

## Meeting of the Malta Ornis Committee

Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018, WBRU, MESDC, Sta Venera  
1630 - 1830

### Minutes

#### Participants:

Magistrate (retd.) Dr Dennis Montebello – Chairman  
Mr Sergei Golovkin - Secretary  
Mr Mark Sultana – Birdlife (Malta)  
Mr Nicholas Barbara - Birdlife (Malta)  
Mr Lino Farrugia – FKKNK  
Mr Joe Perici Calascione – FKKNK  
Mr Joseph Tabone - Member nominated by Government  
Mr Marco Falzon – Member nominated by Government  
Mr Horace Micallef - Member nominated by Government  
Mr Mark Gauci – Avifauna Expert  
Ms Maria Attard – Representative of the Environment and Resources Authority

**Other contributors present:** Mr Richard Lia, Senior Manager, Wild Birds Regulation Unit

**Absent:** Mr Frank Vassallo– Hunting and trapping expert

#### (1) Approval of the agenda

1.1 Mark Sultana referred to FKKNK’s proposal for discussion on spring hunting derogation and to Birdlife (Malta)’s request to have all relevant information pertaining to implementation of 2017 live-capturing derogations, particularly on enforcement, to be tabled at Ornis prior to consideration of spring hunting derogation. The Chairman confirmed that Ornis will await official comprehensive report on live-capturing derogations to be tabled by the government prior to consideration of any further live-capturing derogations. However since live-capturing derogations are unrelated to spring hunting, discussion on spring hunting can proceed.

1.2 Agenda was approved

#### (2) Matters arising and matters to report

2.1 Sergei Golovkin informed the Committee that the Minister approved Ornis recommendations of 22/11/2017 concerning research derogation to authorise a study of Blue Rock Thrushes. A corresponding notice in the Government gazette was published on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2018 in accordance with the provisions of regulations 10(6) and 9(1)(e) of SL 549.42. The project proponent was informed accordingly and was requested to review and confirm acceptance of the conditions of the permit. Until the date of the present meeting, the proponent did not respond to this request.

2.2 Sergei Golovkin furthermore informed the Committee that the study on breeding and wintering birds of the Maltese Islands in fulfilment of the requirements of Article 12 of the EU Birds Directive and the updating of the Malta Breeding Bird Atlas (2018) is progressing as initially planned and is currently at the second phase of primary data collection. The current field work for the wintering season is expected to last till mid-February whilst monitoring for the breeding seasons is expected to start from early March till mid June. The study would benefit

from capturing as much as possible local knowledge on breeding and wintering birds and for this reason Committee members who are in a position to extend support and contribute to this study are urged to do so by contacting the project team on email [mtbirdsatlas@gmail.com](mailto:mtbirdsatlas@gmail.com). Of particular relevance would be any publications in scientific journals, or any local studies, and any reports of sightings of wintering or breeding bird species.

### **(3) Approval of the minutes**

3.1 Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

### **(4) Assessment of the conservation status of Turtle Dove and Quail**

4.1 The Chair invited a representative of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit to brief the Committee on this item. The presentation was delivered by Richard Lia, Senior Manager, WBRU.

4.2 Richard Lia explained that this assessment was compiled pursuant to the practice established by the Unit since 2013, wherein every year the population status of species that are subject to hunting or live-capturing derogations is assessed with reference to all latest available scientific evidence. Although no derogation is presently being considered for the Turtle Dove, this year's assessment included this species for the sake of understanding latest trends in the population of this species, since the last such assessment was performed in 2016.

4.3 As regards Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) the breeding population trend at EU level is classified as *Decreasing* in the short-term and *Unknown* in the long-term. The EU population status for Common Quail is *Unknown*, as the data reported were not sufficient to assess the population status of the species. However the Common Quail has an IUCN Least Concern classification at both the EU and European scale. EU population of Common Quail constitutes 41% of the total European population. This species is not included in the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (EBCC, 2017). The assessment carried out as part of the present update has shown that, on the basis of Article 12 reports (EEA, 2014) at EU28 level (EU27 Article 12 reports + Croatian data for 2004), the Common Quail is *Increasing* in the long-term trend (Min. calling males: +23.49%; Max. calling males: +27.40%). However, this percentage increase should be interpreted with caution given that it is based on data pertaining to only 69% of Common Quail population within EU28—the remaining 31% have an *Unknown* long-term trend. In the short-term, the EU28 population of Common Quail has a *Stable* maximum number of calling males (-9.23%) but a *Decreasing* minimum number of calling males (-13.65%). Similarly, the reference population (population that is known to migrate over Malta) of the Common Quail has a short-term trend classification of *Stable* in the maximum number of calling males (+6%) but *Decreasing* in the minimum number of calling males (-11.73%). The long-term trend of the reference population is *Unknown*.

