

BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA MOS NEWSLETTER

MAY/JUNE '95

New Council

During the Annual General Meeting, held last March, a new council was elected to serve BirdLife Malta. The following members now form the new Council: Mr John Grech (President), Dr Antoine Vella (Vice President), Mr John Borg (Secretary), Mr William Wait (Treasurer), Ms Desiree Falzon (Ass. Secretary), Mr Alex Casha, Mr Norman Chetcuti, Mr Victor Falzon, Mr Josef N Grech, Mr Robert Hewitt and Ms Ruth Sultana.

Whilst ushering in the new, a heartfelt thank you must be said to the three outgoing members. Mr Denis Cachia, Mr Joe Doublet and Mr Raymond Galea have worked for long years as council members. They have certainly contributed greatly to the present state of nature conservation and BirdLife Malta's image.



that the word 'development' is not anathema to environmental organisations. The concern rather lies in the lack of foresight and holistic planning. Social and environmental parameters that characterize certain projects are considered by developers as trivial compared to the economic benefits. The Gozo airstrip is a typical case.

The NGOs concluded that greater social benefits may be derived from improving existing sea/land transport services as opposed to air-links. It was also stated that the proposed development should not even reach the stage of an Environment Impact Assessment since its effects on the environment would be too obviously extensive to remedy.

A position paper has been prepared on the impact of such a project on the environment. The six NGOs expect to meet both local and foreign authorities to discuss this issue during the weeks following the press conference. Anybody wishing to view this report may contact the BirdLife Malta office (tel: 230684/ 250229).

White Elephant in Gozo

The Annual General Meeting passed a resolution regarding the proposed development of an airstrip in Gozo. The resolution states that BirdLife Malta is totally against such a development and demands that the authorities withdraw the project completely. This issue was again brought up in a press conference held late last March in which Birdlife Malta together with five other environmental organisations (NGOs) expressed their objections on the development of an airstrip in Gozo. During the press conference it was emphasised

Kampanja għall-Kampanja

BirdLife Malta has recently launched a campaign entitled **Kampanja għall-kampanja** to raise awareness towards the countryside. This campaign has been launched in response to the alarming rate at which the countryside is disappearing. What is left is being degraded and is losing



its aesthetic and ecological value.

The need for a healthy environment should not be underestimated. The countryside provides us with our air, food and water on which we depend. The countryside is necessary for recreation and is also essential for providing habitats for other living things including birds.

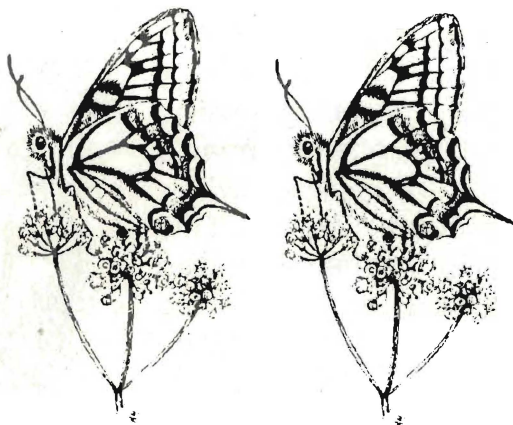
Along with **Dinja Wahda**, a campaign which encourages environmental action among primary schoolchildren, **Kampanja għall-Kampanja** is a contribution by BirdLife Malta to the European Nature Conservation Year. Several other activities are being held on a national and local level including a photographic competition and a seminar.

Road Verges

We frequently see government employees working along country roads and lanes removing wild plants from under rubble walls. Unfortunately this practice is destroying an interesting ecosystem that supports several species of flora and fauna.

Authorities in several European countries consider road verges an important habitat worthy of study and maintenance. Such is the case in the Netherlands, where nowadays road verges contain up to 50% of all Dutch plant species.

BirdLife Malta is insisting with government authorities that roadside vegetation in the countryside should be managed properly so that this ecological system is not damaged. The vegetation should be removed only if really necessary and under no circumstances should herbicides be used.



MLP Policy Paper

Political parties have a significant say in the protection of the environment. For some years political parties have introduced the concept of environment protection in their overall political strategy.

BirdLife Malta was asked to review the Labour policy paper on the environment and has, following this, prepared a dossier on the subject. Several aspects have been touched on in the policy paper including building development, traffic, air and water quality, the natural environment and hunting and trapping among others.

Whereas some aspects of the policy paper were highly commendable, it was disappointing to note the low priority given to bird protection, an issue that BirdLife Malta will surely bring out in its discussions with officials of the Labour party.



