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The threats to Malta from invasive species

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Modern transport, by land, air or sea, has provided ample opportunities for species to travel from one continent to another. As a consequence of this migration, some introduced species do not only settle in the country of introduction, but also compete with indigenous species and sometimes even change natural habitats, weakening conservation measures for local indigenous species.

The ever increasing pet trade, together with the demand for exotic flora are some of the main reasons for such spread by invasive species, especially in regions where there is free movement of goods. Climate change is also offering a helping hand to invasive species. The negative impacts of invasive species, whether intentionally or unintentionally introduced, are not just ecological, but there are also economic and social repercussions.

Despite international guidelines and legislation, not least European Union initiatives, invasive species are still a big concern. Even islands, such as Malta, which have a natural barrier, are not immune to such invasions. Some common alien invasive species on the Maltese Islands will be reviewed in this communication, namely the Red Palm Weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*), Brown Mulberry Longhorn Beetle (*Phrynetta leprosa*), Geranium Bronze Butterfly (*Cacyreus marshalli*), Hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*), Castor-oil Tree (*Ricinus communis*), Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*), Siris Tree (*Acacia lebeck*), Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Levant Water Frog (*Pelophylax bedriagae*), Red Swamp Crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*), Nimble Spray Crab (*Percnon gibbesi*) and some other invasive species introduced as a result of Lessepsian migration.

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