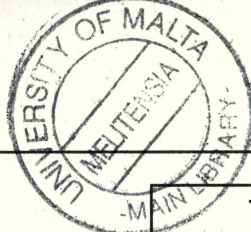


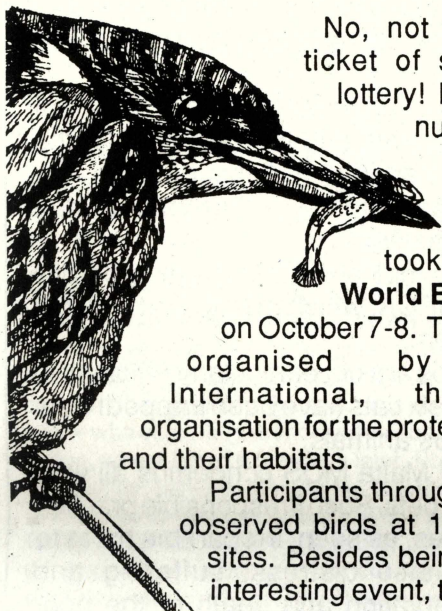
# BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA MOS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1995

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No, not the winning ticket of some super lottery! It is the total number of birds observed by over 30,000 people who took part in the **World Birdwatch 95**

on October 7-8. The event was organised by BirdLife International, the mother organisation for the protection of birds and their habitats.

Participants throughout Europe observed birds at 1661 different sites. Besides being in itself an interesting event, the Birdwatch also highlighted the need for active protection of migratory birds along the stopover sites of their autumn journey southwards.

In Malta alone **over 700 people** joined in the Birdwatch held at the nature reserves of Is-Simar and Għadira. For this activity BirdLife Malta volunteers helped members and public spot birds such as kingfishers, cranes and swallows.

The event was given evening television coverage

## One World

Last year BirdLife Malta MOS launched **Dinja Wahda**, an original and exciting environmental award scheme. The idea was to encourage environmental action among primary schoolchildren: it was an instant success. **A staggering 74 schools** took part and competed for gold, silver and bronze awards. This year Dinja Wahda will be even more ambitious! It will be extended to include not only secondary schools, but a special section will actually cater for the non-scholastic sector. Three new awards are therefore being launched, namely:

## Environmentalist of the Year Award



For Maltese nationals who show outstanding environmental initiative. Nominations may be submitted by non-government organisations (NGOs) or by five nominators.

## Green Pen Award



For Maltese nationals who have promoted the environmental cause with their writings. Individuals must be nominated by three persons.

## Green Local Council Award



For local councils who undertake outstanding environmental initiative. Local councils may nominate themselves.

Nomination forms are available on request from BirdLife Malta office. Anyone interested please call.

## Big Blue Rock Thrush!

The 28<sup>th</sup> issue of **Il-Merill**, the scientific journal of BirdLife Malta, is just out and upgraded to a larger A4 format. This bumper 78-page issue contains a systematic list of birds seen in the Maltese Islands during 1990-1992, a formidable exercise that combines the observations of 37 ornithologists and birdwatchers! This issue also includes bird-ringing reports for the years 1990-1993, as well as 24 original papers and short notes relating to the study of birds in the Maltese Islands and the Mediterranean region.



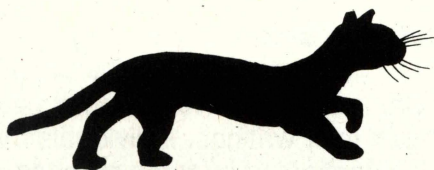
This publication costs Lm2, but for BirdLife Malta members it is available at request **at no charge**. If you are interested in the scientific work of BirdLife Malta, write to or call BirdLife Malta office. Although free of charge, donations will be very welcome. Thank you.



