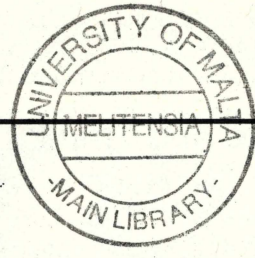


BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA NEWSLETTER

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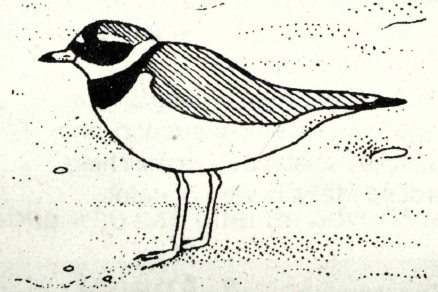
editorial board: Ian Mifsud (editor), Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon

SUCCESS STORIES

Despite the many dangers posed by human activities, hazards from natural elements and the infamous return-to-the-middle-ages suffered by the bird protection law, this year was another good year for some of our rarer breeding birds.

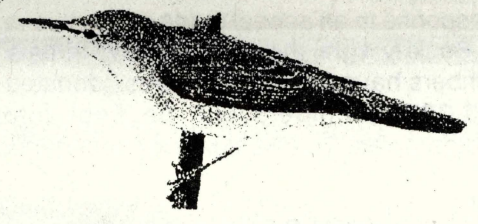
Second Year Running

A pair of **little ringed plovers** raised two chicks at Ghadira Nature Reserve. This is the second time that this species has been known to breed in Malta. The creation of suitable habitats as well as the safety of a nature reserve will hopefully make this plover one of our regular breeding birds.



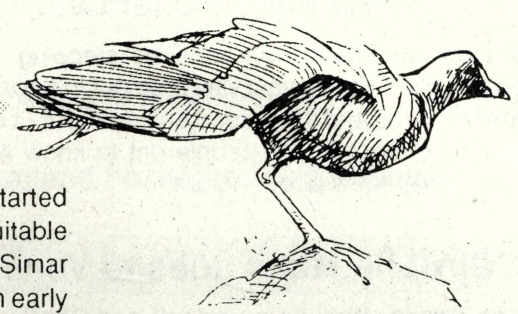
Gone with the wind

Two pairs of **reed warblers** built their nest at Is-Simar Nature Reserve. The reedbed developing in the reserve ensured sufficient abundance of reeds around which the birds could weave their nests. One nest, however, perished because strong winds rocked the reeds until the nest was literally torn apart. The other nest was firmly secured to the reeds and managed to resist the strong winds. The pair eventually raised a successful brood.



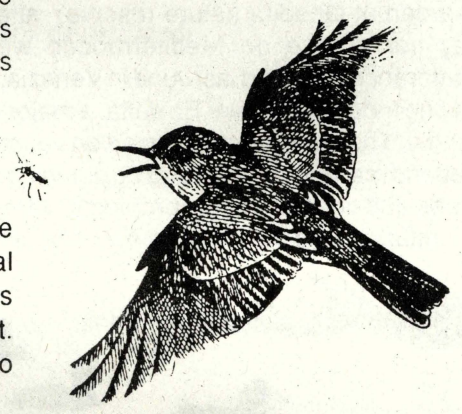
Breed breed breed

Although a very common bird in Europe, the **moorhen** has only started to establish itself as a local breeding species. Due to lack of suitable habitat, this bird is restricted to a couple of sites. Apparently, Is-Simar nature reserve is a moorhen's dream. The bird starts breeding in early spring and raises several broods throughout summer. A few pairs also breed in a fresh water pond in Gozo. Unfortunately recommendations made to the 1993 bird protection regulations listed the moorhen as game. Not a very sensible way to encourage a species to flourish!



Catching on

The **spotted flycatcher** is a woodland bird. It builds its nests in pine trees and usually lays 4-5 eggs. Three pairs managed to raise a total of thirteen chicks at Buskett. This small population of flycatchers appears to have established itself over the past few years at Buskett. The offspring return the following summer to build their nest close to the place where they originally hatched.



