

BirdTalk

BirdLife Malta Newsletter

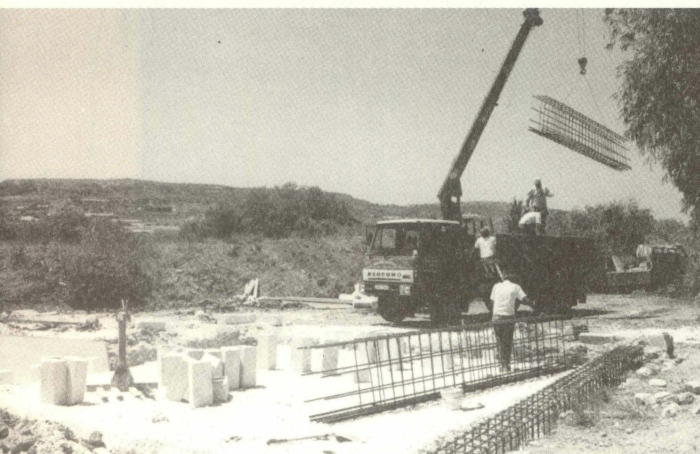
Issue 66

Jul - Aug 2001

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



Scratching the surface. A small JCB excavates the initial foundation hole.



Groundwork. As there is no bedrock, a massive (and expensive!) reinforced-concrete bed was in order.



Shell complete. The building will incorporate workshop, store and toilet/shower facility.

Photos by Charles Coleiro

Cranes at Is-Simar!

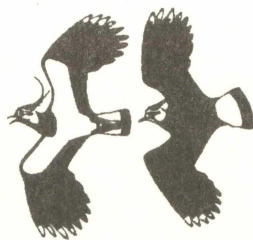
BirdLife Malta's nature reserves serve two main functions: **conservation** and **education**.

With support from its membership, other BirdLife Partners and the EPD, BirdLife Malta spent the first decade of its involvement at Is-Simar to make it as perfect a haven for birds and wildlife as possible - breeding moorhens, little bitterns and reed warblers have given ample proof of this. Now we have finally come round to the educational bit, that is, to render Is-Simar a tool for environmental education. Since March this year, the reserve has been receiving school visits. But basic amenities are still lacking at the site, which is why the reserve is not yet regularly opened to the public. BirdLife Malta is now in a position to start tackling this issue, which is what the pictures on the left are all about.

Since June, work has been going on at the reserve to erect a small building to house a basic workshop, store and toilets. The project took several weeks, but disturbance to the local wildlife was kept to the minimum - indeed, a pair of squacco herons regularly fished in the reserve canal only metres away from the building site!

The shell is now complete, and BirdLife Malta is now seeing to the fittings and furniture. These will go a long way into making the nature reserve more people-friendly. The three hides at Is-Simar, have for years doubled as toolsheds, warden's office etc! Once the new rooms are complete, the hides will be cleared and allowed to start living up to their real purpose - the non-intrusive observation of wildlife!

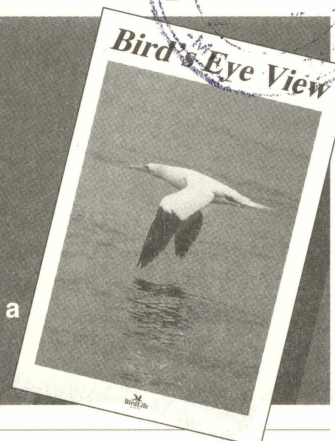
The construction was funded exclusively by membership support and donations. We cannot but mention here the wonderful sum of 250,000 Danish kroner (Lm13,500) given by Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (BirdLife in Denmark) some years ago.



DOF (logo at left) has generously supported the creation of Is-Simar nature reserve.

Annual Mag

With this issue of BirdTalk you will find enclosed, hot off the press, a copy of the 18th and latest issue of Bird's Eye View, which is BirdLife Malta's annual magazine. This issue takes a look at the activities that occurred in 2000.



Fighting bird crime

In June BirdLife Malta organized two training courses for members of the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE), the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM), Maltese Customs, the Environment Protection Department (EPD) and Malta International Airport (MIA) security personnel.

It is virtually useless, and often very frustrating, to have good wildlife regulations if there isn't a constant flow of information between the various entities involved in their enforcement. Without co-ordination, one entity could easily weaken the efforts of another. One aim of these courses was therefore to strengthen relations among the various groups for better cooperation and more effective enforcement.

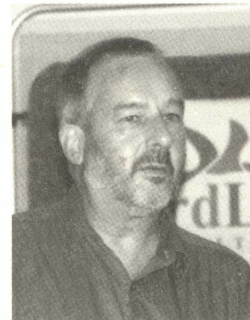
BirdLife Malta made arrangements for two enforcement officers from Scotland to come and give these courses. Dave Dick is in the Investigations Department of the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK) while Alan Stewart is Wildlife Liaison Officer with the Scottish environmental police. Both have many years of experience in investigation of bird crime. The RSPB kindly sponsored these courses.

