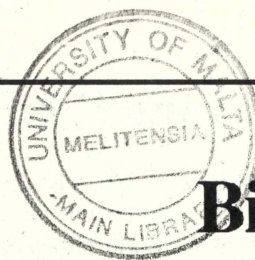


# BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1996 • 37

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

## Battle of the Reeds

Is-Simar is developing rapidly. Reeds and rushes have covered large sections of the water surface. Reedbeds are perfect breeding grounds for birds like moorhen and reed warbler, and a magnet to the more secretive species such as bittern.

Reeds also provide fringe benefits, like removing excess nutrients from the water.

However, left on its own, the reedbed will spread too much, clog all the open water areas of the reserve and revert to dry land in a short time! It would be a pity to lose these open freshwater pools, an interesting habitat and, in Malta, a rare one. BirdLife must constantly fight back the ever-spreading rhizomes, otherwise the reserve will become a swathe of reedbed with three birdwatching hides drowning in it!

BirdLife volunteers regularly wade in among the reeds to manually cut back the vigorous growth in order to expose patches of water. Open water is vital for birds like kingfishers, grebes, terns and ducks.

The edges of the pools also need to be regularly cleared of vegetation in order to provide ideal feeding areas for waders. BirdLife has appointed a team of volunteers to ensure that all the necessary work at the reserve is co-ordinated and carried out. Volunteers will work according to a rigorous management plan drawn up on expert advice. Work that involves heavy machinery will be done by contractors - a costly chore which, however, is cushioned by our members' generous donations.



# Help!

Voluntary work is always very welcome on reserves, and there's plenty for everyone at Is-Simar and Ghadira. You may wish to sweat it out in manual work (e.g. reed-cutting), or keep your hands clean (e.g. helping out with guiding visitors round the reserve) or even jingle coins (e.g. shop-assisting)! If you can spare a few hours at weekends, call BirdLife on 230684/250229.

## Back to the Killing



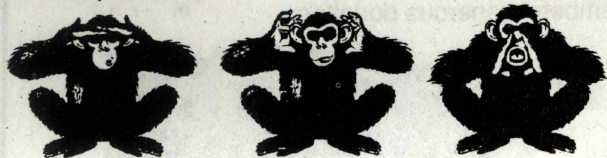
September 1 ushered in the hunting season. From then to January 31, hunting is legal. However, there are various things which remain illegal and which we all should know of. Here are **10 basic commandments**:

- 1 No hunting in or around built-up areas
- 2 No hunting within 50m of a road
- 3 No hunting in or around bird sanctuaries and reserves
- 4 No hunting at sea within 3km from the shore
- 5 No hunting from motor-driven vehicles
- 6 No hunting on Sunday afternoons
- 7 No hunting on public holiday afternoons
- 8 No hunting earlier than 2hrs before sunrise
- 9 No hunting later than 2hrs after sunset
- 10 No hunting at sea except in November and December

Added to them is a long list of birds which are fully protected all year round. These include grebes, shearwaters, storks, cranes, herons, gulls, birds of prey, hoopoes, swallows, swifts, nightjars, kingfishers, most waders and most perching birds. Other regulations deal with age, shot calibre and cartridge magazine size.

The law looks sufficient, but is neither respected by the hunters nor adequately enforced by the authorities. Recent changes have actually weakened it.

Members who see or hear hunters breaking the law are urged to report it at once to the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) on **240707**. Having done that, do also phone the details on our special 24hr answering machine on **237258**. In this way, BirdLife could later follow up your report with the police. But *do* phone ALE first - it is the quickest way to lodge your report. Remember, you our members are our best eyes and our sharpest ears.



**240707 and then 237258**  
**Keep them handy**

## CyBIRDspace!



Yes! BirdLife Malta too has its own homepage on the Net. So all you computer freaks hooked on the Internet can home in on us at

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest3211>

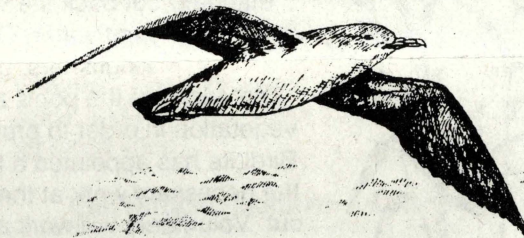
Thanks Dennis Falzon for building the page, and Konrad Pizzuto for managing it. Comments on the 'guestbook' are welcome.

