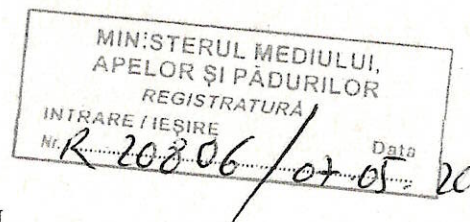




EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate D - Biodiversity
Nature Conservation unit
The Head of Unit

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Brussels
ENV.D.3/AV/SB/GGJ

To the Members of the EU Task Force on the
Recovery of Bird Species

**Subject: Invitation - Twelfth meeting of the Task Force on the Recovery of Bird Species
18 May 2026**

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to invite you to the **twelfth meeting of the Task Force on the Recovery of Bird Species**, which will take place on **Monday 18th May 2026** (9h30-16h30). You will find hereunder the draft agenda for the meeting.

Please note that the meeting will be online and supported via Webex. The details for the connection from computer, tablet, or smartphone are indicated under the draft agenda.

The meeting will focus on the 2026 annual iteration of the Adaptive Harvest Management mechanism for Turtle Dove, with presentation of the latest data on population trends and demography, an analysis of the 2025 hunting season and the technical recommendations by the scientific advisors. We will also discuss habitat restoration measures (key actions) and their possible integration into national restoration plans.

All the documents for the meeting are uploaded on the meeting folder in CIRCABC:
https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ff1a319e1c5/library/0c8f6a36-6c16-41bf-b98f-2151271d1c30?p=1&n=10&sort=modified_DESC

Should you have any questions, please contact Gonzalo González Jurado (gonzalo.gonzalez-jurado@ec.europa.eu).

Yours faithfully,

E-signed
Andrea Vettori

Cc: Sylvia Barova, András Bartal, Gonzalo González Jurado (DG Environment),
Beatriz Arroyo, Carles Carboneras (IREC – contractor).

DRAFT AGENDA – 12th Task Force on the Recovery of Bird species

Monday 18/05/2026

9:30 Start		
1		Welcome by Chair. Adoption of the agenda. Adoption of the minutes of the meeting of 12-13/02/2026 (<i>TFRB 26-02-minutes</i>)
2	09:45	Update on the contract “ <i>Supporting the recovery of bird species through scientific and technical advice</i> ”
3	10:00	Turtle Dove AHMM 2026 iteration Both flyways: - Update on population and demography (<i>TFRB 26-05-01</i>) Western flyway: - Summary and analysis of MS responses on hunting and management (<i>TFRB 26-05-02</i>) - Technical recommendations (<i>TFRB 26-05-03</i>)
	11:30	Turtle Dove AHMM 2026 iteration – central-eastern flyway - Summary and analysis of MS responses on hunting and management (<i>TFRB 26-05-04</i>) - Technical recommendations (<i>TFRB 26-05-03</i>)
13:00 to 14:00 Lunch break		
5	14:00	Non-hunting Key Actions - Habitat restoration interventions and proposal for integration into National Restoration Plans (<i>TFRB 26-05-05</i>)
16:30 End		

Hosted by ENV.D Ares – Webex credentials

Join information

Meeting link:

<https://ecconf.webex.com/ecconf/j.php?MTID=medc9d6e1a47a5316fd0c53e3db538e48>

Meeting number:

2741 076 0445

Password: eJnW3DJK@22 (35693355 when dialing from a phone)

Join by video system

Commission européenne/Europese Commissie, 1049 Bruxelles/Brussel, BELGIQUE/BELGIË - Tel. +32 229 91111
Office: BRE2 8/DCS - Tel. direct line +32 229-56411

Dial 27410760445@ecconf.webex.com

You can also dial 62.109.219.4 and enter your meeting number.

Join by phone

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+352-2730-0072 Luxembourg Toll

Access code: 2741 076 0445

TFRB 26-05-03

**2026 annual iteration Turtle Dove AHMM
Management scenarios and technical recommendations
(western and central-eastern flyways) ¹**

Carles Carboneras and Beatriz Arroyo²

Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos (IREC, ES)

The 2026 technical update for the Turtle Dove AHM mechanism has delivered another set of scientific evidence in relation to the population size and demographic parameters of the species. As in previous iterations, such evidence comes from assessments conducted by the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS) of European-scale field data, as well as analyses of capture-mark-recapture programmes and other studies conducted in the western flyway. In addition, the technical update has determined that the three conditions established in 2021 for the resumption of hunting in the western flyway are being met again in 2026, while those established in 2022 for maintaining hunting in the central-eastern flyway are still not met. Based on that information, the scientific consortium makes the following technical recommendations to be discussed at the Task Force on the Recovery of Birds (TFRB).

