

# *Bird's Eye View*

2002





# BirdLife MALTA

BirdLife Malta was set up in 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) and is today the largest environmental group in Malta, with over 3000 members.

BirdLife Malta's mission is the protection of birds and their habitat, and through this to work for biological diversity. With this directive in mind, the organisation has over the years used various approaches to achieve adequate bird protection. Such activity has ranged from street protests against wanton bird killing to the creation of nature reserves. Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves are direct results of far sight and sheer hard work by BirdLife Malta volunteers.

BirdLife Malta publishes **Il-Merill** (a scientific bulletin), **Bird's Eye View** (the members' annual magazine), **Il-Huttafa** (the young members' bimonthly magazine) **BirdTalk** (the members' bimonthly newsletter), and newsletters for ringers, school delegates, youth leaders and weekend guides. The Society also produces various educational material such as books, posters and leaflets for use by schools and other institutions. The organisation is also active in the press.

BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International.

BirdLife Malta can be reached at:  
postal address  
**57/28 Triq Rigord**  
**Ta' Xbiex MSD 12 Malta**  
tel (356) 21347646  
fax (356) 21343239  
email [info@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:info@birdlifemalta.org)  
website [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)

©BirdLife Malta, 2003  
Editor: Victor Falzon  
Design and production: Victor Falzon  
Front cover : Osprey by Michael Sammut  
Back cover: Artistic impression by PLCS

BirdLife Malta is a charity organisation and depends on subscriptions and donations. Membership in BirdLife Malta is Lm4 (overseas = EUR20) per annum for adults (Lm2 for juniors and Lm6 for families). One can now join, renew membership or make a donation online at [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)

Bird's Eye View was first published in 1977. This is the 20th issue.

## editorial



Malta's list of breeding birds is pathetically short. But then, what can you expect from a tiny, semi-arid island state with a teeming human population! It is a wonder that we actually have birds nesting in Malta!

But we do, and for all the habitat destruction that the land has suffered down the centuries, birds still cling to a diminishing countryside, and somehow eke out a living. Birds can adapt against many odds, but against Malta-style hunters and trappers, nature seems to have no survival kit, and the birds lose out every time.

So let us for a moment imagine that hunting and trapping in Malta were to stop completely - tomorrow! What would happen birdwise?

Even the most conservative guess would add six to eight new species to the list of regular breeding birds. What's to stop common kestrels, turtle doves, quails, chaffinches, greenfinches, serins, goldfinches and linnets from setting up house in Malta? It would be no big deal for them - after all they would only be returning home! All these species have nested here in the past, and several of them still try from time to time. But the shotgun and the clapnet always spoil their plans.

With a little extra help, such as re-introduction programmes and more nature reserves, the list can be extended. The jackdaw was hunted to extinction in Malta in the 1950s, but if re-introduced would probably rapidly re-occupy its lost niche. With no threat from shotguns, re-introduced barn owls would readily breed again in steep-sided valleys, inland cliffs and derelict fortifications (and food supply should be the least of the owls' problems, considering that their favourite prey - rats and mice - are not exactly Red Data species in Malta!).

A little habitat management can also push the odds squarely in favour of birds, something which BirdLife has proved when reed warbler, little ringed plover and moorhen moved in at one or both nature reserves at Ghadira and Is-Simar, not to mention the occasional little bittern.

More optimistic speculation would add short-eared owl (which nested as recently as 1983 but was killed by guess what!), peregrine falcon and maybe even eleonora's falcon. Local birders have lately been reporting collared dove more regularly in their observations - given the chance, this bird could well be another breeding candidate.

So it is evidently thanks to the men with the gun and the men with the net that this country keeps being cheated out of a richer biodiversity.

What exactly, I dare ask, are these people giving in return?

**Victor Falzon**  
editor



# A Gift for Life!

Victor Falzon

**A new project is always exciting, but to a nature organisation like ours, no project can be more gratifying than one which gives land directly back to nature. It is visible, tangible proof that the onslaught of environmental destruction can be stopped and actually reversed. It is perhaps conservation in its purest form, and it's what we're doing at Foresta 2000.**

**F**oresta 2000 (F2000) is a project intended to plant a largely barren hill slope with lush Mediterranean woodland. The aim is to increase biodiversity in an area which has endured centuries of human disturbance. Taking the dream to its wildest extent, the proposed woodland should cover an area more than three times the size of the nearby Ghadira nature reserve, and would literally stretch from shore to shore, albeit at the country's narrowest part (see plan on backpage)!

BirdLife has been joined in this project by two other organisations, namely Din l-Art Helwa and Parks and Landscapes Conservation Section (PLCS). Such a partnership will extend the scope and step up the rhythm of the project.

## in phase

Due to the large size of the land, the project is being carried out in phases. Phase 1 is the east side, largely bounded by the Ghadira-Cirkewwa road, and the first to be tackled. Known as It-Taflija due to the presence of surface blue clay, it is the least vegetated area and the part which has been degraded most. Once terraced and worked, it has long since been abandoned, probably due to the

excessively clayey soil, the walls left to crumble and the topsoil carried down the steep gradient by rainwater, which in time created deep gullies. Some patches are still worked, partly by squatters. The land is almost entirely public property.

It-Taflija is the most degraded of the entire project area. For years it has been used for parking, camping, horse-riding and off-roading, the latter being particularly destructive. In winter, however, clumps of narcissus still show that nature has not yet given up!

## the show begins

Throughout the first half of 2002 the Partners met regularly, some in office, some on site, to determine when and how to plant what and where. By the end of summer, plans were more or less in place.

On 10 October, work on Phase 1 began. Heavy machinery cleared the east border, and parallel to the road a footpath was created. This will join other footpaths further up the slope. Heaps of roadside junk were removed, truckloads of earth and soil brought in and a proper embankment created. This will be planted with native trees and shrubs, which will help stabilise the soil, as well as form a thick hedge habitat and screen off the road.

Hundreds of trees from government and BirdLife nurseries were set aside for winter planting. In May, Ambiente's welcome donation of 50 pine and oak saplings swelled the nursery stock, and in June we added another 260 young holm oaks, lovingly reared from acorns by primary school children taking part in Dinja Wahda (see page 22).

A chunk of very good news was that Foresta 2000 had placed second in the Malta Heritage and Environment Awards. This translated into a wonderful Lm2000 from Thomson Services Malta Ltd, which the Partners received in May on behalf of the project.

## co-existence

Also in October, a meeting was held with Mellieha farmers to dispel rumours that they were to be evicted from the land! During this meeting, farmers understood that the project would aid and enhance, rather than disrupt, their activity - F2000 does not intend to blanket the entire area with trees, but will be a mosaic of different habitats, among which, areas of farmland; indeed it would be an excellent example of how human activity and nature can co-exist. The Partners are grateful to the Mellieha Local Council for their co-operation and their belief in our project.

On the very last day of the year, work began on the installation of a gate to seal off the area to off-roaders and mark the south entrance for Foresta 2000!

**Victor Falzon** is a member of the Foresta 2000 steering committee.



Justin Vassallo

The year 2002 was a comeback for Falko, BirdLife's teenage section. Falko had not seen a year of such strong activity since 1995! The newly-formed committee kept to its bi-monthly meeting schedule, held on Saturday afternoons. Such consistency for the youth section augurs well.

Falko's image needed a brush up. So while the name Falko was retained, a new logo was designed by Simon Sultana, Franco Farrugia and Anthony Sammut. Meanwhile, committee roles were better defined.



Falko in Salerno, with nest-boxes

Another issue that was tackled was establishing overseas contact. It is Falko's intention to organise international exchanges to broaden environmental appreciation among its active members, hopefully with financial help from the EU Youth Action Programme. To this end, Graziella Grech attended a four-day seminar in Gozo, during which contact was established with a Danish organisation.



A new logo for Falko

At the core of Falko were the activities. During 2002, the group organised a sea-watching activity, a bike hike, a visit to Kemmuna and a three-day camp on Kemmuna during which rubble walls were rebuilt and trees watered at Wied l-Ahmar. The camp was a great success. Falko also organised a boat trip to Ta' Cenċ cliffs to watch Cory's shearwaters close up. The activity received such overwhelming response that it was extended to all BirdLife volunteers. Over 50 participants confirmed the success of the event.

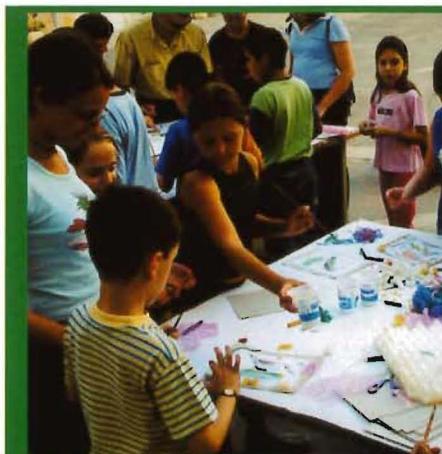
In September the international RaptorCamp was once again organised. Saviour Spiteri and Simon Sultana gave invaluable help.

In October another bike hike was organised, this time in Gozo.

In December, nine Falko members attended a camp in Salerno, organised by LIPU (BirdLife in Italy). During the week-long camp, the members did voluntary work to upgrade the natural assets of a stretch of coastal woodland.

All in all, 2002 was a year full of bustle. We sincerely hope to keep it this way in the coming years!

Justin Vassallo is chairperson of the Falko committee.



