

Report on the Outcome of the 2023 Spring Hunting Season in Malta

June 2023

Wild Birds Regulation Unit

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Enclosures

- Annex 1:** Assessment of the conservation status of Turtle-dove and Common Quail, February 2023
- Annex 2:** Report on a survey of the influx of migratory Common Quail and Turtle-dove over the Maltese Islands in autumn 2022
- Annex 3:** Specimen of the special licence issued for the 2023 Spring Hunting Season
- Annex 4:** Report on a survey of the influx of migratory Common Quail and Turtle-dove over the Maltese Islands in Spring 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 This voluntary report has been prepared in addition to Malta's formal reporting obligation under Article 9 of the Birds Directive. During bilateral discussions with the Commission Services, it was agreed that spring hunting reports are to be submitted within one month from termination of the migration study—a fixed period between 15 March and 15 May—rather than within one month from closure of the spring hunting season. The report provides an overview of the implementation of Malta's spring hunting derogation for European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) and Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in April 2023, including:

- an overview of the decision-making process leading up to the application of the derogation;
- consideration of the relevant legal and policy parameters;
- consideration of the conservation status of the species concerned;
- an assessment of the outcome of the previous autumn hunting season and an independent assessment of the migratory influx of European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) and Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) during autumn 2022;
- the necessary preparatory measures and regulatory controls effected prior to and during the season;
- an assessment of the migratory influx of Turtle-dove and Quail during the 2023 spring season and bag data;
- the enforcement effort in place to ensure the strict supervision of hunting during the 2023 season;
- disclosed offences and corresponding enforcement action taken; and
- the legal and other management aspects of relevance.

2. Legal and policy basis for the application of a derogation permitting spring hunting of Turtle-dove and Common Quail in 2023

2.1 As was also the case in previous years, a derogation permitting spring hunting in 2023 was applied on the basis of Article 9(1) of Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the Conservation of Wild Birds, which states that “*Member States may derogate from the provisions of Articles 5 to 8 [of the same Directive], where there is no other satisfactory solution*” in line with a number of limited reasons, such as that stipulated by Article 9(1)(c): “*to permit, under strictly supervised conditions and on a selective basis, the capture, keeping or other judicious use of certain birds in small numbers*”.

2.2 As regards the “no other satisfactory solution” criterion, the judgment delivered by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in case C-76/08, explicitly noted that “*hunting for Quail and Turtle Doves during the autumn hunting season cannot be regarded as constituting, in Malta, another satisfactory solution, so that the condition that there be no other satisfactory solution, laid down in Article 9(1) of the Directive, should, in principle, be considered met*”.¹

2.3 This judgment therefore recognises the right to apply a derogation for spring hunting in Malta subject to the strict conditions laid down in Directive 2009/147/EC. Malta's biogeographical circumstances that were recognised by the Court in 2009 have remained the same, and therefore the hunting of Turtle-dove and Quail in spring remained the only satisfactory solution within the meaning of Article 9(1)(c).

¹ Case C-76/08 *Commission v Malta*, ECR I-8213, paragraph 63

- 2.4 The [Conservation of Wild Birds \(Framework for Allowing a Derogation Opening a Spring Hunting Season for Turtle-dove and Quail\) Regulations \(Subsidiary Legislation 549.57 of the Laws of Malta\)](#) (Framework Regulations) establish a series of parameters to be considered **prior to** any decision to apply a derogation, particularly the requirement to consider the previous autumn hunting bag data for Turtle-dove and Quail, and to consider the conservation status of the species concerned.
- 2.5 Consideration of the above two parameters is discussed in the following sections of this report.

3. Consideration by the Malta Ornis Committee

- 3.1 The Malta Ornis Committee, established under Regulation 10 of the [Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations \(Subsidiary Legislation 549.42 of the Laws of Malta\)](#) considered a range of aspects prior to providing a recommendation to the Maltese Government.
- 3.2 At its sitting on 29 March 2023, the Committee considered an updated assessment of the conservation status of Common Quail and Turtle-dove (enclosed in Annex 1 to this report).² The findings of this assessment are summarised in section 4 of this report.
- 3.3 The Committee further discussed the potential application of a spring hunting derogation for Quail and Turtle-dove. As a result of its deliberations, the Committee recommended in principle the application of a hunting derogation for Common Quail in spring 2023 with the same parameters as established in 2022. During the same sitting, the Committee voted in favor of opening a spring hunting season for the Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*). A final recommendation to Government on the dates of the season was made, namely to open the season for Quail from 10 April until 30 April and for Turtle-dove from 17 until 30 April.
- 3.4 Following Ornis Committee recommendation the Government opted to open the season for Quail between 10 April and 30 April, inclusive of both dates by virtue of [Legal Notice 78 of 2023](#). The season for Turtle-dove was opened between 18 until 30 April inclusive of both dates by virtue of [Legal Notice 87 of 2023](#), following the Court's final decree on the warrant of prohibitory injunction described in the below section. The national quota was set at 2,400 Quail and 1,500 Turtle-doves.

Warrant of Prohibitory Injunction

- 3.5 On 3 April 2023, BirdLife Malta filed a warrant of prohibitory injunction against the Maltese Government, requesting the Courts to withhold these authorities from opening a spring hunting season for Turtle-dove. In its decree of 3 April 2023, the Court provisionally accepted the request for prohibitory injunction.
- 3.6 On 17 April 2023, the Court revoked the provisional injunction it had issued earlier and delivered the decree from its chambers. The Court noted that the warrant of prohibitory injunction applied for was within the same merit of the warrant of prohibitory injunction decided upon the previous year. In this regard, the Court in its judgment dismissed the request.

² Minutes of the Ornis Committee meetings are available at: <https://ministryforgozo.gov.mt/en/Pages/WBRU/Ornis-Committee.aspx>

4. Consideration of the conservation status of European Turtle-dove and Common Quail

- 4.1 As was also the case in previous years, prior to further consideration by the Malta Ornis Committee on whether or not to recommend to Government the application of a derogation, the Wild Birds Regulation Unit carried out an assessment of all latest available scientific data pertaining to the population status of the Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) and Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*). This assessment was presented to the Malta Ornis Committee on 29 March 2023 and is contained in Annex 1 to this report, which also includes an update on the conservation status of the European Turtle-dove.

Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)

- 4.2 The EU population status for Common Quail is Unknown, as the data reported were not sufficient to assess the population status of the species (EEA, 2020). The Common Quail has an IUCN Least Concern classification at global level but at European Level it was placed in a higher risk Red List category from Least Concern (2015) to **Near Threatened** (2021) (BirdLife International, 2021: 19). At EU level, the breeding population status is **Unknown** (EEA, 2020). This species is not included in the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme.
- 4.3 During the current (2013–2018) Article 12 reporting period, the Italian population (95% of Malta's reference population) registered an increase in the long-term trend from the previous (2008–2012) status of unknown. However, the Hungarian population now stands at 5,000–10,000 *less* calling males than previously reported. **Malta's reference population retained a stable short-term trend status in the maximum number of calling males and improved the short-term trend status in the minimum number of calling males, from declining to stable. The long-term trend of the reference population remains unknown.**

European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)

- 4.4 This species is listed as **Vulnerable** at the European and global levels and **Near Threatened** within the territory of the European Union (BirdLife International, 2015a: 41). A ten-year (2018–2028) international single species action plan is in place *to restore the European Turtle-dove to a favourable population status so that it can be safely removed from the Globally Threatened categories of the IUCN Red List* (Fisher *et al.* 2018).
- 4.5 The Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS) [European Bird Census Council] data (2021 update; 2019 base year) has shown that at Pan-European level, the Turtle-dove **declined by 85%** when compared with the 1980 baseline data and by 17% during the 10-year trend (2012–2021). Compared with the previous EBCC update, the Turtle-dove declined by an additional 3% in the long-term trend [from -82% to -85%] and declined by 5% in the short-term (10-year) trend [from -12% to -17%].
- 4.6 Based on the latest Article 12 reporting cycle (2013–2018), **the Turtle-dove reference population improved its short-term trend status from Decreasing to Stable** (Min. Pairs: -0.27%; Max. Pairs: -0.26%) and remained **Stable in the long-term trend** (Min. Pairs: -0.28%; Max. Pairs: -0.32%). During the previous reporting cycle (2008–2013), the decrease in the short-term trend of Malta's reference population was as follows: Min. Pairs: -13.02%; Max. Pairs: -10.61%. Thus, **in the short-term, the reference population increased by 12.75% (Min. Pairs) and 10.35% (Max. Pairs)**.
- 4.7 In the long-term, the overall trend remained stable at -0.28% in the minimum number of breeding pairs and -0.32% in the maximum number of breeding pairs. When compared with the previous trends (for Article 12 reporting period 2008–2012), this equates to an increase of 11.77% [(-0.28%)

– (-12.05%)] in the minimum number of breeding pairs and an increase of 15.35% [(-0.32%) – (-15.67%)] in the maximum number of breeding pairs.

- 4.8 In the previous (February 2022) update on the conservation status of Turtle-dove, Italy constituted 46.5% of Malta’s EU reference population whereas in the latest (February 2023) update (Annex 1), based on the 2021 and 2022 satellite-tracking data³, **Italy now constitutes 53.1% of Malta’s EU reference population**. The previous Article 12 (2008–2012) data showed that Italy’s population was assessed as unknown in both the short-term and long-term trends. Subsequently, in the latest update for the 2013–2018 Article 12 reporting period, **Italy’s population has been reported as stable in the short-term and increasing in the long-term trend**.
- 4.9 At reference population level, the previous Article 12 (2008–2012) data showed that Malta’s EU reference population was decreasing in the short-term trend and stable in the long-term trend. The latest scientific data (Article 12 reports for period 2013–2018) shows that **Malta’s EU reference population of Turtle-dove is stable in both the short-term and long-term trends** (see Tables 12 and 13 in the February 2022 and February 2023 conservation status reports, the latter included as Annex 1 to this report).
- 4.10 It should be noted that, as stated in the latest report⁴ prepared by IREC⁵ and PECBMS, “March 2023 Technical update: Turtle Dove population data and trends, abundance estimates and management scenarios (central-eastern flyway)”:

PECBMS estimates carry a significant amount of uncertainty when they refer to the three most recent years [2019-2021]. This is due to the fact that only part of the data were available to produce these estimates... [c]onsequently, these results must be taken as provisional and to be confirmed in future iterations of this exercise.

- 4.11 The level of uncertainty in the estimated population trends of the European Turtle-dove for the most recent years (2019–2021) rendered it impossible for the Maltese authorities to compile any additional updates to the February 2023 report (Annex 1). Nonetheless, as evidenced in the annexes to the IREC-PECBMS March 2023 report, the population size of each Member State that constitutes Malta’s reference population was identical to the one reported in the latest Article 12 composite report, on which Malta based its latest update on the conservation status of European Turtle-dove.

5. Consideration of autumn 2022 bag statistics, migration data and enforcement parameters

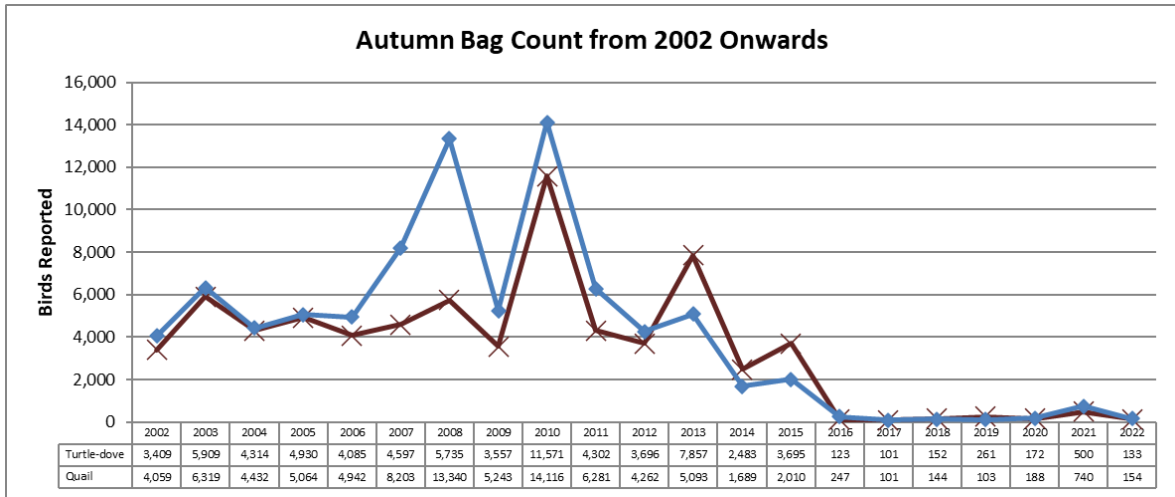
- 5.1 In 2022, there were 9,884 persons licensed to hunt birds on land. During the autumn hunting season, a total of 154 Common Quail (between 1 September 2022 – 31 January 2023) and 133 Turtle-doves (during September 2022) were reported hunted.
- 5.2 The total number of Quail reported hunted during the 2022 autumn season was lower than in 2021 (740). The total number of Turtle-doves reported hunted during the 2022 autumn season was lower than in 2021 (500).

³ In 2021 and 2022 two satellite-tracking projects were conducted in Malta by FKNK and KSU, the latter co-financed by the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund and extended for period 1 April – 31 May 2023 (the 2023 data was not available at the time this report was compiled).

⁴ Document prepared in the frame of the service contract with the European Commission “Supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status” (09.0201/2022/886665/SER/D.3) in preparation for the March 2023 meeting of the Task Force on the Recovery of Birds (21-22/03/2023).

⁵ Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos (IREC, ES)

Figure 1 - Quail and Turtle-dove reported during autumn seasons since 2002.



5.3 Detailed accounts of the reported catches by each month of the season (Figure 2, Table 1) were also considered.

Figure 2 - Reported catches for Quail between September 2022 and January 2023.

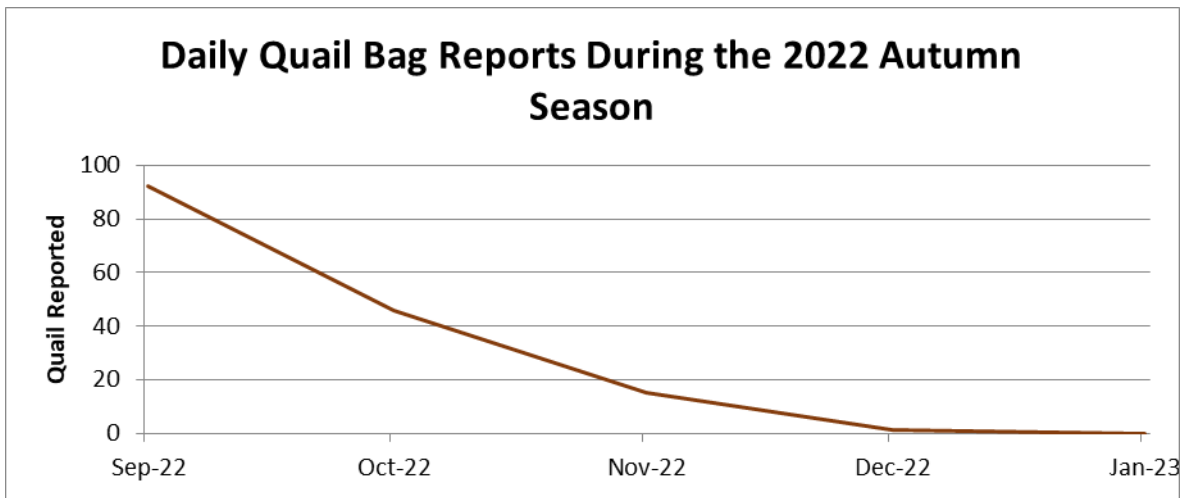


Table 1 - Monthly catches of Common Quail and Turtle-dove in the autumn of 2022 / winter 2023

Month	Quail	Turtle-dove
September '22	92	133
October '22	46	N/A
November '22	15	N/A
December '22	1	N/A
January '23	0	N/A
Total	154	133

5.4 An independent **migration study** to estimate the influx of Turtle-dove and Quail during the peak migration period in the autumn 2022 was conducted. The study aimed at surveying and scientifically monitoring the daily influx of Turtle-dove and Common Quail between 1 September and 31 October 2022 in order to estimate the overall daily presence (influx) of these two species for

the whole study period, subject to scientifically justified assumptions. The full report of the study is enclosed in Annex 2 to this report.