WESTERN FLYWAY – FULFILMENT OF ALL THREE CONDITIONS

The recovery of the population size in the seasons following the establishment of the temporary hunting suspension was already reported by Carboneras *et al.* (2024)³ and Carboneras *et al.* (2026)⁴. The 2026 technical update provides evidence for now the fourth consecutive breeding season with substantial population increase⁵. The estimated population size for the last breeding season in 2025 has become the highest since 2009 (16 years) at 2.12 million breeding pairs, with 673,000 more pairs than in 2021, an increase of 46.6% in four years and an average 9.6% increase every year. Starting in 2024, the 10-year trend measured by the PECBMS multiplicative slope has improved to “moderate increase” from the previous “moderate decline” of 2021 and the years before then, and the “stable”

¹ Document prepared in the frame of the service contract with the European Commission “Supporting the recovery of bird species through scientific and technical advice” (090201/2025/4500138516/SER/ENV.D3) in preparation for the 12th meeting of the Task Force on the Recovery of Birds (18/05/2026).

² Document reviewed by the scientific consortium, which is led by Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos (IREC-CSIC) and consists of Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB), Aarhus University (AU), Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU), University College Dublin (UCD), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Czech Society for Ornithology (CSO) and Wetlands International – European Association (WI-EA).

³ Carboneras, C., Šílarová, E., Škorpilová, J. & Arroyo, B. 2024b. Rapid population response to a hunting ban in a previously overharvested, threatened landbird. *Conservation Letters*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.13057>.

⁴ Carboneras C, Šílarová E, Škorpilová J & Arroyo B. (2026). Applying PECBMS data in conservation: the Turtle Dove population decline, adaptive management, and recovery. *Environmental and Experimental Biology*, 24(1), 57-61. <https://doi.org/10.22364/eeb.24.09>

⁵ Arroyo B, Cruz-Flores M, Šílarová E, Škorpilová J, Carboneras C. 2026. Turtle Dove Adaptive Harvest Management mechanism. Technical update. Available on CIRCABC.

trend of 2022 and 2023. It is unquestionable that the temporary hunting ban is associated with a noticeable increase of the population, perhaps even higher than that predicted by Bacon *et al.* (2023)⁶. The ban was lifted in the 2025 hunting season (August-September), but the breeding population size reported now was estimated several months earlier, in April-July. Therefore, the breeding population size in 2025 was still free from the additional mortality caused by hunting and increased in comparison with the data for 2024, as predicted⁷.

In relation to the fulfilment of the three conditions for resuming hunting in the W flyway, the 2026 technical update confirms that the first one, a *population increase of at least 2 years* measured with the PECBMS index (confidence interval with a lower limit > 0.95 and upper limit < 1.05) was again met in 2025.

Similarly, the second condition, an *increase in survival* leading to a *growth rate (λ)* estimated by the population model that is *reliably equal to or above 1*, is also met. Our analyses with updated data for the year 2025 allowed to compare individual survival rates for the two periods, pre- and in-moratorium. Regarding adults, the average annual survival rate changed from 0.57 ± 0.01 mean $\pm$ SE pre-moratorium to 0.63 ± 0.02 in-moratorium, which represents a 10% increase. For juveniles, it grew from 0.28 ± 0.09 pre-moratorium to 0.40 ± 0.10 in-moratorium, which indicate a 42% increase. Fitting those values to stochastic population models such as Vortex and PDP shows that they are compatible with sustained population growth. Therefore, the second condition is also considered as met.

In relation to the third condition, the existence of *credible regulatory and control/ enforcement systems* in place at the time when hunting is reopened, the new assessment done in 2026 concludes that the information provided by the relevant Member States (MS) in the flyway is sufficient, thus the condition is equally met.

WESTERN FLYWAY – MANAGEMENT SCENARIOS

Previous work using population modelling tools (e.g., Carboneras *et al.* 2024²) revealed that only those harvest rates situated below the threshold of 4% would lead to sustained population growth and potential recovery, apart from scenarios of intermittent hunting. Indeed, Bacon *et al.* (2023) had estimated the harvest rate leading to population stability under partially compensatory mortality to be 3.7%.

