



BirdTalk



BirdLife Malta Newsletter

Issue 65

May - June 2001

BirdLife Malta is the Society for the protection of birds and their habitat. It is the Partner of BirdLife International in Malta

The Calabrian Experience

In May, BirdLife Malta organised a visit to Reggio Calabria, Italy, for a group of police officers of the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) section, led by Inspector Alex Miruzzi, who is in charge of the ALE. BirdLife Malta council member Justin Vassallo, who co-ordinated the event from the Malta side also attended. The visit was organised jointly by BirdLife Malta, Naturschutzbund Deutschland NABU (BirdLife Germany) represented by Christoph Hein and Fondazione Mediterranea Falchi FMF, represented by Antonino Morabito.

The Maltese delegation met the officer of the Guardie Forestali in charge of the platoon of 70 policemen stationed temporarily in Reggio Calabria specifically for anti-poaching purposes. The officer described how the illegal hunting situation had developed historically and how it had been brought under control during the last few years.



The Maltese delegation with members of the Guardie Forestali in Calabria. For BirdLife: Justin Vassallo (squatting second from left). For the ALE: Insp. Alex Miruzzi and Sgt. Brian Scicluna (squatting fourth and fifth from left).

The meeting was followed by an inspection of the equipment used by the Guardie on their missions, including Land Rovers, bullet-proof vests and firearms. This was followed by a patrol of the area in the Guardie's vehicles and an explanation of the Guardie's work from a practical point of view.

To help control illegal activity, two helicopters are deployed to the area every year - the Maltese group were actually taken on patrol in these aircraft. The tour from the air showed the geographical features of this mountainous region which pose difficulties to migrating birds. The Italian police are now using the same vantage points hunters previously used. The use of aircraft gave

an idea of how the Armed Forces of Malta air unit could support the work of the police.

On the last day of the visit, a press conference was held in the Prefettura, the office of the highest representative of the Italian State in the province. This event was attended by the mayor of Reggio, the Head of Police, the Commander of the anti-poaching section of the Corpo Forestale dello Stato, and the President of the Province of Reggio Calabria. Several local tv, radio stations and newspapers covered the event.

This visit was intended to inform and motivate the Maltese Police, as well as to forge a stronger bond between BirdLife Malta and the ALE, towards better bird protection.

Looks familiar? But no, for once it's not about Malta. This page from a 1990 LIPU (BirdLife Italy) magazine highlights the bleak situation in Calabria 11 years ago. Since then, *sustained* effort by a police force *determined* to solve the problem have changed the picture. The same can happen in Malta!

...thousands of poachers, shooting everything that flies...

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) killed by poachers
Falco pescatore ucciso

Injured Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
Falco di palude ferito

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) killed by poachers
Barbagianni ucciso dai braccatori

Injured White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)
Ciconia bianca ferita



BirdLife at GreenWeek 2001

BirdLife Malta took part in this year's edition of the **GreenWeek** fair On 3-6 May. Apart from a healthy sale of BirdLife publications and other material, 25 new adult members joined our ranks, plus over 100 youths.

A big thank you to all the volunteers who helped at this event. Without their commitment, BirdLife would never have been able to participate.

Thank you also to Forestals Ltd, Miller Distributors Ltd, Kemmunet Ltd and Flower Power for their support in providing some great membership incentives.

Translation:
Hey you! Want to join Klabb Huttaf???

Ojj int!
Trid tidhol fi
Klabb Huttaf
???



Iva? Mela aqleb wara...

Nature reserves closed!

Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves will be closed for the summer period. During this time, much-needed refurbishing works will be in progress at the Ghadira visitor centre, while construction of a small workshop/office/store/toilet complex will be under way at Is-Simar.

The reserves will re-open in October.

EPD handout

BirdLife is grateful for a donation of **Lm500** by the Environment Protection Department to help us produce more educational material. With the money BirdLife plans to publish two new posters in the *Haj, Hieles u Sabih!* series.

The flyer on the left is a new BirdLife membership form in colour aimed specifically at youngsters! Thank you BOV for footing part of the costs.

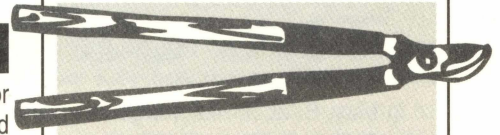
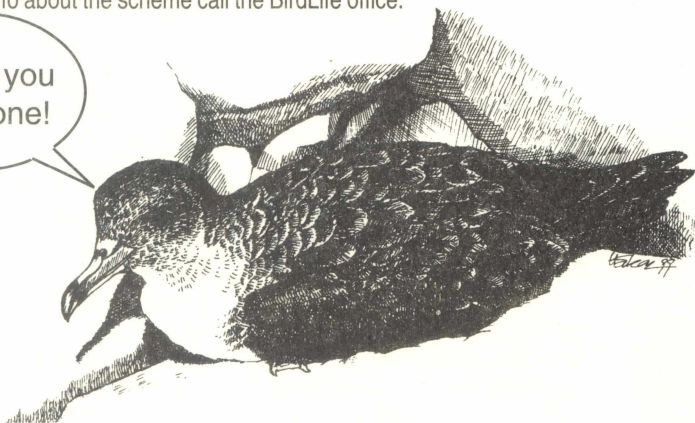
ScandinAVIAN help!

