

EU Task Force on the Recovery of Birds
MINUTES of the 4th meeting, 1st December 2023

The fourth meeting of the EU Task Force on the Recovery of Birds (hereafter, the Task Force or TF) was held in hybrid mode on the 1st of December 2023. The meeting was organised and chaired by the Nature Conservation Unit (ENV.D.3) of the European Commission. It was attended by 65 participants representing national authorities and stakeholders (Wetlands International, FACE and BirdLife International). The *Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos* (IREC, ES), the contractor in service contract No. 09.0201/2022/886665/SER/D.3 “Supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status”, also took part in the meeting.

Welcoming address

The Commission, in their role as chair, opened the meeting and welcomed all the participants.

Agenda

The chair presented the agenda of the meeting, which was adopted and is attached in Annex 1. All the documents and presentations relevant to this meeting are available on the dedicated pages of the Task Force on the Recovery of Birds on the European Commission CIRCABC website https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ff1a319e1c5/library/2454dcd0-2bb1-4c4e-b857-5ef6ed2a76ab?p=1&n=10&sort=modified_DESC. The minutes of the 3rd meeting of 21-22 March 2023 were amended to take into account the comments of the members of the Task Force, and adopted.

Update on the contract “Supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status”

The Commission services provided an update on the contract. They reviewed the tasks and informed the meeting participants about the deliverables and their timing. In relation to Task 4 of the contract, “Development and implementation of adaptive harvest management mechanisms (AHM)”, the Commission described the ongoing work on the Turtle Dove AHM, the scheduled presentation by Aarhus university on the AHMs for Bean Goose and Common Eider and the presentation of the approach taken by ES, which would be take place later in the meeting.

Approach for assessing the (un)sustainability of hunting in the context of the Birds Directive (task 5 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status)

IREC presented the proposed approach for assessing the (un)sustainability of hunting in the context of the Birds Directive, as described in document “TFRB 23-12-01 Sust hunting” and the

presentation “Agenda point 3 – Sustainability”, both available on CIRCABC¹. They emphasised that software Popharvest², the state-of-the-art analytical tool proposed, could only determine those situations when hunting had a high probability of being unsustainable, but it could not establish when it was sustainable.

IREC indicated that one crucial aspect in relation to the Population Take Level (PTL) approach is the F_{obj} factor, which applies to the proportion of the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) that can be considered for hunting. The most appropriate value of F_{obj} , to ascertain the (un)sustainability of hunting, depends on the management objective for the population/flyway. In the absence of agreed population objectives, it has been suggested that, in general, $F_{obj} = 1$ can be considered for robust (i.e., secure) populations subject to recreational harvest, while $F_{obj} < 1$ is more appropriate for vulnerable, non-secure populations. Conversely, $F_{obj} > 1$ should be used when the objective is to limit populations (e.g., for population control). Assuming the general objective of population recovery for populations with non-secure status, it will therefore always be necessary to consider F_{obj} values lower than 1 to assess the sustainability of current harvest, because harvest should be lower than MSY to allow population growth, but the actual F_{obj} value to be used may be subject to debate.

IREC emphasised the need for pre-defined management objectives, including population objectives (favourable reference values) and the desired pace to achieve them. The challenge lies in reaching a prior agreement on these objectives, and there is currently no established process for reaching such agreement. A key point of consideration was the timeline for reaching those objectives.

The discussion extended to the use of F_{obj} , specifically on how to distinguish between the red, orange, and green categories suggested in the proposal. There was a discussion on establishing specific percentage thresholds to define if a scenario falls under red, orange or green. Other questions dealt with the inclusion of harvest data, particularly whether to use only the data reported under Article 12 or also more comprehensive data, including data from outside the EU. Other issues raised considered how to address mortality from crippling losses and other non-natural sources (e.g., by-catch). The meeting acknowledged that the assessment on the (un)sustainability of harvest had to be done at the flyway population level, highlighting the importance of communicating this accurately, even if hunting was found to be sustainable at the level of individual Member States.

