



FKNK

Conserving the Indigenous Socio-Cultural Tradition of Live-Finch Capturing on Malta

Preamble:

This Paper has been prepared as supporting documentation to the Federation for Hunting & Conservation – Malta (FKNK) legislation proposals to conserve the indigenous socio-cultural tradition of live-finch capturing in autumn/winter on Malta, which practice, so passionately following by thousands of Maltese trappers, was suspended on 31st December 2008.

Thus, having regard to:

1.0 Extract from the “Guidance document on Hunting under the Birds Directive”p.59:

3.5.23 9(1)(c)A fundamental question arises as to whether hunting can constitute a "judicious use" for the purposes of Article 9(1)(c). This question has now been answered by the Court in Case C-182/02 Ligue pour la protection des oiseaux and others. Based on previous case-law¹²⁰, the Court stated that:

“It is clear from the foregoing that the hunting of wild birds for recreational purposes during the periods mentioned in Article 7(4) of the Directive may constitute a judicious use authorised by Article 9(1)(c) of that directive, as do the capture and sale of wild birds even outside the hunting season with a view to keeping them for use as live decoys or to using them for recreational purposes in fairs and markets”;

1.1 The fact that the 5 year transitional period between 2003 and 2008, negotiated between the Maltese Government and the EU, has elapsed and is a closed chapter;

1.2 Malta’s legal and possible right to apply derogations to permit the live-capture with traditional selective manually-operated clap-nets, of seven finch species;

- 1.3** The reality that any caught finch is never killed;
- 1.4** The present situation that Maltese trappers have no other satisfactory alternative solution to live-finch capturing;
- 1.5** Article 8 1. of the “Birds” Directive, which prohibits the use of nets for the taking of birds from the wild. It has to be emphasized that the prohibition **only** applies when such use causes large-scale or non-selective capture, or is capable of causing the local disappearance of a species;
- 1.6** Article 9.1(c) Derogations from the “Birds” Directive four sub-conditions, namely small numbers, judicious use, selectivity and strictly supervised conditions, which can all be satisfied as explained further on in this Paper;
- 1.7** FACE Med Malta Memorandum and Petition presented in Maltese Parliament.¹
- 1.8** The published letter of Ms. Nicoletta Flessati, press officer, European Commission, Representation in Malta, Ta' Xbiex, of 7th March 2009, wherein it is stated: “Following the expiry of this period under the Treaty, Malta can, along with all other member states, apply a derogation to permit trapping to continue.”²

¹ Annexes I & II

² Annex III

2.0 Alternative Satisfactory Solution

The Maltese trapper has been left without an **alternative satisfactory solution** and this Paper hopes to justify the claims for the application of a derogation and hence the re-activation of a significantly shortened legal live-finch capturing season during autumn/winter.

Live-finch capturing for the Maltese trapper is not some kind of hobby or sports, but an integral part of each individual's way of life. This way of life is what has evolved into Maltese traditional socio-cultural passions (very romantically termed *namra* in the Maltese language. The same word is used when a couple courts. "*Namra* is the semantic equivalent of the hunting '*pathos*' of the Mediterranean island of Zakynthos (see Theodossopoulos 2003), the '*passione*' of Italian hunters, the '*Jagdfieber*' of German-speaking countries, and the 'bug' that afflicts hunters in the US. [Dr. Mark-Anthony Falzon Ph.D.(Cantab.)³"]. Take away this way of life, and that kills or rather murders an integral part of that individual. The trapper has nothing to look forward to in life or plan for at different time intervals of the year as he would have been accustomed to do with such loving dedication throughout his living years. He would have nothing to dream about, pray for, hope for, dress-up for. He would not be much to socialize, both his mental and physical health will suffer, he may look elsewhere, and maybe not always in the healthiest environments especially with the younger generation, for 'alternatives', to find no such thing, he may fail to perform in work and even in sex, his family and friends relationships will suffer. In fact he might have nothing else to live for. He will suffer mental depression verging on suicidal.

One would not expect non-trappers to understand nor grasp the seriousness of the forgoing statements. Put bluntly it is tantamount to having someone whom you would have loved throughout your life, mother, father, daughter, son: murdered. And the same hurt will emerge with every approach of spring and autumn. Your loved ones will be mercilessly murdered year-in year-out.

Malta's EU negotiated package regarding the trapping tradition, wherein finches breeding in captivity was said to replace the capturing of the same species from the wild,

³ Paper – A Passion for Birds 2007 Dr. Mark Anthony Falzon Ph.D.(Cantab.)

is simply utter nonsense. How would a similar arrangement sound to an angler who would be asked to pack-up his fishing gear and enjoy fish bred in an aquarium in the comfort of his home!

However whilst on fishing, the catch-and-release method is certainly something one should look into when considering possible alternatives to trapping.

It is the uncertainty, wait, hope and *fever* that is experienced by a traditional trapper who challenges his wits against those of an ever alert migratory wild finch species, and the rewarding moment when a catch is made, *il-qelba*, that make trappers tick and what they live for.

Finally, the 'catch-and-release' aspect which could include an aspect of bird-ringing and breeding in captivity, just as long as the trappers is allowed to retain a small stock of the caught birds for the following trapping season that he may use as live call and decoy birds (*biex ikollu xi' rabbi*), should maybe also be investigated further.

The “small numbers” principle: Limit in the order of 1% of mortality:

3.0 General

The 7 *fringillidae* species are all evaluated under the taxon: Least Concern. The global population size and breeding/resident range of these finches are extremely large and stand between 500,000,000 and 1,550,000,000 individuals, spread over more than 21,000,000 square kilometres.

3.1 Small numbers condition

All accredited texts relating to European finches describe these birds as *partial migrants*, in that not all leave the European continent during the autumnal equinox. Furthermore migration over the Maltese Islands during this seasonal period is completely dependant on wind and weather shifts, thus only a small subset of the species ever reach the Islands.

Indeed each seasonal catch completely differs from the previous one insofar as live-finch capture data is concerned. Reliable studies carried out in 2004 (National Statistics Office Finch Survey) and FKNK commissioned studies in 2007 on live-finch capture, including *Carnet de Chasse* data (2005 - 2008) all average at each trapper catching 20 birds per capita per season, again certain seasons were and will be extremely poor in terms of live-finch capture due to the unpredictability of each season, the 2006 live-finch capture season is a typical example of extremely low numbers caught.

