

SUB-EXPERT GROUP ON THE NATURE DIRECTIVES ("NADEG")

24th Meeting, 01 April 2025
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SUBJECT: **Recommendations of the 10th meeting of the Task Force on the recovery of birds**

During the 10th meeting of the Task Force, held on 04/03/2025, the consortium IREC presented its assessment of the situation of the Turtle Dove in the two flyways further to the 2024 hunting season and in light of the updated monitoring results, as well as its scientific recommendation for the 2025 hunting season. The second item discussed was the recommendations for key actions addressing habitat-related pressures and threats and non-hunting and non-habitat related pressures and threats. The summary record of the meeting, the presentations and the preparatory documents are available in Circabc¹.

The **conclusions and recommendations** of the discussions held at the meeting are the following:

Turtle Dove Western flyway

(1) Hunting

The Task Force received the technical recommendation that **hunting may be allowed in the western flyway around 1,5 % of Western flyway population harvested, which represents 132,000 individuals**. After the application of the agreed methodology for the allocation of hunting quotas at flyway level, the maximal harvest is 106,920 individuals for Spain, 10,560 for France and 924 for Italy. All the three agreed conditions to resume hunting are met, and in place at the time when hunting is reopened:

- a population increase of at least 2 years,
- an increase in survival that leads to a growth rate (λ) estimated by the population model that is reliably equal to or above 1 and
- the existence of credible regulatory and control/ enforcement systems.

The positive noticeable effect in the three breeding seasons corresponding to the hunting ban (springs 2022-24), is an increase of 40.5 % equivalent to 615,000 additional breeding pairs, to a new size of 2.13 million breeding pairs in 2024, the highest total since 2009 (15 years), as demonstrated by the PECMS monitoring results (See Annex 2). In 2024, the hunting ban was still largely observed across the flyway. Control/enforcement systems showed sufficient progress. Habitat management measures cover many schemes, but with disparities and lack of detail. In particular, there are insufficient measures targeting the Turtle Dove, and insufficient monitoring to assess effect of birds on population increase. We observe many ongoing efforts to improve data on survival and productivity, but lack of national censuses.

¹ All documents and presentations are available on CircaBC https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ffa319e1c5/library/0acfe64a-6df6-41a2-b280-f01abdfab799?p=1&n=10&sort=modified_DESC

In order to respect the above recommendation of hunting, the Task Force received the technical recommendation to ensure the **proper implementation of the mechanism for enforcing reduced harvests.**

(2) Habitats management

The recommendation on habitats is that **Member States should apply management measures specifically targeted to Turtle Dove and improve/implement monitoring mechanisms to assess effect of habitat.** Targeted interventions in tree dominated landscape where birds are present or where they might return, should include the clearing of woodland undergrowth; provide an open structure and herbaceous understorey ; unpaved tracks and fire breaks ; and grazing by livestock, wild ungulates at low densities. On farmland, interventions should include the maintenance and promotion of elements of non-farmland habitats (natural grasslands, patches of woodland, shrub); the promotion of complex cultivation landscapes, grassy field margins and open areas, and the retention of cereal stubble at least until October.

(3) Research

The recommendation on research requires **the maintenance & potentially expansion of collection of survival data, and carrying out national censuses and full surveys of abundance.**

(4) Conclusion

There was consensus (with the exception of Estonia and Birdlife) to reopen hunting with the 1.5% quota in the western flyway. Meanwhile, the reaction of the birds population to the hunting take will need to be closely monitored in the next years, and the three recommendation needs to be implemented.

Turtle Dove Central-eastern flyway

(1) Hunting

The Task Force received the technical recommendation that **zero harvest be set in the central-eastern flyway for 2025.** The 2024 recommended hunting ban was not implemented, as it was the case in 2023, 2022 and 2021, except for Romania. Hunting effort levels were reported to be reduced (ca. 67%). This reduction in hunting pressure is, however, not reflected in the flyway population trend, which shows, in contrast, a continued decline (See Annex 2). The population size is shown to have reached its lowest level of the entire time series in 2024, after suffering a 46% decline since 2005 (19 years). One hypothesis is that the reported take vastly underestimates real take. Another hypothesis is that hunting, albeit reduced, is still taking place above the maximum threshold that the population is able to sustain, given the (unknown) demographic variables of the flyway. This year Member States reported more information on the regulatory and control/enforcement systems, but which is in contradiction with population trends. As a consequence, the above mentioned three agreed conditions to resume hunting are not met. Habitat management actions implemented by relevant Member States are insufficient and lack of details. They are not specific for Turtle Dove, and robust monitoring mechanisms are lacking. There is a lack of national censuses, and no ongoing efforts to improve data on survival or productivity.

