



**An analysis of Common Quail Carnet De Chasse Data
versus Common Quail and Turtle Dove Migration Data in spring**

***Document presented to Malta Ornis Committee
in February 2018 following a decision to recommend
a hunting season in spring for Quail in 2018***

1. Introduction

BirdLife Malta insists that in the case of the application of a derogation for the hunting for Quail in spring, the practice is unsustainable, and in its opinion does not fulfill the criteria required for the correct application of a derogation according to Article 9 of the Birds' Directive¹.

This is due to the fact that the application of a derogation can be justified where there is "no other satisfactory solution". Year after year, migration studies commissioned by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU) have shown that the autumn hunting period provides a suitable opportunity for the hunting of Common Quail, enough that a spring hunting season is not needed.

Hunting bag statistics of recent years are proving to be unreliable in comparison with the electronic system introduced by WBRU in 2016 showing just a 10% participation of hunters reporting their catches². Accordingly any inferences to be made from hunting bag statistics are frivolous, and do not provide any reliable data on which to base a decision to open a spring hunting season. The best available data when it comes to acquiring an understanding of Common Quail migration over the Maltese Islands in spring and in autumn, currently relies on Ecoserv's reports which are referred to in this document.

It is understood that despite the above situation, the Ornis Committee has on the 24th January 2018 decided to vote (in principle) for a spring hunting season for quail, with a further discussion on the topic to ensue on the 21st February 2018. The governing notices concerning this decision are S.L. 549.57³ and G.N. 538/2016⁴.

- Spring hunting framework legislation (S.L. 549.97) allows for a maximum 3-week hunting season in March and/or April, with a maximum quota of 5,000 Quail if less than 10,000 Quail are declared caught during the autumn hunting season of 2017.
- Government Notice 538 of 2016 enacts a moratorium on the hunting of Turtle Dove in spring as a conservation measure for the declining status of the species (IUCN Red List⁵).

Accordingly the parameters that should govern any decision to open a spring hunting season for quail should take regard of autumn catches of Common Quail (still to be presented by WBRU), and must ensure that the Turtle Dove remains not hunted during this period as a conservation measure respecting its IUCN status as well as the government notice.

These parameters remain unchanged from 2017, for which the Ornis Committee had recommended a hunting season for quail during the period 25th March to 14th April. Minutes of this meeting are available online⁶, and the Ornis Committee had considered this period as providing a satisfactory catch of Common Quail while avoiding the peak migration of Turtle Dove.

The following analysis of migration data and Carnet De Chasse data is meant to inform the Ornis Committee of the rationale behind such a decision taken in 2017. It is understood that FKNK however are proposing a 3-week hunting season between the 10th to the 30th April 2018.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32009L0147&from=EN>

² See Point 4.8 of Ornis Committee meetings of the 15th December 2016:

<https://msdec.gov.mt/en/Documents/Downloads/WBRU/2017/OrnisComm/Minutes%2015-12-2016.pdf>

³ <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11570&l=1>

⁴ <https://gov.mt/en/Government/Government%20Gazette/Government%20Notices/Pages/2016/05/Gov-Notices-2705.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22690419/0>

⁶ <https://msdec.gov.mt/en/Document%20Repository/WBRU/2017/ornisCommittee/Minutes%2001-02-2017.pdf>

2. Analysis of declared catches of Common Quail during past spring hunting seasons

Carnet De Chasse data reporting catches declared by hunters during past spring hunting seasons exist since 2002. In 2008, Malta was referred to the European Court of Justice for breaching the Birds' Directive in opening spring hunting seasons since 2004, with an interim court junction imposing a moratorium on spring hunting seasons. Accordingly no data exists for 2008 and 2009 spring catches. A derogation for spring hunting was first applied in 2010 with the season boycotted by hunters.

Since 2011, the derogation placed the onus of whether to open a spring hunting season or otherwise on the hunters' self-declarations of caught quail. The duration of spring hunting seasons also depended on whether hunters reached their seasonal quotas. For the purposes of a gross difference in declared catches pre and post the 2009 ECJ sentence, we present these statistics separately.

2.1 Declared catches pre-2009 ECJ sentence

Prior to 2008, when reporting bag statistics had no influence on hunting seasons, numbers of reported catches for Common Quail reached a peak at the third week of April, with catches starting from the last week of March onwards, and spanning to the end of April. This trend is found each year between 2002 and 2007 (Figures 1-6).

