

# Bird's Eye View



issue  
**50**  
★ DECEMBER 2016 ★

  
**BirdLife**  
MALTA

COMMON STARLING Aron Tanti

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Another feather in our cap!



BirdLife Malta is an environmental organisation working to protect Malta's wildlife by managing natural spaces, inspiring the new generation, opposing illegal hunting and undertaking research.

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## Bird's Eye View turns 50!



**Darryl Grima**  
President



**Mark Sultana**  
CEO

This is a special edition of our Bird's Eye View, being the 50th issue in 39 years. That in itself shows the history and the strength of our organisation. Whilst looking back at all the achievements, including the management of Għadira and

Is-Simar, the educational programme, the scientific research and study of birds, along with the lobbying and advocacy measures embarked on, we as people leading the organisation, with the rest of the Council members and the employees at BirdLife Malta, feel and respect the responsibility we have to sustain and continue moving forward.

Thanks to the support of many, we believe we are on the right track, to keep on achieving more for the protection and benefit of our country's biodiversity. We will very soon be managing another nature reserve, Salina, which is also a Natura 2000 site. We are looking at ways to redesign school buildings to have more green spaces so that children can learn whilst surrounded by nature. This idea is backed by research which was recently published through our Lifelong Learning through Nature project that showed how children of all ages engage, focus and participate more with a calm atmosphere when they are learning in nature.

Nature in Malta will still be facing many challenges in the years to come and our position and strength is going to be instrumental to safeguard what we have today, for the benefit of the generations to come. With this in mind, we need your help to improve our membership numbers to allow us continue our work into the future. We encourage you not only to renew your membership but to enrol friends or family as new members of BirdLife Malta. On behalf of the Council, management and staff of BirdLife Malta, we wish you and your loved ones a happy festive season and a new year full of good health and happiness.

## BirdLife Malta Council

Darryl Grima, **President**  
Saviour Balzan, **Secretary General**  
Norman Chetcuti, **Treasurer**  
Nicholas Galea, **Council Secretary**

Irene Mangion, **member**  
Kathleen Mamo, **member**  
Eurydike Kovacs, **member**  
Ray Galea, **member**  
Geoffrey Saliba, **member**

BirdLife Malta has launched a membership drive to increase membership. Today, we are the largest environmental NGO in Malta and we are getting bigger and bigger.

We manage four nature reserves, we have succeeded in our efforts to reduce illegal hunting in Malta, we run an annual nationwide school education programme, and we manage several EU LIFE-funded scientific studies about Malta's seabirds - thanks to which, the first eight marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the Maltese Islands were announced earlier this year.

Help us continue to grow and carry on with the work we do to protect nature and wildlife in Malta. **Join us today by visiting <http://birdlifemalta.org/become-member> and you get a free lovely book about Malta's birds. Help us fly...join BirdLife Malta and fly with us!**



## Raptor Camp 2016

On 1 September 2016, the autumn hunting season opened in Malta. With this came BirdLife Malta's annual Raptor Camp, which brought together 20 volunteers from eight countries to monitor migration and any potential illegalities for a three-week period. Despite BirdLife Malta's persistent presence in the field and calls on the Government to end the hunting season, by 20 October – just as the trapping season opened too – nearly 50 birds of protected species had been killed, including a Peregrine Falcon. Following this shameful start to the season, BirdLife Malta has continued to highlight the need for a Wildlife Crime Unit in Malta.



The Peregrine Falcon shot down at Imqabba. Photo by Nicholas Barbara

## Autumn migration brings mega-rarities to Malta

The peak migration period also brought with it some exciting visitors including a Levant Sparrowhawk, a small bird of prey which was spotted in the Buskett area. Dubbed a mega-rarity, this juvenile female was the first of her kind to visit Malta. As well as this extraordinary migrant, Black Storks, Greater Flamingos and a spectacular sighting of over 60 Black Kites were observed. The first days of November brought an exceptional migration of a flock of around 60 Short-toed and Booted Eagles which sadly led to at least ten of these rare birds ending up being targeted illegally. The birds had sought refuge in Malta after crossing over from Sicily but were shot by hunters in the outskirts of Rabat.



