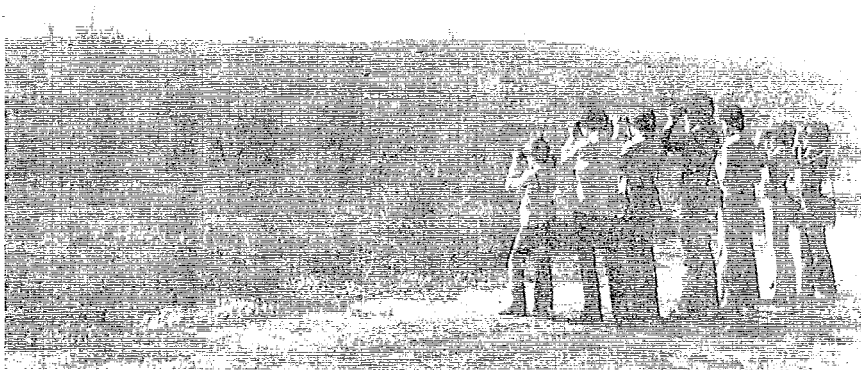


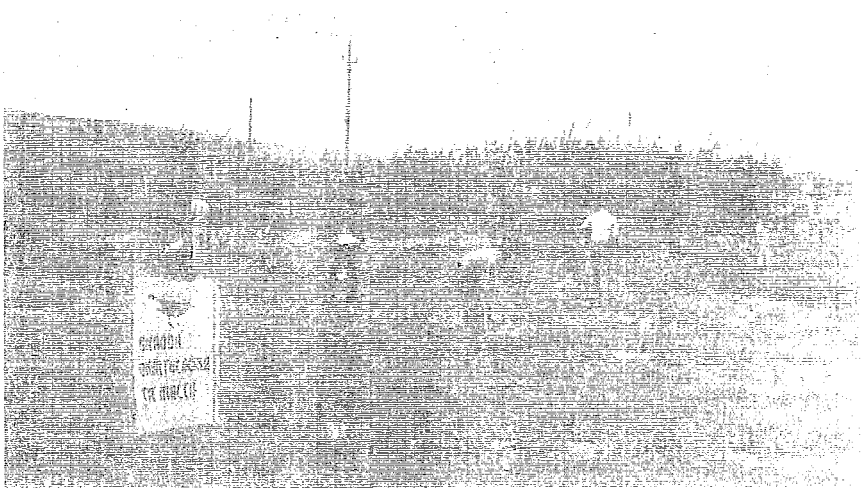
M.O.S. YOUNG MEMBERS' SECTION

John Azzopardi

It is heartening to learn that, in a country like Malta where the general public is totally unconcerned about the deterioration of the natural environment and where there are many who purposely seek to destroy the limited wildlife of the Island, there is a band of youngsters who are conservation-minded. Although



M.O.S. Young members bird-watching at Ghadira. (photo: A. Baldacchino)



Young members planting trees at Ghadira. (photo: J. Azzopardi)

still in their teens, these people have already understood the grave loss which would be incurred by the destruction of the flora and fauna — especially the avifauna — in the Maltese Islands. These youngsters make up the Young Members' Section of the Malta Ornithological Society.

The Section enrolls people up to the age of eighteen years. Members are mostly school children and students. It is run by a Y.M. Officer and a Secretary who are appointed by the Main Committee of the MOS, and by other committee members who are chosen from among the young members themselves.

Bird watching outings are organized at least twice a month. These are mostly held at Ghadira — Mellieha, which is a unique tract of land in the centre of which forms a large pool of rain water. There is also a grove of mature tamarisk trees as well as a reed bed and areas of low vegetation. This plot of land, situated in the north-western part of Malta is ideal for educating the public in environmental and nature conservation. The large variety of bird species which may be seen here is amazing. Besides, many rare species of plants are to be found.

The MOS recognizes the great potential of Ghadira as a bird sanctuary and its educational potentialities for young people. The establishment of a field centre at Ghadira has been the target of the Society for the past 12 years. The Young Members' Section has helped to emphasize the importance of Ghadira where, on 12th October 1974, the first tree-planting session was held. Similar tree-planting sessions have become part and parcel of the activities of the YMS. These help to arouse a public conscience — especially amongst youngsters — towards the appreciation of nature.

In recent years it has been discovered that appreciation of nature by youngsters is best learnt by observing nature at close quarters. With birds, bird-ringing provides unparalleled opportunities for close observation. And this has proved a great help in teaching young people more about the need of preserving birds. Consequently, members of the YMS have on several occasions attended bird-ringing sessions organized by the MOS Ringing Group. The activity has proved



Placards exhibited at the City Gate, Valletta, during one of the protests organised by the Y.M.S.

worthwhile because several young members have shown a promising inclination towards bird-ringing, and a few already possess the Trainee Permit of the B.T.O.

The YMS believes in the dire need for the conservation of birds in the Maltese Islands. And its members stand up for what they believe in! For the second year running they staged a protest with placards, once at Buskett — a supposed bird sanctuary, where bird shooting still takes place openly — and another time in the centre of Valletta, the capital City. They called for the introduction of closed seasons and for adequate legislation protecting all breeding birds as well as the birds of prey. Birds know no boundaries and many species which are strictly protected in Europe are shot down as they migrate over the Maltese Islands. They also stressed the need for the enforcement of the legislation which proclaims certain areas as bird sanctuaries, still however often ignored.

A new activity which the YMS organized was a three-day Field Study Camp at Ghadira which was held from 31st March to 2nd April 1975. Activities during camp included bird-ringing and bird-watching as well as a survey of the flora and fauna of the area. No less than three rare species of plants were discovered as well as rare species of snake, other reptiles and insects were also observed. This, together with the great variety of birds seen and ringed during the three days proves the great potential of Ghadira as a nature reserve and bird sanctuary.

The YMS also publishes a monthly leaflet in Maltese under the title of "L-Ghasfur" (Bird) for its members. It carries essays, reports of outings, notes and observations contributed by members themselves, as well as prize competitions. This also has become a symbol of the Young Members' Section's autonomy and self-support which is a tribute to the eagerness of the Section's own members.

These activities are helping to fulfill the aims of the YMS to foster among youngsters the need to preserve the bird-life and the natural environment of the Maltese Islands.



A bird-ringing training session. Front row: Charles Gauci (Ringling Sec.), Michael Grima (Y.M. Officer), Joe Sultana (M.O.S. Sec. & Ringling Officer) and John Azzopardi (Y.M. Sec.). Back row: Four of the young members who hold a bird-ringing training permit. (photo: J. Azzopardi).