Craft activity in session



## kids' korner

Desirée Falzon

Junior membership is at the core of BirdLife Malta's raison d'être. The education of the younger generation is one of the Society's pillars of activity. The committee in charge of Klabb Huttaf is well aware of this, and for this reason met every month in 2002 to organise and supervise activities for the juniors.

Apart from another six issues of the popular kids magazine *Il-Huttafa* (picture at top), the group organised a sponsored walk from Rabat to Xemxija (Lm247 collected), two outings to Kemmuna, a craft evening, a visit to Ghadira and the annual Christmas party.

As in past years, inserts in the junior newspaper *Taghna t-Tfal* featured every month of the scholastic year, handled by committee chairperson Jason Aloisio.

The 2002 *Huttafa* tas-Sena (Swallow of the Year) Award for active membership was won by Jürgen Pavanello, and the Elizabeth Coxon Award for conservation went to youth leader Graziella Grech

Desirée Falzon is a member of the Klabb Huttaf committee

# Wied I-Ahmar

A soft, warm breeze sways the giant fennels as the sun prepares to set. The only sound in an otherwise peaceful evening is the incessant call of European bee-eaters hunting insects over the rich garigue - a typical scene enjoyed by those who participate in our annual ringing project on Kemmuna.

BirdLife Malta now has a proper, permanent ringing station on Kemmuna (see box), thanks to which the ringing group can now look forward to extending the period of the annual spring project. The project usually runs from mid-April to mid-May, but in 2002 we actually doubled the time span, with non-stop ringing for two months: 19 March to 11 May.

Since we are only a small number of ringers, we requested help from our European Partners, and the response was encouraging!

A total of 17 ringers (including two Germans, one Welsh and three English) aided by 12 helpers, ringed a total of 2171 birds of 45 species. These included some rare birds like semi-collard flycatcher, melodious warbler and olivaceous warbler. The highlights of the project must have been a blackcap bearing a ring from Slovenia and a pied flycatcher ringed in Germany. Such information is exchanged with our European colleagues, and goes a long way to determining important migration patterns of these birds.

Still fresh from this success, the ringing group gave Kemmuna another shot and organised a pilot autumn project. The project spanned nine days (25 October - 2 November). Once again Kemmuna showed its potential and although the autumn migration was a poor one, interesting birds like sky lark, common starling and blackbird were ringed. Hopefully in coming years such important projects will expand.

More hard work is still required to improve the ringing station as well as the habitat of the valley. Several tree-

planting sessions have been carried out, but lack of water remains a limiting factor - summer conditions are too harsh for trees to stay alive without proper irrigation, something not yet present at Wied I-Ahmar.

BirdLife Malta is grateful to Vogelbescherming (BirdLife in the Netherlands) and Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening (BirdLife in Sweden) for financial assistance in the setting up of the ringing station. Thanks also to the Comino Hotel for their reduced ferry fares.

Mark Gauci is a qualified ringer and co-ordinator of the Kemmuna project.



common starling

Diana Gattala

## Small beginnings...



John Sullivan

Aerial view of part of BirdLife's lease at Wied I-Ahmar - boundary in red. Note pumphouse (with reservoir) in foreground, still roofless!

It all started in 1990, when BirdLife Malta's ringing scheme took part in a project run by the Italian ringing scheme to study the importance of small Mediterranean islands for bird migration. For the first year Ghadira was used. But then the project was diverted to Kemmuna, a small island, which was also relatively hunting-free and virtually uninhabited. We never looked back!

Following encouraging ringing results, the Society sought ways to make Kemmuna a more permanent ringing base. BirdLife leased a sizeable piece of land that includes most of upper Wied I-Ahmar, a shallow valley with scattered tree cover. A tiny derelict pumphouse was taken in hand, properly plastered and tiled, and bunk beds fitted - the two-roomed building can now accommodate up to eight people at one time. Conditions are not five-star, but far better than sharing tents with the rats and whatever the weather feels like throwing at you! What is more, we now had an all-weather bird observatory that could function all year round.



# That was last year...

*BirdLife's calendar of events for 2002*



24 January - 40th anniversary event

Mark Sultana

## January 2002

- 04 Volunteers get-together
- 09 Education committee mtg
- 10 Council mtg
- 11 Birdtalk 68 out
- 12 Pied wagtail roost count
- 13 Vogelbescherming to Kemmuna
- 14 Council meets Vogelbescherming
- 15 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 16 Conservation committee mtg
- 18 Wildlife of the Maltese Islands out
- 20 On NetTV re swan massacre
- 24 40th anniversary event
- 26 Press conference re swan killing
- 27 On Sunday Times re swan killing
- 31 PR re trapping close season

## February 2002

- 03 Leaders outing to Ras il-Pellegrin
- 05 BirdTalk 69 out
- 07 Council mtg
- 11 School delegates outing
- 11 Mtg with Env Minister + Police Commissioner + EPD
- 13 Education committee mtg
- 13 Conservation committee mtg
- 13 PR re killing of Audouin's gull
- 19 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 21 Council mtg
- 23 Falko mtg
- 24 President on Malta Today
- 26 Mtg with MEPA
- 27 Talk at Birżebbuġa Primary
- 28 Talk at FIS
- 28 Reserves committee mtg

## March 2002

- 01 Il-Huttafa 48 out
- 01 PR re close of hunting at sea
- 01 PR re CITES importation without check
- 03-10 BirdLife at RSPB EU accession project review mtg in Poland
- 13 Education committee mtg
- 14 Council mtg
- 15 PR re shooting of raptors in Gozo
- 17 Klabb Huttaf marathon hike
- 21 Annual General Meeting
- 23 PR re large duck migration
- 24 Mtg with MEPA + Police Assistant Commissioner re dinghies

- 25 PR re killing of ducks in channel
- 27 Conservation committee mtg
- 27 PR re illegal hunting all over Malta
- 30 PR re illegal importation of finches
- 31 Falko bike hike

## April 2002

- 03-07 BirdLife at Green Week
- 03 PR re saving of Cory's shearwater
- 04 PBS at Ghadira
- 04 PR re Is-Simar open month
- 10 Education committee mtg
- 11 PLCS at Ghadira/Is-Simar
- 11 Council mtg
- 13 Ġorġ Pullicino MP at Ghadira
- 13 Brikolage (TV) at Ghadira
- 15-19 NGO dialogue mtg in Brussels
- 17 Talk at Balzan Youth Centre
- 18 EU Env MEP delegation visit Ghadira
- 18 Interview for ecotourism programme on PBS television
- 18 Ghadira/Is-Simar leaflets out
- 19 Il-Huttafa 49 out
- 20 Falko committee mtg
- 21 PR re illegal hunting
- 22 Malta Heritage Award for Foresta 2000
- 23 School delegates newsletter out
- 23 Talk to Swedish students
- 24 Mtg re Foresta 2000
- 24 Talk to St Joseph School Sliema
- 27-28 Cygnus bird festival
- 28 Klabb Huttaf 1st outing to Kemmuna
- 29 NGOs mtg with MLP

## May 2002

- 01 Klabb Huttaf 2nd outing to Kemmuna

- 03 Talk to Żurriq Youth Centre
- 04 Press conference re protected species
- 08 Education committee mtg
- 09 PR re honey-buzzards massacre
- 10 PR re illegal development on Kemmuna
- 11 Seminar for NGOs at EU Commission
- 14 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 16 Council mtg
- 17 BirdTalk 70 out
- 20 DG Education at Is-Simar + Ghadira
- 22 Mtg with Ġorġ Pullicino MP
- 22 Education committee mtg
- 24 NGOs mtg at BirdLife office
- 26 PR re close season
- 26 Donation of trees for Foresta 2000
- 28 EO Biology at Is-Simar
- 29 BirdLife on EuroNews re hunting

## June 2002

- 01 Mtg of NGOs with Ġorġ Pullicino MP
- 04 Research group mtg



20 may - DG Education at Is-Simar

Charis Caines

- 10 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 11 Education committee mtg
- 13 Council mtg
- 18 Conservation committee mtg
- 21 Il-Huttafa 50 out
- 24 Falko committee mtg
- 28 Ringing Scheme mtg

## July 2002

- 06 Falko work at Ghadira + barbecue
- 08-10 In-service course for Kindergarten Assistants



10 July - in-service course fieldwork for Kindergarten Assistants

Vivian Falson



- 09 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 10 Kemmuna steering committee mtg
- 10 PR re nature reserves summer closing
- 11 Mtg re Foresta 2000
- 12 BirdTalk 71 out
- 12-13 Research group night on Filfla
- 17 Conservation committee mtg
- 18 Council mtg
- 23 Mtg at EU Commission delegation
- 24 Nature reserves committee mtg
- 27 Falko work at Is-Simar
- 27 PR re sustainable hunting
- 27 Mtg re EU negotiations
- 29 Il-Merill 30 out
- 30 Bird's Eye View 2001 out
- 31 Mtg re EU accession negotiations

**August 2002**

- 01 BirdTalk 72 out
- 02 Il-Huttafa 51 out
- 02 Volunteers boat trip to Ta' Ċenċ
- 05 Klabb Huttaf on MiniBugs (NetTV)
- 06 Mtg with Education Department