- 5.5 The methodology used by Ecoserv during the autumn 2022 survey was identical to that used in surveys made by the same company from autumn 2015 to autumn 2021 (Ecoserv, 2015–2021) and during the spring migration studies (Ecoserv, 2011–2022).
- 5.6 The survey design was aimed at assessing changes in migratory influx, which entails trend analysis based on data from monitoring carried out regularly over a sufficiently long period comprising subsequent years, and using the same methodology. During the survey, two individuals—a field assistant capable of identifying Turtle-dove and Common Quail and an observer who was responsible for recording of data in the field—were stationed at a total of 21 sites (= count stations) distributed over Malta, Comino and Gozo.
- 5.7 Prior to enrolment for the survey, the field assistants and observers (field personnel) were assessed by Ecoserv’s environmental consultants and ecologists to ensure that they were capable of identifying the two bird species and were also briefed on the contractual procedures required for data collection. Throughout the survey, Ecoserv’s environmental consultants and ecologists ensured close monitoring of the activities of the field personnel to ensure that collection of data proceeded as per designated protocol by carrying out field visits (most of which were surprise / unannounced visits) on a regular basis.

Migration observations of Common Quail

- 5.8 Raw daily counts for Common Quail recorded from any given site (out of the 21 sites) during the present study varied between 0 and a maximum of 6, while the mean daily counts ranged between 0 and 1.67. The recorded counts did not vary appreciably between the different sites: at the higher end, a total of 12 individuals were recorded from grid location 4480 located in northeast Malta; at the lower end, no Quail individuals were recorded throughout the survey period from grid location 5663, 4268, 6067 and 4283 located in different regions around Malta.
- 5.9 Values of mean daily counts and total counts of Common Quail recorded during the period 1 September to 31 October 2022 from the present survey, as well as the respective area surveyed at each site, are given in Table 2. Values of standard deviation associated with the mean daily counts are also provided in Table 2. Standard deviation is a measure of the variability among counts recorded from the different sites, that is, low standard deviation implies that very similar counts were recorded at all six sites surveyed during a particular day, whereas dissimilar values would lead to high standard deviation. Standard deviation is influenced by sample size (i.e. number of study sites); it tends to increase with a decreased sample size. These same values are also shown, along with values of mean counts for the same period in 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2014 till 2021 (Ecoserv, 2014a, 2015a, 2016a, 2017a, 2018a, 2019a, 2020a, 2021a), in Figure 4. The daily mean counts recorded during the period 1 September to 31 October 2022 (present survey) are overall lower than values recorded in 2008 and 2009 (Thomaidis, nd) for the same period, but similar to those recorded in 2014–2021 (Ecoserv, 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a, 2021a)). No migration peaks (with a mean count >3) were recorded during the 2022 survey. The general pattern from all years being compared is a main migratory influx between mid-September and mid-October.
- 5.10 Values of the grand mean for Common Quail counts for autumn 2022 (Ecoserv, 2022), 2021 (Ecoserv, 2021), 2020 (Ecoserv, 2020), autumn 2019 (Ecoserv, 2019), autumn 2018 (Ecoserv, 2018), autumn 2017 (Ecoserv 2017), autumn 2016 (Ecoserv 2016), autumn 2015 (Ecoserv 2015), autumn 2014 (Ecoserv, 2014a), and autumn 2008 and autumn 2009 (Thomaidis, nd) surveys, are shown graphically in Figure 3. The comparison in Figure 3 is based on data collected during the same period (1 September to 31 October) in each of the surveys. The grand mean recorded during

the autumn 2022 survey is lower than that recorded during the 2008 and 2009 (Thomaidis, nd) surveys, but similar to values recorded during the 2014-2021 surveys (Ecoserv, 2014–2021).

Table 2 - Values of mean (\pm SD) daily count and daily total count recorded from the six study sites, together with total influx of migratory Common Quail

Date	Mean Count \pm SD		Total Area Surveyed (km ²)	Total count	Estimated Daily Influx
01-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
02-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
03-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.148	0	0
04-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
05-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
06-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
07-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.148	0	0
08-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
09-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.162	1	1364
10-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
11-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.148	0	0
12-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
13-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
14-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
15-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.148	1	1493
16-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.197	1	1123
17-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
18-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
19-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.148	1	1493
20-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
21-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
22-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
23-Sep-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	0.148	2	2987
24-Sep-22	1.00	\pm 1.67	0.197	6	6737
25-Sep-22	0.33	\pm 0.82	0.162	2	2729
26-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	0.182	3	3651
27-Sep-22	1.00	\pm 1.26	0.148	6	8960
28-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.197	1	1123
29-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
30-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
01-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.55	0.148	3	4480
02-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	0.197	3	3369
03-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
04-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
05-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	0.148	2	2987
06-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.82	0.197	2	2246
07-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	0.162	2	2729
08-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	0.182	2	2434
09-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	0.148	3	4480
10-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.82	0.197	2	2246
11-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	0.162	2	2729
12-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
13-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	0.148	3	4480
14-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.197	1	1123
15-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
16-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0

Date	Mean Count \pm SD		Total Area Surveyed (km ²)	Total count	Estimated Daily Influx
17-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.148	1	1493
18-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
19-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
20-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
21-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	0.148	3	4480
22-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
23-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
24-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.182	1	1217
25-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	0.148	1	1493
26-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
27-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
28-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.182	0	0
29-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.148	0	0
30-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.197	0	0
31-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0.162	0	0
Sum total				60	79731

- 5.11 The highest mean count was recorded from Mistra (Grid 4480) located in northeast Malta, while overall high counts were also recorded from Ta' Ċenċ (Grid 3286) in Gozo, and from Fawwara (Grid 4666) in the west of Malta. The lowest mean counts were recorded from Dingli (Grid 4268), Għar Hasan (Grid 5663), San Tumas (Grid 6067) and L-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa (Grid 4283), located in different areas of the island of Malta. The mean count recorded from the study site on Comino was 0.066, which was similar to the median value for the whole range of recorded mean counts.
- 5.12 As has been done in previous surveys undertaken in autumn (Ecoserv, 2014–2020) and spring (Ecoserv, 2011–2022), the total influx of Common Quail was estimated for the whole area of the Maltese Islands using the recorded area surveyed for Common Quail at each site. However, such an estimate should be considered with great caution because of the assumption that the rate of Common Quail settling at coastal sites (where the survey was carried out) is equal to that at inland locations. While this appears to hold true during spring, observations indicate that Common Quail tend to settle in larger numbers in coastal areas compared to inland ones.
- 5.13 It was furthermore noted that Quail also tends to appear in certain localities before others (Fenech, 2010; Fenech, *in litt.*). On the other hand, coastal areas are more likely to serve as short-term stopover sites immediately following a migratory flight compared to inland locations; thus, including inland locations as study sites in the survey may result in an overestimate of the total influx due to repeat counting of resident Quail.
- 5.14 To ensure that the total area used to estimate the migration count does not include regions within which Quail do not normally settle, even though some birds may fly over urbanized areas, the total area was calculated as the sum of agricultural areas (161.5 km²), forested areas (2.1 km²) and areas of natural vegetation (57.8 km²); this amounts to 221.4 km², representing 72% of the 315 km² total area of the Maltese Islands (land cover data source: MEPA, 2010).
- 5.15 The mean (\pm SD) daily counts and estimated daily influx of birds per day are shown above in Table 2. The estimated daily influx was obtained by extrapolating the mean daily values obtained for the surveyed areas to an area of 221.4 km² obtained as explained above. Values of estimated daily influx were then summed to obtain an estimate of the total influx of migrating Quail for the eight-week study period. Based on these data, extrapolation translates to a total influx of Common Quail

during 1 September – 31 October 2022 of 79,731 individuals, or some 1,307 Quail per day (Table 2).

Figure 3 - Grand mean of Common Quail counts made using data from the period 1 September – 31 October for autumn 2022 (Ecoserv 2022) and autumn 2014-2021 (Ecoserv, 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021) and autumn 2008 - 2009 (Thomaidis, nd)

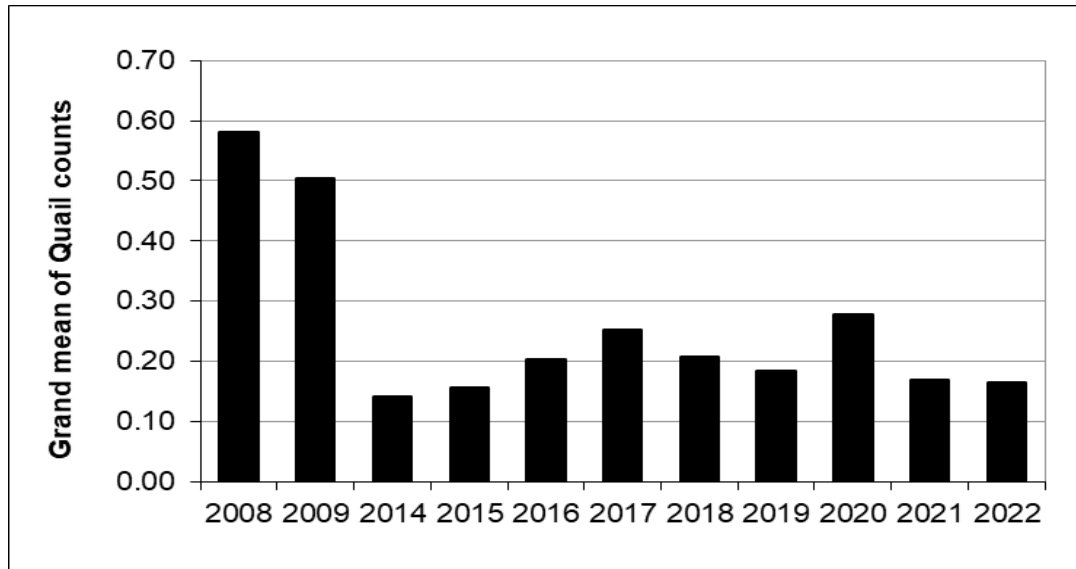
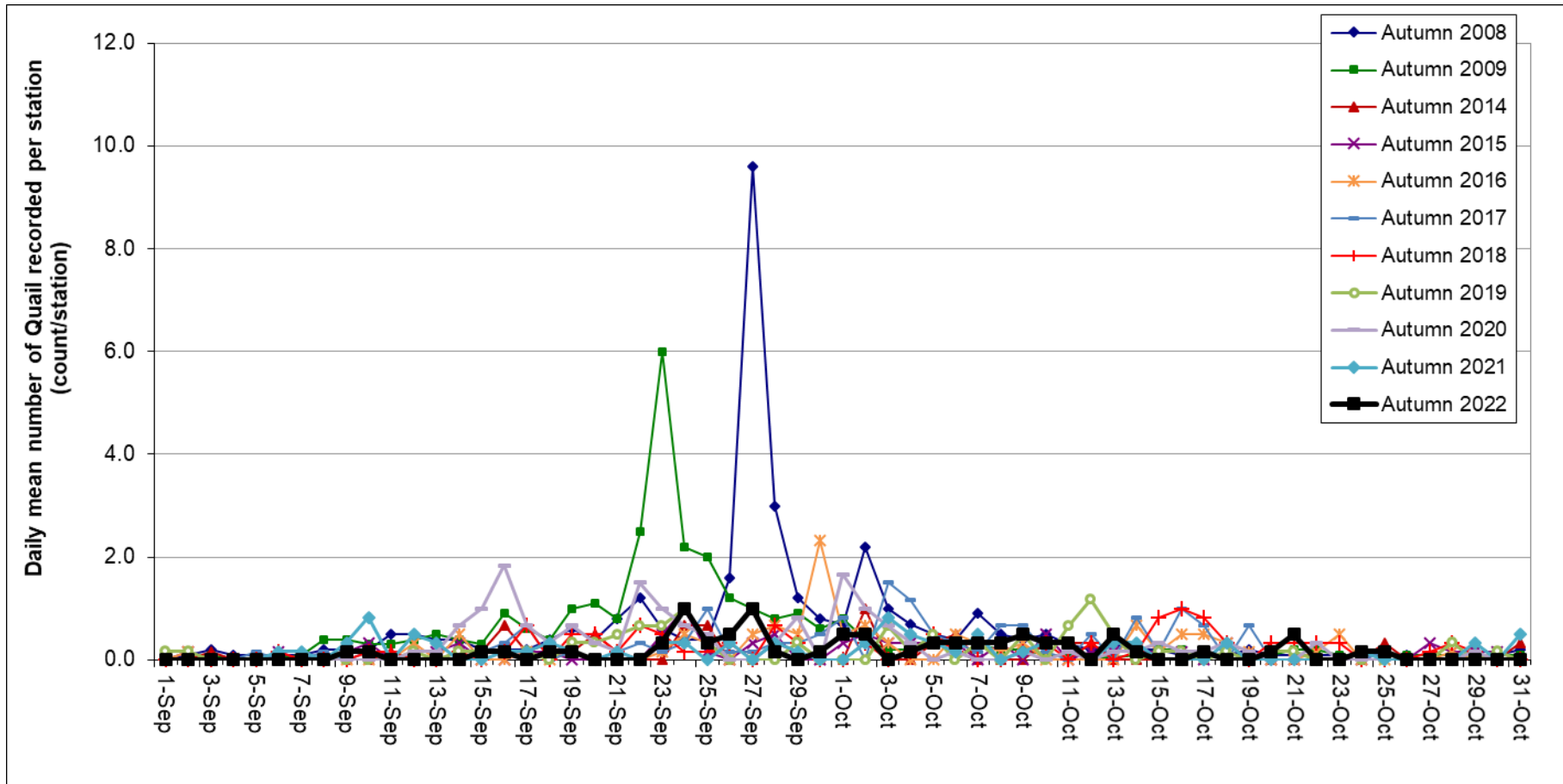


Figure 4 - Daily mean counts of Common Quail per station (= site) recorded during the present survey during the period 1 September to 31 October 2022, together with values of the same statistic for autumn 2008 and 2009 as reported in Thomaidis (nd), for autumn 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 as reported in Ecoserv (2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021).



Migration observations of Turtle-dove

- 5.16 Raw daily counts for Turtle-dove recorded from any given site (out of the 21 sites) during the autumn migration study 2022, varied between 0 and a maximum of 14, while the mean daily counts ranged between 0 and 2.33. No appreciable peaks in migratory counts were recorded throughout the survey period. The recorded counts showed some variation between the different sites over the whole survey period: at the lower end, only one Turtle Dove individual was recorded throughout the survey period from grid location 5064 (southwest Malta), while at the higher end, 27 Turtle Dove individuals were recorded from the site at grid location 4070 (northwest Malta).
- 5.17 Values of mean daily counts and total counts of Turtle-dove recorded during the period 1 September to 31 October 2022 are summarised in Table 3. Values of standard deviation associated with the mean daily counts are also provided in Table 3. As explained above for Common Quail, standard deviation is a measure of variability among counts recorded from the different sites, that is, a low standard deviation implies that very similar counts were recorded at all six sites surveyed during a particular day, whereas dissimilar values would lead to high standard deviation. Standard deviation is influenced by sample size (i.e. number of study sites); it tends to increase with a decreased sample size. These same values are also shown, along with values of mean counts recorded for the same period in 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2014 till 2021 (Ecoserv, 2014 - 2021) in Figure 6. Overall, counts recorded during the present survey show a similar trend to those recorded by Thomaidis (nd) in autumn 2008 and 2009, and by Ecoserv (2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a, 2021a) in autumn 2014–2021; that is, the main migratory influx occurs during September, with occasional migratory peaks recorded in some years.
- 5.18 Values of the grand mean of Turtle-dove counts recorded during the period 1 September to 31 October 2022 from the present survey, together with values of the grand mean for the same period in 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 (Ecoserv, 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a, 2021a) are shown in Figure 5. Overall, the grand mean recorded during the autumn 2022 falls within the range of those recorded during previous surveys held in autumn.

Table 3 - Values of mean (\pm SD) daily count and daily total count recorded from the six study sites, together with total influx of migratory Turtle-dove.

