

Joe Sultana (11th November 1939 – 11th September 2018) – An Appreciation

EDWIN LANFRANCO

My friend Joe Sultana has been a driving force in the promotion of the conservation of wild birds in particular and the natural environment in general. Prior to 1962 when the Malta Ornithological Society (now BirdLife Malta) was set up, soon followed in the same year by the Natural History Society of Malta (now Nature Trust Malta), there was very little environmental awareness in Malta. These societies and, eventually, others started the ball rolling.

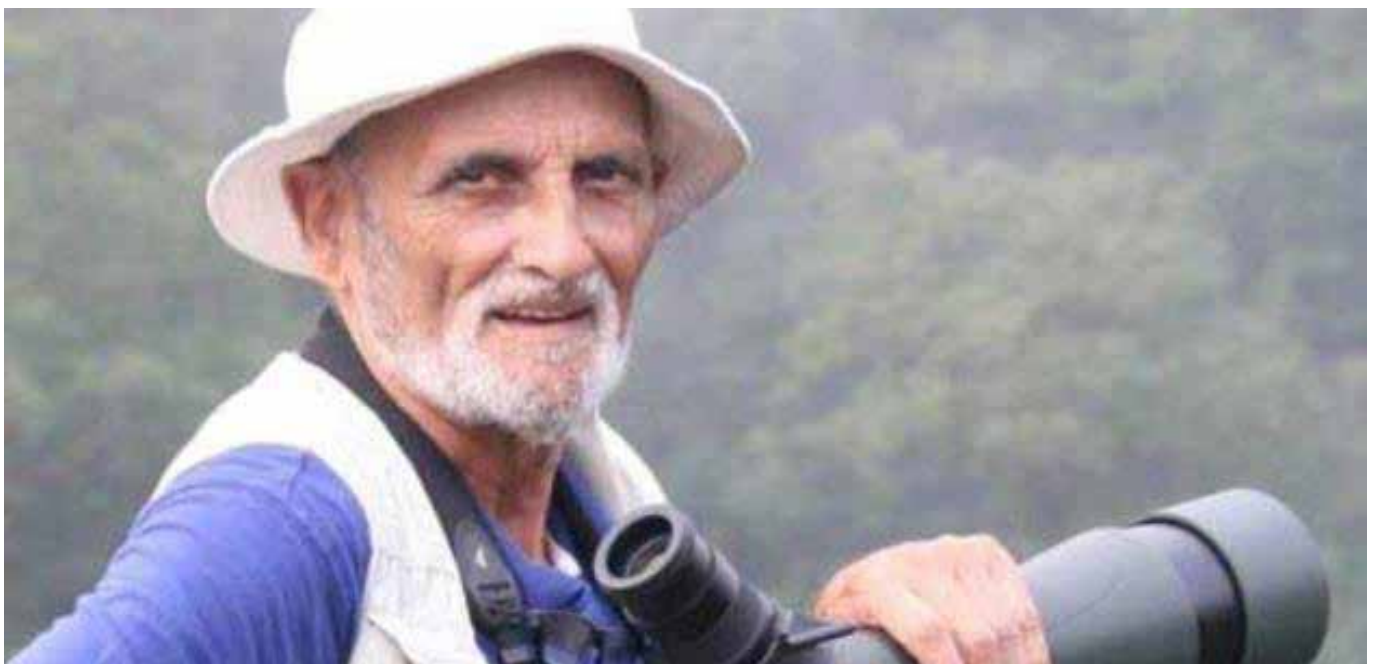
Joe immediately joined the MOS and from the 24th April 1962 he started to form part of the committee of its Gozo Branch. He started serving on the main committee as Honorary Secretary in 1967 until he was elected president in 1976, which post he held till 1987.

In 1957 Joe started his career as a teacher in Government schools. Later on, in this capacity, he was posted to Villa Psaigon in Dingli which, at the time, served as a field studies centre where schoolchildren, teachers, environmentalists participated in short field courses – often residential - with field work being carried out in areas such as Buskett and followed up by laboratory sessions and lectures. He held this posting until 1980 when moved to pastures new occupying the post of environment officer for

conservation in the ministry then responsible for the Environment. In 1993 he was appointed environment manager (reserves, sites and habitats) while in 1995 he was promoted to principal environment officer, retiring in 2000. Sultana also held numerous prestigious posts in international conservation organisations such as the International Council for Bird Preservation (now BirdLife International), MEDMARAVIS and others.

Joe has also been the recipient of numerous awards such as the Gouden Lepelaar (Golden Spoonbill) by BirdLife Netherlands; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Medal and made a Member of Honour by BirdLife International. His latest award was the Premju Buonamico (together with David Dandria and myself) presented by the Environment and Resources Authority on the 20th April 2018.