Levant Sparrowhawk observed in Buskett. Photo by Raymond Galea

## Research shared at two international conferences

September and October saw some exciting developments in the LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija project with Project Manager Paulo Lago attending two international conferences. One of these, in Paris, aimed to develop the Species Action Plan for Yelkouan Shearwater, and was attended by leading bird researchers and experts from across Europe as part of the LIFE EuroSAP project. The Paris meeting followed the project's attendance at the sixth International Albatross and Petrel Conference (IAPC6) in Barcelona to share information on its pioneering seabird research. This was also followed by attendance at the Marine Task Force Meeting to review the European BirdLife Marine Strategy up until 2020.



BirdLife Malta at the IAPC6 in Barcelona. Photo by Teresa Militao

## BirdLife Malta's rehabilitation successes

In the last months, BirdLife Malta has had some great successes in rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing birds which came into our care, including two Common Kestrels. 'Baal', a male kestrel and female 'Tanit', were both found by members of the public with human-inflicted injuries but after an assessment from the vet, it was decided that rehabilitation should be attempted. Following several weeks of recovery, both birds were ringed and released back into the wild. Also, after a record-breaking number of Scopoli's Shearwater fledglings were found stranded this October, BirdLife Malta was able to rescue and release 20 of these seabirds back at sea following a public appeal to help report sightings.



The release of Common Kestrel Baal. Photo by Iryna Lukashuk

## Tal-Bosk Farmhouse, nature reserves open to the public

In September, Tal-Bosk Farmhouse opened its doors to the public as part of BirdLife Malta's Migration Festival. As one of three scheduled farmhouses in Buskett, built by the Knights of Malta, the farmhouse has been restored to its former glory with the help of EU funds. Managed through a collaboration between BirdLife Malta and the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, Tal-Bosk Farmhouse will open to the public during weekends and will host future events and seminars as well as acting as the starting point for guided walks around Buskett. In November, even our Għadira and Is-Simar Nature Reserves reopened to the public after the summer break.



Tal-Bosk Farmhouse in Buskett. Photo by BirdLife Malta

## Environmental youth training in UK

The BirdLife Malta education team has been further developing its work with the Lifelong Learning through Nature (LLN) project. In recent months, the team has visited both the UK and Ireland to coordinate training sessions, to plan the next steps in developing resources and ultimately to raise more awareness for the project to increase participation. The project also celebrated its concluding seminar at Blata l-Bajda Middle School which was attended by Minister for Education and Employment Evarist Bartolo as well as teachers, education officials, college principals and heads of school.



LLN training in the UK. Photo by BirdLife Malta

# Common Starling

Sturnell

WORDS MARTIN AUSTAD



**Scientific Name:** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Length:** 19-22cm

**Wingspan:** 37-42cm

**Status:** very common in autumn and winter; rare breeder in Malta

**Call:** diversity of calls; flying birds make a short “churr” while the song sometimes even heard in winter is very complex and can include imitations of other birds

**Habits:** most often found in large flocks, even up to thousands of birds when they perform rapid changes in flight direction called murmurations

**Habitat:** found in a diversity of open habitats, including fields, but also urban areas, especially to roost

A compact flock of birds flies by, with the sound of fluttering wings and noisy contact calls. The flock is gone as quickly as it arrived; it’s a wonder that they do not collide with each other when flying so fast and close. They are starlings, one of the first signs that summer is nearing the end. They start arriving in mid-September, often with the first autumn storms, but numbers peak in October and November. Apart from their flight acrobatics, short tails and pointed wings, at a distance they appear simply dark and perhaps even featureless. However, as they stop to rest on tops of trees and electricity cables, one can notice finer plumage details. Starlings are covered with yellowish-white spots and in good light, the purple and green iridescence of the feathers is quite brilliant - especially in males.

The number of spots decreases whilst iridescence increases as spring and the breeding season approaches. Most starlings leave Malta by late winter to mainland Europe, but some stay long enough for us to observe this plumage change. The beak also turns yellow from a dark grey. Although a few pairs breed sporadically in the Maltese Islands, especially on Comino, most of these are of feral origin.

Starlings do not only stay in flocks when on migration and overwintering but often nest colonially too. In their main breeding range, nest boxes are often set up to make up for fewer natural nesting holes caused by habitat destruction. In fact, whilst still common and characteristic of suburban and agricultural areas, the Common Starling is decreasing in parts of its range, particularly in the UK and northern Europe. Agricultural intensification is likely a major negative factor, as with other farmland birds. The main diet of the starling is worms and other invertebrates found in the soil and therefore these birds are often seen feeding on the ground in fields and pasture. On migration and in winter they will however happily welcome a meal of fruits or berries and in turn are important dispersers of the trees they feast on. Locally, they typically frequent olive orchards and garrigue with Lentisk bushes. After spending the day foraging in the countryside, they gather to roost in large Ficus trees found in some avenues and village squares.