On the F_{obj} factor, IREC explained that it aims to bring into consideration other elements that might be limiting maximum population growth, such as by-catch, habitat quality, crippling losses. The work of the Task Force is focused on population recovery, even if this may not be quantified. The criteria for categorizing red, orange, or green would originally rely on expert opinion, followed by a discussion in the Task Force. IREC also emphasized that the most important thing

¹ <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ff1a319e1c5/library/203089b1-39a7-4d74-81dc-7898d0541d4c/details>

² Eraud C, Devaux T, Villers A, Johnson FA, Francesiaz C (2021). *popharvest: An R package to assess the sustainability of harvesting regimes of bird populations*. *Ecology and Evolution*, 11, 16562–16571. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.8212>; and Johnson FA, Eraud C, Francesiaz C, Zimmerman GS, Koneff MD. 2023. *Using the R package popharvest to assess the sustainability of offtake in birds*. Preprint. <https://doi.org/10.32942/X21G7D>

was to agree on the data to be used for calculations, both in terms of abundance and of hunting. The contractors planned on using hunting data from Article 12 reports, although it had to be complemented and qualified using more up-to-date information, with the cooperation of Member States and FACE. At this stage, data outside the EU are not planned to be included due to resource limitations, so the sustainability assessments will relate to hunting carried out within the EU.

The Commission drew attention to the ongoing work on Favourable Reference Values (FRV) carried out in parallel and emphasised that there is no need to wait for those values to be agreed before proceeding with the assessment of the unsustainability of hunting. Recovery is an agreed objective, and we need to act now. In the FRV process, population objectives are still to be determined.

ES expressed willingness to collaborate in the sharing of hunting bag data, and FACE also offered to provide hunting bag data, including more recent ones than those in Article 12 (the data are more accurate from 2013-2017). FACE highlighted that they supported the ~~use of a traffic light system for the assessment of unsustainability, and emphasised the need to define sustainability considering factors beyond hunting that are limiting the populations, such as habitat and non-habitat related pressures~~ approach for assessing sustainability, including the stepwise processes to apply the potential Take level (PTL). They emphasised the need to consider factors beyond hunting that are limiting the populations, such as habitat and non-habitat related pressures. The Commission highlighted the importance of complying with the existing legal frameworks in the decision-making process. In particular, hunting should not jeopardise conservation efforts in the birds' distribution area and bird populations should be restored to secure/favourable conservation status. Among other elements to be taken into account is the cooperation with AEWA.

IREC presented the contractor's approach to selecting species for rapid assessment of (un)sustainable hunting, using data on winter abundance at flyway level; the consortium would try to include a wide range of situations potentially with species classified in red as well as some classified in green, and necessarily including 3 potential species for which an Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) will have to be developed. They clarified that AHM is not synonymous with moratorium. It is necessary to adjust the abundance estimate and to agree on how to project the population size at the beginning of the breeding cycle (pre-breeding population size), which will be used for the analysis with Popharvest.

The discussion touched upon the adjustment of projections of population size and the need for transparency in relation to the data and the processes used to calculate indicators or parameters. Birdlife raised concerns about the lack of guidelines on minimum reporting requirements for Article 12 statistics and stressed the importance of stakeholder input. They requested being more involved and informed on the progress and projects, aside from the TFRB meetings. They questioned the relevance for the selection of the 15 species, for example Oystercatcher is only hunted in France and the hunting of Velvet Scoter is banned under AEWA. The Commission took the point on better guiding MS for reporting hunting bag data and clarified that the selection of species is still subject to internal debate.

Wetlands International (WI) suggested that considering the full population volume (e.g. in Africa) could lead to a more optimistic assessment of sustainability especially for species affected by

low reproduction (although this may be taken into account when choosing the F_{obj} value). WI also addressed whether the assessment should consider hunting mortality outside the EU. For example, Garganey is much hunted unsustainably in Africa. IREC explained that, when survival estimates exist, e.g. for Turtle Doves, they already integrate mortality outside the EU. A fraction of the annual mortality takes place outside the EU for several species, but this is captured in the estimates of annual survival. They would be able to differentiate better between mortality inside and outside EU and make more focused recommendations, but only if survival and breeding data are available.

