

~~The Malta Ornithological Society is committed to remove this blight which afflicts Maltese society and seeks bravely to face up to it. In the course of time this struggle has not wasted us away but we have gathered momentum and gone from strength to strength.~~

~~Of course it has been possible because others have decided to do something about it too -- each within the limits of his ability and possibility: people who have found within themselves the rare sensitivity and generosity of heart to offer a helping hand.~~

~~Among the noblest at heart, we came across Mr. H.C. Morris, a gentleman serenely at peace with himself because he was at peace with nature and appreciative of its inspiration. He is now no longer among us to strengthen our resolve but in tribute of his aid, we will keep the memory of this friend alive.~~

~~This H.C. MORRIS Memorial Issue of *Il-Merill* will ensure that his name will always be associated with the Malta Ornithological Society.~~

**Dominiq Cutajar**  
**Editor**  
***Il-Merill***

## THE 14TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 14th Annual General Meeting was held on 5th February 1976. Here is the Presidential Address which was delivered at the meeting and the Hon. Secretary's report for the year March 1975 -- January 1976.

### President's Address

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to welcome you again for this annual general meeting. The past year was a time of great activity for the Society. Many members have contributed a great deal to the aims of the Society. Others have been very generous towards its funds. Many others have shown their appreciation and encouraged us in our difficult task. It would take me long to mention all these members by their name, but I would like to bring to your notice the sterling work done by the Young Members Section, the way they have been organising themselves, the harmony they are keeping with the Executive Committee and the propaganda they are spreading amongst other youths about what we believe is beneficial to our avian fauna and ornithological studies. To many other youths they have proved to be a beacon of light in a world darkened by indiscriminate shooting and vandalistic acts. On several occasions they collaborated with the Department of Agriculture in planting hundreds of young trees at Ghadira and Ta' Qali.

Two years ago we announced in a general meeting that the Society had undertaken to publish a book on the birds of Malta. It is my great pleasure, this evening, to announce that this book under the title "A Guide to the Birds of Malta" is ready and will be launched in a Press Conference in the very near future. As stated by the authors themselves this guide is not intended to serve as a descriptive and illustrated handbook when standard European field guides and much wider works are available, but it provides a comprehensive, unambiguous baseline for future ornithological studies. It is a great credit to

the Society and the three authors J. Sultana, C. Gauci, M. Beaman, whose coordinated work has produced this much needed publication not only for the local ornithologist but for anyone interested in the birds of the Palacaretic Region.

During the last months of 1975 our hard working Secretary Joe Sultana in collaboration with the Society's P.R.O. Alfred Baldacchino, produced a series of seven programmes on Malta T.V. under the heading "Wirt in-Natura" (Our Natural Heritage). These featured different important aspects of our natural history and were prepared by Malta's leading authorities on each relative subject. We must say that birds were one of the main features in these programmes and we were glad to view the message of conservation being conveyed to the Maltese public, loud and clear.

Not very long ago the Government announced the amendment of the Regulations for the Protection of Birds. The inclusion of a 200 yards non-shooting zone round six areas in Malta including Buskett and Kennedy Grove makes more sense in the enforcement of the law. This is a reintroduction of a clause which was included in the 1932 Bird Protection Regulations and repealed some years later due to the enormous pressures exerted on the Government by the big noises of the shooting community. It is a well known historical fact that in Malta birds have been spared a certain degree of protection whenever the element of danger to life and limb arose to those living and quite surprisingly when those who have already passed away were flagrantly disrespected by the discharging of shot-guns on and around their graves. This is why we have some public gardens and cemeteries on the list of bird sanctuaries, but not Ghadira and Filla which after all have the greatest potentialities as nature reserves.

The Malta Ornithological Society has over the years established itself as one of the leading national societies. It has always been the policy of the M.O.S. to see new blood in the vanguard of its uphill struggle and therefore I feel I should surrender my place on the committee. I am sure that whoever will occupy the place of president will receive the co-operation and respect which has never failed from the committee members since 1967. On the other hand I assure the president to be elected and the incoming committee that they should continue to count on my support and co-operation. To all those who have shown confidence in me and given me their support in these last nine years, I say 'thank you'.