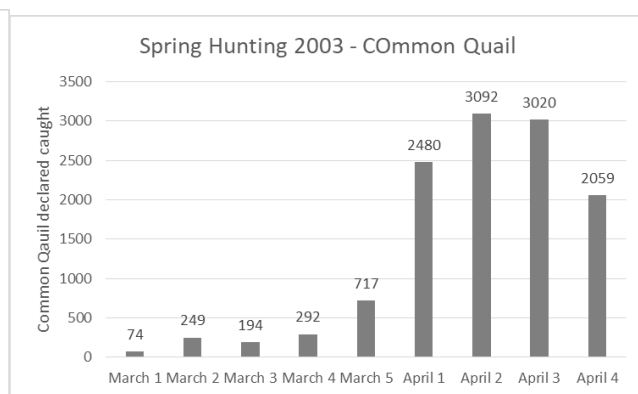
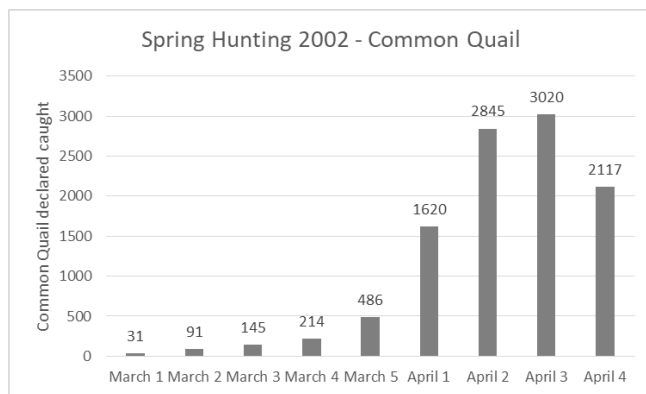


Figure 1: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2002

Figure 2: Common Quail declared caught March and April 2003

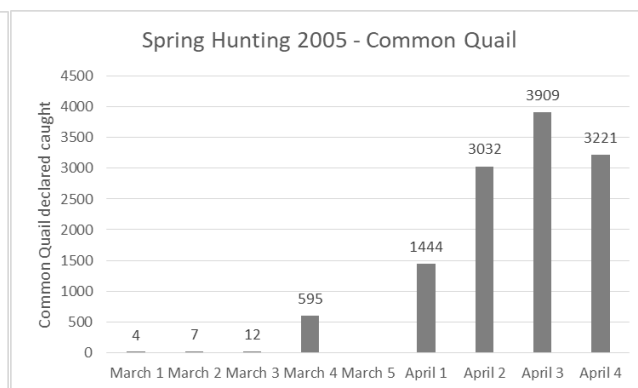
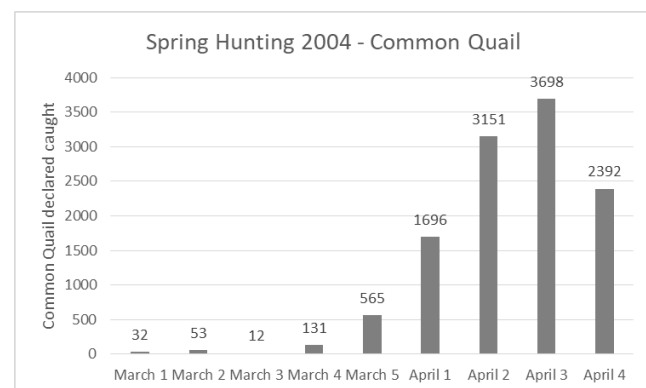


Figure 3: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2004

Figure 4: Common Quail caught during March and April 2005

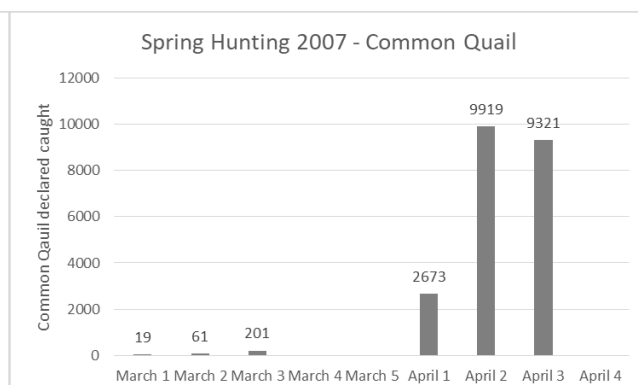
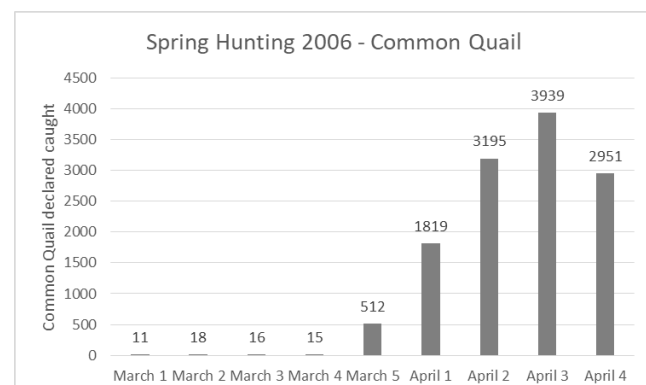


Figure 6: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2006

Figure 7: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2007

If one had to look at the total catch declared during the last week of March and the first two weeks of April, the figures reported are close to the 5,000 maximum quota allowed for spring hunting seasons in recent years (Table 1). 2007 reflects a possible exceptional migration which did not occur in previous years.