- 02 Reserves committee mtg
- 03 PR re damage at Qortin tal-Magun
- 03 Mtg at OPM re EU accession negotiations
- 03 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 04 Foresta 2000 mtg
- 04 Mtg with Police Assistant Commissioner
- 06 Conservation committee mtg
- 07 PR re shooting of honey-buzzards
- 09 BirdLife on RTK radio
- 11 Education committee mtg
- 11 Mtg with Malta Tourism Authority
- 11 Mtg with EU Peer Review Committee
- 11 EU Peer Review Committee at Ghadira
- 12 Mtg at OPM re EU accession
- 13-27 RaptorCamp 2002 @ Buskett
- 13 PR re large passage of marsh harriers
- 16-18 In-service course for Kindergarten Assistants
- 17 Mtg with Mellieha LC re Foresta 2000
- 18 Mtg with Police Commissioner
- 18 PR re birds of prey massacre
- 18 PR re Kindergarten inservice
- 19 Mtg with Hawk & Owl Trust UK
- 20-22 Falko camp @ Buskett

- 12 BirdLife on PBS radio re hunting
- 13 BirdLife on Super 1 TV re hunting/EU
- 14 Mtg for Ghadira weekend guides
- 14 Mtg with Ġorġ Pullicino MP
- 15 BirdTalk 73 out
- 18 BirdLife Birds/Habitats Directive task force mtg in Brussels
- 19 Falko night hike
- 20 Falko work at It-Taflija (Foresta 2000)
- 21 Falko committee mtg
- 22 Mtg with farmers re Foresta 2000
- 23 Debate on Super 1 TV
- 24 PR re Ghadira re-opening
- 26 Ghadira opens for weekend visits
- 27 Klabb Huttaf outing to Ghadira
- 28 Dinja Wahda 3 report out
- 28 Mtg with Xarabank (PBS) team
- 31 Dinja Wahda 3 award ceremony
- 31 PR re Dinja Wahda 3

**November 2002**

- 01 PR re hunters' proposals
- 06 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 06 Mtg with reporter Andre Beijen
- 07 Council mtg
- 13 Education committee mtg
- 13 PR re Hondoq ir-Rummien megaproject
- 17-19 NGO Dialogue mtg Brussels
- 27 University KSU debate on EU and environment
- 29 Reserves committee mtg

**December 2002**

- 04 Council mtg
- 09 Klabb Huttaf workshop
- 10 Il-Huttafa 53 out
- 11 Talk at Hal Luqa primary school
- 12-15 Fabio Casale visit re EU familiarisation/Natura 2000
- 12 Talk at Hal Luqa primary school
- 15 BirdTalk 74 out
- 17 Mtg with Ġorġ Pullicino MP re laws
- 17 Ringing committee mtg
- 18 Klabb Huttaf Xmas party
- 27 Foresta 2000 site visit
- 31 Work at It-Taflija (Foresta 2000)



- 08 BirdLife on Terrazzin (NetTV)
- 09-10 BirdLife Jazz Festival @ Valletta
- 10-11 Falko outing to Ta' Ċenċ
- 11 PR re killing of flamingoes
- 16-18 British Birdwatching Fair
- 20 Mtg with Education Department
- 21 Education committee mtg
- 21 Kemmuna steering committee mtg
- 22 Council mtg
- 24 PR re EU concessions to hunters
- 29 Research group mtg

**September 2002**

- 01 BirdLife @ Honey-buzzard Day Sweden
- 01 PR re killing of night herons

- 23 Interview for Reporter (PBS television)
- 26 PBS @ reserves re EcoTourism prog
- 26 On PBS television re EU negotiations
- 27 Meusac mtg re EU accession negotiations (hunting)

**October 2002**

- 03 Council mtg
- 05-06 NGO Dialogue prep seminar - Hungary
- 05 PR re EU package
- 08 Klabb Huttaf committee mtg
- 09 Education committee mtg
- 10 Work begins at F2000 east perimeter
- 11 Il-Huttafa 52 out

**2 august - volunteers boattrip to Ta' Ċenċ**



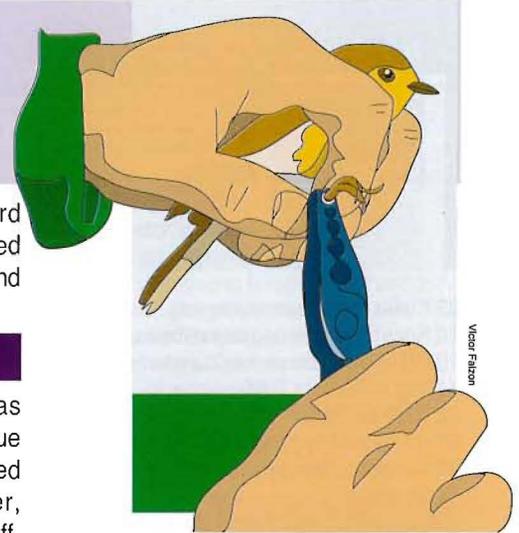
Edward Aquilino

Joseph Mungion

# BirdQuest

Round-up of the Research Group's work

Charles Gauci



Victor Falzon

## ringing

Year 2002 was another productive year for the Valletta Ringing Scheme. Twelve ringers were active, with trends very much like those in 2001. The main ringing sites were BirdLife's nature reserves at Ghadira and Is-Simar, both of which were worked practically daily throughout the year, as well as Kemmuna ringing station where this year's contribution to the Piccole Isole Project ran for 2 months in spring and a further 9 days in autumn (see page 5).

About 12,800 birds were ringed in 2002, with a significant number of foreign-ringed birds controlled or recovered in Malta:

2 barn swallows	Italy
2 barn swallows	Slovenia
1 barn swallow	Finland
1 blackcap	Italy
1 blackcap	Slovenia
1 sand martin	Finland
1 sand martin	Hungary
1 sand martin	Serbia
1 pied flycatcher	Germany
1 great reed warbler	Hungary
1 reed warbler	England
1 little ringed plover	Czech Rep
1 wood sandpiper	Germany
1 willow warbler	Italy

Meanwhile, four Malta-ringed birds were controlled in Italy:

1 common kingfisher	in Forli
1 garden warbler	in Latina
1 barn swallow	in Bergamo
1 barn swallow	in Rimini

An interesting longevity record concerned a yellow-legged gull ringed as a chick on Filfla on 30 May 1983, and found dead there on 21 May 2002.

## publication

The 30th issue of Il-Merill was published in 2002. The 48-page issue carried papers, studies and extended notes about Sardinian warbler, Procellariiformes, common chiffchaff, black redstart, levantine shearwater, peregrine falcon and black vulture, plus 15 bird-related short notes. Editor was Mark-Anthony Falzon.

Due to difficulties encountered with our new computer ringing programme, the monthly ringing newsletter was temporarily put on hold.

## new ringers

At the end of the year, the ringing committee judged that two trainees - Justin Vassallo and Jean Paul Farrugia - had successfully completed their training programme and were recommended for a ringing licence in the coming year.



Raymond Galea

Five foreign-ringed barn swallows were logged by Maltese ringers

## birdwatching

Our birdwatchers were again very active throughout the year and co-ordinated sessions were organised for raptor-counting and duck and seabird watches. Highlights and general trends were regularly covered in the Birdlog section of BirdTalk.

## nest records

Although most of our ringing is done on fully-fledged free-flying birds, a few of our ringers specialise in ringing pulli, i.e. birds still in the nest. These are a very valuable asset as the exact age and origin of the birds are in this way known. Ringers conducting such activity fill nest record sheets which record the history of the particular nest. This year 31 nesting record sheets were logged for three species:

sardinian warbler	21 nests
zitting cisticola	8 nests
reed warbler	2 nests

Charles Gauci is managing warden at Ghadira, a qualified ringer and ringing secretary of the research group



Travel **Light** - Travel **Ticketless**

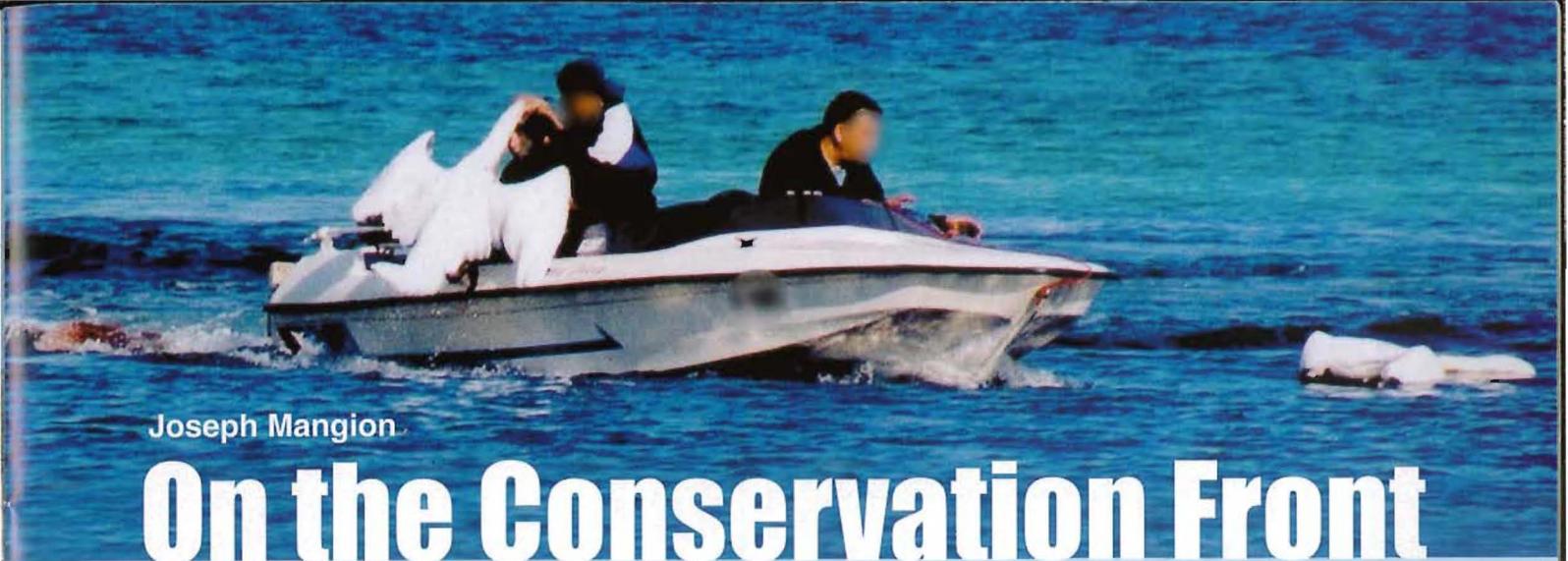
Travel **Etix**® and save...

