



PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT FOR
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

Wild Birds Regulation Unit

Conservation of Wild Birds Funding Scheme for Voluntary Organisations

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Conservation of Wild Birds Fund is set up by the Minister for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change and falls under the responsibility of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit within the Parliamentary Secretariat for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights. The fund¹ is offering financial support in the form of grants to registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs)², which are active within the domain of conservation of wild birds. Financial support under the fund is available for projects that directly contribute to the conservation of wild birds, in accordance with the priorities of this funding scheme.

1.2 The legal basis covering the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund is Regulation 31 of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations (SL549.42) which states:

- 31. (1) The Minister shall set up a fund, hereinafter referred to as the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund.**
- (2) The Conservation of Wild Birds Fund shall be used to finance activities, projects, programmes and schemes related to the implementation of the aims and objectives of these regulations, including activities organised by non-governmental organizations.**
- (3) The Conservation of Wild Birds Fund shall be administered by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit.**
- (4) There shall be paid into the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund: any sums appropriated by Parliament for the purpose; any donations or grants made to the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund by individuals or institutions; sums received by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit for the purpose of being placed in the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund; such other sums or monies as may from time to time be provided by, or collected under this or any other law or regulations.**
- (5) The Conservation of Wild Birds Fund shall keep a proper account of its revenue and expenditure and the Wild Birds Regulation Unit shall, every financial year deliver to the Minister, a copy of its balance sheet together with a report of its activities during the previous financial year.**
- (6) The revenue of the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund shall not be subject to tax under the Income Tax Act and the [...] Fund shall not be liable to tax under the Duty on Documents and Transfers Act.**
- (7) The Wild Birds Regulation Unit may make proposals for endorsement by the Minister, concerning the procedures to be followed in the functioning of the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund.”**

¹ The terms “fund” and “funding scheme” shall be used interchangeably throughout these guidelines to denote “Conservation of Wild Birds Fund”

² The terms “registered NGOs” or “Voluntary Organisations” shall be used interchangeably throughout these guidelines to denote non-profit organisations enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in terms of the Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap 492 of the Laws of Malta) and its subsidiary legislation 492.01 (Annual Returns and Annual Accounts) Regulations 2012, and having, amongst their primary aims and fields of activity, the promotion of the conservation of wild birds

2. Objectives

2.1 In accordance with Regulation 31 of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations (SL 549.42), the objective of the Fund is to finance activities, projects, programmes and schemes related to the implementation of the aims and objectives of these regulations, thus directly contributing to conservation of wild birds.

3. Priority Areas

3.1 The Parliamentary Secretariat for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights will set priority areas for funding each year. These priority areas were established in consultation with the Wild Birds Regulation Unit and the Malta Ornis Committee and are listed in 3.2 below.

3.2 In 2019, the Fund shall provide financial support in the form of grants for projects that directly address one or more of the priorities listed below:

- a. Actions to support implementation of enforcement priorities related to eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade in wild birds;
- b. Initiatives that contribute to sustainable hunting governance;
- c. Avifauna species re-introduction programmes;
- d. Avifauna habitat restoration projects;
- e. Avifauna species and habitats conservation measures;
- f. Training for personnel involved in the conservation of wild birds;
- g. Scientific studies related to monitoring of the status of bird species;
- h. Innovation and technology use for avifauna conservation;
- i. Awareness raising and educational initiatives related to conservation of wild birds;
and,
- j. Initiatives that promote stakeholder dialogue and cooperation in the field of conservation of wild birds.

3.3 Projects that do not address fully at least one of the above priorities shall not be eligible for support by the Fund.

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3.4 The same NGO, or partnership amongst NGOs, may apply for financial support for a maximum of two projects within the same call for proposals, without prejudice to the provision of clause 4.11 of these Guidelines.

4. Management and Administration of the Scheme

4.1 This Funding Scheme is administered by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit and managed by the Conservation of Wild Birds Committee, appointed by the Permanent Secretary and composed of:

- i. Director General (Operations) within the office of the Permanent Secretary PS – Chairperson
- ii. Representative of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU)
- iii. Representative of the Veterinary and Phytosanitary Regulation Department (VPRD)
- iv. Representative of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS)

The Chairperson shall have an original vote and where, the votes are equally divided, the Chairperson shall have a second and casting vote.