The Scandinavian Leisure Group (SLG) of Sweden has joined the list of individuals and associations who are helping BirdLife study and defend Malta's natural environment. SLG is supporting our Adopt a Shearwater scheme and is actually fostering 20 separate Cory's shearwaters! BirdLife is grateful to the three companies Marysol, Always and VING (forming part of SLG) who are directly sponsoring the birds.

The Adopt a Shearwater scheme is mainly aimed to raise funds for research into Malta's breeding birds (particularly seabirds). The scheme also aimed to raise awareness about a little-known seabird, and to provide a way in which groups and individuals can support bird conservation. So far about 500 adoptions have been made!

For more info about the scheme call the BirdLife office.

Thank you
everyone!



Help!!

BirdLife urgently needs volunteers to help with manual work at Ghadira nature reserve (eg pruning). If you're interested please phone the BirdLife office on 347646.



Discussion meeting

Here's your chance to get to know more about BirdLife's policies and current direction.

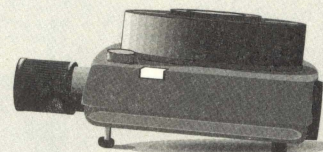
This meeting is for those members who would like to discuss policy and perhaps make suggestions to BirdLife's Council about various issues on the BirdLife agenda.

Date: **5 July 2001**

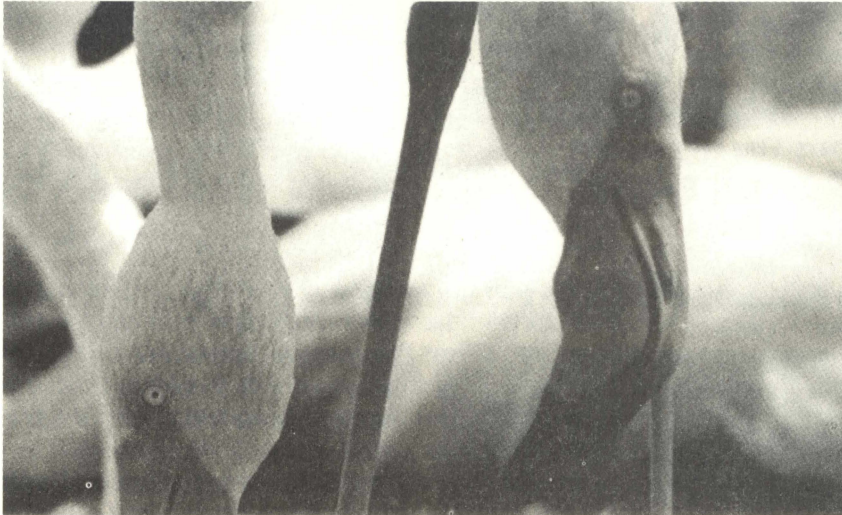
Place: **BirdLife premises
Ta' Xbiex**

Time: **6pm**

Before the meeting there will be a short slide feature about Selvagem Islands by Joe Sultana.



Flamingo blues!



On 6 May a **greater flamingo** paid a rare visit to Għadira nature reserve. Since it was a Sunday, many visitors enjoyed the spectacle, some spending literally hours watching and admiring this magnificent bird at close range from the hide and centre - it was a particularly beautiful adult specimen! However the story was somewhat soured later on in the day.

At around 4pm a group of six men (obviously hunters, although unarmed) gathered on a low ridge outside the nature reserve and did their best to flush the bird out of the protected area by shouting and waving their T-shirts! Unluckily they succeeded and the bird flew off towards L-Aħrax, a hunting hotspot. But somehow the bird wasn't killed, because later on in the evening it returned to Għadira. The story, however, still had a chapter to go.

That night, someone with evil intent cut the perimeter fence in two places and broke into the reserve. No shots were heard that night, but the intruder was apparently bold enough to climb to the roof of the hide, presumably to get a better view! The cheek! BirdLife reported the incident next day to the Police.

This often happens at Għadira whenever unusual birds are present. Apart from the abhorrent instinct to exterminate defenceless life, such incidents show a particularly repulsive lack of respect to rules and property.



World Environment Day

On 5 June BirdLife Malta took part in this year's **World Environment Day** event, held at Freedom Square in Valletta. The square was visited by at least 1500 schoolchildren. Leaflets and stickers were given out free to the young visitors, who also bought posters, cards and other BirdLife educational material. The new bird fridge magnets were equally well-received!

Information about the present breeding success of the little ringed plover at Għadira was available on a leaflet specially published for this event, and distributed to the numerous public visiting our stand. One of our organisation's crucial functions is educating young people about birds and biodiversity.

The BirdLife stand was also visited by the Minister for the Environment.

And justice for all!

