Record number of Spoonbills seeking shelter from storm greeted with gunfire in Malta

Title Starting last Friday, and continuing into the weekend, illegal hunters have been targeting rare protected Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* as a record three flocks totaling around 70 Spoonbills sought shelter in the southeast of Malta from gale force winds. Many vehicles followed the birds, which are scarce but regular visitors to the islands, along the coast as the flocks dispersed to seek roost sites. The BirdLife Malta (BirdLife Partner) office received several reports of illegal hunting, including a report of 11 spoonbill being killed in Delimara. The reports were forwarded to the Malta police force, who sent patrols to the area. BirdLife Malta fieldworkers sent to the area heard over 25 shots from St Thomas Bay, with several more from Delimara where a team was told the police had confiscated a shotgun. BirdLife Malta received photos of a hunter who fired a total of 6 shots at several spoonbill, within just a few metres of residences in Marsascala. The photos were passed onto the police to help with investigations. On Saturday at least 13 shots were heard from St Thomas Bay area. Only six spoonbill were seen leaving their roosts, one of which had a dangling leg ? an injury consistent with gunshot injuries. ?These so called hunters have shot at protected species during the closed season on their migration to their breeding grounds? said Nicholas Barbara, BirdLife Malta Policy and Conservation officer. ?The Eurasian Spoonbill is listed under Annex I of the Bird Directive and is considered a rare bird in Europe. We hope that the remaining Spoonbills have made it safely off the islands.? concluded Barbara. If you would like to help stop the illegal killing on the Maltese Islands, read more about BirdLife Malta's international Spring Watch conservation camp here.