

~~as a result degenerates into a wholesale and indiscriminate slaughter of bird-life that happens to be merely passing over the Maltese Islands.~~

~~Consequently the Archpriest's remarks could only have an adverse effect since they cater for the old prejudices and vested bias. We deplore that the rites of the Church were made to serve such a cause and specifically to invest with an aura of sanctity such symbols of brutality and violence as shotguns and ammunition cartridges."~~

~~11. Publicity Stand~~

~~The MOS was among those exhibitors who had a stand at the XX Malta International Fair. The main theme was the appreciation of birds in their natural habitat, without the need to shoot or trap them. Many shooters called at the stand to express their feelings and most important of all, to admit to the indiscriminate shooting going on in the island. MOS stickers were greatly in demand and all stocks were exhausted. The stand was designed by Alfred E. Baldaecchino and set up by MOS members. (see photo on page 39).~~

~~12. Official contact~~

~~In its efforts to further stress the importance of the appreciation of birds in their natural habitats, and the need to protect certain declining species, the Malta Ornithological Society on the 25th of May, 1976, wrote to the Director of Museums requesting a meeting between the two bodies to discuss ways and means of furthering bird appreciation and protection in Malta. The MOS hopes that as a result of similar expanding contacts, more educational material appreciative of wildlife in its natural setting will gradually become available to the people of Malta.~~

~~31.9.76.~~

YOUNG MEMBERS' SECTION: PUBLIC RELATIONS

John Azzopardi

The age-old tradition of bird-catching is so well embedded in the mind of the Maltese people, and the best way to alter this mentality is through education.

Most of the activities of the YMS are organised with the aim of reaching young people. During 1975 two major activities of this kind were launched.

1. Essay Competition

In May an essay competition was organised for secondary school students. The topic was bird protection and the title was "L-Ghasafar: X'Ifissru Ghalik?" (What do Birds mean to You?). Considering that this was the first time such an activity was being held, over 130 entries could be well considered an excellent response. 98 girls and 39 boys took part from ten schools, 5 boys' and 5 girls' schools. The standard reached was quite high and in addition to the first three prizes, an extra three consolation prizes were offered. The winners were as follows:

- 1st Prize of £M5 book-token:*
Miss Carmen Dalli — Maria Regina Secondary School.
- 2nd Prize of £M3 book-token:*
Miss Bernardette Gauci — Zurrieq Secondary School.

3rd Prize of £M2 book-token:

Miss Mary Cachia — Zurrieq Secondary School.

Consolation prizes: of £M1 book-token each.

a. Mr. Raymond Mifsud, St. Aloysius College

b. Miss Sandra Theuma, Maria Regina Grammar School

c. Miss Colette Cumbo, St. Louis Secondary School.

The prize-giving ceremony was held on 10th October at the Cultural Institute, Floriana. The event opened with an illustrated talk on the breeding birds of Malta by Mr. J. Sultana, then Secretary of MOS. After an opening talk by the Secretary of the YMS, the Asst. Director of Education Mr. L.A. Farrugia distributed the prizes. When he addressed the audience, Mr. Farrugia praised the work of the MOS as well as the bold resolution of the YMS. He emphasised the fact that education should be instrumental in the MOS effort to make the public conscious of the need to conserve the natural heritage of our country. The evening closed with the reading of the winning essay by Miss Carmen Dalli.

An exhibition of the work and publications of the MOS was held in the entrance hall of the Institute. The Press was invited for the occasion.



The Asst. Director of Education presenting the first prize to the winner of the Essay Competition. Looking on are J. Azzopardi YMS Secretary (on left) and R. Cachia Zammit YMS Committee Member.

2. Bird Conservation Campaign

For the third consecutive year the YMS staged a protest with placards in Valletta on 4th October. A set of hand-painted posters carrying telling slogans were displayed. The posters appealed for the protection of all breeding species and all birds of prey, as well as for the establishment of bird sanctuaries at

Ghadira and Filfla. The posters also called on the local shooters to be more discriminate in their quarry and to spare beneficial and rare breeders such as the barn owl, as well as those birds which do not constitute game. Leaflets about the MOS were also distributed.

The views of the general public watching the protest were varied. Many agreed with our cause, others dismissed it with sarcasm. Others still did not bother. However, it is certain that the effort was never lost — some good will always result.

3. Habitat Management at Ghadira

A lot of voluntary work is carried out during the year by the YMS in the management of the habitat at Ghadira. This is a long-term policy which the YMS has adopted in trying to save Ghadira from disappearing for ever under steel and concrete, as well as improving the habitat which had started to degenerate through the random parking of cars and pitching of camps. The work which is being carried out in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture under the guidance of Mr. Joe Borg, Afforestation Officer, involves the planting of several hundred trees (mostly tamarisk and pine) as well as the erection and maintenance of a reed fence to protect the saplings from the wind. Recently a stretch of land along the outer border of Ghadira has been planted with prickly pears to form a natural barrier thus impeding cars from entering and causing the erosion of the soil.

Several tree-planting activities have been held at Ghadira and others are projected for the near future. Tree-planting sessions have also been held on other occasions at Xemxija and Ta' Qali.

~~TAXONOMICAL POSITION OF THE TREE SPARROW OF MALTA~~

~~Andrew Keve (Budapest)~~

~~The occurrence of the Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* in Malta has been known since 1843, but even Despott (1917), Roberts (1954), De Lucca & De Lucca (1959) and De Lucca (1967) have taken it for a sporadic straggler. Its breeding in 1967 was published for the first time by Sultana (1969). Since that time larger flocks have been observed, smaller ones more frequently, although the Tree Sparrow is not a regular visitor to Malta (Gauci & Sultana 1971).~~

~~Some specimens were collected, but it seemed not valid enough for a taxonomical determination, as the populations of South-Italy and Sicily had been determined for *P.m. montanus*.~~

~~The IBP meeting in Leningrad in 1973 decided to prepare a monograph on the Tree Sparrow, and it was an honour for me, that Dr. Pinowski invited me to write the taxonomical chapter.~~

~~Till now 33 subspecies of the *Passer montanus* have been described, but many of them synonymized, so Moreau and Greenway (1962) accepted only seven~~