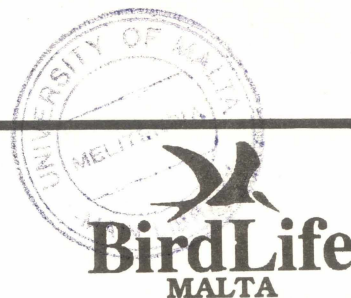


BirdTalk



BirdLife Malta Newsletter

Issue 52

March - April 1999

Editorial Board: Ian Mifsud, Antoine Vella

Maltese authorities rapped by International Court

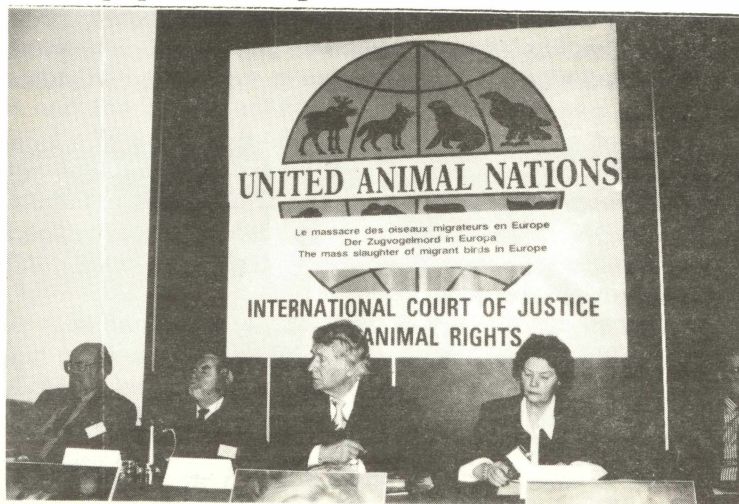
On Monday, February 15th, 1999, the International Court of Justice for Animal Rights based in Geneva, Switzerland, heard "The Case of Bird-Hunting and Mass Destruction of Migratory Birds on the European Continent"

This International Conference which took the form of a Public Trial was held at the *Centre International de Conférences de Genève* (CICG), and Malta was represented by one member each from Birdlife Malta and International Animal Rescue (Malta). The Conference was organized by United Animals Nations, a non-governmental organisation to which hundreds of lobby groups are affiliated.

Seven countries, namely France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Greece, Lebanon and Malta were called to account and the Court heard evidence of the annual mass slaughter of migratory birds over these countries. The Maltese delegation gave a detailed and illustrated report on the present situation especially as regards the shooting and trapping of wild birds on the Islands.

Many groups from different European countries and representing various animal rights and bird protection organizations, attended the conference. Journalists and TV crews also attended to report to their respective countries.

The 'Court' was presided over by the UAN President, well-known ecologist, Mr. Franz Weber, who found Malta guilty on a number of counts. Malta was found responsible for the genocide of migratory avifauna and of enormous pollution in a small territory as a result of lead pellets originating from thousands of spent shotgun cartridges.



Mr Franz Weber presiding over the International Court of Justice in Geneva.

**The BirdLife Malta
Annual General Meeting
will be held on
Thursday 8th April, 1999
at the
Despott Hall, Floriana
(Ministry of Education)
at 6.30pm**

**The AGM will be opened with an illustrated
talk in Maltese on "Creating a bird habitat"**

More help from Britain

As part of the technical assistance that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has been giving BirdLife Malta for the past several years, Mr Shane Cormie has been sent over from the UK to help us with a recruitment campaign. Mr Cormie will stay in Malta till May and will also help to upgrade our members' database.

The following BirdLife Malta members have applied for the Society's Council

Anita Aloisio, Dennis Cachia, Alex Casha, Ray Galea, Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon, Ian Mifsud, Antoine Vella,



Bird-smuggling on the rise

The smuggling of wild finches into Malta has been brought into the limelight by a number of different cases that were in the news lately. A batch of birds being brought into the country from Tunisia was intercepted at our airport some months ago: four hundred finches stuffed into two hand luggage bags, many of them dead through suffocation. Two Maltese were apprehended but they have not yet been arraigned, unlike the two Libyans who were also caught smuggling in finches and were arrested, investigated, arraigned, judged, sentenced and deported in three days flat!!