...check out [www.malta.lufthansa.com](http://www.malta.lufthansa.com)

For more details contact:

Lufthansa German Airlines, Malta International Airport on: Tel: 21 25 20 20  
or your Travel Agent.





Joseph Mangion

# On the Conservation Front

## Pushing for action

Bird protection was, as always, the main agenda of the Conservation Committee, and as usual most of the work was directed at putting pressure on the authorities to enforce or improve the laws.

Contacts with the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) section and the police force in general were maintained. Improvements were few, but we received positive and proactive feedback following the frequent reports we lodged with the police. BirdLife's constant request for government to set up an environment wardening squad has been repeatedly refused. However, following further pressure, the ALE was promised delivery of three new vehicles and seacraft to facilitate patrolling duties. Unfortunately, during 2002, an already seriously understaffed ALE section was further reduced.

## Spreading the word

Our work in the press was mainly directed at making the public aware of the magnitude of the hunting problem. The message came across especially strong just after the killing of the mute swans in late January, which caused a furore from public and groups, both local and foreign. Letters of protest and condemnation peppered the press, and the killings made the news and front-page coverage more than once. The outrage of the massacre of at least 1000 honey-buzzards on a single day in May was also carried by the media. Unfortunately it is often such incidents that open people's eyes to what happens in Malta, though the bottom line remains that the culprits, to date, are still unpunished. A survey by Xarabank showed that most people want better law enforcement and the

majority want hunting in spring to stop.

The committee was responsible for most of the 36 press statements issued by the Society in 2002.

## How are EU?

During the summer months, as the closing of the Environment Chapter drew near, our contacts and meetings with government increased. The government was trying to find a way to meet the hunters' demands to allow spring hunting and trapping of turtle dove and quail, but BirdLife was doing its best to pull the other way. In the end, the Environment Commission refused anything more than a derogation, which was however spelt out as the government's intention in the common position paper. Effectively this means that we still have a way to fight through in the coming years. It also means that with hard work (and some luck), we can eventually seal up the loophole, and start looking ahead to a time when hunting and trapping in spring are totally illegal.

## Kemmuna connection

In July 2002 BirdLife Malta was invited to form part of the Kemmuna Steering Action Committee set up by MEPA. The group's aims are to oversee environmental management on Kemmuna, formulate and implement a management plan to protect and enhance the environment on the island. Topping the list of issues are the gradual removal of alien trees, an afforestation scheme, dumping, the relocation of the camp site and the restoration of the saline marsh, the control of pig effluent, light pollution, the impact of certain roads and tracks, ecological restoration of

degraded areas and the need for a monitoring programme.

## Camp for life

The now annual International Raptor-Camp was held in September, co-ordinated by Justin Vassallo, with the help of a Falko team. Daily monitoring of Buskett continued throughout the peak raptor migration weeks of September. Police activity had noticeably slackened since 2001, but this year Girgenti was also given due attention.

In September we established contact with the Hawk and Owl Trust of the UK. Barbara Handley and Rob Davies came over to witness the local situation, and there are plans of future co-operation in the the Migration Unlimited network.

## To the rescue

Many people phone BirdLife to collect injured birds which fall in their garden. BirdLife has stepped up efforts to co-ordinate the rescue of such birds from sympathetic members of the public, and is making plans to give proper training to an active member in handling and care of injured birds.

Joseph Mangion is President of BirdLife Malta and chairperson of the conservation committee.

BirdLife has no doubt that hunters will use the spring loophole to keep shooting down raptors, such as this honey-buzzard, and other protected birds.



Joe Sultana

# Keeping Seabirds off the hook!

John J Berg

Many seabirds never see a human being throughout their life, yet they are still affected by man's activities. Pesticides contaminate penguin rookeries hundreds of kilometres from human settlement. Floating plastic is swallowed by petrels and then fed to the chicks. Introduced cats and rats raid seabird colonies and destroy thousands of nests. Driftnets, the infamous "walls of death", regularly killed tens of thousands of shearwaters until banned in the 1980s. Seabird colonies are regularly disturbed by visiting tourists, particularly in Antarctica. And, relatively new to the scene, comes the threat of the longline...

## longline death

Longline fishing is a problem which threatens seabirds globally, and which has now reached critical levels. Seabirds regularly swallow baited hooks and drown. As many as 30 species, including the world's largest flying bird, the wandering albatross, is threatened with extinction by longlining.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that reproductive rates in these species are low, meaning that these birds are unable to compensate for the added losses.

## victims of ignorance

A dead seabird with a fishing hook protruding from the side of its bill is an appalling sight. Each year tens of thousands of seabirds drown from getting caught in longlines. This has been going on for years, but it is only recently that this issue has attracted considerable attention.

Fishermen have probably never been exposed to the concept of conservation ethics or know much about the birds that fly around their boats. In their line of work, animals die

every day and the objective of their work is to catch and to kill. Little wonder that the occasional bird caught is considered unremarkable. Single boats may only see one dead bird per week so they never realise the total numbers that are dying: the loss of the odd bird or two will surely not make much difference.

Today, however, ignorance is no longer an excuse. We know that longlines are a serious threat.

## the right incentive

But can there be sufficient incentive for the fisherman to take preventive measures? Surely stopping the birds from stealing the bait is desirable for the fishermen. But again, losing a little bait at a time is not serious enough to worry about; profits from fishing are adequate despite the birds. So the incentive must come from elsewhere.

Can one really hope that governments will introduce enforceable regulations, changing the way fishermen operate at sea and making their life more difficult, perhaps less profitable?

Solutions on how to minimise bird deaths are not lacking. In the southern

oceans there is widespread use of a number of bird avoidance measures, but this is not yet standard on all vessels of all nations - far from it. The equipment used can generally eliminate seabird mortality (save for the odd unavoidable incident), but it has to be efficient and practical. Fishing is a time-consuming activity and fishermen don't usually have much time to fiddle with imposed and what they might view as unnecessary gear. The search must therefore continue for even better solutions, which fishermen will find easy to use.

## a smaller catch?

A search has also begun for ways to reduce excessive global fishing by 20-30%. But even with half the number of hooks set, it is possible that the same number of birds could still die because of location and timing - where and when you lay the lines can make all the difference. So even with present declining fish stocks that will probably result in less fishing globally, better ways of reducing seabird mortality are still essential. As the search for better methods continues, there must be a

more concerted effort on both sides to understand and co-operate.

Meanwhile the birds themselves might help! It has been observed that some seabirds have actually learned not to pursue longline hooks. One hopes that enough can learn in time - just in case all else fails!

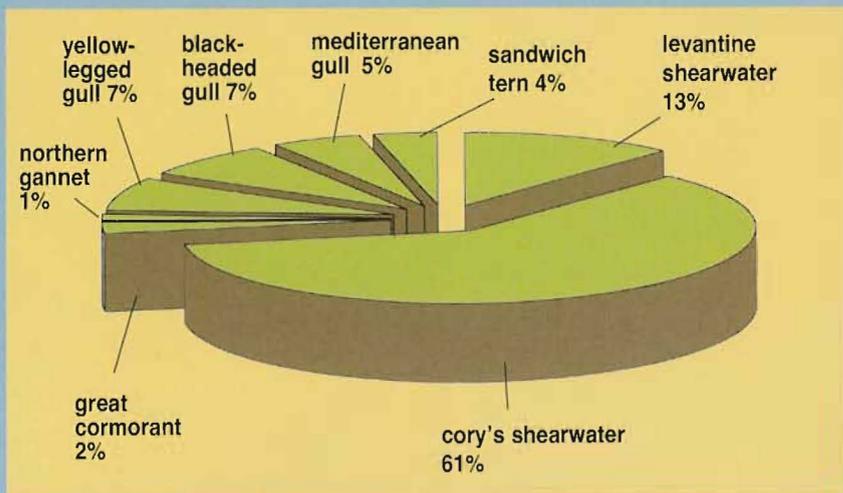
### four objectives

BirdLife International's Seabird Conservation Programme has established a Save the Albatross Campaign subtitled Keeping the World's Seabirds off the Hook. The campaign has four main objectives that can be addressed at national level. They are:

- The adoption of National Plans of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries in terms of the initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.
- The development and adoption of an international Agreement for the Southern Hemisphere Albatrosses and Petrels under the auspices of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.
- The elimination of the illegal, unlicensed and unregulated longline fishing for toothfish in the Southern Ocean that causes huge levels of bird mortality.
- The adoption of an ecosystem approach... by regional fisheries especially those which harvest migratory species such as tuna, which approach will result in a reduction of bird by-catch.