Date	Mean Count \pm SD		Total count	Estimated Daily Influx
01-Sep-22	1.17	\pm 1.60	7	633
02-Sep-22	1.17	\pm 1.47	7	633
03-Sep-22	0.83	\pm 0.98	5	452
04-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	3	271
05-Sep-22	1.83	\pm 2.14	11	994
06-Sep-22	1.33	\pm 1.37	8	723
07-Sep-22	1.17	\pm 2.86	7	633
08-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.55	3	271
09-Sep-22	1.00	\pm 1.10	6	542
10-Sep-22	1.33	\pm 1.21	8	723
11-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.55	3	271
12-Sep-22	1.67	\pm 1.51	10	904
13-Sep-22	1.00	\pm 0.89	6	542
14-Sep-22	0.83	\pm 0.98	5	452
15-Sep-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	2	181
16-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.55	3	271
17-Sep-22	2.33	\pm 3.83	14	1266
18-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.55	3	271

Date	Mean Count \pm SD		Total count	Estimated Daily Influx
19-Sep-22	0.67	\pm 1.21	4	362
20-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 1.22	3	271
21-Sep-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	2	181
22-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
23-Sep-22	2.33	\pm 3.39	14	1266
24-Sep-22	0.67	\pm 0.82	4	362
25-Sep-22	0.67	\pm 0.82	4	362
26-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
27-Sep-22	0.33	\pm 0.52	2	181
28-Sep-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
29-Sep-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
30-Sep-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	3	271
01-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	3	271
02-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
03-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
04-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
05-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
06-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 0.84	3	271
07-Oct-22	0.50	\pm 1.22	3	271
08-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
09-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
10-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
11-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
12-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
13-Oct-22	0.33	\pm 0.82	2	181
14-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
15-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
16-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
17-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
18-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
19-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
20-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
21-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
22-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
23-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
24-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
25-Oct-22	0.17	\pm 0.41	1	90
26-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
27-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
28-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
29-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
30-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
31-Oct-22	0.00	\pm 0.00	0	0
Sum total			166	15003

5.19 The highest mean count was recorded from Mtaħleb (Grid 4070) located in northwest Malta, while overall high counts were recorded from other study sites located along the western parts of Malta and from Ta' Ċenċ (Grid 3286) in Gozo. The lowest mean counts were recorded from Lapsi (Grid 5064) and Żonqor (Grid 6069) in south Malta, and from San Blas (Grid 3690) in north Gozo, while low counts were also recorded from several sites located on the northern and south-eastern sides of the Maltese Islands. The mean count recorded from the study site on Comino was 0.246, which was lower than the median value for the whole range of recorded mean counts.

- 5.20 As has been done in previous surveys undertaken in autumn (Ecoserv, 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a, 2021a) and spring (Ecoserv, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014b; 2015b; 2016b; 2017b; 2018b; 2019b; 2020b; 2021, 2022), an estimate of the total influx of Turtle-dove over the Maltese Islands was made using the daily counts. Extrapolations were then made to obtain the total number of individuals of this species that have migrated over the Maltese Islands on a particular date. However, as emphasised in reports from previous surveys (Ecoserv, 2014a till 2021a), such an estimate must be treated with utmost caution, given that the Turtle-dove migration starts around the third week of August, which period is not covered by the present survey; the relatively small number of sites used; and that the counts were not made daily at each site.
- 5.21 Furthermore, passage of birds at different localities is extremely variable, with potential large differences in number of birds passing at two different localities, even if these are separated only by a very small distance. As already stated, the other limiting factor is that the field survey stops at 14:00 and does not start again before 07:00, hence potentially missing birds that arrive in the afternoon and during the night, which are usually seen at the very first light of day, some of which may have been hunted in the early hours of the morning, and therefore these may have not been recorded by the field observers during the survey. On the other hand, the estimate given in the present report is useful when making comparisons between different years, assuming data from surveys based on a similar design are available to assess whether the trend in influx is increasing or decreasing with time. Since the coastal length surveyed at each site during the present survey is approximately 0.5 km, the mean daily count represents the mean influx of Turtle-dove per 0.5 km coastline.
- 5.22 The estimated daily influx was obtained by extrapolating the recorded mean daily values (per 0.5 km) to the total coastline length for the Maltese Islands, which have a perimeter of 271.22 km (Mallia et al, 2002); that is, the estimated daily influx equals the mean daily count multiplied by an extrapolation factor of $271.22/0.5$. The values of estimated daily influx were then summed to obtain an estimate of the total influx of migrating Turtle-dove for the eight-week study period. Based on the mean daily counts, extrapolation translates to an estimated daily influx ranging between 0 and 1,266 individuals, with a total influx over the survey period (1 September to 31 October; i.e. 61 days) of 15,003 individuals, i.e. some 246 birds per day.

Figure 5 - Grand mean of Turtle-dove counts made using data from the period 1 September to 31 October for autumn 2022, autumn 2014–2021 (Ecoserv, 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a; 2021a) and autumn 2008–2009 (Thomaidis, nd).

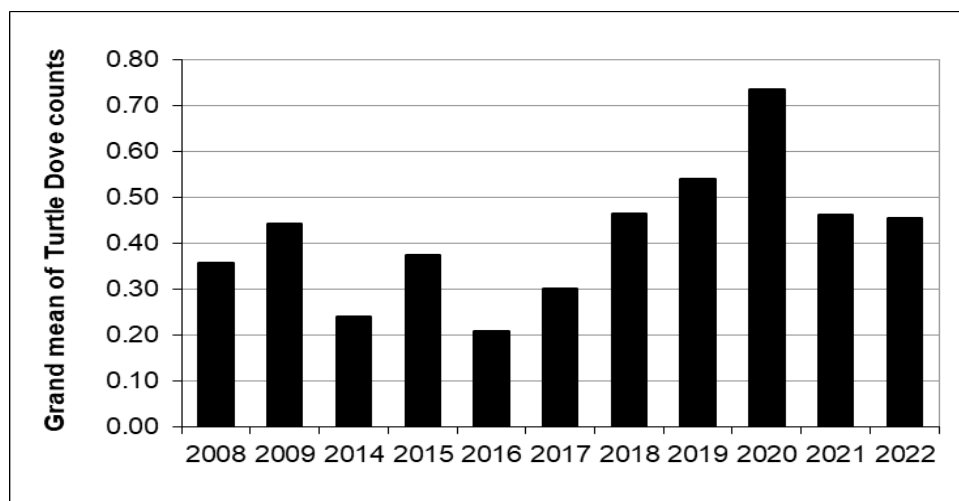
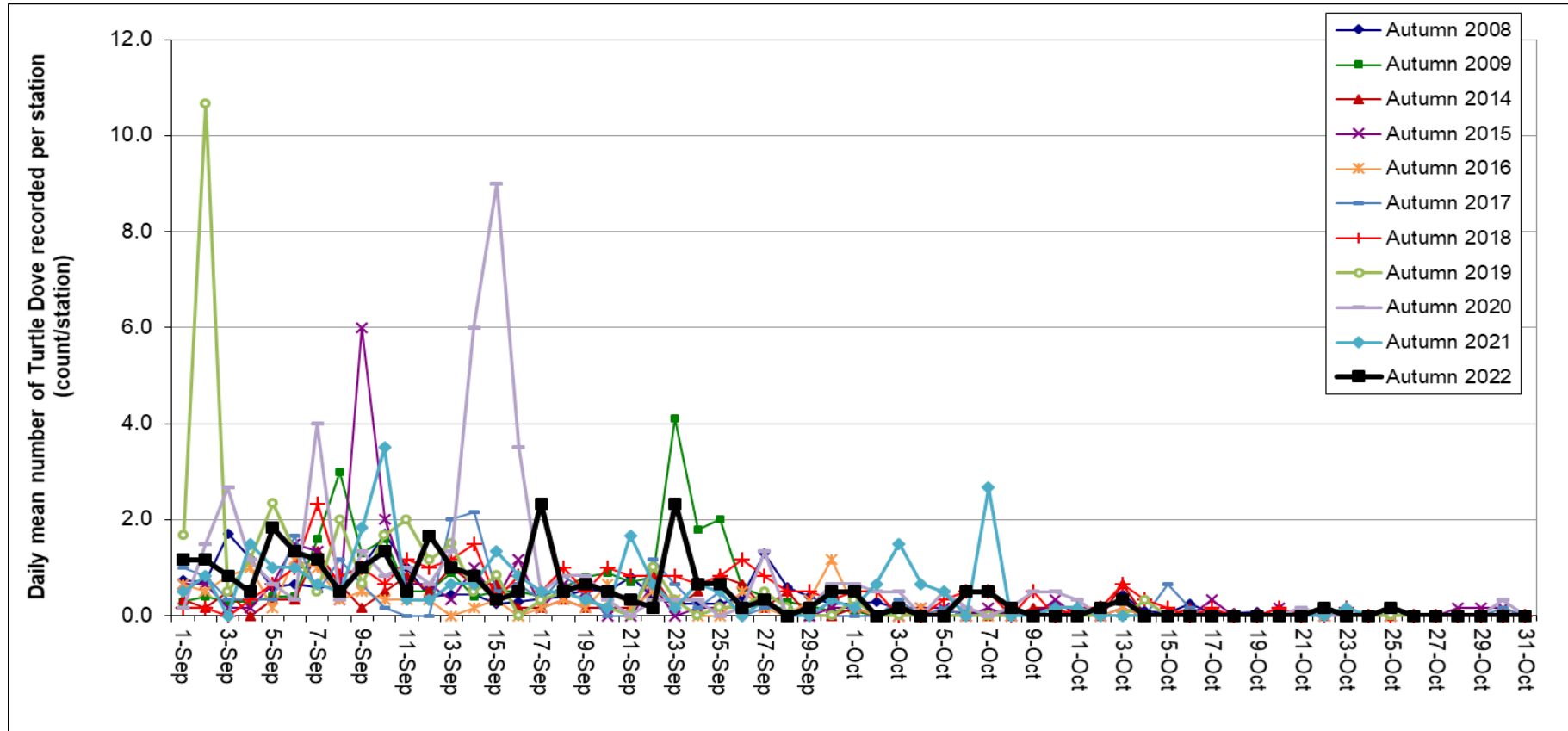


Figure 6 - Daily mean counts of Turtle-dove per station (= site) recorded during the present survey from 1 September to 31 October 2022, together with values of the same statistic for autumn 2008 and 2009 as reported in Thomaidis (nd), and for autumn 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 as reported in Ecoserv (2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020a; 2021a).



Correlation of migration observations with reported bags

- 5.23 The analysis shows a general correlation between the number of catches reported by hunters in autumn and independent observations of migration for the Common Quail. There was a very similar temporal trend of counts in September 2022, in both the daily counts made during the 2022 survey and the bag count data for the Turtle Dove, while no comparison could be made for the period 1 to 31 October since the hunting season for Turtle Dove was closed on 30 September 2022 in accordance with Legal Notice 341/2021⁶ (Figure 7 and Figure 8).
- 5.24 The above data on reported catches and observation trends were considered also in the context of the enforcement statistics pertaining to the 2022 autumn season summarised below.

⁶ Legal Notice 341 of 2021 <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2021/341/eng>

Figure 7 - Daily bag count of Common Quail during 2022 (blue line; values on left-side y-axis), together with the mean daily counts recorded during the 2022 survey (black line; values on right-side y-axis), for the period 1 September – 31 October 2022.

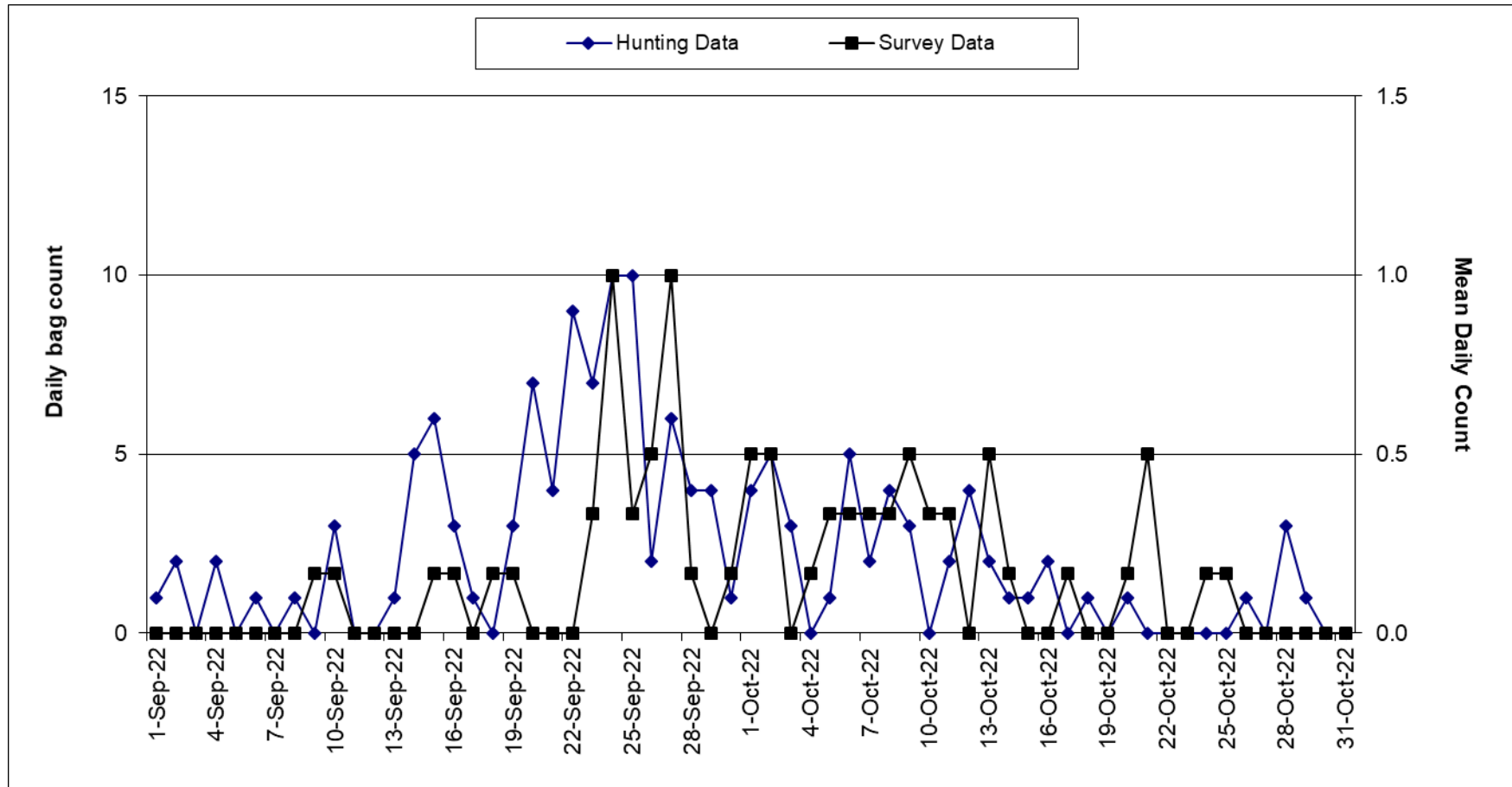
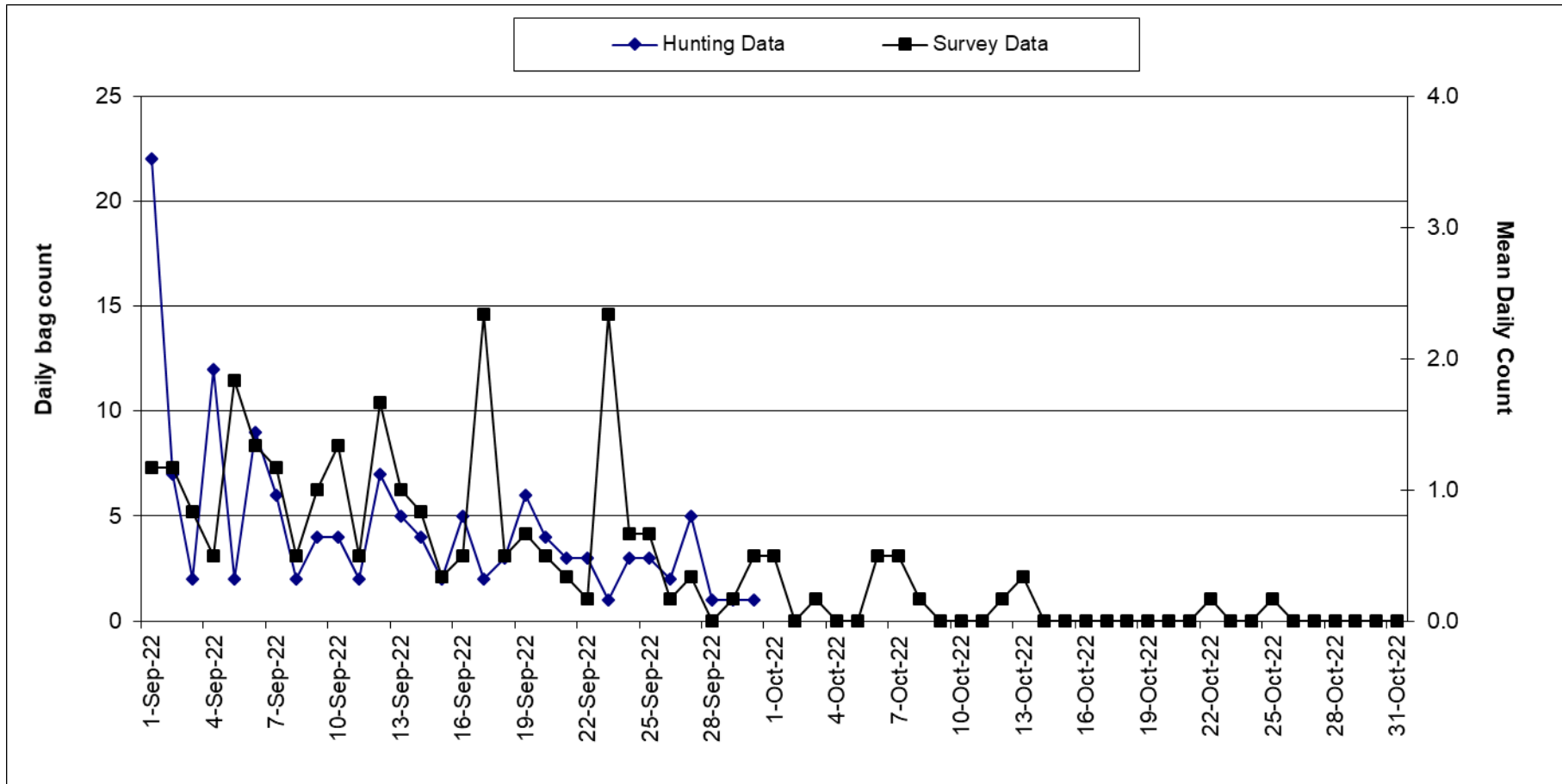


Figure 8 - Daily bag count of Turtle-dove during 2022 (blue line; values on left-side y-axis), together with the mean daily counts recorded during the 2022 survey (black line; values on right-side y-axis), for the period 1 September – 31 October 2022. It should be noted that bag counts after 30 September are all zero given that the hunting season for this species closed on this date.



