



2nd October 2009

Spring hunting 2010

On the 10th September, 2009, the Court of Justice of the European Communities (ECJ) accepted the following facts:

1. In the case of Malta, autumn hunting is not another satisfactory alternative to spring hunting;
2. Malta is not on the central Mediterranean bird-migration flyway;
3. The turtledove (*Streptopelia turtur*) and the quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) – the only two species traditionally hunted on Malta in spring – are classified as *Of Least Concern* by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature).

At the same time the ECJ found against the Government of Malta for not abiding strictly by the conditions of the spring-hunting derogation that had been applied for the years 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 in terms of the EU “Birds” Directive.

BirdLife International and FACE (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation in the EU) prior to the verdict in a joint media release overtly declared that they would respect the ECJ decision, and encouraged others to act likewise. However BirdLife International, local partner BirdLife Malta, have already started trying to undermine the ECJ ruling. They are doing that by concentrating on the Maltese Government’s failure, and by completely ignoring the cardinal points at the crux of the matter.

BirdLife Malta need to accept once and for all the first three above-mentioned points, all of which now have the approval stamp of the European Court of Justice. From now on BirdLife Malta should desist from their hitherto persistent distortion of the fundamental truths concerning Maltese hunting.

The ECJ is clear and unequivocal on the determining facts of Maltese hunting:

1. Autumn hunting is no satisfactory substitute for spring hunting;
2. Malta is definitely not on the central Mediterranean bird-migration path;

3. The two Maltese spring quarry species (turtledoves and quails) are widespread and abundant.

Instead of indulging in scare-mongering tactics clearly aimed at preventing the Maltese Prime-Minister from applying a derogation allowing spring hunting in 2010, we expect BirdLife Malta to offer their professed expertise to assist the Maltese Government to prepare for this exercise. Justice, in the form of the European Court, has decreed that the hunters should be allowed spring hunting. The Maltese Government is morally bound to open the spring hunting season. The ECJ ruling has compounded the Government's obligations towards the hunting community.

Instead of planning publicity stunts such as the recent suspect "discovery" of a bird-cemetery at the hunting reserve of Miżieb, BirdLife Malta should face up to the new reality and abide by the letter and spirit of the FACE/BirdLife International statement. Instead of concentrating their efforts on roping in the world media against tiny Malta, the birding organization should embark on projects aimed at a greater increase in the populations of the two species, assuming it is truly love for birds that spurs them on.

Lino Farrugia

Mark Mifsud Bonnici

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