

Bird's Eye View

issue 39 • dec 2012

The Breeding Birds of Malta

years

HALUH HIELES

FORESTA 2000

AXI GHAL ITIRROSSI

STOP ILLEGAL HUNTING

Huttu Di-Huttu
Huttu Il-Huttu
Huttu Il-Huttu
il-Huttu

Għasafar għall-
għajnejja

Miżieb Bi
One year
No Invest


BirdLife
MALTA

50
YEARS
1962 - 2012

Special
50th Anniversary
Issue

Dinja
Waħda



from the president

It is indeed wonderful to look back at the history of BirdLife Malta and note the achievements and changes we have managed to bring about for bird and nature conservation throughout these 50 years - bird protection and nature conservation, nature reserves, site management, ornithological studies, education and publications, and above all an active public awareness about the need to protect our environment. All this with the help of invaluable financial support and volunteer work.

At the same time as we celebrate 50 years of bird conservation in Malta, we must keep our vision focused on the challenges ahead of us. Never has the future of the environment been so challenged as it is today, not least due to the spectre of climate change. It is imperative that we continue working for better law enforcement, for more nature reserves and protected areas, for more sustainable development, and to increase awareness, education and public participation in nature conservation.

With such a track record to the credit of BirdLife Malta I am sure there can only be a brighter future for birds and the natural environment both in the Maltese Islands and beyond, hand in hand with our BirdLife International partners - together as one for nature and people.

Joseph M. Mangion
President



BirdLife Malta was set up in January 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS). It is the oldest and largest environment movement in Malta, with over 3000 members.

BirdLife Malta's mission is the protection of wild birds, their habitat and biodiversity. To this end, the organisation has over the years used approaches including street protests, educational campaigns and habitat restoration projects.

BirdLife Malta spearheaded the creation of the wetland nature reserves at Ghadira and Is-Simar - which it manages today - as well as Foresta 2000, a woodland restoration project on Marfa Ridge.

BirdLife Malta publishes various educational material such as books, posters and leaflets for use by schools and other institutions. It is also active in the media, as part of its effort to raise public awareness. The organisation issues regular magazines/newsletters for its membership.

BirdLife Malta studies migratory and breeding birds to expand scientific knowledge and to further establish the ornithological value of the Maltese Islands. It also studies threats to birds and ways to mitigate these problems. As part of its research, the organisation runs the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme.

BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of bird and nature protection organisations, with over 10 million members and supporters in more than 100 countries and territories.

BirdLife Malta is a non-profit organisation and depends on subscriptions and donations.



editorial

Dear Members,

In this special edition of *Bird's Eye View* we present you with the highlights of 50 years of work for bird protection.

This issue only takes a whistlestop tour of major achievements and doesn't record the inevitable frustrations and failures that come with changing a deeply ingrained mentality.

Only days ago, for instance, we had a scandalous court story where a magistrate acquitted a hunter who had been witnessed shooting and killing swallows and was filmed training his dog with the dead birds, following which he was caught by the police, to whom he actually *confessed* his crime. Reason given for case dismissal: lack of evidence!

Notwithstanding such setbacks, BirdLife will continue to apply the heat on authorities, police and the courts for the law to become a real deterrent to bird crime, not just words on paper.

It is with pride that I present the incredible efforts and achievements of the scores of amazing and inspirational people who across half a century enriched and fortified our precious organisation. I hope you enjoy this brief history, and I continue to count on your unfailing support as BirdLife turns the page on the next 50 years.

Desirée Falzon
Editor

Editor **Desirée Falzon**
Associate Editor **Victor Falzon**
Publisher **BirdLife Malta**
Printer **Printit Ltd**
Contributors to this issue **Joe Attard Tabone, John J. Borg, Dominic Cutajar, Tony Dandria Hunt, Sonia Dhandia, Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon, Mark Gauci, Guido Lanfranco, Rupert Masefield, Steve Micklewright, Joe Sultana.**
Photography by **Jason Aloisio, Bert Axell, Ian Balzan, John J. Borg, Ben Borg Cardona, Joe Camilleri, Denis Cachia, Chris Cachia Zammit, Frank Dhermain, Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon, Raymond Galea, Mark Gauci, Mont Hiron, Liz Knowles, Kathleen Mamo, Joseph M. Mangion, Rupert Masefield, Benjamin Metzger, Werner Müller, M. Muscat, Helen Raine, René Rossignaud, Geoffrey Saliba, Joe Sultana, Aron Tanti, Raymond Testa, Giulia Valentini, Justin Vassallo.**
Design and production **Victor Falzon**

© 2012 BirdLife Malta. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher is prohibited.

Printed on Total Chlorine Free paper

contents

	page
president's comment and editorial	2
appeal	3
news	4
fifty years of campaigning	6
fifty years of habitat restoration	10
fifty years of ornithology	14
fifty years of education	18
message from the founding fathers	22
the international connection	22
out and about	23

BirdLife Malta Council

President **Joseph M Mangion**
General Secretary **Desirée Falzon**
Members
Matthew Borg Cardona
Raymond Galea
Manuel Mallia
Mark Sultana
Nadja Tschovikov
Justin Vassallo

Honorary President **Joe Attard Tabone**

mailing address
BirdLife Malta
57/28 Triq Abate Rigord
Ta' Xbiex XBX 1120, Malta
tel **+356 21347644/5**
email **info@birdlifemalta.org**
website **www.birdlifemalta.org**



Let's not wait another fifty years!

BirdLife Malta has been celebrating its 50th birthday in 2012 and what a lot has been achieved. However, Malta is still a place where birds are illegally hunted and trapped on a massive scale. We have been campaigning about this for 50 years and progress has been made.

But this progress is simply not enough when you consider the continuing widespread persecution of protected migratory birds in the Maltese countryside. During the 2012 autumn migration, BirdLife Malta received more than 60 illegally shot protected birds, making it the worst autumn since we began keeping records in 2007. The victims of illegal hunting included rare species of conservation concern in Europe, such as the pallid harrier, as well as numerous more common raptors, such as honey-buzzards, for which Malta is an important resting point on their long migration between mainland Europe and Africa.

One of the most poignant moments of the autumn came when two juvenile greater flamingos - young birds making their first migratory journeys - were seriously injured when their flock was shot at from the Qawra coastline. Members of the public reported the shooting and the location of the injured birds to BirdLife. But after two days' guarding the birds and a successful rescue operation involving the police, local residents and the Armed Forces of Malta, both flamingos died of their injuries.

We have just completed a survey of bird trapping sites on Malta and Gozo and we have gathered evidence of widespread illegal trapping, with approximately 70% of active sites on Gozo alone being used to catch protected finches, some of which have been found to be targeting lapwings and ruffs.

With an election looming, there is a very strong possibility that the political parties may offer concessions on existing hunting laws to try to gain support from the hunting lobby. This simply cannot be allowed to happen. In fact, BirdLife Malta wants to persuade politicians that protecting birds and enhancing the natural environment is more important to more people than hunting.