3.2 Mortality Rate of the 7 finch Species

The mortality rates for the 7 finch species in question, being highly predated birds, is high, but they possess the *r* breeding factor in that their reproduction rate is also extremely high. Replacement clutches averaging 4 per clutch is the norm. The Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* , Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* , Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* and Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* have the highest reproduction rate, averaging at 10 fledglings per pair, whilst the Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* has the lowest reproduction rate, averaging at 6 fledglings per pair.⁴

⁴ Dr. G. Micali 2008, Lars Jonsson & C. Holm 1992

3.3 Workings

Based on the EU Guidance Document the mortality rates of the Greenfinch *C. chloris*, Chaffinch *F. coelebs*, Goldfinch *C. carduelis*, Linnet *C. cannabina*, Siskin *C. spinus*, Serin *S. serinus* and Hawfinch *C. coccothraustes* are based on two key reference sources;

Birds of the Western Palearctic (BWP), vol VIII (2002),

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Robinson RA, Bird Facts (2005).

The calculation of the 'small number' figure for the 7 finch species, equivalent to 1% of the total annual mortality rate, is based on the criteria established by the EU Commission itself in the Guidance Document for Hunting as related to the "Birds" Directive, and the data used is based on the figures as provided by BirdLife International.

Greenfinch *C. chloris*

Breeding success for the Greenfinch would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 55% (adult) and 58% (juvenile). Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Greenfinch = 21 - 48 million pairs = 42 - 96 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France greenfinches have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 6.4 million individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

$42,000,000 - 6,400,000 = 35,600,000$ greenfinches (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair (17.8m x 3) = 53,400,000

Mortality rates @ 58% of 1st year chicks (53.4m x 58%) = 30,972,000

Mortality rates @ 55% of adults (35.6m x 55%) = 19,580,000

Total Annual mortality (30,972,000 + 19,580,000) = 50,552,000

1% of total annual mortality (50,552,000 x 1%) = **505,520**.

Goldfinch *C. carduelis*

Breeding success for the Goldfinch would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 63% (adult) and 66% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Goldfinch = 18 - 43.5 million pairs = 36 - 87 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France goldfinches have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 5,626,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

$36,000,000 - 5,626,000 = 30,374,000$ goldfinches (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair ($15.187\text{m} \times 3$) = 45,561,000

Mortality rates @ 66% of 1st year chicks ($45.561\text{m} \times 66\%$) = 30,070,260

Mortality rates @ 63% of adults ($30.374\text{m} \times 63\%$) = 19,135,620

Total annual mortality ($30,070,260 + 19,135,620$) = 49,205,880

1% of total annual mortality ($49,205,880 \times 1\%$) = **492,050**.

Linnet *C. cannabina*

Breeding success for the Linnet would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 63% (adult) and 66% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Linnet = 15 - 42 million pairs = 30 - 84 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France linnets have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 7,100,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

$30,000,000 - 7,100,000 = 22,900,000$ linnets (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair ($11.45\text{m} \times 3$) = 34,350,000

Mortality rates @ 66% of 1st year chicks ($34.35\text{m} \times 66\%$) = 22,671,000

Mortality rates @ 63% of adults (22.9m x 63%) = 14,427,000

Total annual mortality (22,671,000 + 14,427,000) = 37,098,000

1% of total annual mortality (37,098,000 x 1%) = **370,980**.

Siskin *C. spinus*

Breeding success for the Siskin would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 54% (adult) and 55% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Siskin = 15 - 27 million pairs = 30 - 54 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France siskins have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 778,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

30,000,000 - 778,000 = 29,222,000 siskins (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair (14.6m x 3) = 43,800,000

Mortality rates @ 55% of 1st year chicks (43.8m x 55%) = 24,090,000

Mortality rates @ 54% of adults (29.222m x 54%) = 15,779,880

Total annual mortality (24,090,000 + 15,779,880) = 39,869,880

1% of total annual mortality (39,869,880 x 1%) = **398,698**.

Chaffinch *F. coelebs*

Breeding success for the Chaffinch would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 41% (adult) and 47% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Chaffinch= 195 - 360 million pairs = 390 - 720 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France chaffinches have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 15,200,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

390,000,000 - 15,200,000 = 374,800,000 chaffinches (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair (187.4m x 3) = 562,000,000

Mortality rates @ 47% of 1st year chicks (562m x 47%) = 264,234,000

Mortality rates @ 41% of adults (374.8m x 41%) = 153,668,000

Total annual mortality (264,234,000 +153,668,000) = 417,902,000

1% of total annual mortality (417,902,000 x 1%) = **4,179,020**

Serin *S. serinus*

Breeding success for the Serin would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 40% (adult) and 44% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Serin = 12.45 - 30 million pairs = 24.9 - 60 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France serins have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 6,000,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

24,900,000 - 6,000,000 = 18,900,000 serins (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair (9.45m x 3) = 28,953,000

Mortality rates @ 44% of 1st year chicks (28.9m x 47%) = 12,474,000

Mortality rates @ 40% of adults (18.9m x 41%) = 7,749,000

Total annual mortality (12,474,000 + 7,749,000) = 20,223,000

1% of total annual mortality (20,223,000 x 1%) = **202,230**

Hawfinch *C. coccothraustes*

Breeding success for the Hawfinch would be 3-4 chicks per pair (the more accepted representative figures), [BTO Research Report, Bird Facts (2005)]. Mortality rate will be calculated @ 51% (adult) and 34% (juvenile).

Breeding populations, (latest figures):

Hawfinch = 3.6 - 6.3 million pairs = 7.2 - 12.6 million individuals. The UK, Iberian and France hawfinches have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago, these finches amount to a total of 60,000 individuals, therefore these numbers will be deducted from the remaining European populations.

$7,200,000 - 60,000 = 7,140,000$ hawfinches (less the UK, Iberia and France populations).

All figures used are based on the lowest estimates:

Method

Minimum breeding success @ 3 chicks fledged per pair ($3.57m \times 3$) = 10,710,000

Mortality rates @ 34% of 1st year chicks ($10.7m \times 34\%$) = 2,427,600

Mortality rates @ 51% of adults ($7.14m \times 51\%$) = 3,641,400

Total annual mortality ($2,427,600 + 3,641,400$) = 6,069,000

1% of total annual mortality ($6,069,000 \times 1\%$) = **60,690**.