FACE put forward the use of their improved bag data since 2017 and suggested considering the species' trends during the wintering season. They also presented information from a scientific article (Mendez *et al.*, 2015³) and emphasized that, however complex, it was necessary to link hunting with habitat management. In some cases, the decline of species is due to habitat destruction or climate change. FACE argued that in Italy the collection of bag data has been improving over the years. An increasing number of regions are providing data to the central authorities. They mentioned that in the EU wintering birds are mobile and always dependent on changes in habitats, habitat loss or climate change that may shift them to eastwards or northwards. According to FACE, we should consider, in the assessments, cases where wintering trends are increasing, despite a decreasing breeding trend. While the wintering count of some ducks doubled in the UK (Mallard, Long-tailed), this was not taken into account in the 8th report of AEWA⁴ which underestimated their population size.

ES mentioned a scientific paper that recommended a pragmatic approach to improving data accuracy and quality. The Turtle Dove example showed that after 2-3 years of efforts there may be a significant improvement in knowledge about demography of the species and the possibility to develop a population model with accurate data. FACE highlighted the need for consistency in the terminology related to conservation status (different terminology used in the Birds Directive, under article 2 and article 12 and AEWA⁴). They suggest that "population status" should be used as this term is used in assessments under Article 12 reporting under the Birds Directive. Favourable Conservation Status is a terminology from the Habitat Directive. In relation to population status, it was acknowledged that hunting alone cannot bring the desired conservation results.

AT highlighted the importance of the rapid assessment of the first batch of 15 species as the first step. They underlined the need to expand the actions outside EU. The Commission noted that the population model required more data, with data availability being the primary limitation. The list of the 15 species preselected for the first batch is not yet final.

In conclusion, the **Commission observed a general agreement of the Members of the Task Force to proceed with the method presented.** The Commission stressed the need for the TFRB to

³ Méndez, V., Austin, G. E., Musgrove, A. J., Ross-Smith, V. H., Hearn, R. D., Stroud, D. A., Wotton, S. R., & Holt, C. A. (2015). Use of environmental stratification to derive non-breeding population estimates of dispersed waterbirds in Great Britain. In *Journal for Nature Conservation* (Vol. 28, pp. 56–66). Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2015.09.001>

⁴ Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds <https://www.unep-aewa.org/>

provide feedback on the sustainability document in the coming days and proceed with the assessment of 15 species by March, marking a crucial step in the ongoing efforts.

Update on the classification of the 33 species in the relevant categories for follow-up action. Review the most up-to-date available information on conservation needs and pressures for each species (task 1 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status)

The contractor presented the review. They started by presenting the reviewed classification of the 33 species, which is synthesised in fig. 1. They emphasised that this was achieved after thorough review and consideration by the consortium, based on the best available evidence, and IREC did not anticipate any further update.

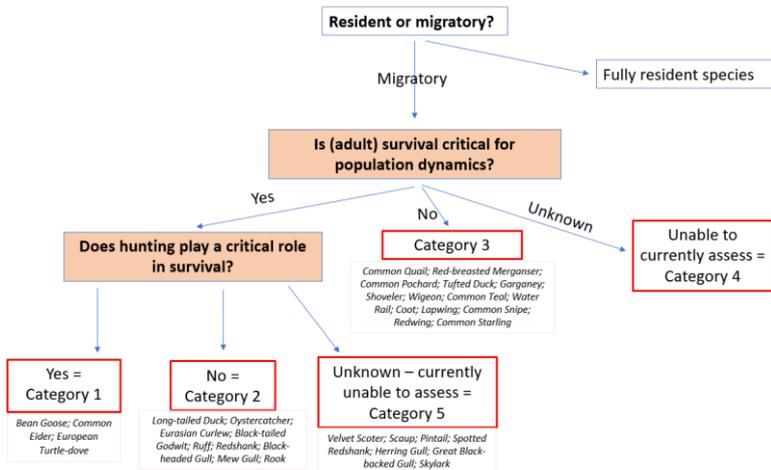


Fig. 1. Graphical summary of the classification of the 33 Annex II bird species with non-secure status proposed in Stroud, D.A. (ed.) (2023). *Review of data on Birds Directive Annex II species with non-Secure status.* Natura 2000 Group and Institute for Game and Wildlife Research (IREC).