Table 1: Declared catches of Common Quail in successive spring hunting season between 2002 and 2007 for the period Week 5 in March to Week 2 in April

Year	Total Quail catches for last week of March and first two weeks of April	Notes
2002	4951	Average catch works out at 5331
2003	6289	
2004	5412	
2005	4476	
2006	5526	
2007	12592	Exceptional year

If one had to calculate an average figure for Common Quail caught between 2002 and 2006 (excluding 2007 which was an exceptional area, the average would work out at 5,331 Common Quail catches.

2.2 Declared catches post-2009 ECJ sentence

As can be seen from Figures 7-14, the number of Common Quail reportedly caught during the periods 2011 to 2017 are markedly much lower than spring hunting seasons pre-ECJ situation. When comparing the number of Common Quail reported each week prior to 2008 and after 2011, numbers of quail reported each week after 2011 are considerably lower than those reported pre-2008, when the reported catches had no influence on hunting seasons.

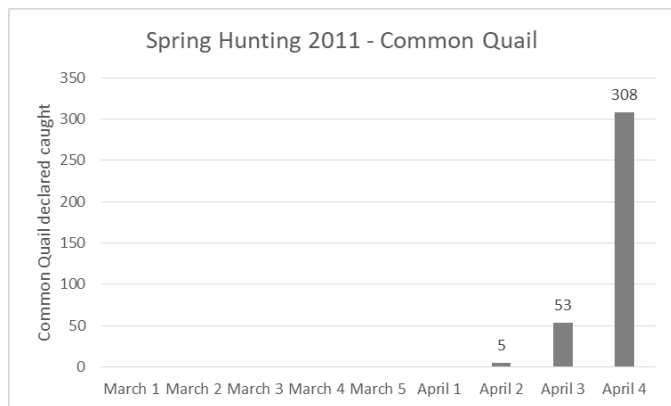


Figure 7: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2011

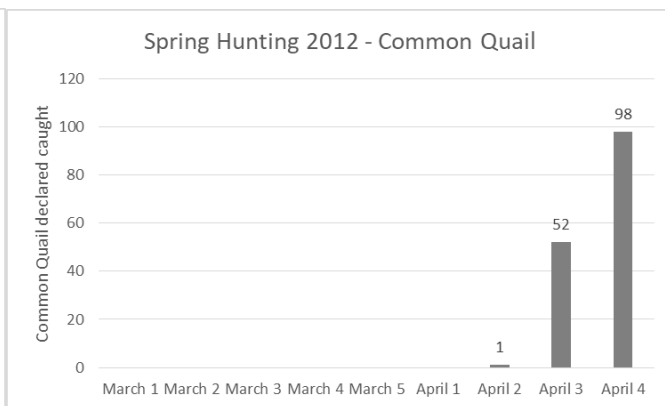


Figure 8: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2012

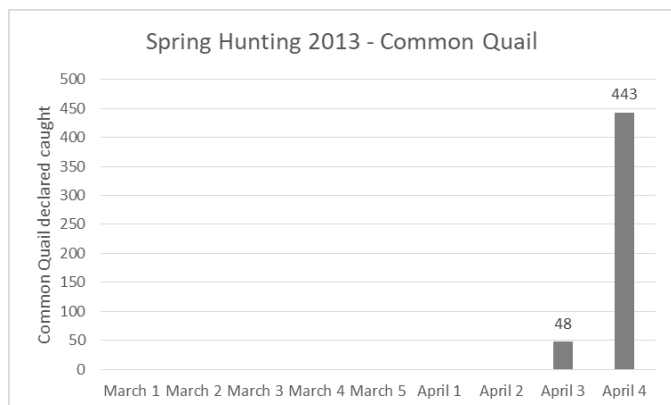


Figure 9: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2013

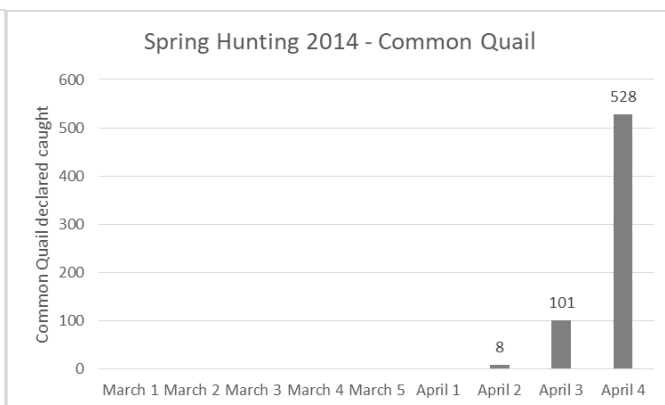


Figure 10: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2014

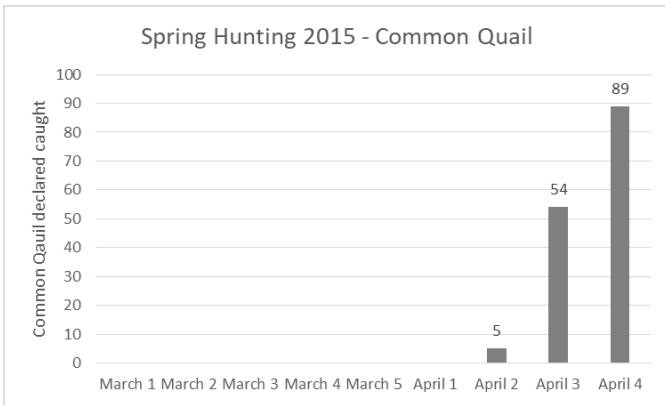


Figure 11: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2015

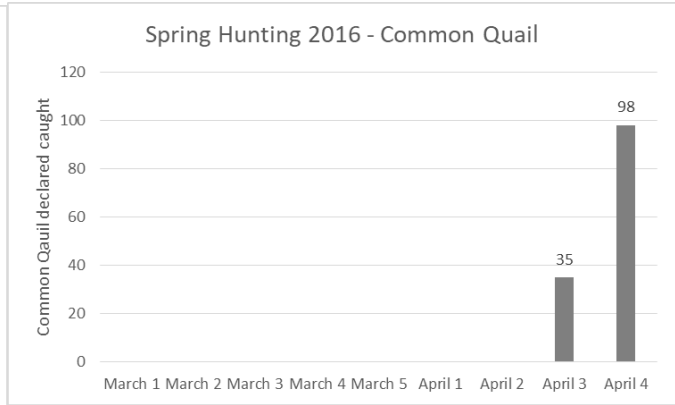


Figure 12: Common Quail declared caught during March and April 2016