4.4 As regards the European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) it was noted that the population status of the species was assessed as *Near Threatened* at EU level, and *Vulnerable* at global and pan-European levels. This re-classification from *Least Concern* was made in 2015, because the species comes close to meeting the IUCN Red List criteria. This classification remained unchanged since 2015. A ten-year (2018–2028) international action plan for this species was drafted by a working group led by Birdlife international and comprising other stakeholders including FACE. Maltese government provided significant contributions to the draft plan, which aims to restore the European Turtle-dove to a favourable population status. The latest (2017) European Bird Census Council update has shown that at Pan-European level, the Turtle-dove declined by 78% when compared with the 1980 baseline data and by 15% during the 10-year trend (2006–2015). Compared with the previous (2016) EBCC update, the Turtle-dove population marginally increased by 1% in the long-term trend and by 13% in the short-term trend. On the basis of recent geo-tagging data, the Turtle-dove

populations of Slovakia and Romania were added to Malta's reference population. Subsequently, this update re-assessed the corresponding short-term and long-term trend categories of the species. It has been shown that the reference population is *Declining* in the short-term trend (Min. Pairs: -13.02%; Max. Pairs: -10.61%) but appears to have remained *Stable* in the long-term trend (minimum and maximum pairs). However, given that both the short-term and long-term trend categories for the major source population in Italy (half the total reference population) is '*Unknown*', such trend classification should be interpreted with caution, taking into account the overall decline of this species at EU (*Near Threatened*), European (*Vulnerable*) and Global (*Vulnerable*) scales.

4.5 Mark Sultana observed that population estimates depend heavily on study effort which is not uniform across different states. Similarly, estimates of reference populations are dependent on the extent of ringing effort which varies greatly between countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

4.6 Mark Gauci made reference to valuable migration data obtained recently as a result of geo-tagging projects. It was also noted that Turtle Doves migrating over Malta were recently recorded in Romania and Slovakia, thus adding to Malta's reference populations.

4.7 Joe Perici Calascione referred to FKNK's consideration of a potential tagging project for the Turtle Dove and also mentioned that this species appears not to be a priority for ringing in Malta.

4.8 Sergei Golovkin explained that this assessment report should be seen in the context of a legal obligation to ensure the maintenance of the population of the species subject to derogations at satisfactory level. The assessment presented must also be read in conjunction with all other data already made available to Ornis, including report on the outcome of the 2017 spring hunting derogation published in June 2017, report of autumn 2017 migration study for these species, as well as bag statistics for previous autumn presented to Ornis during November 2017 sitting.

## **(5) Spring hunting derogation**

5.1 Lino Farrugia on behalf of FKNK presented a motion concerning application of Regulation 9(1)(c) derogation to permit spring hunting of Quail. He invited the Committee to consider, having been presented all relevant technical information by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit, the application of derogation in principle. He suggested that subsequent Ornis session can discuss further details such as dates of the season, once an in-principle recommendation is adopted. He underlined that Ornis followed the same process over the past years.

5.2 Joe Perici Calascione further explained that whilst acknowledging that the population status of the Turtle Dove has remained unfavourable, and whilst the FKNK is convinced that small scale hunting of this species in Malta would not have any measurable impact on its population status, the FKNK nonetheless refrained from proposing a Turtle Dove derogation for upcoming spring, but is limiting its proposal to Quail, which continues to enjoy a Least Concern status.

5.3 Mark Sultana explained that Birdlife Malta's position on spring hunting derogation has been clear and consistent throughout the years. BLM does not agree with permitting hunting of any species during spring reproductive period. BLM furthermore does not believe that a derogation for Quail is justified, given that migration study data has shown considerable migration of the Quail in the autumn, which in BLM's view is therefore a satisfactory alternative to spring. BLM also has significant reservations regarding capacity to enforce derogation parameters.

5.4 Further to a brief debate, the Chairman subjected the motion proposed by FKNK on whether Ornis shall recommend in principle the application of a hunting derogation for Quail in spring 2018 to a vote. The motion was approved with six votes in favour (The Chairman, FKNK, three government-appointed representatives and ERA representative) and one vote against (Birdlife Malta).

**(6) Any other business**

6.1 The Committee did not discuss any other business.

6.2 The meeting was adjourned at 1830 hrs.