4.2 The role of the Committee is to:

- i. Manage the Fund on an ongoing basis in an efficient and effective manner in accordance with the established objectives and criteria;
- ii. Set calls for application and establish requirements and procedures;
- iii. Ensure full visibility of the Scheme including a fair, transparent and equitable selection process, and furthermore ascertain that the due process is followed in compliance with all applicable rules and regulations;
- iv. Inform successful and unsuccessful applicants with the outcome of their application;
- v. Publish the results of the scheme in the form of a ranking list, indicating final mark and budget allocation;
- vi. Have the prerogative to retain and not allocate a part of the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund for the purpose of contingency or for other purposes related to administration and management of the Fund itself;
- vii. Monitor the implementation of funded projects to ensure compliance with the grant conditions.

4.3 The Committee shall also have the power to:

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- i. Request any clarifications from applicants for the purpose of assessment;
- ii. Assess the applications and the proposals therein received against the objectives, parameters and criteria established in these Guidelines, and prioritise accordingly;
- iii. Issue Letters of Acceptance to the successful applicant organisations, giving them an appointed date and time to sign the grant agreement;
- iv. Prepare the grant agreement for signing with the beneficiary organisation;
- v. Not finalise a grant agreement in the event that copies of any relevant regulatory permits or other necessary documentation have not been provided by the applicant organisation as necessary, unless a commitment to obtain such permits at a later stage of the project forms an integral part of the grant agreement itself;
- vi. Cancel the Letter of Acceptance or the grant agreement, if the applicant organisation fails to provide the required regulatory permits or other necessary documentation as applicable by the due date as had been agreed, or if it defaults on any other obligation under the grant agreement.
- vii. Authorise payments only for proposals where all applicable conditions pertaining to such expenditure were fulfilled unless unspent funds are used for other purpose that fit the fund guidelines subject to prior approval by the Committee;
- viii. In special justified circumstances, recommend for Minister’s approval on any specific waiver of any specific requirements.

4.4 The Committee shall be assisted as necessary by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit which shall provide the necessary technical, administrative, executive and secretarial support to the work of the Committee.

4.5 Applications received within the closing date for applications shall be evaluated using a three-stage procedure.

4.6 The first stage of the evaluation procedure involves eligibility screening checks and administrative compliance assessment. At this stage, proposals will be checked for completeness (e.g. whether all relevant sections of the application forms were filled in correctly, whether all requested accompanying documentation was enclosed, whether the forms are duly signed by an authorised representative of the organisation, etc), as well as for compliance with the eligibility criteria.

4.7 Support under this Fund shall only be made available to Voluntary Organisations / NGOs that are enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in accordance³ with the provisions of the Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap 492 of the Laws of Malta) and its subsidiary legislation, and having, amongst their primary aims and fields of activity, the promotion of the conservation of wild birds.. Non-enrolment with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations with the stated primary aims renders any grant application under this scheme ineligible: Provided that if an NGO that has requested enrolment in terms of the

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Voluntary Organization Act has not yet been enrolled as a voluntary organization in accordance with the Voluntary Organization Act at the closing time of a grant application, such grant application may be kept in abeyance until such time that enrolment is achieved in which case it would then be processed. An application may only be retained in abeyance until the next call for grant applications is issued.

4.8 In the case of clarification or missing documentation, the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund Committee may request the applicant organisation to rectify administrative non-compliance and the application shall be kept in abeyance until the clarification and missing information is provided. An application may only be retained in abeyance until the next call for grant applications is issued. Failure to comply with such instruction shall render application for project grant support ineligible for further evaluation and the applicant shall be informed in writing accordingly.

4.9 After eligibility screening checks and administrative compliance assessment are completed, the proposal undergoes technical evaluation stage, according to the following criteria:

- Relevance of the proposed project to the priorities of the Fund - Is the proposal relevant in terms of the objective of the fund and will it cover a priority area? This criterion carries 100% out of the total of 300% weighting score that can be granted.
- Quality of the proposal – does the proposal contain relevant, detailed information? Is the proposal well structured and well thought out? This criterion carries 100% out of the total of 300% weighting score that can be granted.
- Capacity of applicant organisation to carry out the proposed project - Is the organisation competent and experienced enough, and does it have the necessary resource, to carry out the project that is being proposed? This criterion carries 100% out of the total of 300% weighting score that can be granted. *Note: This Fund encourages collaboration between organisations, therefore proposals from consortia will automatically receive an additional 10% as part of this criterion.*

4.10 A technical evaluation pass mark of 65% for each criterion is set. Proposals scoring less than the pass mark for each criterion shall not be considered further. Those proposals scoring above the pass mark for each individual criterion shall have their total score computed and shall be shortlisted for support in the order of priority. Such qualifying proposals shall be awarded funding support, subject to availability of funds.

