

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 52 • June 2017



contents

news page 3

Updates from BirdLife Malta

bird profile page 4

Blue Rock Thrush

on reserve page 5

Nature in focus at Foresta 2000

in focus pages 6 & 7

What motivates us to connect to and protect nature?

nature days pages 8 & 9

Nature Walk in Gozo

in progress page 10

Ongoing projects by BirdLife Malta

what's on page 11

Upcoming events and activities



Bird's Eye View production team:

Editorial Board

Nathaniel Attard (editor), Victor Falzon, Jessica Irwin, Lorenzo Locci, Veerle van Werde (design and layout)

BirdLife Malta Council

Darryl Grima (President), Saviour Balzan (Secretary General), Norman Chetcuti (Treasurer), Nicholas Galea (Council Secretary), Kathleen Galea, Raymond Galea, Eurydike Kovacs, Irene Mangion, Geoffrey Saliba (members)

BirdLife Malta Team

Mark Sultana (CEO), Nicholas Barbara (Conservation Manager), Gianmarco Santirocco (Finance Manager), Nathaniel Attard (Communications Manager), Mark Gauci (Reserves Manager), Sarah Brady (Education Officer), Paulo Lago (LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija Project Manager), Janet Borg (Office Coordinator)

Contact BirdLife Malta

Flats 1/2, Xemxija Waterfront Apts, Triq is-Simar, Xemxija, SPB 9025, Malta +356 21347644/5/6

info@birdlifemalta.org

www.birdlifemalta.org

Printing

Poulton's Print

Front cover photo - Blue Rock Thrush by Denis Cachia

Reg. Vol. Org. VO/0052

© 2017 BirdLife Malta. All rights reserved.

Placing the environment on the political agenda

While writing this, Malta is engulfed in a surprise electoral campaign, although by the time the magazine goes to print and reaches you everything should hopefully be calmer. During the past weeks I came to realise how BirdLife Malta has developed. Within a few days we came up with 10 electoral proposals. From these, only two are related to hunting and trapping and one of them is actually related to wildlife crime. For me this just shows how our organisation has grown by understanding and acting to put the natural environment on the agenda in its entirety.



How can we take care of our much loved birds if we don't protect all the chain of biodiversity? What about pollution, water usage and the last but maybe the most important for our island, land use? This thought was the backbone for the proposals which we presented to all the political parties and I would encourage you to go to our website and read them. We have placed on the political agenda issues such as waste management, pollution, Natura 2000 sites, urban spaces and green schools.

In a meeting with the four main political party leaders organised by over 20 local NGOs, I stated that in our country we have placed environmental needs on the shelf for decades due to a mixture of reasons be it lack of awareness or need for economic growth. Yet today every time environmentalists oppose or propose actions for the benefit of the environment we come across the argument for the need to find a balance. Now there is no time for finding balances, protecting the environment is a pressing need. Creating an environmentally-conscious society is a vital need. Only this can bring a balance in our wellbeing because taking care of the environment is taking care of our lives. BirdLife Malta is committed to this aim and I hope to have your support throughout the many years to come.

Mark Sultana
CEO

Living Land Campaign

Following the success of the Nature Alert campaign, BirdLife Malta - alongside the BirdLife partners and international NGOs - actively participated in raising awareness for the Living Land campaign. The campaign was directed to ensure that the EU's new agricultural policy must be fair for farmers and rural communities, environmentally sustainable (for clean air and water, healthy soil, and thriving plant and animal life), healthy for good food and the well-being of all people, and globally responsible for the planet's climate and sustainable development around the world. This resulted in 258,708 citizens and 600 civil society organisations and businesses joining the initiative to tell the European Commission a radical change needs to be made to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the largest EU public consultation on agricultural policy, which closed on the 2nd of May. We would like to say a big thank you to everyone who helped to support this campaign!

“Over 250,000 citizens and 600 organisations and businesses joined the campaign”

World Seabird Twitter Conference

On the 14th of April, LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija took part in the 3rd World Seabird Twitter Conference to share knowledge and information about the project with other experts and researchers from across the world. The conference proved to be a great way to connect with other projects as well as raising awareness for the work of LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija and conserving the Yelkouan Shearwater. You can now follow LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija on Twitter for the latest updates. Don't forget to keep up to date on the latest news and events on the Facebook page too!



