camp is over Euro 17,000 and BirdLife Malta still needs Euro 7,000.

Help BirdLife Malta at this very difficult time for birds migrating over Malta!

Cheques can be sent to: BirdLife Malta, 57/28 Marina Court, Triq Abate Rigord, Ta' Xbiex XBX 1120, Malta.

For more information please contact Steve Micklewright, Executive Director at BirdLife Malta