

# BirdTalk



Michael Sammut

BirdLife Malta Newsletter

Issue 69

January - February 2002

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



BirdLife Malta Images

## It happens all the time!

**What happened in St Thomas Bay on 20 January happens every day for 151 days of the year.**

For five entire months (1 Oct - 28 Feb) hunters are legally allowed to pursue and kill birds from seacraft. They are supposed to restrict themselves to 11 species of birds (nine ducks and two geese), to have a special licence, use legal shot etc. On top of it all, they are not allowed to do any killing within 3km from shore - in other words, they are actually ordered to practise their blood-hobby far from prying eyes!

BirdLife Malta has always condemned hunting at sea, not least because it's practically impossible to

monitor, let alone regulate. In the past the Society staged street protests specifically against this novel and even more unfair way of waging war against birds. But pleas fell on deaf ears, and so the floating hunter proliferated and even demanded his rights. The result is that today we have an impressive armada running into hundreds of powerful seacraft, full of weapon-wielding men killing birds with total freedom and virtual impunity.

So what happened on that black Sunday was really nothing out of the

ordinary, except that the victims were very rare visitors to Malta and that the swans were slaughtered in front of horrified members of the public!

BirdLife Malta is often accused of exaggerating what happens in the country, and many remain blissfully unaware of the stark reality - indeed, it's not surprising that such barbaric behaviour takes seeing to be believed.

How appropriate that it had to happen in the very bay named after the proverbial skeptic!

### BirdLife Malta in Brussels

Last November, Joseph Mangion (then vice-president), Norman Chetcuti (treasurer) and Justin Vassallo (Council member) visited the European Community Office in Brussels to discuss with various key personnel the Birds and Habitats Directives vis-a-vis Malta's EU accession process.

The delegation met personnel from BirdLife International, the Directorate General's Environment Unit dealing with Malta's accession, Members of European Parliament, and the General Secretary of European Greens. A seminar on legal cases related to the Birds and Habitats Directive was also attended. The meetings were very fruitful and will help BirdLife Malta plan its strategy for the near future.

This visit was sponsored by the TAIEX funds through the Regional Policy Office of the OPM, and the Tripartite Committee.



Norman Chetcuti and Justin Vassallo (1st and 2nd from right) in discussion with officials from BirdLife International and the DG Environment Unit.

BirdLife Malta Images



Mark Sultana

Joe Attard, founder member of BirdLife Malta and current Honorary President of the Society, receives a copy of *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands* from the President of Malta.

## Forty Years for Birds

On 29 January 1962, the Malta Ornithological Society was founded, giving rise to the environment movement in Malta. In 1996, MOS changed its name (though not its mission) to BirdLife Malta to promote the fact that what is done locally is part of a global movement for the protection of all birds and their habitat. This is the partnership known as BirdLife International, which embraces over 90 organisations worldwide.

Today, 40 years later, we are proud to celebrate the anniversary of a Society which still spearheads the struggle for bird protection in Malta.

To mark this special year, BirdLife Malta (together with Nature Trust) has reprinted the book *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands*, highlighting the Society's commitment to environmental education. The book was launched during a special event on 24 January 2002 held at St. James Cavalier. His Excellency Prof Guido DeMarco, President of Malta, presented special hardbound copies of the book to founder members of BirdLife Malta, to past presidents of the Society, to the book contributors present at the event, and to various dignitaries connected with the environment.

## Saving up for Is-Simar



victor falzon

As you know, we are saving up to build and equip a visitors centre at Is-Simar. The project, being the second and last of the building units at the reserve, is expected to cost about Lm26,000. We simply don't have that kind of money - yet!

So BirdLife Malta is indeed grateful to all those members who helped by buying or selling raffle tickets: thanks to their effort we have already raised **Lm2100**. The Society is equally

indebted to donations from our Overseas Members' Appeal, which raised a further **Lm1500**.

We're still far from the magic figure, but at this rate we may actually start the job this very year.

Thanks once again for your trust and wonderful support.

