

Campaigners say protected birds in danger in Malta

24 April 2014



A billboard encouraging government to abolish spring hunting in Malta on March 8, 2008

Campaigners on Thursday said protected migratory birds were being shot in Malta and called for an exemption from EU hunting rules for the island state to be scrapped.

The Committee Against Bird Slaughter's general secretary Alexander Heyd said only "a small percentage" of [illegal activities](#) by hunters were actually being documented.

"Our teams can only monitor a small part of the island" during the spring [hunting](#) season, he said.

A video from the group on YouTube shows two kestrels and two marsh harriers being targeted by hunters.

But the government defended itself from accusations that it was not doing enough to clamp down on [illegal hunting](#).

A spokesman said that since the start of the season on April 12, several thousand migrating protected birds were had been spotted flying over

the Maltese islands, including a rare long-legged buzzard.

"A total of 24 suspected offenders were apprehended by [law enforcement officers](#) carrying out routine field patrols, inspections and spot checks on individual hunters up to last week," the spokesman said.

Spring hunting is not allowed in the EU but is possible in Malta through a derogation of the EU Birds Directive, despite fierce opposition from conservationists.

Hunting is allowed in spring for turtle doves and quail although even those species have become a concern because their numbers are declining rapidly in Europe.

A petition calling for a referendum to ban spring hunting has garnered 43,000 signatures which are currently being verified by Maltese authorities.

Referendums in Malta require signatures from 10 per cent of Maltese voters which amounts to nearly 33,500 people.

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APA citation: Campaigners say protected birds in danger in Malta (2014, April 24) retrieved 20 October 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-04-campaigners-birds-danger-malta.html>

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