It is scientifically proven that migrating birds move south/south-west during the autumn migration (post-nuptial) from the northern hemispheres. Birds from the European continent disperse, albeit some, partially (partial migrants), as is the case for the 7 European finches, BWP (2002).

Therefore to be scientifically correct, European finches resident or breeding in the United Kingdom (including Ireland), Spain and Portugal (Iberian Peninsula) and France, amounting to a total of 42,000,000 finches from the 7 species (BTO, IUCN), have been removed from the remaining European continent numbers. These finches resident or breeding in these countries have never been recorded as passage migrants over the Maltese Archipelago according to reliable scientific data, (BLM ringed records).

4.0 Judicious Use

Live-finch capture does not and never did constitute the culling or killing of the caught specimen. The caught finches are:

- 4.1** Cared for zealously by the trapper so as to provide a healthy stock for the following season, an arduous task which entails daily bird husbandry;
- 4.2** Finches caught are never sold by the traditional trapper, although some trappers do exchange birds;
- 4.3** The best quality care is devoted to the caught finches so that the finches acclimatise and come into full song due to their incredible adaptability to the surroundings;
- 4.4** All caught finches housed in trapping cages, during the trapping season, are never short of food and water. The traditional trapper has even devised methods to shelter the caged finches from inclement weather during a typical trapping day;
- 4.5** All caged finches are transported in specially designed 'carrying bag' to and fro from the trapping site. This 'carrying bag', locally known as *gabjun* is specifically designed to prevent the caged birds from injuring themselves during the trapper's commuting to the trapping area;
- 4.6** All caged finches are released into large bird rooms and aviaries after the season is over;
- 4.7** The traditional trapper never catches more birds than he can physically keep, by-catch is released upon accidental capture and excess females from certain finch species are also released back into the wild;
- 4.8** Cage-bird enthusiasts who traditionally keep and captive breed these species of finches, often need to restock to guarantee genetic diversity. The caught finches from the wild immensely contribute towards such aim. In fact these devotees are today already complaining that they cannot find such stock, precisely because the tradition of live-finch capturing has been suspended since over two years now.

5.0 Sustainable and Selective Methods

The passion of live-finch capture requires skill, patience and a specialised array of manually-operated selective equipment apart from the selection of healthy live decoys. This equipment has hardly changed over hundreds of years of finch capture and traditional trappers have been using the same methods annually, thus also maintaining the area used as close to the natural environment as humanly possible. Indeed the 7 finch species are the trappers' main objective but this socio-cultural tradition has also created an ideal habitat for other flora and fauna to flourish unhindered.

Live-finch capture is a sedentary and passive discipline, the trapper has to challenge his wits and capacity towards fulfilling his expectations by outwitting the migrating finches and hope to attract the birds and accomplish a catch. This can only be done by being one with nature and not against it, the trapping site must represent the natural surroundings, otherwise the migrating finches will not be attracted to it.

Only the area covered with nets is cleared of debris and such clearing by the use of commercially available pesticides is highly discouraged. The catchment area (where the nets fall together for catching) must be furnished with indigenous plants and water troughs to attempt to entice the finches to settle in the manually triggered site.

No other bird species apart from the finch species is of use to the trapper and any by-catch is immediately released back into the wild since it is caught alive.

This completely selective method practiced during the autumn season has never affected any local finch populations.

The method of manually clearing debris and weeds to lay the nets is completely reversible and once the season is over the site will return to its original natural, although Trapping sites on karstland/garrigue perpetually reverse natural succession, preventing the regeneration of the apex floral community. Fragmentation and habitat loss perpetuates with each season. Trapping sites on stretches of garigue should not be allowed.

6.0 Strictly Supervised Conditions

The stationary and passive socio-cultural tradition in itself will facilitate proper and effective monitoring by the Law Enforcement personnel (ALE). All trapping sites have been registered on site-plans and these maps are available to the Maltese Police Force, since it is a pre-requisite to obtain a re-issue of the existing trapping licence.

The derogation proposed checks, are the same as have been successfully used when the spring-hunting derogation was applied in April 2011 with 5,642 hunters. The number of licensed trappers at present is closer to the 2,000 mark.

The money from the Special Trapping Licence can be similarly utilised as was the case for the spring-hunting derogation, that is, to finance the Police and Marshals' officers that will be required.

FKNK, again, as it did with the spring-hunting derogation will offer all its assistance to ensure the strict supervision and, after the end of the derogated period, will again prepare a Report for the Commission's consideration.

Further to the registered trapping sites, the Maltese Islands are easily accessible throughout relatively easy and within the hour. Law enforcement personnel can be physically on site anywhere in the islands using their off-road vehicles.

The registration of all finch trapping sites and related site-maps will facilitate further the strict control issue. Moreover live-finch capture regulations are still in force, maximum size of trapping site, maximum size of cages (*gabjetti*), etc.

Infringements will be dealt with accordingly and penalties applied according to existing local legislations

7.0 Proportionality Principle

Previously, finch capturing seasons consisted of 192 days of open season, starting from 1st October till the 10th April of the following year.

The suspension of, 31 December 2008, have left the traditional trappers devoid of their indigenous way-of-life without any **satisfactory alternative solution**⁵.

The previous trapping seasons gave **scope** and **expectations** to the local finch trapper of harvesting, on average, a minimum of >20 to a maximum of >25 finches per season (NSO finch capture survey 2004), the proposed application for a derogation will limit considerably the live-finch capture season to a maximum of only **60 days of trapping**.

The maximum proposed 60 days of live-finch trapping will result in:

- a) 69% fewer trapping days than was previously legally allowed.
- b) Maximum starting from the 7 October till the 7 of December, of the same year, both days included, this measure coincides with part of the autumn seasonal equinox.
- c) Will limit the previous years' average catch as established by different surveys and studies.
- d) Shall honour the small numbers principle as established by the requirements of the derogation.
- e) Post-nuptial finch migration, although as established finches only partially migrate from the European continent, is also bolstered by first year fledglings.
- f) The proposed season will not **coincide with** or **affect** any wintering or resident finches or any pre-nuptial finch activity, locally.

Joseph Lia - Raymond Cordina - Lino Farrugia
June 2011©

⁵ Bio-psychosocial Study, Malta Association of Psychiatric Nurses, 2011

MALTA MEMORANDUM

The representatives of the hunting organisations of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain that make up “FACE Med” met in Malta on the 11th, 12th and 13th July 2008 to investigate inter alia the problems linked to the capturing of seven species of finches in the islands of Malta.