**Martin Austad** is a Project Warden with BirdLife Malta’s LIFE+ Arcipelagu Garnija project

on reserve

GHADIRA NATURE RESERVE Joe Sultana

# Nature in focus at Ghadira

WORDS VICTOR FALZON

## Dunlin *Pispisella tad-Dabra*

Many species of shorebirds – also known as waders – occur at Ghadira at different times of the year, and one of the more regular ones is the Dunlin. It's small as waders go, but its rather long and slightly down-curved beak makes it relatively easy to identify, even more so if sporting the large black patch on its belly in summer. Dunlins only stop here for short stints to feed and rest while on migration. They do not breed in Malta or anywhere near the Mediterranean, but seek out the cool Scandinavian summers up north. Like many other shorebirds, Dunlins feed on aquatic invertebrates, which shallow coastal lagoons like Ghadira can provide in large quantities.



Photo by Denis Cechia

## Sweet Alison *Buttuniera*

The Sweet Alison belongs to the same plant group that gives us cabbages and cauliflowers but looks nothing like them. It's a short plant that makes up for its short stature by flowering profusely and for most of the year. Its flowers are grown in round bundles that look a bit like pompoms, which gave the plant its Maltese name. The Sweet Alison is not particularly associated with wetlands, as it grows in many habitats. Still, we can safely consider this species part of the reserve ecosystem as it grows regularly along the nature trail, adding beauty, colour and variety to the reserve flora as well as providing more food for insects, of course.



Photo by Victor Falzon

## Red Admiral *Farfett tal-Hurrieq*

You needn't be a lepidopterist to recognise the Red Admiral. Those red sashes on its silky black wings are an instant ID. Butterflies are great pollinators and wonderful natural gems, all the more precious because we have so few species in Malta – around 20 or so. Our limited countryside is of course one of the main reasons but we make the situation worse with our constant chemical war on so-called weeds. The Stinging Nettle is one such 'weed', but it happens to be one of the chief foodplants of Red Admiral caterpillars (hence the Maltese name). We do not wage war on plants at Ghadira, so Red Admiral caterpillars are guaranteed a full larder.



Photo by Desiree Falzon

## Meadow Pipit *Pespus*

The Meadow Pipit is a common winter bird in the Maltese Islands. It is small, with grey-brown upperparts and pale, black-streaked underparts. This rather drab colour scheme helps the bird merge with its surrounding despite being in full view, especially if it stands still. Meadow Pipits are birds of open country, such as steppe, farmland, garrigue and grassland, and they are also common visitors at Ghadira. Birdwatchers often spot them among the low shrubbery looking for insects and other invertebrates to snap up with their slender beak. The best giveaway to the Meadow Pipit's presence is its characteristic *pss-wss-wss-wss!* call, the sound that gave the bird its Maltese name.



Photo by Aaron Tanti

in focus

# Conservation – protecting wild birds and habitats

WORDS NIK BARBARA & NICK PILUDU

In an environmental NGO like BirdLife Malta, conservation work is at the core of what the organisation is all about. Although by conservation work one might automatically imagine something like the release of a flamingo at Għadira Nature Reserve or the setting up of an afforestation area, the stark reality is that in a challenging environment like the Maltese Islands, a great deal of our work is focused on countering that which threatens the very livelihood of our birds and their environment; the vast urbanisation and exploitation of what remains of our countryside and sea, and the unsustainable levels of hunting and trapping from one of the densest aggregations of hunters and trappers in the world.

## Spring Hunting

In spring, birds make their way from their wintering grounds in Africa to their breeding grounds in northern Europe, and thousands of them fly over Malta along the Central Mediterranean Flyway. Spring hunting is forbidden in Europe by the Birds Directive, to prevent birds from being shot before they have the chance to breed and replenish their population. It is widely considered a harmful and unsustainable practice. However, Malta derogates from the Birds Directive and until 2016 the country opened a spring hunting season for both Common Quail and Turtle Dove until a moratorium was recently approved for Turtle Dove which will not be hunted in spring 2017 following a collapse in its population numbers.