/maltaseabirds



/arcipelagugarnija

In memoriam

In March, a tree planting ceremony was held at Is-Simar Nature Reserve in memory of Victor Zahra, an active and committed BirdLife Malta member and friend. A generous donation of €500 was also made in Victor's name. Victor was a regular attendee of the adult group activities both locally as well as in Sicily and showed a great interest in each event he attended. The ceremony was attended by Victor's family, including his two sons David and Peter, and BirdLife Malta's Adult Activities Committee. Victor will be greatly missed. The donation made by his family will help us to buy telescopes for the use of visitors at Is-Simar Nature Reserve.



Victor's tree-planting ceremony. Photo by Marcel Tellus

School grounds activities

Earlier this year, BirdLife Malta was featured in the International School Grounds Month Activity Guide, showcasing one of our education department's environmental education activities that aims to make children aware of how important wild flowers are to butterflies and how damaging pesticides are to them. BirdLife Malta appeared in the guide as one of the few European and the only Mediterranean contributor. Issued by the International School Grounds Alliance, the guide shares ideas and activities from schools across the world to help engage pupils outside in their school grounds.



Children enjoying the activity. Photo by BirdLife Malta

Spring Hunting Season 2017

April brought the end of the spring hunting season and with it a total of 15 known protected species shot, making up 10% of the total number of known shot birds this season. Video footage taken by BirdLife Malta during the hunting season and Spring Watch camp helped to secure two convictions for illegal activity, including the shooting of a Stone Curlew and a Turtle Dove. After the season ended, a further five protected birds were shot highlighting an all-time low in law enforcement. BirdLife Malta continues to call for a professional and permanently responsive Wildlife Crime Unit which would be independent and totally dedicated to wildlife crime without political influence.



Shot Lesser Kestrel. Photo by Filip Wieckowski

Chris Packham's visit

At BirdLife Malta's annual Spring Watch camp, BBC wildlife presenter Chris Packham joined us in the countryside to take part in the teams monitoring activities. During a visit to Gozo on the 18th April after learning of a report on protected species being held in an aviary, Chris was falsely accused of having pushed the owner of the aviary and having trespassed on private property. He was charged and taken to court by the local police. Luckily, Chris' team filmed the whole incident on camera which was presented to the magistrate as evidence and was subsequently acquitted.



Chris Packham's acquittal. Photo by Mark Zammit Cordina

Coastal clean-up

In April, BirdLife Malta and the LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija team joined a clean-up event held at L-Irdum tal-Madonna alongside a number of other local eNGOs and the Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FKNK) to clear the trash from this protected Natura 2000 site. The event, coordinated by Žibel, formed part of the Valletta Green Festival which aimed to raise awareness of the impacts of littering on the environment and marine life. The site where the event was held in Mellieħa is home to the main Yelkouan Shearwater colony in the Maltese Islands with 500 pairs of this endemic Mediterranean seabird breeding in the cliffs. The clean-up proved to be a great success and saw over 100 volunteers participate.



Waste collected at the clean-up. Photo by BirdLife Malta

European Natura 2000 Day

For over 25 years, the EU has been supporting the conservation of our precious natural heritage. In recognition of this milestone which also marks the 25th anniversary of the EU Habitats Directive, LIFE programme and Natura 2000 Network, BirdLife Malta joined the celebrations on this day designated as European Natura 2000 Day. Malta is home to 39 Natura 2000 sites that make up a network of over 27,000 across Europe so to raise awareness about the amazing work that made the preservation of important sites and unique wildlife possible, BirdLife Malta held a series of fun-filled events at the nature reserves and Majjistral Park for the public to enjoy.



European Natura 2000 Day at Simar. Photo by BirdLife Malta

Blue Rock Thrush Il-Merill

WORDS RAYMOND VELLA

- **Scientific Name:** *Monticola solitarius*
- **Length:** 21-23cm
- **Wingspan:** 33-37cm
- **Status:** frequent all round resident
- **Call:** a melodious haunting song
- **Habits:** mostly solitary, inhabiting high exposed areas
- **Habitat:** cliff faces, scree and sometimes urban habitats



What better way to herald the arrival of spring in Malta by spending time on one of the majestic cliffs listening to the melodious haunting song of the male Blue Rock Thrush as it climbs into the air and parachutes itself down to its favourite perch? Malta's national bird is striking; the male's beautiful blue colours shine in spring giving it an appealing hue which contrasts with the female's brownish-grey appearance.

