

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Alfred E. Baldacchino

1. MOS Executive Committee and Sub-Committees for 1976/78

After the General Meeting held on February 9th, 1976, the new MOS Executive Committee for 1976/78 was appointed as follows: *President*: Joe Sultana; *Hon. Secretary*: Alfred Baldacchino; *Assistant Secretary*: John Azzopardi. *Treasurer*: B.K. German; *Public Relations Officer*: Tony Meli*; *Members*: Victor Cilia; Dominic Cutajar; Charles Gauci; Michael Grima; Vincent Sammut.

Mr. Joe Attard who has been MOS President for the last nine years, has been nominated an Honorary President.

The following members on the sub-committees were also appointed: *MOS Bird Ringing and Research Group*: *Ringing Officer*: Joe Sultana; *Ringing Secretary*: Charles Gauci; *Treasurer*: B.K. German; *Gozo Representative*: John Grech.

Rarities sub-committee: *Chairman*: Joe Sultana; *Members*: Charles Gauci; Vincent Sammut; Martin Thake; Frank Smith.

Young Members Section: *Chairman*: Michael Grima; *Secretary*: John Azzopardi.

Fund Raising Committee: *Chairman*: Tony Meli; *Members*: Guido Bonnett; Joe Azzopardi; Mrs. A. Rosamond Williams; Tony Gauci.

MOS Gozo sub-committee: *Chairman*: Mrs. Veronica Grech; *Members*: John Grech; Mr. E.F. Nicholas.

2. I.C.B.P. European meeting and subsequent appointment

Mr. Dominic Cutajar, Chairman of the International Council for Bird Preservation, Malta Section attended the ICBP XI European Conference at Radolfzell, Baden; he was elected Vice-President of the European Section of the ICBP. Subsequently he was appointed "ex officio" member of the Steering Group — ICBP European Committee for the Prevention of Mass Destruction of Migratory Birds.

3. I.C.G.W.C. General Assembly

The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation held its XXIInd Triennial General Assembly in Chambord Paris from 2 to 4 September 1975. Three recommendations were passed, the most important one concerning Malta being that regarding the protection of birds of prey, both diurnal and nocturnal. The I.C.G.W.C. insists that in view of their continuing decrease, protection of birds of prey should be enforced especially during the migration when they visit countries other than those where they breed and raise their young. When shall birds of prey — afforded total protection in all Europe — be given

* Mr. Tony Meli was eventually appointed Chairman of the Fund Raising Committee, while Mr. Michael Grima has taken over the duties of PRO.

legal protection in Malta as well?

4. **The Peregrine on the coin**

The Maltese Falcon (the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*) has figured on the £M10 gold coin in the Malta Numismatic issue for 1975. The Peregrine Falcon is a fast declining species in Malta, in fact there is only one known breeding pair. Although its depiction on the gold coin will help the Falcon to be remembered when eventually wiped out, we would be happier to have it both depicted on the coin and still alive in the Maltese natural environment — or whatever is left of that!

5. **'Wirt in-Natura'**

'Wirt in-Natura' (Natural Heritage) was the name of a series on Malta Television produced by Joe Sultana and Alfred E. Baldacchino. These consisted of eight programmes of six five-minutes items on the Maltese natural environment and also on past Maltese naturalists. It was televised fortnightly and ran from October to December. Many local naturalists took part in this programme.

6. **New Bird Protection Regulations**

New regulations regarding certain protected areas in Malta came into force by Legal Notice 158/1975 published in the supplement to Government Gazette number 13,170 dated 19th December 1975. The following new regulation was inserted to the principal regulations, published in 1937. It reads: "No person shall discharge any fire-arms within two hundred yards from the boundaries of the following localities: Addolorata Cemetery; Buskett Gardens; Civil Airport at Luqa; R.A.F. base at Luqa; Kennedy Grove at Salina; The Radio Transmitting Station at Xrobb il-Għagin".

Two new localities have been added, the Civil Airport at Luqa and the Radio Transmitting Station at Xrobb il-Għagin.

If these regulations are enforced, it will certainly help in the protection of birds, especially birds of prey at Buskett.

7. **MOS Stickers**

During the past year, the MOS issued four stickers. The first sticker issued appealed for help towards the protection of birds. This was followed by two smaller stickers which were eagerly sought after and displayed by young members.

