

Launching of IBA Book

On the 29th of March 2000, BirdLife International launched its latest book *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, which has been described as the most important document for more than a decade to identify the critical sites in Europe that must be conserved in order to protect Europe's birds and biodiversity.

BirdLife Malta also participated in this Europe-wide event, presenting the book to Prof Guido Demarco President of Malta, in a ceremony at the President's Palace in Valletta. Later that day, *Important Bird Areas in Europe* was also presented to the Minister for Internal Affairs and the Minister for the Environment.

The book is basically a report that substantially updates BirdLife International's earlier inventory of Important Bird Areas in Europe published in 1989. That publication was widely acknowledged as an authoritative list of Europe's conservation hotspots, making IBAs the building blocks of European wildlife conservation throughout the 1990s. The 1989 IBA review has proven to be a key scientific reference for the selection of sites to be protected under the EC Birds Directive. The European Union Court of Justice has recognised that it represents a list of sites of great importance for the conservation of wild birds.

In the new review a total of 1,175 additional IBAs have been identified since 1989, with improved coverage, particularly in the east of Europe.



His Excellency Prof Guido Demarco listens raptly as Joe Sultana extols the beauty of birds and their importance for humankind.

Analysis has shown that there are 3,619 IBAs in Europe, covering more than 900,000 km², roughly equivalent to 7% of the land area of Europe.

The 1,600-page study has taken four years of intensive research to compile, involving hundreds of ornithologists and volunteers across 51 European countries at more than 3,600 sites who between them have identified a comprehensive network of IBAs. Effective protection and management of these sites, is a realistic goal that would make a significant contribution to conserving many bird species and biodiversity within Europe.

BirdLife magazine



With this issue of BirdTalk you will find enclosed the latest issue of **Bird's Eye View**, giving an overview of the activities of BirdLife Malta during 1999 as well as other features of national interest

Historic Occasion

By the time this newsletter reaches our readers, BirdLife Malta will have announced the formation of a Wild Birds Conservation Foundation - a historical initiative taken by our society together with the Hunters' Federation. This Foundation will provide a forum for dialogue between environmentalists and shooters and will reduce the tension that has traditionally existed between us.

Thanks to the Foundation, a Monitoring Board with executive powers will be set up by the Government to ensure that the Hunting Regulations are effectively enforced; representatives of BirdLife will be sitting on this Board together with representatives of hunters, the Police and relevant Ministries.

Greenweek Participation

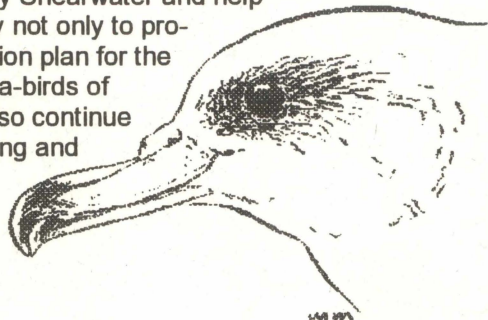
In April, BirdLife Malta again participated in the annual Greenweek Fair with a very well-attended stand. Our theme this time was the conservation of seabirds and their nesting sites and we also launched the Adopt a Shearwater scheme.

About 73 new members (including adults, children and families) were enrolled and more than 52 shearwater chicks were adopted during the five days of the Greenweek.

For a small fee, a person can become the adoptive parent of a shearwater chick and is presented with a

soft-toy representing a shearwater fledgling and a certificate indicating the name, date of birth and development of the particular bird.

Individuals, commercial organisations and NGOs can adopt a Cory Shearwater and help raise money not only to produce an action plan for the breeding sea-birds of Malta but also continue the monitoring and research programme on these birds.



Spring Migrations

Birdwatchers have this year expressed disappointment at the relatively small numbers of birds that could be observed migrating north this spring. This referred both to the number of different species and the total number of individual birds. There may have been several reasons for this, including the weather and the fact that some species may be changing their routes and bypassing the central Mediterranean as they go to their nesting sites.