## The Night Shifters

Most of us are accustomed to seeing birds during the day. However some birds are active at night as well. One of these is **Cory's shearwater** (Maltese: Ċiefa). Under cover of darkness, about 8000 pairs of this species breed in our cliffs, mainly along south-facing stretches like Hal Far and Ta' Ċenċ. They nest in fissures along the sheer cliff faces, and raise their single chick on squid and mackerel.

Due to their nocturnal habits and inaccessible nest sites, the Cory's shearwaters have so far survived the hunter's onslaught. However they face other threats, such as sea pollution, cliff-edge quarrying and other development (especially lights) along or close to the cliffs, and now possibly also rock-climbing.

Nature itself is demanding on these birds. In late September, the young birds are abandoned by their parents when still in the nest and unable to fly. Alone, the now fully-grown chicks must learn to exercise their wings, fly, swim and hunt for food. Improbable though it looks, most seem to make it, and soon depart for the long journey west towards the Atlantic, then south to the fish-rich waters of southern Africa. After four years at sea, they return to our cliffs, this time as adults and with breeding on their mind.



## To the rescue

At this time of the year, young Cory's shearwaters are inexperienced and vulnerable. Boaters often report sightings of floating young birds, apparently lost and tired. But unless they are visibly injured or covered in oil, such birds are best left alone - they will regain their strength and orientation and take flight. Some, however, are blown off course by strong winds, or fly towards lights from land, and may get grounded even in our streets. Unused to the surroundings, they frequently remain motionless and may fall victim to cats or cars. Such birds need help. If you do find such birds (or any other bird in similar circumstances), follow these 6 simple steps:

- 1 Approach the bird slowly with an open towel.
- 2 Gently cover the bird with the cloth and wrap lightly around.
- 3 Lift the bird bodily, that is, not by the wings.
- 4 Place the bird in a not-too-large box, and remove the cloth.
- 5 Cover with a lid, poke in a hole or two for air and keep the box in a dark and quiet area.
- 6 Call BirdLife (230684/250229) or International Animal Rescue - Malta (233321) for the bird to be collected.

Do not attempt to feed, clean or examine the bird - you may cause more harm. And at all times beware of beaks and claws - they are formidable weapons in large species like shearwaters, herons, gulls and birds of prey.

# Join the CLUB!



Among the diverse members of BirdLife are a strange breed who, rain or shine, brave the elements and roam coast and country to spot and log all feathered objects that come within range of their weather-beaten binoculars. They're birdwatchers!

This group can now share their experiences by joining our newest offspring: the **Birdwatchers' Club!** The club is planning various birding and social activities for its members, and to show that these are not idle promises, it has already published the first issue of its new quarterly magazine **WOODCHAT**. Club membership is open only to members of BirdLife. To cover printing costs, prospective members are being asked to contribute an annual subscription of **Lm1.50**.

Interested members please complete the form on the right and send it with the subscription (unused 5c stamps, cheque or PO payable to BirdLife Malta) to:  
**Birdwatchers Club,**  
 c/o BirdLife Malta, POBox498, Valletta CMR 01

R D W A T C H E R S C L U B I

**TERRIFIC!**

**COUNT ME IN!**

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

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

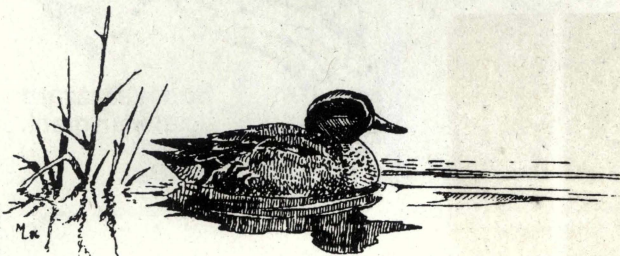
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

R D W A T C H E R S C L U B I

*Latch onto the birding grapevine, and get the most out of the bird world!*

## Opening 1



Following the summer period, **Ghadira nature reserve** will again be open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays, starting on October 19. Opening hours are 9am-12.30pm and 2pm-4pm.