In the second part of their presentation, IREC introduced the draft knowledge review⁵. They invited TFRB members to consider this knowledge as a reference and to submit their comments by the end of December 2023.

On the classification of species, the representative of the ES Ministry of Ecological Transition asked about case 3 species ('adult survival is not critical for population dynamics') and stated that it was not clearly defined in the concept was not clear from the diagram alone. Specifically, ES acknowledged the population decline of Quail and its poor conservation status, despite its

⁵ *Review of data and information extent and quality relevant to the conservation of unsecure Annex II birds*, available on CIRCABC <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ff1a319e1c5/library/9558da5c-bfea-4d69-923e-4e79b033b3fe/details>

good productivity. The complexity of categorizing Quail in case 3 was discussed, and ES suggested that it might be more appropriate for case 4, as survival is probably key but there may not be enough information.

IREC replied that survival is critical in all cases, but it depends how much in comparison to other parameters. They questioned whether survival is more critical than productivity for Quail, given the biology of the species, but also highlighted that the assessment of the sustainability of hunting will be done in all cases including for Quail except for those in case 1, and that being allocated in case 3 does not mean that it cannot be over-harvested. IREC indicated that the allocation of Quail in case 3 is well supported, although it could be reconsidered in case of new evidence. They also noted Quail is a widespread bird but there is no assessment of integrated (multinational) population trend data like PECBMS⁶, which has been so useful in the Turtle Dove AHM. IREC insisted that monitoring of Quail abundance is a priority. The Commission pointed out that even for case 3, actions will be needed on hunting and habitats, as responses will need to address all causes of decline. If the proposal was to put Quail in case 4, the short-term response would be to suspend the authorisation of hunting in application of the precautionary principle.

ES suggested analysing Quail in the first batch of species for a rapid assessment of hunting (un)sustainability. IREC emphasized the need for population size and harvest data for analysing hunting (un)sustainability, and that there is currently not enough information to determine management units or abundance data at the appropriate spatial scales (i.e. flyway level). The Commission expressed understanding with the perspective of ES, highlighting the implications of categorizing Quail in case 4.

The representative of the ES Ministry of Agriculture provided further information on Common Quail, noting that hunting bag data in ES were available and up to date, with census data being collected by forest rangers and hunters.

WI congratulated the contractor team on their work and inquired about plans for improved monitoring to inform short-term and long-term sustainable assessments, before opening the hunting season. Wetlands ~~will send~~ committed to sending their biogeographical good state of knowledge population data separately. The Commission clarified that the contract would assess (un)sustainability but monitoring and research would need to be implemented by Member States. WI proposed developing coordinated monitoring systems for cases 2 and 3. The Commission explained that the AHMM (Adaptive Harvest Management Mechanism) was currently being planned for a few species only, as resources needed to be focused on those for which it was possible to make a significant difference. Horizon can cover some of the data gaps of case 2 and 3. For monitoring we will only be able to make recommendations using the orange/green/red conclusion of the rapid assessment, but monitoring is a duty of Member States.

⁶ PanEuropean Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (<https://pecbms.info/>).
N.B.: It should be noted, however, that the A12 report gives a national short-term trend for most Member States https://nature-art12.eionet.europa.eu/article12/summary?period=3&subject=Coturnix+coturnix&reported_name=

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BirdLife International (BI) raised concerns about ~~hunting-killing~~ under derogation. In the case of Rook, ~~they said it-the total catch~~ can be higher than regular hunting, this being a challenge for the species in certain countries; the impact of derogation needs special attention for some species. BI was also concerned about the practice of releasing farm-raised Quail for hunting, for which there are no official ~~data~~. He emphasized the need for careful screening of derogations, and ~~stressed the need to obtain and share~~ ~~the availability of~~ data from species impacted by avian influenza. Those concerns were noted by the Commission, who emphasized that, if possible, derogations should be added into the parameters assessing (un)sustainability of hunting. IREC highlighted a key action for Rook, emerged from the recent workshop in Prague, which pointed at the need to gather more data on the extent of Rook culling or derogated killing.