Could you help Malta's birds by making a gift to help us ensure that when we celebrate our 60th birthday we will be able to say that illegal hunting and trapping in Malta have been ended?

Please use the enclosed donation form to help us. We cannot wait another 50 years for this to stop.

Steve Micklewright
Executive Director

Benjamin Metzger



first tagging

For the first time in Europe, researchers on the **EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project** have successfully tracked storm-petrels using radio-tracking technology. In July, BirdLife Malta scientists equipped 34 adult European storm-petrels on Filfla with very small devices (picture left) that emit radio signals. During July and August over 200 signals from 24 of these birds were received and interpreted with special software that enables the birds' locations to be pinpointed. Signals were picked up as far away as Linosa, an Italian island 130km west of Malta.

One of the aims of the Malta Seabird Project is to identify important feeding areas for seabirds in Maltese waters, so as to designate special protection areas at sea under EU legislation. The project is managed by BirdLife Malta with support from the Ministry for Tourism, Culture and Environment, and BirdLife Partners RSPB (UK) and SPEA (Portugal).

Joe Sultana



birdwatching fair

The BirdLife Malta stall attracted a lot of interest at this year's **British Birdwatching Fair** (19-21 Aug 2012), with a display of bird photography by local birders, posters about our projects and campaigns, and new publications. As well as catching up with our UK and European friends and supporters, and enjoying the bird-friendly atmosphere, highlights included talks about BirdLife Malta's 50-year history of bird conservation and our newest EU Life+ project: the Malta Seabird Project.

Liz Knowles



raptorcamp 2012

More than 45 international participants joined local volunteers, birdwatchers and staff to help monitor bird migration and deter illegal hunting at our annual **Raptor Camp** (16 Sep - 7 Oct 2012). For many, the highlight was the night spent guarding two juvenile Egyptian vultures that roosted near Ħad-Dingli, then watching both birds continue their migration to Africa the next morning, having survived the night thanks to their vigilant protectors. Unfortunately, this triumph was the exception rather than the rule and this year saw an increase in illegal killing of protected birds over 2011. This

autumn BirdLife recovered over 60 shot protected birds, which is double the number over same period last year. During the camp period alone, BirdLife recorded at least 567 illegal hunting incidents and observed at least 124 injured birds in flight.



new on the conservation team

One time a Klabb Ħuttaf member and Spring Watch volunteer, **Christian Debono** started working as Conservation and Policy Officer at BirdLife Malta in September. Christian has a strong background in research and campaigning, having worked at the European Environmental Bureau in Brussels, the International Ocean Institute (Malta), and as project manager for Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar. Christian also helped organise the European Youth Perspective Conference on Biodiversity (YouPEC 2010) in 2010, and has been actively involved in campaigns with Friends of the Earth Malta and Europe. Christian's first

involvement with BirdLife Malta was as a teenage member of BirdLife's junior section, Klabb Ħuttaf; and in 2009 he was one of the local volunteers on the Spring Watch conservation camp. Christian says, "I am very pleased to now be working for BirdLife Malta and I hope I can apply my experience to help the organisation achieve its aims of improving protection for wild birds and their habitats in the Maltese Islands."

BirdLife Malta is very grateful to member and supporter **Ms Pauline Corinna Margery Sitwell** from London (UK) for her generous legacy bequest of £5000. The donation will be used to further the society's conservation efforts.

Denis Cachia



nature reserves reopen

On 3 November 2012, **Għadira** and **Is-Simar nature reserves** reopened to the general public for another season of birdwatching and enjoyment of nature, after the summer break. The opening weekend saw record numbers of visitors enjoying the good weather and the wildlife (such as the snipe at left) at both sites, a promising start to the year. Meanwhile, weekday visits from schools have been open since September; these visits introduce children to nature and help them learn about wildlife and biodiversity.

Members of the public can visit on Saturday (Għadira only) and Sunday (both reserves) from 10.30am to 4.30pm until the end of May. Entrance is free, with hourly guided walks led by friendly and experienced reserve staff and volunteers.

Victor Faizon



one world 2012-13

On 13 November 2012, 83 primary schools received awards in recognition of their participation in last year's edition of **Dinja Wahda**. Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, the Hon. Mario de Marco, and Minister for Education and Employment, the Hon. Dolores Cristina, presented the awards to students and teachers from schools, over half of which attained gold category. The event also marked the launch of the new (eighth) edition of the Dinja Wahda Action Guide for the new scholastic year. Schoolchildren present at the event helped paint a giant 'environment clock', representing the round-the-clock green lifestyle that Dinja Wahda

seeks to generate in children. Dinja Wahda is BirdLife's green initiative in schools, run with our Partner in Education Bank of Valletta, in collaboration with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE).



new director

In November, **Steve Micklewright** joined BirdLife Malta as its new Executive Director. Steve is an experienced ecologist, with many years of campaigning on conservation issues in the UK. He says, "I am delighted to be joining BirdLife Malta. I hope I can bring some of the lessons I have learned about campaigning in the UK to the very difficult and complicated issues being tackled here on Malta." Steve coordinated the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England's work to prevent the UK government from selling its forests, and has been involved in many campaigns to protect nature havens in his native Bristol. Steve visited BirdLife's RaptorCamp in September and was amazed by what he witnessed. "I had heard a lot about bird hunting on Malta, but it was not until I saw what BirdLife Malta is doing that I realised the true scale of the problem." Steve spent many years working for WWF and was working for Avon Wildlife

Trust in Bristol before making the move to Malta. "One of my great passions is to bring people closer to nature," he says, "because I think we can only protect it if people value it. I am really looking forward to developing projects at BirdLife Malta that will enable more people to enjoy birds." On his move to BirdLife Malta Steve says, "I know working here will be very challenging, but I am surrounded by dedicated and talented people and I am sure that together we can make Malta a much better place for birds."

Rupert Massfield



book fair

In the second week of November, BirdLife took part in the National Book Fair. It was great to meet and talk to so many Maltese supporters and nature lovers, as well as curious schoolchildren and interested tourists. The President, Prime Minister and Archbishop of Malta were also among those who visited our stand.

Fifty years campaigning

joe sultana



first success

The first achievement occurred in 1966. A road proposed to pass through the heart of Għadira wetland - now one of Malta's leading nature reserves - was stopped thanks to pressure by MOS, which included a memorandum presented to the House of Representatives.

bombs and birds

Encouraged by this first taste of success, MOS turned its attention to Filfla, an internationally important bird area for breeding Mediterranean storm-petrel. For many years this seabirds islet was bombed and shelled for target practice by the British services. MOS lobbied persistently against this and soon after MOS published *Bird Studies on Filfla* in 1970, the practice was finally stopped. Filfla would eventually (in 1987) be declared a strict nature reserve.

landmark laws

When MOS was set up, bird protection laws were virtually in-existent. The last time regulations were enacted had been in 1936. They were inadequate, old-fashioned and unenforced. For nearly 20 years, the Society lobbied unabatedly, through letters and meetings, for better bird protection legislation. Good news was few and far apart: in 1969 Kemmuna was declared a bird sanctuary, and ten years later Għadira too was added to the list of bird sanctuaries. Finally, in 1980, new bird-protection laws were passed. The page had slowly started to turn.

