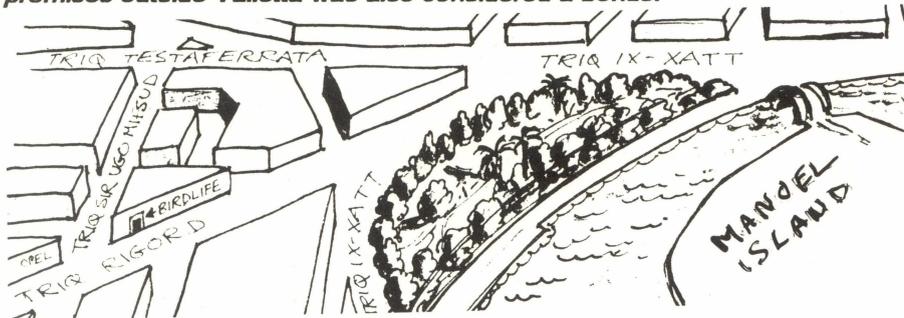


NEW QUARTERS FOR BIRDLIFE

Last September, BirdLife moved office from Valletta to Ta' Xbiex. This move was necessary since the old office needed a lot of maintenance work due to structural damage in the building. A more accessible premises outside Valletta was also considered a bonus.



The new premises include a well-stocked library for the use of our members as well as rooms where the various sub-committees of BirdLife can hold their regular meetings. Members are being actively encouraged to make as much use as possible of the new quarters.

Relocating our stuff was quite a job. Although professional movers took care of the actual transport of furniture, a lot of work still needed to be done so that everything could be back in place in the new office. A big thanks goes to all the volunteers helping out in this task, especially John Grech (BirdLife

After viewing several properties, the Council chose a flat situated in a commercial block at Ta' Xbiex. We were looking for a place that could, not only serve as an office, but also be suitable as the general headquarters of our Society.

President), Etienne Grech and Robert Borg who spent several hours hard at work to ensure a smooth and (almost) painless transition.

An open weekend will now be held for our members, on the 24th and 25th of October, at the new office and a special programme has been prepared for the occasion. This includes a slide presentation, a pictorial history of our society and a bazaar of various items such as Christmas cards and decorations. BirdLife promotional material, including school accessories will also be on sale. Everything on sale will be heavily discounted.

Medmaravis - conserving marine animals

More than 50 local and foreign participants took part in an international symposium on marine life in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea which was recently held in Gozo. This symposium was organised by BirdLife Malta on behalf of Medmaravis which is an NGO dealing with research and conservation of island and coastal ecosystems in the Mediterranean.

This important symposium is held every three years in a different site of the Mediterranean. This year it was Malta's - or rather Gozo's turn - to host the numerous experts who discussed various issues relating to marine life conservation.

Our thanks go to the main supporters of this event including United Nations Environment Programme, the Biological Station of Tour de Valet in France, the Environmental Protection Department, the National Tourist organisation of Malta and AvanTech Ltd.



BUSKETT refuge or death-trap?



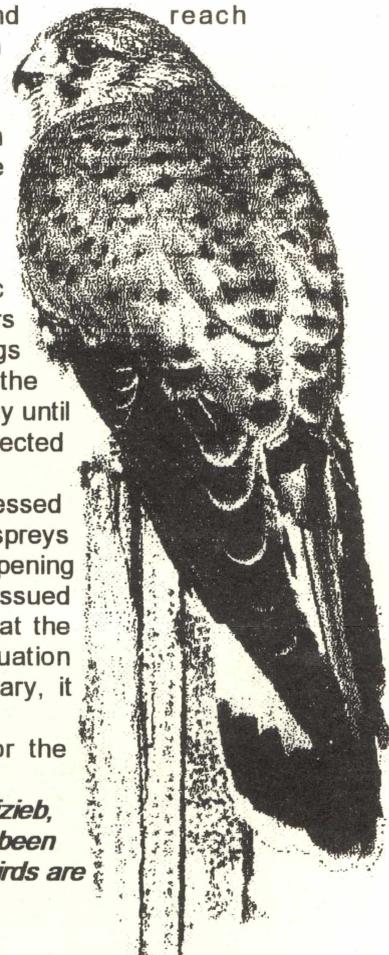
Spring and autumn are the two most important seasons for local birding with large numbers of birds flying over Malta as they move to and from their breeding sites in the north. In particular autumn brings thousands of birds of prey migrating towards their winter quarters in Africa. These birds start coming over towards the beginning of September and reach their peak by the third week of the month. Many of them continue their journey southwards without stopping in Malta. It should be pointed out that the welcome they receive from our hunters does not entice them to remain anyway. However, a number do stop to roost for the night, especially in the wooded hills and valleys of Buskett. These are usually birds that reach our shores by early evening, many of them juveniles making the crossing to Africa for the first time.

