

Bracing for jellyfish this summer



Physophora hydrostatica, a new species of jellyfish for Maltese waters, has been included in the Spot the Jellyfish database. Photo courtesy of www.oceanfoto.co.uk. Right: The Med-Jelly smart phone app is available for free download for Android phones and iPhone.

The International Ocean Institute-Malta Operational Centre (IOI-MOC) at the University is coordinating the organisation of a Med-Jellyrisk conference on Tuesday and training seminar on Wednesday at the Corinthia St George's Hotel in St Julian's. Besides commemorating European Maritime Day, the events will showcase the array of tools that have been developed by the project to address the jellyfish bloom phenomenon.

These tools include a smart phone application, which has just been launched by the IOI-MOC for both iOS (iPhone) and Android platforms, that provides users information about different jellyfish species and about local beaches. Other tools include a waterproof factsheet that answers the most common questions about jellyfish blooms, mathematical models to predict the dispersion of jellyfish blooms once these are sighted in open waters, and a waterproof booklet with scientific advice as how to treat the stings of different jellyfish species.

The smart phone application can be downloaded for Android phones from the following link:

The events will showcase tools developed to address the jellyfish bloom phenomenon

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=jelly.med.mobileapp> and for iPhone from the following link: <https://itunes.apple.com/LY/app/id868757617?mt=8>.

The training seminar will be held on the beach at St George's Bay, and will include a demonstration of how the Med-Jellyrisk anti-jellyfish nets are deployed and training for local lifeguards by pharmacists specialised in the treatment of stings and injuries from venomous animals.

The conference and training seminar is being attended by world-renowned experts in the field of jellyfish blooms, by stakeholders in the local tourism industry, by members of scuba diving clubs and officials from local councils and environmental NGOs.

The University participates in this project through the IOI-MOC and the Department of Biology. The project is funded under the ENPI-CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the EU. The multilateral cross-border cooperation 'Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme' is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and of its financing instrument (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument – ENPI). The programme is 90 per cent co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and 10 per cent from national funds.



Mepa has finally revived enforcement action against the internet cafe on the sand dunes at Golden Bay.

Mepa enforcement steps up a gear

Malta Environment and Planning Authority enforcement frequently assumes the role of a punching bag with the public pouring scorn and contempt on this much-maligned section of Mepa in view of its perceived helplessness when faced by the ever-mounting cases of pending cases of planning infringements.

This criticism is probably justified in some, if not most cases, although the section suffers from a chronic lack of manpower and facilities, and in some cases, political interference from successive governments. For consistency's sake, when the unit embarks on positive action I regularly feature it in this column to convey the message that such decisive and concrete action is what the public expects from this unit.

It is heartening that Mepa recently issued an enforcement notice (ECF 0005/14) in relation to the illegal development of a 465-square-metre internet cafe and restaurant on the scheduled sand dunes at Golden Bay, a case which has been dragging on for a decade and which has resulted in the beach being accorded the Beach of Quality status rather than the coveted Blue Flag.

At the end of April, I also queried with Mepa the legitimacy of ongoing large-scale soil excavations at an Outside Development Zone site on the periphery of Mosta, opposite Ta' Żokrija hamlet and the wayside chapel dedicated to San Pawl tal-Qlejja. Mepa officers duly visited the site and enforcement action is being undertaken on the unauthorised engineering works after they were unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade the land owner to restore the site.

About a month ago, complaints were submitted to Mepa by various people, including myself, about the possible dumping of inert waste and the smothering of carob trees at a site close to the Red Tower and the Foresta 2000 site in Mellieħa. Investigations are being concluded and an enforcement notice, with daily penalties, is being issued for the site to be restored.

One hopes this enforcement action is followed up until the land in question is restored to its original state and is not allowed to become just another insignificant statistic. For example, when will the decades-long pending enforcement notices issued on La Grotta disco at Xlendi Valley be acted upon?



This site in Mosta, close to the lower reaches of Chadwick Lakes, has been subjected to an enforcement notice for unauthorised works after a report lodged with Mepa by the author.

Mepa clarification on Qala Square trees

In a previous article in this column on the proposed uprooting of trees in Qala parish square ('Those nasty trees in Qala', March 23), I had stated that Qala local council had a permit to uproot the palm trees in the square and that permits to uproot the remaining (circa 27) Ficus trees were awaited from Mepa.

Mepa recently issued a clarification to counter this claim by the Qala local council, which reads as follows: "Mepa had approved a Development Notification Order application DN 00181/14 for embellishment of the square. This did not include any interventions on the trees, and was limited to pavement works and street furniture.

"More recently, the authority received a further application NP0043/14 for the uprooting of four Washingtonia palm trees. In this regard, the authority would like to clarify that only the four Washingtonia palm trees can be uprooted.

"No other interventions on the Ficus trees in the same square are being permitted."

This clarification further undermines Qala council's position on the issue since it exposes its lack of legitimacy in uprooting the remaining 27 Ficus trees and reveals that the initiative to uproot the trees came exclusively from the council itself.

One must commend Mgr Anton Sultana from Qala for taking up the defence of the trees and speaking out vociferously against their uprooting.

A sniffer dog in your smart phone

There seem to be no limit for the multitude of applications for which you can use your smart phone.

The Foodsniffer project (www.foodsniffer.eu) aims to develop a food-testing device, to be incorporated in smart phones, to check for the presence of pesticides, mycotoxins, allergens and other unsavoury chemicals in food prior to its consumption.

This ambitious goal would surely be ground-breaking since, with globalisation and the presence of food items from all the corners of the world on our supermarket shelves, ensuring food safety along all stages of the food chain has become more and more challenging.

However, don't hold your breath for now as it is expected that this cutting-edge technology will only be commercialised in three to five years' time following completion of the project since mandatory validation protocols need to be conducted to ensure the technology is completely watertight.

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