Although it is our national bird it is not an endemic - far from it in fact! This species breeds from southern Europe and northwest Africa, right across into Turkey and even further into Asia, across the Himalayas, China, the Philippines, and Sumatra. You can easily see Blue Rock Thrushes at home on the Taj Mahal in India as well as closer to home on Mdina bastions! The reason it was recognised as the national bird was due to its relative abundance in Malta at the time in 1970. It also was the bird on the logo of the Malta Ornithological Society (today BirdLife Malta) for 30 years.

Unfortunately, the Blue Rock Thrush was persecuted for years as many people used to climb down cliff faces to rob nests and take the male Blue Rock Thrushes to be kept in cages for their song or as companions. The females were usually released back into the wild. Although this is now illegal and the bird is protected by local and international law, a few people still persist in this illogical behaviour.

Blue Rock Thrushes breed on inaccessible cliff faces, abandoned buildings, and sometimes on churches and other high buildings. The male will sing practically all year round to maintain territory but the loudest singing of course is in spring. The female lays anywhere from two to seven pale blue eggs, with six being the normal clutch size. They are incubated for 15 days, and after hatching the chicks are fed insects, lizards, geckoes, and other young birds that have been taken from nests. After 15 days the young are ready to fly and will be fed for some time later by the parents before being completely independent. The young birds disperse and take up residence from the parents' territories.

In autumn, young birds wander further inland and may be seen in more urban areas, including towns and villages where they can be seen perched on rooftops and TV antennas. For a time, the species was not doing well as disturbance was hindering their breeding success but recently it seems to be adjusting more to the urbanisation of the Islands. In fact, birds are breeding further inland on bastions, abandoned buildings and quarries and will tolerate some disturbance near the nest sites.

Through ringing it has been established that some birds can actually live for up to 10 years which is quite an achievement in our harsh climate. Hopefully we will be able to see our national bird thrive for years to come!

Raymond Vella is a BirdLife Malta Ranger

Nature in focus at Foresta 2000

WORDS VICTOR FALZON

Mediterranean Slant-faced Grasshopper Ġurat Rasu Twila

The Mediterranean Slant-faced Grasshopper is one of our largest grasshoppers. An adult female can reach almost 80mm, which ranks it among the largest insects that occur in the Islands. Despite its size, however, this beauty can be frustratingly hard to spot. Its body is long and slender, with long and thin stalk-like legs (the closest you'll get to a stick insect in Malta!) and its streaky hues of green or brown help it merge perfectly with a backdrop of dry tufts of grass. This is one of the weirdest looking of our orthopterans (grasshopper family). As both its English and Maltese names imply, this particular type of grasshopper's head is strangely elongated with a marked forward slant that is further enhanced by a pair of flat tapering antennae that look almost like an extension of the head. All of this is in the name of camouflage, a strategy of vital importance for an animal totally lacking in defence. A slow and watchful walk at Foresta 2000, especially in areas with Esparto Grass, can reward you with a sighting of this unusual animal.



Photo by Desirée Falzon

Zitting Cisticola Bufula tal-Imrewħa

From February all the way through summer it is virtually impossible to walk at Foresta 2000 without hearing the repetitive tsipp-tsip-tsip call of the Zitting Cisticola. It may be our smallest breeding bird, but it certainly makes up for size by its efforts to announce its presence. The Zitting Cisticola is indeed tiny even when compared with a sparrow but do not be deceived - this bird colonised the Maltese countryside in the space of a human generation! Until the 1960s the Zitting Cisticola was a scarce migrant, but since its first nest was discovered by BirdLife Malta ringers in 1973 the species has spread to many parts of the country. This success is partly due to the bird's prolific breeding, with a single male able to sire and defend up to five nests (and five ladies) simultaneously within his territory. Clearly size does not matter! As Zitting Cisticolas prefer to nest in tall grass and low shrubs, the steppe and low vegetation areas at Foresta 2000 are ideal for this bird to breed.