6. Determination of the 2023 spring hunting bag limit and other parameters

- 6.1 Regulation 5 of the Framework Regulations stipulates the requirement for the establishment of an overall bag limit for a spring hunting season for Quail and for Turtle-dove, based on figures contained in Annex 1 to the same Regulations. The same Regulations also stipulate the requirement of taking into consideration the conservation status of the two species concerned and the maintenance of the population of both species at a satisfactory level when establishing the overall bag limit. Regulation 5 also provides for the requirement of establishing seasonal and daily bag limits per hunting licence.
- 6.2 The Regulations also establish that, should a spring hunting season be declared open, the overall national spring hunting limits would be set at not more than a ceiling limit of 5,000 for Quail and 11,000 for Turtle-dove, based on the principle of 1% of the total annual mortality of the species. They also establish that a spring hunting season will not be opened in cases where the number of birds hunted during the previous autumn season reaches 20,000 in the case of Quail and 21,000 in the case Turtle-dove. Furthermore, it should be noted that:
- (i) the maximum bag limit for a spring hunting derogation may be fully allowed in cases where the number of Quail or Turtle-dove hunted during the previous autumn season does not exceed 10,000 individuals for each species respectively; and that,
 - (ii) the maximum bag limit for a spring hunting derogation should be reduced by inverse proportion to the number of birds hunted in excess of 10,000 or each species in the previous autumn season.
- 6.3 Since the total bag for the autumn 2022 hunting season was 154 Quail and 133 Turtle-dove, the maximum limit of birds hunted in autumn as established by the Regulations in question (20,000 for Quail / 21,000 for Turtle-dove) was not reached. Moreover, since the numbers hunted did not exceed 10,000 individuals in either species, the maximum national bag limit allowed by law could have been applied.
- 6.4 However, the European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) was uplisted as Vulnerable on the IUCN global Red List of Threatened Species and, on the basis of Member States' reports under Article 12 of the Birds Directive, it was classified as Near Threatened within the territory of the European Union. Given the rapid decline an “International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the European Turtle-dove 2018-2028” (ISSAP) was prepared in the context of the LIFE EuroSAP project. It was recommended for implementation by NADEG members in May 2018 and then adopted at COP 12 (October 2018) of the Convention on Migratory Species. After discussing the issue through workshops and ad-hoc meetings, the European Commission requested Member States forming part of the Central-Eastern Flyway and that hunt this species, to implement a compliance system if a hunting season of the Turtle-dove was foreseen. Malta has committed to implement the measures recommended by the European Commission and in 2021 limited the annual bag to a maximum 50% of the average off-take between 2013–2018. The 50% reduction in hunting bag of the average off-take between 2013–2018 for Malta adds up to 2,000 Turtle-doves. Legal Notice 341 of 2021⁷ reduced the autumn national quota of the Turtle-dove from 7,000 to 500 birds, hutable in September only (from 1 to 30 September, inclusive of both dates). Considering that 133 Turtle-doves were taken-up in September 2022 hunting season, a quota of 1,500 Turtle-doves was proposed for the 2023 spring hunting season.
- 6.5 Based on the above, the 2023 spring hunting overall bag limit for Quail was set at 2,400 and 1,500 for Turtle-dove on condition that the season would be closed immediately should this national overall bag limit be reached before 30 April 2023.

⁷ Legal Notice 341 of 2021 <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2021/341/eng>

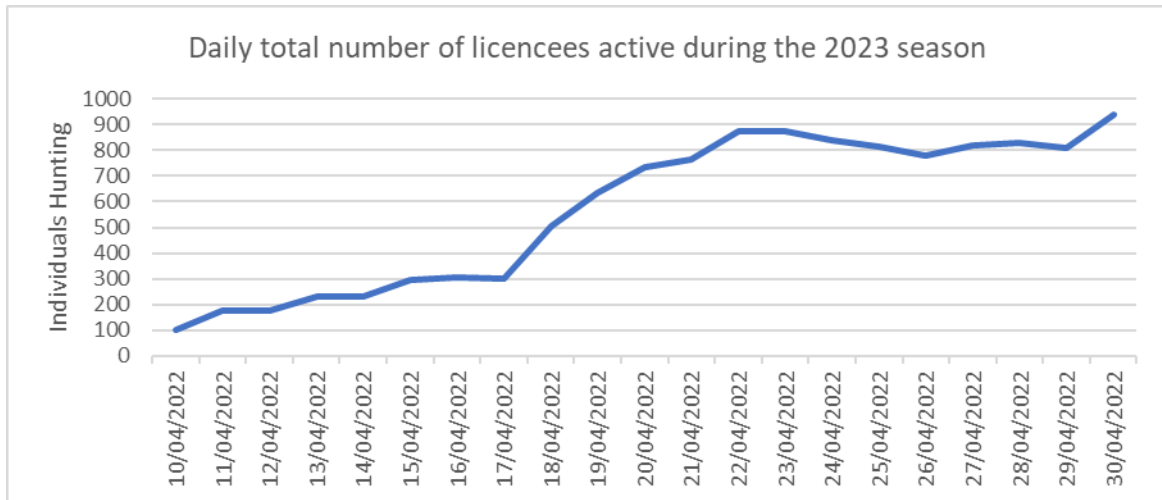
7. Application process and issuance of special spring hunting licences

- 7.1 In order to be eligible for a 2023 Spring Hunting Special Licence, a hunter was required to be in possession, by the time of application, of the following:
- (a) Valid general licence to hunt birds on land;
 - (b) Paid-up membership in a recognised hunting organisation for 2023;
 - (c) Valid third party liability insurance cover for 2023;
 - (d) Valid permit to carry a firearm for hunting of birds on land issued by the Police.
- 7.2 Applications for a special spring hunting licence were received through the Game Reporting System (GRS) during a seven-day period from 15 March to 22 March 2023. During this period, the GRS was switched over to an application call flow where callers in possession of a valid general hunting licence were guided via automated voice prompts and declarations to apply for a special licence.
- 7.3 In 2023, the Wild Birds Regulation Unit received 7,961 applications for a spring hunting special licence, which is approximately 1% lower than the number of applications received in 2022 (8,057). Upon verification, seven of these applications were considered invalid and thus rejected.
- 7.4 A total of 7,954 licences were subsequently issued, 6,634 to applicants resident in Malta and 1,320 to applicants resident in Gozo. A total of 86 issued licences (75 in Malta and 11 in Gozo) remained unclaimed throughout the season leaving a total of 7,868 active licences. Details on minimum statutory enforcement deployment is provided in the enforcement section of this report.
- 7.5 Spring hunting licence conditions were established according to the provisions of the Framework Regulations and the provisions of Legal Notice 78 of 2023 as well as the provisions of Legal Notice 87 of 2023. Additionally, all licensed hunters were required to abide by the regulations laid down in the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations. A copy of the special spring hunting licence, including details of the licence conditions, is attached in Annex 3 to this report.
- 7.6 Hunters were required to carry their spring hunting licence and general licence at all times. They were also required to immediately report Quail and/or Turtle-dove caught by calling on 8000 2020, or by using the Game Reporting MT mobile application. Hunters were also required to abide by the time restrictions and respect the national bag limits of 2,400 Quail and 1,500 Turtle-dove. These conditions were strictly monitored, supervised and enforced, as described in the enforcement section of this report.

8. Activity Data (Hunting Effort)

- 8.1 During this year's spring hunting season, hunters were obliged to report 'hunting effort' after each hunting outing which did not result in any bagged game through the Telephone Game Reporting System or the Game Reporting mobile app.
- 8.2 Reporting 'hunting effort' is a legal obligation as provided for by Regulation 12(9) and paragraph 1(c) of Schedule IV of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations as well as being explicitly stated in condition 10 of the special licence. Subsequently, hunters who upon inspection are found to have failed to report their hunting effort are issued with an administrative fine of €50, in line with Schedule VIII of the same Regulations.
- 8.3 During the 2023 spring hunting season, 919 individuals reported at least one bird caught whereas 1,195 individuals reported hunting effort only (no birds caught)—the data excludes individuals who were issued with a fine for failure to fulfil their reporting obligations (vide section 12 on enforcement). The maximum number of hunters active on any given day during the 2023 spring hunting season was 937 on the last day of the season, as shown in Figure

Figure 9 - Individuals hunting during the open season.



9. Real-time Game Reporting System

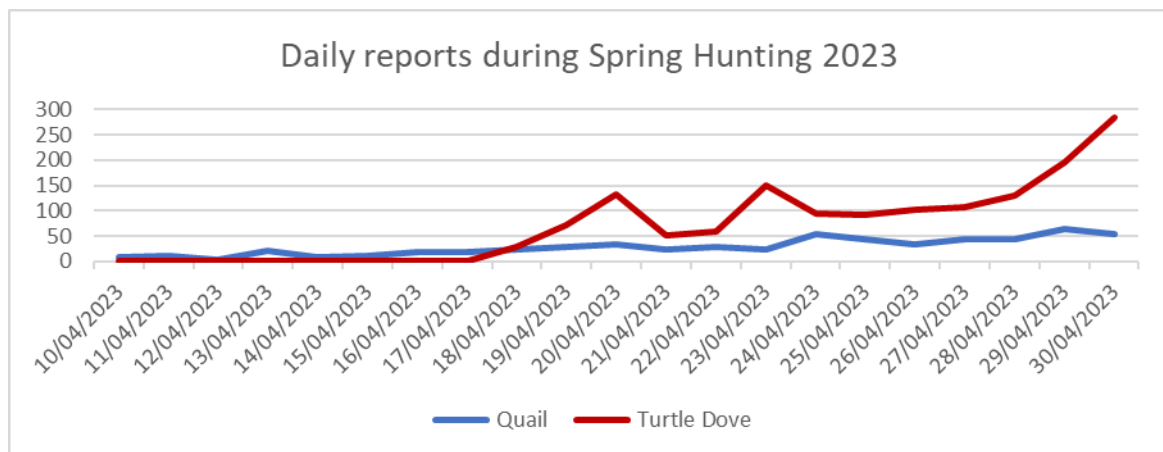
- 9.1 Prior to the commencement of the season, as was also the case in previous years, the Wild Birds Regulation Unit carried out an intense information campaign to promote awareness of hunting regulations and enforce compliance with the legal obligations, including the hunters’ reporting obligations. All hunters in possession of a spring hunting licence were reminded of their legal obligations through a letter sent together with the Spring Hunting Licence.
- 9.2 In accordance with Regulation 5(d) of the Framework Regulations, hunters in possession of the special spring hunting licence were obliged to immediately notify the authorities of any Quail and/or Turtle-dove hunted during the season. The Special Licence required the hunters to do so by calling on the telephone reporting system via their mobile phones or through a mobile reporting app immediately after catching a Quail or Turtle-dove stating the amount of birds caught.
- 9.3 Each report was registered in a database. Only calls made from registered mobile numbers of hunters in possession of a Special Licence were accepted for reporting. The relevant data for reported Quail and Turtle-dove is presented in Table 4 and Figure 0 respectively.

Table 4 - Number of birds reported through the game reporting system

Date	Quail	Turtle-dove
10/04/2023	9	N/A
11/04/2023	12	N/A
12/04/2023	4	N/A
13/04/2023	21	N/A
14/04/2023	9	N/A
15/04/2023	12	N/A
16/04/2023	18	N/A
17/04/2023	18	N/A
18/04/2023	25	30
19/04/2023	28	73
20/04/2023	34	132

Date	Quail	Turtle-dove
21/04/2023	23	52
22/04/2023	30	58
23/04/2023	24	151
24/04/2023	55	94
25/04/2023	45	93
26/04/2023	34	101
27/04/2023	44	107
28/04/2023	43	131
29/04/2023	65	195
30/04/2023	53	283
Total	606	1,500

Figure 10 - Daily total number of Quail reported during the 2023 spring hunting season – as reported through the telephonic system.



9.4 The total number of reported birds did not exceed any of the national overall bag limits—the Turtle Dove quota of 1,500 was reached on 30 April 2023 at 11:51. During the 2023 spring hunting, the total number of Quail reported equates to 25.3% of the limit permitted by law, while the total number of Turtle-dove reported equates to 100% of the limit. Table 5 provides data on the number of Quail and Turtle-dove caught. There were 271 hunters who reported Quail and 790 hunters who reported Turtle-dove during the 2023 spring hunting season.

Table 5 - Number of birds caught by hunters

Birds reported shot by hunters	Number of hunters declaring Quail	Number of hunters declaring Turtle-dove
1	150	120
2	61	165
3	24	87
4	13	35
5	8	20
6	4	7
7	1	4
8	1	5
9	2	1
10	0	2

Birds reported shot by hunters	Number of hunters declaring Quail	Number of hunters declaring Turtle-dove
>10	7	6

- 9.5 Hunters were bound by a legal obligation to report game caught immediately upon making a catch, thus allowing precise temporal data to be collected. Table 6 indicates percentages of Quail and Turtle-dove reports made within each hour time band.

Table 6 - Percentages of Quail reports made within each hour time band.

Time	Quail Reports (%)	Turtle-dove Reports (%)
05:00 - 06:00	0.0%	0.1%
06:00 - 07:00	2.5%	7.9%
07:00 - 08:00	10.7%	12.3%
08:00 - 09:00	12.0%	14.5%
09:00 - 10:00	20.3%	17.2%
10:00 - 11:00	18.8%	16.9%
11:00 - 12:00	35.6%	31.1%

10. Independent bird migration study in spring 2023

- 10.1 As was also the case in previous years, an independent scientific study was carried out in Spring 2023, in order to obtain an estimate of migratory influxes of Turtle-dove and Common Quail over the derogation period. The study was carried out by Ecoserv (2023) with the following main objective: *To survey and scientifically monitor the daily influx of the Turtle-dove and Common Quail; to estimate the overall presence (influx) of these two species per day and for the whole study period and to analyse observed and estimated migration trends in conjunction with the trends recorded in past studies, and in conjunction with any hunting data on the species surveyed.* The geographical scope of the study extended across the three inhabited islands of the Maltese archipelago (that is, Malta, Gozo and Comino), with data gathered between 15 March and 15 May 2023. A full copy of the report in question is attached in Annex 4, with key conclusions summarised below.
- 10.2 The methodology used in this study was identical to the methodology used for similar studies conducted in 2011–2022. Twenty-eight monitoring stations were set up across the Maltese Islands, with counts obtained from ten different sites each day. A field assistant capable of identifying the relevant species and an observer responsible to record data were posted to each station, in order to conduct counts of individuals. Each group of ten sites was surveyed once every three days, such that over a three-day period, all 28 sites would have been surveyed. Furthermore, wherever possible, the study site at Comino was included in the ten sites surveyed on any one day, such that this site was surveyed on a daily basis. When weather conditions precluded surveys at the Comino site due to unavailability of sea transport services, these were undertaken at an alternative site (Qala, San Blas or Ramla tal-Bir) instead. Given that the study was mainly intended to quantify the influx of migrating individuals, field sites were located at strategic locations along the coast, which locations would be expected to serve as stop-over points for migrating individuals.
- 10.3 Counts obtained across this network of observation stations over the survey period for the Turtle-dove are given in Table 7 below.