## Of Cats, Pets and Traps!

**A self-styled "animal rights group" calling itself Animal Rescue Malta (ARM - no connection with International Animal Rescue) decided a few weeks ago to promote itself by staging a mud-slinging campaign against BirdLife Malta MOS.**

**It accused the Society of being cruel to feral cats at Ghadira nature reserve. Newspapers, always on the prowl for scandal, decided this was one, and gave the issue prominence. Some readers and organisations wrote back, defending cats and condemning cruelty. BirdLife Malta MOS agrees with these indignant readers, and likewise condemns cruelty to animals. So where lies the controversy?**



**These facts should make things clearer:**

- Feral (domestic-turned-wild) animals are not compatible with wild animals. They cannot fit into the pattern of the local ecosystem. In order to survive, they frequently destroy the indigenous (local) wildlife: they feed on and often wipe out species unequipped to defend themselves against exotic (not local) intruders.
- Ghadira nature reserve harbours cats by the score. They are surviving by eating young birds, young rabbits, lizards, geckoes, snakes, chameleons, skinks, perhaps even young weasels. In short, cats are depleting the natural wildlife of the reserve, several species of which are Red Data listed, meaning they are threatened with extinction. This is not surprising: feral species have spelt extinction across entire continents, let alone a tiny 11 hectares of land!
- BirdLife Malta MOS cannot allow this. Somehow it must control the spread of feral animals in what must be the last foothold for rare species. This is not favouritism, this is not animal racism: this is a law of nature!
- There are various ways of controlling cats. They may be shot, poisoned or trapped and removed from the area. BirdLife Malta MOS respects and reverses all forms of life. Under no circumstance will it consider any but the last-mentioned method. So traps have had to be installed.
- There are various methods of trapping, most of which are cruel and inhuman. The traps at Ghadira are certified cruelty-free and are the kind used and recommended by the SPCA. The traps involve no poisoned baits,

leg-snares or other maiming contraptions. They are simply cages with food inside to lure the cat. A mechanism releases a door which shuts the cage.

- Contrary to what L Magrin of ARM said, the cages were installed in the shade, not in the sun - the one pictured in the papers was actually pulled out into the sunlight to be photographed.
- The cages are inspected daily as part of the warden's patrol, and they are shut for the night. The "starving endless days in the scorching heat etc" are figments of the uninformed imagination.
- All cats that are caught are promptly taken to the SPCA, which tries to find suitable homes for them.
- The traps are not particularly efficient: in 10 years only six cats have been trapped! Cats are suspicious animals.
- BirdLife Malta MOS condemns all who abandon their pets. Such irresponsible practice not only causes, as seen, irreparable harm to wildlife, but also distress, suffering and frequently starvation and death of the poor home-accustomed animals.

**The Society would like to reassure its members that it has very clear policies with regard this matter. It has declined from embarking on lengthy crusades in the papers, as it was clear from the start that the real aim behind the issue was no more than an ego-boosting exercise for the proponents of the group. L Magrin's peculiar brand of love for animals was made all too clear when he stated in his very first letter of accusal that he will henceforth not support BirdLife's anti-hunting stand!!**

**BirdLife Malta MOS has other, more pressing matters to attend to!**





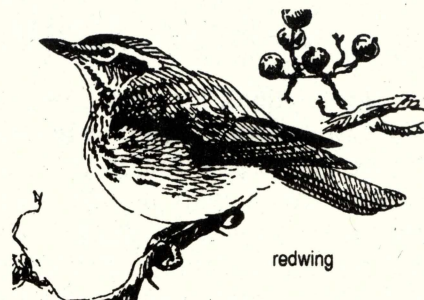
## Winterwatch

Once again Is-Simar nature reserve at Xemxija will be open to members and friends. At this time of year one expects birds like robins, starlings and thrushes in the groves, while the open water should produce birds like grebes, coots, moorhens and ducks. Don't miss an opportunity to come close to our winter birds.