In all years 2011 to 2016, peak catches were declared during the last week of April (this actually reflecting the very last few days of the hunting season). However, in 2017, the hunting season was moved earlier to avoid overlap with peak migration of the Turtle Dove. Despite the hunting season closing two weeks earlier, on the 14th April, the peak in catch reports also occurred in the final week of the hunting season (See Figure 13). This shows that rather than catches reflecting migration or real catches, declarations continue to be made at the end of the hunting season, irrespective of when this is opened. This stems from a possible fear of having the hunting season close prematurely if the 5,000 quota is reached.

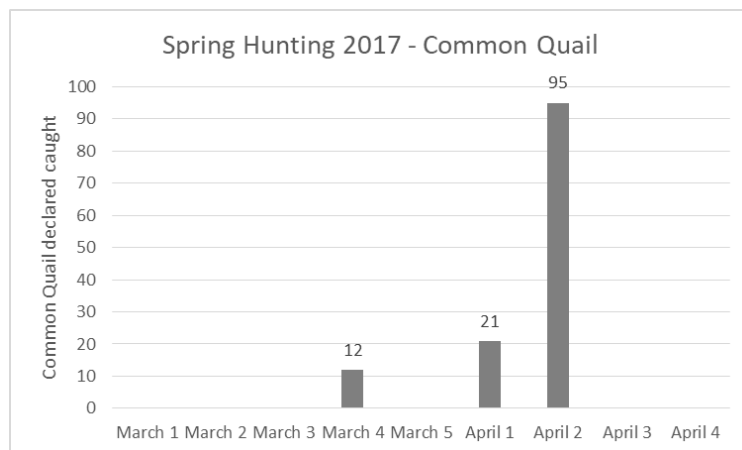


Figure 13: Common Quail catches as declared during the 2017 spring hunting season

For the above reasons, namely that (a) quail catches post 2009 ECJ show a significant under-reporting of catches when compared to pre-2009 situation, as well as (b) even if one had to consider such catches these are unreliable given that irrespective of time, catches are reported at the last days of each season, we do not consider post-2011 data as being anyhow reliable on basing a decision on which to open a spring hunting season.

3. Common Quail migration in spring

From 2012 to 2017, the company Ecoserv was commissioned to conduct a survey of migrating Common Quail and Turtle Dove over the spring season. Trends in weekly influxes of migrating Common Quail seem to vary from year to year, as well as the total number of migrating birds (Figures 14-19). From the available data, it would seem that Common Quail reach a peak in migration in the middle of April, but a general statement cannot be made due to the lack of data from March. Data from 2017 are the only indication of migration trends in March, which indicate an increasing influx between the end of March and mid-April (Figure 19).