Table 7 - Counts obtained for Turtle-dove across the network of observation stations over the study period.

Date	Total Daily Count
15-Mar-23	0
16-Mar-23	0

Date	Total Daily Count
17-Mar-23	0
18-Mar-23	0
19-Mar-23	0
20-Mar-23	0
21-Mar-23	2
22-Mar-23	0
23-Mar-23	0
24-Mar-23	0
25-Mar-23	0
26-Mar-23	0
27-Mar-23	0
28-Mar-23	1
29-Mar-23	2
30-Mar-23	0
31-Mar-23	0
01-Apr-23	0
02-Apr-23	4
03-Apr-23	1
04-Apr-23	1
05-Apr-23	1
06-Apr-23	2
07-Apr-23	4
08-Apr-23	1
09-Apr-23	4
10-Apr-23	9
11-Apr-23	10
12-Apr-23	7
13-Apr-23	5
14-Apr-23	5
15-Apr-23	9
16-Apr-23	20
17-Apr-23	14
18-Apr-23	18
19-Apr-23	40
20-Apr-23	57
21-Apr-23	22
22-Apr-23	15
23-Apr-23	57
24-Apr-23	17
25-Apr-23	27
26-Apr-23	23
27-Apr-23	24
28-Apr-23	20
29-Apr-23	24
30-Apr-23	17
01-May-23	17
02-May-23	7
03-May-23	6
04-May-23	17
05-May-23	8
06-May-23	7
07-May-23	14
08-May-23	17
09-May-23	4
10-May-23	12

Date	Total Daily Count
11-May-23	3
12-May-23	9
13-May-23	5
14-May-23	13
15-May-23	6
Total	608

- 10.4 Daily raw counts for Turtle-dove recorded from the 28 sites during the 2023 study varied between 0 and a maximum of 57, while the mean daily counts ranged between 0 and 5.70. Overall, counts recorded during the 2023 survey show a similar trend to those recorded in previous surveys. The general pattern is of very low counts recorded in March and early April, with marginally higher counts recorded from mid-April to early May. The daily mean counts recorded during the 2023 survey are similar to those recorded in previous years. Occasional peaks were recorded in some years: in 2008, a very high mean count (98, on 15-4-08) and a secondary peak (26, on 20-04-08) were recorded, while a single main peak was recorded in 2009 (33, on 23-04-09) and in 2018 (25, on 19-04-18); no mean counts greater than 20 were recorded in any of the other years, including during the 2023 survey (Figure 12).
- 10.5 Comparisons of the grand mean for the period 15 March to 15 May from the 2023 study with that from other previous surveys is not possible since the latter covered much shorter periods. The main period which was covered by most surveys is from 10 to 30 April. Values of the grand mean of Turtle Dove counts recorded during this period (10 to 30 April) from the 2023 survey, together with values of the grand mean for the same period in 2018, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), for the period 14 to 30 April 2015 (Ecoserv, 2015), for the period 10 to 14 April 2017 (Ecoserv, 2017), and for the period 10 to 21 April 2018 (Ecoserv, 2018) are shown in Figure 1. Overall, the grand mean recorded during the 2023 survey during the period 10 to 30 April is similar to that recorded from most surveys held between 2012 and 2022, but lower than that recorded from surveys made in 2008, 2009 and 2018.

Figure 11 - Grand mean of Turtle Dove counts for data from the period 10 to 30 April recorded in spring 2023 (present survey) and spring 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), together with the grand mean for data from the period 14 to 30 April recorded in spring 2015 (Ecoserv, 2015), from the period 10 to 14 April recorded in spring 2017 (Ecoserv, 2017), and from the period 10 to 21 April recorded in spring 2018 (Ecoserv, 2018).

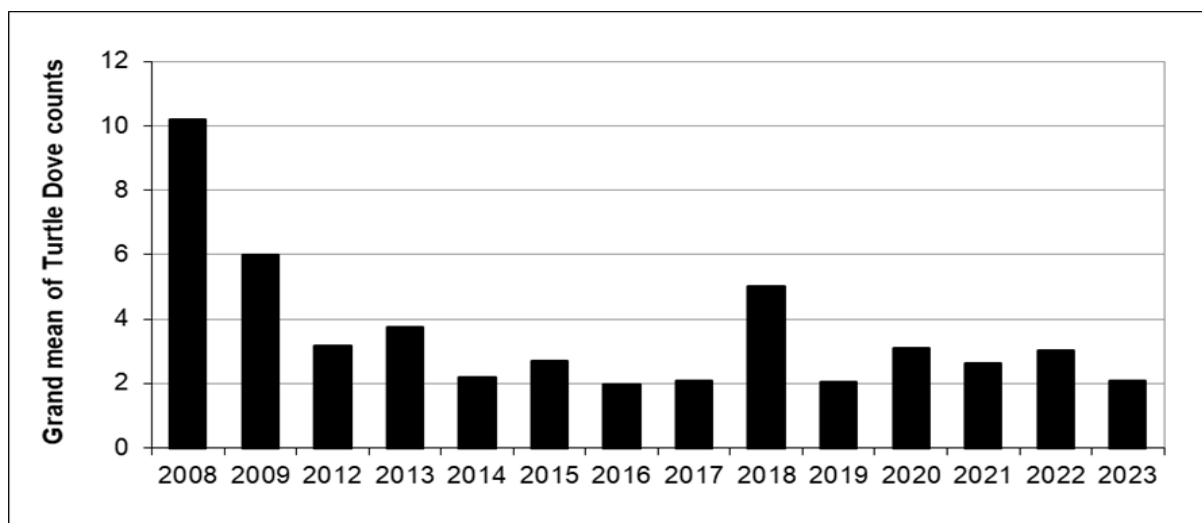
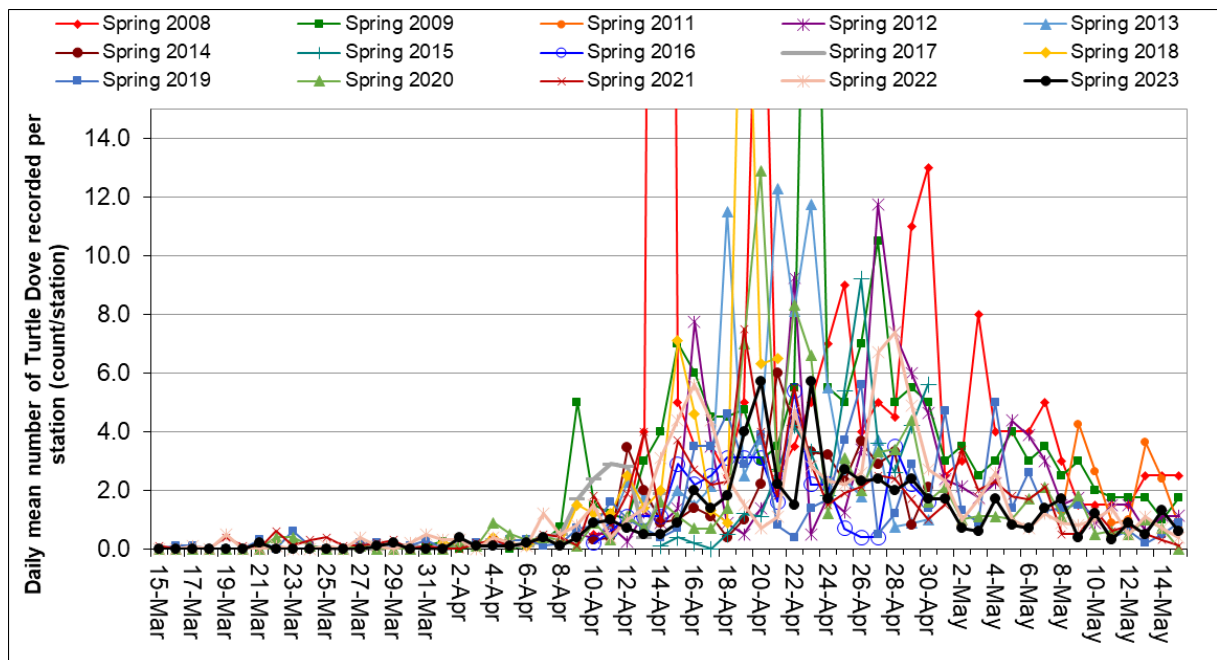
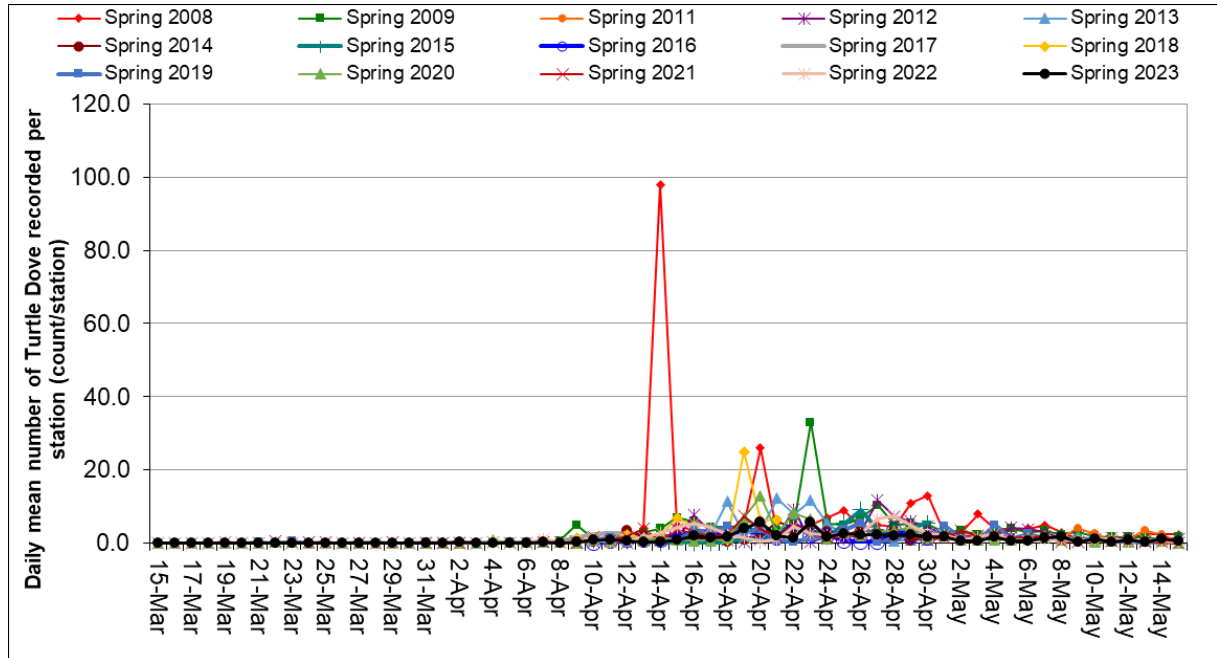


Figure 9 - Daily mean counts of Turtle Dove per station (= site) recorded during the spring 2023 survey held between 15 March and 15 May, together with values of the same statistic for spring 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).

Top: graph showing all values including peak counts >20 individuals recorded in 2008, 2009 and 2018;

Bottom: graph showing all values except the peak counts >20 individuals recorded in 2008, 2009 and 2018.



10.6 An estimate of the total influx of Turtle Dove over the Maltese Islands was made using the daily counts recorded from the 2023 survey. Extrapolations were then made to obtain the approximate total number of individuals of this species that are envisaged to have migrated over the Maltese Islands on a particular date. However, as emphasised in reports of surveys from previous years made in spring (Ecoserv, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), such an estimate must be treated with utmost caution, given the relatively small number of sites used on any one day and that the counts were not made daily at each site. Furthermore, passage of birds at different localities is extremely variable, with potential large differences in

birds passing at two different sites, even if these are separated by a small distance. Other limiting factor is that the field survey stops at 14:00 and does not start again before 07:00 of the following morning, hence potentially missing birds arriving late in the afternoon and early evening, as well as those arriving during the night, which may have not been recorded by the field observers during the survey.

10.7 On the other hand, the estimate given in the 2023 report is useful when making comparison between different years, assuming data from surveys based on a similar design are available to assess whether the trend in influx is increasing or decreasing with time. Since the coastal length surveyed at each site during the present survey is approximately 0.5 km, the total influx of migrating Turtle Dove for the three-week study period was estimated by extrapolating the values obtained to the total coastline length for the Maltese Islands, which have a perimeter of 271.22 km (Mallia et al, 2002) . Based on the mean daily counts, extrapolation translates to an estimated daily influx ranging between 0 and 3,092 individuals, with a total influx over the survey period (15 March to 15 May 2023; i.e. 62 days) of 32,976 individuals, i.e. some 532 birds per day.

Table 8 - Estimated total influx of Turtle-dove during 2023 study period.

Date	Estimated Total Daily Influx
15-Mar-23	0
16-Mar-23	0
17-Mar-23	0
18-Mar-23	0
19-Mar-23	0
20-Mar-23	0
21-Mar-23	108
22-Mar-23	0
23-Mar-23	0
24-Mar-23	0
25-Mar-23	0
26-Mar-23	0
27-Mar-23	0
28-Mar-23	54
29-Mar-23	108
30-Mar-23	0
31-Mar-23	0
01-Apr-23	0
02-Apr-23	217
03-Apr-23	54
04-Apr-23	54
05-Apr-23	54
06-Apr-23	108
07-Apr-23	217
08-Apr-23	54
09-Apr-23	217
10-Apr-23	488
11-Apr-23	542
12-Apr-23	380
13-Apr-23	271
14-Apr-23	271
15-Apr-23	488
16-Apr-23	1085
17-Apr-23	759
18-Apr-23	976
19-Apr-23	2170
20-Apr-23	3092

Date	Estimated Total Daily Influx
21-Apr-23	1193
22-Apr-23	814
23-Apr-23	3092
24-Apr-23	922
25-Apr-23	1465
26-Apr-23	1248
27-Apr-23	1302
28-Apr-23	1085
29-Apr-23	1302
30-Apr-23	922
01-May-23	922
02-May-23	380
03-May-23	325
04-May-23	922
05-May-23	434
06-May-23	380
07-May-23	759
08-May-23	922
09-May-23	217
10-May-23	651
11-May-23	163
12-May-23	488
13-May-23	271
14-May-23	705
15-May-23	325
Total	32,976

10.8 Counts for Common Quail obtained across the twenty-eight monitoring stations set up across the Maltese Islands as described in section 10.2 are given in Table 9 below.

Table 9 - Counts obtained for Common Quail across the network of observation stations over the study period.

