



# BirdTalk



NEWSLETTER OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

MAY '93

# 3200

Yes, this is the current membership of MOS. This figure was reached due to our participation at the Green Week which was held at the Trade Fair grounds last month. MOS has over the years grown to become the largest environment society in Malta. Since 1962 we have seen MOS grow from a dedicated group of people into what it is today.

Although the figure may seem small, pro-rata this amount of members is one of the largest per country in Europe.

This ever growing number of members is a clear message that many people would like to see a stop to the indiscriminate hunting and trapping that goes on in our Islands.

MOS has had as one of its main objectives an on going campaign for better bird protection. In the near future we are expecting further legislation that will bring us in line with EEC regulations.

MOS membership is divided into three sections, adults, over fourteens and under

fourteens. The latter two sections regularly hold activities, so that its members can appreciate birds and their precious environment.

MOS is not just an anti-hunting society, there are also conservation and education aspects to it. These include bird ringing, the monitoring of bird movements such as the Piccole Isole Project which takes place every year in Autumn on Comino. The Injured Bird Unit which looks after the many unfortunate visitors to our Islands, conservation work at the Ghadira and Is-Simar nature Reserves and the last but not least education section.

Our Education Officer regularly visits schools to create awareness among children as to the beauty of birds through conservation rather than elimination.

With your precious support we can bring about a better climate in which birds can visit our islands and continue on their migration unmolested. We in turn can appreciate the beauty of birds knowing we have done our bit to protect this fragile link of nature.



The Italian Member of Parliament Stefano Apruzzo recently protested against hunting in Malta in a most unusual way. With the means of a small private plane he released thousands of protest leaflets over the Grand Harbour area. On the under side of one of the wings was written No Caccia (*No Hunting*).

This is not the first time that this MP has shown his disapproval to hunting, in fact just before the World Cup qualifying game between Malta and Italy was about to be played in Palermo, Sicily, he protested in the football ground by putting up a banner saying "No to

hunting in Malta".

During his brief visit to Malta the Greens MP had separate meetings with the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Dr Stanley Zammit and MOS President Mr Joe Doublet and Director Mr Paul Portelli. During the meeting Dr Stanley Zammit stated that by the year's end the Berne Convention will be signed by the Maltese Government and that before August there will be further bird protection legislation among which will include the abolition of hunting at sea and the ban on the use of automatic shot-guns.

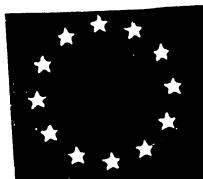
## ***Hunting Association's reaction . . .***

The Hunting Association held a press conference whereby they showed their disapproval of Dr Stanley Zammit's comments regarding the signing of the Berne Convention and the abolition of hunting at sea the ban of automatic shot-guns.

The Association has made several proposals which include the reduction of the closed season, although they want to be allowed to shoot at sparrows during this short closed season. Also that it would be legal to stuff birds as long as the bird was found dead. And we ask the six million dollar question. **How did the bird become dead ?**

They propose to retain hunting at sea and also the use of automatic shot-guns. They want to increase the hunted species to include grebes, many of the waders and cuckoos. They also want to see the reduction of the distance they can shoot from in built up areas to 100 metres and 30 metres from the roadside. Their definition of built up areas is where more than 100 people live.

# Interesting Question at EEC



The following is a written question No 244/92 that was put to the Commission of the European Communities by Mr Francesco Speroni (ARP) on 8 October 1992 that was carried in the Official Journal of the European Communities of 3 March 1993.

The subject is : Accession of Malta to the Community while requirements concerning hunting are not complied with.

The question is : In Malta, hunting, especially fowling is practised indiscriminately regardless of both domestic and international regulations on the subject. What relevance will be attached to this fact when considering Malta's application for membership of the Community ?

The answer was given by Mr Matutes on behalf of the Commission : The Commission is fully aware of the problem arising from practices of bird hunting in Malta, and this will be, in principle, reflected in its opinion on Malta's accession to the European Community.

Maltese competent authorities are already perfectly informed of the situation. Malta has enacted regulations to control bird hunting more strictly, and its authorities are currently preparing new amendments which would bring their legislation into closer conformity with EC provisions, and in particular with those of Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds.

## MLP to formulate hunting policy

Recently the MOS President Joe Doublet and Director Paul Portelli had a meeting with the Malta Labour Party (MLP) spokesman for the environment the Hon. Charles Buhagiar MP, to discuss the bird hunting and trapping problems.

The MLP had this meeting in order to formulate their policy on this issue. The Hon. Charles Buhagiar MP said that there was need for more enforcement of the already existing laws. He also said the opposition is willing to support the government to provide better bird protection.

The MLP later issued a press release regarding this meeting and its support for better controls.

## Another malicious act

The MOS Director has again been the target of a vandal act. This time somebody poured a staining liquid on his car. The roof, bonnet and sides of the car have been discoloured because of this cowardly act.

This is not the first time that his car was a vent of somebody's malice. The Director had all the tyres on the car slashed twice in one week last February.

# Bird-Watch

MOS involves itself in various activities involving bird awareness, conservation and appreciation. One such activity is bird-watching.

A group of members regularly go bird-watching in various sites all over the Maltese Islands. Each area has its speciality, for instance Il-Qammieh limits of Mellieha is popular for watching spring migrants, Il-Buskett is an ideal site for watching birds of prey in September and other migrants in Spring and Autumn. The nature reserves of Ghadira and Is-Simar are home to wintering sea birds and for waders for almost all the year. Autumn migrants can be seen along the coast of Is-Salina on their way down to Africa.

As from this month with the cooperation of this group we shall introduce you to the various birds that visit us and where you are most likely able to watch them.

Our first guest is the Hoopoe. Hoopoes are the forerunners of the spring migration, with the mass of their numbers passing through March



and the first week of April. The first Hoopoe observed this Spring was at Ghadira Nature Reserve on 5<sup>th</sup> March. In Autumn it repasses in smaller numbers mostly from mid-August to mid-September. The Hoopoe has also been observed in Gozo, Il-Qammieh and Ghajn Tuffieha.

This is one of the most strikingly-patterned birds. Its colour is a cinnamon-brown with banded black and white wings. On its head is a crest which is often raised and expanded when taking flight. Its characteristic call is 'oop oop'. Due to the bird-ringing system used by similar authorised ringers in other countries, we know from the ring on their feet that these birds have come from such places as Poland, Hungary and Germany.

