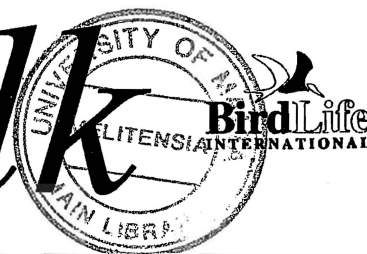




# BirdTalk



NEWSLETTER OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SEPT '93

## Birds of Prey

September and October is the time when the birds of prey come through our islands on their way south. Among the more common visitors one may see Marsh Harriers, Honey Buzzards, Hobbies, and Kestrels.

These birds all have common characteristics such as a hooked beak which they use to tear meat, strong feet with sharp toes to be able to catch their prey, their eyes are set forward on their head to be able to see better their prey. Every species has adapted to suit itself best for its particular habitat. For example the Honey Buzzard has large wings to be able to soar for a long time in search of its prey. The Peregrine has narrow pointed wings to be able to swoop down at great speed to catch its prey. The Sparrow Hawk has broad but short wings to be able to manoeuvre among trees.

The birds of prey are at the highest level of the food-chain helping to maintain a natural balance of rodents and other small animals.

Until a few years ago the Kestrel was one of the Maltese breeding birds that fed on mice thereby controlling their numbers.

When birds of prey travel they use only warm air currents that occur only overland. Therefore they choose the shortest route with least open sea crossing. That is why Malta is so important on their journey, and although they are protected by law, hunters abuse these laws to kill thousands of these beautiful birds every year.

## ROBIN

MARATHON '93

## POSTER

*As part of MOS's public awareness campaign, this year we shall be again organising a marathon walk in aid of Save the Robin Campaign. As part of this campaign we use a poster with a robin theme to distribute in schools and public places. We would like one of our members to design a poster to be used for this purpose.*

*The poster has to be on an A4 upright format and in an outline design so that school children can colour it.*

*If you have an artistic flair, use it for a worthy cause and help us to stop completely the catching of such a cute bird which incidentally returns to its exact same wintering home, whether it is your garden or nearby trees.*

*Please Contact Peter P. Camilleri for further information.*



Robin



## Bird-Watching Hide Appeal

We have had a very encouraging response to last month's appeal to raise funds to build the bird-watching hides at Is-Simar Reserve.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to this appeal. If you have not, you are still in time, it is never too late. Every donation will help to build these hides, which would give you the opportunity to watch birds in their natural environment.

If you still have the donation form, you can send that in, otherwise a note accompanying your donation (please do not send cash) marked The Hide Appeal would be appreciated. All donations will be acknowledged.

## BRIEFS .....

- Recently MOS had a meeting with the Young Socialist League to discuss various topics regarding the hunting situation in Malta. Among the subjects discussed was the possibility of the introduction of an exam of the issue of a hunting license. The Berne Convention and the role of environmentalists and political parties in the conservation of the environment were also discussed.
- On 19 August, the police found in Mosta over 100 carcasses of birds which included protected birds of prey, swifts, hoopoes, shearwaters and golden orioles in the residence of an unlicensed taxidermist. Also found in captivity were three marsh harriers and two protected species of snakes. The carcasses and live animals belonged to the father and his two sons who when prosecuted admitted to the charges and were fined a total of Lm110. The court also ordered the confiscation of the birds and the carcasses.

MOS welcomed the fact that the political parties have included the environment on their agenda but complained that these have not yet taken

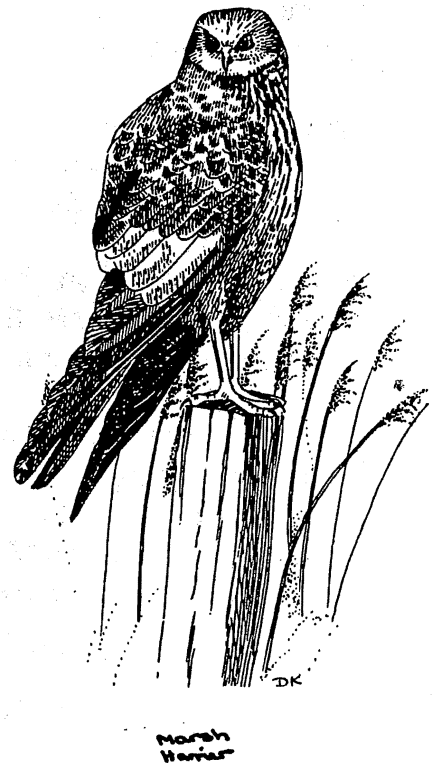
a clear stand on hunting and trapping.

## TAXIDERMISTS

Most hunters own a collection of stuffed birds. The size of the collection varies from a few tens to several hundreds. These collections have one thing in common — birds which were not allowed to carry out their cycle as part of the natural environment.

The birds are stuffed by an estimated 50 taxidermists, who perform their illegal work in secret. MOS often gives information about persons breaking bird protection laws to the Police.

We are now in the process of compiling data about Malta's taxidermist. If you are aware of any taxidermist please contact Paul Portelli on 230684. All information will be treated in strict confidence.



## lost forever

The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker is the latest bird that has succumbed to the pressure put on it by habitat destruction. This bird was once numerous in Cuba and the South-Eastern United States. This large impressive woodpecker has not been seen in the US since the early 1970's. Hope for the species centered on a small forested area in eastern Cuba where the bird was last sighted.