However the recent migrations were still able to offer some satisfaction to ornithologists. Among the highlights of this year were undoubtedly a great spotted cuckoo recorded at Iklin and a spoonbill which came to roost at Gh adira. Unfortunately, the latter bird was taken by hunters who broke into the reserve at night.



Eye-opening Visit to Italy

The Fondazione Mediterranea Falchi (FMF), an Italian nature-protection foundation, is one of the organisations that participated in the International Birds of Prey Watching Camp held at Buskett last September. This Foundation has been running a similar camp in Calabria, Italy for the past fifteen years and in the eighties they had a huge problem with illegal hunting, as we still do in Malta to this very day. Nonetheless, fifteen years of constant work have led to the peaceful situation they have today where poaching is largely controlled and the laws are respected.

This situation of almost total lack of illegal hunting in autumn (and therefore a lack of **all** hunting since Italian law forbids spring shooting) was observed at first hand by a group of 22 youths from the Junior College who visited Calabria earlier this year. The students had to pay only for their flight, while FMF financed and organised all that had to do with lodging, food and excursions! During the visit the students had the unique opportunity to assist to the phenomenon of migration at close quarters, meet Italian students and, of course, enjoy the beautiful landscapes of Calabria, where snow and sea are just a few kilometres from each other!

We thank the Fondazione Mediterranea Falchi for their generous offer and look forward to another exchange next year.

Minister visits Ghadira

On the 29th of April, Dr Francis Zammit Dimech, Minister for the Environment, visited the Ghadira nature reserve where he was shown round by the warden Charles Gauci and other members of BirdLife Malta.



The Minister for the Environment being shown round Ghadira by Joe Sultana (above) and speaking to the schoolchildren of Fgura Primary (right).

The Minister could see for himself the work being carried out on the reserve as a group of schoolchildren from Fgura Primary School were also visiting Ghadira on that day. Dr Zammit Dimech praised the efforts of BirdLife Malta in favour of the environment and declared that the management by our Society of the nature reserves - Simar and Ghadira itself - will soon be given official recognition.

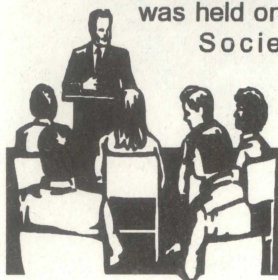
During his visit, Dr Zammit Dimech was presented with a copy of the BirdLife International book *Important Bird Areas in Europe* which was being launched internationally on that same day.

He was also presented with over 2000 postcards calling for the protection of the narcissus plant. The postcards had been coloured by schoolchildren and were presented to the Minister on their behalf as one of the activities forming part of the Dinja Wahda project.



Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Malta was held on the 30th of March at the Society's premises. The members present



approved the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting and the reports by the Chairperson, the Secretary and the Treasurer.



In April, BirdLife Malta participated in the much-maligned but widely followed television talk-show Xarabank. This was an opportunity to explain to a wide audience the policies that BirdLife Malta is presently following with regards to shooting and trapping.

Distinguished Visitors

In May, we have been very happy to welcome to Malta our good friends Ms Johanna Winkelman and Mr Eduard Osieck who were here on a short visit.

Johanna is the International Officer at Vogelbescherming (the BirdLife partner in the Netherlands) as well as a member of the World Council of BirdLife International. On the 11th of May she gave an illustrated talk on the work being carried out in the Netherlands by Vogelbescherming and explained the aims and the organisational framework of BirdLife International.

Eduard is the co-ordinator of BirdLife International's Birds and Habitat Directives Task Force and an expert on these Directives which are of major interest to us in view of Malta's future membership of the European Union. He also gave us a talk about the implications of these Directives on the 9th of May.



News from our Youths

The Department for Youth and Sports within the Ministry of Education annually organises a contest called the "Gharfien ghaz-Zghazagh fis-Socjetà" ("Appreciating Youths in Society") to a youth organisation deemed to have done the best work in being useful to society. Last year there were over 35 entries for this contest; the Youth Section of BirdLife Malta was one of seven finalists and we were presented with a certificate and a prize of Lm50.