As in the 2026 technical update, fig. 1 shows the expected population trajectories under three different management scenarios, ranging from zero harvest ($h = 0$) to 2% harvest ($h = 2$). Such scenarios are similar to those considered in 2025 and have been selected because they are likely to guarantee the combination of ongoing population growth with sustainable exploitation. As expected, $h = 0$ would deliver the most rapid population response, with total size doubling approximately every 8 years if the

⁶ Bacon, L., Guillemain, M., Arroyo, B., Carboneras, C., Fay, R., Sauser, C. & Lormée, H. 2023. Predominant role of survival on the population dynamics of a threatened species: evidence from prospective analyses and implication for hunting regulation. *J Ornithol* 164: 275–285.

⁷ Notice; however, that because the PECBMS methodology implies a recalculation of the annual indices and the estimates of total population size with each iteration, the analyses presented at the 10th TFRB meeting in March 2025 (with inferred data for 4 countries) were revised with updated data for all countries in May 2025. This resulted in lower estimates of flyway population growth and total population size for both flyways compared to March 2025. The final figures for the 2024 breeding season are 2,004,500 bp $\pm$ 103,552 SE (W flyway) and 666,643 bp $\pm$ 71,481 SE (CE flyway).

current growth rate persisted as it is now. At the other end, $h = 2$ would still deliver population growth but at a much slower rate – the population would double in size only after 13-14 years.

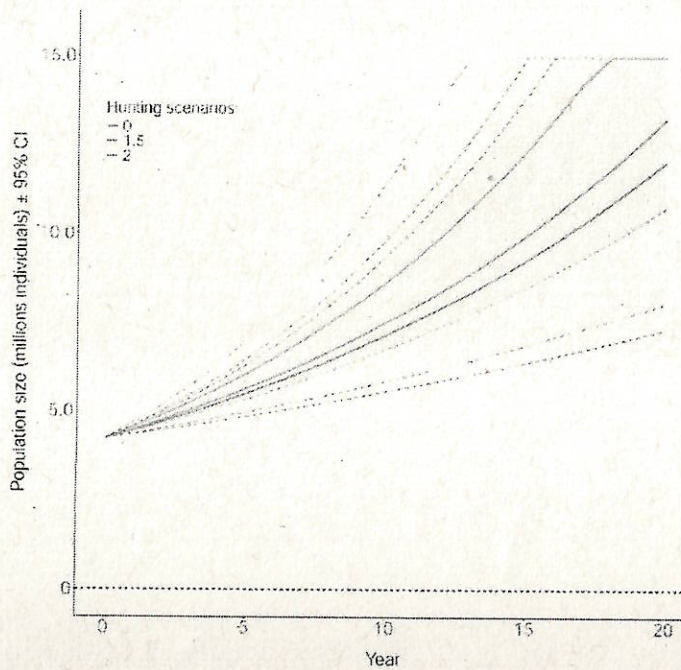


Fig. 1. Projected turtle dove population trajectories in the W flyway estimated by a Population Dynamics P System (PDP) Model, using the 2025 PECBMS estimate as the initial population size, adult survival estimated by CMR, and different values of juvenile survival and reproduction. See Technical Update document for details.

It is possible to calculate the potential harvest quota, by considering an initial pre-breeding population size in 2026 equivalent to the 2025 post-breeding population size multiplied by the (updated) annual survival rates of adults and juveniles respectively. The post-breeding 2026 population total would thus be the breeding population size in 2026 plus their offspring (2.31 fledglings per breeding female), as shown in the following table:

	2025	2026	comments
breeding pairs (PECBMS)	2,117,950		
total breeding adults	4,235,900		pairs x 2
offspring produced 2025	4,892,465		pairs x 2.31
2025 ads surviving to 2026		2,655,909	2025 ads x 0.627
2025 juvs surviving to 2026		1,976,556	2025 juvs x 0.404
total breeding adults		4,632,465	surviving ads + juvs
offspring produced 2026		5,350,497	2026 pairs x 2.31
TOTAL POSTBREEDING 2026		9,982,962	breeding ads + offspring
2026 proposed quota (1.5%)		149,744	

The predicted number of individuals (adults plus offspring) potentially available at the end of the breeding season in 2026 is close to 10 million. Therefore, a harvest rate of $h = 2\%$ in 2026 would represent approximately 200,000 individuals, and $h = 1\%$ would mean an offtake of 100,000 individuals. Given the considerations above in terms of pace of recovery and the population objective, as well as the consensus reached among the relevant MS last year, we suggest for consideration the same $h = 1.5\%$ scenario. Rounding up, this would mean a quota of approximately 150,000 birds for the whole western flyway.