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4.11 Wherever more than one eligible proposal is received from a single applicant organisation, and such proposals obtain the pass mark stipulated above and are thus shortlisted for funding support, the Committee shall, in its final ranking decision, have regard to the overall number of applicant organisations participating in a given call for applications, the number of eligible proposals per applicant organisation, and the availability of funds under the call, so however as to ensure a balanced allocation of funding support across beneficiary organisations participating in a given call.

5. General Parameters

5.1 Eligible NGOs must submit, within the deadline stipulated in the call for proposals, a fully completed project proposal grant application form in the online format prescribed by the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund Committee, together with the requested accompanying documentation. Submissions should be made as indicated in the project proposal grant application form. Submissions in any other format, late applications, or containing incomplete information, shall not be accepted.

5.2 Each proposal will be evaluated in accordance with the process and criteria described in these Guidelines. If a project is selected for support, the beneficiary organisation will be required to sign a grant agreement which stipulates the precise terms and conditions of funding support, and which will bind the beneficiary organisation to deliver the project in strict accordance with such terms and conditions.

5.3 The Fund may provide up to 80% of the total project value (actual cost backed by fiscal invoices and receipts), capped at a maximum of €20,000 per project, provided that this maximum allocation may be increased if deemed advisable by the Committee and following approval by the Minister. The remainder, i.e. not less than 20% of the project's eligible costs should be provided by beneficiary organisation, possibly with the support from sponsorships or other funding support that may be provided to the beneficiary organisation by third parties.

5.4 Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to support that proportion of the costs of the project that shall not be supported by the grant. Costs that are not eligible for support under this Fund in accordance with these Guidelines shall not be included in the estimates of the total project value.

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- 5.4 Grants will be awarded subject to availability of funds. Projects that are qualified and selected for funding, but which cannot be presently financed due to the funds being unavailable at that time, are placed on a reserve list.
- 5.5 All applicant organisations shall be notified about the outcome of their applications, whether accepted for funding, placed in reserve or rejected.
- 5.6 No double financing is allowed and projects that have already received any form of support from the Government or EU funds shall not be supported by this Fund. New projects similar to other projects which have been allocated funds under this scheme can be accepted subject to certified completion of the previous project as agreed by the Committee.
- 5.7 Funding shall only cover costs that are necessary for the implementation of the chosen project and included in the proposed budget for the project.
- 5.8 Funding shall not be granted to finance projects involving commercial elements. The beneficiary shall be bound not to generate revenue of any kind (except through voluntary donations) as a result of the use of any items procured with the support of this Fund (refer to further Guidelines on eligible/non eligible costs).
- 5.9 Grants shall be provided in two parts as follows: 50% of the grant will be given to the beneficiary organization upon signing of the grant agreement and the balance of 50% will be given upon certified completion of the project as agreed to by the Committee.
- 5.10 No amount of the grant element may be awarded for a project which is already completed at the time of application. Grant funding may be awarded for a project which forms part of the scope of a larger project or initiative that has already commenced only where the applicant organization can demonstrate the need to start the project before the grant agreement is signed.
- 5.11 Any unspent funds will have to be returned back within one month of project completion, failing which these will be considered as a public debt due to the Committee and commercial interest will also be charged on them.
- 5.12 Should a beneficiary organisation, within a period of 5 years from obtaining the grant under the Fund, wish to dispose of any asset which had been purchased by the grant funds and which had a value exceeding €2,000 at the time of purchase, the beneficiary must submit a written application to the Committee requesting consent to the disposal. The Committee shall have sole and final discretion on the matter.