Caught red-handed

Mr David Briffa, public relations officer of the Hunters and Trappers' Association was caught red-handed trapping finches during the close season! The trapping devices were confiscated and the hunters' official will be taken to court.

It is interesting to note that in a recent television debate, Mr Briffa proclaimed that the new laws were so banal as to be impossible not to break!

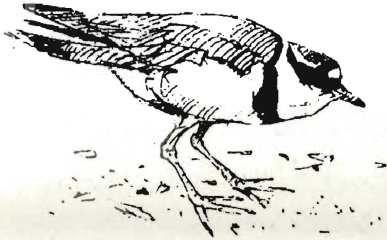
Several other hunters and trappers had their equipment confiscated over the past months following swift action by the police force and the environment inspectorate. Nonetheless BirdLife Malta receives phone calls daily reporting hunting infringements. This useful information will allow BirdLife Malta to monitor hot spots for illegal hunting and ensure efficient and effective action to be taken at the appropriate time.

Outing to Is-Simar

This is your opportunity to be one of the first members to visit Is-Simar Nature Reserve. The work at the reserve is progressing well, with the three birdwatching hides nearing completion and the several hundred tree saplings becoming established. This has only been possible through the financial support of BirdLife members and the dedicated work of several volunteers.

A team of birdwatchers will show the visitors around the reserve for a spot of nature observation. We may be lucky to see a number of interesting migratory birds which may have delayed their northward journey.

The activity is scheduled for Wednesday 7 June at 7.00pm. The group will meet at the



main gate located midway along the secondary road (Triq Pwales) corner with the car park on Xatt il-Pwales.

Long-awaited Book

Flora u Fawna ta' Malta is the title of a new popular publication by the Environment Protection Department.

The book, published this year to coincide with the European Nature Conservation Year, describes almost 1000 local species of plants and animals in 434 pages. Each species mentioned is also depicted in colour. Written by 9 experts in different fields of



biology, this publication will fill a large gap in the information available about Maltese wildlife.

The book costs Lm8.00 and can be bought from the BirdLife Malta Nature Shop at 65 Triq Sta Lucija, Valletta.

Teacher members

One of the top priorities of BirdLife Malta is the education of the young generation in line with the modern concepts of nature appreciation. Teachers have a crucial role to play in this field.

In view of this, the Education Unit within Birdlife Malta is offering its specialised services to this profession. **If you are an adult member and involved in teaching, you may avail yourself of concessions in membership rates and at the same time be serviced with material adequate for teaching.**

Write to the Education Officer at the BirdLife Malta address (PO Box 498 Valletta, CMR 01).

Trade in Wildlife

Authorities recently enacted a new regulation that will restrict the importation of various species of fauna and flora. Most of these species are CITES listed. CITES is the United Nations' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. It is the convention having the most signatory parties (128 countries so far), including Malta.

An incredible 50 species of animals and plants are lost *every day* due to the destructive activity of man. Along with habitat destruction and direct persecution, the illegal trade in wildlife is also taking its toll.

The implementation of CITES is essential for combating this illegal trade.



Bird of the Year

The Kingfisher (Maltese: Ghasfurta' San Martin) has been chosen Bird of the Year 1995.

A large head, a long bill, a short tail and even shorter legs; an almost excessively colourful plumage: brilliant blue head, iridescent blue-green back, orange underparts - the bird is unmistakable. Despite its extrovert colours, however, it is a rather shy bird, normally resting and feeding away from people. Its flight is swift and direct and close over the water surface. Even then it would be difficult to spot, were it not for the high pitched whistles which it usually utters in flight. However hard to locate, a sighting of this gem of a bird makes the search worthwhile.

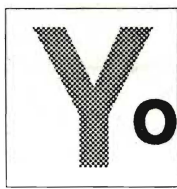
In Malta the Kingfisher is a fairly common autumn migrant from mid-July to mid-November, although a few occur irregularly up till March. It is seen mostly around the coast. It is also seen inland in valleys where fresh water pools are present, and keeps a low profile among the reeds. The kingfisher often graces the reedbeds at Għadira and Is-Simar.

Although a protected species, the kingfisher unfortunately shares the fate of other brightly coloured birds and has always suffered the worst of the showcase mentality.



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





our opinion counts!

Filling in the questionnaire below will help us evaluate better the benefits you expect as a BirdLife Malta member. It will only take a few minutes to complete, but it will go some way to providing a better service for our members. The completed questionnaire should be returned to BirdLife Malta MOS. No stamp is required if this sheet is folded and stapled with the Business reply service address clear shown on the cover sheet.

