

Lessons from Chadwick Lakes



Fertiliser-fuelled growth of algae at Chadwick Lakes.

A stroll through the part of Wied I-Qlejgħa known as Chadwick Lakes is normally invigorating, especially after heavy rainfall. It rewards visitors with a rare snapshot of what a river environment should be like, which is quite a treat in an arid country like Malta.

But lately, this stroll is turning into a disconcerting experience. What should be clear gushing water is a viscous green soup of algae, which is stifling freshwater life in the area.

*This is the result of
uncontrolled use of fertilisers*

- Alan Deidun

This is the result of uncontrolled use of fertilisers in the surrounding fields, which is in turn fuelling the algal growth.

One can only imagine the voluminous quantities of nitrates leaching from these fields and seeping into our aquifers after heavy rainfall. It seems like organic farming is still far off the radar for many local farmers.

Another source of disillusionment for naturalists at Chadwick Lakes is the sight of parents, who should know much better, teaching their children the dubious 'skill' of poaching tadpoles and frogs, only to see the same hapless creatures slowly dying in a bottle of murky water.

One wonders why one still encounters such sights, considering the wealth of environmental education programmes in schools nowadays, such as Ekoskola and Dinja Waħda. Home upbringing is just as important as school education.

Trammel nets cause problems at Dwejra

Last week I photographed trammel nets (parit) being laid at Crocodile Rock (L-Iskoll tad-Dwejra) in Dwejra, Gozo, in a case that was reported in *The Times* earlier last week.

According to the Qawra/Dwejra Heritage Park Action Plan approved in November 2005, which incidentally was supported by the then Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, only the following fishing techniques are allowed within the Dwejra marine protected area (MPA)

- Wind-drawn surface long-line (Imrejkbja);
- Rod and line (Qasba);
- Trolling (Rixa);
- Hand line (Xlief tal-qiegħ jew Hġiel jew Kulpara);
- Pots (Nassi);
- Demersal bottom set long lines (Konzijiet tal-qiegħ);
- Surface drifting long lines (Konzijiet tal-wiċċ).

According to the action plan, Crocodile Rock lies on the boundary of the MPA, while the area is clearly included within the boundaries of the Dwejra MPA in the Government Notice issued in

August 2010 that designated Dwejra as an MPA, along with three other areas.

Legislation aside, it is inconceivable how such a destructive and non-selective fishing technique, which also poses an underwater threat to divers, is permitted at a prime dive site, which is promoted by the Malta Tourism Authority and diving clubs the world over and which is frequented by hundreds of thousands of divers each year.

Incidentally, divers also complain about the paucity of mature fish in the area. Could the trammel nets and the dozens of pots laid in the area on a daily basis be responsible for this?

What is certain is that our MPAs exist only on paper and foreign divers may be forgiven for giving Malta a miss when earmarking the best Mediterranean MPA to dive in.

Jellyfish invade Canary Islands

Numerous people have contacted the Spot the Jellyfish campaign team (www.ioikids.net/jellyfish) since January in connection with the occurrence of particularly large mauve stinger (*Pelagia noctiluca*) jellyfish in Maltese waters.

Some of these jellyfish had bell diameters of up to 15cm and weighed up to 250 grams.

One possible explanation for this phenomenon might be that these jellyfish have managed to survive the winter in the Mediterranean, and thus they are now in their second year.

Our islands are, however, not in the same league as other archipelagos when it comes to jellyfish infestations.

For instance, the Canary Islands, lying on the fringes of the Atlantic Ocean off the western coast of Morocco, have been swamped in the past few days by a mauve stinger bloom of apocalyptic proportions.

Over a period of just 28 days, communal authorities removed a staggering 3.2 tons of mauve stinger jellyfish from the beach of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. In some instances, even tractors had to be used to assist the clean-up. (View www.canarias7.es/articulo.cfm?id=255256).

A great asset to the Gozo Curia

Canon Mario Cassar's views two weeks ago regarding the new Nadur cemetery case are refreshing and contrast with the questionable position taken by the Nadur parish on this case.

Can. Cassar said that farmers' justified concerns about the impact of the proposed cemetery on freshwater resources in the area were never appropriately taken into consideration by the project proponents.

He added that the Malta Environment and Planning Authority should never have issued the permit for the cemetery, especially as no Environment Impact Assessment was commissioned in this case.

He said farmers should be compensated through an alternative source of freshwater, especially as the development has possibly compromised the quality of the natural spring.

The mind boggles as to why the media in general failed to pick up on the following hard-hitting statements made by Can. Cassar in the final part of his letter, especially as he laudably condemns the use of religious practice to sway decisions:

"In the same issue, your Gozo page reported that Mass was concelebrated on the site of this new yet unfinished cemetery. Surely this was not for the repose of the souls of the dead buried in the cemetery, since the graves are empty. Could it have been a subtle way to get Mepa to reissue the permit?

"Of course, if this were the case, it was morally wrong. Holy Mass or any other form of religious practice should never be intended to bring pressure to bear. The local Church should seek reconciliation with the farmers and their families."

Can. Cassar is an asset to the Church in Gozo, which should take a page out of his book, as he has shored up its environmental credentials, giving legitimacy to the Church's Environmental Commission in the process.