Photo by Aron Tanti

Holm Oak Ballut

The Holm Oak is the unquestioned queen of the Mediterranean woodland. Much of the land around the Mediterranean (including Malta) was once covered in oak woodland but most of that disappeared with the rise and fall of wasteful empires. The Maltese Islands were not spared the onslaught and today only a handful of centuries-old matriarch oaks can possibly claim to be original wild stock. The Holm Oak was the species that fuelled the original dream to create Foresta 2000 way back in the late 1990s, and the idea then was to plant 2000 oaks somewhere. That idea of course evolved and diversified into many species and several habitats, but nonetheless many oaks were planted, many of which are now in their second decade of life. This is not even toddler stage in oak years, but the young trees are already spreading their shade, producing acorns, providing food and shelter for birds and insects, creating new topsoil and helping to sustain an entire ecosystem.



Photo by Victor Falzon

Victor Falzon is a naturalist and field teacher with BirdLife Malta

What motivates us to connect to and protect nature?

WORDS STEFANIA PAPADOPOUL

About the Walk for Nature 2017

This year's annual Walk for Nature event was held on the 26th of March and more than 100 people participated. Several schools even organised children to come together on this Sunday walk for a fun-filled day exploring their local environment.

The Walk for Nature took place along the 10km route from Mdina to Is-Simar Nature Reserve through the countryside and surrounded by nature. Walk for Nature is organised every year by leaders of Klabb Huttat (BirdLife Malta's young members group), Dinja Waħda (BirdLife Malta's school programme) and BirdLife Malta's adult members and works to raise funds through sponsorships.

The aim is to encourage children and adults to experience nature and wildlife first-hand, whilst also raising awareness for the importance of nature conservation and environmental protection. There was a fantastic atmosphere during the event with everyone who was participating (including a few dogs!) enjoying what spring has to offer in Malta. People came together to enjoy and take photos of the wonderful wildlife around them and learning all about the value of nature and what can be done to conserve it. At the end of the walk, each child received a gift bag containing treats and other goodies which were kindly donated by Trolli as well as a host of other fun activities organised by BirdLife Malta's education team.

Why did a group of more than 100 children, parents, grandparents, teachers, and many others get out of bed early on a Sunday morning to walk 10km in the Maltese countryside? What is it about nature that not only entices people to spend time outdoors but also to actively take action to protect it?

There are two strands of research which explore the relationship between humans and nature. Firstly, that there is a biological need for humans to connect to and be dependent upon nature as described by researchers Kellert and Wilson in the 'biophilia theory'.

Secondly, there is an emotional need to connect to nature as noted by environmental psychologists Kals Schumacher and Montada in 1999. This relates to Leopold's famous quote as nature connection is the feeling of belonging to a natural community:

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect”

This concept was explored and developed to include that the connection between humans and nature can take the form of an interpersonal relationship, exploring the sense of self in relation to nature. As we form closer links and stronger bonds with the natural world, this is what motivates us to develop positive environmental behaviour.



After walk activities



Further research* indicates that this bond with the natural world is actually really good for us. Connection to nature improves wellbeing, happiness, reduces stress, and overall positively impacts our mental and physical health.

This year's Walk for Nature event brought a community together who not only have the biological need to be part of nature which is ingrained in every human being, but who also have a strong relationship with the natural world. It is this emotional bond to nature that motivated them to take action to protect nature. Thanks to the donations and sponsorships of the participating children in this year's walk from Mdina to Is-Simar Nature Reserve, we raised more than €1,000 which will be used to support wildlife conservation and to purchase educational resources for the nature reserves.

“I take care of the environment by admiring it and having fun”

The importance of BirdLife Malta's education programmes is rooted in the belief that by providing such opportunities and inspiring people to connect to nature, we are promoting positive environmental behaviour which will improve wildlife and habitat conservation in the Maltese Islands. As well as this, we are also improving general wellbeing and physical health in communities.

“We've seen places we never visited here in Malta. This is a very good thing to create awareness among the young generation. BirdLife is doing a lot in our community and it has a very important role to strengthen the nature that surrounds us”

*(Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown and St. Leger 2006).

Stefania Papadopol is the Education Assistant at BirdLife Malta

“Thanks to BirdLife Malta we have the reserves where we can learn more about the birds and watch them. They are very good in teaching the children as well about birds and insects”



Friends enjoying the flower field

“I enjoyed the walk. I was walking and talking with friends.”