At the start of this year a team of ornithologists went to search for this bird but after an intensive search it was ascertained that this woodpecker was no longer present in the area.

So the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker has joined an ever increasing list of extinct fauna and flora. This bird which evolved over millions of years was eradicated in a few decades. You might think that it was a treat to mankind, but no, it just had no place in our ever increasing need of land development. How much longer will the list grow? What would future generations think of us? It is our responsibility to conserve the wildlife we have inherited. We have to make sure that the delicate balance of nature is maintained. Every time a species disappears, a vital link is lost forever.

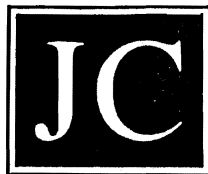


P. Hayman

*Painting of Ivory-billed Woodpecker.*

## Marathon Fliers

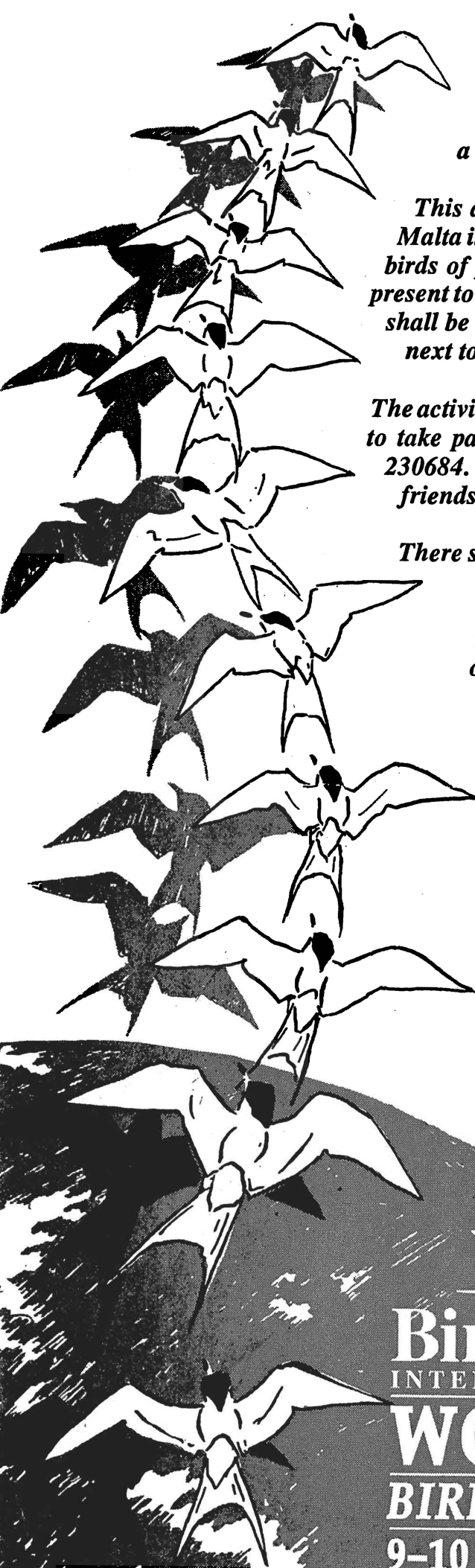
The Arctic tern flies the greatest distance of any bird, and covers the greatest distance over a lifetime. Runners in the Olympic Marathon have to compete 26 miles, but Arctic terns flying from Greenland to Australia cover no less than 25,000 km. The oldest Arctic tern was 26 and must have flown several million kilometres!



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O P T I C I A N

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Paul Camilleri, F.A.D.O. (Hons.)  
Managing Director



*As announced previously we shall be taking part in a World Bird Watch which is being coordinated by BirdLife International. This event aims to involve over a million birdwatchers.*

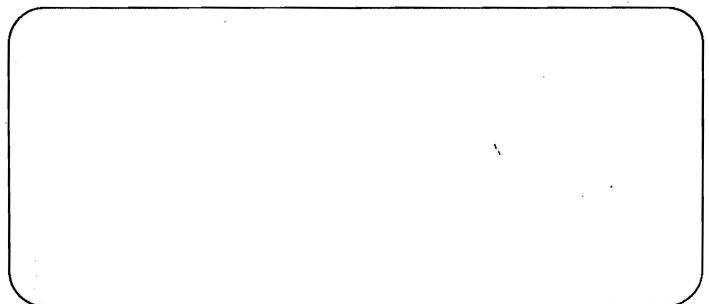
*This activity is being held on the 9th and 10th October. In Malta it is being held at the Buskett Gardens, a popular site for birds of prey on their journey South. MOS volunteers will be present to help members appreciate this interesting past-time. We shall be meeting in the first car park as you enter Buskett, just next to Buskett Roadhouse.*

*The activity shall run from 2.00pm until 6.00pm. If you would like to take part please contact Paul Portelli or Peter Camilleri on 230684. The activity is also open to non-members, so tell your friends to come and join us.*

*There shall also be an activity in Gozo. The bird-watching site chosen is Ta' Kuljat, Mr. Victor Borg shall be coordinating the activity so if you would like to know more about it please contact Mr. Victor Borg on 556720 or Mr. John Grech on 551180.*

*All the data collected from this activity will be forwarded to BirdLife International, who will compile a picture of the bird movements around Europe.*

*P.S. Don't forget to bring along with you a pair of binoculars and if you have one, a field guide.*



**BirdLife**  
INTERNATIONAL  
**WORLD**  
**BIRDWATCH**  
**9-10 OCT 1993**

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