The fourth sticker depicting the head of a hobby, emphasised that birds of prey are not game birds (something which unfortunately the local 'shooters' have still to understand). This was kindly sponsored by the Hawk Trust of the U.K. and the Society for the Preservation of Birds of Prey of California, USA. Both Societies contributed towards a part of the stickers' expenses. Stocks of the latest small stickers were completely exhausted after a week at the MOS stand at the Malta International Fair (see below). Other similar stickers are in the pipeline and these will be launched as soon as the necessary funds are available.

8. **MOS Posters**

Two more posters were launched by the MOS. The seventh MOS poster



M.O.S. Stickers and (below) Posters.
(photos by A. E. Baldacchino)



appealed for the appreciation of birds in their natural habitat. The design and expenses for this poster were kindly seen to by a local MOS member.

The other poster was issued by the MOS in conjunction with the ICBP Malta Section. This poster was issued in connection with the campaign by the Council of Europe for the conservation and management of wetlands. It was kindly designed by Mr. Saviour Mallia.

9. 'A Guide to the Birds of Malta'

We are glad to say that the MOS publication 'A Guide to the Birds of Malta' has been a great success. Our appeal for funds in the very initial stages was well received and handsomely contributed. After hard weeks of printing and

proof reading under the charge of Joe Sultana, the 'Guide' was launched on March at a Press Conference held at the Hotel Phoenicia and was well-received both locally and abroad. The 'Guide' has already been very favourably reviewed in the IBIS and 'British Birds'. A few hard-bound copies are still available for sale (price £3.00 sterling).

A big thank you must go to all those who aided in some way or other; to those who contributed financially; to those who saw to the printing and the proof reading; to Dr. W.R.P. Bourne for writing the foreword; to M.D. England for supplying the front cover photo and to Rodney Ingram for supplying all the line drawings found in the 'Guide'; thanks most of all to the three authors, Joe Sultana, Charles Gauci and Mark Beaman, for contributing the manuscript without which the 'Guide' would not have been possible. A big thank you to all those concerned.

This MOS publication is a tribute to all MOS members, who without outside help from any source, have succeeded in overcoming all difficulties, financial or otherwise. If you are an MOS member, you should be proud of your effort.

10. A Blessing in disguise

The MOS in connection with the Natural History Society of Malta and the ICBP Malta Section had sent an appeal to all the Parish Priests in Malta and Gozo to draw the attention of all clergy to emphasise to their parishioners the need for safeguarding and affording protection to birds which are discriminately shot at in Malta, while being afforded protection overseas. This appeal was sent in 1975.

It was therefore with great surprise for us to read in the papers that Rev. Archpriest of Xaghra, Gozo celebrated mass in the open for more than 100 shooters, who were told in a brief sermon that the scripture speaks of the right to kill and consume animals and birds. A gun, cartridges and turtle doves were presented during the offertory. After the mass, the Archpriest blessed the guns, and the shooters shot in the air a final fusillade!

The MOS and the ICBP Malta section protested strongly against such behaviour by a person in his position, especially since no distinction was made of birds which constitute game, for everybody knows the local shooters' definition of game is 'all that flies'. Many readers of the local papers deplored this sermon to shooters. Only one shooter, claiming to be a 'true sportsman' came forth and congratulated the Archpriest. The following extract is from a letter which the Chairman of the ICBP Malta Section, Mr. Dominic Cutajar, wrote to the Press.

It is reported that the Archpriest cited the Scripture to justify the annual slaughter of many thousands of migratory birds in the Maltese Islands under the pretext that all living creatures were given to man for his own use.

The ICBP Malta Section disagrees entirely with this interpretation of the scriptural passage in question, which to start with ignores the fact that for some 500 million years there were animals in the world and nothing resembling a human-being to exploit them. The divine injunction referred to is a *commission* to mankind, first of all to tend the living creatures, and then *where advisable and necessary*, to harvest the *surplus* according to the need but without impairing the very existence of these creatures.

Shooting as practised in our country observes none of these restrictions and

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. Baldacchino 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.

31.8.76.

~~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-Chacafar: X'Iffissru Chalik?" (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 - Zurriq Secondary School.~~