Two other Maltese were intercepted by Italian coastguards off the Sicilian coast. They admitted they were intending to smuggle birds into Malta and the police duly found large numbers of goldfinches ready for loading. This particular case would seem to indicate a connection between smuggling of birds and clandestine migrants.

Finally, yet another Maltese, this time the owner of a local pet-shop and a bird-importer was recently caught red-handed by the British police with several thousand wild, illegally-trapped birds ready to be shipped to Malta. These last two cases represent yet another piece of the jig-saw and place the flourishing racket into its proper international perspective: bird-smuggling is being carried out by well-organised professional criminal networks.

The aggressive demand of the Maltese black-market is putting pressure even on the wildlife of other countries. British public opinion is understandably outraged by this traffic and unfortunately tends to label all Maltese as barbaric, especially because our local authorities do not seem unduly perturbed by the traffic and make only half-hearted attempts to curb it.

This whole mess is giving Malta a very bad name all over Europe; British national newspapers and television stations have been covering the subject and contacting BirdLife to give its views. The only way to repair the damage is for our Government to take energetic steps to stop the smuggling. Meanwhile, Maltese public opinion has to be alerted to this growing racket, before it too becomes a cultural "tradition" to be conserved at all costs.

BirdLife Malta is actively lobbying for a proper surveillance around our coasts and at the airport. We're also urging Government to be more effective in controlling the trade of song-birds, checking pet-shops and market-stalls.



Media campaign

The appeal for funds to launch a media campaign was very successful and BirdLife Malta managed to collect LM 2000 from its members in Malta and abroad. We thank everyone for their generosity and commitment towards preserving Malta's wildlife.

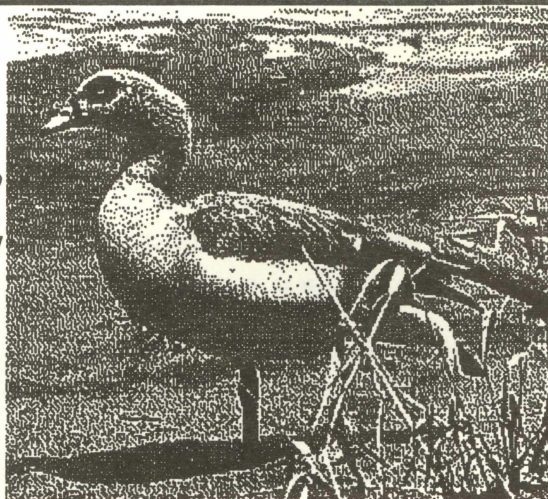
The campaign has already started and will

gather momentum in the coming months. Adverts have been placed in newspapers and television - appearing twice during the popular programme Xarabank. Publicity material was also prepared for BirdLife Malta's participation in the Geneva International Conference (see page 1 of this issue).

Hunting in Egypt: what we wanted to hear

The foremost commercial organiser of hunting tours to Egypt has recently gone on television and complained that *"thanks to BirdLife Malta and International Animal Rescue, we (i.e. hunters) have hardly been able to enjoy this past shooting season in Egypt"*.

Thank you Mr H.F.A., that is exactly what we aimed to do. Such words, coming from the hunters themselves confirm the efficacy of BirdLife Malta's actions to save birds, not just in our country but wherever they are threatened by human selfishness and greed.



Meeting authorities

BirdLife Malta believes that its aims can best be achieved by educating the general public in order to appreciate nature and want to conserve it. However, another important aspect of the Society's work involves lobbying the persons who are in charge of guiding and governing the country. With this in mind, BirdLife Malta seeks to establish personal contacts and good working relationships with the various authorities of our country.