The said meeting agreed to present the following memorandum for the attention of the Maltese Authorities.

Considering that:

- * the transitional period to phase out such practice that was agreed with the EU Commission prior to Malta’s entry into the EU did not reflect the reality of the ancient tradition of live capturing of finches in the Maltese islands. The agreement suggested the setting up of a captive breeding program that would require wild birds to be captured for the purpose of sustaining the genetic diversity of such breeding program;
- * notwithstanding that the Malta Government did its best to establish a professional captive breeding programme such efforts proved to be unsuccessful despite the advice and assistance of foreign experts in the field;
- * this Maltese socio-cultural passion is carried out by manually operated selective methods, on a small scale and for bird species that enjoy an abundant and very healthy conservation status in the wild, and that the practice due to logistic orientation is very easily strictly supervised;
- * similar practices by the use of similar methods and for the same species of birds are carried out in other Mediterranean countries also Members of the EU, where the captured birds are kept alive in captivity for the same purposes as in Malta – their eventual use for song, live decoys and for ornithological purposes.

FACE Med is confident that the Authorities of Malta including its Government:

- * are prepared to re-negotiate the erroneous pre-accession agreement with the Commission in a manner that reflects the real local situation by means of a limited derogation in Autumn;
- * are willing to accept and rely upon serious and irrefutable scientific and technical support in this regard that is readily available by FACE Med countries, besides considering new proposals that are not ultra vires the obligations and benefits of the Directive 79/409/EEC.

Finally, FACE Med understands that the Government of Malta is fully aware of its rights as an EU Member State and is prepared to exercise such rights in the best interest of its citizens. The application of a strictly controlled, programmed and coordinated derogation under Directive 79/409/EEC by means of article 9.1c with respect to article 2 and the 13th “consideration” from the preamble, can permit the continuance of this ancestral Maltese socio-cultural tradition beyond 31st December 2008 within the spirit of the same “Birds’ Directive”. FACE Med is hereby placing its scientific and legal expertise at the disposal of the Maltese Government in order to substantiate the last 4 years readily available data and for any assistance it may require for such purpose.

FACE Med, at Malta, the 12th July 2008

On the 8th of March 2010 a petition containing over 8000 signatures was presented to the Maltese parliament, requesting the government to apply for a derogation to reactivate the passion of live-finch capture (copy follows in Maltese).

8 ta' Marzu 2010

Lill-Onorevoli *Speaker* u Membri tal-Kamra tad-Deputati ta' Malta.

Din hija l-umli Petizzjoni tas-Sur Joseph Buttigieg (86748M) fil-kapaċita tiegħu ta' President tal-Federazzjoni Kaċċaturi Nassaba Konservazzjonisti (FKNK) ta' 138, Triq il-Kunċizzjoni Msida MSD 1831, imressqa f'isem il-firmatarji ta' din il-Petizzjoni, li jamontaw għal total ta' 8237 (7693 manwali u 544 *on-line*) – hawn mehmuża, imressqa illum mill-Onorevoli Dr. Michael Falzon LL.D., A.C.I.B., MP

Jesponi bil-qima:-

illi minkejja d-diversi wegħdi u garanziji, kemm politiċi u kemm uffiċċjali, magħmula kemm bil-fomm u kif ukoll bil-kitba, u li kienu saru mill-awtoritajiet tal-Gvern Malti qabel is-shubija ta' Malta fl-Unjoni Ewropea lin-nassaba tal-ghasafar tal-ghana, fis-sens illi din in-namra ma kelliex tintemm ma' l-aħħar tal-2008;

illi minkejja ukoll, li t-Trattat ta' bejn Malta u l-Unjoni Ewropea ma kienx jindika li dan l-insib kellu jitwaqqaf għal kollox;

illi minkejja ukoll li fis-7 ta' Marzu 2009 ir-rappreżentanza tal-Kummissjoni Ewropea f'Malta, permezz ta' ittra ppublikata f'Malta fil-ġurnal bil-lingwa Ingliża, *The Times*, spjegat li l-Gvern Malti, bħal kull Stat Membru ieħor tal-Unjoni Ewropea seta', jekk ried, japplika deroga mid-Direttiva tal-Unjoni Ewropea magħrufa bħala tal-“Ghasafar” biex ikompli jippermetti dan l-insib;

Minkejja dana kollu, għall-ewwel darba fl-istorja ta' Malta, l-insib għall-ghasafar tal-ghana fil-harifa ma kienx permezz fis-sena 2009.

Għaldaqstant, dawn li qed jagħmlu din il-Petizzjoni, qed umilment jitolbu li l-Onorabbli Kamra Tagħkom jogħgobha tikkunsidra bis-serjeta kollha kull triq possibli, inkluz id-diversi suggerimenti u proposti li diġa ressqet l-FKNK, sabiex minn din is-sena stess tintemm is-sofferenza li kellhom jgħaddu minnha n-nassaba Maltin u Għawdxin fis-sena 2009; u dana billi tigi applikata b'mod korrett deroga mid-Direttiva tal-“Ghasafar” sabiex ikun permess l-insib tradizzjonali għall-ghasafar tal-ghana fil-harifa tal-2010, b'mod limitat u ikkontrollat u bil-metodu selettiv tax-xbiek tradizzjonali u sabiex ukoll ikun jista' jsir użu xieraq mill-ghasafar li jinqabdu.

Dan għandu jsir ukoll, sabiex l-eluf ta' nassaba Maltin u Għawdxin tingħatalhom soluzzjoni xierqa u ma jibqawx iħossuhom qed jiġu trattati aghar minn nassaba oħra bħalhom ta' Stati Membri oħra tal-Unjoni Ewropea, ilkoll ċittadini tal-istess Unjoni Ewropea; u dawn, kif huma fid-dmir, jibqgħu rikonoxxenti.”

Saturday, 7th March 2009

Severe conditions for continuance of trapping

Nicoletta Flessati, press officer, European Commission, Representation in Malta, Ta' Xbiex

With reference to the reports of February 24 (timesofmalta.com) and February 25 in The Times about a poster campaign by the Federation of Hunters, Trappers and Conservationists and the subsequent appearance of the posters on billboards in Malta, the European Commission Representation in Malta wishes to clarify the position concerning bird trapping in Malta and in other member states of the European Union.