**Joe M. Attard**  
**President**

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### **Secretary's Report March 1975 — January 1976**

The 13th Annual General Meeting was held at the British Council on 11th February 1975 at 5.50 p.m. After the President's address, the Secretary read the minutes of the 12th Annual General Meeting and the report for the year April 1974 to February 1975. The Financial Report as on 31st December 1974 was also presented at the meeting by the Hon. Treasurer. The President's address and the Secretary's report appeared in "IL-MERILL" No. 15 while cyclo-styled copies of the Treasurer's financial report were sent to all members. No election was held during the meeting because the Committee had been

lected to serve for a period of two years during the 12th Annual General Meeting. The Committee members during the past year were the same as in 1974; however Mr. Vincent Sammut was co-opted during 1975 to serve on the Committee, bringing the total of Committee officials and members to eight.

1975 was again another year full of activities. 11 Committee Meetings were held while 7 indoor meetings and 3 outings were organised for the members. The mass media of communications was frequently and regularly used. 10 interviews and discussions by M.O.S. officials were broadcast on Radio Malta and Cable Radio, while for the first time programmes on local Natural History and Conservation, entitled 'Wirt in-Natura', were screened on Malta Television. The programmes were produced by the M.O.S. with the help of various members of both the M.O.S. and the Natural History Society. This series which was well received, carried conservation ideals into thousands of Maltese homes. The weekly articles 'Our Natural Environment' in the *Times of Malta*, which were started in 1974 jointly by the M.O.S., I.C.B.P. Malta Section and N.H.S.M. were continued during 1975, while the articles 'Nghixu man-Natura' (Living with Nature) in the Maltese Sunday paper '*It-Torċa*' continued to appear though not regularly. Press releases were frequently issued and were given good coverage by Radio, TV and the Press. 2 Posters and Car Stickers were also issued while one number of 'IL-MERILL' (Jan.-June 1975) was published. The other issue (July- Dec. 1975) which carries the annual report of the MOS Ringing and Research Group for 1974, is in press. The Society's major publication 'A Guide to the Birds of Malta' was finalised and taken to press during the year. Its publication is being announced at this meeting. Illustrated talks were also given at schools and to various associations. The Commissioner of Police was frequently informed officially of law infringements as was the case in the trapping of Yellow Wagtails in Gozo, the shooting from sea-craft, bird shooting and trapping on Comino and in and around Buskett, bird trapping at Pieta Glacis and the trapping of Robins. Both independently and through the Malta Section of the ICBP, the M.O.S. forwarded proposals to the Government for better bird protection legislation. A survey of birds of prey shot in spring 1975 was carried out and a report on the situation of these species in Malta was prepared and submitted to the European Meeting of the Birds of Prey World Working Group, through the National Section of the ICBP. Contacts and exchange of literature were maintained with various International and National Ornithological Bodies.

Both the Young Members' Section and the MOS Ringing and Research Group were also continually active. The Young Members Section held several outings, helped in carrying out habitat management at Ghadira, took part in TV programmes, organised an Essay Competition in Secondary Schools, contributed a fair share in the MOS Ringing and Research Group's activities and organised another protest with placards against the indiscriminate shooting. This Section also issued its own newsletter "L-GHASFUR".

The Ringing Group's hard work was rewarded with a record total for one year. 10,176 birds were ringed apart from controlling a large number of retraps and some recoveries. The grand total of birds ringed since ringing started in autumn 1965 now numbers over 54,500 birds. As in previous years, a daily log of birds recorded was also kept. The Group organised four expeditions to Filfla and issued regularly newsletters to its ringing members.

Following is a list of the main activities by month.

