

BirdTalk

BirdLife Malta Newsletter

Issue 67

September - October 2001

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

One World of Fun!

For the third time, Dinja Wahda has taken off in Primary schools throughout Malta and Gozo. The year-long project is BirdLife Malta's biggest effort in environmental education.

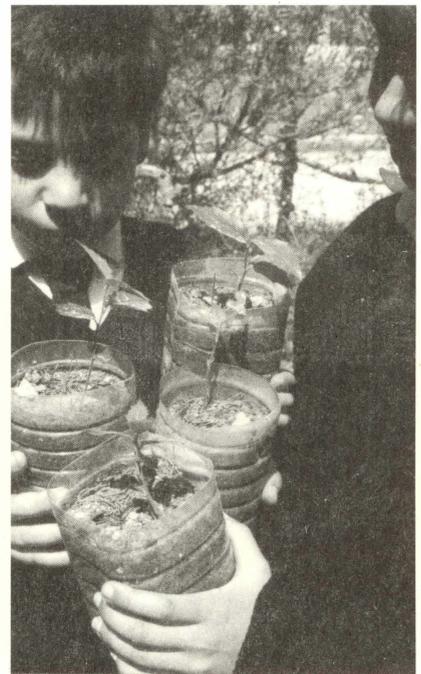
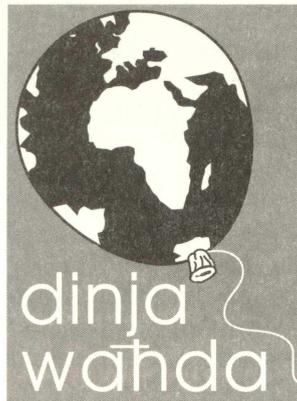
Dinja Wahda III is a collection of green activities that can be done in and around schools. The 18 activities that make up this scholastic year's Action Guide vary in level of difficulty from making a bird-table to organising a school recycling campaign. For each task completed, a school is awarded a number of points which accumulate to win that school an award at year's end. Different categories of awards reflect a school's commitment to environmental education.

The activities in the new Action Guide cover a range of projects designed to appeal both to teachers looking for craft activities or others inclined towards deskwork. But the underlying principle remains the same: a child who is regularly involved in environmental action will become an adult with environmentalist values. This

has been BirdLife Malta's motivation behind Dinja Wahda and its commitment to working with schools and teachers for a better future.

Dinja Wahda's school participation and feedback are being co-ordinated by Ms Cecily Rizzo, whose work is directed by the Education Committee. A big thanks goes to our volunteers and to our sponsors: Nos Oiseaux, BirdLife International and SOF (BirdLife Partner in Sweden)

Dinja Wahda III was launched in the schools on 23 October 2001, and will continue until May 2002.



victor falzon

Left: Dinja Wahda logo.

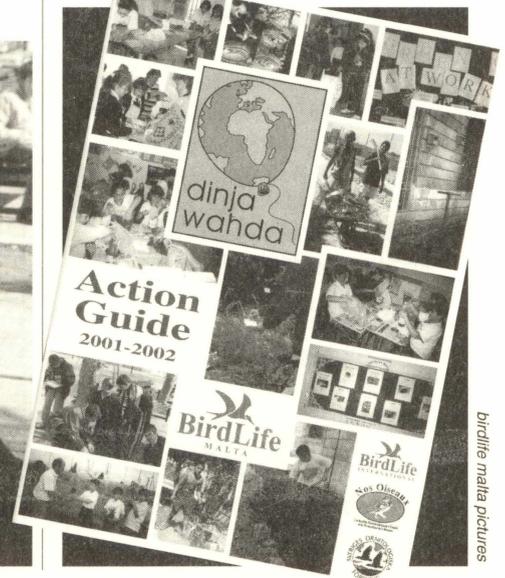
Above: Fgura B schoolchildren collecting sprouted oak seedlings.

Below: The new 32-page Action Guide.

Below left: Paola B students doing a litter survey.



paola primary b



birdlife malta pictures

Briefs...Briefs...