May we please remind any members who still have raffle money, to forward this to the office as soon as is convenient for them.

## Annual General Meeting

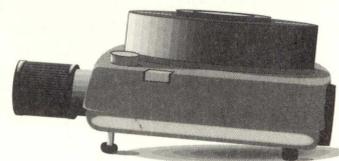
This year's Annual General Meeting will be held on 21 March 2002. Before the meeting there will be an illustrated talk by Raymond Galea. The meeting proper will come next, with the following agenda:

- President's address
- Secretary's report
- Committee reports
- Financial report
- Statute amendments
- Other matters
- Refreshments

The Council is proposing the following amendment to the Statute: **Section 8f**

*"Council may take on loan, from any commercial bank and/or financial institution, any sum necessary for the acquisition/development of said immovable property and to hypothecate all the property/pledge any funds or assets of BirdLife (Malta) in warranty of the repayment of the said loan and interest and observance of the condition of the loan."*

(words in bold to be added)



Date: Thursday 21 March 2002  
 Time: 6pm  
 Place: BirdLife Malta premises, Ta' Xbiex  
 All subscribed members of BirdLife Malta are welcome to attend.

## Lottery results

These are the winning tickets of the *Simar Visitors Centre Fund Raffle*, drawn in Jan 2002:  
 1st prize: Tkt **025081** Mario Muscat - Żejtun  
 2nd prize: Tkt **009833** Gertrude Galea - Isla  
 3rd prize: Tkt **048767** Carmel Ċefai - Gżira  
 4th prize: Tkt **006050** F Żammit - Rabat  
 5th prize: Tkt **002191** Darleen Żerafa - Bormla  
 6th prize: Tkt **033279** André Sciberras - Mosta  
 7th prize: Tkt **022562** Rose and Leslie Powell

Erratum...  
 BirdLife Malta would like to point out that it was **ECOPURE** who sponsored drinking water at our International Raptor Camp 2001 last September. Sincere apologies.

## Dutch assistance

BirdLife Malta is grateful to Vogelbescherming Nederland (BirdLife in the Netherlands) for renewing financial support for this year's employment of our marketing co-ordinator. This is the third year running that Liz Curmi has been doing BirdLife Malta's marketing work thanks to our Dutch BirdLife Partners.

On behalf of Vogelbescherming, Ms Johanna Winkelman came to Malta in January. During her stay, Ms Winkelman also visited the Kemmuna Wied I-Ahmar project, which is also being supported by Vogelbescherming.



## Pointing the way...



BirdLife Malta Images

Special traffic signs showing the way to Is-Simar and Ghadira nature reserves are now in place! BirdLife Malta thanks the Malta Tourism Authority for sponsoring the signs. There are six in all, three for Is-Simar and three for Ghadira. Watch out for them at roundabouts!

