

White Storks hunted down

Title

The largest flock of White Storks ever recorded in Malta shot at from several different locations, as the birds sought overnight shelter in Malta. At least six the 200-strong flock of storks were seen to be shot down, while another injured stork was recovered but had to be euthanized by a vet. Another two injured storks were recorded in flight with dangling legs and missing feathers. A shot Glossy Ibis, another rare migratory bird for Malta, was also received by BirdLife from Zabbar.

The flock of 200 White Storks arrived in Malta on 18 May. The BirdLife Malta office immediately informed the police and mobilised its field teams to monitor the birds and ensure their safety. A hunter was reportedly apprehended by the ALE after shooting one of the Storks in Madliena, and another was apprehended by the ALE in Zurrieq with two dead storks.

The flock eventually flew towards the Luqa airport area and two groups roosted at Ta' Kandja and Zurrieq. BirdLife Malta teams, the ALE and two MEPA environment officers watched over the birds until they roosted in the evening. BirdLife Malta, joined by 9 local volunteers, maintained a watch through the night on the two known roost sites at Ta' Kandja and Zurrieq. During the night watch both teams heard distant shots coming from other areas.

A member of the public reported an injured stork in his field in Zurrieq. The protected bird was recovered by BirdLife and taken to an independent vet. However it had to be euthanized due to substantial gunshot injuries, including an open fracture to wing and a fractured leg.

On the 19 May morning, BirdLife volunteers recorded several shots on the birds that left their roosts and at least one other Stork was shot down. The team also filmed another Stork with a dangling leg, consistent with typical gunshot injuries.

“The sighting of White Storks is a reason for joy in many countries around Europe as they are one of the most majestic species that represent the phenomenon of bird migration. Yet, in Malta their appearance causes enforcement officials and bird watchers to rush to their vehicles to protect them from the brutal hunting we witnessed over the last 24 hours.” said Nicholas Barbara, BirdLife Malta conservation and policy officer. “Despite the efforts of our teams, the police, and MEPA’s environment officers at least seven storks were killed. Some of the birds are still flying over Malta and if they do not continue with their journey but decide to spend another night, we fear that more might be slaughtered.” continued Barbara.

BirdLife Malta calls on the Office of the Prime Minister to significantly increase minimum penalties for illegal hunting, and permanently revoke licenses for all serious hunting and trapping contraventions, as this scenario repeats itself in the Maltese islands every single migration season.