Goodbye and Thanks

Early in January 1989, **Paul Portelli** became the first director of BirdLife Malta (then MOS). Over the seven years that he occupied this important position, BirdLife Malta grew from a small organisation with a few hundred members into a society with over 3,000 members. Operating from BirdLife's Valletta office, Paul co-ordinated various campaigns to promote local bird protection. Paul has now moved on from BirdLife Malta. We take this opportunity to sincerely thank him and wish him the very best of luck for the future.

RSPB visit

Trevor Gunton and **Paul Easman** from the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) development department visited BirdLife Malta in July and had several discussions with Council, working groups, staff and volunteers. The RSPB has for several years been helping BirdLife Malta with technical support and financial assistance. For their help, BirdLife Malta is very grateful.



Appeal

In response to an appeal made earlier this year to help the Society fight the ever-growing threats to birds, members have (as we go to press) donated a total of **Lm3,337**. Members will be kept informed of developments. Thanks again for your generosity.

Now's your chance...

Election candidates will soon be stepping up their home-visits. In airing your views, do **put in a concerned word** for birds and the natural environment - it could be the only chance these people get to know what the public really feels about nature.

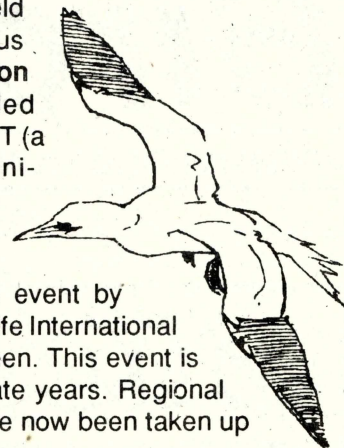
BirdLife Malta goes to Venezia

John Grech (BirdLife president) and **Charles Gauci** (warden at Ghadira nature reserve) attended a five-day conference on Mediterranean wetlands. The conference was held last June in Venezia. Venezia lies on one fringe of the river Po delta, a major wetland area in Italy. The conference focused on various aspects of wetland management, including planning of catchment areas and coastal zones, problems of toxic chemicals in wetlands, and the involvement of local communities.



World Birdwatch

The World Birdwatch, held last year, was a tremendous success. Almost **1.5 million birds** were recorded throughout the world. NTT (a Japanese telecommunications network) sponsored last year's World Birdwatch and pledged to support this event by donating US\$10 to BirdLife International for every bird species seen. This event is regularly held on alternate years. Regional birdwatching events have now been taken up by various continents.



This year a *European* Birdwatching event will be held at the end of September. The focus of this event will be bird migration and habitats. BirdLife Malta will participate in this event. More info in next issue of BirdTalk.

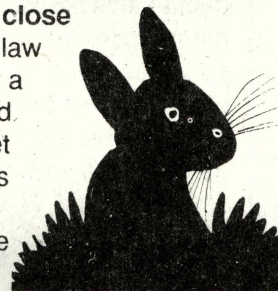
Swallows on air

Six members of **Klabb Huttaf** (BirdLife's young members' section) were recently interviewed during a children's programme on Super 1 TV. They talked about club activities, as they painted plaster bird models. During the interview, the channel screened video clippings of conservation work at Ghadira nature reserve. Good show, Huttaf!



Bunny Blues

The recommendations made to the bird protection regulations have riddled the law with gaping loopholes, of which the hunters are already happily availing themselves. One such gap is the rabbit issue. In the original regulations, both rabbit- and bird-hunting seasons opened concurrently on 1 September. With the new proposals, the rabbit season starts on 21 July, a full **42 days into the bird close season**. This of course renders law enforcement next to impossible: a shooter apprehended in the period 21 July-31 August will always get away with the excuse that he was out for rabbits. BirdLife has taken this issue to the press.



Renewals

When returning your renewal forms, please ensure that all details are filled in properly. Incomplete forms invariably involve extra paperwork at the office, and may result in problems with the mail.