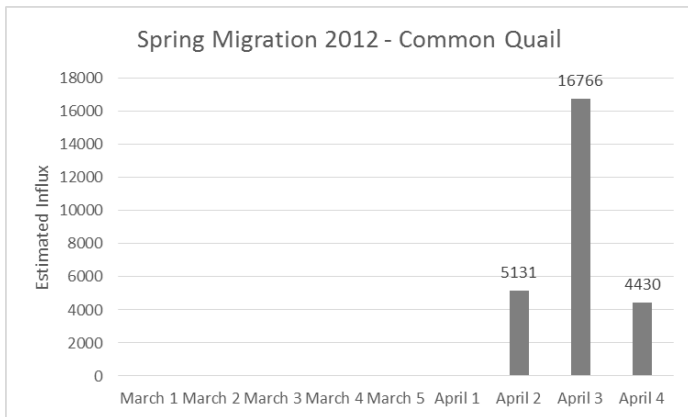


Figure 14: Ecoserv Migration Study 09/04/12 – 30/04/12 (Ecoserv 2012)

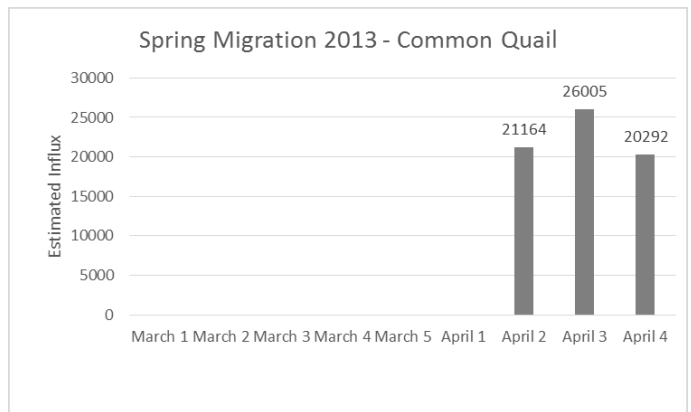


Figure 15: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/13 – 30/04/13 (Ecoserv 2013)

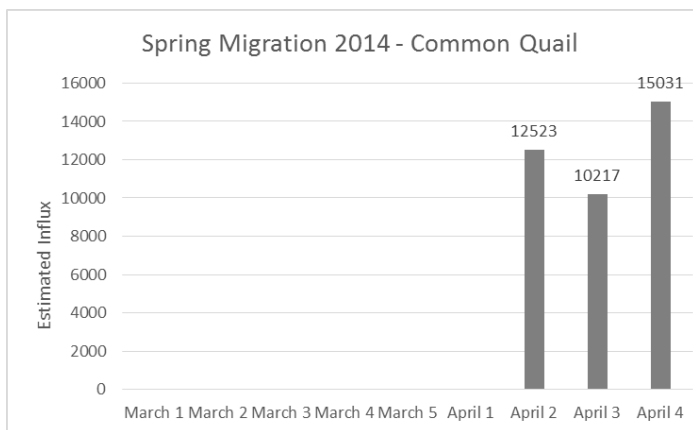


Figure 16: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/14 – 30/04/14 (Ecoserv 2014)

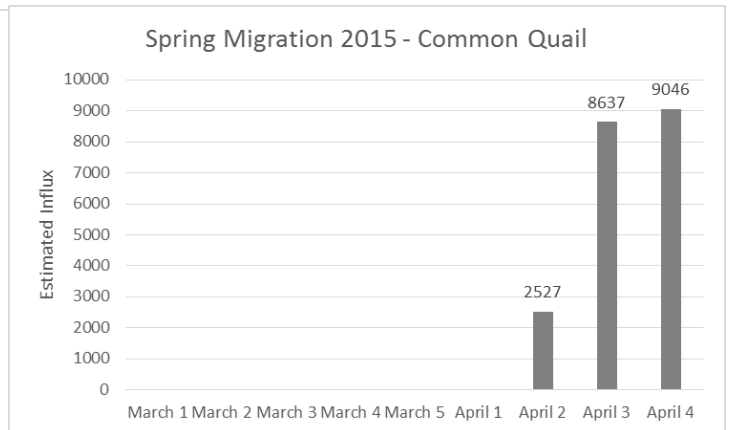


Figure 17: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/15 – 30/04/15 (Ecoserv 2015)