### the local picture

Surface longlining was introduced in Malta in the early 1960s, and was found to be particularly effective in catching swordfish and a few tuna. Longline fishing in Malta takes place from April to September. The technique uses longlines of various lengths ranging from 3km to 9km. Hooks are tied to a 3m line dangled at 60m intervals. The number of hooks used varies from between 100 and 300. Floating plastic bottles are tied to the longlines at intervals to keep them at the surface. Lines are laid at various distances from the shore and deployed at considerable



Results from 6 fishing boats and 8 small boats in March-June 2000

speed, rendering the process quick but also more dangerous. The lines are normally set late in the afternoon and collected four to six hours later.

A survey carried out by BirdLife Malta from March to August 2000 investigated the mortality caused by a small sample of fishing boats. Findings indicated that the problem is far greater than it was thought. In the period March to June 2000, 81 birds of eight species (see chart) were collected from the fishing hooks, from which only two were released alive - the rest had already drowned by the time they were found.

Most catches occurred when the bait was set in the late afternoon or just before sunrise. Midday and night by-catches were almost insignificant. Two types of fishing methods - longlining and surface trawling - have proved to be more detrimental to birds than other types of fishing. Most species were caught through longlining, while surface trawling was particularly deadly for our two species of shearwaters.

### joint effort

The best tool to combat this increasing problem is undoubtedly education. A joint effort by interested parties - fisheries, government departments and BirdLife Partners - should be directed towards this aim. Once convinced of the need to safeguard seabirds, fishermen will be more ready to adopt

BirdLife Malta's seabird research is partly paid from funds raised by the Cory's Shearwater Fostering Scheme.

measures as prescribed by BirdLife International in order to reduce by-catches.

More information at [www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/seabirds](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/seabirds)

**John J Borg** is a qualified ringer and the country's leading authority on seabirds.



**Ignorance is no longer an excuse - we know that longlining is a serious threat!**



The short-toed lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla - bilbla*) is earth-coloured for camouflage on the ground (photo Denis Cachia).

## *Singer in the Sky*

▪ *the short-toed lark* ▪



Four eggs are usually laid (photo Joe Sultana).

*It is late spring or early summer. The midday sun scorches an already parched, open countryside. Nature seems to be having a siesta, lulled by the monotonous song of cicadas. Nothing moves.*

*Yet in the air there is a persistent, high-pitched twittering song, just a few notes repeated over and over. You look up into the glaring brightness of the sky, and possibly pick out the dark, undulating speck that's making all the noise. It is the short-toed lark.*

*The short-toed lark is a small, sand-coloured, ground-dwelling passerine. Its European populations winter in Africa, inhabiting open, dry, tree-less countryside. In Malta it is a very common migrant and breeding summer resident, arriving here in early March. It nests on the ground in open rocky areas, airfields and agricultural land.*

*Nest-building starts in April. The nest is a mere depression in the ground, scantily lined*

with fine roots and grasses and generally built in the shelter of a small plant or even a stone. Four eggs are usually laid, and the young hatch after about 13 days. They are fed by both parents, and at 10 days old, the chicks are eager to leave the nest, though not yet able to fly. Danger comes mostly from the western whip snake, the larks' main predator - snakes account for the deaths of almost half the chicks that hatch in a season! Over the long summer season, short-toed larks usually lay two clutches. By mid-October, they are all back in Africa for the winter.

In former years the short-toed lark was more numerous and widespread in the islands. But by the early 1930s, the Maltese naturalist Giuseppe Despott had already remarked that its numbers were much reduced. A recent survey showed that this bird is nowadays sparsely distributed on mainland Malta and absent in large areas, particularly in the eastern half of the main island. Fortunately it is still quite widespread in Gozo.

One of the main reasons for its decline in the Maltese Islands in the last thirty years is building development, which has taken up much agricultural land. The introduction of new agricultural practices has also contributed to its decline.

Joe Sultana

Joe Sultana is an ornithologist and co-ordinator of BirdLife Malta's research group.



The young hatch after about 13 days (photo Denis Cachia).



Short-toed larks often scrape out shallow depressions in the ground, where they shelter for the night (photo Victor Falzon).

Short-toed lark country is wide open country (photo Victor Falzon).



# In reserve

Mark Gauci

It is now three years since BirdLife Malta signed the agreement with Government through which Ghadira and Is-Simar became the Society's responsibility. In 2002 the nature reserves personnel, six in all, maintained the momentum of previous years, which gave excellent results on both management and education fronts.

## land job

Both managing wardens had the best possible start to the year in the form of a new pair of helping hands. In January, Alex Casha joined the wardens team as an assistant at both reserves. This brought the total of reserves staff to six. Alex started off by organising, upgrading and diversifying the tree nursery found at Is-Simar - this nursery will be supplying trees and shrubs for our Foresta 2000 project.

Charles Coleiro, Is-Simar warden, continued the ongoing clearing of the reedbed, which was extended to new areas. Charles explains that dead reeds of previous years gradually pile up on the bed of the pools and unless removed can lead to several submerged areas drying up.

Attention was also given to a patch of tamarisk trees growing in part of the pool. These trees were pruned to create areas of shaded water, which is beneficial for birds, fish and other wildlife. Invasive alien trees (mainly acacia) growing on some islands were cleared, and new feeding grounds uncovered for ground dwellers like moorhen.

Another problem tackled was the nature trail at Is-Simar. The trail had so far been very uneven and after rain

used to hold large puddles of water, making it extremely difficult for schoolchildren to tour the reserve. Fine earth-coloured sand and gravel were spread along the trail and, with the help of a small roller, flattened to perfection.



The small garage/office built in 2001 had water and electricity fittings installed, and the place was properly plastered and painted.

Another important job was the laying of a new drip irrigation system all around the reserve, which means more trees and shrubs can now be planted in areas of the embankment which are still relatively barren.

The workload facing Ghadira managing warden Charles Gauci was no less demanding. Much attention was once again given to the removal of the invasive shrubby orache from the northwest part of the embankment. This shrub is gradually being replaced by shrubs like hawthorn and lentisk, and trees like olive and Aleppo pine. Efforts

were made to extend the area of common reed in the main pool at Ghadira. Reeds provide optimum cover for several bird species, and create new breeding habitats for established birds like the moorhen. Given the high salinity levels of the water and the tricky conditions required by reeds, this is no easy task. But optimism is rife at Ghadira!

Along with the land management work, bird observation and study at the reserves is never lacking. Ringing was carried out at both sites throughout the year. This study is very important for us to determine the validity of the reserves as stopover and refuelling station for migratory birds, as well as a permanent home for the local species. A total of over 3800 birds of 85 different species were ringed at the reserves in 2002.

## with class

Now in their second year of working at the reserves, full time teachers Victor Falzon and Jason Aloisio turned their attention to possible ways of making the daily visits more interesting and interactive for the students. Both teachers prepared education packs for children to use during their field trips. Several small binoculars were bought specifically for students at the reserves,

Dennis Caschiera

Jason Aloisio

Victor Falzon



New asst. warden Alex Casha busy at Is-Simar nursery (left), new display boards at Ghadira (middle) and invasive shrubby orache at Ghadira (right).

and a spotting scope was mounted at Ghadira. Magnifying loupes were also bought, which made the nature trails even more interesting as the smaller details of wildlife were opened up to the students. In 2002 a total of 3927 students visited the reserves during school hours.

## going public

As usual, Ghadira was open to the public at weekends from January to May and from October to December. All this was made possible thanks to a group of dedicated weekend guides, who are always ready to offer their free time to ensure that people get the most from their visit of the reserve. In February, five large boards depicting the reserve's wildlife were put up in the visitors' centre at Ghadira.

For the first time Is-Simar also opened its gates to the public for a trial month in April. The response received was encouraging, and clearly shows the thirst that people have for places of natural interest.



lesser  
crystal-plant

Alex Casina

Press releases were issued to announce the opening and closing of the reserves. Moreover, a PBS television documentary on ecotourism was shot entirely at Is-Simar, while The Times gave Ghadira full centre-spread coverage in November.

A note of thanks goes to the Malta Tourism Authority who sponsored six traffic signposts indicating the way to the nature reserves. Such things help us in our cause to teach people nature appreciation through the reserves.

**Mark Gauci** is BirdLife Malta's nature reserves supervisor.



Victor Filizos



# Maquis

Edwin Lanfranco

**M**aquis (makkja in Maltese) is a Provençal term used for the Mediterranean shrublands - other terms include matorral and chaparral. Mediterranean maquis is characterised by small evergreen sclerophyll trees and large shrubs, generally between 1-5m in height. They typically have stiff thick-skinned leaves, an adaptation to retard water loss during the long dry season.

In Malta, maquis occurs in many areas, particularly along dry valley floors, among boulder scree and on reclaimed agricultural land. Practically all our maquis (like most in the Mediterranean area) is secondary maquis because it is often dominated by trees and shrubs which are not true natives but which were imported in antiquity and have since become fully naturalised, i.e. they now grow wild. Such plants are called archaeophytes.

