GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR GOZO
AND PLANNING

Conservation of Wild Birds Funding Scheme for Voluntary Organisations

Funding Guidelines 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Conservation of Wild Birds Fund falls under the responsibility of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit within the Ministry for Gozo and Planning. The fund[1] offers financial support in the form of grants to registered Voluntary Organisations (VOs)[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 (S.L.549.42), 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.***
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> ***(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.***
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> ***(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.***
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> ***(6) The revenue of the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund shall not be subject to tax under the Income Tax Act and the Conservation of Wild Birds 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 (S.L.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 the conservation of wild birds.

3. Priority Areas

3.1 The Ministry responsible sets priority areas for funding for each call for proposals. The priority areas were established in consultation with the Wild Birds Regulation Unit and the Malta Ornis Committee and are listed in Section 3.2 below.

3.2 In 2025, 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. Implementation of habitat measures in accordance with the recommendations set out by the Task Force on the Recovery of Bird Species;
b. Avifauna habitat restoration projects;
c. Avifauna species and habitats conservation measures;
d. Actions to support implementation of enforcement priorities related to eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade in wild birds;
e. Initiatives that contribute to sustainable hunting governance;
f. Avifauna species re-introduction programmes;
g. Training for personnel involved in the conservation of wild birds;
h. Scientific studies related to monitoring of the status of bird species;
i. Innovation and technology use for avifauna conservation, including satellite-tracking;
j. Awareness raising and educational initiatives related to conservation of wild birds;
k. Initiatives that promote stakeholder dialogue and cooperation in the field of conservation of wild birds; and
l. Initiatives that provide information on hunting, live-capturing, and bird conservation to countryside users and incoming travellers.

3.3 As stipulated in clause 4.9 of these Guidelines, the Committee will give priority to projects addressing pressing conservation issues listed in clause 3.2.

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

3.5 The same VO, or partnership amongst VOs, 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 (acting on behalf of the Government), appointed by the Permanent Secretary and composed of:

i. Director General (Support Services) within the Office of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Gozo and Planning – Chairperson
ii. Representative of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU)
iii. Representative of the Veterinary Regulation Directorate (VRD)
iv. Representative of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS)
v. A Secretary

The Chairperson shall have an original vote and, where the votes are equally divided, a second and casting vote. All committee members must declare to be independent from any of the applicants which can potentially be beneficiaries.

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 applications 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:

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** (see Section 7) 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 by the closing time and 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 that are enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in accordance 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 and/or sustainable hunting governance. Non-enrolment with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations with the stated primary aims renders any grant application under this scheme ineligible: Provided that if a VO that has requested enrolment in terms of the Voluntary Organisation Act has not yet been enrolled as a voluntary organisation in accordance with the Voluntary Organisation 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 date stipulated by the Committee, which date is to be communicated to the VO in the respective correspondences.

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 date stipulated by the Committee, which date is to be communicated to the VO in the respective correspondences. Failure to comply with such instructions shall render the application for project grant support ineligible for further evaluation and the applicant shall be informed in writing accordingly.

4.9 After the eligibility screening checks and the administrative compliance assessment are completed, the proposal undergoes a **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. *Note: This Fund encourages VOs to address pressing conservation issues, thus projects aiming at addressing such issues will receive an additional 10% as part of this criterion.*

- 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 resources to carry out the proposed project? 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.

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 VOs 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 applications 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 financial support, the beneficiary organisation will receive a **Letter of Acceptance** and also required to sign a **Grant Agreement**. The grant agreement 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. 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.

5.4 Grants, including requests for increase in the maximum allocation, as specified in clause 5.3, 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 organisation 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 organisation 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. An interest rate of 2% above commercial interest rate applicable at the time of default will apply.

5.12 Should a beneficiary organisation, within a period of five 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 for the disposal. The Committee shall have sole and final discretion on the matter.

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 Clause 6 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 timeframe.