FACE expressed gratitude for the work done and raised questions about Skylark and Pintail. For Skylark, they ~~argued that hunting does not play a role in survival~~ highlighted that the consortium's work resulted in the conclusion that hunting does not play a critical/important role on survival, so that the species should not be in case 5 but in case 2, according to the consortium's methodology. There was confusion about hunting for migratory species in case 5; FACE provided monitoring data from Italy, suggesting a stable migratory population despite a decreasing breeding population in the EU, which shows a good breeding population in Eastern Europe (and outside EU). Pintail was also classified as case 5, despite a demonstrated positive role of hunting on ~~survival~~ abundance, thanks to low harvest and the preservation of good habitats by hunters in the Adriatic coast and in the Po coastal lagoons, which would have been degraded by farming otherwise. IREC agreed that case 5 indicated some lack of knowledge and the aim was that in the future there were no species in case 5; they emphasized the need for a flyway approach to understand species' responses to management. FACE highlighted the importance of hunting and fishing to conserve natural areas. If some species are fully banned from hunting, it may pose a risk for those areas.

The Danish representative (DK) offered more updated hunting bag data and raised concerns about the need to differentiate breeding and non-breeding populations in the EU for case 1. IREC clarified that the approach depends on the species, with some exclusively wintering or breeding in the EU. IREC stressed the obligation to conserve these species taking into account the specificities of each case. The discussion touched upon the need to ensure the conservation of species during their time in the EU, with assessments conducted on a case-by-case basis.

In conclusion, the **Commission observed a general agreement on the classification, with some species requiring an additional check**. Members should send justified requests to change the classification by the end of December.

Criteria for setting hunting quotas in the context of adaptive harvest management mechanisms

IREC presented the proposal for criteria to allocate hunting quotas in the context of running AHM mechanisms; they emphasised the convenience of having this discussion in anticipation of the situation when hunting of species like Turtle Dove can restart. They highlighted the idea of allocating a proportion of the quota linked to efforts for the recovery of the species, alongside current distribution and historical share of the quota among countries. The weight between those three factors is still to be discussed. The idea behind the historic dimension is to

contemplate only countries that have hunted the species in the past, not to invite countries that currently do not hunt a specific species to commence its hunting.

FACE pointed out that the US implements the Adaptive Harvest Management Mechanism (AHMM) with different regulations for determining quotas, including day limits agreed upon by different states. Despite Pintail populations not recovering, they are still hunted. The idea of limiting the harvest by controlling the number of hunting days is under discussion, but it was acknowledged that this approach could be complex. In Italy, there is difficulty over national quota allocation among regions for Turtle Doves. IREC mentioned that the current proposal was based on ongoing work for Common Eider, currently being developed under AEWA, and highlighted that those principles are good as a starting point for the debate.

MT emphasized the need for more work to develop principles at the flyway level. Countries should not close hunting to bypass the need to work on habitats. They clarified that the implementation of Articles 3 and 4 of the Directive remain unaffected by this work.

Birdlife raised questions about the purpose of quotas, highlighting the need for better monitoring and improved enforcement mechanisms. BI stressed the need for an organized system for quota monitoring, taking into account regional and temporal aspects; they raised concerns about potential manipulation of the system, as exemplified by the MT example.

On the proposal, FACE suggested that quotas could be defined in terms of reduction, considering factors like daily bag limits and the number of days within the season instead of a MS quota. AT emphasized the importance of data delivery. The Commission clarified that there would be no redistribution if a Member State decides not to hunt.

The Office Français pour la Biodiversité (OFB)⁷ emphasized that quotas should only be set for species that are currently hunted, and that the objective of hunting quotas is to reduce hunting as it serves as a tool to distribute the reduction of hunting among countries. They considered that there should be no opening of new or more hunting given that all species under consideration are doing poorly. FACE welcomed the weight correction index and conservation effort criteria set out in the document, stressing the importance of considering both harvest and conservation efforts. Some authorities pay little attention to this subject, but the hunting community would be penalised without them.

Birdlife highlighted the need to assess the quality of the data and said that the complexity varies across species and regions due to different legislative approaches. He questioned how hunting tourism, derogations, and quotas on derogations would fit into the proposed framework. In addition, there is the issue of hunting tourism with species such as Skylark, which is killed by EU hunters more outside the EU than inside. IREC clarified that harvest by hunting tourism is included in some Member States' bag statistics such as Spain, and hunting through derogation is also reported. The Commission emphasized the importance of considering all elements in the third condition, including legal hunting, derogations, and hunting tourism.