The moratorium is one of the latest developments in a long battle which started with Malta's EU accession in 2004, to the spring hunting referendum in 2015. Over the years - thanks to the efforts of activities like our Spring Watch camp - we have been able to relay directly to the European Commission, the lack of enforcement and control that occurs during spring hunting seasons. The derogation is only permitted under very specific regulations and that is why in spring the conservation team is joined by more than twenty volunteers to patrol the countryside. Teams are out all day monitoring hunting activity, bird migration, enforcement, and any wildlife crime. Volunteers are placed on high watch points that allow them to have a clear view of the surrounding countryside and, armed with binoculars, telescopes, cameras and datasheets, they ensure that the laws regulating spring hunting are respected.

## Raptor Camp

From the humble beginnings of a group of volunteers positioned at Buskett, Raptor Camp has grown to cover the Maltese Islands, during the spectacular autumn migration of birds of prey. Historically, birds of prey remain prime targets for taxidermy collections. Raptor

Camp, which takes place in the peak of the migration, deploys experienced volunteers in the most important migration corridors and hotspots of illegality to deter wildlife crime, protect vulnerable birds and collect evidence in case any illegality is encountered.

In 2016, Raptor Camp was supported by 25 volunteers and staff and ran for three weeks in September and October, during which nearly 50 birds of protected species were known to have been shot down and a total of 120 illegalities were recorded. Volunteers and staff worked relentlessly on very little sleep, protecting raptors early in the morning as they left their roosts in fields and trees, watching over sleeping storks all night, and working with the police when illegalities were recorded.

## Our international work

Armed with the evidence we collect during our fieldwork, we have been able to recount the situation on the ground to both local government and the international community roping in the support of the European Commission, international conventions and agreements, to lobby for better enforcement.

BirdLife Malta has in recent years become increasingly active within the BirdLife Europe partnership contributing to aspects relating to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives – the two main pillars which guide the conservation of Europe's natural environment. Through engagement with our European partners, we have been able to counter certain positions and legislation effective in Malta, pushing these to be in line with the rest of Europe.

Our latest joint battle has been to save the directives from being scrapped or renewed, a matter which has involved a strong lobby across Europe. Keeping the directives intact means we can still continue fighting for bird conservation in Malta, backed by a common European policy.



One of the Booted Eagles shot down at Tal-Virtù this autumn hunting season. Photo by Janina Laurent

## Lobbying for an end to finch trapping

Our success in gathering the assistance of our European partners has given us the means to fight causes like the one against finch trapping through the proper means. From attracting international funding, and collaboration with other BirdLife partners in the Mediterranean, we have worked together on field methods and have had the necessary resources to bring this cause to the door of the European Court of Justice where a decision is expected in 2017.

Finch trapping was outlawed in 2009 but was then reintroduced in 2014, bringing much destruction to our countryside with the setting up of thousands of trapping sites in coastal areas. From aerial surveys to investigations on the illegal trade of finches, we are fighting the habit of catching wild birds to be kept in cages for mere enjoyment, which goes against the principle of the Birds Directive.

## Rehabilitation of injured birds

The conservation team runs a rescue and rehabilitation programme that provides assistance to wild birds in distress, a very common occurrence in Malta. Birds get exhausted during migration, confused by light pollution and end up stranded in towns, hit windows or buildings, fall in the sea, or suffer gunshot injuries. We rescue birds reported by the public and ensure that they receive veterinary attention, then follow the course of action prescribed by our doctors.

While sometimes the outcome is negative – if injuries are just too severe for the bird to survive – this year's work resulted in some amazing successes. Last spring saw the team busy with two Yelkouan Shearwater chicks which were rescued from the water in Blue Grotto and hand-reared for months until they were successfully released at a colony site at the cliff. This was the first ever successful captive raising and release of Yelkouan Shearwater in the world!

During summer, two Common Kestrels, both victims of illegal hunting, were rehabilitated and then released in Comino. Countless more birds have been released in our reserves and given a new start after a short stay with us.