Date	Total Daily Count
15-Mar-23	3
16-Mar-23	0
17-Mar-23	1
18-Mar-23	1
19-Mar-23	0
20-Mar-23	0
21-Mar-23	1
22-Mar-23	1
23-Mar-23	3
24-Mar-23	1
25-Mar-23	4
26-Mar-23	0
27-Mar-23	3
28-Mar-23	4
29-Mar-23	1
30-Mar-23	3
31-Mar-23	2
01-Apr-23	0

Date	Total Daily Count
02-Apr-23	4
03-Apr-23	1
04-Apr-23	1
05-Apr-23	2
06-Apr-23	4
07-Apr-23	3
08-Apr-23	4
09-Apr-23	2
10-Apr-23	3
11-Apr-23	2
12-Apr-23	1
13-Apr-23	7
14-Apr-23	0
15-Apr-23	3
16-Apr-23	3
17-Apr-23	5
18-Apr-23	1
19-Apr-23	1
20-Apr-23	2
21-Apr-23	7
22-Apr-23	4
23-Apr-23	3
24-Apr-23	3
25-Apr-23	5
26-Apr-23	3
27-Apr-23	1
28-Apr-23	2
29-Apr-23	2
30-Apr-23	4
01-May-23	0
02-May-23	0
03-May-23	0
04-May-23	0
05-May-23	0
06-May-23	0
07-May-23	1
08-May-23	0
09-May-23	0
10-May-23	0
11-May-23	0
12-May-23	0
13-May-23	1
14-May-23	1
15-May-23	2
Total	116

10.9 Daily raw counts for Common Quail recorded from the 28 sites during the present study varied between 0 and a maximum of 7, while the mean daily counts ranged between 0 and 0.70. Overall,

counts recorded during the 2023 study remained low during the entire survey period, but were slightly higher in the second half of April and lowest in May. The general pattern observed in previous surveys is of low migratory counts in mid-March, which start to increase in late March, with the highest counts usually recorded in mid to end April, and a subsequent decline in counts during May. The daily mean counts recorded during the 2023 survey are overall slightly lower than those in 2008 and 2009 (Thomaidis, nd) and similar to those in 2011–2022 (Ecoserv 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). Minor peaks of around 2.0–3.0 were recorded in spring 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2020, while no mean counts greater than 1.5 were recorded in any of the other years, including in the 2023 survey.

10.10 The grand mean of Common Quail counts recorded during the period 15 March to 15 May from the 2023 survey is 0.19, which is lower than the grand mean of 0.74 recorded over the same period in 2009, and slightly lower than those recorded in 2019–2022 (0.25–0.40). Comparisons of the grand mean for the period 15 March to 15 May with other previous surveys is not possible since these covered much shorter periods. The main period which was covered by most surveys is from 10 to 30 April. Values of the grand mean of Common Quail counts recorded during this period (10 to 30 April) from the 2023 survey, together with values of the grand mean for the same period in 2018, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), for the period 14 to 30 April 2015 (Ecoserv, 2015), for the period 10 to 14 April 2017 (Ecoserv, 2017), and for the period 10 to 21 April 2018 (Ecoserv, 2018) are shown in Figure 13. Overall, the grand mean recorded during the present (2023) survey for the period 10 to 30 April is similar to that recorded during the 2013–2022 surveys, but lower than that recorded in 2008, 2009 and 2012.

Figure 10 - Grand mean of Common Quail counts for data from the period 10 to 30 April recorded in spring 2023 and spring 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), together with the grand mean for data from the period 14 to 30 April recorded in spring 2015 (Ecoserv, 2015), from the period 10 to 14 April recorded in spring 2017 (Ecoserv, 2017), and from the period 10 to 21 April recorded in spring 2018 (Ecoserv, 2018).

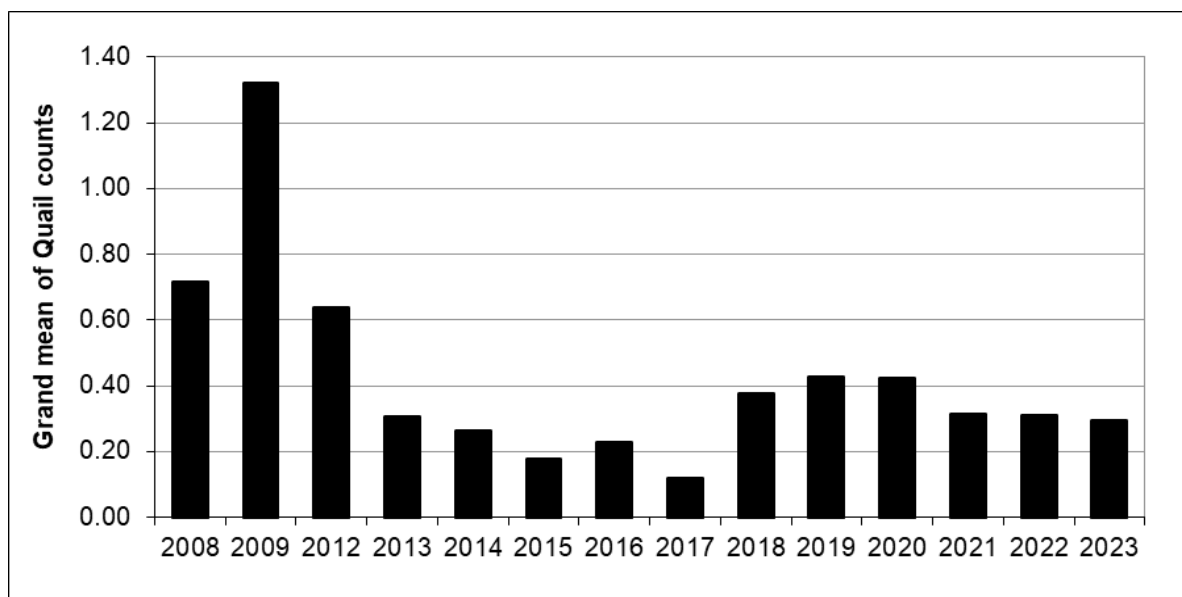
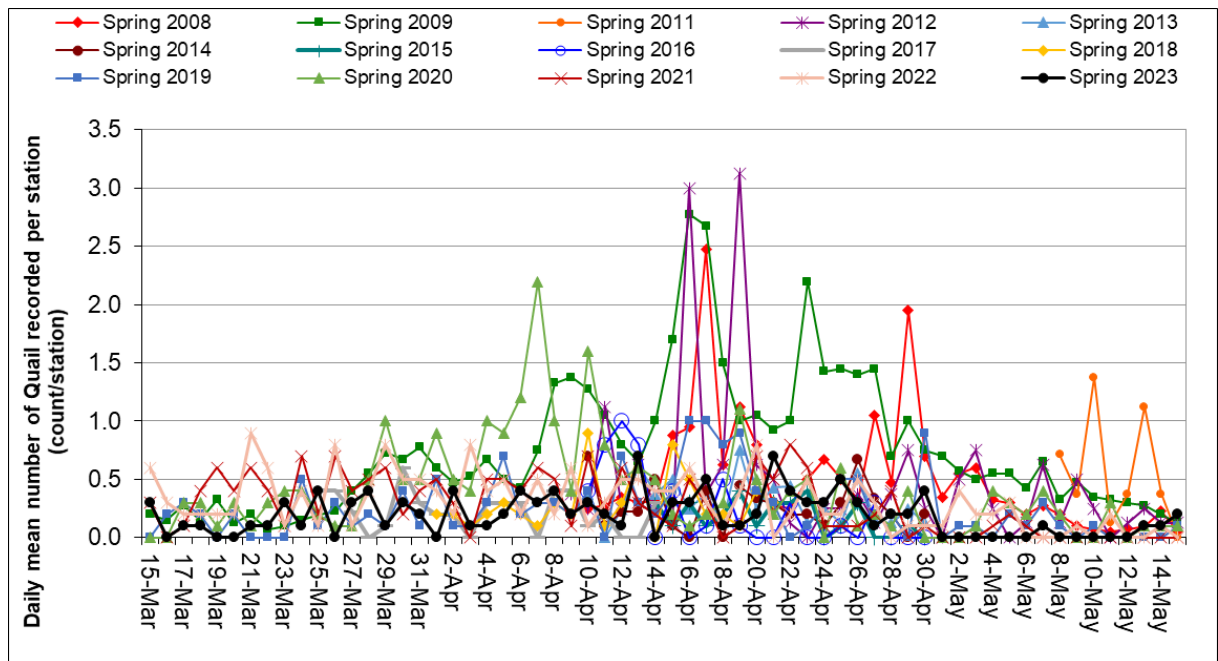


Figure 11 - Daily mean counts of Common Quail per station (= site) recorded during the spring 2023 survey held between 15 March and 15 May, together with values of the same statistic for spring 2008, 2009 (Thomaidis, nd), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (Ecoserv, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).



10.11 The total influx of Common Quail was estimated for the whole area of the Maltese Islands using the recorded area surveyed for Quail at each site. However, such an estimate requires the following assumptions: (i) the rate of Quail settling at coastal sites (where the survey was carried out) is equal to that at inland locations, and (ii) the total area used to estimate the migration count does not include areas where settlement of Quail cannot occur in practice. Since Quail tend to migrate to inland sites, settling of Quail in coastal areas will likely be less than or equal to that in inland regions, but not greater, meaning that the estimated total may be an underestimate. The use of only coastal sites is still justified since these are more likely to serve as short-term stopover sites immediately following a migratory flight than inland locations; thus, including inland locations may result in an overestimate of the total influx due to repeated counting of resident Quails.

10.12 To ensure that the total area used to estimate the migration count does not include regions within which Quail do not normally settle, even though some birds may fly over urbanized areas, the total area was calculated as the sum of agricultural areas (161.5 km²), forested areas (2.1 km²) and areas of natural vegetation (57.8 km²); this amounts to 221.4 km², representing 72% of the 315 km² total area of the Maltese Islands (land cover data source: MEPA, 2010). The mean (\pm SD) daily counts and estimated total influx of birds per day are shown in Table 10. Based on these data, extrapolation translates to a total influx of Common Quail during 15 March to 15 May 2023 of 96,297 individuals, or some 1,553 Quail per day (see Table 10). However, as emphasised in the reports of previous surveys (Ecoserv, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022), such an estimate must be treated with utmost caution, given the relatively small number of field sites used on any one day and that counts were not made daily at each site, such that only a very small portion of the total area of potential habitat in the Maltese Islands was sampled.

Table 10 - Estimated total influx of Common Quail in 2023 study period.

Date	Estimated Daily Influx
15-Mar-23	2907
16-Mar-23	0
17-Mar-23	803
18-Mar-23	1007
19-Mar-23	0
20-Mar-23	0
21-Mar-23	1011
22-Mar-23	693
23-Mar-23	2426
24-Mar-23	969
25-Mar-23	2773
26-Mar-23	0
27-Mar-23	2907
28-Mar-23	2780
29-Mar-23	803
30-Mar-23	3020
31-Mar-23	1386
01-Apr-23	0
02-Apr-23	4043
03-Apr-23	695
04-Apr-23	809
05-Apr-23	1938
06-Apr-23	2780
07-Apr-23	2410
08-Apr-23	4026
09-Apr-23	1395
10-Apr-23	2417
11-Apr-23	1938
12-Apr-23	693
13-Apr-23	5662
14-Apr-23	0
15-Apr-23	2092
16-Apr-23	2426
17-Apr-23	4845
18-Apr-23	695
19-Apr-23	803
20-Apr-23	1938
21-Apr-23	4866
22-Apr-23	3235
23-Apr-23	2907
24-Apr-23	2080
25-Apr-23	4016
26-Apr-23	3020
27-Apr-23	693
28-Apr-23	1606
29-Apr-23	2013

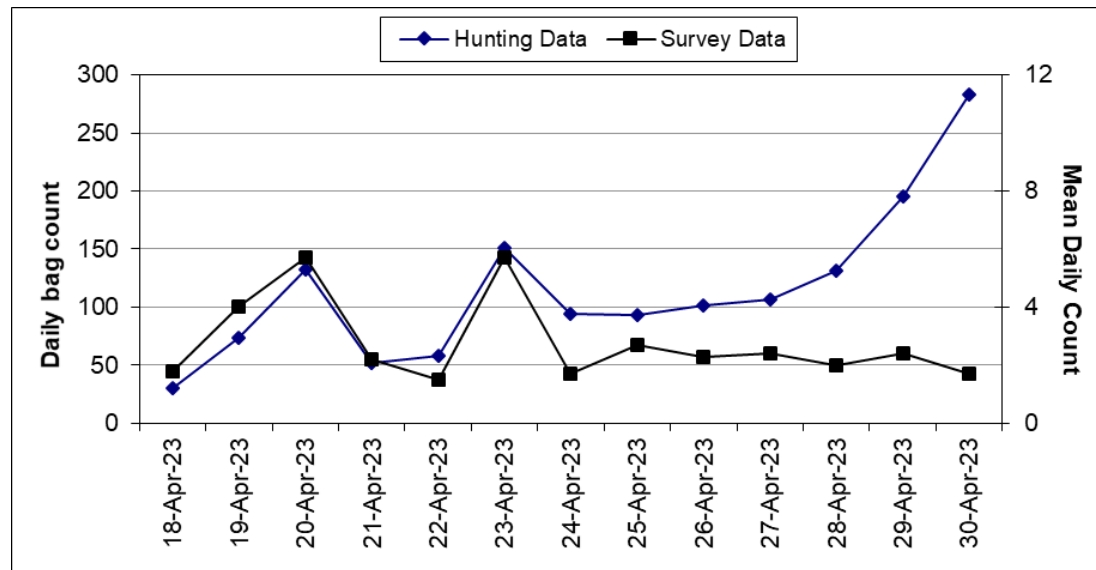
Date	Estimated Daily Influx
30-Apr-23	2789
01-May-23	0
02-May-23	0
03-May-23	0
04-May-23	0
05-May-23	0
06-May-23	0
07-May-23	809
08-May-23	0
09-May-23	0
10-May-23	0
11-May-23	0
12-May-23	0
13-May-23	809
14-May-23	969
15-May-23	1395
Total	96,297

11. Comparison between migration study data and game reporting data

- 11.1 A comparative analysis of data from the monitoring study with bag data was undertaken. The bag dataset comprises the daily bag count of Turtle-dove (as reported by hunters through a telephone reporting system and the Game Reporting MT app) for the period 18 to 30 April 2023, and the daily bag count of Common Quail (as reported by hunters through a telephone reporting system and the Game Reporting MT app) for the period 10 to 30 April 2023. It should be noted that the two sets of data were collected for different purposes and using very different methodologies; therefore, the magnitudes of values are not directly comparable. However, the temporal trends can be expected to follow similar patterns; that is, within the same season the periods when higher mean daily counts were recorded during the monitoring survey should broadly follow the days when higher numbers of Turtle-dove or Common Quail were caught (and reported in the bag data). Graphical representations of the mean or total daily counts made during the 2023 survey and the daily bag counts for the same period (10 to 30 April 2023 or 18 to 30 April 2023) for Turtle-dove and Common Quail were compared.
- 11.2 The daily bag counts indicating the number of Turtle-dove caught during the 2023 spring hunting season made during the 2023 survey are shown in Figure 15. As already noted, the magnitudes of the bag counts and those of the total counts made in the 2023 survey are not directly comparable; hence the two sets of values are on different scales. Therefore, in Figure 15, two separate y-axes are used: the bag count data is plotted on the left-side y-axis, whereas the counts from the 2023 survey are plotted on the right-side y-axis.
- 11.3 Overall, the general trend of daily counts made during the 2023 survey is of relatively similar counts between 18 and 30 April, with small peaks on 20 and 23 April. The bag count data includes a similar trend of relatively similar counts between 17 and 28 April, with small peaks on 20 and 23 April, but also an appreciable increase in bag counts during the last two days of the spring hunting season, with the bag count reported on 30 April being more than twice that recorded on most of the other days. This coincides with the date when the number of licensees hunting concurrently was the highest. Therefore, overall, there was a similar temporal trend of slightly higher counts on 20 and 23 April in both the daily counts made during the 2023 survey

and the bag count data, but the latter showed a significant peak in counts made on 29-30 April, whereas no such increase in daily counts made on 29-30 April was recorded during the 2023 survey.