OFB raised a question about how quotas would be shared between legal hunting and derogations, pointing out that derogation hunting is a response to a problem and an exception.

⁷ Consortium partner Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB).

FACE highlighted ~~the role of every hunter in the take, indicating that more hunters lead to a larger take. They also mentioned that hunting tourists have the obligation to report to the hunting grounds, that the highest harvests happen when most hunters (e.g., in a country) have the opportunity to encounter a given bird species in their normal activity, so for common species.~~

DK shared their experience with quotas for Pink-footed Goose, suggesting the exploration of species-specific criteria for quota allocation. The Commission suggested more reflection and a pragmatic approach to avoid lengthy discussions on theoretical aspects. However, it might have the opposite effect of being more complex and generate further discussions on every species on the weights of each factor rather than discussing the issue once. IREC added that the weight of criteria could be adjusted to zero for certain species, underlining the need for further reflection.

The Commission concluded that the mechanism needs further development to be re-discussed in the next meeting.

State of play of the Adaptive Harvest Management of the Common Eider and the Taiga Bean Goose

The Head of Centre for Adaptive Nature Management, Aarhus University, presented an update on the state of play of the AHM being developed for Taiga Bean Goose and Common Eider under AEWA, with contributions from different participating regions and organizations. His presentation focussed on aspects related to data collection, harvest management, and conservation efforts for those species. For Common Eider, it is necessary to decide an optimal framework for coordination, as no sea duck working group exists under AEWA. He mentioned that data are missing from DE and PL for the AHM. There was an ongoing proposal to develop an Adaptive Harvest Management mechanism (AHMM) for the eastern management unit of Taiga Bean Goose under AEWA, but essential abundance data were limited, in particular in PL.

FACE mentioned a moratorium for Taiga Bean Goose in place in Finland since 2014 and cited limited hunting activity in other countries since then. This took place following a recommendation of the AEWA Working Group.

The Commission clarified that the role of the Task Force is to complement, not to duplicate the work undertaken under AEWA. The Commission would consider whether IREC could work to fill the gaps to develop the Adaptive Harvest Management mechanism of the Eastern Taiga Bean Goose and the Common Eider. In particular, IREC could help collecting the gaps identified (abundance and hunting bags)

The Commission concluded that the synergies between the Task Force and AEWA need to be further discussed.

Round-table update by Member State authorities reporting any new information on Turtle Dove (hunting, habitat management, monitoring and research) since the third meeting of the task force of 21 March 2023

ES provided information on the AHMM, indicating that there were no data on its implementation yet. They announced the development of a new catalogue of eco-scheme interventions and a monitoring program to assess its effects. They also reported on the enforcement of moratorium, which detected that 3,000 Turtle doves were illegally killed in the region of Murcia.

~~BirdLife reported that experimental harvest had continued in the Extrema, complained that experimental harvest had continued in the ES region of Extremadura; on the data presented about illegal killing in Murcia, the Extremadura region of ES, with nearly 3000 birds killed in 2023, asked whether the number of «captures» presented shown in the presentation corresponded to the number of offenses detected or to the number of birds killed. ES replied it was the number of birds.~~

~~OR~~

~~ES provided information on the implementation of the AHMM, indicating that there were no data on its implementation results yet. They announced the development of a new catalogue of eco-scheme interventions and a monitoring program to assess its effects. They also reported on the enforcement of moratorium, which detected that 3,000 Turtle doves were illegally killed in the region of Murcia.~~

OFB-France provided information on activities carried out in France, where there is a moratorium, similar to those in Spain; they said enforcement data are available and can be provided. France has an agreed management plan with the ministry of Agriculture and Environment, for which funding is secured. In terms of scientific work, there are ongoing ringing programmes and surveys to assess population trends. They also mentioned habitat management and afforestation projects carried out by hunters, and the collection of spring migration data. They provided insights into the hunting activities, with inspections conducted and few irregularities reported.