Enjoying the countryside walk

“It was fun, there were people from all walks of life taking part. We enjoyed the lovely nature and countryside”



Colours of Malta

GOZO

A summer walk through history

WORDS LORENZO LOCCI
PICTURES BIRDLIFE MALTA

This Gozo walk is a rewarding daytime tour surrounded by the azure sea and scenic limestone hills in one of the pearls of the Mediterranean Sea where nature and landscape shaped the local history during the past centuries. Start the morning with a coastal walk of around 7km from Mġarr Harbour (Gozo Ferry Terminal) to Ix-Xatt I-Aħmar, then on to Ras il-Ħobż, Mġarr ix-Xini watchtower, followed by Mġarr ix-Xini bay, Wied Ғanzira, and all the way to the village of Xewkija. This perfect summer walk can take between two and four hours, leaving you enough time to reach your destination for a spot of lunch and the opportunity to visit the ancient Ġgantija Temples in Xagħra in the afternoon.

Start the walk at Mġarr Harbour

The experience begins in the humble yet busy harbour of Mġarr with yacht and fishing boats swaying on the waves with busy fishermen preparing their nets for the day. Mġarr Harbour is the first glimpse of Gozo when approaching the island from the channel. The channel crossing itself is steeped in history with the first ferry boat service known as Id-dgħajsa tal-Mogħdija recorded in 1241. After docking, take the uphill path that runs parallel to the coast, by the left side of the police station opposite the ferry terminal. From here, you can admire the impressive Fort Chambray that dominates the harbour. The bastioned fort was constructed in 1760 by the Order of Saint John in a failed attempt to create another fortified city in Gozo that replaces the Ċittadella as the island's capital. The plan however, never materialised as by the time construction started, Berber and Turkish marauders were no longer a major threat and people began feeling safer living in the rural areas. In the past, it has been used as a military base and even a hospital and is now being restored and redeveloped as a luxury accommodation. Adjacent to the fort is the neo-Gothic Lourdes Chapel.

The saltpans and the fougasse of Ix-Xatt I-Aħmar

Walking along the curving path you can notice large boulders, sprouting vegetation, typical rubble walls and wonderful sea views. It is so amazing how in such a short time you can find yourself in the wild! After 400 metres and a bit of a climb, you arrive on the top of a clay slope. Here you can take in great panoramic views of Comino and the picturesque bay of Ix-Xatt I-Aħmar.

From here, trek downhill and along the coast leading to the ancient saltpans at the small inlet of Ix-Xatt I-Aħmar. Just after the parking spaces you can find a fougasse. A type of cannon sculpted into the rock designed to fire large quantities of stone onto approaching enemy ships which was used by the Knights of Malta for coastal defence against enemy vessels.

From Ras il-Ħobż to Mġarr ix-Xini Tower

Walk down the hill and take a dip in the beautiful sea inlet. Head along Ix-Xini Cliffs which offer natural limestone entrances into the clear water. If you are a keen diver, you can find a number of interesting sites here including the submerged remains of an old Gozo ferry boat.



Mġarr ix-Xini Tower

Following the coastline, you reach the historic Knights-period tower. This is part of a historical defense system of 14 watchtowers constructed in the 17th century around the coasts of Malta and Gozo to prevent the Ottoman Turks from using this inlet when most of the population of Gozo was taken into slavery. The towers could communicate with neighbouring towers – usually through fires on their roofs. The Mġarr ix-Xini Tower's neighbours were the St Cecilia Tower (also on Gozo) and the Santa Marija Tower on Comino

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR



BLUE ROCK THRUSH
Malta's national bird can be seen and heard easily in these areas



WILD AND CULTIVATED FLORA
Such as Fig, Judas Tree, the endemic Maltese Salt-tree, Blue Stonecrop (pictured) and the endemic Maltese Rock-centaury



OLD SALTPANS
The area is characterised by a checkerboard of rock-cut salt pans protruding into the sea dating back about 350 years



IN THE WATCHTOWER
The winding spiral staircase and the entrance to the tower embellished with a palisade drawbridge



nestled between Malta and Gozo. This massive tower is visible from the Mġarr ix-Xini Tower. Recently, the Mġarr ix-Xini Tower was jointly restored by the Ministry for Gozo and Gozitan eNGO Wirt Għawdex. You can explore the site by booking a visit led by a volunteer who will show you the two floors inside with the spiral staircase leading up to the roof.