The new laws extended protection to a much longer list of birds, and now included all birds of prey. At last, no

Fifty years ago a small group of nature lovers made history in bird conservation in Malta. They founded the Malta Ornithological Society, with one of its main aims being the protection of birds and their habitats. It was a bold step in a hostile environment for birds. Shooting and trapping of birds was a popular way of life with all classes of Maltese society. Theirs was a dream, but MOS (now BirdLife Malta) was here to stay. Along the years volunteers put their heart into it in spite of the fact that it has been an uphill struggle all the way.

Joe Camilleri



1963. The very first exhibition organised by MOS was at the Xaghra cultural centre, in Gozo. Note the stuffed owl used as decoration, an item no-one would dream of using today.

more pictures in the papers of hunters posing proudly with the rare eagle they had just shot down! And whereas hunters could until then hunt any day of the year, the concept of a close season was now introduced.

Although undeniably a landmark in bird protection, the 1980 regulations still left much to be desired. Herons and egrets, and vulnerable species like European nightjar, had been left out from the list of protected birds, and the close season was too short and left spring open for hunting and trapping. MOS soon realised that law enactment and law enforcement were two very different things. Illegal killing and trapping of birds remained the order of the day. The battle was clearly far from over, it was time to change strategy.

awareness drive

MOS now launched a public awareness campaign to tell everyone about the plight of birds in Malta. It was time to stop treating hunters as just another innocent - almost idyllic - feature of the countryside. No effort

was spared and no opportunity lost to spread the bird conservation message. Robin trapping, the shooting of birds of prey, hunting at sea, the seasonal slaughter of birds at Buskett (a bird sanctuary): these became the topic of highly visual annual campaigns

that included posters, stickers and leaflets. The media darlings, however, were the colourful street

working together to protect birds and their habitats.

the eu ingredient

Over the 1990s, the bird protection laws underwent several adjustments: at one point a trapping ban in spring was imposed, but later retracted. What became increasingly certain was that with the view of joining the European Union, Malta had to improve its bird protection regulations significantly. As signatory to the EU Birds Directive, for example, Malta had to phase out the trapping of finches altogether.

After its accession in 2004, Malta moved into the spotlight. Armed with



May 1990. MOS Youths protesting at Bahar ic-Ċagħaq against the growing trend of shooting birds at sea from fast craft. Laws have since improved, but much illegal sea-shooting still occurs.

demonstrations. MOS protests made the headlines every time, especially when our banner-wielding members were attacked and beaten up by angry hunters. These protests became annual events throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Meanwhile, annual school campaigns against robin trapping, a widespread activity among school-age boys, began to bear fruit. The practice dwindled, and is today

the Birds Directive, BirdLife Malta stepped up the campaign against spring hunting, which is illegal in Europe. Hunting in spring targets birds at the critical period when they are travelling north to nest and to

a ghost of what it was.

In 1992, MOS became a Partner of the new setup of ICBP, now BirdLife International. MOS accordingly changed its name to BirdLife Malta, and acquired the backing of a worldwide partnership of bird conservation organisations

Joe Sultana



September 1983. Members of the MOS Youth committee giving a press conference prior to a protest organised later that day at Buskett to condemn the wanton killing of birds of prey.



November 1985. "Let it fly free" said this giant banner draping Valletta City Gate.

Joe Sultana

Joe Sultana



September 1984. A protest in Valletta against the shooting of raptors. A repeat performance that evening in Tas-Sliema turned nasty.



October 1990. MOS Youths protest at Valletta against hunting in Buskett, supposedly a bird sanctuary.



May 1988. Street action in Rabat (Gozo) against the shooting of hirundines. This was part of an awareness campaign conducted mostly in schools.

replenish a population depleted over the previous year. In 2007, BirdLife Malta and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) presented to the Prime Minister a 115,000-strong petition against spring hunting.

Malta was taken to the European Court of Justice over the spring-hunting matter, and a court order stopped Malta from opening a season in the spring of 2008 and 2009. But the court ruling unfortunately allowed Malta to derogate, albeit with strict conditions. As expected, these conditions have been ignored and, since 2010, hunters have again been allowed to kill quail and turtle dove in spring. Moreover, many hunters use the open period to shoot whatever they fancy, as attested by the scores of dead and injured birds brought to the BirdLife premises every time a hunting season opens.

keeping watch

Since 2008, BirdLife has organised annual Spring Watch and Raptor Camps to monitor bird migration but also to record illegal hunting. These camps are attended by several volunteers from around Europe, who join BirdLife activists and staff for two

or three weeks that coincide with peak migration periods. Armed with high-powered telescopes, cameras and camcorders at many of the birding hotspots around the Islands, our camp teams not only record and report illegal activity, but often cause many hunters to think twice before breaking the law and getting filmed doing it! The fight goes on.

finch furore

Meanwhile, finch trapping officially ended in 2009. In practice, however, it is still widespread, although less than before: a BirdLife survey in 2011 confirmed at least 4787 trapping sites in the Maltese Islands, but since the ban, trapping licences have dropped by a third, plus an encouraging 75% reduction in active trapping sites.

In 2008, BirdLife Malta launched an EU Life+ Project to educate finch trappers and help them take up alternative practices to trapping wild birds, such as captive finch breeding. The initiative met with stiff resistance from the hunters and trappers' association, which still hopes for concessions or, at least, the creation of legal loopholes through which they can resume finch trapping.



March 1989. Campaigning for the protection of herons and egrets. Herons were eventually added to the list of protected species.



August 1999. BirdLife gives a press conference underneath Ta' Cenc' cliffs, part of a campaign against a tuna-penning project proposed for the area. The project was eventually turned down.



June 2010. A mock *dura* is set up in Pjazza San Ġorġ (Valletta) to represent the thousands of illegal hunting hides dotting the countryside.



January 2007. Demonstrating at Castille prior to handing the Prime Minister a 115,000-signature petition asking for a ban on hunting in spring.



February 2008. Thirteen Maltese celebrities join BirdLife's campaign against spring hunting. Billboards are set up everywhere.

looking ahead

Fighting for bird protection has never been easy for BirdLife Malta officials, active members, volunteers and staff. Many threats, insults, acts of vandalism and violence against BirdLife personnel had to be endured by BirdLife people during this half-century struggle for birds. Politics too play a part in this hostile environment. Hunters and trappers constantly use their number to bully the government into giving them concessions, however unwise these may be. We all remember the hunters' pre-election mantra of 20,000 hunters = 20,000 votes... and the two main political parties are held to ransom.