Under the Accession Treaty, trapping of certain bird species (seven species of finches) was permitted until the end of December 2008.

The Accession Treaty also set out a number of "milestones" for the Maltese authorities to undertake, including the registration of trapping sites, the establishment of a breeding programme and an assessment of its effectiveness.

Following the expiry of this period under the Treaty, Malta can, along with all other member states, apply a derogation to permit trapping to continue.

Trapping of birds is permitted only in exceptional circumstances, where it complies with the strict conditions set out in the Birds Directive.

Trapping of only a small number of certain birds is allowed under strictly supervised conditions and on a selective basis, as set out under article 9(1)(c) of the directive.

The member states referred to on the posters have all sought to permit trapping in accordance with those requirements.

Under the Birds Directive, member states permitting trapping under article 9(1)(c) are obliged to provide evidence to the Commission on an annual basis to show that all the conditions are being met.

In cases where the evidence shows that a breach has occurred, the Commission has taken, and will continue to take, legal action to address this breach.

Further Reading Extracts:

Joseph Lia©

Live-finch Capture in Malta – Definition

Abstract

The Maltese tradition of live-finch-capturing is a life-long passion for circa 4000 trappers and their families that hail from all sectors of the population. This passion knows no boundaries when it comes to the continuum of social ranks: civil servants, farmers, lawyers and doctors, to name but few, all form part of this indigenous lifestyle and custom. It is very difficult for the casual observer, admirer or opponent alike to grasp the concept and passion of this Maltese tradition. Like a picture that can tell a thousand words, attempting to extrapolate a custom or an indigenous way of life may feel rather superficial. It is hoped that this explanatory paper does justice to such ethos by at least describing the philosophical, traditional and practical issues that make up this sustainable practice.

The Species

This regional old custom revolves annually around 7 European finch species:

- Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)
- Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)
- Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)
- Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)
- Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)
- Serin (*Serinus serinus*)
- Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Methodology

These birds are caught alive in harmless clap-nets. Finches are placed around the spread nets (flat on the ground) so as to attract species of their own type. This method is selective as only the 7 species are of interest to the trapper, not to mention that only a small subset of migrating finches actually descend within range; many more proceed en route without getting anywhere close to the calling or singing “*armatura*”.

Live-finch trapping is a passive indigenous tradition and custom that does not involve killing, neither during the moment, when the clap-nets are operated, nor thereafter. The trapper must be at his station continuously so as to operate manually his nets to attempt a catch; any by-catch is immediately released.

The birds caught are cared for zealously and lovingly by the trapper, almost forming part of their family unit, appreciated for their song quality, companionship, bird husbandry and future deployment in subsequent seasons. The annual cycle is never complete and the caught finches far outlive their wild counterparts mainly due to the fastidious attention given by their keeper/s, (Lander and Partridge 1998).

Not just a matter of catching finches: life-long passion

For the trapper this national and regional tradition is a year-round activity involving daily caring of the birds, preparation and repairing nets and equipment for the highly anticipated following season, preparation of the capture site such as hoeing, trimming and planting thus maintaining the site as near to the natural habitat as humanly possible, (indeed the live- finch trapper works with nature not against it), maintenance of water troughs and so on. The anticipation, bird sightings, the occasional catch, and bird husbandry results, including breeding, form an intrinsic part of this traditional custom. The hours spent each day close to his treasured responsibilities create a bond between the trapper and the bird such that the birds feel safe in the trapper's presence as witnessed by their behaviour that differs considerably should anyone else get close to them. Indeed the local tea-shops and bars reverberate with daily conversations on this topic. A major part of the trappers dedicate their annual holiday/break off work solely for this activity and passion.

Unlike certain practices in other European countries these finches are never killed or considered as a food delicacy, the local trapper would shudder at this thought. Harming, killing or eating these finches is taboo for the Maltese live-finch trapper. The live caught finches form an integral part of the trappers' way-of-life. This passion is the reason why the trappers tick and go about their lives 'dreaming' and continuously attempting to improve the biodiversity of their capture sites and the surrounding area, finding their best live decoy and anticipating a 'better' season than the last one. The birds are never sold by the traditional trapper but some birds are exchanged amongst other enthusiasts.

Live-finch trapping is not only about the catching of finches, this passion takes the trapper out into the fields and valleys, especially during the autumnal Maltese period where there are the first hints of thunder and the promise of rain after a parched hot summer. The trapper is able to observe the full suit of birds, apart from finches, that start their annual passage over the Maltese Islands. Finch trappers are a store-house of bird migration, weather phenomena and country lore. To climax all this he, or even she, is able to anticipate and experience the thrill of the "hunt", leading to the blood-less and harmless capture. The "trophy" is taken home alive to be treasured as like one of the family (Wiener, 2007).

Proportionality Principle

The trapping of finches requires specialist equipment, hours of patience and constant vigilance during the post-nuptial finch migration. The occurrence of finches is completely dependent on the weather on that particular day.

There is never a guarantee that the trapper is going to catch anything, hence the expectations are ever more increased and the exhilaration of the 'chase' is at its peak. Although various factors will definitely contribute to the success or failure of making a catch, the best information collected will be from the trappers themselves. Hence the qualitative and quantitative survey carried out in 2004 by the National Statistics Office is the best available data regarding live-finch capture. The small numbers criteria is more evident when the comparable available data is proportionally disseminated as follows:

Finch Population (individual)	Finches caught (NSO 2004)	Percentage
Chaffinch (<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>)	15,370	0.0075%

270,000,000 – 480,000,000		
Serin (<i>Serinus serinus</i>) 17,000,000 – 40,000,000	9,317	0.09%
Greenfinch (<i>Carduelis chloris</i>) 27,000,000 – 64,000,000	37,924	0.12%
Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>) 23,000,000 – 57,000,000	2,266	0.015%
Siskin (<i>Carduelis spinus</i>) 20,000,000 – 36,000,000	2,357	0.015%
Hawfinch (<i>C. coccothraustes</i>) 4,800,000 – 8,300,000	1,768	0.04%
Linnet (<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>) 20,000,000 – 57,000,000	34,538	0.12%

All percentages are reached by ‘rounding-up’ the number of finches caught; e.g. 37,924=38,000 and so on. The minimum finch population is used in the working and all population dynamics are as at IUCN data 2004.