Note that estimating the post-breeding population size in the above manner leads to an optimistic result, because it considers that no mortality exists between spring and autumn for adults, or between fledging and harvest time for juveniles, and that productivity and annual survival will be maintained at average levels.

As in 2025, we must stress that the allocation of any quota among MS in the flyway should follow the principles and mechanisms agreed by the TFRB in the revised document *“Principles and mechanisms for hunting quota allocation, at flyway level, in the context of the recovery of Annex II bird species in non-secure status”* (doc. TFRB 24-11-02), available on CIRCABC⁸. According to those criteria, and considering the information provided by the MS in the annual turtle dove questionnaire in relation to the MS’s contribution to population growth, in the form of investment in habitat restoration, rules and efforts to avoid further habitat deterioration, as well as their research, solution-testing and monitoring activities (principle 5 – contribution to population growth), ES, FR and PT situate themselves above the flyway average in terms of contributions to population growth. IT, on the other hand, is ranked below the average. Therefore, the proposed quota distribution would be as follows:

	% Quota entitlement from historic harvest	% reduction for below-average contribution to pop growth	Total quota allocated
Spain	81%	0%	121,500
France	8%	0%	12,000
Portugal	10%	0%	15,000
NW Italy	1%	30%	1,050 ⁹

CENTRAL-EASTERN FLYWAY

For the central-eastern flyway, the evidence provided by the new data from PECBMS confirmed again the continuation of the decline and a worsening of the population status, both already observed in previous years. The population size in 2022-2025 (average 619,500 bp) is currently at its lowest historical level, after undergoing a 41% decline since 2003 (22 years). This is totally unlike the situation in the W flyway, which is currently growing at an average 9.6% every year.

Despite the recommendation to not allow hunting in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, all the MS in this flyway that can allow hunting of Turtle Dove according to the Birds Directive have reported some harvest of the species (except for RO in 2022 and 2025 and AT in 2024). Hunting occurred allegedly in smaller numbers, but this may be linked to the shrinking population, be potentially inaccurately reported or inflated through unknown levels of illegal killing. In any case, the continued observed decline suggests that harvest rate is still above what the population can sustain with its current (unknown) survival and (unknown) productivity. It is relevant in this context that, from 2021 onwards, one of the agreed conditions to maintain hunting was to develop research programmes that would

⁸ Arroyo B, Carboneras C, Rubio B. 2024 Revised document – Principles and mechanisms for hunting quota allocation, at flyway level, in the context of the recovery of Annex II bird species in non-secure status. Document N°: TFRB 24-11-02, 08 November 2024. Available on <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/e21159fc-a026-4045-a47f-9ff1a319e1c5/library/7af5a60f-fc63-4ebb-af10-5b236665105a/details>

⁹ Although IT reported zero harvest in the W flyway in 2025, it is still entitled to its share in 2026, according to the agreed criteria and mechanisms in place.

allow to obtain sufficient demographic information to adequately assess the population outcomes of different harvest scenarios, something that has not yet occurred as far as the consortium is informed.

Given the aggravated situation, it seems essential to repeat and underline the same technical recommendation for the central-eastern flyway made in previous years, that is, to maintain and enforce **zero harvest** for the 2026 hunting season. This decision should remain in place until there is evidence of recovery and similar conditions to those conditions agreed for the western flyway are met in this flyway too:

1. A population increase of at least 2 years measured with the PECBMS index (confidence interval with a lower limit > 0.95 and upper limit < 1.05);
2. Available flyway-specific survival data, allowing to develop a bespoke population model, indicating a growth rate (λ) reliably equal to or above 1 (with the risk of decline lower than 15%);
3. Credible regulatory and control/enforcement systems in place in relevant MS at the time when hunting is reopened.

The example of the western flyway has shown that the species may potentially react quite quickly to the appropriate action, and that population recovery may be possible in a relatively short time frame, hence the zero-quota management option must not necessarily be long-lasting in the central-eastern flyway.