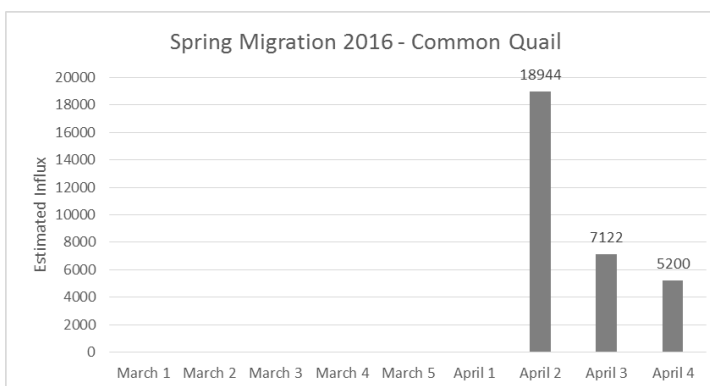


Figure 18: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/16 – 30/04/16 (Ecoserv 2016)

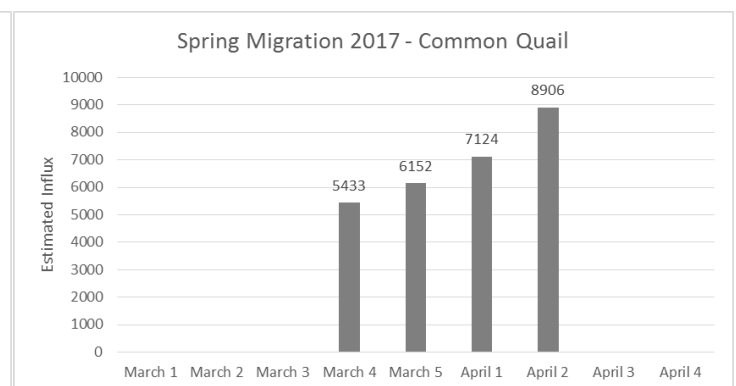


Figure 19: Ecoserv Migration Study 25/03/17 – 14/04/17 (Ecoserv 2017)

4. Turtle Dove migration in spring

Based on the Ecoserv migration studies from 2012 to 2017, it can be seen that the peak of Turtle Dove migration occurs at the last week of April (Figures 20-25), with significant migration also recorded in week 2 and especially week 3.

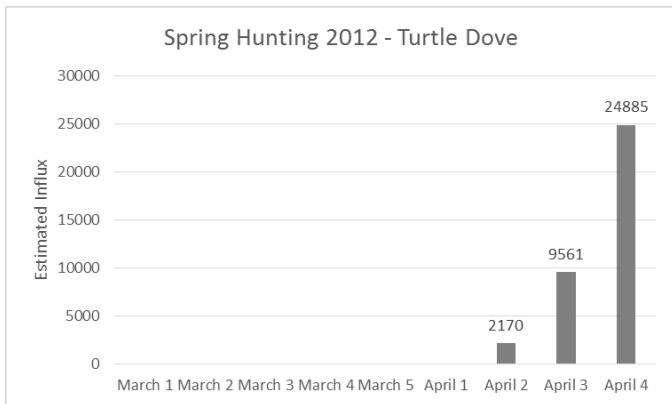


Figure 20: Ecoserv Migration Study 09/04/12 – 30/04/12 (Ecoserv 2012)

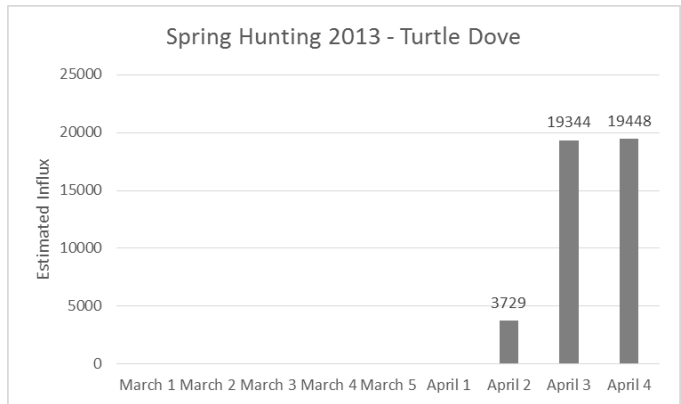


Figure 21: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/13 – 30/04/13 (Ecoserv 2013)

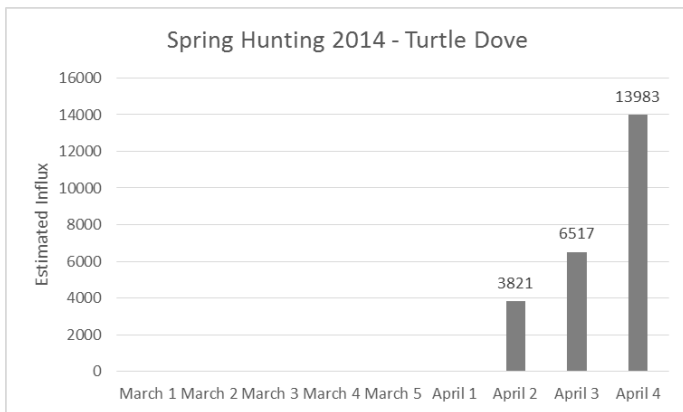


Figure 22: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/14 – 30/04/14 (Ecoserv 2014)