On the 16th of March a delegation from BirdLife met the Hon Dr Joe Borg, Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting was held in a friendly and co-operative atmosphere and the

delegation was able to explain its views concerning the international aspect of environmental protection, especially with regards to migratory birds.

Enforcement of the present hunting regulations was discussed with the Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, Brig. R.C. Montanaro on the 17th of March. BirdLife Malta expressed its appreciation of the work done by the AFM especially as regards the patrolling of coastal waters and the curbing of various abuses, including illegal shooting. We urged the Brigadier to intensify this aspect of the AFM duties and to involve even more the Armed Forces in combating lawlessness inland as well as offshore.

Greenweek Fair April 14 - 18

Make sure to visit the stand of BirdLife Malta during next month's Greenweek Fair. You will find information about the Society and its work as well as hands-on attractions for children, a photographic exhibition, plus a video of BirdLife activities and a brand new poster for sale.

This year there will also be a group of students making bird-tables and nest-boxes which will also be for sale.

Needed

- ◆ Volunteers to help with membership recruitment at the Green Week stand. (Call Des 436335)
- ◆ Guides for the Ghadira reserve (no experience necessary - training will be provided)
- ◆ Persons with carpentry skills who can do small odd-jobs voluntarily

New Poster

BirdLife Malta has just produced a new poster, this time portraying the little ringed plover. This bird is the latest addition to the species that are known to be breeding in Malta.

Little ringed plovers have successfully bred at the Ghadira nature reserve and are now established as regular breeding birds of Malta, proving that many more birds could breed locally if they were not disturbed and persecuted.

The poster is going to be employed in an education campaign about the Ghadira reserve and the birds breeding there. It will be used together with other educational material to foster a better understanding - and love - of nature among schoolchildren.

Naturally the poster will also be available to the general public and will in fact be on sale during the Green Week

BirdLife Malta Website

Thanks to Konrad Pizzuto for upgrading and maintaining the BirdLife website. This may be accessed at the following address:
<http://www.waldonet.net.mt/birdlife/>

Hieles, ħaj u sabiħ!



Monakella

Charadrius dubius Little Ringed Plover

BirdLife

L-Għajra għali Ħarsien ta' l-Għajra

Support for BirdLife Malta from the Netherlands

BirdLife Malta had the pleasure to play the host for a few days in March to Johanna Winkelman, International Officer of Vogelbescherming, BirdLife Partner in the Netherlands. Ms Winkelman is also presently Acting Head of the European Section of BirdLife International. Vogelbescherming Nederland has kindly offered its support to BirdLife Malta to employ a full-time marketing officer who will be responsible for promoting the society and furthering its cause.

Ms Winkelman herself assisted in interviewing a number of applicants for the job. She also took the opportunity to discuss bird conservation matters with Council members of BirdLife Malta and found time to visit the reserves at Għadira and Simar for which she had words of praise.



Above: Johanna Winkelman of Vogelbescherming Nederland and Antoine Vella, President of BirdLife Malta signing the contract in the presence of other BirdLife Malta Council members.

Right: Johanna Winkelman at Is-Simar Nature Reserve, with John J. Borg, the managing warden.



Thanks . . .

. . . to Mr Ian Cardy of Wilts, UK, for the generous donation of a beautiful telescope for use in our nature reserves. Mr and Mrs Butler kindly offered to bring the telescope over to Malta.

A base is now being prepared for the instrument and it will be installed in one of our reserves very soon.

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Printed on recycled paper

BirdTalk is published by
BirdLife Malta
57, Marina Court, Abate Rigord St.,
Ta' Xbiex, MSD 12, Malta
Tel: 347646
Fax: 343239
e-mail: blm@orbit.net.mt
<http://www.waldonet.net.mt/birdlife/>

BirdLife Malta is the Society for the protection of birds and the natural environment
BirdLife Malta is the partner of BirdLife International in the Maltese Islands