The two four-day courses were held on 18 - 21 June and ran parallel, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Both courses were held at the BirdLife Malta premises in Ta' Xbiex.

The morning course had participants from ALE, AFM, EPD, Customs and MIA. The themes were surveillance at points of entry (airports and seaports), illegal bird trade and CITES issues, with a focus on how cooperation between entities can facilitate surveillance and investigation of related crimes. The course tackled the control on importation of live songbirds and skins of protected species.



Alan Stewart



Dave Dick

The afternoon course was specifically aimed at ALE staff. This course focused mainly on illegal taxidermy, surveillance and prosecution of illegal hunting and trapping. There were also field sessions.



Site-seeing. Members of the EPD and ALE investigating a trapping site

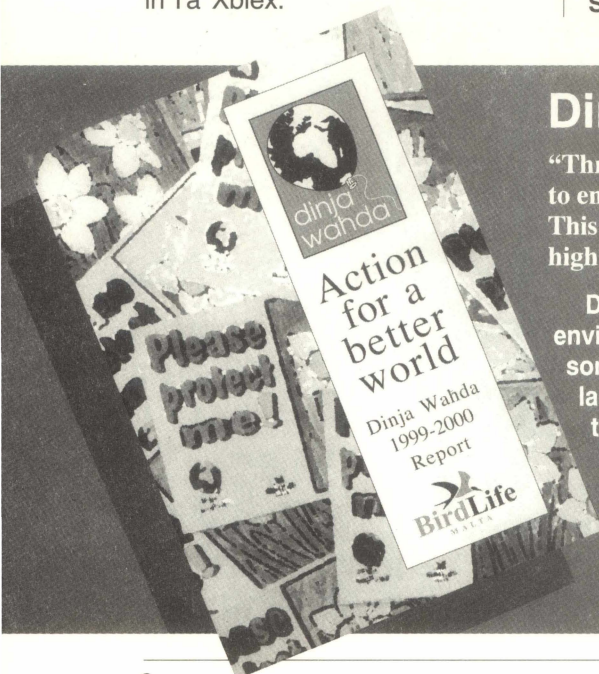
Dinja Wahda Report Out

"Through Dinja Wahda and other educational activities, BirdLife Malta hopes to encourage today's young generation to develop a deeper respect for nature. This way, tomorrow's adults will hopefully find it natural to put the environment high on their personal values."

Dinja Wahda is an exciting awards scheme that not only teaches about the environment and its problems, but also creates the opportunity to actually do something tangible about it. In the scholastic year 1999-2000 BirdLife Malta launched its second edition of Dinja Wahda, with 20 environmental activities that included nature boards, compost-making, solar energy promotion, making a wildlife photo album, adopting shearwaters and campaigning for the protection of wild narcissus. Thirty-one schools took part in this edition, of which De la Salle College won the gold award.

BirdLife Malta has now printed a 16-page report of this event.

For a copy of the report please send 30c in unused 6c stamps to the address on p4.



British Birdwatching Fair 2001

BirdLife Malta once again participated in the British Birdwatching Fair held on 17-19 August 2001 at Rutland Waters, UK. This year the Society focussed mainly on our annual International RaptorCamp, as well as bird migration over the Maltese Islands.

BirdLife Malta would like to thank the Malta Tourism Authority for their donation of Lm150; Car Zeiss for sponsoring our participation; Dorothy Bashford (RSPB) who helped provide boards for our stand and find people to help us at the Fair; Bob and Anne Scott for their lovely hospitality; and all the volunteers who helped us man the stand. A special thank you to Duncan MacDonald from Wildsounds who helped BirdLife Malta raise £St1000 for bird protection in Malta.



Stand with a Smile. Mike Rands (with tie), Director of BirdLife International, and Alistair Gammell (with glasses), Head of RSPB International Department were among the thousands who visited our stand.

Home for the Martins



For the second year in a row, a pair of **house martins** (*hawnwief* *Delichon urbica*) have bred in the garage porch of a house at Raba' Nemel, limits of Had-Dingli. They used the same nest that they - presumably the same pair from last year - built in summer 2000. The Bonnici family, who are the human occupants of the house, and who are members of BirdLife Malta, are extremely proud of their feathered lodgers!

The house martin is a common breeding bird across Europe and down to Tunisia. Unfortunately, this is not the story in Malta, most probably because of direct human persecution - many hunters still shoot this protected species for target practice. Before last year, the last known breeding attempt was in 1985, when a pair of house martins built a nest underneath City Gate in Valletta! For some reason, that nest was abandoned.

SOS Hotline

The hunting season is upon us, a time when birds rain down from the sky in lifeless lumps. Some birds, however, are only injured...