## Having our say on developments

Apart from the impacts of hunting and trapping, our countryside, Important Birds Areas, Natura 2000 sites and nature reserves are always under the constant threat of urban development. From new hotels which may increase light pollution on the coast close to a seabird colony, to road networks challenging the viability of our nature reserves, our input in alerting the authorities to possible threats has never been as crucial. Our team is regularly working on development briefs and position papers, roping the support of other eNGOs in the process. Although in the fight against irrational development, successes are not usual, we have indeed successfully influenced quite a number of developments in recent years. These include the abandonment of plans for the Sikka I-Bajda offshore windfarm in front of our largest colony of Yelkouan Shearwaters at L-Irdum tal-Madonna, the design of the coast road, and various developments proposed in outside development zones.

## What lies ahead?

With a possible end to finch trapping and spring hunting in the coming years, prospects for Malta are looking interesting if we are able to gather support and keep up the momentum on illegal killing of birds and our campaigns for better enforcement and legislation. Although this year has already been marred by a rise in illegal hunting incidents compared to the previous two years, our countryside has already shown us its potential for recovery. This year has marked a record number of breeding Common Kestrels, two confirmed successful nestings by Peregrine Falcon, and breeding Short-eared Owl.

Ensuring our countryside regenerating and free from damaging impacts is what conservation is truly all about. It is only with the backing of our members and supporters that we might see more of these in the coming years!

---

**Nik Barbara** is the Conservation Manager and **Nick Piludu** is the Conservation Coordinator at BirdLife Malta



Bahar, one of two Yelkouan Shearwater chicks hand-reared for the first time. Photo by Paul Bray



Linnet in a cage on an illegal trapping site in Ta' Cenc during spring. Photo by Nik Barbara



Raptor Camp participants. Photo by Ella Beeson



The Turtle Dove will not be hunted in spring 2017 thanks to a moratorium following a collapse in its population numbers. Photo by Aron Tanti

# Comino

## The perfect escape from it all

WORDS YANKA MILUSHEVA  
PICTURES IRYNA LUKASHUK

**A destination much loved over the summer due to the magnetic nuances of the water in the Blue Lagoon. Still, this tiny island has so much more to offer. Having in mind that winter has come, along with the sudden urge to reconnect with nature after the hot sunny months, it is a perfect idea to dedicate a day to Comino, or Kemmuna in Maltese.**

The island is the largest bird sanctuary in the country, conveniently situated between the islands of Malta and Gozo. It is also a Natura 2000 site and has a status of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) of international importance and a Special Protection Area (SPA).

After stepping away from the boat and climbing on to the land, don't forget to turn around and enjoy the magnificent view over the Blue Lagoon where the sun's rays are playing with the azure waters.

The size of this unique rocky island allows you to discover its wonders without racing against time. Beware, there are no roads but only pathways. Nevertheless, a stroll along the coastline is always better. You can begin your walk from left to right, and first enjoy the more rugged side of the island.

The dry, rocky land of Comino is characterised with garrigue vegetation, which is typical for the Maltese Islands. Easily recognisable are the endemic Maltese Salt Tree and Maltese Spurge. There is also a wide palette of other flora such as Mediterranean Thyme, Lentisk, Evergreen Honeysuckle, Common Centaury, and a couple of orchids – Brown Orchid, Bumble Bee Orchid and Mirror Orchid together with many other plants.

Hiking along you will pass by the Comino Hotel grounds which in winter appear to be abandoned with only a mere memory of the busy summer season. Now Santa Marija Bay feels even more tranquil and remote than usual. It is a perfect place for a short break and an opportunity to allow your imagination to flow picturing the arrival of pirates and corsairs hiding their precious treasures on the island.

Continue your way along the path leading in a northeast direction, keep on going in a relatively straight line and when you reach the rough edges of the rock, search among the crevices for Santa Marija Caves and have a look inside. You will be pleasantly surprised!

From here you can continue enjoying the island via the few pathways inland or decide to make a big circle around its coastline depending on your preferences. You can even do both, just be cautious about the boats' schedule as in winter time they are not so frequent, the last one being at 16:00.

The stroll inland on the few paths eventually leads you to the old hospital used for cholera victims in the beginning of the 20th century and Santa Marija Tower, dating back to 1618, built by the







**WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR**

Knights in order to protect from pirate threats. I personally would prefer the coastal walk as it is really fascinating to observe how the waves meet the barren rock and patiently carve the shape of Comino creating a unique picturesque landscape.

On the way you will also encounter Santa Marija Battery facing the South Comino Channel which still houses some cannons from the 18th century.