European meeting

More than 100 delegates attended the BirdLife European Partnership Meeting in Gibraltar in September. The 5-day meeting discussed the European Programme and future activities, as well as issues like hunting, agricultural and fishing policies icw bird conservation. Representing BirdLife Malta were John J Borg, Joe Sultana and Liz Curmi. Thanks to Vogelbescherming (BirdLife Partner in The Netherlands) for their sponsorship.

IMAX connection

Eden Century's Imax Hall was the venue for a total of four talks about birds and nature by BirdLife Malta teacher delegates Jason Aloisio and Mariangela Schembri Meli. The talks formed part of summer school activities attended by several groups of children.

Foresta 2000

A development plan for the re-forestation of part of Marfa ridge has been completed by Antoine Gatt, landscape architect with the EPD. Plans include wooded area of mixed Mediterranean forest and maquis, garrigue and clay steppe, freshwater pools, rubble walls, hedges and vegetation corridors, footpaths and picnic spots. This project will be BirdLife Malta's biggest contribution to the greening of our island. Thanks to EPD for Mr Gatt's services.

Rare spots

Five lesser spotted eagles were seen together on a single day September by BirdLife Malta's Buskett monitoring group. Eagles are rare enough in Malta, since they prefer the eastern migration route across the Bosphorus. So a sighting of 5 lesser spotted was indeed a record - what's more, one of them actually landed in Buskett to spend the night!

Also outstanding this autumn was a record passage of 53 ospreys. Unfortunately, many of them came to a very tragic end. Ironically, British papers have recently heralded the long-awaited comeback of the osprey as a breeding bird in England. Ospreys are fiercely protected in northern countries like the UK and Scandinavia. The osprey is the only European raptor which lives exclusively on fish.

Team Watch



In September BirdLife Malta organised and hosted its third International RaptorCamp. Once again, birdwatchers have proved that there are no political frontiers when it comes to bird protection.

Thirty foreigners from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland and the UK met in September for a three-week RaptorCamp based in Buskett. They joined Maltese participants to monitor and enjoy the spectacle of autumn migration. Very prominent on their agenda was also an intention to stop hunters from shooting birds of prey.

The camp started off badly, with honey-buzzards and a short-toed eagle shot down at Girgenti right in front of the participants' eyes. The incident turned

the camp's attention to this notorious area, which needed some very serious surveillance.

The watchers kept close contact with the police and constantly reported hunters seen shooting at raptors and other protected species - as a result of this, several suspects were searched by the police. The watchers' perseverance led to a dramatic drop in the slaughter at Girgenti.

Insults, vindictive punctures and direct threat (including some very close shaves!) didn't dampen the group's spirit - indeed it was a clear sign that the law breakers were feeling the pinch.

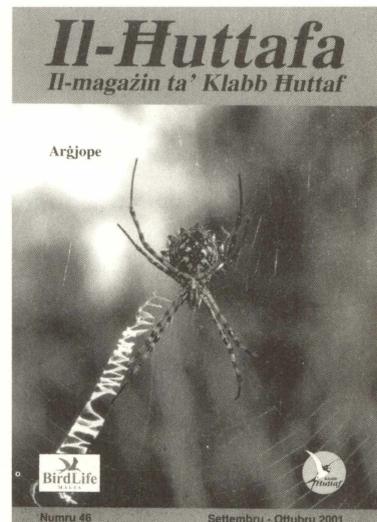
Unfortunately, as soon as the camp ended, illegal shooting at Girgenti resumed (see also p4).

For the young ones!

The biggest spider in Malta spins its web across the front cover of issue 46 of **Il-Huttafa**, the latest of Klabb Huttaf's 12-page bimonthly magazine.

This issue includes features about freshwater crabs, storks, great birdwatching spots and mysterious giant hummingbird pictures! Older club members can read about toxic chemicals or check out their next activity. The magazine is mailed to 1300 members.