A total of 140 persons (122 on land, 18 at sea) were apprehended by the Police in the first four months of this year for violating hunting regulations.

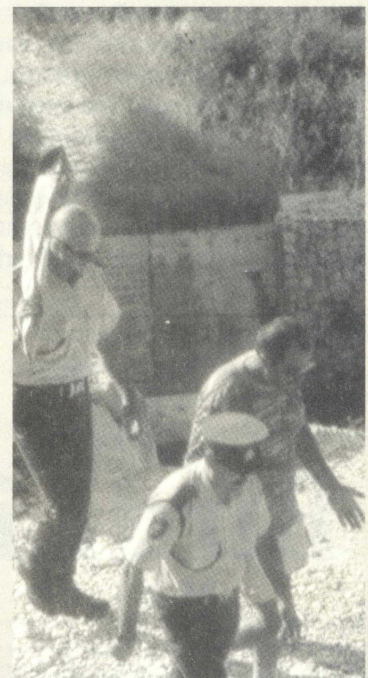
Moreover, 59 hunters have been arraigned in Court, found guilty and fined a total of Lm3945. Among these were...

- Robert Scerri of Birkirkara, who was fined Lm300, had his shotgun confiscated and his licence suspended for a year. All this for having in his possession a short-eared owl, a protected species.
- Joseph Mangion of Birżebbuġa, who was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment (suspended) and fined Lm200 for carrying a shotgun without licence while out hunting earlier this year.
- Carmelo Zarb of Siggiewi, who was fined Lm70 for being in possession of a protected bird species.

A total of 49 shotguns have been confiscated from these persons.

All persons were detected and apprehended by ALE members, assisted by other sections of the Police.

BirdLife issued a press release earlier this month to congratulate the judiciary for finally beginning to get tough with perpetrators of birdcrime.



News from the Rock

The European storm-petrel (Kanġu ta' Filfla *Hydrobates pelagicus*) is a small seabird which only visits land to breed, and only approaches the nest at night. The island of Filfla is the principal breeding site of this bird in Malta, with about 5000 breeding pairs. Filfla is in fact one of the strongholds of this bird in the Mediterranean basin.

A group of experienced ringers from BirdLife's research group visits Filfla every year to ring the birds and to monitor the breeding situation on the rock. This year, the group visited Filfla on 31 May. They ringed over 400 storm-petrels in a single night, among which were two rather special individuals...



Whitehead!

One bird had unusual albinistic (white) feathers on its head. The European storm-petrel is normally all black except for the rump, which is white. Albinism is a genetic trait that occurs throughout the animal kingdom, humans included. The trait is often partial, wherein there is only a partial lack of pigmentation in the skin, but total albinos occur as well.

Old timer!

Another storm-petrel was found already carrying a Maltese ring. This in itself is not uncommon. What took away the ringers' breath was that the ring was put on this bird's leg way back in 1974 - this bird was at least 27 years old (it was ringed as an adult). The realisation must have dawned on two of the three men huddled around the bird - this wisp of a bird must have hatched when they were still schoolboys! Not only were they holding the oldest bird ever retrapped in Malta, but one of the oldest European storm-petrels on the world record! Seabirds are surprisingly long-lived.



Spot chick!

The four **little ringed plover** chicks mentioned in BirdTalk 64 have now fully fledged and can fly well. They are still at the reserve, however, waiting for autumn to wing their way south to Africa! Four is a record number of chicks to have fledged at Għadira. But there's more...

Four other chicks hatched from a **second pair** nesting on another shallow island in the reserve. Another record - this is the first time that more than one pair nested at Għadira. Unfortunately two of this brood died in the first few days.

Meanwhile the original pair are incubating again, soon to show results.

As we go to print, the second pair also seem to be planning a second family!

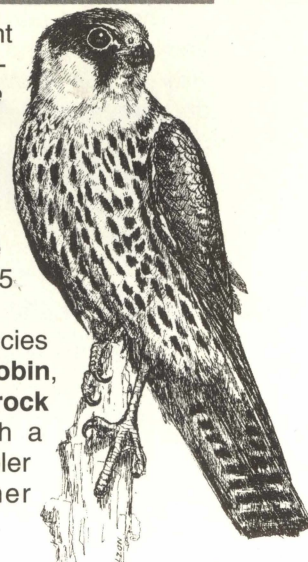
The plot thickens - check this space!

TwoTwoFourTwo

A total of **2242** birds of 42 different species were ringed in this year's six-week bird ringing *Piccole Isola* Project.

BirdLife's Kemmuna ringing station at Wied I-Ahmar was manned every day from 1 April to 15 May by a roster of volunteers made up of 9 Maltese licenced ringers, 5 foreign ringers and 12 helpers.

Among the more interesting species ringed were **rufous-tailed scrub robin**, **melodious warbler**, **hobby** and **rock thrush**. A garden warbler with a Hungarian ring and a sedge warbler with a Croatian ring were other interesting highlights.



BirdLife
MALTA

Ms. Monica Lopez
Assistant Librarian
Melitensia Special Collection
University of Malta Library
Msida MSD 06