Despite the obstacles, much progress in bird protection has been



Desiree Falzon

Shortly before the 1992 general elections, threats like this appeared on walls, and seem to have haunted politicians ever since. In truth, hunters' vote never amounted to much, as was amply proved in the abysmal support garnered by the hunters' MEP candidate in 2004.

made over the last half century, but there is still a long way to go before Malta becomes a safe place for migratory and breeding birds. And while it celebrates 50 years of bird conservation and proudly looks back at its achievements, BirdLife

Malta looks forward to more years of relentless campaigning.

Joe Sultana has been an active volunteer since 1962 and has served, among other posts, as MOS Secretary for eight years and as President for twelve years.

No picnic...

BirdLife people and property have often been the target of bullies who apparently can only express themselves through threats, violence, vandalism, arson and obscenity.



Giulia Valentini

▲ Spring Watch team car vandalised



Joe Sultana



Raymond Galea

▲ Public signboard vandalised.

◀ Youth leader Michael Grima beaten up during a peaceful protest in Tas-Sliema.

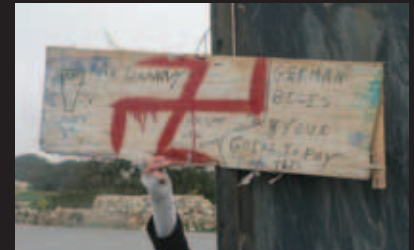


Geoffrey Saliba

▲ Forest 2000 ranger's farm buildings burnt down



▲ Death threats.



Giulia Valentini

▲ Threats, obscene language and xenophobic comments.



Victor Falzon

▲ Three thousand young trees at Foresta 2000 destroyed



▲ Trees and vegetation at Ghadira nature reserve set on fire



John J. Berg

▲ Three BirdLife volunteers' cars gutted at Buskett

Fifty years of habitat restoration

mark gauci



a wetland saved

It all started in controversy when, in the mid-1960s, a small wetland at Ghadira was threatened with the construction of a new road cutting right through it, which would have destroyed it. The then Malta Ornithological Society lobbied the government and managed to have the plans for this road shelved. Riding on this success, the society pressed for proper protection of the site and in 1978 the site was declared a bird sanctuary. MOS presented the government with plans to turn the site into a proper nature reserve.

The heavy machinery rolled in on site in the summer of 1980 and works continued over three summers. The general plan was to lower the level of the ground by about a metre so as to recreate a permanent brackish lagoon. Critics were not lacking, but people soon realised what a great place for nature Ghadira was turning out to be.

first nature reserve

Highlights of the reserve's development were the building of the birdwatching hide (the first of its kind in Malta), the visitor centre, and the employment of a managing warden. The warden saw to the various projects and daily needs of the reserve, and from 1988 Ghadira began welcoming visits by schoolchildren. The reserve soon became an annual destination for environmental education with many schools; this aspect was eventually taken up by a resident field teacher, and school visits are today an almost daily event.

Ghadira passed through some hard times, especially in the first

In the year that BirdLife Malta celebrates 50 years since its inception, one tends to look back on its achievements. Very few of these achievements can be as tangible and as visual as the nature reserves. All these projects started as a dream, and today they harbour and protect some of Malta's finest flora and fauna.

Victor Falzon



Summer 1981. MOS youth leaders and junior members carry stones to build a boulder island at Ghadira.

Mark Gauci



Summer 1995. BirdLife Malta youth members help create a shingle island at Ghadira for little ringed plovers.



Victor Falzon

Secluded creeks overgrown with reed, like this area along the southern shore of Ghadira, are good for shy birds like water rail and purple heron.

years when regular intrusions by poachers wrought havoc, mostly on wintering birds. But the positive results have outlived these nasty memories. Suffice it to say that the reserve became the first and only breeding site for little ringed plover: since 1995, the species has nested there every year, with up to eight pairs. Last year, the black-winged stilt added another star in the reserve's breeding-bird log and successfully raised four chicks; this year it was the collared dove's turn. Five further species also breed at Ghadira.

return of the reedbed

Hot on the heels of the success at Ghadira, BirdLife scouted around for another site to save for birds and nature. Opportunity knocked again at Xemxija, where a derelict area of drained marshland known as Is-Simar was being touted as a site for massive development.

BirdLife wasted no time, and after some hard lobbying presented plans to turn the site into a nature reserve. The plans were approved in 1991. The major structural works at Is-Simar took two summers to complete and consisted of shallow excavation to create areas of open water, canals and islands. Contrary

to the situation at Ghadira, the less saline waters of Is-Simar were soon colonised by reed, and with the flourishing reedbed came a list of new breeding birds. Reed warbler and moorhen, which previously bred

irregularly and sporadically in Malta, established here a small but stable population, while little bittern, little grebe and coot bred occasionally. Is-Simar was another notable first for BirdLife Malta in that the building



Victor Falzon

Summer 1992. MOS volunteers thinning a grove of tamarisk at Is-Simar to make way for more varied habitat, including reedbed and canal.



Victor Falzon

Summer 1993. Volunteers from ProNatura (Switzerland) help in the landscaping of the protective embankment around Is-Simar.

Joe Sultana



1992

Victor Falzon



2012

Before and after. (left) Freshly created islands, canals and pools at Is-Simar. (Right) The same place twenty years later: a lush reedbed has since formed in much of the cleared area, creating ideal breeding habitat for reed warbler, moorhen, coot, little bittern and little grebe.

of the visitor centre was mostly funded by public donations - proof that Għadira had been well received and people wanted more of such sites. Like Għadira, Is-Simar is also manned by a managing warden, with a field teacher to do educational work with visiting students.

ringing base

Another milestone in BirdLife's eventful history was the 'discovery' of Kemmuna as a site for bird ringing in spring and autumn. In 1989 BirdLife's ringing scheme joined an annual project organised by our Italian research colleagues. The aim of the project was to establish - through bird ringing and observation - the importance of small

Mediterranean islands as stopover sites for migratory birds. In the first year BirdLife used Għadira as base, but the following spring the group tried Kemmuna and spent an entire month ringing birds there, based in a single two-man tent! The results were surprisingly positive, so BirdLife leased some land in the upper part of Wied L-Ahmar, where it set up a bird observatory and ringing station.

Kemmuna has since remained the project base, and today carries out extended ringing periods in both spring and autumn, with many ringers - including foreign visitors - participating. Facilities have since improved, with a tiny centre equipped with bunk beds and a small table-top cooker - the tent conditions (see also p. 15) are now part of the Kemmuna

'lore'! BirdLife hopes to extend the project in the coming years.

Considering all the problems and the difficulties faced when planning and developing such sites, it is commendable that in a relatively short span of 50 years BirdLife Malta has managed to achieve so much. These achievements will hopefully remain in place for one and all to enjoy forever.

Here's hoping that, 25 years down the line, on the occasion of our 75th anniversary, this article will be even longer!

Mark Gauci was practically born into BirdLife Malta. He is BirdLife's nature reserves supervisor, a qualified ringer and head of the BirdLife Malta Bird Ringing Scheme.

Denise Cachia



An old and derelict pumphouse at Wied L-Ahmar has been converted into a small but useful base for ringers.