Sustainability and Proportionality of live-finch-capturing

A unique geographical situation - The Maltese Archipelago

The Maltese archipelago lies virtually at the centre of the Mediterranean, with Malta 93km south of Sicily and 288km north of Africa. The archipelago consists of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino with a total population of 400,000 inhabitants over an area of 316sq km. This fact makes Malta the smallest and most densely populated EU Member State. The demographic density of the Maltese archipelago stands at 1300/sq km, none of the land mass being devoid of human activity. (Malta Tourism official website, 2010).

The Maltese archipelago also boasts of 18 nature reserves, comprising 20% of the total land mass, with another 22% of built up areas and over 120 parks and public gardens. Innumerable roads and public footpaths make every corner of the islands easily reachable (MEPA 2010).

These geographic and demographic facts indirectly contribute to the sustainability of live-finch capture. The 5000 registered trapping sites (MEPA 2008) have to be categorised into their specific trapping orientation.

Live-finch capture sites, although comparatively using the same techniques, differ completely from Turtle Dove, Golden Plover, Song Thrush or Quail trapping sites. Live-finch capture trapping sites are in themselves species-specific; and it is a false impression given by antis and the non-versed in the subject that any trapping site for finches is capable of multi-species capture.

Arboreal finches, such as the hawfinch and siskin, are never caught from trapping sites situated where trees are lacking. The reverse applies to non-arboreal finches such as the linnet or

goldfinch, which traditionally are never caught from trapping sites situated amongst wooded groves. Certain live-finch capturers do not even target the above finches if they have a trapping site situated as described above.

In 2008 Birdlife Malta publicly stated that “putting all the registered trapping sites together would amount to covering the whole city of Valletta”. Our capital city has a total area of 0.71sq km or 1306 m x 546 m (Mapquest, public mapserver generated on 14th September 2010).

Since it is legally and geographically impossible to construct trapping sites in Nature Reserves (63.2 sq. km.) and built-up areas (69.5 sq. km.), there remains only 183.28 sq. km. of land mass for potential trapping sites. Therefore, based on the BirdLife Malta estimate of 0.71 sq. km., the space actually taken up by existing trapping sites makes up only 1.3% ($0.71 \times 183.28 \times 100\%$) of that remaining land mass. On this criterion bird-trapping cannot, therefore, qualify as widespread.

Additional to the fact that live-finch capturing sites are species specific, the trapping nets are fixed in situ, and the trapper – unlike the shooting man – is not mobile and cannot move away in pursuit of the quarry.

Conclusion

Finch capture is therefore restricted to only 1.3% of the Maltese Islands’ land mass. This explains why aerial photography shows the densely clustered trapping sites in specific restricted areas.

Most live-finch trappers own more than one trapping site situated either on the northern or southern side of the islands, or eastern and western respectively due to the logistics of attempting to catch finches with ‘the wind at one’s back’, literal translation in finch capture jargon means, *rih ma dahrek* therefore not all trapping sites are manned altogether at once for obvious physical reasons.

With the proposed introduction of a drastically short legal finch trapping season by means of a derogation, finch trappers would be able to practise their traditional way of life and this indigenous custom of socio-cultural import will not be lost forever.

Lino Farrugia©

History

What were known as *paragne*, trapping stations (trapping stations used for the capture of thrushes in Spain as called *parany*) were to be found on both main islands of Malta. These upright nets were used for the trapping of migratory quail and other bird species.

The first hunting laws in Malta were introduced with the arrival of the Order of the Knights of St. John. “In a Bando⁶ of 1773, Grand Master Ximenes decreed the use of “*reti d’uccelli piantati in terra e terriehe*”, in other words, “ ... nets stuck in the ground ...”, and ‘the tirasse net’ (*terrieħa*).⁷” The Order also saw to the introduction of both hunting and trapping licences.

The ‘modern’ and now traditional method used for bird-trapping, *mansab*, or rather the capturing of birds by the use of nets for the purpose of keeping the birds in captivity for eventual use as live-decoys, *tahrik*, call-birds, *ghajjat*, captive breeding, *tnissil fil-magħluq* and song *ghana*, is called a clap-net *xibka bil-mindud*. The clap-net has a long history and was even depicted on ancient tomb paintings in Egypt.

The snaring and trapping of birds and beasts boasts of a long tradition, antedating other modes of hunting.

During the Classical Period bird trapping was commonly and widely practiced in the Roman Empire.

The first written records of bird trapping are those concerned with the capture of raptors for their use in falconry, while the trapping of less ‘noble’ birds did not deserve a mention. In fact, bird trapping for the table was considered as another farmhouse chore. In the 13th century the netting of birds of prey for their use in falconry was a privilege granted to a favoured few, usually on a hereditary basis.

⁶ Bando was a proclamation by the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, equivalent to present-day Legal Notice

⁷ Notes on Hunting in the Maltese Islands – Aldo E. Azzopardi (Unpublished)

The earliest known depiction of a recognizable trapping station in Malta is shown on the ‘Great Siege’ map. The map shows a double row of nets that could either be clap-nets or upright nets⁸.

One finds that on 19th March 1773, in another Bando, His Serene Highness permits his subjects to practice hunting by means of, inter alia, nets used in the capture of migratory birds and of turtle doves. And in another Bando of the 13th August 1773, the same Grand Master permitted the hunting of migratory birds using ‘bird nets’ *piantati in terra, e terrieha*, upright nets and tirasse nets⁹.

“In a Maltese-Italian dictionary printed in 1796, *Ktÿb yl klÿm Mâlti*, MYNSUB, and its derivatives, have the connotation of ‘erect’ or ‘to erect’ (*eretto*), and raised (*inalzato*), which suggests that the earlier nets used by local bird trappers were upright nets, the *xibka wieqfa* or *ranja*.¹⁰”

The Maltese Hunter and Trapper Way of Life...

The hunter and trapper presence in local myths, legends or folklore is well embedded in several local sayings, proverbs, places, glossary and in turn evidenced in his every day way of life through his habits, beliefs, customs and practices.