In the Maltese maquis, the most characteristic tree is the **carob**, originally a native of the eastern Mediterranean but introduced for its edible pods. In Malta this tree is dioecious (male and female flowers growing on separate trees). Flowers lack petals and sepals, and the stamens and ovaries grow in large bunches directly out of the older branches.

The **olive** is not very common but is on the increase. Both the cultivated type and the wild type (subspecies *oleaster*) occur; the former introduced, the latter possibly a true native. The wild

olive usually has small leaves and branches ending in a strong spiny tip. A true native is the **lentisk** which in Malta usually grows as a shrub about 1m high, (sometimes up to 4m). Lentisk also has male and female flowers on separate shrubs, and produces bright red berries. It is one of the first to colonise newly-abandoned land, starting the process towards becoming maquis. The related **terebinth** is very rare. It looks like lentisk but is generally larger with hard pointed berries; it is the source of commercial turpentine.

The **Mediterranean buckthorn** is a large shrub with very variable shiny leaves. It is relatively uncommon, but on the increase. It is quite common at Buskett, but has now spread out and large populations can be seen e.g. at Wied Qannotta. It is probably not a true native, but is typical of Mediterranean maquis, so its spread should be no cause for alarm. The related **olive-leaved buckthorn** is a true native and is much more frequent, though declining; it is usually a low, very spiny shrub which, in dwarfed form, also grows on garigue. The **bay laurel** is another true native, and even its fossilised leaves have been found. While frequent in cultivation, it is no so common in the wild, but good populations exist at Buskett and at Wied

Qirda. It also grows along water courses, and in parts of the Mediterranean forms entire woods. The **myrtle** is a large shrub with lemon-scented leaves and white flowers. It is quite rare but I believe it is slowly on the increase. The best populations are at Ghajn il-Kbira, Ġnien Ingraw and Wied Gerżuma. The **mock privet** is extremely rare, with one specimen at Buskett and another at San Martin! This tree is rather similar to the related olive, but may resemble Mediterranean buckthorn; it is an extremely variable species. **Rosemary** is well known as a culinary herb; it is a medium-sized shrub with crowded, hard, narrow leaves and is rather uncommon though it seems to be increasing.

All the species mentioned so far are evergreens, but maquis can also include deciduous species. One of the most widespread and frequent is the **hawthorn** which produces masses of scented white flowers, followed by large orange-red berries. The related and very similar **azarole**, on the other hand, is very much on the decrease. The **fig** is a native of the eastern Mediterranean but was introduced for its edible fruits, and now grows practically anywhere! The **almond**, likewise introduced for its fruit, is equally part of the Maltese landscape. The **bean trefoil** is a rare,

highly poisonous shrub which flowers in early winter. The **Spanish broom**, so common along much of the Mediterranean coasts, is very rare in Malta, and declining - it is a dense twiggy shrub with reduced leaves which, in May, becomes covered in masses of bright yellow flowers.

Maquis may also include a palm and a few conifers. The **dwarf palm** is very widespread in the warmer coastal regions of the western Mediterranean, but in Malta it has been driven to virtual extinction - as far as I know there is only one tree left in the wild! The **sandarac** is a rare conifer with a very restricted geographical distribution, mostly in western North Africa. In Malta the main population is near Mellieħa, with scattered trees elsewhere, e.g. Maqluba and Wied il-Għasel.

Apart from trees and shrubs, maquis generally also has a rich undergrowth of lianas (woody climbers) and other creeping and climbing species, as well as large herbs. **Ivy** is on the increase, while the invasive **bramble** often takes advantage of disturbed ground to form impenetrable thickets, as does **spiny asparagus** with its mass of spines, another valuable pioneer of abandoned land. Other climbers and creepers include the large and spiny **smilax**, with bunches of bright red berries; **evergreen traveller's joy** with whitish flowers in early winter; **madder** with its minute flowers; and the rare **evergreen rose**.

Herbs include the magnificent **bear's breeches** with its huge leaves (the inspiration for Corinthian column capitals) and large flower spike which appears in April and May; **Italian lords and ladies** with large lance-shaped leaves and peculiar inflorescence; and **alexanders**, a large edible herb which is probably an early introduction.

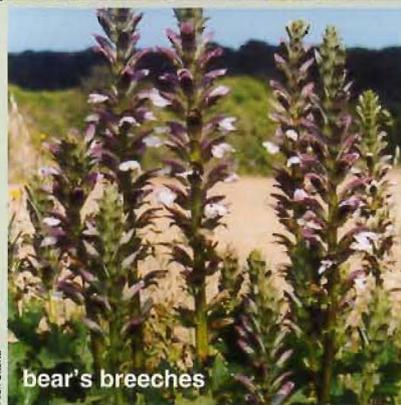
Maquis also supports a great array of animals and fungi which depend on the plants for food and sheltered. Many of the plants themselves depend very



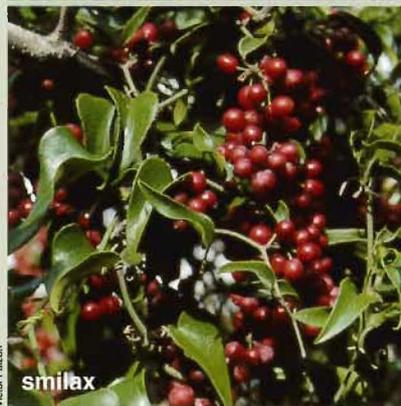
Mediterranean buckthorn



carob



bear's breeches



smilax

much on birds for seed-dispersal, and on fungi associated with their roots which facilitate the movement of nutrients from the soil to the plants.

Maltese maquis is a relatively healthy community, in fact the only natural vegetation type actually on the increase in the Islands. Some maquis has spread dramatically over the past 30 years due to reduction in grazing and agriculture. Nevertheless certain maquis species are still rare. Far in the past, Maltese maquis was probably richer than it has become now. There are several "missing" species in our maquis, species which occur in neighbouring lands but which are inexplicably absent here. I suspect that these used to occur, but became extinct before being formally recorded. There is still no proof for this, but studies of pollens may shed some light. One such species is the **strawberry tree**, a large shrub with edible red berries. It is absent in Malta, but until recently grew on neighbouring Lampedusa which is even more arid than Malta. Another is the **Phoenician juniper**, a conifer with berry-like cones; it is occasionally cultivated as an ornamental and has become naturalised at Ballut tal-Wardija. The **kermes oak** is another "missing" species, a large shrub, sometimes a tree, with spiny, shiny, holly-like leaves.

Since Malta lacks proper woodland, maquis is our most important tree and shrub community, and should be afforded appropriate protection. Although it is spreading, yet much of it is also under threat, particularly from building encroachment, but also by accidental or deliberate introduction of aggressive alien species which may actively compete with the native and arachaeophytic vegetation.

**Edwin Lanfranco** is a lecturer at the Biology Department of the Malta University, and the country's leading botanist.

Scientific and Maltese names of flora mentioned in the text

- Carob - *Ceratonia siliqua*, Siġra tal-harrub
- Olive - *Olea europaea*, Siġra taż-zebbuġ
- Lentisk - *Pistacia lentiscus*, Deru
- Terebinth - *Pistacia terebinthus*, Skornabekk
- Mediterranean buckthorn - *Rhamnus alaternus*, Alaternu
- Olive-leaved buckthorn - *Rhamnus oleoides*, Żiju
- Bay laurel - *Laurus nobilis*, Siġra tar-rand
- Myrtle - *Myrtus communis*, Rihan
- Mock privet - *Phillyrea latifolia*, Ollvastru
- Rosemary - *Rosmarinus officinalis*, Klin
- Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*, Żaġhrun

- Azarole - *Crataegus azarolus*, Anżalor
- Fig - *Ficus carica*, Siġra tat-tin
- Almond - *Prunus dulcis*, Siġra tal-lewż
- Bean trefoil - *Anagyris foetida*, Fulel il-klieb
- Spanish broom - *Spartium junceum*, Ġenista
- Dwarf palm - *Chamaerops humilis*, Ġummar
- Sandarac - *Tetraclinis articulata*, Ġhargħar
- Ivy - *Hedera helix*, Liedna
- Bramble - *Rubus ulmifolius*, Ġholliq
- Smilax - *Smilax aspera*, Paizana
- Evergreen traveller's joy - *Clematis cirrhosa*, Kiesha

- Madder - *Rubia peregrina*, Robbja
- Spiny asparagus - *Asparagus aphyllus*, Sprag xewwiewki
- Evergreen rose - *Rosa sempervirens*, Ġirlanda tal-wied
- Bear's breeches - *Acanthus mollis*, Hannewija
- Italian lords and ladies - *Arum italicum*, Ġarni
- Alexanders - *Smyrniolum olusatrum*, Karfus il-hmir
- Strawberry tree - *Arbutus unedo*, Imbrijaġla
- Phoenician juniper - *Juniperus phoenicea*, Ġniperu
- Kermes oak - *Quercus coccifera*, Ballut xewwiewki

# Getting Aligned

## with the Birds Directive

Joseph Mangion

On 2 April 1979, the Council of the European Economic Community passed a Directive which was to bring about significant effects on the conservation of wild birds in Europe. Council Directive 79/409/EEC, now commonly referred to as the Wild Birds Directive, has brought about important legislative change in EU member states to the benefit of birds. But is everyone in line?

**A**lthough widely believed to be an anti-hunting tool, the Birds Directive is in reality a measure for the protection of birds, irrespective of the cause. While it is unavoidable that the Directive affects hunting practices in member states, it nonetheless also puts great emphasis on habitat protection.