Mark Gauci



Native shrubs on their way across the channel to Kemmuna for planting. Their foliage, flowers and fruit now provide shelter and food for insects, birds and reptiles.



Aerial view of part of Wied L-Ahmar Ringing Station and Observatory site. The area is composed mostly of shallow terraces of old abandoned fields, now taken over by garrigue vegetation. The white building on the right is the ringing base.



Plans for phase planting.



July 1997. Saplings arrive at Is-Simar nursery.



January 2002. Erosion barriers to reduce soil loss.



March 2004. Rebuilding rubble walls.

A forest for the future

victor falzon

In the 1980s BirdLife created Għadira and in the 1990s it created Is-Simar. But what about the 2000s? Could BirdLife pull off a hat trick? It did, with Foresta 2000.

a lost habitat

Mediterranean woodland is a habitat that Malta rapidly began losing from the moment people set foot on the islands. Today virtually all the original tree cover is gone. As an environment organisation, BirdLife could not think of a better gift to the third millennium than to grow back a bit of this lost habitat.

best site

Among other sites considered, the south-facing slope of Marfa Ridge just north of Għadira nature reserve fit the bill best. It consisted largely of abandoned fields, and most of the site fell inside the no-hunting buffer zone surrounding Għadira nature reserve. Moreover, a reforestation project here would save the site from being overrun by tourism-related development.

By local standards the area was huge (over 30 hectares) but, with the help of botanical, forestry and landscaping expertise, BirdLife drew up and presented plans. Meanwhile nurseries were set up at Is-Simar and Għadira, where thousands of native trees and shrubs, especially holm oak and berry-bearing shrubs, started being grown.

The plans were approved and planting began in earnest: the project was called Foresta 2000. In 2002 BirdLife invited Din L-Art Ħelwa and PARK to join the initiative, and a forest ranger was employed to manage the project.

a dream coming true

Despite many vandal attacks - including arson, theft and the infamous May 2007 incident when 3000 trees were destroyed overnight - Foresta

2000 is fast growing into a vibrant area of woodland, with patches of maquis, clay steppe and garrigue to stimulate a richer biodiversity. More birds on their autumn migration are now staying longer and even overwintering, thanks to the sheltering trees and the massive crop of fruit that shrubs like lentisk and hawthorn now provide. Hundreds of Science and Biology students too are visiting the site for fieldwork and observation.

One can hardly wait to see Foresta 2000 grown to maturity!

Victor Falzon joined BirdLife in 1975 and has been active since 1979. He is field teacher at the Għadira SAC and was one of the founders of Foresta 2000.



Robin



Narcissus



Chameleon



Strawberry Tree



October 2007. After the May 2007 vandal attack, response from the public to replant was massive.



April 2010. Vigorous growth of young trees and shrubs at It-Taflija.

Fifty years of ornithology

john j. borg



database

One of the first initiatives of the newly fledged MOS was to build a database of bird sightings containing past records and present observations. From these records the first monthly lists of birds observed started to be printed in the society's newsletters; these were the precursors of the annual systematic lists that are still published in the Society's scientific journal *Il-Merill*.

ringing

A giant leap in Maltese ornithology was made in 1965 when scientific bird ringing was introduced in our islands. The use of mist-nets and the technique of placing a ring on an individual bird with the hope of subsequent recovery opened up the science of ornithology in ways and means that our predecessors could only dream of. Through bird ringing, species that were regarded as scarce, rare or even vagrants, were found to be more common than previously thought.

Malta was now part of a much wider network of people studying bird migration. During the first years of ringing, some results were published in *Il-Merill*, or in several reports or publications like the *Malta Bird Observatory* published in 1966.

migration study

Situated midway between two continents, the Maltese Islands are ideally placed to study migration. Several studies on the migration of raptors have been published since the late 1970s, highlighting the major role the Islands play in

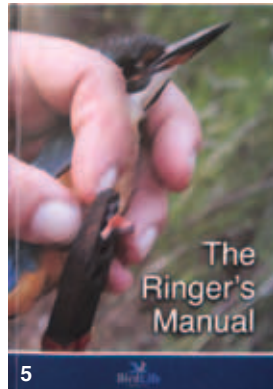
In the first half of the 20th century, like the century before it, Maltese ornithology was characterised by a rather haphazard and a very individualistic approach. People with an interest in avifauna, like Antonio Schembri, Charles Wright, Giuseppe Despott and Carmelo De Lucca, who all left us an invaluable wealth of information, worked on their own. All this was to change in 1962 with the formation of the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS). A systematic and collective approach was finally introduced in Maltese ornithology and this produced immense changes that radically transformed our way of looking at birds.



Bert Axell



Joe Sultana



Raymond Testa

(clockwise) 1. The first bird ringed in Malta was this icterine warbler at Xaghra (Gozo) in 1965. 2. Extracting a bird from the nets at Buskett in 1969. 3. An early-1990s scene of the *Piccole Isole* Project tent base on Kemmuna. The annual project has been sustained since 1989. 4. Ringing demonstration to young members during an outing to Kemmuna. 5. The Ringer's Manual, published in 2011, is the basic guide for Maltese bird ringers. There are currently 20 licensed bird ringers in Malta, all regulated and co-ordinated by the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme.

migration patterns of certain raptor species, such as marsh harrier and various falcons.

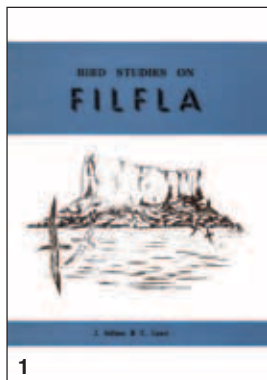
The observation of migrating raptors in both spring and autumn is today more comprehensive. This is due to many of the birders having now amassed decades of experience, coupled with access to better viewing, recording and communication equipment. For several years now too, BirdLife Malta has been organising bird monitoring camps every spring and autumn, which bring together for several weeks a concentration of

birders from across Europe, some with extensive field experience. Through these camps, more people are recording bird migration from more places, and the ornithological picture becomes ever more clear.

seabirds

Malta holds major seabird colonies, including on the offshore islet of Filfla. Since the mid-19th century, Filfla had attracted its fair share of visitors to record and study its unique flora and fauna, in particular its seabird populations.

So it was no wonder that, in 1968, the newly set up ringing team paid a series of visits to this island, which at the time was still being used as a bombing target by the British forces! The results of these visits were published in 1970 in a booklet entitled *Bird Studies on Filfla*. This booklet became the catalyst for a longterm study on the breeding biology of our seabirds, a study that has also led to two EU funded Life projects: *Proġett Garnija* (2006-2010) and the *Malta Seabird Project* (2011-2016), the latter still under way. Both projects have added



Victor Falzon



Joe Sultana

(clockwise) 1. *Bird Studies on Filfla* was the first study of Maltese seabirds. 2. Dusk falls over Filfla as ringers set up mist-nets around the islet's treacherous shore to await the first storm-petrels and Scopoli's shearwaters. 3. A ringer is lowered by helicopter onto Filfla's flat top, which is no longer accessible from the shore. 4. Yellow-legged gull chicks carrying colour rings. This helps researchers track, among other things, dispersal patterns of Filfla's gull colony to other locations in the Maltese Islands or even beyond.



