

WILL YOU LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR NATURE?

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, EEB (European Environmental Bureau), Friends of the Earth Europe and WWF European Policy Office call on Commissioner Karmenu Vella to take decisive action in his remaining time as EU Environment Commissioner to improve the implementation and enforcement of the EU's world-leading nature laws – the Birds & Habitats Directives¹.

Threats to birds and the implementation and enforcement of the EU Birds & Habitats Directives

The #NatureAlert Countdown is on! But there is still time to take action to save threatened wildlife and habitats across Europe, such as the threatened finches of Malta!

European biodiversity is in freefall. Major gaps in the implementation and enforcement of our nature laws are leaving our natural heritage dangerously exposed. Bird populations – a barometer of ecosystem health – are collapsing across the continent. The threat of illegal shooting, trapping, poisoning and collision or electrocution is having a massive impact on bird populations, particularly migratory birds, like vultures and many raptors. Scientific reviews have recently estimated that around 24 million birds are illegally killed each year by shooting, trapping or poisoning in the Mediterranean alone. With many species already brought to the brink by habitat loss and climate change, we must urgently address these illegal threats through better law enforcement and better planning of energy infrastructure.



SAVE THE FINCHES OF MALTA



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Nestled at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, the islands of Malta lie on one of Europe's most important migratory bird flyways. Twice a year, millions of migratory birds pass over as they make their epic journey between their southern wintering grounds and northern breeding grounds and back again. The journey is already long and difficult, but it is made all the more dangerous by the threat of illegal shooting and trapping.

On the island of Gozo, the Irdumijiet ta' Għawdex Natura 2000 site is a prime location for the illegal trapping of wild finches as they migrate along coastal areas in both spring and autumn. Finch trapping was made illegal in Malta back in 2009, however, the introduction of a derogation in 2014 allowed for the trapping of seven finch species once again. These include Eurasian Siskins, European Goldfinches, European Serins, Common Linnets, European Greenfinches, Common Chaffinches and Hawfinches.

Finch trapping has many devastating effects for the environment. Apart from the eradication of these song birds, thousands of other species end up caught in the nets and traps as well. Furthermore, vast areas of land are cleared annually to allow for the installation of traps. It is estimated that the land used for trapping is equivalent to 42 football pitches.

On 21st June 2018, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) delivered a judgement concluding that Malta was guilty of infringing the EU Birds Directive when it allowed finch trapping to reopen in 2014. The ECJ clearly stated that by adopting a derogation allowing the trapping of these seven species of wild finch, Malta has failed to fulfil its obligations under EU law. Though Malta now risks receiving severe fines unless it ends this practice, the trapping of finches continues in defiance of this ruling.

¹ [January 2019. 'Joint Policy Brief on the Implementation and Enforcement of the Birds & Habitats Directives'](#)

**The #NatureAlert countdown is on!
Will you, Commissioner Vella, leave a lasting legacy for nature?**

Make sure the European Commission closely monitors the situation in Malta to ensure that the ruling of the European Court of Justice is implemented and enforced.

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