

THE 11TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 11th Annual General Meeting of the Malta Ornithological Society was held on Wednesday, 28th February, 1973. Following is the Presidential Address and the Secretary's report.

Presidential Address

It is again my great pleasure to be addressing this annual general meeting of the Malta Ornithological Society. Looking at the year past we see that the Committee and individual members have been exceptionally active, airing their views and taking part in different types of educational activities. We have been reading for months in the local papers how certain people who even serve on councils of certain important national societies whose aims are shared with those of our Society, are often biased in their approach to bird preservation. In every aspect of life, in environmental problems and in matters related to bird preservation our little Malta and tiny Gozo cannot stay in an insular position in the middle of what is now termed a 'small lake'. We can foresee the day when countries and islands in the Mediterranean littoral form a union to fight pollution, to control overfishing and to preserve trans-Mediterranean migrants of the bird world. It is hoped that the first Mediterranean Conference on Bird Preservation will take place in Cyprus in 1974 and, this, we are sure, will be a new prelude in the international co-operation between North and South, East and West.

Bird protection legislation has been a very common topic lately. It is not easy to have adequate legislation in a country unless it is respected by the public. Here I would like to point out two aspects of bird preservation. The first is adequate legislation based on close seasons and respecting Maltese shooting customs and including a list of birds which can be either shot and/or trapped by clapnets. The second is education based on a practical approach, i.e. by having a bird reserve run as a field study-centre which anyone from every walk of life can use for pleasure or study. These two aspects go hand in hand. We cannot expect a public response to any future legislation without preparing the public through practical experience in the field.

We are lucky to have a Prime Minister who possesses a great love for the countryside especially for trees and wild birds and I would like to bring to your attention that it is not through his lack of co-operation that things have not moved in the past year. On the contrary things have been moving through the personal intervention of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice, but when matters were going well, serious unfavourable difficulties have arisen which, we are sure with the co-operation of all, will be eventually thrashed out.

I would like to express my gratitude for the sympathy I found for the M.O.S. last October during my visit to England where I met several persons who have a great say in the Conservation movement in U.K. and also in Europe.

Who said that Ghadira will not be kept up and managed properly once it is turned into a bird reserve? First we have to help ourselves and then on such an enormous venture we have to request the generous assistance

of our friends abroad who are always ready to help our cause. The shooting lease at Ghadira will end by the 1st January 1974 and it is up to the incoming committee to keep up the "Save Ghadira" campaign with the Authorities.

To help us in our struggle, a national league for the preservation of birds and their environment has been founded and its policy and activities are being studied and will be launched in the immediate future. Delegates from the M.O.S., the Natural History Society, Din l-Art Helwa, the Men of the Trees, and the Royal Society for the Protection and Care of Animals are participating in the National League.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. the Governor General for accepting our invitation to unveil the memorial marble plaque commemorating the centenary of the death of Antonio Schembri; and the Librarian Dr. Vincent Depasquale for co-operating so much with us to put on show for the public at the Royal Malta Library the works of Schembri which were unknown to almost every Maltese citizen. This was a noble contribution for a man who laid the foundation stone of the Ornithology of Malta.

I would also like to thank the Government and the Directors of the Central Bank of Malta for being conservation minded to choose the Blue Rock Thrush for the £20 gold coin. This does not mean that the Blue Rock Thrushes of Malta have turned into gold or that they are laying golden eggs for the M.O.S. On the contrary we are facing a financial problem and unless you are generous enough the publication of il-Merill will be eventually stopped. To overcome this very common problem we have set up a fund raising sub-committee which will see to this and we hope for better days though we are not expecting a golden age.

I would like to place on record the good work of the Bird Ringing Group and the contribution of Brother Edmund who as Editor of il-Merill has always been most efficient and practical.

I would like to end this address by thanking all members of the outgoing committee and hope the incoming committee will be as inspiring and hardworking.

J.M. Attard
M.O.S. President

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The Secretary's Report for March 1972 — February 1973

The Committee for 1972 was as follows:
President — Mr. Joe M. Attard
Secretary/Treasurer — Mr. Joe Sultana
Assistant Secretary — Mr. B.K. German till July, from then Mr. John Azzopardi.