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 five 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 five years, or until such assets are fully depreciated under normal use conditions if this occurs within a period of less than five years;

5.19 Beneficiary organisations shall be required to submit periodic progress reports about the project implementation stage as 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, carry out/commission 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 not to be in good order due to negligence or omission or due to any other factor within the 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, by not later than one (1) month prior to expiry of the deadline for completion, and properly justified.

6. Eligibility

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

a. 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 Organisations and compliant with the provisions of the Voluntary Organisations Act and its subsidiary legislation (S.L.492.01), and thereby 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 aims 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 financial statements for the last financial year for which accounts have been closed or presented to the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations;

vii. Provide clear documentation showing their capability to implement the project;

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 the 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 within the timeframe given. **The online system will not allow any applications to be submitted past the closing date and time of application**.

6.3 In order to qualify for funding, 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:

1. Cost directly related to the implementation of the project proposed (excluding ineligible costs outlined in Clause 6.4 below) including VAT and other taxes and charges incurred in relation to project activities;
2. Purchase of equipment;
3. Purchase of infrastructure;

4. Purchase of captive-bred specimens for species re-introduction projects;[3]
5. Works of any kind including refurbishment, restoration of habitats, soft landscaping, including tree planting, clean-up operations, etc;
6. Scientific research, including laboratory analysis;
7. Animal health monitoring activities, including laboratory analysis in case of suspicion of diseases;
8. Shipping and transportation costs;
9. Communications-related expenses;
10. Training;
11. Services related to the scope of the project (except those considered ineligible – see Clause 6.4);

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:

1. 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;
2. 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);
3. Notary fees;
4. Accountancy or audit costs;
5. Fines and penalties of any kind;
6. Lease of any property or equipment;
7. Purchase of land or any immovable property or real estate of any kind;
8. Depreciation costs and other non-cash expenses;
9. Insurance of any kind;
10. Any costs outside the eligibility period or defrayed out of the eligible project period (e.g. prior to signature of the grant agreement);
11. In-kind and volunteer contributions;
12. Costs incurred in the winding up of a company;
13. Telephone, internet and mobile expenses;
14. Utilities costs;
15. Salaries, any bonus or allowances that are not taxable, golden handshakes and exceptional/extraordinary provisions for pension rights, redundancy payments, income supplements;

[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.

16. Consumables (other than those necessary for the operation of the project within the project timeframes);
17. Provision for bad debts;
18. Gifts/gratuities, recreational activities of any kind;
19. Fuel;
20. Maintenance agreements on equipment and capital assets extending beyond the project's timeframe;
21. Payments into private pension schemes;
22. Overheads expenditure (other than those necessary for the operation of the project within the project timeframes);
23. Costs incurred in relation to activities not foreseen in the project or in modifications of the action for which the Committee's written agreement was not given;
24. Costs in the project budget heading over and above the amount foreseen in the approved project budget;
25. Indirect costs exceeding the percentage or value agreed in the grant agreement; and;
26. Indirect costs declared by any organisation receiving an operating grant from the EU budget.

7. Grant Agreement

7.1 Successful applicants shall enter into a grant agreement with the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund Committee.

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, obtaining a minimum of three quotations for purchase of items, works or services under the value of €10,000, and issuance of a tender for the purchase of items, works or services exceeding the value of €10,000 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 (progress) reports when and as 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 and this without prejudice to any further action that can be taken against the organisation.

8. Audits, Monitoring Visits and Recovery

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 and copies of 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 must 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 on the VO funding website and WBRU's website together with these Guidelines and with relevant details regarding application forms and closing date.

9.2 Such call for applications and relevant documentation, including application form, shall be publicly available on www.vofunding.org.mt which may also be accessed through https://wbru.gov.mt/en/the-department/notices-2/.

9.3 Applicants should ensure that they:

- are eligible for funding under this scheme;
- complete the grant application form in its entirety;
- 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 through the VO Funding Portal: www.vofunding.org.mt by the closing date and time stipulated in the notice of the call for applications. Late applications and 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.

9.6 Queries concerning this funding scheme can be referred to the Wild Birds Regulation Unit, 122, Triq Misraħ il-Barrieri, Santa Venera / Telephone: 22155602 / email: wildbirds@gov.mt