



BirdTalk



NEWSLETTER OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

September/October '94

New Hunting Regulations Debated

The issue, late last year, of new hunting regulations has afforded greater legal protection to birds than previously. These new regulations came into effect on the 1st of January 1994. The Act under which these regulations have been formulated allows for any objections made by individuals or groups, to be verified by an independent Authority. This authority may advise the Minister concerned on the possibility of amending the regulations. In view of this, both MOS (and other environmental organisations) as well as the hunters' association have voiced their objections to the new regulations.

MOS has insisted that the regulations are not comprehensive enough. Among others, the most important shortcoming was that birds are not being afforded protection during the spring migration. Spring is an important time of year for migratory birds, since they are travelling to their breeding grounds. The killing of birds at this stage is highly detrimental to the breeding success of any species.

The present law makes concessions for a limited killing of birds in April and May. However this spring has shown that large numbers of protected birds are inevitably shot down along with the turtle doves and quails which are legal quarry. Spring hunting has been banned from several European countries for some years now.

For their part, the hunters' association have said that the new law is unjustified as it

greatly restricts the activities of hunters.

The Authority of Review has held meetings with both conservationists and hunters/trappers. It is now up to the Authority to evaluate the objections and proposals of the various parties concerned and to make appropriate suggestions to the Ministry of Environment.

Emergency Conservation Orders

In a bid to halt the destruction of the environment, the Planning Authority has issued a number of emergency conservation orders. These legal orders come into effect within a few days of being drafted. They are intended to afford protection to any features of a site which have been threatened by human activity. Penalties of up to Lm 50 000 may be charged to individuals caught breaking such orders. To date emergency conservation orders have been issued for various sites. These include two localities around Ċirkewwa where slots of garrigue were being reclaimed for agricultural use, threatening various plant species as well as archaeological remains. The largest sand dune habitat in the Maltese Islands, that at Ir-Ramla l-Hamra in Gozo, is also covered by an emergency conservation order. The latest conservation order issued by the Authority includes the coastal area around Ghajn Tuffieha.



Buy Now and Help Nature

As September looms up, many of us get down to preparing for school. This year you could help conservation whilst stocking up your schoolbags with a visit to the MOS Nature Shop. Besides school sundries you may pick up a gift or two for a nature lover or simply come and browse through the selection of books, binoculars, greeting cards and the rest. Remember all profits go to the conservation of our natural environment! The Nature Shop at 65 Sta. Lucia str, Valletta, opens from 9.00am-12.00 noon and 5.00pm-7.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings between 9.00 and noon.

Raffle Draw

The MOS raffle draw will take place at the end of this month. Please ensure that any tickets left (sold or unsold) reach the MOS office by not later than the 23th September. You may return the tickets either by post or by handing them in personally at the MOS Nature Shop. The lottery winners will be duly informed and their names will appear in the next issue of Birdtalk.

World Bird Watch

MOS will be participating for the second year running in the World Bird Watch. This event will be held at **Buskett**. MOS officials will meet members under the shelter car park at **2.00pm on Sunday 2nd October**, for an afternoon of bird spotting. Keep this date free and come and join MOS for an afternoon of nature appreciation. Bookings aren't

necessary but be sure to be on time.

At this time of year Buskett is an important site for various migratory species. Although the autumn migration of birds of prey will be approaching its end, there will still be a good chance of observing various raptor species including kestrels, hobbies and sparrowhawks. Besides raptors, the first wintering robins start coming in, searching for insects among the trees. Their characteristic call will almost certainly join us along our walk through the gardens. Other bird species common for this time of year include yellow wagtails, song thrushes and wrynecks.



Hunting Season Opens Again

The hunting season has opened again on the 1st of September. Under the new regulations hunting is forbidden in the afternoon on public holidays and Sundays. Shooting from seacraft is only allowed in November and December. Comprehensively the hunting period is between 1st September and 31st January. Hunting activity is prohibited in various places including Buskett, parts of Girdgħ, Kennedy Grove and the Salina area. Infringements of bird protection laws may be reported to the nearest police station or to the MOS office (on tel: 230684) during office hours. Your vigilance is important to effective law enforcement!

*Prices off at the Nature Shop
Buy your copybooks and other stationery now
and save money*

YEE Annual General Meeting

The YEE (Youth and Environment Europe) is a federation embracing several environmental youth movements throughout Europe, including Falko. The yearly General Meeting (AGM) is hosted by one of the participating environmental organisations. This year's AGM was held in Bulgaria between the 9th and 13th August. Two Falko representatives, Patrick and Caldon, attended the four-day meeting and participated in a number of working sessions. These working sessions included topics such as the environmental situation in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, fundraising, financing, debts(!)... Numerous contacts with foreign environmental organisations were also established. The final day of the meeting was dedicated to voting for a new committee that would steer YEE for the coming twelve months. Hopefully in the near future a similar AGM of YEE will be held in Malta, hosted by Falko.

Birds of Prey Camp

As notified in the last issue of Birdtalk Newsletter, a camp will be held at Villa Psaison between the 16th and 18th September. This period normally coincides with the best part of the Autumn migration of birds of prey. A few places are still vacant. So send in your application (previous issue of Birdtalk) before it is too late!



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News from Around the Globe

Fishy Business

Conflict between fishermen from various European Union (EU) countries hit the international headlines early last August. Spanish fishermen have accused those in France, England and Ireland of violating EU regulations regarding the use of drift nets. Spaniards fishing for tuna in the Bay of Biscay in the North Atlantic, hold that fishermen from other EU countries are using drift nets longer than the permitted 2.5 km limit, in order to increase their catch. Drift nets are very destructive to marine wildlife as they are not selective in the species caught. Sea birds, turtles, dolphins and other marine mammals, are prone to entanglement in such nets, suffocating before the nets are drawn back on board fishing vessels. Selective methods of catching tuna, by bait and line do not cause unnecessary damage to other marine animals. With a little effort, you can join the conservationist bandwagon by looking for the "Dolphin Friendly" label on the next tuna can you buy.

Slender-Billed Curlew in Danger

The slender-billed curlew (Maltese: Gurlin Geddumu Rqiq) is in great danger of becoming extinct within the next 10-20 years. This species, which is a winter visitor to the Mediterranean from its breeding quarters in the Asian steppes, numbers a mere 50-200 birds. At the turn of this century, the Maltese naturalist Despott listed it as fairly common locally. Today it is considered a very rare and irregular spring and autumn migrant to the Maltese Islands. The slender-billed curlew may be saved from extinction if adequate action is taken within the next three to five years.



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