

Malta has been shamed yet again by its illegal bird hunters who have blasted a number of Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* this week which were passing through the islands on migration from Europe to Africa. A flock of 22 Spoonbills - relatives of storks and herons - were observed roosting in the north of Malta, but horrified birdwatchers scanning the flock the following morning observed that three of the birds had blood-soaked feathers on their all-white plumage after being shot by illegal hunters. Of the original 22 birds, only nine have continued their journey to Africa, while five have remained at a nature reserve, including the three injured birds. Two of the injured birds have now been taken into care by the authorities. Grahame Madge from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), who has witnessed the horrors of illegal hunting in Malta, said: "The Spoonbill is a conservation icon across Europe. This year in the UK, the Spoonbill has enjoyed its best year for several centuries with 10 young being reared. However, it appears that Maltese hunters have killed or injured more spoonbills than this in one night's orgy of slaughter." Currently, BirdLife Malta is dealing with a high level of incidents of protected birds of prey being shot and targeted. "The targeting of protected birds during the night invariably takes place every time rare species roost in the islands," said Dr Andre Raine, BirdLife Malta Conservation Manager. "This is clear indication of just how ridiculous the illegal hunting situation in Malta is, and it is about time that the government accepts the situation for what it is - a serious international conservation problem."