

This short article with an accompanying sketch and photograph, is intended to show a type of Maltese cricket cage (*gagġa tal-werzieq*) for its folkloristic interest and research only. As environmentalists, lovers and admirers of this creature, we do not, in any way, encourage the capture and insensitive imprisonment of this insect which fills the hot summer nights with its song; it forms an intimate part of our life and environment.

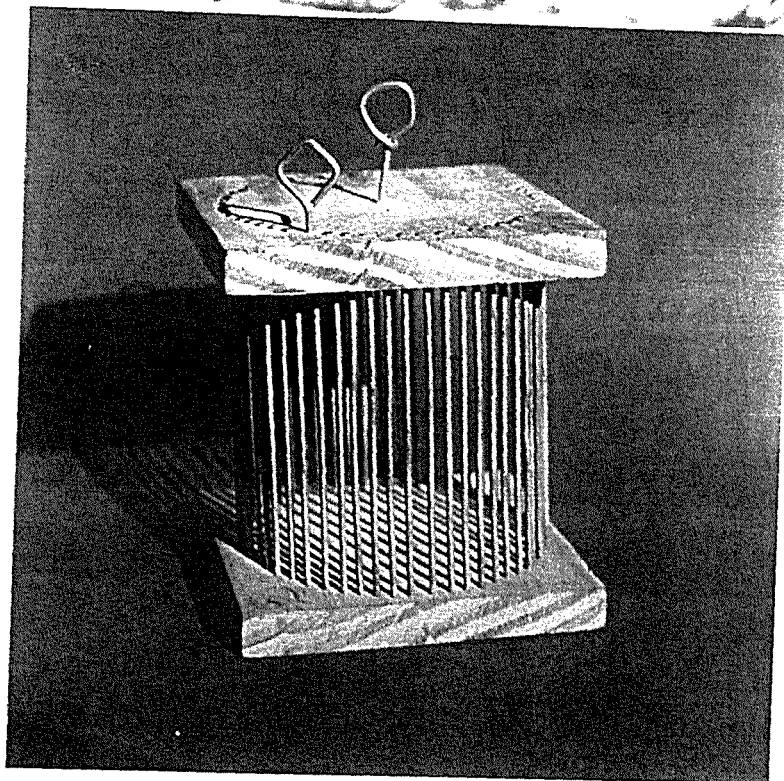
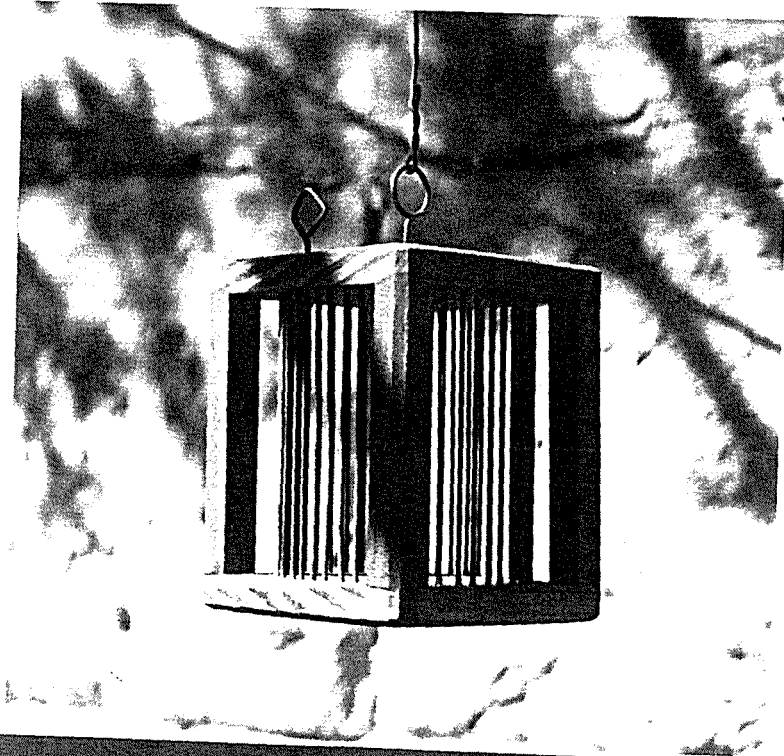
The Song The cricket's song, in reality the male's mating call, is a shrill staccato chirp heard during the night. It has inspired many poets, including in Maltese literature, to write about it. In Maltese it is known by several names, varying according to locality, but mostly called *zerzur*, *grillu* or *werzieq il-lejl*. It is associated with summer, and comes out of hibernation during the hot months, mainly from July to September, and is heard no more during the colder, wintry months. Some people, especially light sleepers and insomniacs, hate its shrill call during the night. It is generally observed that it chirps more sharply and strongly when the weather is humid or threatening to rain.

Folklore Considering that the cricket is so much a part of our life, there is not much lore about it. A fallacious but very strong belief among country folks is that its song ripens the grapes on the vine. There is a saying which goes: *Il-kant tal-grillu jsajjar l-gheneb* (the cricket's song ripens the grapes), or: *Meta l-ġewnaħ tal-grillu jagħleb, isir l-gheneb*. (when the cricket's wing vibrates, the grapes ripen). In Chinese folklore, the cricket is the symbol of song, happiness and a long life, and regarded as a good luck charm. They also keep crickets in cages, and it is surprising how such a tiny country like ours has this folkloristic aspect in common with such a mammoth nation as China!

The Cage Obviously, many people like the cricket's song, and have contrived to cage it. Frans Farrugia from Hal Ghaxaq, a lover of folklore and member of the Folklore Society Committee, made the cage shown in the photograph. The construction of the cage (see the annotated drawing) is based on the old method, of which he has one over fifty years old. It is made of wood and rigid 1mm gauge steel wire, with vertical rods set at some 5mm apart. When wire was not available in the past, bars were made of thinly split reeds (*żafżaf*) cut to size; obviously the cage was very fragile and more perishable.

THE CRICKET'S CAGE

Cricket's cages made by Frans Farrugia of Ghaxaq.



Photos: (Top) Angelo Dougall, (Bottom) Guido Lanfranco