

## **Large-scale finch trapping in Malta is not a legitimate research activity and qualified bird ringers should not participate in it**

### **Statement from EURING, the European Union for Bird Ringing**

Seven finch species occurring in Malta (3 breeding in small numbers, the rest entirely non-breeding) have historically been trapped in large numbers for keeping as cage birds. Trapping of these species is prohibited under the EU Birds Directive, with the Republic of Malta's accession treaty allowing for a phasing out period until 2009. After reopening trapping seasons for finches in 2014, Malta was taken to court by the EU Commission and in 2018 the European Court of Justice found Malta guilty of breaching the EU Birds Directive when it allowed finch trapping seasons to resume.

Since 2020 the Maltese Government has proposed and implemented a derogation to allow former finch trappers to continue to catch finches with the stated aim of obtaining ringing recoveries of birds marked elsewhere in Europe, so as to identify the breeding origins of finches wintering in Malta. They were again taken to the European Court of Justice by the EU Commission and the Court's judgement, issued on 19 September 2024, found that the Republic of Malta had failed to fulfil its obligations under the EU Birds Directive. [The court concluded](#) that the Government of Malta's Finches Project does not establish a genuine research purpose and hence cannot be considered as being justified under the derogation of Article 9(1)(b) of the Birds Directive. Despite this, the Government of Malta has again opened a Finch trapping season for the period 20 October to 20 December 2024, continuing to claim that it is a scientific study.

EURING considers that this approach is unlikely to provide useful scientific data on a reasonable timescale, and that the poor-quality data being gathered does not meet acceptable scientific or ethical standards. Furthermore, the intensity of finch trapping that is being undertaken is likely to have major impacts on bird movements and behaviour, and is therefore not compatible with studying the natural movement patterns of these species. We have therefore asked all member schemes to ensure that their ringers do not associate with, or participate in, these activities. Any attempt to do so risks being used to give legitimacy to an activity that runs contrary to EU law. EURING fully supports the Maltese Bird Ringing Scheme that is operated by BirdLife Malta. There is scope to develop future studies of the ecology and movements of the finch populations that visit Malta but that would require more structured sampling approaches designed to deliver high quality science while minimizing disturbance.

As agreed by the Board of EURING  
2 December 2024