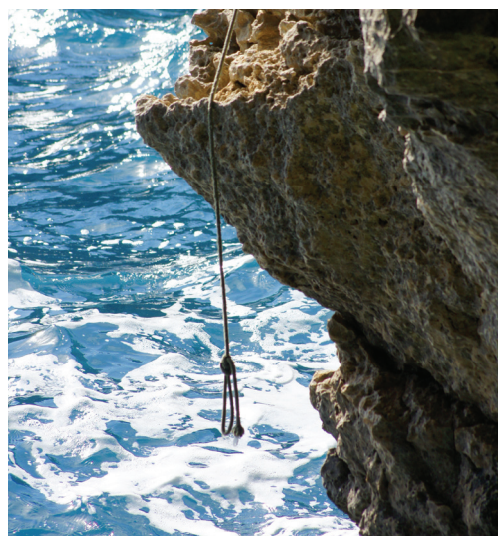
During the time you spend on this tiny island you may have a chance to observe Common Starlings usually foraging in huge flocks along with the Robin, Song Thrush, Common Chaffinch, Black Redstart and other birds. Another common bird is the Collared Dove which has a resident population on Comino.

Try to spot the flowers of the French Daffodil and Mediterranean Heath flowering until early spring. Be careful not to step on a Maltese Wall Lizard or Moorish Gecko gathering some sunshine on the surrounding stones. Keep an eye open for some beautiful butterflies like the Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Swallowtail. Finish your walk again overlooking the magnetic colours of the water and shapes of the cliffs just a few metres away from St. Mary's Tower while keeping the outlines of Cominotto and Gozo on the horizon.

Due to its relatively peaceful atmosphere, Comino is the ideal setting for ornithological research. For this reason the Comino Bird Ringing Project has been conducted twice a year since 1991 with large numbers of birds ringed and released. You can contact BirdLife Malta for additional information about this.

**Yanka Milusheva** is the Events Assistant at BirdLife Malta

**HOW TO GET THERE**  
Boats to Comino leave from Marfa Jetty and Ċirkewwa. Keep in mind that in winter time they are not as frequent as during summer.



**LENTISK**  
Evergreen shrub or a small tree growing on rocky areas and even in saline environments



**MOORISH GECKO**  
Can drop its tail as defence mechanism, and licks its eyes instead of blinking



**RED ADMIRAL**  
Can be spotted all year round

Photo by Aron Tanti

Photo by Aron Tanti

# Volunteering for a cause

Since 2007 BirdLife Malta has been facilitating young volunteers eager to gain professional experience whilst living abroad. Through the European Voluntary Service (EVS) BirdLife Malta recruits a fresh batch of 18-30 year olds every year to work across a number of departments including conservation, education, finance, communications, and administration in Malta's largest environmental NGO. This year-long scheme offers these volunteers the opportunity to participate in a unique working environment learning invaluable skills whilst experiencing a new country, culture and colleagues. This year, 17 volunteers took part in the EVS scheme. We heard from some of them about their experience, what they have learnt and where it will take them in the future.



**Anna Ivanova, EVS Finance Assistant – 23, Russia**

BirdLife Malta is a great organisation in a lot of aspects. It is impressive how many different projects are run by this small NGO, so the finance department has quite some work to do! When you are a finance volunteer you contribute to the daily running of each department in many ways. Above all, at BirdLife Malta you feel part of a team. This helps a lot in your personal development. Participation in the EVS scheme is in itself a beautiful experience and we are lucky to do it at BirdLife Malta and in a country which has given us a lot in terms of its extraordinary cultural traditions, ways of thinking and living.



**Pedro Martins, EVS Administration Assistant – 28, Portugal**

In the administration department I developed a wide range of tasks, mainly what concerns office coordination and project administrative support. Since it is a varied role, I have also been given the chance to be involved in other departments, which made the experience more engaging. By taking this volunteering position I became even more autonomous, improved my ability to take initiative and now have a clearer picture of the career path I want to follow in the next years.



**Rachel Shepherd, EVS Conservation Assistant – 25, England**

The role of a conservation EVS in BirdLife Malta is pretty varied. When in the office, we help keep databases up to date and work on research and public engagement projects. We also occasionally help out at BirdLife Malta's reserves. However, most of our time is spent monitoring for illegal hunting and trapping in Malta's countryside and handling injured birds that the public inform us about. BirdLife is a big name in conservation, and for someone like myself who wants to build a career working in the conservation of birds, a year's work with BirdLife Malta is incredibly valuable for my future prospects.