There are some very important bird conservation thresholds set by the Birds Directive. The most important is that those species mentioned in Annex I of the Directive shall be subject to special conservation measures concerning their habitat in order to ensure their survival and reproduction. The Directive further requires that similar measures be taken in respect of regularly occurring migratory species not listed in Annex I as regards their breeding, moulting and wintering areas and staging posts. Special Protected Areas (SPAs) are to be designated by every member state to ensure the conservation of birds within the territory. While allowing hunting, the Directive specifically requires that hunting be forbidden during the period of reproduction or during the birds' return to their breeding grounds.

EU member states were bound to transpose and implement the Directive into national legislation by 1981 or by the date of accession for the ones that joined in or after 1981. Yet even today some countries still defy it and allow unacceptable hunting practices. Most of these cases involve breaches relating to hunting seasons, particularly hunting during the breeding/return migration season. Other problems relate to the misuse by some member states of the articles of the Directive (esp Article 9) under which derogations can be made. Derogations are formal exceptions that are granted if circumstances satisfy

several conditions. In this respect the Directive is very clear about applying derogations, accepting them in the absence of other satisfactory solution, subjecting them to "strictly supervised conditions" and for "small numbers".

As recently as 15 April 2003, in one of the Commission press releases, notice was given that infringement proceedings against Ireland, France, Spain and Greece are being started for failure by these countries to provide information about possible breaches of EU legislation.

### españa

One of the complaints relates to the Spanish province of Orense, where it is claimed that the hunting season for quail does not comply with the requirements of the Birds Directive. On Fuerteventura (Canary Islands) it is claimed that EU nature conservation requirements were not respected with regard to a number of projects within an SPA. Spain was also warned in relation to misuse of Article 9 of the Directive, and particularly with reference to hunting of birds in their breeding periods.

### suomi

Finland has been in the limelight since 1997 for allowing hunting of waterfowl in spring even as late as April, with the result that the closed season is too short to cover the return migration and the breeding season of the species concerned. According to the Commission, hunting of velvet scoter and tufted duck on the Åland Islands, and hunting of eider, goldeneye and goosander on the mainland were excessive. After giving it a Reasoned Opinion, the Commission brought an action before the European Court of Justice against Finland. By August 2002



Finland had taken steps to further restrict its hunting season, but it still did not satisfy the condition restricting the activity to small numbers of birds.

## france

Similarly with France - after 17 years that the Directive had been in force, and 10 years after a ruling on the inadequate transposition, France almost found itself for the second time in court over the transposition of the Directive. As this was the second case for the same issue, the Commission had also proposed a daily fine of EUR105,000 (about Lm 45,000 at the time). The French government soon informed the Commission that it had legislated the necessary regulations to give adequate protection to another 71 species (including ortolan bunting). Following this, the fine was reduced to EUR26,375 (Lm11,500) per day, until at last France afforded the necessary legislative protection to all the wild bird species concerned, thus ending the infringement. Since then, France has been playing hide and seek with the Directive and further warnings can be expected in the near future.

## eire

Ireland has had its share too, with a Reasoned Opinion being notified earlier this year for allowing hunting of woodpigeon during the breeding seasons. The Directive allows shooting of this species outside the hunting season as a pest-control measure, but derogation is necessary and Ireland has not notified any to the Commission. Ireland is also under scrutiny in respect of a marina development and deterioration of water quality in Lough Ree that have had a cumulative adverse effect on a natural habitat in breach of the Habitats Directive.

## österreich

Austria also came under the hammer in October 2002 for allowing the killing of birds of prey in Lower Austria. In this state, common buzzard, rough-legged buzzard, marsh harrier and goshawk are being shot with the excuse that they kill smaller birds,

pheasant and grey partridge. Yet the number of raptors being shot is far too high and does not respect the strict conditions imposed by the Directive. In addition, the Commission has questioned the strength of the argument, since buzzards do not normally prey on small game.

## hellas



Victor Fataon

Greece has been brought to court as well. In January 2001, the Commission acted against Greece because the hunting legislation infringed the obligation to protect migratory wild birds during their return to the breeding grounds. Hunting was being

allowed until 28 February. In December 2002 Greece was warned a second time, this time for designating an insufficient number of SPAs under the Wild Birds Directive as a contribution to the EU's Natura 2000 network. In Crete, an alarming increase in mortality rate of Eleonora's falcon, attributed to overuse of pesticides, has raised questions on the specific measures that have been taken to protect the species and to comply with EU nature conservation legislation.

## italia

The Commission also cautioned Italy in March 2002 when it did not amend its legislation concerning wild birds following a decision of the European Court of Justice the previous year. On 17 May 2001 the Court found against Italy because Italian legislation permits the capture and keeping in captivity of Italian sparrow, tree sparrow and common starling. Under the terms of the Wild Birds Directive, none of these species can be hunted.

## deutschland

In December 2002 Germany too was in the sights of the Court, in relation to a plan to construct a windfarm on a site in Lower Saxony. The site is an 11,000ha site known as Krummhörn-Westermarsch, which has been identified as being important for the conservation of wild birds, including

avocet and bluethroat. Parts of the site have been designated as an SPA by Germany under the Directive. The Commission is concerned that the project, one of a number of windfarm projects in this area, will have a negative impact on important bird habitats, and that safeguards set down in the Birds and Habitats Directives have not been respected. Germany was also referred to Court of Justice in March 2002 because aspects of German federal and state hunting legislation contravene the Directive. Both federal and state regulations allow the hunting of certain species during periods of migration and reproduction, which is contrary to what the Directive says.

## no easy job

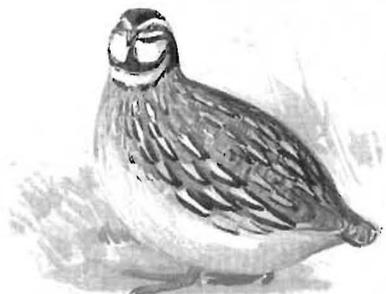
From the above it may seem that it is difficult to bring about effective bird protection. Yet the EU Commission is very strict on environmental issues, and with a growing list of cases is slowly but surely paving a secure future for European birds.

Malta will soon be another important link in the EU nature conservation plan. With a strategic location in the central Mediterranean, we are called to do our part in protecting European birds and contribute to enriching Europe's natural heritage. To date, Malta's amended hunting legislation is not fully in line with the Birds Directive. Will Malta start on the right footing on 1 May 2004, or will it be on the blacklist?

The full text and annexes of the Birds Directive 79/409/EEC can be downloaded from <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/legis.htm>

**Joseph Mangion** is President of BirdLife Malta and chairperson of the conservation committee.

Andrew Micallef



Quail is one of the two species still huntable in spring in Malta - a situation which defeats the spirit of the Birds Directive that allows birds free passage directly preceding and during the breeding season.



**SURPLUS &**<sup>TM</sup>  
**ADVENTURE**  
EQUIPMENT STORE



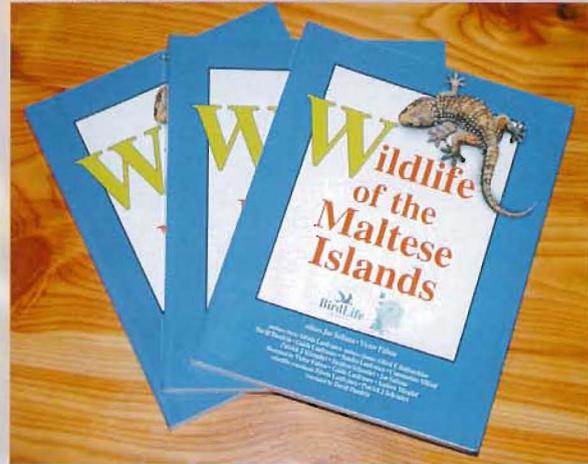
**Make the Right Choice.**

***MALTA'S LARGEST CAMPING & ADVENTURE STORE***

Main Street Mosta, Tel/Fax: 21 420454, Mob. 99460046  
surplusadventure@onvol.net, [www.surplusadventure.com](http://www.surplusadventure.com)

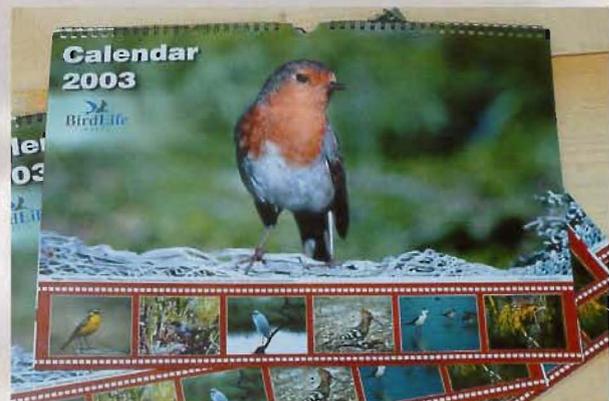
Out in 2002

## wildlife book



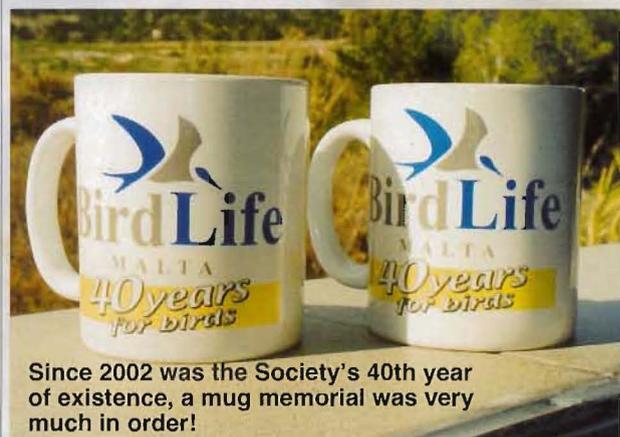
The book *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands* (1996) had been out of print for years. So BirdLife Malta obtained the publishers' permit to reprint this landmark book of natural history, described by the President of Malta as "a labour of love"! Sporting a new jacket, the book was launched in January 2002 to co-incide with the Society's 40th anniversary. *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands* is the English translation of the book *Flora u Fawna ta' Malta* (1995), also long out of print and now a collector's item!