## Crime and punishment

The following were all tried and sentenced in December 2001

Jesmond Grixti (Kirkop)	Lm1036	Trying to import 52 birdskins
Daniel Giordmaina (Rabat)	Lm500 + susp lic.	Shooting protected species
		Hunting from main road
George Camilleri (Mtarfa)	Lm20	Letting minor handle shotgun
Mario Farrugia (Qrendi)	Lm50	Using illegal leadshot
Godwin Cutajar (Rabat)	Lm50	Hunting without licence
Jonathan Attard (Birzebbuga)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Carmel Camilleri (Siggiewi)	Lm50	Hunting in close season
Kevin Micallef (Gharghur)	Lm50	Trapping without licence
Andrew Brincat (Luqa)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Andrew Camilleri (Luqa)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Antoine Falzon (Pietà)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
John Busuttill (Birzebbuga)	Lm50	Hunting near residential area
Carmel Falzon (Birzebbuga)	Lm50	Hunting near residential area
Walter Galea (Rabat)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Francis Vella (Zurrieq)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Carmelo Muscat (Mosta)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Nicholas Bartolo (Zebbug)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Joe Camilleri (Naxxar)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Joseph Gatt (Naxxar)	Lm50	Using birdcaller
Alan Spiteri (Fgura)	Lm50	Hunting in residential area
		Overloading shotgun
Pasquale Pulis (Marsaskala)	Lm50	Letting minor handle shotgun
Robert Borg (Fgura)	Lm50	Hunting at sea in close season
Cristino Grech (Naxxar)	Lm100	Overloading shotgun
		Threatening police officers
Giovanni Scerri (Marsa)	Lm20	Letting another party handle shotgun
Mario Calleja (Zabbar)	Lm50	Hunting in close season
George Casha (Marsa)	Lm10	Letting others handle gun
Joe Camilleri (Zurrieq)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Roderick Bugeja (Qrendi)	1wk jail (susp)	Hunting without licence
John Lia (Zabbar)	Lm50	Possessing protected species
Emanuel Vella (Qormi)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Stephen Bartolo (Mosta)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Julian Xriha (Qormi)	Lm70	Hunting at sea in close season
Victor Bonnici (Zejtun)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Michael Boyianzis (Qormi)	1wk jail (susp)	Hunting without licence
Francis Gafà (Gudja)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Joseph Gafà (Paola)	Lm50	Overloading shotgun
Carmelo Caruana (Zurrieq)	Lm50	Loading shotgun near residential area
Robert Farrugia (Zurrieq)	Lm50	Exposing shotgun near residential area
Philip Borg (Qrendi)	Lm50	Hunting near main road

BirdLife Malta would like to thank Inspector Alex Miruzzi, head of ALE, for forwarding this list.

## Birds of a feather snore together!

On 12 January, 14 BirdLife Malta volunteers met at Valletta and braved the cold and clammy weather. Purpose: to count wagtails!

Pied wagtails arrive in autumn and take advantage of our mild climate to overwinter in Malta. In the evening, they gather in large numbers to roost (sleep) in trees. They do this for safety in numbers. Other birds (like sparrows, starlings and swallows) do the same. A roost may run into thousands, all perched in a small group of trees in one village square! What's more, they will often stick to the same spot for years: the pied wagtails who visit Malta have chosen the ten *Ficus* trees in Great Siege Square in Valletta to spend their winter nights.

This habit of using the same site year after year is of course very convenient for study purposes, and this year's survey yielded a total of 2768 birds. The same study last year gave 2235 birds.



pied wagtail

BirdLife Malta Images

## New Assistant Warden

Alex Casha has joined the personnel at Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves in the role of assistant warden. Alex will be helping both wardens by doing habitat management on a roster basis between the two sites. Alex has been an active member of BirdLife Malta for many years.

BirdLife Malta thanks the EPD for this important appointment.

Get your special BirdLife Malta Anniversary mug!

Call 21347646



# Wildlife of the Maltese Islands

BirdLife

editors: Joe Sultana • Victor Falzon

members: Peter Edvin Lafranco • editor: (assnt) Alfred F. Bubbacchino  
David Dandrea • Guido Lafranco • Nicolas Lafranco • Constantino Vissal  
Piero J. Schemmel • Stephen Schemmel • Joe Sultana  
illustrated by: Victor Falzon • Guido Lafranco • Anthony Micallef  
scientific consultation: Ettore Lafranco • Patricia J. Schenkel  
translated by: David Dandrea

## Yep! It's out again!

Already something of a classic, the book *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands* was a formidable undertaking, bringing together the combined knowledge of several experts to produce a fully-illustrated description of just under 1000 species of Maltese flora and fauna. The book became popular, sold well and eventually... sold out!

So last year BirdLife Malta sought permission to print this landmark publication once again, also as part of its upcoming 40th anniversary celebrations. The Minister of Environment promptly agreed, and for this the Society is grateful.

Since Nature Trust also turns 40 this year, BirdLife Malta felt it appropriate to share with its sister organisation the pride of publication.

The book is a replica of the original 1996 edition, but with a special foreword by the President of Malta. And of course, the temptation to give it a new cover was far too great!