Mġarr ix-Xini bay, Wied Hanzira

Turning inland, walk along the scenic sea inlet of Mġarr ix-Xini which is traditionally associated with the sacking of Gozo by pirates in 1551. After about 400m, once you reach a villa, take the path and steps to the left down to the beach. Here you can swim or relax in the shade of the tamarisk trees. Take a look at the deep valley heading inland. This secluded gorge hosts a wide diversity of flora and fauna; admire the plants growing on the cliff sides and look out for the Blue Rock Thrush, the national bird of Malta!

From Xewkija to Ġgantija Temples

Finally take the steep uphill road from the beach which leads towards the village of Xewkija, about 1.5km away. After a break for lunch - if you are still willing to explore some more - you can combine this nature walk with some more history by visiting the ancient Ġgantija Temples in Xagħra. To reach Xagħra you can either take the bus or walk up to the megalithic temples which date between 3600 and 3200 BC. This ancient archaeological site has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and is cared for by Heritage Malta.

HOW TO GET THERE

By public transport, take any bus to Ċirkewwa Ferry Terminal (X1 – 41 – 42 -101 – 221 – 222) and take the ferry to start your trip from the Gozo harbour by following the walking path along the coast. From Xewkija to the Temples in Xagħra, you can take the bus 303 (every 25-35 minutes) stopping at the racetrack (the nearest bus stop to the temples) or you can opt to walk instead for around 35-45 minutes. The transport will cost approximately €10 per person (including Gozo ferry fee, without car) and between €5 and €9 per person for the tickets to access the archaeological site and museum.

Lorenzo Locci is the Events Assistant at BirdLife Malta

In this issue of Bird's Eye View, we shall be looking into our 'Together Against Air Pollution from Ships' project through which we have partnered with several other international NGOs to deliver an awareness campaign on air pollution generated by cruise ships in the Mediterranean. We shall

also delve into the initiatives undertaken by our LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija project which is researching the breeding colonies of the Yelkouan Shearwater in Malta and Gozo. We will be dedicating this page to all of the latest news and updates of our ongoing projects.

Together Against Air Pollution from Ships

BirdLife Malta's collaborative project 'Together Against Air Pollution from Ships' is well underway and has seen some exciting progress in the months since its official launch in December last year. In March, BirdLife Malta formed part of an alliance alongside other European environmental organisations and adopted a declaration to designate the Mediterranean Sea an Emission Control Area (ECA) to limit air pollution from ships. Dubbed the "Rome Declaration" following a one-day international Mediterranean Shipping Conference in Rome, the initiative would ideally encompass emission control areas for sulphur (SECA) and nitrogen oxides (NECA) whilst explicitly addressing particulate matter and black carbon emissions.

Research has shown that air pollution can negatively affect human health and the environment with ocean-going transport contributing towards

this. Urbanised areas in particular are facing a decline in air quality and Malta is no exception. A reading taken by the project revealed that there were high concentrations of ultrafine particles in the ambient air when ships were transiting through the Grand Harbour between Valletta and Birgu - 80 times higher than clean air levels expected of areas not exposed to any pollution sources.

The project is continuously working towards mitigating the impacts of air pollution which have not only been linked to causing serious health conditions but also climate warming and, a significant loss of productivity in agriculture and a negative impact on biodiversity. With the implementation of suitable monitoring equipment in Malta, valuable scientific data on air pollution caused by marine traffic in the area could be collected to work towards tackling the issue.



Adoption of the Rome Declaration. Photo by NABU

“Research has shown that air pollution can negatively affect human health and the environment with ocean-going transport contributing towards this”

LIFE ARĊIPELAGU GARNIJA project update

Monitoring Yelkouan Shearwater nests

In 2016, the LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija project team deployed 83 nest boxes for Yelkouan Shearwaters in known breeding colonies around the coast of Malta, including Comino and Cominotto. Using nest boxes is a useful tool when trying to monitor seabirds as they are easily accessible (compared to a 10m crevice inside a steep cliff!) This followed the lessons learnt from two pilot nest boxes deployed during the LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project in 2012, one of which has been occupied since 2014. During the 2017 breeding season, one of the new nest boxes has been home to a breeding pair of Yelkouan Shearwaters with a further three boxes showing a good possibility of hosting more. Since it may take several years for the seabirds to become used to the nest boxes, the team is extremely happy with the success so far.