Joe Sultana



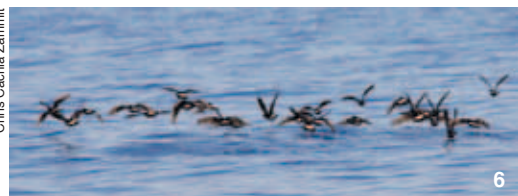
Eldest and youngest. The first 16-page issue of *Il-Merill* was published in April 1970, while the latest issue (No. 32, with 124 pages) came out in December 2010.



Eleven IBAs of European Importance have been identified by BirdLife Malta, five in mainland Malta, four in Gozo, and Filfla and Kemmuna. All but one were selected because of their seabird populations; Buskett woodland, on the other hand, is an important resting site for raptors - including marsh harriers and honey-buzzards - migrating via the Central Mediterranean flyway.



(clockwise) **1.** Examining a Scopoli's shearwater chick at the southern cliffs of Gozo in this early 1980s photo. **2.** Observers at sea scanning the water for seabirds; boat-based observation is an important data-gathering exercise in seabird research. **3.** Through satellite tagging, the yelkouan shearwater's foraging trips can be plotted on a map. **4.** *Proġett Garnija* included a rat eradication programme at L-Irdum tal-Madonna, which involved regular abseiling to inspect rodent traps underneath the cliffs. **5.** A yelkouan shearwater in flight. **6.** A flock of European storm-petrels feeding out at sea.



invaluable data about the seabirds' foraging and wintering whereabouts. Armed with this knowledge, BirdLife will be able to identify - and propose for protection - the areas at sea that are critical for these birds' survival.

IBAs

One of the obligations related to Malta's accession to the EU was the identification of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Maltese Islands. In 2004, BirdLife published *Important Bird Areas of EU Importance in Malta*. Eleven sites were identified, ten of which hold seabird colonies. All these sites were eventually given special status as Natura 2000 sites, a pan-EU network of protected areas of outstanding ecological value.

publication

The accumulation of data, both through the society's network of birdwatchers and ringers greatly increased our knowledge of our Islands' avifauna. A systematic approach led to a more accurate pool of information, nest record cards and moult forms were introduced, compiling a wealth of information that resulted in a series of papers and major publications. The first-ever studies on the breeding biology of breeding birds like Sardinian warbler and corn



L-Irdum tal-Madonna
Victor Falzon



Filfla
Joe Sultana



Il-Ponta tal-Wardija (Gozo)
Aron Tanti

bunting were published not only in *Il-Merill* but also in foreign journals. Many other notes and papers dealt with various aspects of ornithology.

In 1975, MOS published the milestone book *A Guide to the Birds of Malta* in which all past and latest records were presented, along with new data from the ringing scheme. Four years later the Maltese-language *L-Aghsafar* was published, which was superseded in 1982 by the publication of *A New Guide to the Birds of Malta*, with revised and updated data.

In 2009, the first-ever breeding bird atlas for the Maltese Islands was compiled and published. *The Malta Breeding Bird Atlas 2008* covered all the birds found breeding in 2008 and established

a standardised methodology for the compilation of future atlases. In 2011, the major publication *The Breeding Birds of Malta* brought together all the accumulated knowledge about past and present nesting species.

expertise

The expertise garnered by Maltese ornithologists in the last 50 years has been recognised internationally and sought by researchers working in neighbouring countries such as Italy, France, Libya and Tunisia, but also as far as South America.

More than ever, research today is crucial for the conservation of birds and their habitats. The designation

of protected areas such as IBAs, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Natura 2000 sites are not based on random whims or anybody's personal opinions but on solid scientific evidence.

As the undisputed authority on bird study in the Maltese Islands, BirdLife Malta must continue to be in the forefront of this research, not only for the next 50 years but for many more to come.

John J. Borg has been active in BirdLife since 1977, serving on various committees and Council for over 25 years. A qualified ringer since 1981, he has focused on seabird research, and has been co-editor of *Il-Merill* for the last 20 years.



A selection of MOS / BirdLife Malta books.

Fifty years of education

desirée falzon



catching them young

The idea of reaching a young audience quickly gathered momentum among the Society's founders and gave birth, in 1969, to the Young Members' Section (YMS). Its aim was to invest in the young generation and create an awareness of the beauty and importance of birds and nature. This concept broke ground among the Maltese, as wild birds were hitherto the sole domain of hunters and trappers.

Monthly activities started being organised for the handful of YMS members, including nature walks, birdwatching camps and tree planting activities. The attention and experience these youths received helped them to eventually become themselves enthusiastic youth leaders, who in turn infected others with their love of nature. By the mid-1980s, the YMS - now renamed MOS Youths (or MOSY) - had nurtured several of these youth who continued to organise outings for anything up to 50 children every month.

In the mid-1990s, BirdLife even had enough leaders to start off local groups for a number of years, with up to five localities organising their own calendar of activities. Membership slowly rose to over 1000 and the junior section's name was changed to Klabb Huttat in a reflection of the flocking nature of the bird, complete with new logo and mascot. For many years, the club also organised separate activities for the teen members of the club. Today, despite a busier lifestyle claiming children's time, outings to the countryside are still at the core of Klabb Huttat's educational agenda.

A few years after founding the Malta Ornithological Society, its leaders realised that if they wanted to have a stronger influence on Maltese society they had to add a tool to their kit: education. BirdLife's education mission grew from humble beginnings led by a handful of youths, to the nation-wide environmental education programme it is today.



Jan 1977. Tree-planting at Dwejra, Gozo



Nov 1988. Nature quiz.



Dec 1990. Starling roost count at Birkirkara



Jan 1991. Nature games at Buskett



Jan 1992. Birdwatching at Wied il-Qlejgha



Jun 1995. Kwizz bis-Sens at Floriana

Junior activities down the years...



Evolution. From *The Young Bird Lover* in January 1969, to today's bi-monthly *Il-Huttafa*, the magazine for young members has changed much, but has maintained its mission to pass information, green values and environmental education, as well as to act as communication tool and newsletter. Other newsletters were also issued concurrently.

in print

From the very start of BirdLife's junior section, the educational value of a publication was recognised. Since 1969, newsletters and magazines for BirdLife's young members have been in issue without fail.