## calendar 2003



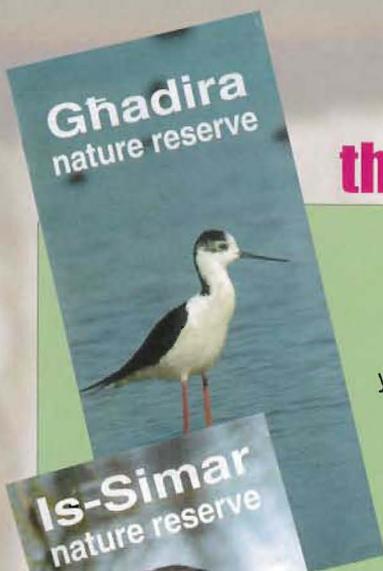
A large-format (A3) calendar for 2003 was produced for sale and distribution. It carried seven stunning pictures taken by the Society's top photographers.

## anniversary mug



Since 2002 was the Society's 40th year of existence, a mug memorial was very much in order!

## three leaflets



Two full-colour fold-out leaflets about Ghadira and Is-Simar were published early in the year, and were very well received by visitors to the nature reserves. The leaflets highlight the faunistic and floristic value of the two sites, with special reference to birds which visit, winter or breed at the reserves.

A new BirdLife Malta membership form was also produced.

This page only covers a selection of items produced in 2002. Other items not mentioned here include handouts, infosheets, newsletters, plaster bird statuettes and plaques etc.

## dinja wahda 3 report



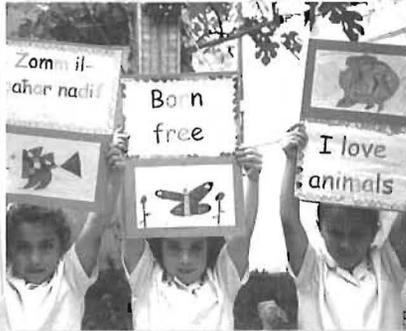
Dinja Wahda 3 came to an end in June 2002. Following the success of this educational event (see page 22), a 16-page report was printed and mailed to all primary schools in the country.



With the exception of the calendar, all items shown on this page were designed by Victor Falzon



# DINJA WAHDA 3



Another edition of Dinja Wahda (DW) has come and gone, but many of the effects which came with it have certainly remained! DW is BirdLife's big educational project, which we try to do every other year (funds permitting). DW3 was a success. Some figures should suffice...

- 62 - number of schools which took part in DW3
- 19,000 - number of children exposed to DW3
- 2375 - highest score (St Joseph of Sliema)
- 460 - number of kids who joined BirdLife
- 260 - number of oak saplings grown by kids
- 161 - number of Cory's shearwater adoptions

The awards were given in October at an event for which Charles Mizzi, Director General for Education, was present. He said that through Dinja Wahda, BirdLife is showing the way forward in environmental education. It seems that he meant it - Government has recently launched EcoSchools in all primary schools, a scheme which awards schools for environmental action. Rings a bell, doesn't it?!

BirdLife Malta is grateful to BirdLife International, SOF and Nos Oiseaux for sponsoring most of DW3.



## WE FLY TO WARMER PLACES

They go from one place to another during the day

Birds fly together for safety

When winter is coming they fly to warmer places

Malta it is warm so birds come to look for food

They fly stop to eat and rest and then they fly again

They get lost when it is cloudy

Some birds stay in the air without closing their wings

Birds fly by flapping their wings

The birds use the sun, moon and stars to find their way



**Honorary President**  
Joe Attard

**President**  
Joseph Mangion

**Secretary**  
Denis Cachia

**Treasurer**  
Norman Chetcuti

**Council**  
Chair: Desirée Falzon  
Secretary: Denis Cachia  
John J Borg

Alex Casha  
Norman Chetcuti  
Victor Falzon  
Raymond Galea  
Joseph Mangion  
Ian Mifsud  
Joe Sultana  
Justin Vassallo  
Antoine Vella

**Research Co-ordinating Committee**  
Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana  
Secretary: John J Borg  
Denis Cachia  
Raymond Galea  
Mark Gauci

**Kemmuna Working Group**  
Co-ordinator: Mark Gauci  
Ian Balzan  
Jean Paul Farrugia  
Manwel Mallia  
Joseph Mangion

**Conservation Committee**  
Chair: Joseph Mangion  
Secretary: Audrey Chetcuti  
Alex Casha  
Raymond Galea  
Justin Vassallo

**RaptorCamp Subcommittee**  
Chair: Justin Vassallo  
Saviour Spiteri  
Norman Chetcuti

**Education Committee**  
Chair: Michael Grima  
Secretary: Victor Fiott  
Jason Aloisio  
Anthony Cordina  
Victor Falzon  
Jean Paul Fiott  
Cecily Rizzo

**Falko Committee**  
Chair: Justin Vassallo  
Secretary: Joanna Ellul  
Stefan Azzopardi  
Matthew Borg Cardona  
André Callus  
Franco Farrugia  
Graziella Grech  
Anthony Sammut  
Saviour Spiteri  
Simon Sultana

**Finance Committee**  
Anita Aloisio  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Klabb Huttaf Committee**  
Chair: Jason Aloisio  
Secretary: Chris Schembri  
Audrey Chetcuti  
Norman Chetcuti  
Victor Falzon  
Mariangela Schembri Meli  
Justin Vassallo

**Nature Reserves Group**  
Supervisor: Mark Gauci  
Jason Aloisio  
Alex Casha  
Charles Coleiro  
Victor Falzon  
Charles Gauci

**Office Management**  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Volunteers**  
Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon

**Websites**  
Webmaster: Denis Cachia  
RaptorCamp: Justin Vassallo

**Publications Editors**  
Bird's Eye View: Victor Falzon  
BirdTalk: Victor Falzon  
Delegates Newsletter: Anthony Cordina  
Guides Newsletter: Mark Gauci  
Il-Huttafa: Victor Falzon  
Il-Merill: Mark Anthony Falzon  
Ringing Newsletter: Mark Gauci

**Staff**  
Marketing co-ordinator: Liz Curmi  
Administration: Victoria Caruana  
Field teachers: Jason Aloisio  
Victor Falzon

The list gives only the people who occupied a specific post in the running of the organisation, but if falls short of mentioning all the other volunteers, leaders, helpers, birdwatchers, ringers, guides, writers, delegates etc, without whose selfless commitment BirdLife's activity and effectiveness would be severely compromised.

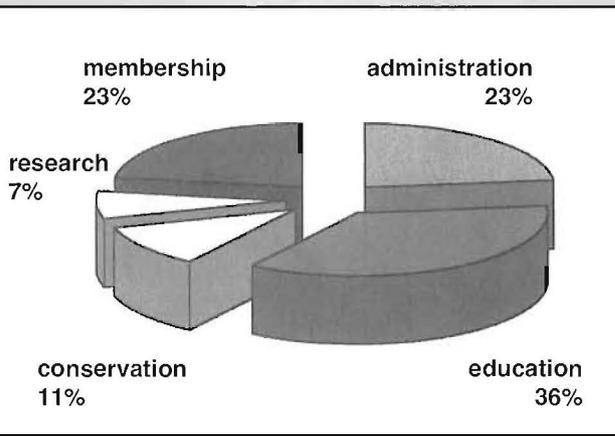


## SOF Focus

On 1 September 2002, Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening (SOF, BirdLife in Sweden) and the Skanes Ornithological Society (SKOF) organised their annual Honey Buzzard Day in Falsterbo. This event is also relevant to BirdLife Malta, because for the third time, funds generated at the fair have been donated to our Society for conservation projects. With the help of Swarovski, Biljett-torget, AviFauna and various other benefactors including renowned bird artists, funds were collected from this year's event for our Kemmuna Bird Observatory project. BirdLife President Joseph Mangion was interviewed on the current bird protection situation in Malta, and also put up a stand with BirdLife Malta publications. Thanks also to Owe & Eva Arnoldsson.

SOF have already helped finance Dinja Wahda 3, a roving school exhibition, and is currently sponsoring a children's publication. BirdLife Malta is indebted to SOF for their help and their unfailing belief in our shared cause.

## Who eats the pie...



The piechart gives a simplified account of how the Society allocated its funds in the period January-December 2002. A detailed financial account is available on request.

Photo by Norman Chetcuti



# Foresta2000

Another dream coming true

**BirdLife Malta conceived and spearheaded what is by far the biggest and most ambitious afforestation project currently under way in Malta. It will be our gift to nature for the third millennium.**

## Project Partners