MT presented habitat management measures, GAEC (good agricultural and environmental condition, an EU standard) measures, restoration measures (afforestation) and the collection of spring migration data for Turtle Dove in Malta. They mentioned daily counts during migrations, research into age composition, and captive breeding and release projects as part of their efforts. MT also outlined spring and autumn hunting activities, along with inspections and irregularities detected. Hunting is open morning till noon in spring with limited quota, and again in September with other limited case. The Commission reminded that there is an infringement case open with MT on this matter.

AT mentioned that Turtle Dove was huntable in three provinces in Austria in 2023, but hunting will be stopped in 2024 in two provinces according to monitoring results, as there is evidence of a decline in the species population.

In Italy (IT), a National Action Plan for Turtle Dove is being implemented by the regions. In-depth reporting is expected at the end of the hunting season, with an emphasis on data collection, reducing hunting effort, and habitat conservation measures. Different regions have varying hunting regulations (no hunting in the western flyway, while hunting is permitted in the eastern flyway in Trento, Bolzano, Abruzzo and Campania), with coordination limited to reducing hunting effort, but the decision of hunting is left to the regions and there is no coordination across them. The Commission noted that the methodology for implementing quotas under development could be tested for the Italian regions.

FACE highlighted that the Action Plan in Italy is mandatory for regions with a minimum 50% reduction quota of historical hunting, and reporting systems are in place. IREC acknowledged the importance of knowing that it works at the Member State (MS) level. Bag limits were specified

for all regions (5 birds/day and 15 birds/season) according to FACE and monitored with a smartphone application.

PT reported progress in their project, including the preparation of protocols, training, Turtle Dove monitoring, although it was currently pending funds which will allow upcoming data collection and analysis. Habitat management measures were delayed due to resource constraints, and a hunting ban is being maintained.

BE mentioned emergency feeding in the western part, which will be maintained in the following year as food availability during the breeding season is the biggest problem for the species. A new breeding census has been carried out and there is ongoing research on habitat use during the breeding season.

CY⁸ reported that it implemented the recommendations made by the Task Force in 2023. They also mentioned investing in GPS tracking for more research on fecundity and survival, and ringing carried out by hunters.

Birdlife raised concerns about the situation in Italy, suggesting the possibility of taking legal actions against some regions, and emphasized the importance of achieving zero take in 2023 and 2024 since the time lag in the estimates of population trends means it will still take some time before any recovery can be confirmed. They noted that the recommended zero take in 2022-2023 was not respected. There was not enough communication of the EC and FACE about the ban. Circabc is only for specialists. The Commission took note of the demand on communication.

BirdLife also welcomed positive developments in Greece (Eonian islands), with fewer incidences of illegal killing and increased enforcement and education efforts towards hunters.

FACE discussed habitat improvement challenges on a wide scale, suggesting the use of CAP funds for species recovery in addition to numerous LIFE projects. They mentioned that a good example is in Spain, but it is not the case in other countries. There is an issue of shifting CAP money from biodiversity to other objectives during the programming period. They asked the EU to specify what funds or shares are available for habitat measures. FACE noted that they support National Restoration Law (NRL) and a restoration fund.

FI highlighted the impact of climate change on migratory behaviour. IT mentioned problems with meeting national reporting deadlines (for the end of January, so they are hoping to report by mid-February).

The Commission concluded that the preparation of the 2024 recommendation on hunting of Turtle Dove will be made at the next meeting of the task force (spring 2024).

Information about the future questionnaires on Turtle dove and on resident species (task 7 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status)

IREC informed the Task Force about the upcoming questionnaires to the Member State authorities on their activities in relation to Turtle Dove, and also on their activities for the

⁸ Cyprus is not listed as part of the central-eastern flyway, but there is consensus that it will report to and form part of that management unit.

conservation of resident species. They announced that both questionnaires would be sent by 15 January, with a deadline for responding by 12 February⁹, to give the contractor enough time to analyse the responses and report back at the spring meeting¹⁰ of the TFRB.

Report from the Prague workshop on the identification of key actions for task 2 (addressing habitat-related threats and needs) and task 3 (addressing non-hunting and non-habitat related threats) of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status

IREC reported orally on the development of an expert workshop in Prague earlier that same week, 27-29 November 2023, hosted by the consortium partner Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU). The workshop was held in hybrid format and was attended by 16 participants in person and 18 participants online.

