



BirdTalk



NEWSLETTER OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

JULY/AUGUST '94

Autumn Migration of Birds of Prey

The raptor migratory season is about to start, while most of us are still cooling off in the sea. The beginning of August brings the first birds of prey soaring over our islands. Amongst the early migrants, the black kite's unmistakable forked tail is a sure sight but the heavy raptor passage will not occur before another few weeks. Around the third week of September large numbers of marsh harriers, honey buzzards and various falcon species will be heading South. Some raptors will spend the winter on the southern Mediterranean fringe but most will cross the Sahara desert in search of more suitable wintering quarters.

For several years MOS members have monitored this annual migration at various strategic points. Buskett in particular is an excellent locality for observing migrating raptors as these birds use the hot air currents generated in the area to soar up to higher altitudes. This allows them to conserve the much needed energy which will see them through to the North African coast. In the late afternoon raptors tend to congregate in the area to come down and roost in the trees of Buskett and surrounding areas.

If you intend to visit Buskett during the coming weeks, keep your eyes open for soaring birds of prey. The best vantage point would be a high position where the view is uninterrupted by trees or other structures. MOS members will be stationed on the open headland directly opposite Verdala Castle, across the valley. Why not take the opportunity to join in a spot of social raptor watching?

MOS Newsletter July/August '94

Local News

Raffle Tickets

MOS raffle tickets sent out a couple of months back are now steadily flowing in. The draw will take place at the end of September so please ensure that all tickets, including those unsold, are returned before the 15th of September. Funds raised through this activity are greatly required for conservation work.

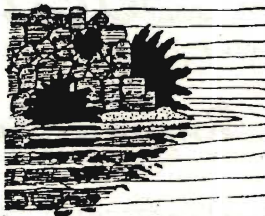
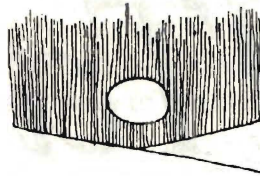
Injured Birds

Under the present bird protection law it is illegal for anybody to be in possession of protected wild birds, without appropriate permission. This naturally includes injured birds. Anybody finding such birds in the countryside should phone the MOS office from where action can be taken without delay. MOS will pass on the birds to authorized personnel who are equipped and trained in injured bird care.



Xemxija Hides

Work on three birdwatching hides will commence shortly within the Simar Nature Reserve. The design of these hides incorporates facilities for disabled people. Hopefully these structures, like the Ghadira hides, will soon prove their worth in drawing hundreds of people to the experience of nature working. Apart from construction work, the current hub of activity in the reserve is concentrating on looking after the 300 native trees planted out last winter. More tree planting work is scheduled for the coming months.



New Breeding Species

Two bird species have been reported to breed on our islands for the first time since several years. The kestrel is one such species. The last record of it breeding successfully was over 20 years back. The kestrel is a frequent migrant during both the spring and autumn migrations. It often tries to over-winter here, but is heavily persecuted.

The Starling has never been recorded to breed locally, but this year, one pair of starlings managed to build its nest and raise its young successfully in Floriana.

It is interesting to note that these new records coincide with the first attempts to seriously implement the bird protection laws. The need for a full scale ban on spring shooting is a prerequisite to ensure the protection of breeding species.

World Bird-Watch '94

For the second year running MOS will participate in the Global World Bird-Watch. This event is organised by BirdLife International, of which MOS is the national representative for Malta. The aim of the event is to create an awareness for the conservation of birds.

The first World Bird-Watch, which took place last October, brought together 57,000 people from all over Europe. In two days they observed over 5 million birds. MOS also participated in that event. MOS members managed to see a total of 4000 birds of 33 different species. A spectacular event occurred in one locality in Gozo where about 800 wagtails were seen coming down to roost. This year this event will also take place in the beginning of October, so watch out for further details in the next issue of the BirdTalk Newsletter.

Any spare pair of hands?

The effectiveness of an organisation such as MOS is very much dependent on work done by volunteers. This work may range from getting your hands soiled with maintenance on reserves to white collared odds and ends. So if you think you can spare a few hours per week or month please phone the MOS office, and make yourself known. You need not be an eminent ornithologist to help MOS, all you need is a measure of concern for nature!



FALKO

Bar-B-Que

On the 19th of August we are organising another Bar-B-Que at Ghajn Tuffieha. This is an ideal opportunity to meet new friends. All you have to do is bring along drinks, friends and meet us at 7.00pm near 'Apple's eye' (Bus no. 47 or 52). Food will be provided. Those who intend to sleep over should bring a sleeping bag.

If you wish to join the fun, phone Ruth Sultana on 440278 or Etienne Grech on 335578 for further details.