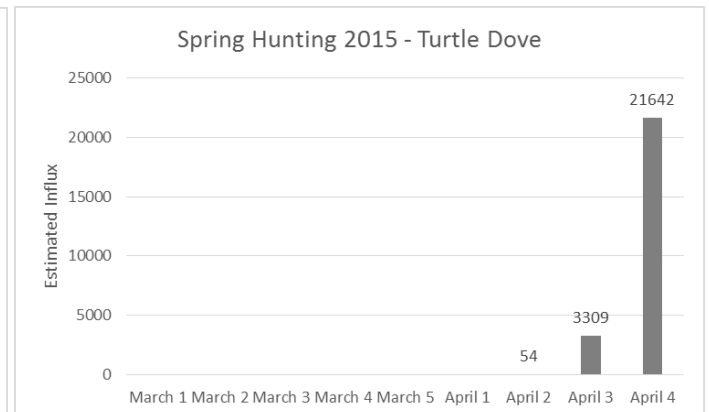


Figure 23: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/15 – 30/04/15 (Ecoserv 2015)

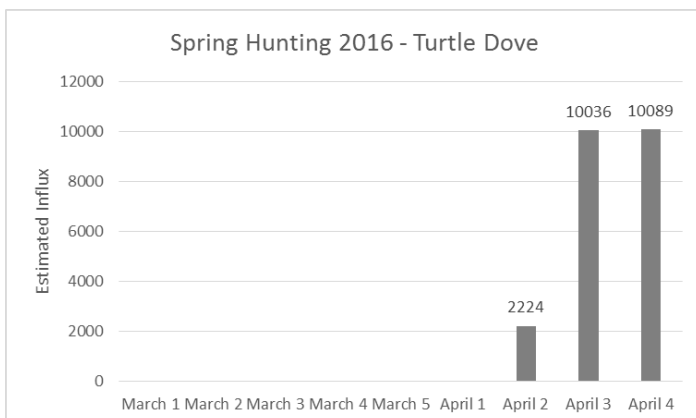


Figure 24: Ecoserv Migration Study 10/04/16 – 30/04/16 (Ecoserv 2016)

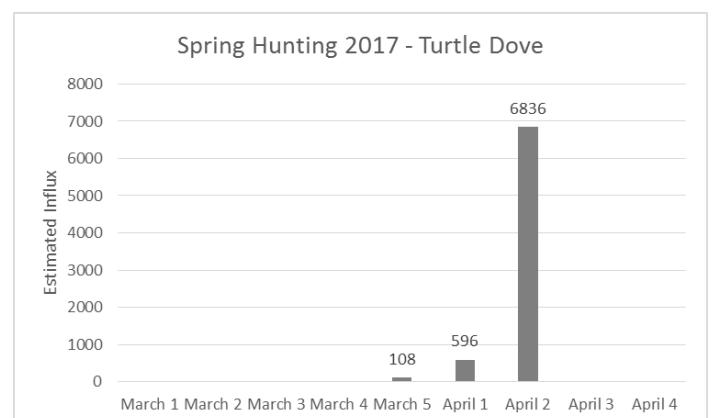


Figure 25: Ecoserv Migration Study 25/03/17 – 14/04/17 (Ecoserv 2017)

5. Conclusion

From the sets of data available which can present a clear outlook of quail migration and what is caught during the spring seasons, **the best available data lies with migration studies**, which outline the fact that spring migration of Common Quail starts from the 4th week of March until the 4th week of April, with more abundant influxes happening around the 3rd and 4th week of April.

This trend is reflected in quail catches declared in the pre-2009 ECJ situation which correlate perfectly with observed/calculated migration influxes. Accordingly it stands to reason that pre-2009 catch data are more reliable than post-2009 ECJ quail catches data which do not correlate at all with migration trends. This was particularly proven during the 2017 spring hunting season when despite the season occurring at different dates, the peak in quail catches was registered in the last few days of the season. This shows that post-2009 ECJ quail catch data are influenced by other factors (such as the closure of a season should too many catches be declared).

On the basis of quail migration happening between the 4th week of March and the 4th week of April, the question would arise as to whether an open season during parts of this period would provide a satisfactory catch of quail (set as a maximum of 5,000 Common Quail by spring hunting framework law). Considering the dates of the spring hunting season of 2017 which stretched between the last week of March and the first two weeks of April, historical data point to catches amounting close to the maximum quotas. As shown in Table 1, the average catches declared pre-2009 for this period amount to 5,331 birds caught in 3 weeks. This would suggest that an open season between the 5th week of March and the 2nd week of April should satisfy such a quota.

