

## **Meeting of the Malta Ornis Committee**

**2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015, Hexagon House, MEPA, 1600 - 1745**

### **Minutes**

#### **Attending members:**

Prof Mark Anthony Falzon – Chairman  
Mr Sergei Golovkin - Secretary  
Mr Nicholas Barbara – Birdlife (Malta)  
Mr Joe Perici Calascione – FKNK  
Mr Mark Gauci – Avifauna Expert  
Mr Marco Falzon – Member nominated by Government  
Mr Frank Vassallo – Hunting and Trapping Expert  
Mr Stephen Saliba – MEPA

**Excused:** Mr Lino Farrugia – FKNK; Mr. Geoffrey Saliba - Birdlife (Malta); Mr Gwido Baldacchino - Member nominated by Government

**Absent:** Ms Emeline Fenech – Member nominated by Government

**Other contributors present:** Inspector Jurgen Vella, ALE

### **1. Adoption of the agenda**

1.1 Agenda was adopted subject to change in the order of the items.

### **2. Approval of the minutes of the meetings held on 04/03 and 10/03**

2.1 Minutes of both meetings were adopted subject to inclusion of the following additional points in the minutes of the meeting held on 10/03:

- Clarifications regarding the reasons for Chairman's and MEPA representative's abstention during the vote on spring hunting derogation;
- Inclusion, after point 1.14, of Nicholas Barbara's emphasis on the importance of the decline in the long term population trend, as opposed to short term increase.

### **3. Study on the illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean**

3.1 Nicholas Barbara explained that Birdlife International, in conjunction with its national and regional partners carried out a study to evaluate the extent of illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean. Birdlife (Malta) was commissioned to undertake the study for Malta. The study followed methodological guidelines provided by Birdlife International and aimed to estimate the number of birds killed illegally per species. Since the subject of the study is, by definition, an illegal activity, precise estimates are not possible. Therefore the findings of the study are presented in the form of a likely range of illegal killing per species, with both the minimum and maximum extent quoted. Since killing of birds in spring, or trapping of birds

with nets is a prohibited activity under EU and international legislation, the number of birds so hunted and trapped were also included in the estimates for Malta.

3.2 Chairman asked why Birdlife (Malta) feels that this study should be presented to Ornis Committee, and what is the expected outcome of this presentation. He said that any estimated figures are likely to generate controversy, and it is highly unlikely that the Committee would be able to form consensus on any estimate provided.

3.3 Nicholas Barbara clarified that the Ornis Committee was identified as one of the main stakeholders and thus discussion within the Committee should take place prior to finalisation of the study's results. He also said that the WBRU were approached to discuss the study's findings, and the Unit submitted its written comments that are being taken into account. He also mentioned that a meeting with the WBRU on this item did not take place.

3.4 Sergei Golovkin said that the WBRU received a copy of the study's findings through the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, which circulated the draft to the relevant Contracting Parties for their feedback. WBRU provided detailed comments concerning the study for Malta. In its comments, the WBRU emphasized that it welcomes the effort to estimate the extent of illegal killing across the Mediterranean, however it also noted that in Malta's case the approach followed by Birdlife (Malta) appears to have not followed the guidelines established by Birdlife International. In particular, it was important to ensure that key stakeholders such as the authorities responsible for enforcement would have been consulted on the methodology of the study from the start, and this was not done in Malta's case. As a result, the methodologies deployed in evaluating the situation for Malta suffered from lack of objectivity. He mentioned by way of an example that the study included estimates for birds that could be legally hunted or captured through derogations, which goes contrary to Birdlife International's guidelines that emphasize a clear distinction between legal and illegal activities. He said he personally clarified and confirmed this point with Mr Willem Vandenbossche who coordinated this exercise on behalf of Birdlife International. Moreover, in the case of some huntable species such as Turtle Dove and Quail, an assumption was made to the effect that every specimen estimated to migrate over Malta in spring (estimates were based on Ecoserv's extrapolations) is illegally killed. Similar assumptions seemed to have been made in the case of Golden Plover, Song Thrush and seven species of finches, which resulted in an overall gross over-estimation of the extent of illegal targeting of these species. Further comments made by the WBRU pertained to other methodologies deployed, such as for instance when estimates pertaining to confiscation of illegally imported live or dead birds were added to annual estimates of illegal killing. The WBRU also questioned draft findings concerning the trends and identification of hotspots.

3.5 Chairman said that in order for the Committee to discuss the study further, the Committee needs more details regarding the actual methodologies deployed and the findings. He asked Nicholas Barbara to present these during the next meeting. Nicholas Barbara agreed.

#### **4. Enforcement during April**

4.1 Chairman invited Inspector Jurgen Vella to present ALE's plans concerning enforcement of the potential spring hunting season.

4.2 Inspector Vella said that in line with the legal requirements, an overall complement of at least 67 officers consisting of core ALE personnel, officers seconded from district police units and other detachments, as well as officers from the AFM, was being assembled. These officers will be deployed in the field as from 2<sup>nd</sup> week of April. If the hunting season opens, this level of deployment will continue to be maintained until the end of the month. Thereafter, staff numbers may be slightly reduced in accordance with legal requirements. If the referendum results in a “No” outcome, and no season is opened, a decision was made that the same complement of officers will still be deployed, at least during the initial two weeks of the season. Thereafter the situation will be evaluated, and deployment may be adjusted accordingly.

4.3 Chairman asked to confirm whether the full complement will be deployed until end of April or if it will definitely be reduced if the hunting season does not open. Inspector Vella confirmed that the full Police complement will continue to be deployed until the end of April, however he is not in a position to confirm whether the AFM detachments will also continue their assignment beyond the initial two weeks, if the season does not open.

4.4 Sergei Golovkin added that during the open season, significant proportion of enforcement resources are dedicated towards conducting field inspections, particularly inspections of individual hunters. Therefore if the season does not open, these inspections will no longer be necessary, beyond normal field surveillance, thus freeing up considerable enforcement resources. He also added that as was the case last year, the officers will be receiving specialised training that will be delivered by the WBRU.

4.5 Chairman asked regarding whether there are any specific plans concerning enforcement in Gozo, and whether patrols will be also conducted at sea. He also asked whether the ALE will be deploying drones. Inspector Vella replied that Gozo district police will be supported by additional AFM patrol vehicle and soldiers. The ALE does not plan any deployment to Gozo at this stage. Also at this point there are no plans for regular sea patrols. Drone will be deployed as last year.

4.6 Nicholas Barbara asked if the WBRU can provide the number of special licenses issued for this spring. Sergei Golovkin replied that he does not yet have the final figure since licensing process is still being conducted. However in all around 9,500 licenses are expected to be issued, which is less than last year.

## **5. Any other business**

5.1 Sergei Golovkin said that by the next meeting, WBRU will be in a position to circulate a report on the outcome of Golden Plover and Song Thrush live-capturing derogation. An update on the conservation status assessment shall also be available shortly. He suggested that the potential GP & ST live-capturing derogation should be placed on next meeting’s agenda.

5.2 The next meeting is proposed to be scheduled for 23rd April at 1630 at Hexagon House.

5.3 The meeting was adjourned at 1745 hours.