Hunting and trapping are inherited and gradually perfected talents works of art. “Growing children require the proper channelling of these instincts. Can anyone honestly say that, as kids, they never felt the urge to capture a wild bird or animal? We have to say that if anyone can actually say that, then they, either never had an opportunity as a child, or are an exception to the rule of human nature. ... We hunt to be alone; to observe wildlife; to witness daily phenomenon, such as sunrise that anyone could observe any day for free, however very few would dare venture or even bother; to face one of the greatest challenges in this world, to take a wild bird/animal on its own turf, using our brain and little else. Forget the ”automatic” guns. When it comes right down to it, such things are no good unless you can create an opportunity to use them. We have to use every sense, every bit of experience we have, and when we accomplish our goal, it’s always a new sensation¹¹.”

⁹ These Bandi were proclaimed by Grand Master G. M. Ximanes de Texada

¹⁰ Notes on Hunting in the Maltese Islands – Aldo E. Azzopardi (Unpublished)

¹¹ WHY HUNT. – Daily Malta Independent by Lino Farrugia February 2006

We thus have sayings, (trapping) expressions and proverbs such as: *Waqt il-passa kisser il-pinnur u oħroġ kulljum* (During the migration period, break the weather-vane and go out (hunting or trapping) every day); *Suffara tal-pluvieri, tintiret u mhux tintara* (A golden plover's whistle (call) is inherited and not bought); *Meta tisma 'il-qerd in-naħal, erfa' x-xbiek, mur lejn ir-raħal* (When you hear the bee-eater calling, pack-up the nets and head back towards your village (trapping of turtle doves in May)); *L-ghasafar trid ghasafar* (Birds need birds (trapping of finches beckons live finch decoys)) ; *Wara l-festa, karti tigbor* (After the feast (a good migration), all you will be able to collect would be waste papers) ; *Itaqtaq daqs tellerita* (He never stops talking (compared to the call of the stone curlew)); *Qiesa Ċawla* (She sounds like a jackdaw (that often calls out loudly)); *Min ibahħar u jwahħar, jieħu l-pluvieri mingħajr ma jsaffar* (He who is out in the early morning and stays out in the late evening will catch golden plovers without having to use the whistle or mouth call).

There are of course several more and the above should by no means be considered exhausted.

As for trapping glossary we get: *Armatūra* (A set of call-birds); *Ġbidt* (The rope used to pull the clap-nets); *Salib* (The point at which the rope that is used to pull the clap-nets separates into two ropes); *Razzi* (The pivots onto which are hooked the rods used in the clap-nets system); *Marbat* (The anchor used in the clap-nets system); *Ġoga or koppa* (The apparatus used to show the harnessed lure live-decoy bird to any sighted birds. *Koppa* refers to the same apparatus used for turtle dove trapping or for the actual stone-built site on which this turtle dove trapping apparatus is mounted); *Ruffana* (Meaning slave, the harnessed live-decoy turtle dove that is not situated within the actual clap-nets site or the actual stone-built site on which this turtle dove trapping apparatus is mounted, again not within the clap-nets trapping area); *Hoxja* (The wire used along the lengths of the nets); *Radd or batta* (Re-setting of the nets in ready position. *Batta* is used in Gozo); *Tehles or tifli* (The release of the trapped bird from the nets. Again *tifli* is the term used in Gozo); *Qelba* (The moment when the nets are lifted to trap); *Għażel* (The nets' material); *Akisa* (A pivot to ease the pull on the string used to lift the harnessed turtle dove lure live decoy); *Arbulett* (The upright stick part of the apparatus used to lift the live-decoy lure birds); *Ġebbla* (The seat used by the trapper. Actually means Stone); *Nassab* (Trapper); *Seffut* (Another type of apparatus used to show the harnessed turtle dove live-decoy lure bird. This apparatus is also a favourite with hunters and normally placed in a tree); *Tertir, tpetpit and tgexgix* (Reference to some finches calls); *Xkiel* (The harness used on turtle dove live-decoy lure birds); *Imbrigar* (To harness); *Kappun* (The hood used on the harnessed turtle dove, similar to what is used for trained

birds of prey in falconry); *Hogor* (The purposely knitted looseness in the nets to avoid harm to any trapped birds); *Lasti* (The rods used for clap-nets system); *Tahrik* (The lure live-decoys); *Čakija* (The stone, preferably blue pebble bed used within the trapping area for turtle dove trapping); *Galetta* (The part of the apparatus used to show the harnessed lure live-decoy turtle dove to any sighted birds, where the bird stands); *Gabjetta* (The cage used for the live-decoy call finches); *Gabjun* (The sack used to carry a set of live-decoy call finches or the container used to carry live-decoy lure turtle doves); *Žaqq* (The feeding of the live-decoy lure turtle doves. Traditionally carried out mouth-to-mouth).

Again the above is by no means comprehensive, and most, as the reader can conclude very difficult to explain to the inexperienced in another language like in English, which language may not have the correct descriptive word, because its people either have never had the fortune to enjoy the tradition, or may have lost it over time. So, if God forbid that the traditional socio-cultural passion of trapping (or capturing which is better understood in EU jargon, since by trapping these would understand that the caught animal/bird is eventually killed) is ever abolished from the Maltese islands, than all the above, and more related Maltese words will be lost in oblivion. From the above list of words it is also evident that Maltese and Gozitans used different words when they mean the same thing. Different words are also used in other related aspects, as in the same species of birds' names. For example Maltese call the yellow wagtails, *sofor*, whereas in Gozo these are called *ġirinelli*. And several others. However what is definitely identical in Maltese and Gozitan hunters and trappers is their passion for hunting and trapping, which no respectable living human should have some almighty right to ever eradicate.

Alfred E. Zammit & Lino C. Farrugia©

Why trap birds?

The live-trapping of birds, especially finches, has long been popular on our islands.

People enjoy the challenges presented by this activity, because it is not just a matter of laying down a net and catching the birds. Unless a trapper masters the art of capturing and employs all his skill to cover every requirement involved, he will not enjoy success. Luck, logistics, great patience and the year round meticulous care of the captive birds, play a predominant part as well.

It must be pointed out at the onset that only manually operated nets may be used to capture birds. In either case the quarry is always caught alive.

Trappers get great satisfaction from the fact that they themselves have caught the birds they keep. They also derive great pleasure from being able to listen to the birdsong all year round, and not just on the few days that the birds are migrating. Unlike people in northern countries who are fortunate in having wild finches present most of the year, Maltese live-finch trappers know that unless they first capture the birds from the wild, they cannot enjoy their beautiful birdsong. A marked difference since trapping was suspended in 2008 is the lack of birdsong one could hear from various trapping stations around our islands, besides the abandonment of some areas around the trapping stations situation.