Kids (under 16s) interested in joining the club please send Lm2 (cheque or unused 6c stamps) + name, address, phone number and date of birth to the BirdLife Malta office.



birdlife malta pictures

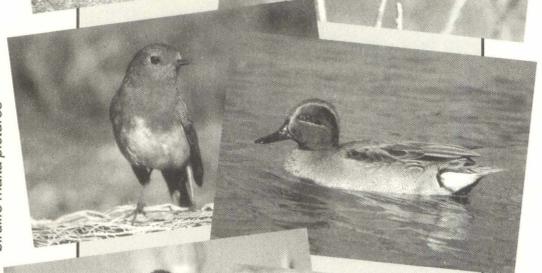
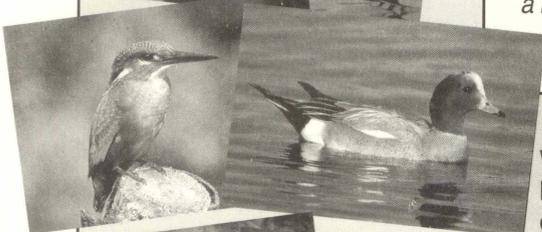
Picture this!

They're colourful, they're attractive and they're the newest items at the Ghadira nature shop.

After a gap of 13 years, BirdLife Malta has produced a further 9 postcards to add to the old set (many of which are now long gone).

The new postcards (numbers 17 to 25) feature **robin, common teal, mallard, Eurasian wigeon, common kingfisher, common chaffinch, hoopoe, linnet and goldfinch** - all great colour photographs taken by Denis Cachia, Raymond Galea and Victor Falzon.

What's more, they're still selling at the unbelievable price of **5c** - yes, just like the old set! You can get them at Ghadira nature reserve, or call the BirdLife Malta office.



Full swing at the reserves

Update... Is-Simar!

- The trenching and plastering work in the workshop block are now complete.
- The ground around the building has been levelled and any protruding sections of the concrete platform covered with earth, ready for landscaping.
- Fourteen new pairs of binoculars have been bought for use by visiting students.
- Students from Secondary schools have now started visiting the reserve practically daily.



Ghadira weekend opening hours

October to November: 10.30 - 16.30
December to January: 9.30 - 15.30
February to May: 10.30 - 16.30

Update... Ghadira!

- Replastering, repainting and re-wiring of Visitors Centre is now complete.
- New viewing windows have been fitted in the Visitors' Centre.
- New roof-membrane has replaced the old and tattered material on the Visitors' Centre and birdwatching hide.
- Faulty mains water feed has been replaced.
- Border hedge has been pruned, thanks to Falko (Klabb Huttaf's active teenagers) and other vols.
- Meeting for weekend guides held in preparation for re-opening of Ghadira to the public.
- Daily visits from Primary Schools have now resumed on a daily basis.
- Ghadira is now once more open at the weekends for visits by the general public.

This is the first scholastic year that has started off with educational activity running at both reserves. Is-Simar is now tackling Secondary schools while Ghadira is taking on Primaries (Year 4 upwards). BirdLife Malta is happy to note that the new system has gone down very well and is running smoothly. The Society has set up a new committee to take care of educational needs on the reserves.

Solid round of applause for Mark Gauci, our indefatigable, omnipresent reserves supervisor!!!

KEEP THE RAFFLE TICKETS FLYING!

We're running a RAFFLE to raise funds for building a visitors' centre at Is-Simar. PLEASE help out by selling as many tickets as you possibly can. And REMEMBER the Open Day at Is-Simar on 18 November 2001.

Thanks to...

- **Anthony Chapman**, a UK member who has kindly offered his help in setting up a UK supporters club for BirdLife Malta.
- **Nicholas Crampton**, UK member, for his help in contacting tourist companies to promote BirdLife Malta among their members.
- **H₂Only** for sponsoring drinking water at our 2001 International RaptorCamp
- **Go Mobile, Video Online, Coastline Hotel, Barracuda Restaurant, Kon Tiki Restaurant (Radisson SAS), General Distributors and The Body Shop** for kindly sponsoring prizes for our raffle.
- **Kemmnet** for sponsoring the BirdLife Malta website.

Oops!

In last issue of BirdTalk we wrongly dated the Little Ringed Plover habitat action as 2000. It should, of course, have read 2001. Sorry!

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egyptian vulture by michael sammut



A Yearful of Birds!

Make sure you don't miss your copy of our brand new 40th anniversary BirdLife Malta 2002 Desk Calendar, hot off the printing machine.

The flip calendar contains 13 stunning bird pictures, all taken by BirdLife Malta photographers.