Date: **13 December**

Time: **10 am**

Meeting point: **Main gate** (along Pwales road just round the corner from the seafront road)

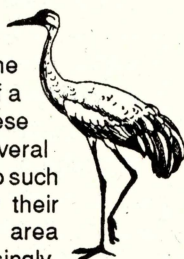


redwing

## .S.n.i.p.p.e.t.s.

### Shootout at convent!

Recently two crowned cranes escaped from their enclosure in San Anton Gardens. After flying around the gardens they alighted in the grounds of a nearby nuns' convent. The flight of these cranes attracted the attention of several passers-by, not least bird shooters. Two such cowboys, craving a new species for their collection, demanded access to the area where the cranes had landed. Not surprisingly, the nuns refused the request. Nonetheless the shooters forced an entrance from the back, and shot one of the cranes. The other bird escaped and was later retrieved by police who escorted the shocked bird back to its cage at San Anton, where it died a few days later. Police investigations, meanwhile, failed to identify the culprits. Crowned cranes are an exotic species to Malta. They are native to Africa, where they live on the savannah. A close relative, the common crane, is occasionally seen migrating over Malta, especially during March and November.



### Boxall boxed them all!

Carmel Boxall of Vittoriosa was fined Lm400 for smuggling into the country 368 linnets, 94 goldfinches and 17 chaffinches, all from Catania. The birds had been packed in exceedingly small containers, needless to say causing them extreme distress.

### Taxi! Taxi!

Police are also expected to arraign taxidermists in court following three separate swoops. The taxidermists were unlicensed and had several carcasses of protected birds in deep freeze awaiting stuffing. One of these taxidermists had over 400 such carcasses, most of these shot during the last migratory season. Other protected animals, such as weasels, were also retrieved.

## Dinner together

An occasion to meet friends and other members in festive atmosphere. A social evening is being organised for members of BirdLife Malta. This activity will centre around a dinner in a hall suitably decorated for the occasion. Friends are very welcome.

Date: **19 December**

Time: **8 pm.**

Place: **Mistra Village Clubhotel, Xemxija**

Price: **Lm6.50** (incl. VAT and 1/4 bottle of Vin d'Or wine)



### Menu

*Prawn cocktail with rosemary sauce*

*Local fish in white wine and parsley sauce*

or

*Sirloin steak served with  
green and black peppercorn sauce  
and vegetables in season*

*Roast potatoes sprinkled with herbs*

*Hot apple pie & fresh cream*

*(A vegetarian alternative is available)*



Please complete the application below and send with cheque (payable to BirdLife Malta) or PO by 7 December to BirdLife Malta PO Box 498 Valletta CMR 01.

## Yes I would like to attend the BirdLife Malta Christmas Dinner

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places.

I enclose a postal order/cheque to the order of

Lm

Meat

☐

Fish

☐

Vegetarian

☐

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Calls for Council

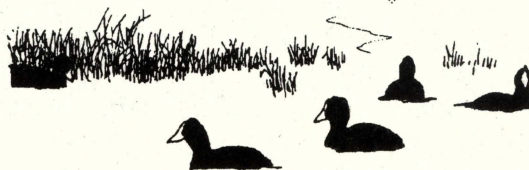
Nominations for next year's BirdLife Malta MOS Council are being now accepted. The term of office is one year and is open to any Maltese-speaking adult with a valid membership. A nomination should be seconded by five other adult members. Prospective candidates are to send their written nomination to the Electoral Commissioner, BirdLife Malta MOS, POBox498 Valletta CMR 01 by not later than 15 December 1995.

Members must understand that this post carries a *high degree of responsibility*, as Council is responsible for formulating the policy of the Society.

BirdLife Malta MOS is looking for a suitable person to occupy the post of Treasurer on the present Council. Interested members please contact BirdLife Malta Office. Thank you.

BirdLife Malta MOS is also looking for the services of a suitably qualified person to look after Society accounts. This post does not require the person to sit on Council. Interested members please contact BirdLife Malta Office. Thank you.

## Reserve Re-opens



Ghadira nature reserve is now open to members and the general public at weekends. The gate will be open from 9 am to 12.30pm, and from 2 pm to 4 pm. If you are keen on observing birds in a more relaxed atmosphere do try and visit in the mornings so as to avoid the afternoon crowds.

BirdLife Malta also takes booking from teachers who wish to orient their students to the different aspects of the nature reserve. In fact bookings are already almost full till the end of the scholastic year, by which time it is estimated that about 3450 schoolchildren will have visited the reserve.

Best  
wishes!

A2235  
Mr. Eric German,  
Assistant Librarian,  
Melitensia Special Collection,  
University of Malta Library,  
Msida.