This fact is well-known to our birdwatchers who are carrying out a scientific study of raptor migratory movements. Unfortunately, it is also known to hunters who congregate in the Buskett area. During this period, it is common to see gangs of men lounging around the outskirts of Buskett and occasionally inside the sanctuary itself. There is normally no sight of the guns that are kept hidden away until the last moment when they have to be used. Their aim is of course to kill the protected birds of prey as they fly low over the tree-tops to select a roosting place.

This year was no exception and, day after day, BirdLife birdwatchers witnessed the massacre of birds of prey, particularly marsh harriers, honey buzzards and ospreys as well as smaller falcons. Our efforts to interest the police in what was happening received with little response from the authorities. It was only after BirdLife issued several strongly-worded statements which were broadcast over the media that the police finally showed up and started regular patrolling of the area. The situation immediately improved and, although hunters still lurked around the sanctuary, it became much more difficult for them to shoot down the protected birds.

This episode proves the importance of ensuring media coverage for the environmental issues that our Society raises continually.

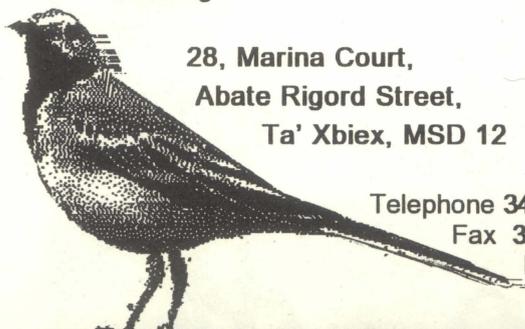
Meanwhile, we dread to think of what must be happening every year in Mizieb, the other major wooded area of Malta. As is well-known, this important site had been handed over to hunters and is not patrolled at all by the police. Unfortunately birds are not aware of this and may easily wander into the lethal trap that is Mizieb.



As we mention in page 1 of this newsletter, BirdLife Malta has acquired new offices. The address of the Society is now the following:

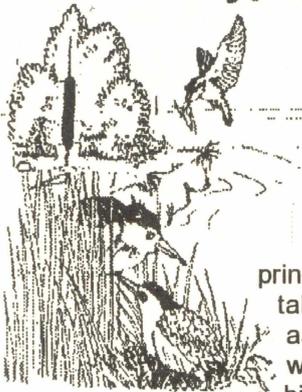
28, Marina Court,
Abate Rigord Street,
Ta' Xbiex, MSD 12

Telephone 347646
Fax 343239.
E-mail bim@orbit.net.mt



The Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Malta will be held next March. Persons interested in contesting the elections for the Council are invited to notify the Electoral Officer at the BirdLife address.

IMPROVEMENTS TO NATURE RESERVES



During the summer months, the nature reserves of Ghadira and Simar are closed to the public. This however, does not mean that nothing is happening during the long hot months of summer.

At Simar, for example, extensive work has been undertaken in order to improve the site and create a more suitable habitat for certain species. This meant, principally, controlling the spread of the Phragmites reed beds which were threatening to take over all of the reserve. These reeds provide excellent cover for certain species such as the aptly named reed warblers as well as little bitterns. Incidentally, the latter species has in fact bred in Malta last year, thanks to the shelter afforded by the Simar reserve.