If you find an injured bird please do not try to treat it yourself, and take great care when handling birds with long pointed bills or talons. Place the bird in a box and call Max Farrugia at once on 09471212.

BirdLife Malta is grateful to a special donation made by Mr Harry Webb, a member resident in the UK.

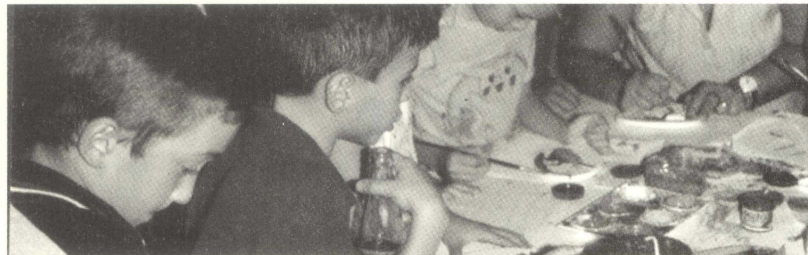


Magnetic items!

A new set of fridge magnets are just in to replace the older items which are sold out. Unlike the exotic species which featured on the old set, the new ones show six colourful local birds, each ordered to specific design. These are **kingfisher, hoopoe, golden oriole, European bee-eater, goldfinch and greenfinch**. These items will be available at the BirdFest and from Ghadira (re-opens in October). Price 60c each.

BirdFest 2001

Take a break on Sunday 21 October 2001 and come over to Buskett for BirdLife Malta's BirdFest 2001. Snacks, kids' games, face-painting, info boards, birdwatching events, sale stalls are all in order. Don't miss out! Time: morning and afternoon.



Jumble

As part of the event, we are again planning to put up a jumble sale. So now is the time to clear your boxroom shelves. Go on, get rid of that kitsch ceramic doll, that heart-stopping alarm clock, and surely you're not going to display those horrible goose book-ends! BirdLife Malta can sell your un-needed items for much-needed funds. Please call Norman Chetcuti (tel: 454548 cel: 79454548) to make the necessary arrangements.

Operation LRP!

On the hot sticky evening of Thursday 26 July 2000, 19 BirdLife Malta volunteers met at Ghadira nature reserve for a very unusual task: to create des res for little ringed plover (LRP)!

Under the close supervision of the reserve warden, the group formed a human chain at one edge of the pool and, bucket after bucket, they transferred shingle from the mainland onto one of several small sandy "islands" which dot the pool area. The shingle was spread evenly to simulate the kind of gravelly ground preferred by nesting LRPs. This method has proved successful in the past. This year was indeed special, with two pairs of LRPs hatching a record 20 chicks...

It is hoped that in a year or two, more pairs will take up summer residence at Ghadira as a result of this effort.



After the good effort that the ALE and AFM put up last year, let's hope the authorities will not now dismantle that image. BirdLife Malta wants this autumn's effort to be even better than last year's. As we go to print, news of illegal shooting of herons and birds of prey are already trickling in from various points around the island.

So what's it going to be?

It's out! It's out! It's out!

- At last! One book that describes and illustrates in colour ALL the birds which occur in the Maltese Islands.
- Each entry gives details about the birds' identification, habits and local status.
- The book explains the scientific name as well as lists all the vernacular names by which every bird is/has been known, an interesting study in itself.
- Text is by leading ornithologist Joe Sultana.
- Illustrations are by leading bird artist Andrew Micallef.
- Call the BirdLife Malta office for a copy. Price Lm4.40 (including postage).
- The book is in paperback (182 pages) and written in Maltese.

BirdLife Malta is at:

Address 57/28 Triq Rigord Ta'Xbiex MSD 12 Tel 347646 Fax 343239 Email info@birdlifemalta.org Website www.birdlifemalta.org

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More Crime and More Punishment

Date: 16 May 2001

Judge: Patrick Vella

Accused: Joseph Zammit

Crime: shot and killed a marsh harrier

Penalty: Lm500 fine, confiscation of shotgun, and withdrawal of hunting licence for 3 years.

Date: 31 May 2001

Judge: Vincent De Gaetano

Accused: Robert Bonett

Crime: carrying an uncovered shotgun with the intent of hunting at Salina Nature Reserve

Penalty: Lm160 fine and confiscation of shotgun.

Date: 9 July 2001

Judge: T Micallef Trigona

Accused: 21 persons

Crimes: various, including hunting in nature reserves, hunting/trapping without licence, hunting in close season, having protected species in possession.

Penalties: Fines ranging from Lm50 to Lm150 and two cases of 15-day suspended jail terms.

Erratum? In last issue of BirdTalk (p3 *And Justice For All*) we wrote that a certain Scerri was fined Lm500 etc, then added "all this for having in his possession a short-eared owl". Some readers took this to mean that we sympathised with the criminal! No fear - we meant the exact opposite, of course, as was really quite obvious from the rest of the feature. But thanks anyway for pointing it out!