The first issue of *The Young Bird Lover* in 1969 was a humble four-page cyclostyled affair, but it was the very first nature publication for children, and it was circulated among the twenty-odd members who formed the YMS in those days. Four years later, the publication changed its name to *L-Ghasfur* and started carrying features in Maltese. As the YMS grew and membership topped the hundred mark, the magazine too evolved, becoming *Storm Petrel* in 1980 and *Il-Kanġu* in 1983. With each change the magazine improved in quality, illustration and layout but it remained ever faithful to its mission of spreading appreciation of local flora and fauna, and encouraging its readers to take up nature- and bird-watching. In 1994 the magazine graduated to its present name *Il-Huttafa*, a 12-page magazine that has been in issue every two months ever since. The latest upgrade happened in 2007 when *Il-Huttafa* went full colour. Today the magazine is read by over 1000 children and their families, with over 30 school libraries subscribed to it. *Il-Huttafa* is currently in its 112th issue.

sites for education

One of the Society's earliest educational aims was to create a field

study centre at the Għadira nature reserve, where schoolchildren could visit to observe birds as these stopped to refuel on their migration journeys. Way back in the 1970s, even before a facility was built for this, indeed even before the site became a protected bird sanctuary, teachers from St Michael's College of Education used to be taken on site to observe how nature could be incorporated into their curriculum. Pressure was constantly made on the Education Department to 'realise what a glorious opportunity is within their grasp if only they would take action.' (Bro. Edmund, *Il-Merill* 10 - 1973).

This dream, however, had to wait until the 1980s to start becoming a reality with the building of a birdwatching hide, a visitor centre and the posting of a site warden who could guide school groups. The Education Department eventually recognised the value of Għadira and Is-Simar as living classrooms with the posting of field teachers in 2001. Today, over 4000 students a year experience nature hands-on at the two sites in tailor-made guided visits.

taking it to school

When a good part of your organising committee is made up of teachers, education is bound to be high on the agenda. This was the situation among the MOS pioneers, who made use of their contacts with the Education authorities to establish links with schools. At first this was restricted to distribution of material with nature conservation messages such as the 1977 stickers of the robin

Victor Falzon



Jul 2005

Teacher training. For many years BirdLife organised in-service courses for teachers.

Desirée Falzon



Jun 1996

Youth-leader training. Prior to junior outings, BirdLife youth leaders - often accompanied by a guest expert - organise their own outings to inform themselves better about nature.

These teachers were the MOS's link with schools, promoting its campaigns, displaying its posters and other material; they were very active throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and MOS communicated with them through a special newsletter. But the campaign that was the forerunner of today's education programme was the robin campaign.

Robin trapping was widespread among boys -

and honey-buzzard appealing for the public to let them live freely, or the 1980s copybooks that had comic strips with hard-hitting messages on the back. One important early achievement was the issuing of a circular by the Directorate in 1978 banning the display of stuffed birds in schools as being a bad educational example. Through personal contacts and much legwork, a network of school delegates was created.

a habit described in *Bird's Eye View 7* (1984) as an 'indigenous disease' that MOS vowed to eradicate. In 1983 a sticker depicting a robin pleading not to be caged was launched in primary schools. It was snapped up thanks to children's innate attraction to the 'Christmas' bird, and the conservation message started hitting home.

From then on and almost annually the Society issued not only new stickers to promote robin awareness, but also a barrage of information material and visual aids for teachers - which included posters, colouring charts, games, leaflets, handouts, craft ideas and lesson notes - to help them drive the message home with their students. The campaign worked, and scenes of boys skulking around the countryside with *trabokki* finally started dwindling. Robin trapping today is a rarity.

one world factor

Building on its success with the robin campaign, BirdLife moved on to a more ambitious project: inspired by an RSPB initiative, the Society embarked in 1994 on an



Nov 1995. Club promotion at a book fair



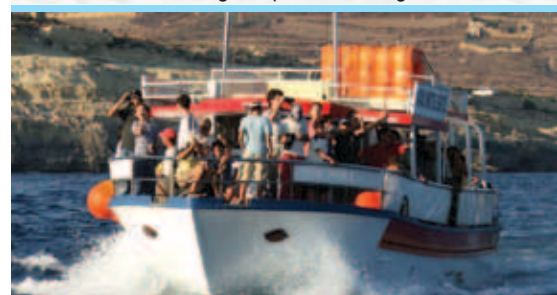
Jun 2002. Art and craft at Floriana



Jun 2002. Camping on Kemmuna



Nov 2006. Observing rockpool life at Xaghra l-Hamra



Jul 2007. Boat trip to watch shearwaters



Mar 2011. Giving out gifts after a marathon hike

Junior activities down the years...



A selection of junior membership promotional material and membership card.

Desirée Falzon
Victor Falzon
Justin Vassallo
Kathleen Manno
Jason Aloisio
Victor Falzon



Robin campaigns were staple annual events that included sponsored walks and a variety of promotional and educational material.

entire programme for primary schools - complete with teacher's guide, resources and awards - that tackled not one subject but a variety of wildlife and environmental issues. This was the start of Dinja Waħda.

The programme was the first to introduce green habits such as recycling in schools, but also a greater focus on Maltese biodiversity and habitats. Originally run every few years, Dinja Waħda soon stabilised as a biennial project until, in 2007 - after repeated requests by teachers - it became an annual event, thanks to support from Bank of Valletta, who became BirdLife's partner in education. The latest (eighth) edition of the Action Guide presents teachers with a set of 30 activities - ranging from migration games to conservation work in Natura 2000 sites - with a multiplicity of supplementary aids.

Starting with an uptake of 30% schools, Dinja Waħda was soon being taken up by 90% of the country's primary schools, an impressive show that was not lost on the Education Directorate, whose support was always forthcoming. This support was further enhanced in 2009 with the posting of a peripatetic teacher to help implement Dinja Waħda in the schools. Dinja Waħda is now expanding into secondary schools with a pilot programme.

Through Dinja Waħda, BirdLife is infusing teachers, children and their families with knowledge, appreciation and action for the environment. With



School visits to Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves give children the opportunity to come face to face with nature in an educational setting.

sustained effort, it is hoped that environmental awareness will change from being the passion of an inspired few to becoming everyone's chosen lifestyle.

Desirée Falzon joined BirdLife in 1977 and since 1985 has served on various committees, including Council Chairperson and BirdLife General Secretary. Her main focus is in education and youth leaders.



Dinja Waħda promotes both outdoor and indoor environmental activity. (right) At the end of the year, schools are awarded special handmade trophies.