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- 5.13 Beneficiary organisations shall not use any of the items designed, developed, delivered or otherwise procured with the support of this Fund for any activities of a political nature, such as lobbying, campaigning, display of any slogans, petitions or any advocacy material except the material forming part of the approved project.
- 5.14 Eligible costs must be identifiable as specific costs directly linked to the performance and implementation of an approved project and can therefore be assigned to it directly (refer to appropriate sections of these Guidelines for information on eligible project costs).
- 5.15 Beneficiary organisations must have the necessary operational capacity, competencies, motivation and experience to undertake and complete the project within the required time frame.
- 5.16 Projects must be covered by all necessary regulatory and other permits and must be carried out in full conformity with all applicable laws and permits, as appropriate.
- 5.17 In the case of grants to undertake structural improvements, a beneficiary organisation must provide evidence of ownership, title and/or right to use the property and must subsequently keep the structural improvements in good order for a minimum period of 3 years after completion;
- 5.18 In the case of a grant project involving procurement of any equipment, the beneficiary organisation shall be obliged to retain and maintain such items in good order for a period of not less than 5 years, or until such assets are fully depreciated under normal use conditions if this occurs within a period of less than 5 years;
- 5.19 Beneficiary organisations shall be required to submit periodic progress reports about the project implementation stage and/or at other times as may be requested by the Committee. A final report should also be submitted, together with financial proof (fiscal invoices and receipts) and possibly other documentary evidence to confirm that all project components have been successfully implemented.
- 5.20 The Committee reserves the right to request evidence, audits, and to inspect any items procured with the support of this Fund to ascertain the maintenance by the beneficiary organisation of all necessary obligations under the grant agreement. Should, after the date of completion of the project, and within the periods stipulated above any of such items are found to be not in good order due to negligence or omission or due to

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any other factor within beneficiary's control, the cost of such items shall be recouped from the beneficiary organisation accordingly.

5.21 The project completion date must not in any event be longer than 12 months from the date of the grant agreement. Extensions beyond the project's delivery date may be considered at the discretion of the Committee, provided the request is submitted in writing and justified.

6. Eligibility

6.1 In order to be eligible for potential support under the Conservation of Wild Birds Funding Scheme, application organisations must be, at the time of application:

- a. Voluntary Organisation (non-governmental / non-profit organisation) that has, amongst its primary aims and fields of activity, the promotion of the conservation of wild birds / and / or sustainable hunting governance, and
- b. Officially enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organizations and compliant with the provisions of the Voluntary Organizations Act and its subsidiary legislation (SL 492.01), meaning that they must have submitted all their annual returns and accounts in their complete form to the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, and are in receipt of a written confirmation of compliance (letter of compliance) issued by the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations.

6.2 In order to apply for funding, an applicant organisation shall be required to:

- i. Submit a fully completed application on the applicable form for the Conservation of Wild Birds Funding Scheme, within the established time-limit and using the indicated online tool which can be accessed on: www.vofunding.org.mt;
- ii. Provide in the application form a brief description of the issue that the project seeks to address, together with the aim and objectives.
- iii. Give an overview of the outcomes that will be expected from the proposed project;
- iv. Include, in the application, a detailed project budget plan, specifying the amount of funding being applied for;
- v. Be in accordance with the provisions and conditions stated within these Guidelines and the grant application form;
- vi. Provide a set of the financial statements for the last financial year for which accounts have been closed or presented to the Commissioner for Voluntary Organizations;
- vii. Provide clear documentation showing their capability to implement the project;

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- viii. Provide a declaration that the project has not benefitted from any prior government or EU funding. Non disclosure may constitute grounds for judicial proceedings against applicant;
- ix. Provide a copy of all applicable regulatory permits and, where such permits are still to be obtained, commit to providing such permits prior to commencing the regulated activity that requires such permits.
- x. Provide all the above requested information in due time, given that the online system will shut down on the closing date and time of application.

6.3 In order to qualify for funding support, the costs of the project must be directly related to the scope of the project, must be incurred during the period of the grant agreement, and must fall within any of the following categories of costs:

- VAT and other taxes and charges incurred in relation to project activities;
- Purchase of equipment, infrastructure;
- Purchase of captive bred specimens for species re-introduction projects;³
- Works of any kind including refurbishment, restoration of habitats, tree planting, clean up operations, etc;
- Scientific research, laboratory analysis;
- Shipping and transportation costs;
- Communications-related expenses;
- Training;
- Services related to the scope of the project (except those considered ineligible – see below);

6.4 Any costs that fall within any of the categories listed below shall not be eligible, and shall be excluded from the calculation of the eligible project value, and hence the 80% portion of such value that can be funded by the grant:

- Interest on loans, bank charges on financial transactions, foreign exchange commissions and losses, and other purely financial expenses including bank charges on accounts and credit facilities;
- Legal fees associated with any litigation (legal fees associated with review of legislation or other purposes directly related to the scope of the project may be considered as eligible);
- Notary fees;

³ Purchase of such specimens must follow strictly applicable regulatory requirements including but not limited to CITES, Veterinary Regulations, Import Licensing Regulations, Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations and other applicable laws.

