



Start of 2018 autumn hunting season should be postponed to mid-October

Figures released today show that 2018 could be the worst year for the illegal killing of protected birds

- *BirdLife Malta writes to Prime Minister Joseph Muscat asking him to delay the start of the next hunting season until October 15th*
- *Only this would send out a clear message by the Government that flagrant abuse, such as the recent massacre of White Storks, will not be tolerated any more*
- *Other eNGOs support the request, whose aim is to ensure protected birds migrating over Malta during the next six weeks are not shot down*
- *The next step should be the setting up of the Wildlife Crime Unit, which now enjoys the unanimous support of the Ornithologists Committee*

A few days before the scheduled opening of this year's autumn hunting season this Saturday 1st September, BirdLife Malta's Council has written a letter to Prime Minister Joseph Muscat requesting that the start of the next hunting season is postponed to mid-October. This request enjoys the support of several other eNGOs such as [Flimkien Għal Ambjent Aħjar](#), [Friends of the Earth Malta](#), [Nature Trust-FEE Malta](#), [Din l-Art Hejwa](#), [fish4tomorrow](#) and [Sharklab-Malta](#).

Only this, states the letter, would send out a clear message by the Government that flagrant abuse and hunting illegalities such as the recent massacre of protected White Storks will not be tolerated any more.

During the past weeks, [18 White Storks](#) were shot down across Malta. The letter to the Prime Minister explains that this species forms part of the huge success being registered across Europe thanks to assistance by local governments leading to an increase in its numbers, with many of these birds also being permitted to nest on the roofs of houses. On the other hand, what happened in our country is shameful.

Apart from these storks, we had other birds which were shot down by hunters. However this remains only a fraction of the reality in Malta's countryside and is symptomatic of bad decisions which were based on wrong advice. It is high time that the Prime Minister takes concrete steps which would not only be visible but also executive, thus taking immediate action to prove that such behaviour will not be tolerated any more and illegal hunting is restrained.

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This, states BirdLife Malta, can only be done by delaying the opening of the autumn hunting season until the 15th of October whilst requesting the police to be more present and visible in Malta and Gozo's countryside. This would be crucial since the upcoming weeks will mark the period when thousands of protected birds of prey and other birds will be migrating over the Maltese Islands. The period after the 15th of October up to the 31st of January 2019 would still remain open for the hunting of legally huntable species.

In the letter to Dr Muscat, BirdLife Malta also reiterated that the next step would be the setting up of a Wildlife Crime Unit as part of the Malta Police Force, equipped with the adequate resources to make sure that Malta's environmental laws are seriously enforced. This request, for once, enjoys the unanimous support of the Ornithological Committee.

"Although there is much more to be done, we insist that at least for now you accept these requests we are making so that we ensure *l-aqwa żmien ta' pajjiżna* also in terms of the protection of our natural environment," the letter continues, whilst adding that this is being requested so that protected birds such as birds of prey, herons and storks which will be migrating over Malta during the next six weeks, and seek refuge in our country, are met with adequate protection and less risk of ending up as casualties of illegal hunting.

"Now is the time for the Government to prove that it can be taken seriously when it says it will not tolerate the flagrant abuse of Malta's environmental laws. It is also the time for the Maltese Government to declare its support to the absolute majority of Maltese citizens who are fed up with the illegal killing of protected birds," stated BirdLife Malta President Darryl Grima and CEO Mark Sultana on behalf of the BirdLife Malta Council in their letter to the PM.

In a [press conference](#) held at its offices in Ta' Xbiex a few hours after the letter was officially delivered to PM Muscat at Castille, BirdLife Malta also released [figures](#) which show that 2018 could be the worst year for the illegal killing of protected birds. Although we are still in August, the number of known shot protected birds recovered by BirdLife Malta and the police since the start of this year has already reached [a total of 44](#) which is nearly double the amount of the same period (January-August) last year and already more than half the total for 2017 as a full year.

The known shot protected birds retrieved during the past five years hit their highest point last year with a total of 82 birds between January and December. Prior to this, the highest number of casualties was registered in 2013 with a total of 76 known shot protected birds. In the following years (2014, 2015 and 2016) the numbers had decreased but illegal hunting casualties started to rise again substantially in 2017 reaching a five-year record. As things stand after the first eight months of 2018, unfortunately it looks like last year's record will be broken. In fact should the number of protected birds shot between September and December this year be similar to the same period last year, it would mean that 2018 would be the worst year for illegal hunting, ironically the same year in which the Prime Minister promised a better scenario.

This afternoon's press conference was addressed by BirdLife Malta President Darryl Grima, CEO Mark Sultana and Conservation Manager Nicholas Barbara. During today's press conference BirdLife Malta officials also declared their support to other NGOs which are being subjected to verbal abuse and threats after they voiced their opinions on the hunting situation in Malta, especially after the illegal killing of the White Storks.



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ENDS

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Attachments:

- Illegal killing comparison 2013-2018
- The list of 44 known shot protected birds recovered between January and August 2018

Useful links (click to open):

- [Information about the hunting seasons and hunting regulations](#)
- [BirdLife Malta press release issued after the killing of the first four White Storks in Dingli](#)
- [BirdLife Malta reaction following the news of a further three White Storks being shot in Magħtab](#)
- [CABS press release about the last surviving White Stork](#)

Download photos here: <https://we.tl/t-6PmlHRMxei> (All photos by BirdLife Malta)

1. Shot White Stork in Dingli
2. Shot White Storks at Magħtab
3. The last surviving Stork before it disappeared
4. The most recent known shot protected bird this year, a Night Heron recovered from Għaxaq
- 5-11. A selection of photos from today's press conference

Download footage here (click to open):

1. [The illegal shooting of White Storks in Dingli](#) and [the recovery of one of the storks](#)
2. [The last surviving White Stork before it disappeared](#)
3. [Today's press conference](#)

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