Message from the founding fathers

On 25 January 1962, seven men met in a house in Tas-Sliema. These were Joe Attard Tabone, Dominic Cutajar, Tony Dandria, Guido Lanfranco, Anthony Navarro, Victor Pisani and Henry Scicluna. During that meeting they founded the Malta Ornithological Society. Fifty years later, here is a message from four of them:



joe attard tabone

"Fifty years of an uphill struggle against great odds! But one can look back with great satisfaction at the achievements in bird conservation and education that the Malta Ornithological Society, now BirdLife Malta, has achieved in such a relatively short time. The battle against crass ignorance and lack of appreciation of wild birds is not yet totally won. However, I am sure that constant dedication, which never lacked in our association, will win the day in the not too distant future."



tony dandria hunt

"I have just been watching your 50th Anniversary DVD and a wave of nostalgia swept over me when I saw the MOS cyclostyled sheets about birds that we used to hand out. Surely none of the founders back in 1962 could have foreseen then that the Malta Ornithological Society would develop into the vital and dynamic conservation body that BirdLife Malta is today. And it is all due in large part to the members who came after us. Much still needs to be done, but as the poet wrote: 'Say not that the struggle naught availeth.' Happy Birthday."



dominic cutajar

"Going back 50 years, the uppermost sensation was then one of utter disgust at the absolute havoc and ignorance that the natural environment in our country was subjected to, particularly the birdlife - a resource ennobling human existence, reduced to a mere object of selfish, inane amusement. It was too degrading, dishonouring our people, our culture. Although bereft of a background in ornithology, I felt that, come what may, one had to get involved to obliterate this stain from our identity."



guido lanfranco

"Since I had the honour to be the first president of the MOS it gives me great pleasure to write a few words after fifty years. A society to continue to be strong and active after half a century is not an easy matter. It means that it has striven, with encouragement of a loyal, supportive membership, to combat and overcome adversities and numerous difficulties. With the advance of time through education, legislation and a changing mentality, the outlook is now brighter than when we started, and BirdLife Malta is heading to survive another fifty years."

The international connection

joe sultana



When MOS was founded, it was a small, struggling society without any resources. The environment for birds was hostile and the resilience and devotion of a handful of active members in the early years would not have been sufficient for it to survive, let alone address its substantial agenda. But help was not lacking from international quarters, first and foremost from the RSPB (UK), whose backing never failed us and still supports us today. Along the years, other bird and nature organisations too extended help in various ways and in many projects. LRBPO (Belgium), DOF (Denmark), NABU (Germany), LIPU (Italy), VBN (Netherlands), SPEA (Portugal), SOF (Sweden), SVS (Switzerland), Pro Natura (Switzerland), SEO (Spain) and MBROC (UK) have been there to support us. More recently, BirdLife International's European Office has been crucial in BirdLife Malta's struggle to bring Maltese bird-protection laws in line with EU legislation.

BirdLife Malta's annual Raptor and SpringWatch Camps receive much international input by way of funding and participation. Many foreign naturalists, mainly from European countries, join our staff and volunteers for these marathon camps to help monitor birds migration and illegal hunting.

In the field of research, The British Trust for Ornithology helped MOS set up its bird-ringing scheme in the early years. In recent years BirdLife Malta joined forces with Partners

RSPB and SPEA to manage and conduct the EU Life Yelkouan Shearwater Project (2006-2010) and the ongoing EU Life+ Malta Seabird Project (2011-2016).

On its part, BirdLife Malta too made a valuable contribution to BirdLife International. A year after its foundation, MOS set up a national section of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), and over the years made important input in the ICBP setup. The MOS representative served several years as Chairman of the European Section and member of its World Council. When, in 1992, ICBP reinvented itself as the stronger and hugely more effective BirdLife International partnership it is today, MOS was at the centre of the process, and was one of the 15 lead organisations to sign the new BirdLife International into existence. BirdLife International today boasts about 120 national organisations worldwide.



Aachen 1992. Representatives of the 15 lead organisations.

Werner Müller



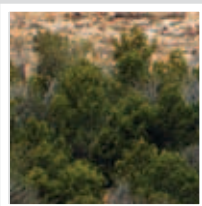


out and about

forthcoming member activities

richard cachia zammit

13 Jan 2013 Walk in the forest



Foresta 2000 was BirdLife Malta's gift to the new millennium. The aim of this project is to restore an area of natural habitat and turn it into a stretch of Mediterranean woodland. As the forest grows, it provides food and shelter to birds, insects and other wildlife, and in this way enrich the ecosystem and increase biodiversity. Forest ranger Ray Vella will accompany us on this walk and explain details about this very important longterm BirdLife project.

24 Feb 2013 Day tripping in Gozo



We are going for a walk along the beautiful southern coast of Gozo. Spectacular scenery guaranteed, plus a dash of early spring flowers. In the afternoon we will either join licensed BirdLife ringers for a bird-ringing session or enjoy a short walk, because Gozo offers countless opportunities for such walks. This activity comes with a fee and the number of participants is limited. Book early to avoid disappointment.

30 Jan 2013 The Amber Time Machine



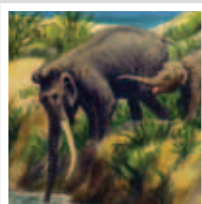
In this indoor activity we will be screening the BBC documentary *The Amber Time Machine*. Sir David Attenborough takes us into a time-travelling detective story that spans 150 million years. Examining and identifying the contents of samples of amber, he opens a window into prehistoric tropical rain forests and unravels detailed stories about the plants and animals that lived in them.

15 Mar 2013 Birds in Art



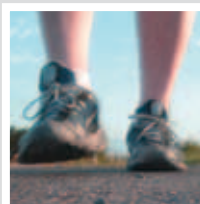
Brian Grima is an established artist. He showed interest in art at a very young age and studied the subject at the School of Art and later at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Firenze (Italy). Now a full-time professional artist, Brian's work can be found in private collections both locally and abroad. In this presentation, Brian will take us on a tour of how man portrayed birds in art down the ages.

15 Feb 2013 Dwarfs and Giants!



An indoor presentation by John J. Borg, senior curator in charge of the Natural History Unit (Heritage Malta). John will take us back thousands of years to the ice age, when the Maltese Islands were very different from today, and when the local fauna included pygmy elephants and giant swans. Don't miss it!

24 Mar 2013 Fundraising walk



Bird and nature conservation requires a lot of funding and BirdLife is always trying to make ends meet. For many years, BirdLife's junior section has been organising annual walks to raise money for BirdLife projects. So we asked ourselves: Why can't we adult members do the same? As there is age to consider, our marathon won't be as hectic as the juniors' 10km march. Let us say our activity will be a longer version of our usual leisurely walks, with enough time for everyone to enjoy nature. The route will take us through beautiful scenery and interesting historical areas. And most of it will be downhill. For our fitter members, family and friends, we may also stage a **fun run** before the actual walk.

For more details send an email to blmactivities@gmail.com or call **Richard Cachia Zammit** on **21672939** (5-7pm). When you join our Activity Mailing List you will receive email details and reminders of forthcoming events. At our outings there will be **experienced naturalists** and birders eager to help with bird identification and other points of natural interest. Unless otherwise stated, all BirdLife activities are **free of charge**.

IMPORTANT: In January 2013 we will issue details and open bookings for a weekend visit to the **Nebrodi Mountains (Sicily)** in June 2013. We will be sending the information via email, so interested members without Internet access kindly give Richard a call.

While every effort is made to stick to the activities as planned, unforeseen circumstances may force us to revise or cancel some of them.

Richard Cachia Zammit is Coordinator of the BirdLife Malta Activity Team.



Oh and by the way...



Do buy our 2013 calendar!

It's only €2.50. Call us for a mailed copy or pop over to Ghadira or Is-Simar nature reserves.