- March 1975: MOS delegation's meeting with the Director of Agriculture re the areas of Ghadira and Xemxija.  
Day outing to Comino
- April: Outing to Ghadira and tree-planting at Ta' Qali by the YMS.  
3-day field study at Ghadira by the YMS.  
2nd day outing to Comino.  
Screening 'Life of a Robin' in various schools.  
MOS and ICBP (Malta Section) meeting with the General Workers Union re the latter's project at Ghadira.  
Proposals re Ghadira as a Field Centre presented to the Prime Minister.  
2 illustrated talks to school children at Ghadira camp by A.E. Baldacchino.  
Illustrated talk to members on the Lea Valley and Rye Meads by W.F. Chapman.  
Illustrated talk to members on the functions of the Wildlife Youth Service by J. Hirons.
- May: Proposals for better bird protection legislation forwarded to the Government through the ICBP (Malta Section).  
2 filmshows for members: The Private Life of a Kingfisher — Avocets Return — Welcome in the Mud — Winged Aristocrats — Flying Birds.  
MOS 6th poster pointing out the danger of losing our scarce breeding birds.  
Two illustrated talks to schoolchildren at Ghadira Camp by J. Sultana.  
4 bird watching outings to Ghadira by the YMS.  
Essay Competition — L-Ghasafar x'ifissru għalik? (What do birds mean to you?) — in Secondary Schools organised by the YMS.  
Illustrated talk on the potentialities of Ghadira as a bird reserve by J. Sultana at the Mellicha Youth Centre.
- June: Issuing Car Stickers with the MOS emblem and with the slogan 'Help us to help you protect your birds'.  
*Il-Merill* No. 15.
- July: Two expeditions to Filfla by MOSRRG.  
3rd expedition to Filfla.  
An appeal to bishops and archpriests of Malta and Gozo by the MOS, ICBP and NHSM pointing out their responsibilities for conveying to the public the need for nature conservation and appreciation.
- August: 4th expedition to Filfla.  
Erection of a giant reed fence at Ghadira by the YMS to protect tree saplings. (This activity was also carried out in the following month).
- September: Two outings to watch migrating Birds of Prey at Buskett by the YMS.

- Report on the situation of Birds of Prey in Malta sent jointly with the ICBP Malta Section to the European Meeting of the Birds of Prey World Working Group. YMS helped Dr. W. Thiede in counts at Spanish Sparrow's roosts.
- October: First and Second TV programmes 'Wirt in-Natura' Illustrated talk to members—Birds of Nepal and India—by Dr. W. Thiede. Discussion on Radio Malta — Bird Shooting in Malta — by Dr. P. Muscat MP and MOS Secretary.
- Protest with placards by the YMS at the City Gate Valletta against the indiscriminate shooting of birds.
- Two bird watching outings to Buskett and Ghadira by the YMS.
- Prize giving ceremony of the Essay Competition.
- YMS Officer (M. Grima) and Secretary (J. Azzopardi) taking part in a seminar on youth organisation at Dar Hidma Ghall-Paci.
- YMS members taking part in a TV programme for teenagers 'Werqa' on bird shooting in Malta.
- November: Tree planting at Ghadira by the YMS.
- Illustrated talk to M.U.S.E.U.M. youngsters at Qrendi by M. Grima and V. Cilia.
- Illustrated talk to members — Migration Survey Spring 1975 by C. Gauci.
- Bird watching outing and bird ringing demonstration to members at Buskett.
- Third and fourth programmes of 'Wirt in-Natura' on MTV.
- Filmshow — Wild Highlands and Between the Tides
- Fifth and sixth TV programmes 'Wirt in-Natura'.
- Publication of MOS 7th poster pointing out the way to appreciate birds.
- Two outings to Hal Far and Ghadira by the YMS.
- January: Seventh programme of 'Wirt in-Natura' on MTV.
- Illustrated talk to local shooters at Haż-Żebbuġ Band Club by J. Sultana.
- Illustrated talk by youngsters at Haż-Żebbuġ by V. Cilia and M. Grima.

I would like to end this report by putting on record the help I received from the President, officials and members of the Committee and to thank all the MOS members, both local and overseas, for their continual help and support both morally and financially. I would like also to extend the outgoing Committee's thanks to Mr. D. Cutajar, Chairman of the Malta Section of ICBP and Editor of *Il-Merill*; to the Representative of the British Council for the loan of films and hall; to the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee (in the persons of E. Coxon (Mrs.), G. Davies, J. Hardman, M. Hirons and M. Taylor) for their continued support and to the British Trust for Ornithology (in the person of Robert Spencer) for continuing to help the Society's Ringing Group.

Joe Sultana  
Hon. Secretary