In consideration of Turtle Dove migration data, from available studies, the last week of April comes out as the peak, with migration starting off from the 2nd week of April and building up towards the last week. Having an open season during this period would definitely conflict with the conservation measures in place for preventing the hunting of Turtle Dove during spring migration (as is the spirit of the moratorium enacted by government notice).

Figure 26 summarises the above conclusions graphically.

A hunting season opened between the last week of March and the second week of April (as in 2017) would guarantee a catch of over/close to 5,000 Common Quail, with still a risk of Turtle Doves being targeted during the second week of April.

A hunting season opened between the second week of April until the last week of April would guarantee a catch of well over 5,000 Common Quail, with a greater risk of Turtle Doves being targeted during at least two of the three weeks of such a season.

A hunting season opened between the 3rd week of March and the 1st week of April would guarantee a catch of Common Quail (possibly less than 5,000), but would totally avoid Turtle Dove migration.

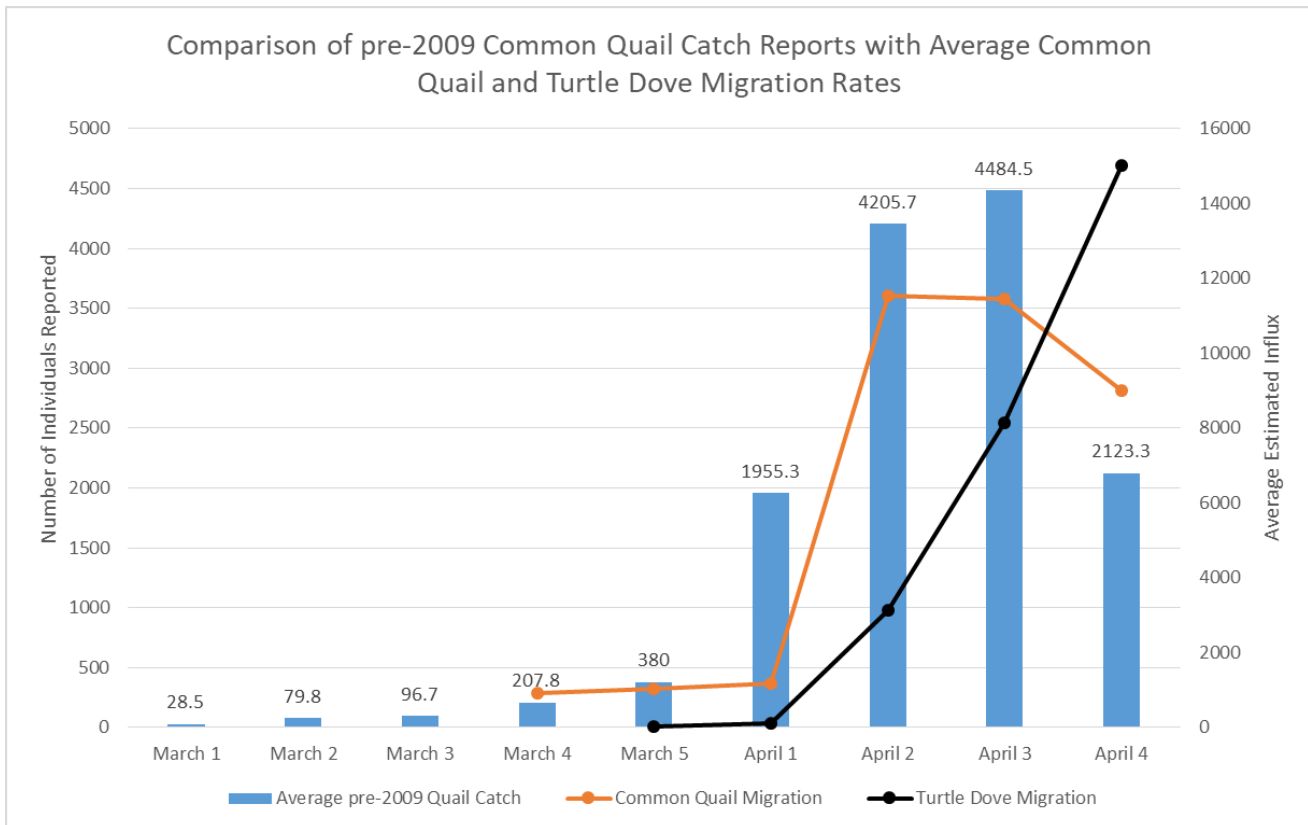


Figure 26: A comprehensive analysis of quail catches (pre-2009), quail migration data (2011-2017) and turtle dove migration data (2011-2017) as sourced from MEPA and WBRU reports, showing possible outcomes of hunting seasons opened during these periods.

References

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