Title

Although it is still early in the year, in the southern Mediterranean early signs of spring are already popping up. Unfortunately, the joy of spring and the promise of some of the best birdwatching of the year is overshadowed in Malta by the Government's intention to again allow spring hunting season, in violation of EU law. This translates into 10,000 hunters being allowed to legally shoot European Turtle-dove and Common Quail returning to Europe to breed. Experience suggests that too many of them will also be illegally targeting protected species, from songbirds to waders, herons and birds of prey.

BirdLife Malta has been campaigning to stop unsustainable spring hunting of European Turtle-dove and Common Quail and the shooting of protected species for many years, and one of the key activities has been the coordination of a conservation camp, Spring Watch, taking place this year 9 - 30 April. In the camp, participants work to monitor bird migration through Malta and to deter and detect illegal killing by gathering evidence to support police prosecutions of poachers. They also help our lobbying, both nationally and internationally, for improved enforcement and protection of migrating birds, by documenting the actual reality on the ground.

Last year, in the face of steadfast refusal of successive Maltese governments to heed calls from conservationists and the public to stop spring hunting, BirdLife Malta joined 13 other Maltese organisations to form a Coalition for the Abolition of Spring Hunting. In recent months the Coalition has worked to gather more than 40,000 signatures from the Maltese public calling for a national referendum to ban spring hunting.

If successful, it will be the first time that such a referendum has been used in Malta to protect wildlife and it will be a significant step towards Malta shaking off its reputation as one of Europe's black spots for bird conservation.

For more information please contact Spring Watch or visit their website.