

## Environment

## Curb the off-roading scourge



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Off-roading and its impacts on the natural environment do not feature high up in the list of environmental concerns normally cited by the public as the link between a non-permanent activity (as opposed to a building) and environmental damage is elusive to many.

The term 'motor sports' is often used by some to give a veneer of legitimacy to this odious practice. However, this is nothing short of a misnomer, especially when one sees the damage being wrought by off-roading abuse at sensitive sites such as Wied il-Mizieb in Mellieħa.

The site is a Natura 2000 site (a special area of conservation of international importance) as it hosts the largest local population of Sandarac gum tree, Malta's national tree. These include both mature trees as well as saplings, some of which were planted by farmers and some by Argotti Gardens as part of an EU-funded project called Seclimed.

The accompanying photos show the extent of the damage, with trampled vegetation (gum tree saplings and Erika bushes), widened paths, eroded soil tracks and overturned boulders.

As Mellieħa local council rightly stressed, more adequate enforcement needs to be conducted on this and other sites used for off-roading, notably the clay slopes at Mġiebaħ, at il-Blata in Selmun and at Mistrā.

Here again, the recent antics with the police Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) unit have taken their toll. While most have linked the recent turmoil at the ALE to possible repercussions on bird shooting and trapping enforcement, few realise that this will also impact other activities that fall within the ALE's responsibility.

For instance, the ALE police officer who was collaborating with the Environmental Protection Directorate staff at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority on reports of off-roading at Wied il-Mizieb has been replaced. The Environment Ministry has now referred the case to the Police Commissioner.

Hopefully a stiffer stance will be taken against this off-roading abuse. If warranted there should even be changes in legislation, especially as a number of environmental NGOs, such as Nature Trust, have been flagging this abuse for decades now, with little or no concrete action being taken to curb the abuse.

## Zonqor is not Valletta

Comments made by Sadeen Group's CEO at a recent meeting with Marsascala local council are cringe-inducing, to say the least, such is their short-sightedness and shamelessness.

Firstly, he compared his group's plans for Zonqor with Renzo Piano's project for Valletta, and said that despite the fact that many disagreed with the latter, it survived the test of time.



This argument defies credulity and is a non-starter, for a number of reasons. For instance, Valletta lies lock, stock and barrel within a building development zone, while the Zonqor site is in an Outside Development Zone. The comment is also objectionable as it seems to reinforce the perception that projects can steamroll ahead no matter how stiff the objections from various quarters are.

Secondly, I disagree with his comment that the best trace one could leave behind in history "was not a factory or a farm building, but an educational institution".

While I will not be drawn in the partisan quagmire over the educational nature of the project, I find it hard to believe that the CEO finds it below him to build farm buildings or even factories for posterity, and that no one picked on this clanger.

Is the CEO suggesting that farming and manufacturing are demeaning as employment opportunities and that siting educational institutions in ODZ areas is fully justified?

The CEO is simply trying to justify the unjustifiable by clutching at straws, with the Marsascala local council (or at least some members of it) playing second fiddle to such antics.

## Airline mitigates its carbon footprint

Emirates Group, which includes the flagship Emirates Airlines, last January released its audited environmental report for 2014-2015. Emirates Airlines is the third largest in the world in terms of passenger-kilometres flown and for the number of countries served, and the second largest in terms of freight-tonnes transported.



The clay slopes at Selmun have suffered the scourge of off-roading for long enough. The activity has scarred slopes with deep gullies that fuel their further erosion.



Off-roading at the Wied il-Mizieb Natura 2000 site has resulted in the widening of existing paths (above) and the trampling of saplings of sandarac gum tree – Malta's national tree and a supposedly protected species.



Over the period under review, Emirates added 24 new aircraft and retired 10 older aircraft in 2014-15, maintaining an average fleet age of 75 months, or about half the industry average of 140 months.

Key highlights for the 2014-2015 period include a continued reduction in aircraft noise emissions, a modest improvement in overall fleet fuel efficiency despite external operational challenges, and improvements in ground vehicle fuel efficiency. All of Emirates' aircraft meet or exceed Chapter 4 limits – the most stringent

International Civil Aviation Organisation noise standards, and new A380 and Boeing 777 deliveries during the year helped to further improve the fleet's margin below the Chapter 4 limits.

Emirates' overall fuel efficiency in 2014-15 improved by one per cent to 0.3057 litres per tonne kilometre, 14 per cent more efficient than the International Air Transport Association fleet average fuel efficiency. On the ground, 30 new electric tractors came on stream to replace diesel-

powered vehicles for use at Dubai International Airport.

The group's ground transport fleet in the United Arab Emirates began using low-sulphur diesel following the UAE government's announcement of mandatory new fuel specifications in 2014. The fuel contains 10 parts per million (ppm) of sulphur, a considerable reduction from the previous specification of 500 ppm, and will greatly reduce levels of particulate emissions. [www.alandeidun.eu](http://www.alandeidun.eu) [alan.deidun@gmail.com](mailto:alan.deidun@gmail.com)