However, given the small area covered by the reserve and the vigour with which these reeds multiply, there was a real danger that the whole territory would end up as a single huge reed bed.

In order to ensure the survival of vegetation bio-diversity and to provide a more balanced landscape in the reserve, it was therefore decided to control the Phragmites. This was done by carrying out excavations to create a water pool - about two metres deep - where the reeds would not be able to multiply so successfully, being unable to produce rhizomes and shoots at such



Excavation works being carried out at the Simar nature reserve this summer.

depths. The deeper water should also prove to be particularly favourable to such species as grebes and kingfishers.

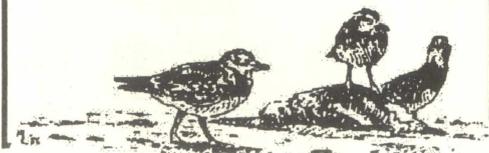
This work was carried out thanks to the valid support of the Environment Protection Department as well as a generous donation from SVS - the Swiss BirdLife partner.



Ghadira Opening Schedule during weekends

9.00 am to 12.30 pm
2.00 pm to 4.00 pm

from 31st October

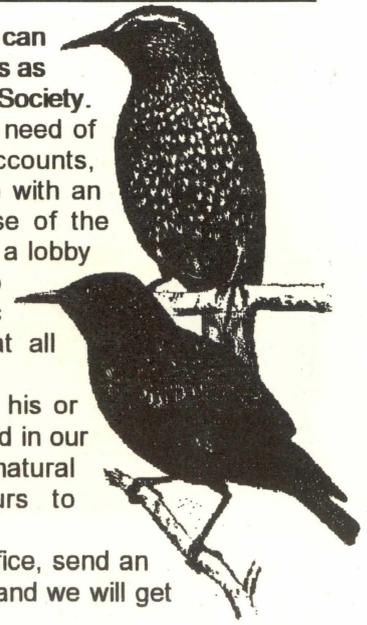


BirdLife Malta is looking for people who can help in the organisation of its campaigns as well as in the day to day running of the Society.

In particular we are presently in need of persons who have knowledge of accounts, book-keeping or legal matters. People with an ability to communicate and make use of the media are also extremely important to a lobby that depends on public opinion to achieve its aims. A scientific background, though useful, is not at all essential.

However, everyone - whatever his or her skills - is welcome to give us a hand in our efforts to conserve the Maltese natural heritage. Remember, it is not ours to squander at will.

So, drop us a line, phone our office, send an e-mail or contact us by carrier pigeon and we will get back to you.



Open days at the new BirdLife quarters

24 - 25th October 1998

Saturday 9.30 am - 12.30 pm
4.30 am - 7.30 pm

Sunday 9.30 am - 12.30 pm
3.00 pm - 7.30 pm

British Birdwatching Fair '98

Europe's largest birdwatching fair is held every year in Britain and attracts thousand of enthusiasts from all over the continent.

Once again BirdLife Malta participated in this event, held last August inside the Egleton Nature Reserve in England. Over 15 thousand people visited the 240 stands and stalls which represented the various facets of birdwatching: from optical instruments dealers and eco-tourism operators to environmental societies and booksellers and publishers.

Birdwatching is usually undertaken as a hobby but, if carried out systematically and seriously, it can form the fieldwork basis for scientific ornithological or ecological research. Moreover, a whole industrial and commercial sector has evolved to cater for the needs of birdwatchers. The organisers of the Bird Fair are hoping that, this year, the popular event will generate £stg 100,000, which would go to finance conservation programmes for endangered bird species.

BirdLife Malta's participation at the Bird Fair was rendered possible through the generous aid given by the following sponsors - the National Tourist Organisation of Malta, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Carl Zeiss Optics and Ruggier Holdings (Malta).



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