The most important activity this section organised last year was definitely the "International Birds of Prey

Watching Camp held in September at Buskett. Thirty Maltese youths and thirteen foreigners. One of these was Owe Arnoldsson from Sweden. On going back home, he explained to various organisations of his country what the Maltese group was doing. As a result, two organisations: the Marks Fagelklubb and Vogel Fagelklubb collected Lm180 and Lm50 respectively and sent the money to BirdLife Malta as a donation. This money was presented to us in Italy this April and will be used for the setting up of a roving exhibition – to be displayed mainly in schools – showing what BirdLife Malta stands for and how it is achieving its aims.

We take the opportunity to thank all those who participated in this fund-raising and wish our youth section another year of fruitful work.



Volunteering in Italy

Every year, the Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli, the BirdLife International partner in Italy, organises a series of volunteering camps during the summer months, namely from June to September. They vary in length from one to eight weeks.

Participants are expected to carry out mostly manual work but there might be other duties, such as assisting visitors to the parks and nature reserves where the camps take place. Of course, all camps have themes related to nature issues but they are not necessarily involved with birds. There is no need at all for participants to have technical knowledge in environmental matters, since they will be led by an expert team who will provide the necessary know-how. What is important is that participants bring along their enthusiasm and good humour.

The participation fee varies from camp to camp, but is about Lm 60. This covers lodging, food and all travel expenses within the camp. For more information, please contact our office on 347646.



Printed on recycled paper

BirdTalk is published by
BirdLife Malta

57/8, 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

Supplement of BirdTalk Issue No. 59

1st June 2000

Dear Member,

As you are aware BirdLife Malta has been involved, since its inception, in an uphill struggle to safeguard birds in the Maltese islands. Indiscriminate shooting and trapping of birds, inadequate laws and lack of enforcement have always resulted year after year in large numbers of birds, legally protected or otherwise, being shot. In spite of all the good work that has been carried by BirdLife Malta and its volunteers, with the unending support of its members, including yourself, the situation of bird killing is still alarming. There have been some great strides and improvement in raising awareness among the general public, but from a general point of view we didn't make much headway in diminishing the numbers of birds killed.

It seems that the solution lies with the enforcement of the law. We have started to realise that effective enforcement of the bird protection laws needs the support of the organization of the hunters themselves. A mission impossible you might say. And rightly so because it is a difficult and bitter way. However in the last few months BirdLife Malta has been in frequent contact with some leaders of the hunters' organization on this matter and we are pleased to announce that we are on the brink of breaking some long-standing ice.

An agreement has been reached with the leaders of the hunting fraternity on some points as detailed hereunder. This agreement also has the support of the authorities who have agreed to back financially some projects on which there has been an agreement with the hunters' organization. We think that these projects, if successful, will go a long way to initiate hope for a better future, if not for all the birds, at least, as a first step, to save thousands of legally protected species which are killed annually.

The projects will be carried out by a joint committee composed of the organization of hunters and BirdLife Malta under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment. This joint committee named the Foundation for Bird Conservation will supervise the main three projects which consist of the following:

- (a) The setting up of a monitoring board which would see that the hunting regulations are enforced as well as respected. This official board is being set up by the Government and will be composed of representatives of the Police, Armed Forces of Malta, Environment Protection Department as well as representatives of BirdLife Malta and the Hunting organization.
- (b) The re-introduction of wild birds species which have been exterminated from the islands, starting with the re-introduction of the Barn Owl.
- (c) The rearing of the game birds, such as Quail, to decrease the pressures on wild birds in the countryside.

As you can imagine, this new BirdLife Malta venture which will be launched to the press on Friday 2nd June by the Ministry of Environment is not an easy task, but we feel we should not leave one stone unturned in our struggle to save birds.

As one of the supporting members of BirdLife Malta, the Council would like to inform you about this new venture and hopes that you will support it on this matter, as you have always done in the past.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



Antoine Vella
President
obo. the BirdLife Malta Council