1. How did you join BirdLife Malta?

- Through a newspaper advert
- Through a friend/relative
- By visiting Għadira Nature Reserve
- By visiting the BirdLife Nature Shop
- Through Birds Eye View
- By visiting an BirdLife Malta stand during a fair
- Other (please specify) _____

2. What is your membership category?

- Youth
- Adult
- Couple
- Family
- Life
- Overseas

3. How long have you been a member?

- One year
- Two to four years
- Five to ten years
- Over ten years

4. Do you have a garden?

- Yes
- No

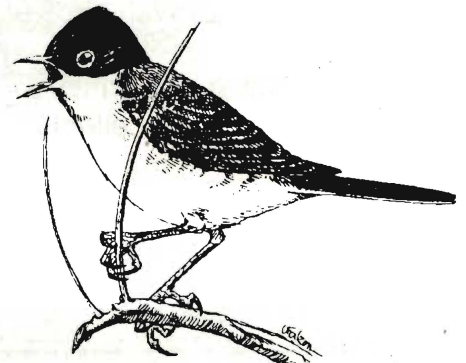
5. Do you ever watch birds?

- Never
- Rarely
- Often

6. Have you ever been to:

The Għadira Nature Reserve
The BirdLife Nature Shop

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |



(* Please tick the appropriate box)

7. Which of the following BirdLife publications do you read?

- BirdTalk
- Bird's Eye View
- Il-Merill

8. BirdTalk is sent to you bimonthly. Should it be sent:

- More often
- As at present
- Less often

9. What sort of information would you like to see included in BirdTalk?

- Local environmental news
- Local news on bird conservation
- Information on birds in general
- More news about the work of BirdLife
- International news concerning bird conservation

10. Bird's Eye View is sent to you annually. Should it be sent:

- More often
- As at present
- Less often

11. Would you like BirdLife to organise more activities for members?

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, what type?

- Visits to nature reserves
- Country walks
- Indoor meetings
- Others (specify) _____

13. Would you like BirdLife to work more on:

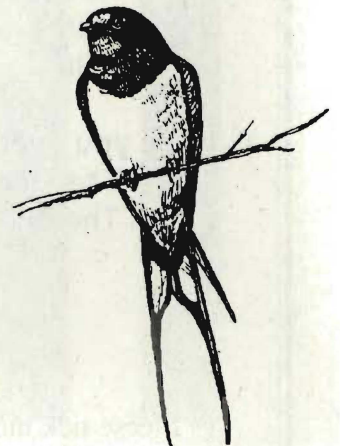
- Education
- Creating Nature Reserves
- To help ensure effective law enforcement

14. Do you think that BirdLife Malta should deal:

- Only with birds
- With birds and nature
- With birds and the environment

15. Do you think that BirdLife Malta performance is:

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor



16. Are you aware of the educational services offered by BirdLife Malta?

Yes No

17. What is your educational level?

- Secondary
- Sixth Form
- Technical
- University

18. Which of the following media do you regularly follow?

- Television
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Local magazines

19. What is your age?

(In case of couples or families please state age of person filling in the questionnaire). _____

20. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

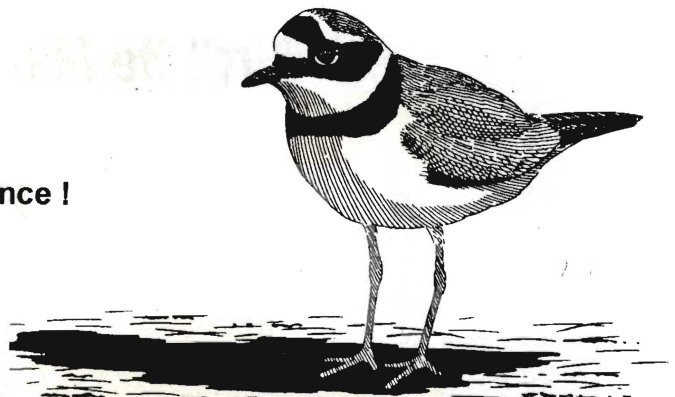
21. What is your profession?

- Student
- Unemployed
- Housewife
- Educational
- Clerical
- Managerial
- Health Care
- Tourism
- Other (please specify) _____

22. Are you employed:

- By Government
- With a private company
- Self-employed
- Other

**Thank you !
You have been of great assistance !**



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