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- Accountancy or audit costs;
- Fines and penalties of any kind;
- Lease of any property or equipment;
- Purchase of land or any immovable property or real estate of any kind;
- Depreciation costs;
- Insurance of any kind;
- Any costs outside the eligibility period or defrayed out of the eligible project period (e.g. prior to signature of the grant agreement);
- In-kind and volunteer contributions
- Costs incurred in the winding up of a company;
- Telephone, internet and mobile expenses;
- Utilities costs;
- Salaries, any bonus or allowances that are not taxable, golden handshakes and exceptional/extraordinary provisions for pension rights, redundancy payments, income supplements;
- Consumables (other than those necessary for the operation of the project within the project timeframes);
- Provision for bad debts;
- Gifts/gratuities, recreational activities of any kind;
- Fuel;
- Maintenance agreements on equipment and capital assets extending beyond the project's timeframe;
- Payments into private pension schemes;
- Overheads expenditure of any kind;
- Costs incurred in relation to activities not foreseen in the project or in modifications of the action for which the Committee's agreement was not given;
- Costs not entailing a cash flow for the beneficiary co/beneficiary;
- Costs in the project budget heading over and above the amount foreseen in the approved project budget;
- Indirect costs exceeding the percentage or value agreed in the grant agreement; and;
- Indirect costs declared by any organisation receiving an operating grant from the EU budget.

7 Grant Agreement

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7.1 Successful applicants shall enter into a grant agreement with the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund Committee (acting on behalf of the Government).

7.2 The grant agreement shall be subject to the conditions set in these guidelines and shall also include any specific conditions and arrangements as necessary to ensure proper governance and enforcement of the grant conditions.

7.3 Where the implementation of a project requires subcontracting or the award of any contracts or any other forms of procurement, grant beneficiaries shall follow the principles of value-for-money and procurement (including green procurement, including obtaining a minimum of 3 quotations for purchase of items, works or services under the value of €10,000 and including issuance of a tender for the purchase of items, works or services exceeding the value of €10,000 – unless agreed in advanced with the Committee) and award the contract to the bidder who offers cheapest technically compliant offer while taking care to avoid any conflict of interest.

7.4 The Committee shall have the right to review any documentation pertaining to the beneficiary organisation with regard to sub-contracting and/or the award of procurement contracts and to take any appropriate action that it considers necessary in the event that the procedures mentioned above are found not to have been observed.

7.5 In accepting a grant, a beneficiary will be expected to:

- (i) Ensure that the project commences as soon as practically possible;
- (ii) Submit performance reports periodically , and/or at other times as may be requested by the Committee;
- (iii) Provide due acknowledgement to the Conservation of Wild Birds Funding Scheme in all public communications and relevant project material; and
- (iv) Ensure that all funds are expensed in line with the grant conditions.

7.6 The Committee reserves the right to repeal any grant agreement at any time in the event that any of the conditions set out in the agreement are not properly observed by the beneficiary organisation.

8 Audits and Monitoring Visits and Recovery

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- 8.1 Beneficiary organisations may be subjected to audit and monitoring visits by the Committee or its delegates, with respect to the projects supported by the Fund at any time as deemed necessary.
- 8.2 Beneficiary organisations will be required to provide proof that the grant has been used correctly and in accordance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement.
- 8.3 Beneficiary organisations must retain all documentation related to the funded project, including original fiscal invoices and receipts, which are to be submitted to the Committee or its delegates when and as requested.
- 8.4 If a beneficiary organisation is found to have defaulted on the conditions of the grant agreement, the Committee may decide to recover all or any proportionate amount of the grant at its sole discretion. The beneficiary has to pay the amount due within 15 days from receipt of such notice by the Committee.

9 How to apply

- 9.1 A call for applications will be issued and advertised in the media with relevant details regarding application forms and closing date.
- 9.2 Such call for applications and relevant documentation including application form shall be publically available on www.vofunding.org.mt which may be also accessed through www.environment.gov.mt and www.agriculture.gov.mt.
- 9.3 Applicants should ensure that they:
- are eligible for funding under this scheme;
 - complete fully the grant application form;
 - submit the form together with the required supporting documentation through the online system;
 - submit complete application by the stipulated deadline.
- 9.4 Applications must be filled online on through the VO Funding Portal: www.vofunding.org.mt by the closing date and time stipulated in the notice of the call for applications. Applications submitted by any other means shall not be accepted.
- 9.5 All mandatory fields should be filled in otherwise the online system will not accept the application.

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9.6 Queries concerning this funding scheme can be referred to the Wild Birds Regulation Unit, 122, Triq Misrah il-Barrieri / tel: 22926412 / email: wildbirds@gov.mt