Raising awareness about the Yelkouan Shearwater

The LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija project has also deployed 12 project signs around the Maltese Islands in the areas where Yelkouan Shearwater colonies are situated. It is hoped that the signs will help to raise awareness about the breeding seabirds within Malta and the surrounding islands, their threats and the need for conservation measures. A new leaflet for the project has also been created and will be distributed to the public in the near future to improve engagement.



Comino project sign. Photo by BirdLife Malta

UPCOMING EVENTS

Shearwater boat trips

23 & 24 June | 7 & 8 July

18:30 – 21:30

Our favourite summer adventure is on again! Join our LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija sunset boat rides to see one of Malta's most spectacular natural phenomena – the Scopoli's Shearwater 'rafting' on the water before returning to their nests in Ta' Ċenċ cliffs.

We shall be organising 4 boat trips in all during June and July. We shall be meeting at Marfa Jetty, opposite the Riviera Hotel, at 18:30 with the boat leaving at 19:00.

This year's boat trips are being co-financed by our LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija project and to cover the remaining expenses we are asking for a €10 donation from each participant. Donations should be made in advance when placing your booking through the online payment facility on our website.



Please also send an email to events@birdlifemalta.org including:

- Name and mobile contact number
- Date of the boat trip you want to attend
- Membership number if you have one
- Names and number of all the people in your group
- Age of the children in your group

For further information or for bookings please email or call:

events@birdlifemalta.org

+356 2134 7646

Subscribe to our events on Facebook:



/birdlifemalta



/falkoblml

PAST EVENTS

Science in the Citadel

Earlier this year, BirdLife Malta participated in the first edition of Science in the Citadel which was held in Gozo within the historic walls of the Citadel in Victoria. It was a stimulating experience for visitors of all ages who were engaged in science, research, creativity, and innovation. Modelled on the annual Science in the City, held in Valletta every September, this day was firmly Gozitan in flavour, with displays relevant to the island's biodiversity, geology, and agriculture, as well as highlighting the science and engineering inherent in the Citadel itself and its museums. BirdLife Malta showcased its LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija stand at the event which included interactive games and activities on the importance of seabirds, and the threats they face. Project Manager Paulo Lago gave a talk about the secretive life of the Yelkouan Shearwater in the Maltese Islands. We also had a welcome stand at the Cathedral Piazza promoting our work together with other eNGOs.

Bird ringing at Comino

Our Falko youth group organised the annual Comino bird ringing session and walk around the island. Participants started the day with a visit to the bird ringing station on Comino during the spring migration – a perfect opportunity to get up close to the birds that were passing through Malta! Falko



events are aimed at young adults interested in exploring nature, taking part in conservation activities and meeting like-minded people.

Day trips to Sicily

BirdLife Malta's Adult Activities Group organised its two annual Sicily day trips to Vendicari Nature Reserve; one for BirdLife Malta members and their friends and another for the Bank of Valletta Sports & Social Club. Situated on the southernmost part of Sicily's east coast, Vendicari is a mixture of lagoons, sand dunes, rocky coastlines, and sandy beaches. The area is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. Thousands of migrating birds pass through here on their way to or from Africa. The day's main event consisted of a 10km trek mostly along the coast of the reserve. This was followed by a typical farmhouse lunch and a quick shopping spree in the town of Pozzallo. It was a great day out enjoyed by all!

Let's have fun together

A group of children diagnosed with cancer enjoyed a special fun-filled morning at Majjistral Natural and History Park earlier this year. Upon the request of a parent who contacted the park, an entertaining morning was especially designed to engage these children with nature conservation and the environment.



The day included pizza making, games in the field, a zip-line and a visit to the Manikata farm open especially for this occasion, topped off with a closing lunch with all the volunteers, parents, and children! The event attracted sponsorship from a number of organisations that offered their services free of charge.

Return to nature

“This spring has been particularly bad with 13 shot birds recovered by BirdLife Malta alone during the spring hunting season”



Regina was one of two Marsh Harriers rehabilitated by BirdLife Malta after being found shot this spring. Following one month under the conservation team's dedicated care and with the advice of our vet, she was successfully released back in the wild from Comino in May to continue her migratory journey. BirdLife Malta will continue building experience and expertise in the area of rehabilitation with the support of our local and international partners to ensure more birds like Regina have the best chance of survival. Thanks to the ongoing support of our members, we are able to make success stories like this possible!

REGINA - FEMALE MARSH HARRIER REHABILITATED BY BIRDLIFE MALTA
Photo by Veerle van Werde