**Yanka Milusheva, EVS Events Assistant – 27, Bulgaria**

Working in the communications department and being responsible for the organisation of social events aiming to raise public awareness on environmental issues has helped me to better understand the importance of NGOs and their role to protect our natural heritage and in particular its biodiversity. What inspires me most is the enthusiasm with which people engage in various activities and their willingness to help. Along with that is also the chance to work in an international team and develop my professional skills in various areas. Writing articles for this magazine increased my interest in travel writing. EVS is a challenge which should definitely be experienced!



**Sarah Brady, EVS Education Assistant – 23, Scotland**

My EVS placement at BirdLife Malta has enabled me to develop both professionally and personally. The opportunities provided by my role have allowed me to take on new responsibilities and use my creativity to build BirdLife Malta's informal education programme. This placement has been incredibly valuable in advancing my career in environmental education. Personally, I have enjoyed the experience of living abroad and making friends with people from a diversity of backgrounds and cultures.

---

Jessica Irwin is the Communications Assistant at BirdLife Malta

# what's on

## Adult event

### Nature Walk in Buskett

22 January 2017

Save the date for a relaxing nature walk to discover the hidden trails in Buskett. We will also visit the Clapham Junction cart ruts and Għar il-Kbir and have a break at Tal-Bosk Farmhouse which is currently under BirdLife Malta management. More information will be available soon.

## Salina Open Day

29 January 2017

10:30 – 16:30, Salina

If you are fascinated by both nature and history coexisting in unique harmony on the Maltese Islands then don't miss the opportunity to explore Salina Salt Pans on this special open day!

You can participate in numerous family activities such as birdwatching, guided tours around the area, boat rides from the Malta National Aquarium to Salina and Kennedy Grove, pony rides and many others.



BirdLife Malta conquers Cavagrande del Cassibile Nature Reserve in Sicily, 5 November 2016. Photo by **Marcel Tellus**



Family writing activity at Is-Simar Nature Reserve, 22 October 2016. Photo by **BirdLife Malta**



Dinja Waħda Prize-giving ceremony, 24 November 2016.  
Photo by **Iryna Lukashuk**

## Dinja Waħda Awards 2016

In November 86 schools were awarded for their achievements during the 2015-2016 scholastic year within Dinja Waħda, which is the biggest environmental education programme in Malta run by BirdLife Malta. This year's prize-giving ceremony was held at Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Education Resource Centre in Wardija on 24 November and 55 schools in all received the Gold Award for excellent achievements in environmental education. A further six were presented with the Silver Award, three received the Bronze Award and 23 schools were given a certificate of participation.

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newsletter for further events details



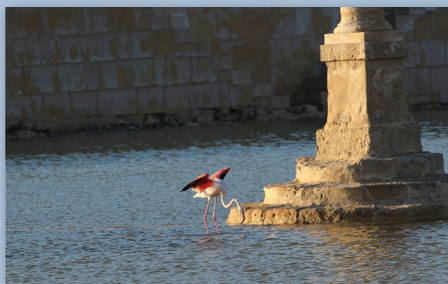
# Another feather in our cap!

Without any doubt the biggest achievement during the last months for BirdLife Malta was the agreement signed with the Government of Malta to manage yet another nature reserve, Salina. This will be the fourth land management project entrusted to BirdLife Malta after Għadira, Is-Simar and Foresta 2000. The Heads of Agreement (HoA) was signed onsite on 15 October and this historic milestone was described as a clear

demonstration of the level of trust the authorities have in BirdLife Malta and in its ability and competence to transform areas such as these in terms of habitat restoration and biodiversity. The Salina site in Burmarrad consists of 15.4 hectares of saline marshland and a number of salt pans built on a reclaimed island of clay surrounded by garrigue. The site was restored through a €7 million project partially financed with EU funds.



The official signing of the Heads of Agreement (From left to right, sitting down) Permanent Secretary Joseph Caruana (MSDEC); BirdLife Malta President Darryl Grima; Permanent Secretary Christopher Cutajar (MTI). Looking on are (from left to right, standing) Ministers José Herrera and Joe Mizzi. Photo by **Reuben Piscopo (DOI)**



Greater Flamingo at Salina. Photo by **Mario Gauci**



The Visitors' Centre. Photo by **DOI**



The handover ceremony. Photo by **DOI**



THE SALINA SALT PANS. Photo by BirdLife Malta