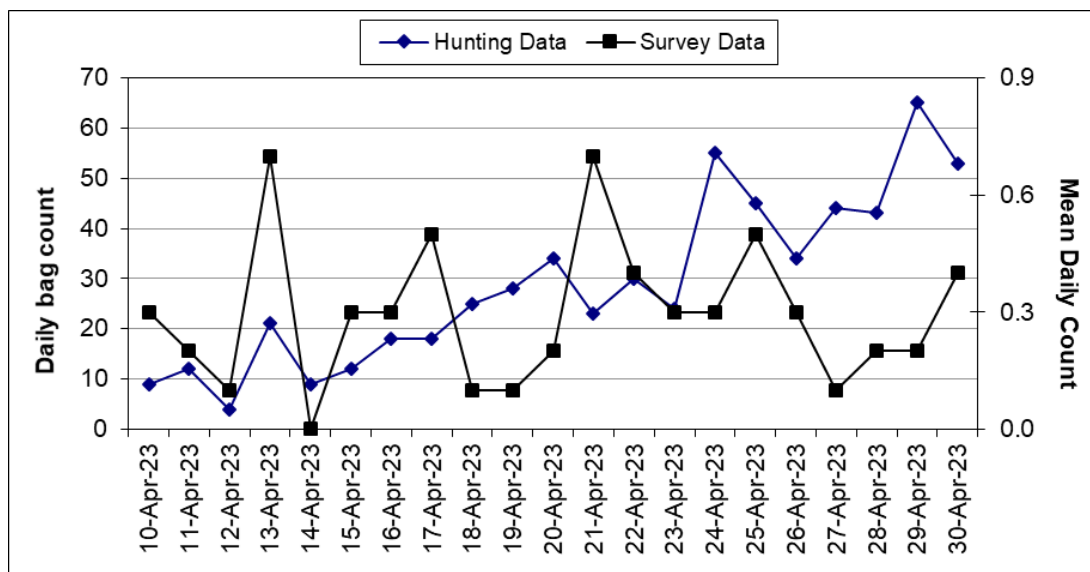
Figure 125 - Daily bag count of Turtle Dove during 2023 (blue line; values on left-side y-axis), together with the mean daily counts recorded during the 2023 survey (black line; values on right-side y-axis), for the period 18–30 April 2023.



11.4 The daily bag counts indicating the number of Common Quail caught during the 2023 spring hunting season are shown in Figure 16. As already noted, the magnitudes of the bag counts and those of the mean/total counts made in the 2023 survey are not directly comparable; hence the two sets of values are on different scales. Therefore, in Figure 16 two separate y-axes are used: the bag count data is plotted on the left-side y-axis, whereas the counts from the 2023 survey are plotted on the right-side y-axis.

11.5 The daily counts made during the 2023 survey include day-to-day fluctuations, but the overall pattern is of similar counts recorded throughout the period 10–30 April with marginally higher counts on 12 and 21 April. No overall trend of increase or decrease in daily survey counts is discernible over most of the survey period. The bag count data also included an overall pattern of similar counts recorded throughout the period 10–30 April, but with an overall increasing trend, with the highest bag count reported on 29 April. Therefore, overall, there was a trend of similar counts between 10 and 30 April in both the daily counts made during the 2023 survey and the bag count data, but with an overall increasing trend in the bag counts, which is not reflected in the daily counts made during the 2023 survey. It should be noted, however, that the total daily counts made during the 2023 survey were low, which introduces an additional difficulty in making interpretations of these comparisons.

Figure 16 - Daily bag count of Common Quail during 2023 (blue line; values on left-side y-axis), together with the mean daily counts recorded during the 2023 survey (black line; values on right-side y-axis), for the period 10–30 April 2023.



12. Enforcement

12.1 The Maltese authorities sought to maintain the level of enforcement effort deployed during previous spring hunting seasons. The Framework Regulations stipulate that a minimum of seven (7) enforcement officers for every 1,000 licensed hunters are required to be deployed during hunting hours. A total of 7,954 hunters (6,634 in Malta and 1,320 in Gozo) were issued with a spring hunting licence in 2023 and therefore a minimum of 55 enforcement personnel were needed in accordance with national legislation to supervise the derogation period (in the region of 46 officers in Malta and 9 in Gozo). Out of the total special licences issued, a total of 86 special licences remained uncollected (75 in Malta and 11 in Gozo), thus 7,868 individuals were in possession of a special licence.

12.2 Field surveillance and patrols were deployed from within the Environment Protection Unit (EPU) of the Malta Police Force with additional support from the 11 district police areas and from the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM), the Compliance Team of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit and Environmental Rangers from Ambjent Malta.

12.3 Prior to commencement of the season, enforcement officers received specialised training delivered by officials of the Compliance Section of the Wild Birds Regulation. Six training sessions were held: two in Malta and four in Gozo. Officers who attended the training sessions as well as all officers participating in enforcement received detailed information through digital platforms, namely:

- The legal framework concerning the conservation of wild birds;
- Legal requirements pertaining to the spring hunting season;
- Monitoring and surveillance techniques and approaches;
- Basic species identification skills;
- Inspections;
- Hotspots and areas requiring particular attention;and
- Potential law enforcement evasion techniques deployed by poachers.

12.4 The objectives of training and enforcement operations are:

- To ensure continuous deployment presence in the countryside to deter any potential abuse from occurring in the first place;
- To ensure that no illegal targeting of species other than Quail and Turtle-dove occurs, and that any detected incidents of abuse are dealt with swiftly and effectively (that is, apprehension of suspects and gathering sufficient field evidence to enable prosecution);
- To ensure that the general prohibitions and parameters related to the open season are enforced (such as: no hunting in prohibited areas; outside permitted hours; using prohibited means like bird callers; semi-automatic or automatic weapons with a magazine capable of holding more than two rounds of ammunition; hunting without a valid spring hunting licence); and
- To ensure that specific regulations applicable to the spring hunting derogation are enforced (such as game reporting obligation).

12.5 Specialised training sessions have been organised over the past years and enforcement statistics show that this training is demonstrating significant added value in terms of efficiency in enforcement action. Enforcement officers have also gained field experience which enables them to identify areas which require surveillance during particular days due to prevailing winds which affect migration, and are also aware of the areas commonly frequented by hunters thus enabling targeted enforcement action.

12.6 As was also the case in previous years, the enforcement operation throughout the season deployed a mix of the following approaches and techniques:

- a) **Vehicular patrols** by EPU, AFM and WBRU to ensure regular coverage of the entire Maltese countryside, with an emphasis on priority surveillance areas and hunting grounds;
- b) **Foot patrols** by uniformed officers (both the AFM and EPU) within particular locations, especially those areas with difficult vehicular access. WBRU officers also accompanied uniformed officers during some of the foot patrols;
- c) **Stationary observation posts** manned by **uniformed** and **plain-clothed** personnel, including WBRU officers. Stationary observation posts were located at vantage points within priority surveillance areas and hunting grounds;
- d) **Systematic spot-checks on individual licensees and roadblocks** at strategic vehicular entry and exit points by Police. The objective of spot-checks is two-fold: (1) to detect the possession of illegally shot protected birds or other illegal material and (2) to enforce bag limit and real-time reporting requirements; and
- e) Deployment of **covert surveillance** backed up by mobile units especially in response to large influxes of protected birds or to ensure sufficient surveillance of particular hotspots known for targeting of protected birds.

12.7 The Maltese authorities paid particular attention to collaboration with the numerous NGO volunteers who were present in the countryside during the season. These volunteers aided the overall enforcement effort by:

- Acting as a deterrent to illegal hunting by virtue of their presence in the countryside;
- Submitting vital day-to-day information about the presence of birds and alerting the authorities to the presence of high risk species or high risk sites such as roosting sites;
- Acting as ocular witnesses to illegal hunting incidents, and reporting such incidents to the authorities;
- Gathering of video/photographic evidence of poaching and making available such evidence to the enforcement authorities.

12.8 During the season, WBRU's Customer Care Branch received a number of calls from hunters wishing to report suspected or alleged irregular activity noticed directly by themselves. All

telephonic reports were immediately passed on to enforcement personnel to ensure swift action against crime.

12.9 During inspections, police forces were responsible for ensuring the lawful operation of hunting practices. Police officers were, *inter alia*, instructed to:

- Verify that hunters were in possession of all the required documents;
- Verify that Quail and Turtle-doves caught were being immediately reported in accordance with regulations;
- Ensure compliance with the provisions of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations, the Framework Regulations and the Regulations opening the spring 2023 season (L.N. 78 of 2023 and L.N. 87 of 2023);
- Ensure that no species other than Quail and Turtle-dove, were being targeted;
- Ensure compliance with bag limits and time restrictions.

12.10 During the derogation period, between 10 April and 30 April 2023, there was a daily average of 47 officers deployed in Malta and a daily average of 10 officers in Gozo deployed during morning shift⁸. Between 10 April and 30 April 2023 after 12pm, there was a daily average of 26 officers deployed in Malta and a daily average of 5 officers deployed in Gozo. Any reports received past these shifts (i.e. at night), are attended by District Police, Rapid Intervention Unit or Mobile Squad as necessary.

12.11 In addition to the above complement, throughout the spring hunting season the Wild Birds Regulation Unit deployed three compliance officers with daily deployment consisting of two teams patrolling the countryside from 6:00am till 12:30pm. WBRU officers were tasked with vehicular patrols, foot patrols within public footpaths, stationary observations and surveillance from vantage points. Moreover, 3 Environmental Rangers (Ambjent Malta) conducted patrols in terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites, other protected and scheduled areas and public rural areas. These uniformed officers are tasked with monitoring and action against different types of environmental crime and also act as deterrent against illegal activities relating to hunting. These officers also report all crime detected directly to the EPU.

12.12 During the derogation period, between 10 April and 30 April 2023, when the season was open, field officers from the Environment Protection Unit and Gozo police carried out 1,211 field inspections / patrols (1,011 in Malta and 200 in Gozo). In addition, these officers conducted 930 spot-checks on individual hunters (657 in Malta and 273 in Gozo). The Compliance Team of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit carried out 37 joint inspections with EPU at 11 locations which resulted in a total of 24 hours of compliance monitoring and inspections during the open season.

12.13 This enforcement effort cumulatively amounts to **2,141**⁹ inspections and spot-checks during the open season (10 April till 30 April 2023), which shows a slight increase in comparison to the previous year. This enforcement effort does not include efforts of District police, Rapid Intervention Unit or Mobile Squad carried out past EPU / Gozo police shifts¹⁰ or enforcement efforts carried out by Ambjent Malta's Environmental Rangers¹¹.

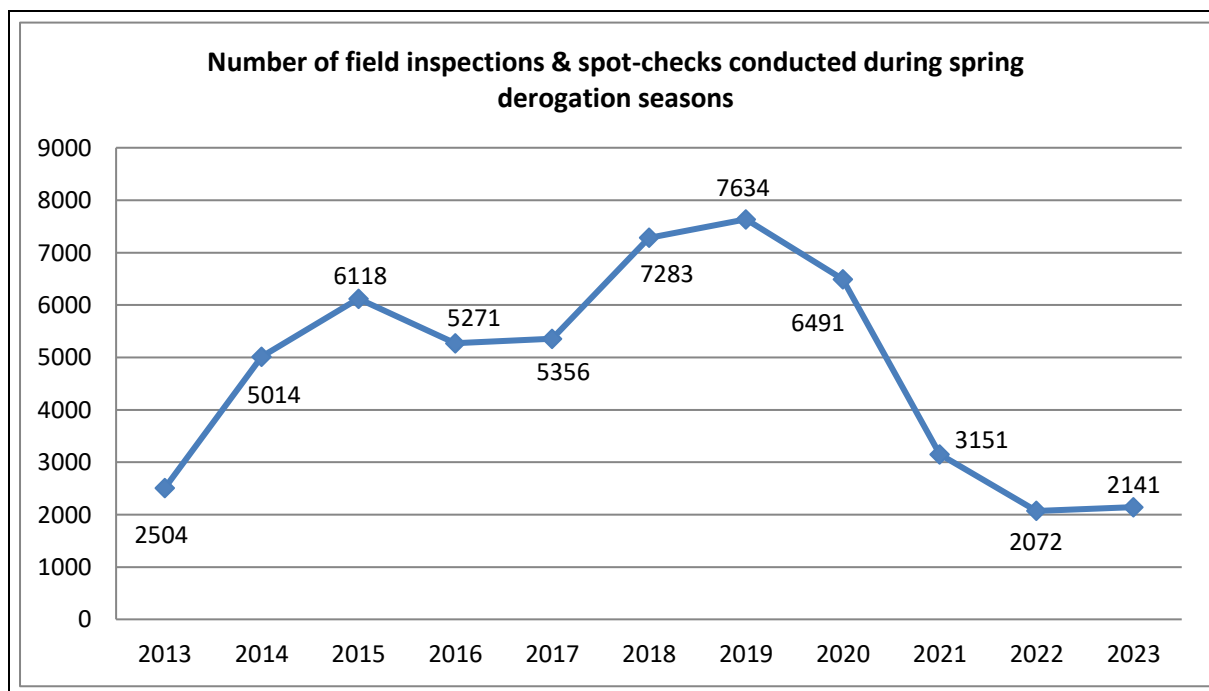
⁸ In Malta, enforcement officers operated on a two-shift basis: 0500 – 1330 and 1330 – 2130, whilst in Gozo, shift roster followed different pattern: number of officers varied between 0500–0700, 0700–1800 and 1800–2000 periods

⁹ 1,211 field inspections / patrols, 930 spot-checks on individual hunters.

¹⁰ In Malta, enforcement officers operated on a two-shift basis: 0500 – 1330 and 1330 – 2130, whilst in Gozo, shift roster followed different pattern: number of officers varied between 0500–0700, 0700–1800 and 1800–2000 periods.

¹¹ Environmental Rangers work from Monday to Friday between 0630 – 1530 and on day-in-day-out shifts from 0630 – 1830.

Figure 17 - Comparison of number of field inspections and spot-checks performed during the spring hunting seasons over the past years.



- 12.14 Following closure of the spring hunting season, the statutory enforcement deployment was maintained until Sunday 8 May with a minimum of three officers per 1,000 licencees in line with Regulation 6(4) of the Framework Regulations. Between the 1 May and 8 May, police carried out 302 field inspections / patrols (274 in Malta and 28 in Gozo).
- 12.15 In the course of these inspections and spot-checks, officers disclosed a total of 19 offences (19 in Malta and 0 in Gozo). These consist of 13 hunting offences which led to the issuing of 10 administrative fines and one court action, and 6 trapping offences which led to one court action. In total, legal action has been taken against 12 persons, 11 for hunting offences and one for trapping offences, whilst no further action could be taken on the remaining cases due to lack of information on the possible culprits which renders futile any attempt to press charges and secure a conviction.
- 12.16 All ten administrative fines were issued to hunters in possession of a spring hunting special licence and thus this shows that 0.13% of the total number of persons with an active spring hunting special licences (7,868 licences) have breached their special licence conditions and fined administratively. These fines are in the process of being settled at WBRU office.
- 12.17 Court action has been initiated against an individual holding a spring hunting special licence who was caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within less than 150 metres from an inhabited area during open season. This shows that 0.01% of the total number of persons with an active spring hunting special licence (7,868 licences) have breached their special licence conditions and will be charged in Court.
- 12.18 Enforcement data shows that between administrative fines and Court action, 11 persons have breached their special licence conditions which translates to 0.14% of all active spring hunting special licences (7,868 licences).
- 12.19 Statistics pertaining to daily enforcement deployment, daily number of field inspections and spot-checks conducted and nature of the offences detected are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11 - Enforcement deployment and offences detected during 2023 spring hunting season.

Date	Number of officers deployed 0500-1500 (EPU / District / AFM)		Number of officers deployed 1500-2100 (EPU / District / AFM)		Number of field inspections conducted (visits to specific areas)		Number of spot-checks on individual hunters ¹²		Offences detected (number of cases and nature of offence)		Number of persons charged and action taken	
	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo
10/04/2023	46	7	21	2	45	23	27	11	0	0	0	0
11/04/2023	47	10	25	6	39	8	18	4	1 Illegal Trapping ¹³	0	0 Court Action	0
12/04/2023	46	9	24	3	56	13	53	6	0	0	0	0
13/04/2023	49	12	26	3	34	4	22	14	1 Use of illegal means ¹⁴ 1 Hunting within Prohibited Distances ¹⁵	0	2 Administrative Fines	0
14/04/2023	50	12	27	5	32	4	29	10	0	0	0	0
15/04/2023	47	10	26	4	35	7	26	18	0	0	0	0
16/04/2023	50	9	25	5	45	15	28	16	0	0	0	0
17/04/2023	47	9	25	6	46	8	30	9	1 Illegal Trapping ¹⁶	0	0 Court Action	0
18/04/2023	46	11	26	5	50	5	27	14	1 Hunting within Prohibited Distances ¹⁷	0	1 Administrative Fine	0
19/04/2023	47	10	30	4	65	15	58	21	1 Use of illegal means ¹⁸	0	0 Administrative Fine	0
20/04/2023	46	10	26	5	90	8	76	12	1 Hunting within Prohibited Distances ¹⁹ 1 Use of illegal means ²⁰	0	1 Administrative Fine	0
21/04/2023	46	11	26	4	49	9	20	13	0	0	0	0
22/04/2023	46	9	25	5	60	10	25	20	2 Illegal Trapping ²¹	0	1 Court Action	0
23/04/2023	49	9	27	6	41	12	16	12	2 Hunting within prohibited distances ²² 1 Use of illegal means ²³	0	2 Administrative Fines	0
24/04/2023	46	10	27	8	45	14	15	19	0	0	0	0
25/04/2023	47	10	26	5	75	8	62	12	0	0	0	0
26/04/2023	46	10	26	5	33	9	26	7	2 Hunting within prohibited distances ²⁴	0	2 Administrative Fine	0
27/04/2023	48	9	27	8	49	10	34	13	1 Hunting within prohibited distances ²⁵	0	1 Court Action	0

¹² Including road checks.