The workshop was aimed at identifying key conservation actions for the recovery of the 26 species covered by tasks 2 and 3 of the service contract. Actions were selected based on their potential to address the identified negative factors impacting on the survival or the breeding success of the species, their feasibility, and population effects. Each key action was considered in detail, together with its geographical scope. The work extended to proposing one or several indicators to assess the implementation of the actions identified. Where applicable, a list of other bird species (listed in Annex II or not) likely to benefit from the action was also considered.

IREC said that the workshop had been a success and it had allowed identifying 5-10 key actions per species to address the main pressures and threats characterised in previous work, as part of the contract. Given that the workshop had taken place only a few days before, they said that the results would be communicated to the members for feedback in due course, ahead of the next meeting of the TFRB.

Wetlands International raised concerns about having too many actions. IREC clarified that the consolidation phase would involve grouping at the species level and clusters based on pressures and threats. They will not create new species action plans with hundreds of actions per species.

The Commission concluded that further discussion would take place once the list of actions will be further elaborated.

Conclusions of the EU hunting Directors meeting

ES presented the conclusion of the hunting directors meeting which took place from 24th to 26th October 2023. The directors addressed the following topics: CAP, biodiversity, and game management; New technologies related to hunting management; Challenges arising from overabundance.

End of the meeting

⁹ The Commission sent the questionnaires on 23/01/2024 with a deadline on 19/02/2024 for the Turtle Dove and 28/03/2024 for the resident species.

¹⁰ The meeting is planned for 19/04/2024

Birdlife asked how stakeholders will be involved, and for the schedule of the process of the next stage. The Commission announced that they would be sending an email with all the information, instructions and deadlines for sending comments to all of the MS and stakeholders. To sum up, there is a general agreement of the approach for assessing the (un)sustainability of hunting. The members of the Task Force had some comments on the update on the classification of the 33 species in the relevant categories for follow-up action. The members of the Task Force gave comments on the criteria for setting hunting quotas in the context of adaptive harvest management mechanisms, which would need to be reviewed and re-discussed. Following the comments that will be sent on those three main deliverables, new versions of those documents will be communicated to the members of the Task Force.

A dedicated meeting of the Task Force will take place in spring to discuss the Turtle Dove recommendations for the 2024 hunting season. A meeting of the Task Force focusing on the presentation of the results of the rapid assessment of hunting unsustainability for a first sample of 15 species will also take place in the coming months. The Commission will continue monitoring the implementation of the actions recommended by the Task Force.

Having no remaining points in the agenda, the chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and the contractor for their support, and closed the meeting.

Annex I. Agenda of the meeting.

TASK FORCE ON THE RECOVERY OF BIRD SPECIES (TFRB)

4th meeting – 1st December 2023

DRAFT AGENDA

9:30 Start	
1	Welcome by Chair and adoption of the agenda
2	Update on the contract "Supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status"
3	Approach for assessing the (un)sustainability of hunting in the context of the Birds Directive (task 5 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status) – Doc TFRB 23-12-01 Sust hunting.pdf
4	Update on the classification of the 33 species in the relevant categories for follow-up action. Review the most up-to-date available information on conservation needs and pressures for each species (task 1 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status) - Docs TFRB 23-12-02 Birds status data.pdf and TFRB 23-12-03 knowledge review
12:00 -13:00 Lunch break	
5	Criteria for setting hunting quotas in the context of adaptive harvest management mechanisms (task 4 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status)-Doc TFRB 23-12-04 Criteria quotas
6	State of play of the Adaptive Harvest Management of the Common Eider and the Taiga Bean Goose
7	Round-table update by Member State authorities reporting any new information on Turtle Dove (hunting, habitat management, monitoring and research) since the third meeting of the task force of 21 March 2023
8	Information about the future questionnaires on Turtle dove and on resident species (task 7 of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status)
9	Report from the Prague workshop on the identification of key actions for task 2 (addressing habitat-related threats and needs) and task 3 (addressing non-hunting and non-habitat related threats) of the contract supporting the recovery of bird species of Annex II of the Birds Directive in non-secure conservation status
16:30 End	