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# Press Release

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AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND ANIMAL RIGHTS**

*Illegal use of bird callers declined by 60% over pre-2013 levels*

Reference is made to Birdlife Malta's press release, and to a similar statement issued by CABS, claiming "unregulated" and "rampant" use of illegal bird callers. Whilst condemning any illegal activity, the Government refutes the allegation of "unregulated rampant use of bird callers which is on the increase". Contrary to these claims, illegal use of bird callers has declined by over 60% since 2012 (72 cases in 2012, 66 cases in 2013, 43 cases in 2014, 34 cases in 2015 and 29 cases in 2016). Prior to the introduction of the new administrative fines system in October 2013, illegal use of bird callers was an offence that was punishable only upon court conviction. Court proceedings took many months to complete, resulting in offenders being meted out with a €232.94 fine. In October 2013, the new administrative fines system was introduced and has so far proved to be incomparably more effective in addressing illegal use of bird callers. Under the new system, anyone caught using a bird caller is automatically fined €250 without the need for lengthy court proceedings and this fine is payable within 21 days whilst the equipment is confiscated and destroyed. Since 2013, field enforcement has more than doubled over the 2012 levels, and therefore one cannot reasonably argue that the decrease in disclosure of illegal bird callers is due to lack of enforcement action. Moreover, although it is logistically difficult to locate and dismantle such illegal electronic devices at night, the authorities nonetheless do their utmost to cooperate with NGOs to locate and disarm these devices. Last year, several night patrols were conducted in the autumn, and at least on one occasion a joint patrol was held between the Malta Police and CABS volunteers that led to the location and dismantlement of 15 illicit devices. Although this is very demanding on the limited enforcement resources, the Police is planning such extra night operations that will take place over the next few days during peak Golden Plover migration. These extra patrols complement routine enforcement operations that are conducted in two shifts between 0500 and 2130.

The assumption made by the NGOs in their statements that reports of illegal bird callers at night are somehow equated with illegal trapping at night is incorrect and in this regard a distinction needs to be made. Although both are illegal, a pre-recorded bird caller at night does not automatically imply that a trapping site is active. In fact, on most occasions, illegal bird callers are well camouflaged to hamper detection and are electronically programmed to become active at specific periods of the night, usually early hours of the morning (most commonly between 02:30 and 05:00). These stationary automatic devices are mostly used to attract target huntable species to the site to enable their shooting or capture during permitted hours early in the morning. The actual incidence of physical trapping activity at night is not as widespread as is being claimed by NGOs. So far, since the start of this year's autumn season, the authorities took legal action against 29 individuals caught

**Attachments: none**

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using bird callers (11 whilst trapping and 18 whilst hunting). Notwithstanding the considerable logistical difficulties of detecting these devices at night and apprehending individuals using them, the Maltese authorities are confident that these illegalities, which are not as widespread as claimed by the NGOs, are being gradually eradicated, through patrols, better coordination, more awareness-raising, and high penalties for abuse.