For a copy call our office, or pop over to Ghadira some weekend. But don't take long thinking about it - the item is going very fast! Considering it's only 40c, it's no surprise!

The calendar also makes an excellent small but decent gift - teachers take note, and pass the word around!

BirdLife Malta meets MLP

In August BirdLife Malta Council members met representatives of the Malta Labour Party in order to outline the Society's policies. Among other things, the need for efficient law enforcement was discussed. The meetings were held with Dr Joe Brincat MP and Mr Carmelo Abela MP.

In September, Mr Abela also visited the BirdLife Malta bird monitoring post at Buskett during the International RaptorCamp.



desirée falzon

Mr Carmelo Abela (centre) visiting BirdLife Malta's raptor monitoring station.

In the name of the law!



Law enforcement was a frustrating story this autumn. September, for example, saw the outrageous shooting of a number of migrating ospreys from various places in Malta.

In a meeting of the Environment Monitoring Board (EMB) the Assistant Commissioner of Police informed BirdLife Malta that this year there would be no extra police from local stations to complement the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) team, as happened last year. This meant that hunters would have a field day at places where the overstretched ALE squad could not reach.

So BirdLife Malta started to turn on the heat. Daily reports of the situation were sent to the EMB chairperson and to the authorities. An open letter was sent to the Prime Minister deploring the unacceptable situation and demanding more political commitment, while requesting the setting up of a special environment police squad. A meeting was held with the Assistant Commissioner of Police Josie Brincat and Environment Minister Francis Zammit Dimech to pressure the authorities into providing more effective wardening. Press releases outlined the same appeal.

As migration intensified late in September, things began to improve. Police patrols of Buskett yielded results: hunters disappeared from the area or just stood around, forced to admire the incoming migrants, trigger-fingers idle!

It is of course depressing that in supposedly-enlightened times such as these, one still has to put in so much effort to get a minimum of enforcement going. Although it would be wrong to be pessimistic, the reality must be faced: political will is still abysmal.

The solution is uncompromisingly simple: if we are to save this country's natural heritage from wanton vandals, we need a strong, permanent squad of no-nonsense, well-equipped and committed environmental police.

So we won't stop asking until we get exactly that!

Crime and Punishment

In October alone, 52 persons were taken to court charged with birdcrime. Most were fined Lm50 for various infringements (killing protected species, shooting without licence etc). The highest fine was Lm300.



Address 57/28 Triq Rigord Ta'Xbiex MSD 12
Tel 21347646 Fax 21343239 Email info@birdlifemalta.org
Website birdlifemalta.org



BirdLife

MALTA

For birds and nature

57/28 Triq Rigord Ta' Xbiex MSD 12
Tel (356)21347646 Fax (356)21343239 Email info@birdlifemalta.org
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November 2001

Dear member,

For the past ten years, BirdLife Malta has been working on the creation of the nature reserve at Is-Simar. Thanks to the effort, this wetland is already providing excellent breeding habitat for reed warblers, little bittern, moorhen and other reed and marshland species.

BirdLife Malta wants to share the beauty of this place with everyone, which is why we are now in the process of planning the building of a small visitors' centre. Through this centre, Is-Simar will be able to receive visitors without disturbing wildlife, and establish facilities for schoolchildren visiting Is-Simar. Once the centre is ready, BirdLife Malta will open the reserve to the public on a regular basis, as it has been doing at Ghadira for several years now.

The costs for building this centre will be substantial, so we thought a raffle might help cover some of the expenses that will be involved. I am enclosing a booklet containing 25 tickets - it would be a great help if you could sell at least 20 of them (the rest are yours free); then just send in the ticket stubs and cheque (payable to BirdLife Malta).

Your support does make a visible difference. May I just remind you that the building of the three hides, workshop, store and toilet facility at Is-Simar was funded entirely by generous support from members and friends of BirdLife Malta. We are indeed very grateful for that.

On Sunday 18 November 2001 BirdLife Malta is having an Open Day at Is-Simar for members and public. The reserve will be open from 10am to 3.30pm, and our volunteers will be very glad to see you there and show you around. So do keep that date free!

On behalf of BirdLife Malta, I thank you once again for your support.

Yours sincerely



Antoine Vella
President