¹³ Case refers to an unattended trapping site of unknown owner. Police seized all trapping paraphernalia however no further legal action could be taken because the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

¹⁴ Case refers to an individual caught using pre-recorded Quail calls. Police seized the birdcaller and the hunter was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

¹⁵ Case refers to an individual caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within 200 meters from an inhabited area. The culprit was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

¹⁶ Case refers to an unattended trapping site of unknown owner in Xghajra. Police seized all trapping paraphernalia however no further legal action could be taken because the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

¹⁷ Case refers to an individual caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within 200 meters from an inhabited area. The culprit was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

¹⁸ Case refers to the discovery of an unattended cage trap in Fawwara. Police seized the cage trap however no further legal action could be taken since the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

¹⁹ Case refers to an individual caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within 200 meters from an inhabited area. The culprit was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

²⁰ Case refers to the discovery of an unattended birdcaller in Bahrija. Police seized the birdcaller however no further legal action could be taken since the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

²¹ The first case refers to an individual caught trapping illegally for Turtle doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) in Mġarr during closed season where police seized all trapping paraphernalia and issued charges against the individual, whilst the second case refers to the discovery of an unattended trapping site in Mġarr where police seized all trapping paraphernalia however no further legal action could be taken since the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

²² Cases refer to two individuals caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within 200 meters from an inhabited area. The hunters were each issued with an administrative fine of €250.

²³ Case refers to the discovery of an unattended cage trap in Bidnija targeting Turtle doves (*Streptopelia turtur*). Police seized the cage trap however no further legal action could be taken since the culprit remained unknown to the Police.

²⁴ Cases refer to two individuals caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within 200 meters from an inhabited area. The hunters were each issued with an administrative fine of €250.

²⁵ Case refers to an individual caught carrying a firearm that was not in its case while within less than 150 metres from an inhabited area. Police seized the firearm and special licence and issued charges against the individual.

Date	Number of officers deployed 0500-1500 (EPU / District / AFM)		Number of officers deployed 1500-2100 (EPU / District / AFM)		Number of field inspections conducted (visits to specific areas)		Number of spot-checks on individual hunters ¹²		Offences detected (number of cases and nature of offence)		Number of persons charged and action taken	
	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo	Malta	Gozo
28/04/2023	46	9	26	7	34	4	18	13	1 Firearm Irregularity ²⁶	0	1 Administrative Fine	0
29/04/2023	47	11	27	7	59	9	33	21	0	0	0	0
30/04/2023	48	13	26	4	29	5	14	8	1 Firearm Irregularity ²⁷	0	1 Administrative Fine	0
CLOSED SEASON												
01/05/2023	25	4	25	4	30	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
02/05/2023	26	3	25	4	45	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
03/05/2023	26	4	25	4	32	3	0	0	1 Hunting during the Closed Season ²⁸	0	0 Court Action	0
04/05/2023	26	5	26	4	23	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
05/05/2023	26	5	25	4	25	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
06/05/2023	27	5	26	4	35	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
07/05/2023	26	5	26	4	43	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
08/05/2023	26	5	25	4	37	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total					1,281²⁹	228³⁰	657³¹	273³²	19	0	12	0
					1,509³³		930³⁴		19		12	

²⁶ Case refers to an individual caught using a firearm capable of holding more than two rounds of ammunition. The hunter was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

²⁷ Case refers to an individual caught using a firearm capable of holding more than two rounds of ammunition. The hunter was issued with an administrative fine of €250.

²⁸ Case refers to two hunters seen hunting during closed season in Żabbar. Police rushed to the area however the culprits managed to escape and remained unknown to the Police. Police seized a birdcaller, a Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) carcass and a number of shotgun shells from the area.

²⁹ 1,011 during open season and 270 during closed season.

³⁰ 200 during open season and 28 during closed season.

³¹ All during open season..

³² All during open season.

³³ 1,211 during open season and 298 during closed season.

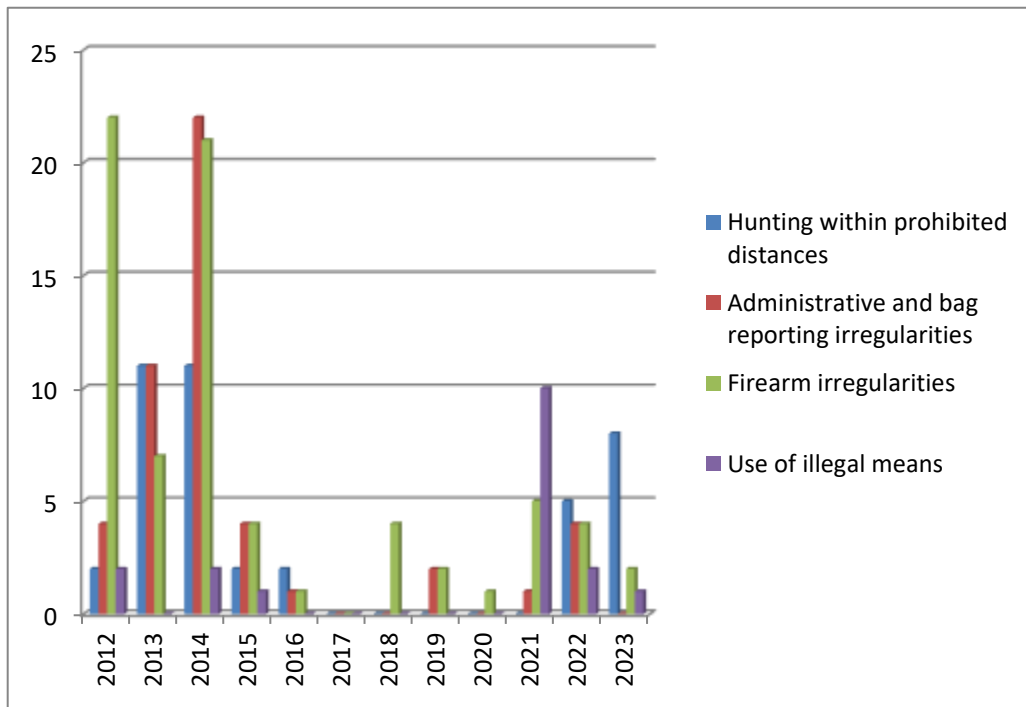
³⁴ All during open season.

12.20 Table 12 below compares the number and nature of the offences detected on which legal action was taken during 2023 spring hunting season with the corresponding statistics for the previous seasons. Figure 18 and Figure 19 illustrate the trends pertaining to detection and legal action of minor (Figure 18) and major (Figure 19) offences during the period of spring hunting derogation over the past ten years.

Table 12 - Comparison of offences detected on which legal action was taken during 2012 – 2023 spring hunting seasons.

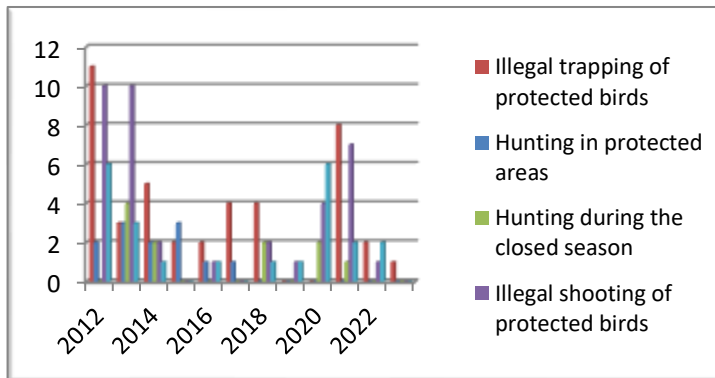
Offences detected on which legal action was taken during 2012 – 2023 spring hunting seasons												
Offences	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hunting within prohibited distances	2	11	11	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	8
Administrative and bag reporting irregularities	4	11	22	4	1	0	0	2	0	1	4	0
Firearm irregularities	22	7	21	4	1	0	4	2	1	5	4	2
Use of illegal means	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	1
Illegal trapping of protected birds	11	3	5	2	2	4	4	0	0	8	2	1
Illegal shooting of protected birds	2	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	4	7	0	0
Possession of protected species	5	1	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Hunting in protected areas	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hunting without a valid licence	10	10	2	0	1	0	1	1	6	2	2	0
Hunting during the closed season	6	3	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	1	1	0
Conspiracy of breaking the law	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total offences against which legal action was taken	64	53	69	18	9	5	17	6	13	34	20	12

Figure 18 - Analysis of the trends pertaining to the detection and legal action on minor offences during the spring hunting seasons over the past years.



Data Source: Wild Birds Regulation Unit / Malta Police, 2023

Figure 19 - Analysis of the trends pertaining to the detection and legal action on major offences during the spring hunting seasons over the past years.



Data Source: Wild Birds Regulation Unit / Malta Police, 2023

12.21 Table 13 provides a comparison between the total number of birds confirmed to have been illegally shot during the 2022 and 2023 spring hunting seasons.

Table 13 - Birds confirmed to have been illegally shot during the 2022 and 2023 spring hunting seasons.

2022 spring hunting season (10/04/2022 – 30/04/2022)			2023 spring hunting season (10/04/2023 – 30/04/2023)		
Date of retrieval	Species	Retrieved from	Date of retrieval	Species	Retrieved from
10/04/2022	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Sigġiewi	-	-	-
11/04/2022	-	-	11/04/2023	-	-
12/04/2022	-	-	12/04/2023	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Xgħajra
13/04/2022	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Santa Luċia	13/04/2023	Eurasian Hoopoe (<i>Upupa epops</i>)	Żebbuġ
				Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Magħtab
14/04/2022	-	-	14/04/2023	Montagu's Harrier (<i>Circus pygargus</i>)	Mġarr
				Eurasian stone-curlew (<i>Burhinus oedicanus</i>)	Mellieħa
15/04/2022	-	-	15/04/2023	-	-
16/04/2022	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Xagħra - Gozo	16/04/2023	-	-
	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Rabat - Malta			
	European Turtle-dove (<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>)	Sigġiewi			
17/04/2022	-	-	17/04/2023	Yellow-legged Gull (<i>Larus michahellis</i>)	Salina
				Eurasian Golden Oriole (<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>)	Salina
				Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Marsa

2022 spring hunting season (10/04/2022 – 30/04/2022)			2023 spring hunting season (10/04/2023 – 30/04/2023)		
18/04/2022	Collared-dove (<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>)	Qala, Gozo	18/04/2023	-	-
	Eurasian Hoopoe (<i>Upupa epops</i>)	Mizieb			
	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Xaghra, Gozo			
19/04/2022	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara	19/04/2023	-	-
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Xaghra, Gozo			
	Yellow-legged Gull (<i>Larus michahellis</i>)	Qala, Gozo			
20/04/2022	Collared-dove (<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>)	Selmun	20/04/2023	Lesser Kestrel (<i>Falco naumanni</i>)	Kalkara
21/04/2022	-	-	21/04/2023	-	-
22/04/2022	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara	22/04/2023	European Bee-eater (<i>Merops apiaster</i>)	Hal Far
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara		European Honey-buzzard (<i>Pernis apivorus</i>)	Salina

2022 spring hunting season (10/04/2022 – 30/04/2022)			2023 spring hunting season (10/04/2023 – 30/04/2023)		
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	Delimara			
23/04/2022	Common Cuckoo (<i>Cuculus canorus</i>)	Ghargħur	23/04/2023	European Bee-eater (<i>Merops apiaster</i>)	Delimara
	European Honey-buzzard (<i>Pernis apivorus</i>)	Delimara			
24/04/2022	Night Heron (<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>)	Luqa	24/04/2023	Yellow-legged Gull (<i>Larus michahellis</i>)	Siġġiewi
				Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Marsa
				Collared-dove (<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>)	Għadira
				Collared-dove (<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>)	Wardija
25/04/2022	European Bee-eater (<i>Merops apiaster</i>)	Żurrieq	25/04/2023	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Għarb, Gozo
	Eurasian Hobby (<i>Falco subbuteo</i>)	Siġġiewi			
	Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Sannat, Gozo		Cattle Egret (<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>)	Siġġiewi
	Eurasian Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	EPU Office			
26/04/2022	-	-	26/04/2023	European Roller (<i>Coracias garrulus</i>)	Limits of Rabat
27/04/2022	European Bee-eater (<i>Merops apiaster</i>)	Żurrieq	-	-	-
28/04/2022	Red-footed Falcon (<i>Falco vespertinus</i>)	Qormi	28/04/2023	Eurasian Golden Oriole (<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>)	Victoria, Gozo
	Osprey (<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>)	Mġarr, Gozo		Common Kestrel (<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Baħrija

2022 spring hunting season (10/04/2022 – 30/04/2022)			2023 spring hunting season (10/04/2023 – 30/04/2023)		
29/04/2022	Eurasian Golden oriole (<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>)	Cospicua	29/04/2023	Red-footed Falcon (<i>Falco vespertinus</i>)	Għaxaq
	Yellow-legged Gull (<i>Larus michahellis</i>)	Rabat, Malta			
	Purple Heron (<i>Ardea purpurea</i>)	Mġarr ix-Xini, Gozo			
30/04/2022	-	-	30/04/2023	Common Cuckoo (<i>Cuculus canorus</i>)	Miżieb
34			23		

12.22 As shown in Table 13 above, 34 illegally shot birds were reported during the previous spring hunting season (10 April – 30 April 2022) whilst during the 2023 spring hunting season, there were 23 illegally shot birds. The ratio of illegally shot birds for the open seasons during both years, that is, from the 10 to 30 April, is 0.67:1 (2023:2022). The Eurasian Marsh Harrier constituted the majority of casualties in spring 2022, however the Common Kestrel was the most illegally shot species during the 2023 spring hunting season.

12.23 In addition to enforcement deployment by the authorities, 26 hunting marshals were deployed by the Federation for Hunting and Conservation – Malta (FKNK) to assist the authorities in surveillance, whilst Kaċċaturi San Ubertu (KSU) deployed 20 observers to assist the authorities in the detection and reporting of any observed illegalities. Furthermore, various volunteers from the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and BirdLife Malta maintained a close watch for irregularities throughout the season.

12.24 As detailed in Table 11, in respect of the offences detected during the 2023 spring hunting season, Court action is being taken against two persons. A person for carrying a firearm that was not in its cover whilst less than 150 metres from an inhabited area and another person for illegally trapping for finches. In addition, 10 administrative fines were issued, two for the use of firearm with magazine capable of holding more than two cartridges in its magazine, one for the illegal use of bird caller, and seven for carrying of loaded/unloaded firearm that was not in its case within 200 metres from any town or village or other inhabited area.

12.25 The minimum enforcement deployment as set out in Framework Regulations was not only met but also exceeded. Additionally, the number of spot-checks have increased when compared to 2022 with the absolute majority of offences detected being effectively investigated and prosecuted.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1 The application of the 2023 spring hunting derogation was preceded by a series of analyses that considered all relevant legal, scientific and technical aspects pertaining to this derogation, as well as by an open and transparent discussion with stakeholders.
- 13.2 As a result of these processes, the decision to apply the derogation was made after ascertaining that there is no other satisfactory solution, and that the following critical prerequisites will be met:
- The derogation will satisfy all the relevant requirements of the Birds Directive, and specifically the parameters stipulated in Articles 9(1) and 9(1)(c) thereof.
 - The actual implementation of the derogation on the ground will ensure that the relevant legal parameters will be respected in the field through an elaborate and robust enforcement regime.
- 13.3 Throughout the period of this derogation, the priority of the Maltese authorities was to ensure that all parameters of the derogation were met in practice. Although the decline in the number of illegally shot protected birds during recent years is evident, both during and on the margins of the spring hunting season, further preventive measures are still required to totally curb this illegality. In this regard, the Maltese authorities are actively working to address this issue by, inter alia, ensuring effective enforcement to deter, detect and prosecute bird-related crime and by addressing the key motives for IKB-related crime, including illegal taxidermy.