In order to ensure a better respect of the reduced harvests, the Task Force received the technical recommendation to ensure the **proper implementation of the mechanism for enforcing reduced harvests.**

(2) Habitats

Member States should apply management measures specifically targeted to Turtle Dove and improve/implement monitoring mechanisms to assess effect of habitat. Targeted interventions in tree dominated landscape where birds are present or where they might return, should include the clearing of woodland undergrowth ; provide an open structure and herbaceous understorey ; unpaved tracks and fire breaks ; and grazing by livestock, wild ungulates at low densities. On farmland, interventions should include the maintenance and promotion of elements of non-farmland habitats (natural grasslands, patches of woodland, shrub) ; the promotion of complex cultivation landscapes, grassy field margins and open areas, and the retention of cereal stubble at least until October.

(3) Research

Member States should collect survival and productivity data, build population model with flyway-specific data and carry out national censuses and full surveys of abundance.

(4) Conclusion

The situation is dramatically different from the western flyway. There is much less knowledge to describe the reasons for the situation in this flyway in terms of productivity, survival, bag data, enforcement but the continued population decline is very clear. The decisions by Member States to keep authorising hunting in such circumstances do not comply with the Birds Directive, article 7 and the precautionary principle. **There is a need to seriously engage in this process and implement the temporary hunting ban.** However, **as a reaction to the recommendation, no Member State committed to implement the 0 take.**

Key actions addressing habitat-related pressures and threats and non-hunting and non-habitat related pressures and threats

The Task Force was consulted with actions for mitigating the main identified non hunting pressures and threats. Those actions are gathered in 2 multi-species action plans. After consultation of the Task Force, and after the discussions in the workshop that took place on 3rd of October in total the “multi species actions plan” contains 63 Key Action on habitats targeting 26 species; and 80 non-habitats key actions targeting 23 species.

The Task Force received the technical recommendation **to establish key actions in Member States where they currently do not exist for the species in question. These actions should be implemented in a way that reflects the specific conditions and needs of each Member State. Efforts should also focus on increasing the efficiency of these actions, evaluating their effectiveness, engaging with stakeholders, and ensuring their inclusion in National Restoration Plans.**

The Key actions did not raise major concerns. Members asked to adapt some actions, and whether they need to commit to implement all actions now. Member States asked for flexibility to adapt the actions to their reality and local context.

The Commission clarified that MS do not need to commit to implementing all the actions now, as it is also for future implementation. The Commission asked however if Member States can already agree on the principle of the relevance of the actions. The Commission encouraged the MS to include the relevant key actions proposed in their Nature Restoration Plans. Hunting cannot be sustainable if solely actions on hunting

management are implemented. Non hunting actions are especially relevant for case 3 species for which survival is not a critical factor, and for case 2 species for which hunting is not a critical factor.

Questions for discussion:

TURTLE DOVE

- **Western flyway:**
 - Do NADEG members agree with the recommendation that a maximum of 1,5 % of western flyway population can be applied for 2025?
 - Do NADEG members agree to implement a proper mechanism for enforcing reduced harvests?
 - Do NADEG members agree to maintain & expand the collection of survival data, and to carry out national censuses and full surveys of abundance?
- **Central-eastern flyway:**
 - Do NADEG members agree with the recommendation that zero harvest be implemented for 2025?
 - Do NADEG members agree to undertake collection of survival & productivity data ; populate population model with flyway-specific data and to carry out national censuses and full surveys of abundance ?
- **Both flyways:** Do NADEG members agree to apply habitats management measures specifically targeted to Turtle Dove and to improve/implement monitoring mechanisms to assess effect of habitat ?

NON HUNTING KEY ACTIONS

- Do NADEG members agree to establish key actions in Member States where they currently do not exist for the species in question ?

ANNEX 1 - Specific conditions for resuming (Western flyway) or performing hunting (Central-eastern flyway) put forward in 2022 and renewed for the 2023, 2024 and 2025 hunting season.

1. A population increase of at least 2 years measured with the PECBMS index² (confidence interval with a lower limit > 0.95 and upper limit < 1.05). This information will be available in 2024-2025.
2. An increase in survival that leads to a growth rate (λ) estimated by the population model that is reliably equal to or above 1 (the reliability of stability or future population growth should be calculated by the assessment that the risk of decline is lower than 15%).
3. The existence of credible regulatory and control/enforcement systems in place at the time when hunting is reopened.

² If the 2021 PECBMS index for the western flyway were, e.g., 20 ± 2 SE (standard error), the condition would be met if the 2022 and 2023 indices were 23 ± 2 SE (23 being $20+2+1$) or higher.

ANNEX 2 - Estimates of turtle dove breeding population size along the European part of the western flyway 1998-2023 and central-eastern flyway 2000-2024

Data: PECBMS (February 2025).