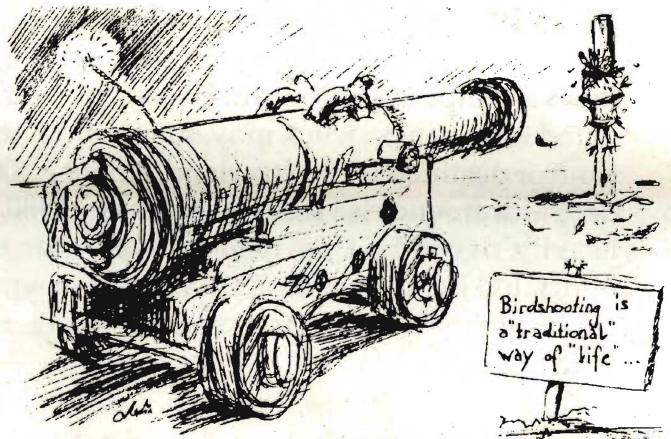
News from Round the Globe

Hunting Issues in BBC Wildlife Magazine

This year's May issue of the renowned BBC WILDLIFE Magazine gave good coverage to the improvement of laws regarding

MOS Youths

Cypriot and Maltese bird shooting. A full page article by Kenny Taylor heading 'Cyprus cleans the air. Malta gets tough, too' shows satisfaction that the ban on spring shooting of migrant birds in Cyprus has been reinstated. The announcement of a change in its policy on spring shooting was made by the Cypriot government late last March, following months of international criticism and soon after publication of an opinion poll, sponsored by BBC Wildlife. This showed that most Cypriots oppose the killing of spring migrants. This move reverses a decision made last year by the newly elected government of President



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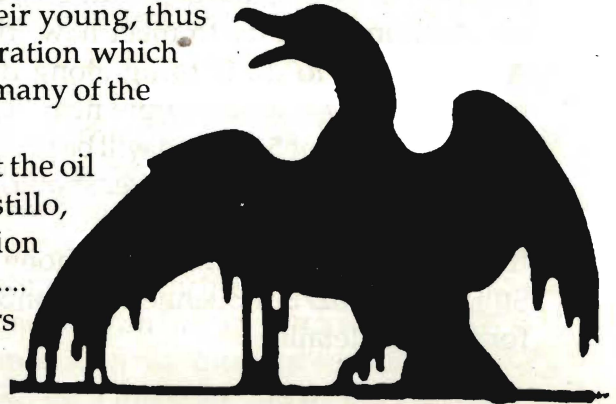
Glaucos Clerides and has been welcomed by ornithologists worldwide.

Praise was also given to enforcement and observance of new bird-protection laws which have also made a dramatic difference to birds in the Maltese Islands. The article mentions also the shooting of a group of mute swans early this year, the defacing of megalithic monuments with pro-hunting graffiti and the pollution with oil of the nature reserves.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Late last June, an oil slick inundated coasts on the South Atlantic island of Dassen (South Africa). The oil slick coincided with the crucial moment when thousands of birds particularly penguins are laying their eggs and feeding their young, thus jeopardizing their survival. A massive rescue operation which included the airforce was set into motion to save as many of the penguins as possible.

The precise cause of the oil spill is still unknown but the oil may well have leaked from the supertanker Castillo, which sank off the Cape coast in 1983. Remedial action was not taken then, and the incident was forgotten.... only to remind us of its deadly presence eleven years later.

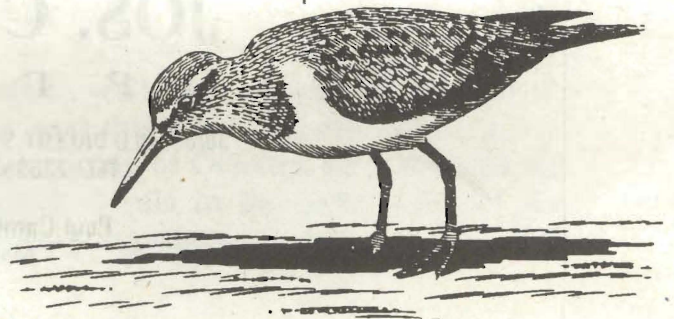


Road Block

In an attempt to protect the Swiss alps from pollution due to lorry movement, the Swiss voted for a ban on truck movement across the country. This does not affect trucks leaving from or destined for Switzerland. About 2,500 trucks take the country's Gothard Pass every day, a dramatic rise from 80 trucks in 1980. The European Union member countries are heavily dependent on road transport for the carriage of merchandise, and have been infuriated by this action. However conveying merchandise by rail is more friendly to the environment than road transport and other European countries should follow the Swiss example.



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Mr. Eric German,
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RAJTA

Iva sewwa rajtu! *l-sezzjoni* zghazagh tal-MOS, il-FALCO, qed jorganizzaw kamp iehor ghalikhom.

It-tema principali ta' dan il-kamp hija *l-passa ta' l-ghasafar* tal-priza, u n-natura fil-harifa fl-inhawi tal-Buskett u Had-Dingli.

Dan il-kamp se jir gewwa Villa Praigon Field Study Centre, Had-Dingli, bejn *is-16 u t-18 ta' Settembru 1994*. Huma mistiedna il-membri kollha tal-FALCO u l-hbieb taghhom li ghandhom bejn 14 u 25 sena. Il-prezz tal-kamp huwa ta' *lm5.00 biss*, u dawk kollha li jixtiequ jattendu huma mitluba jcemplu lil Etienne fuq 335578, jew lil Ruth fuq 440278 mhux aktar tard mill-31 ta' Awissu. Il-postijiet huma limitati u kontra qalbna se jkollna naccetaw biss lil dawk li japplikaw l-ewwel.

narawkom hemm!

