# Exemptions to EU law cause wildlife damage in Malta

Title
Despite condemnation from the European Court of Justice and repeated warnings from the European Commission, Malta seems to be determined to continue ignoring EU laws on the regulation of hunting. BirdLife Europe asks the European Commission to finally take decisive action. Malta applies two derogations (exemptions) to EU conservation legislation, allowing Maltese hunters to kill birds during the spring migration (generally forbidden under EU law) and to trap bird species protected under the EU Birds Directive. These derogations, which cost thousands of threatened birds? lives, have been contested by the European Commission in the past. In June 2012 the European Commission pressed Malta to put an end to the derogation that allowed the trapping of the threatened Song Thrush in 2011. However, this autumn, the trapping of the Song Thrush was allowed again and the protected Golden Plover was added to the derogation. The derogations and the hunting practices in general are not effectively supervised.

Consequently, hunters shoot birds without distinguishing between common and protected species. In November ? December in the Maltese island of Gozo, more than 30 cases of illegal trapping of birds were reported, especially targeting protected finches. The shootings took place in protected areas. Hunting is an important tradition in Malta and it looks like politicians and authorities are scared of effectively regulating it, while the majority of Maltese want an end to illegal killing. The climate of complacency extends to the judicial system. For example, in a recent incident a Maltese hunter was taken in flagrante delicto ? in blazing offense - of shooting and killing a protected bird. BirdLife Malta, that reported the incident, presented a video of the man handling the bird.

Despite the hunter?s confession and other evidence, the Maltese Magistrates Court concluded it was not sufficient for conviction. The Maltese government does not seem to be ready to conform to EU law and have it strictly enforced. BirdLife Europe expects the European Commission to take the necessary decisions and give credibility to its recently launched 7th Action Plan, of whose central aims is making the Members Sates effectively implement EU directives. You can support BirdLife Malta?s fight against illegal killing by participating to the annual bird conservation camps (Raptor Camp in autumn and Spring Watch). For more information, please contact Rupert Masefield, EVS Communications Intern at BirdLife Malta.

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