Spare hands, please!

In the process of reorganising BirdLife's funds department, we have come up with some vacant spots, which we're appealing to you to help fill up! If you can offer some voluntary support in any of the following areas, please tick the relevant box/es, fill in your details and send them to:

BirdLife Malta
(Attn Norman Chetcuti)
POBox498
Valletta CMR 01

In the line of fire

The Vernon Coleman saga is not news anymore... not that it ever should have been. No doubt sensation-mongers the likes of Coleman revel in the sort of reaction that he triggered.

His main accusations were levelled at Maltese hunters - no novelty, considering the numerous letters of disgust that land on editors' desks, of which only a fraction actually make it to the columns.

BirdLife constantly warns that hunting in Malta puts us in a very bad light with foreigners who visit our shores. Many of them come from countries where hunting is highly restricted and seriously enforced. For many of these people, the killing of birds is a dangerous anachronism practised by the few who still have not learned to come to terms with their adrenalin flow.

No wonder people write, although they sometimes overdo it (as Coleman did).

Try as they might, the shooters will never sell the tale that Maltese individuals go abroad to give Malta a black image. Their ploy even failed at court when a few weeks ago the Shooters' Association was fined Lm600 for trying to pin the blame on BirdLife.

They have no-one to blame but themselves.



Yes!

I can help!

Jumble Sales

I can

- provide space (garage etc) for setting up of sale
- collect items for sale
- organise collecting
- sell items at the sale
- provide transport for volunteers/tables etc

Advertising

I know someone who can offer an advert for

- Il-Huttafa* (young members' magazine)
- BirdTalk* (adult members' newsletter)
- Earth* (youth members' magazine)

Street Collections

I can

- help with collecting money
- attend Society publicity stands

Lottery

I can help with

- lottery paperwork

Name _____

Address _____

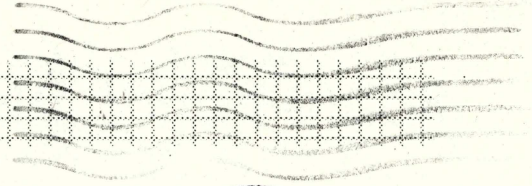
Post Code _____

Tel _____

Fax _____



WORLD ROUNDUP



The Ousted Emperor

The Imperial Woodpecker seems to have lost its empire. Appropriately named for its size, appearance and behaviour, it also has an aristocratic preference for large territories.

The bird's habitat is the mature pine forests of northern Mexico. These forests, once double the size of Denmark, have been reduced by over 99%. The major threat has been the logging activity of companies supplying pulp to the paper industry. Last year a team of ornithologists led an 11-month expedition to assess the numbers of this impressive species, but they did not even hear the bird, let alone see it. They have concluded that the species may have possibly ceased to exist.

On a more positive note, the expedition team reported the presence of other endemic birds such as Thick-billed Parrot and Eared Quetzal, both of which appear to hold stable populations.

The Return of the Natives

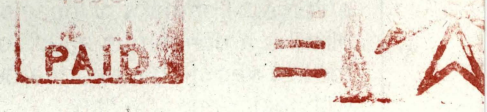
Wintering Black-faced Spoonbills have shown a 14% increase in the Asian states of Vietnam, Taiwan and Hong Kong. A co-ordinated spoonbill count held in February produced the exciting total of 456 birds. This gives hope for the survival of this endangered species.

New Species at Crossroads

A new bird species belonging to the antbird family has recently been discovered in Brazil. Incredibly, this new find came to light only 60 metres from a road connecting two busy summer coastal resorts.

Unfortunately, however, ornithologists fear that this bird is already sliding towards extinction. The Taboa swamp, where the bird lives, is steadily being encroached on by human activities.

(source World Birdwatch Magazine)



Barn Owl
Used to breed...

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

**BirdLife Malta is the Society for the protection of birds and the natural environment.
BirdLife Malta is the Malta Partner of BirdLife International.**