If you still don't have the book, we urge you to buy your copy from our own outlet at Ghadira nature reserve, or call our office at Ta' Xbiex. That way, all profits will go to bird protection. Copies bought from BirdLife Malta are signed by the editors.

### Specifications

Format 203x260mm; softbound;  
336pp; 46 colour plates; c300 line art;  
Price Lm7.50



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## Young trees want home!

### Sandarac Gharghar *Tetraclinis articulata*

Evergreen. Rare conifer, hardy with bright green leaves and small cones. National tree. Size of saplings 50-60cm. Availability 50 saplings. Price Lm2.25.

### English oak Balluta Ingliza *Quercus robur*

Deciduous. Staggeringly beautiful when mature - the classic oak tree! Needs space! Size of saplings 60-140cm. Availability 40 saplings. Price Lm2.25.

### Aleppo pine Sığra taż-Znuber *Pinus halepensis*

Evergreen conifer. Hardy with bright green spindly leaves with familiar cones. Size of saplings 80-120cm. Availability 300 saplings. Price Lm1.75.

### Pomegranate Rummiena *Punica granatum*

Medium-height, deciduous tree, well-known for its fruit. Beautiful in all seasons. Size of saplings 200cm. Availability 15 saplings. Price Lm2.25.

### Stone pine Żnuber ta' l-Umbrella *Pinus pinea*

Rare evergreen conifer, assuming umbrella shape when mature. Seeds edible. Size of saplings 150cm. Availability 20 saplings. Price Lm2.25.

### Mediterranean buckthorn Alaternu *Rhamnus alaternus*

Thick, evergreen, berry-bearing shrub; hardy, with small waxy leaves. Size of saplings 100-200cm. Availability 20 saplings. Price Lm2.25.

All trees and shrubs in our nursery are locally-grown by members of BirdLife Malta. To buy trees from our nursery, please contact Mark Gauci (cel 79354269) or visit Ghadira nature reserve at the weekends (10.30am-4.30pm).

## Birders Log

Joe Sultana

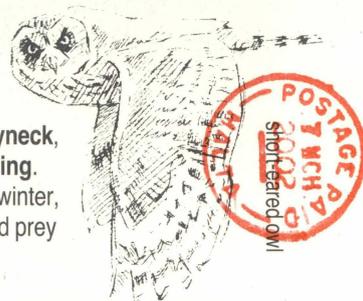
Geese made the headlines in December, but in January it was the **mute swan**, much rarer in Malta, which was the talk of the town (see page 1)

The usual wintering birds - **meadow pipit, pied wagtail, grey wagtail, black redstart, robin, stonechat, song thrush, blackcap, chiffchaff, hedge accentor, starling** etc - appeared in every birdwatcher's list, while seabird watching, mainly from Qawra and Point St. Elmo, continued to provide good results. **Yellow-legged gulls, lesser black-backed gulls, black-headed gulls** and **Mediterranean gulls** were regularly logged. **Northern gannet** and **sandwich tern** also figured in the list, as did a few **little gulls**. **Levantine shearwaters** were also spotted off Qawra. But the seabird par excellence for January was a single **Pallas's gull** (also known as great black-headed gull) a very rare species in Maltese waters. A rare **Arctic skua** also put in an appearance in early February.

Some birdwatchers were worried about **zitting cisticolas**. This tiny breeding bird is usually quiet in winter, but this January they seemed to be even quieter. However, by mid-February their familiar zipping call was being heard regularly.

**Black-necked grebes**, a few ducks (mainly **Eurasian teal**), **moorhens, coots, water rails**, and **kingfishers** were present at Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves. Other species seen at one or both reserves included **woodcock, common snipe, jack snipe, little stint, common sandpiper, northern lapwing, wryneck, bluethroat, moustached warbler** and **reed bunting**.

A single **short-eared owl**, rarely recorded in winter, delighted birdwatchers at Is-Simar, where it hunted prey for a couple of evenings in early January.



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In case of incorrect or incomplete name and address details, please inform the office. Thank you.