



6th November 2009

Anti-Finch Trapping BirdLife Malta International Seminar in Malta

The Federation for Hunting & Conservation – Malta (FKNK) is informed that an international seminar will be held locally by BirdLife on 11th November at the St. James Cavalier in Valletta as part of the LIFE+ EU funded anti-finch trapping project.

The FKNK knows well that the project's ultimate aim is to abolish the traditional socio-cultural passion of finch-capturing practised by thousands of Maltese. Consequently the FKNK has good reason to believe that this "international seminar" is being organized to unfairly and unjustly further tarnish Malta and the Maltese *internationally*.

Furthermore, the FKNK is aware that the government - through MEPA - had agreed to contribute €30,000 towards the project, on the condition that trappers participate. As far as can be ascertained, this condition has not been met, and MEPA have, therefore, refused to pay up.

For the above-stated reasons the FKNK has refused an invitation to participate at the Seminar, as we would have done if BirdLife Malta's intentions had been genuine. Moreover the FKNK wishes to request its trapper members who may be approached by BirdLife on this issue to first contact the FKNK before replying.

For the first time in the history of the Maltese islands, the Maltese traditional socio-cultural passion of finch-capturing practised by thousands of enthusiasts was not permitted this autumn. The present government took this step, notwithstanding the fact that even the EU Accession Treaty specifies that finch-capturing may continue in a limited form after 31st December 2008, and, indeed, notwithstanding also that the European Commission Representation in Malta in March 2009 publicly declared "...Malta can, along with all other member states, apply a derogation to permit trapping to continue." The several promises and guarantees, political but also official, made by government in writing to every individual trapper were also ignored.

Why should then both the EU Commission and the Malta government, which makes the final decision about which Life+ projects are selected in Malta, contribute public funds to abolish a practice that the same government has opted not to permit this year anyway, despite the fact that EU regulations permit it through the application of a derogation?

And, to add insult to injury, Malta's main negotiator over hunting and trapping in the run-up to EU membership is also involved in this campaign against trapping. Media Today co-owner and editor Saviour Balzan is an associate beneficiary of over €157,000 funds granted by the EU for this controversial 'Stop Trapping in Malta' campaign. Before Malta's accession to the EU in 2004, Mr. Balzan was engaged by the government as a paid consultant to negotiate the highly sensitive 'hunting and trapping' dossier on Malta's behalf. It is surely unethical and incorrect that Mr. Balzan who was the man paid to deal with the EU on behalf of hunters and trappers is now campaigning against trappers and, to boot, getting money from the EU to do so.

Finally, the FKNK makes it clear that, just as it did in the case of traditional spring-hunting, it will step up its efforts in favour of traditional and sustainable finch-capturing.

Lino Farrugia

Secretary – FKNK

Finch-Capturing in Malta - A local traditional socio-cultural passion, finch capturing is carried out on a small scale, with selective clap-nets, for the purpose of keeping the caught birds alive in captivity (no finch is ever killed), where they outlive by several years the birds in the wild. The kept birds are eventually used as live-decoys, call-birds, show-birds, for their song and for captive breeding. The birds in question are the linnets, serins, siskins, hawfinches, chaffinches, goldfinches and greenfinches. All these birds enjoy a very healthy conservation status in the wild and are classified by the IUCN under the taxon of 'least concern'.