Which finches could be captured?

The finches that could be trapped in Malta up to 2008 are seven, viz.:

Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Hawfinch, Linnet, Serin, and Siskin.

European Finch Populations and Maltese Finch Capturing

Finches	European populations (individual birds)	Malta Captures (2005 -2008)	Percentage of minimum total
	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Estimated yearly averages</i>	
Chaffinch	60,000,000	20328	0.034
Goldfinch	23,000,000	920	0.004
Greenfinch	26,000,000	20328	0.078
Hawfinch	5,300,000	2033	0.008
Linnet	20,000,000	50820	0.254
Serin	17,000,000	2033	0.012
Siskin	20,000,000	5082	0.025
TOTAL	271,300,000	101640	0.037%

Notes:

1. The above information is based on the latest data obtained from websites of (a) The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - 2008 IUCN Red List Category (as

evaluated by BirdLife International - the official Red List Authority for birds for IUCN), (b) The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and (c) Avibirds - Online guide to the birds of Europe.

2. The conservation status of the seven finch species, both on the European and on the global level, is that of: ***Least Concern***

3. Captures and percentages per species are based on individual records kept by FKNK Members in line with the facts as follows:

captures relate to figures for 2005 – 2008 (autumn seasons only); figures are based on the number of 4,616 registered trappers as on 31 December 2008; numbers of finches captured are based on the average take of 22 birds per annum per trapper – a publicly-stated figure borne out by a sample survey carried out over the last four legal trapping seasons (2005-8).

Live-Finch capturing derogation

At any time it chooses to do so, the Maltese government may apply a derogation permitting live-finch capturing in autumn for the seven traditional finch species under certain conditions in terms of Article 9 of the “Birds” Directive.

Live-finch capturing derogations are applied in various EU countries for the purpose of upholding local cultures. *Example:* the Salzkammergut region in Austria.

Some points of interest

- The number of live-finch trappers’ licences has gone down from 4616 in 2008 to 2744 in 2010, a decrease of about 41% from 2008.
- Finches captured on the Maltese Islands are invariably for keeping alive at home. No finch captured on Malta and Gozo ever ended on a dinner table or on a restaurant menu.
- Maltese finch capturers are dedicated people who love the birds and consider them as their extended family.
- Finches in captivity are known to live much longer than they do in the wild.
- The majority of Maltese live-finch trappers are experts in their field, and they could be a great asset in the furthering of scientific knowledge on Mediterranean finch migration, with particular reference to Malta.
- The benefits that bird-ringing may derive from live-bird trapping is still untapped owing to restrictive and biased legislation.

Finches

The seven finch-species, for which live-capturing was suspended at the end of 2008, were always the favourites with Maltese trappers. We will leave no stone unturned to reinstate this centuries-old socio-cultural tradition so passionately practised by Maltese trappers. It is no surprise that psychological repercussions and psychiatric disorders have increased within this section of FKNK Members.

Annotations regarding the local conservation status and breeding records of finches held by different authors as recorded over the years, and a migration chart follow:

The local migration status of the seven finch species

Both the local occurrence (presence of species during the migration period) and the breeding status have remained static ever since records started being kept. The local conservation status of the Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, Serin *Serinus serinus*, Siskin *Carduelis spinus*, Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* and Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* ranges from 'fairly common' to 'very common'.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) designates all seven finch-species under the *taxon* of 'Least Concern'.

Local occurrence during migration of the Seven Finch species according to various ornithological authorities							
<u>Author/s</u>	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Roberts 1953	Common	Common	Common	Uncommon	Common	Uncommon / Some years numerous	Irregular
Sultana/Gauci/Beaman 1975	Very common	Common	Common	Fairly common	Common	Irregular numbers	Frequent
Bannerman/Vella-Gaffiero 1976	Very common	Common	Common	Annual	Common occasional abundant	Annual visitor in small numbers	Frequent
Sultana/Gauci 1979	Very common	Generally common	Common	Fairly common	Common some years very common	Irregular	Annual
Sultana 1979	Common	Common	Common	Frequent	Common	Frequent	Scarce some years frequent
Fenech 2010	Common	Common	Common	Frequent	Common	Frequent	Frequent

Breeding status of the Seven Finch species according to various ornithological authorities							
Author/s	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Roberts 1953	Few pairs in Gozo	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
Sultana/Gauci/Beaman 1975	Few pairs	Rare 1-2 pairs on two occasions	Occasional 1-2 pairs	Very rare 1 pair on two occasions	Occasional 1-2 pairs	Never	Never
Bannerman/Vella-Gaffiero 1976	Few pairs	Reported on 1 occasion	Possibly on one occasion	Never	Rarely	Never	Never
Sultana/Gauci 1979	Few pairs mostly in Gozo	Rare	Never	Very rare	Rare	Never	Never
Sultana 1979	Few pairs Gozo	Rare. 8 nests 30yrs	Few pairs	Never	Rare	Never	Never
Fenech 2010	Few pairs regularly	Occasional few pairs	Few pairs	Never	Irregularly few pairs	1 occasion	Never

Although some of the species do attempt to breed, and sometimes succeed in raising a brood locally, none of the seven species may be termed as regular breeders in viable numbers. Constant human disturbance coupled with lack of suitable food in the breeding period are determining factors.

European Finches migration chart			Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Scientific Name	Maltese	English												
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Sponsun	Chaffinch	S	F	I						O	R	F	S
<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Taz-Żebbuġ	Hawfinch *		I	I	S						I	I	
<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Ġojjin	Linnet	O	O	R	S					O	R	R	O
<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Gardell	Goldfinch			S	O	O					I	F	F
<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Verdun	Greenfinch	O		I	O						I	F	O
<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Ekru	Siskin *			S	S						I	I	I
<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Apparell	Serin	O	O	I	S						I	F	R

1) Data compiled according to migratory periods indicated in the most recent publications on Maltese birds.
 2) The Hawfinch and Siskin (* table 2 & 6) above are irruption migrants. Therefore these two species may be very common throughout the period indicated above in a given year and not even sighted in a number of years.
 3) Bar chart indicates peaks when most sightings are likely to occur during the migratory periods in accordance with the following legend: F frequent / R regular / O occasional / I irregular / S scarce