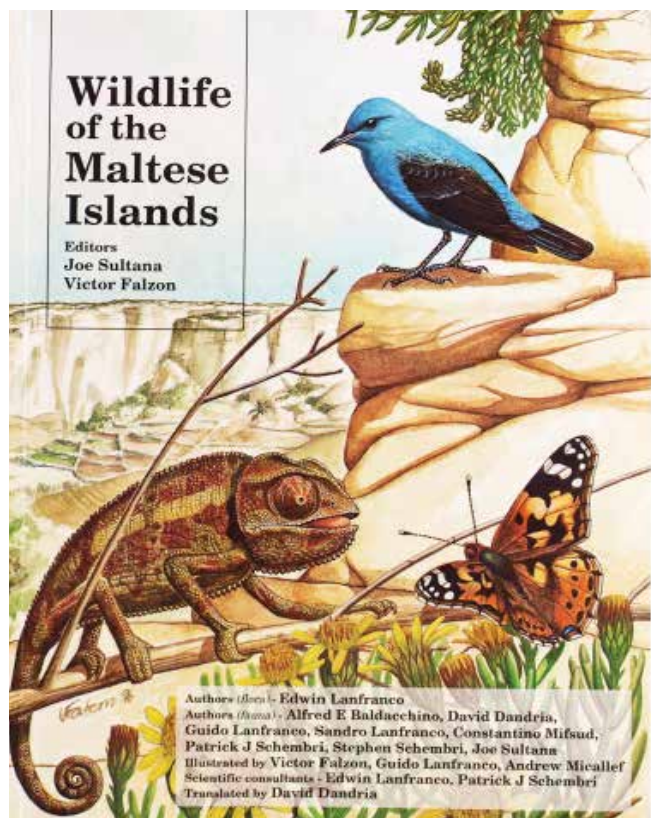
Joe has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books and other publications. Among these one can mention: *A Guide to the Birds of Malta* (1975, with Charles Gauci and Mark Beaman); *L-Aghsafar* (1979, with Charles Gauci and colour plates by Rodney Ingram) of which an English language edition was published in 1982 as *A New Guide to the Birds of Malta*; *L-Għasafar ta' Malta* (2001, with



colour plates by Andrew Micallef); *Nature in Gozo* (2007, with John J. Borg and Edwin Lanfranco); *The Breeding Birds of Malta* (2011, with John J. Borg, Charles Gauci and Victor Falzon and, his last book, *Il-Wirt Naturali ta' Ghawdex* (2018) which is a compilation of articles written by him over the years.

In 1995 he was editor, and one of the authors of *Flora u Fawna ta' Malta* illustrated by Victor Falzon and Andrew Micallef; this is certainly one of the most important works on the natural history of Malta aimed at the general public. It was translated into English (by David Dandria) and published as *Wildlife of the Maltese Islands* (1996 and edited together with Victor Falzon), which was reprinted in 2002. Alas both Maltese and English edition have long been out of print and I feel that there is still a great need for this book and hope that an updated edition must, some day, see the light of day.

In my opinion his Magnum Opus is the detailed *History of Ornithology in Malta* (2016, with John J. Borg and design by Victor Falzon). In the same year he edited *A Man of Cultural Achievements*, a festschrift in honour of the Gozitan Scholar Joseph Attard Tabone. In addition he also published several scholarly papers on the ornithology of Malta and the Mediterranean area in several scholarly journals as well as many articles in popular media. I was very



History of Ornithology in Malta



Joe Sultana • John J Borg

glad to have been invited by Joe to write studies for the various publications which he edited.

I first got to know Joe some time in the mid 1960s when I became involved with the natural environment and joined both the NHSM, in which I was most active, as well as the MOS. He invited me to collaborate in various of his projects – he was a veritable volcano of ideas, initiating projects and seeing them through. We also collaborated when he left the Education Ministry to join that responsible for the environment. Occasionally we did not see eye-to-eye on some matters but this never affected our friendship and mutual respect. Alas, over the past year his health rapidly began to wane and he passed away in Xagħra (Gozo) the town where he was born. He is survived by his wife Lucy (née Sammut), his daughter Ruth and his son Mark who, following in his father's steps, is now CEO of BirdLife Malta.

Edwin Lanfranco is a botanist and ecologist; he holds a degree in botany from the University of London. He was a teacher in government institutions at all levels (primary, secondary and sixth form) since 1968 and also a lecturer of biological sciences at the University of Malta since 1978 on a part-time basis and since 1987 on a full-time basis. He is author of various studies, mainly on botany and ecology of the Maltese Islands and the Mediterranean area. He has carried out fieldwork and delivered presentations, apart from Malta, in several countries around the Mediterranean.