BirdLife will also be taking bookings from schools who wish to organise visits for their students on schooldays.

## Opening 2

As from October, the **BirdLife premises** will be open to members on Friday evenings (7pm-9pm). This way, everyone will have the opportunity to get to know each other in suitable 'birder' atmosphere!

So if you're working on a local bird project, planning a nature-watching holiday abroad, or simply want to browse through birdwatching magazines with the steady buzz of bird-oriented conversation in the background, a call at BirdLife is the thing for you... You'll find BirdLife at **Door 111 Flat 7 Sta. Lucia Str. Valletta** (see map).

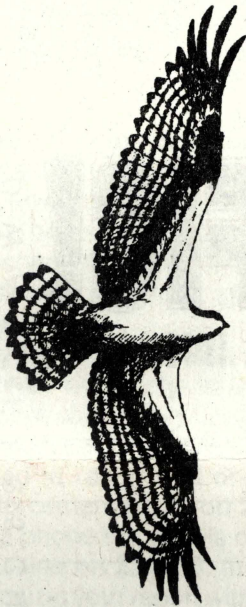
**See you there!**



## EURObirds

This year's **European Birdwatch** will be held over two days in September. For this year's event the nature reserves at Ghadira and Is-Simar will be open specifically for BirdLife members. This year we're also organising an activity at Ta' Ċenċ for the benefit of our Gozitan members.

Come along, bring your family (and all the binoculars and telescopes you can lay your hands on!) and help our birdwatchers spot as many species of birds as possible - remember, every species logged on this European Birdwatch stunt will mean US\$10 for BirdLife International (as promised by NTT network). So do show up and lend an eye! Here are the details.



Date: **Saturday 28 September**  
Place: **Is-Simar nature reserve**  
Meet: **Main reserve entrance**  
Time: **3.30pm**

Date: **Saturday 28 September**  
Place: **Ta' Ċenċ, Ghawdex**  
Meet: **Square in front of hotel**  
Time: **4pm**

Date: **Sunday 29 September**  
Place: **Ghadira nature reserve**  
Meet: **Main reserve entrance**  
Time: **8am-12noon**

## Stock 'em up!

Where can you

- stock up your children's schoolbag?
- browse through nature books?
- pick a gift for a nature lover?
- help the conservation movement?

**ALL AT THE SAME TIME!?**

A visit to the  
**BIRDLIFE NATURE SHOP**  
should do the trick!

Opening hrs: **Mon-Fri from 9am-12noon**  
Address: **65 Sta Lucia Street Valletta**

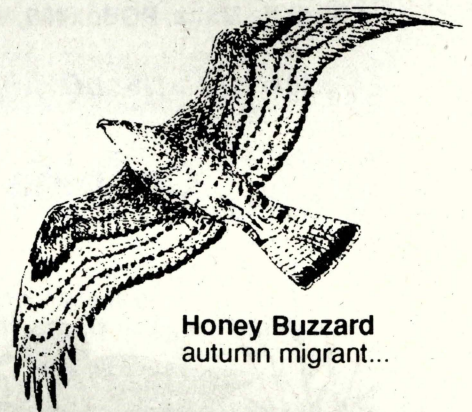
### PROPERTY FOR SALE

Valletta - Two adjacent flats, each with 5 rooms, bathroom and kitchen. Private roof. For sale separately or together (both flats can be easily converted into a single large premises).

### PROPERTY FOR RENT

Valletta - Small premises, consisting of 3 rooms, cellar and two WC. 100m from Republic Str. Ideal for small shop.

Call BirdLife Malta on 230684/250229.



Honey Buzzard  
autumn migrant...

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.**