Committee Members — Rev. Bro Edmund, Mr. Sammy Borg, Mr. Charles Galea & Mr. Charles Gauci

Sub-Committees

Bird Ringing Group— Ringing Officer: Mr. Joe Sultana
Ringing Secretary: Mr. Charles Gauci
Recorder: Mr. Sammy Borg
Sub-committee Member: Bro Edmund

Young Members Section— Messrs. Brian K. German, Michael Grima, John Azzopardi, Charles Galea & Martin Thake.

Fund-raising Committee— Mrs K.N.S. McKay, & Messrs A. Baldacchino, Brian K. German and Michael Chircop.

The Gozo Branch Sub-committee composed of Messrs John Grech, Victor Vella Muskat and Joe Sultana did not function except in helping the Ringing Group.

Main activities of the Committee:

March

Publication of Il-Merill No. 6

Young Members Outing.

List of areas that should be declared reserves forwarded to the Director of Agriculture.

A Visit to Ghadira by the Minister of Justice in the company of the President and Secretary of the Society.

Illustrated talk at the Teens and Twenties Talents Trust on the Wildlife of Filfla by J. Sultana.

April

President Joe M. Attard meeting The Minister of Justice on various occasions regarding Bird Protection. Other similar meetings took place in other months.

Young Members' Outing

Day Outing to Ghadira and Marfa Ridge jointly with the 4Ts.

Filmshow — 'Wildlife for the Future'.

Discussion on the problem of Conservation in Malta chaired by Mr Joe Attard. Guest speaker Mr. Glynn Davies

May

Il-Merill Issue No. 7

2nd Issue of the Young Members Leaflet I-Ghasfur

Expedition to Filfla by the Bird Ringing Group.

Young Members Outing

Corresponding with the Prime Minister regarding Ghadira.

Report on the need of better bird protection with a draft legislation sent to the Department of Agriculture.

June

Corresponding with the Prime Minister re Filfla

2nd expedition of the year to Filfla

July

Stand at the Malta Trade Fair

September

Il-Merill Issue No. 8

Two Young Members' outings to Buskett to watch migrating Birds of Prey

October

Filmshow — 'Winged Aristocrats'

President's visit to UK meeting officials of the International Council for Bird Preservation, World Wildlife Fund and Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee.

November

Filmshow — Wild Wings

Showing of 'Winged Aristocrats' in various schools.

" " " " with a Maltese commentary on MTV

Young Members Outing.

December

Illustrated talk by Mr. Charles Gauci on Bird Ringing in 1972.

Winged Aristocrats shown to students of St. Michael's College of Education during their Field Course at Ghadira. Shown also in other schools.

Winged Aristocrats and Wild Wing shown to R.A.F. Luqa O.S.

Exhibition of Antonio Schembri's works at the Royal Malta Library.

January (1973)

Erection of a marble plaque at Buskett to commemorate Antonio Schembri's death.

Helping in setting up a National League for Bird Preservation with other interested bodies.

MOS Represented on the Men of Trees Working Group Committee for the Seminar which was held in the following month.

February (1973)

Illustrated talk by Mr. Joe Attard on Antonio Schembri's life and works.

Illustrated talk by Mr. Joe Sultana on 'Conserving the Wildlife of Filfla' at Zurrieq.

Apart from the above activities the President and Committee Members frequently contributed articles and letters to the local press and opportunity was also taken to convey the Society's ideals on various occasions on the local Rediffusion. Contacts with local and foreign bodies were continued and il-Merill was sent to most of the European Bird Societies which commented favourably about it. The Bird Ringing Group continued its study of our birds. No fewer than 6,528 of 81 species were ringed during 1972. The

Group's report on Ringing and Bird notes will be published in a future issue of Il-Merill.

On behalf of the President and Committee I thank the Representative of the British Council for the use of the hall;

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the British Transport Films for the loan of two films;

The Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee for their continual help; and last but not least all our members, donors and supporters without whose help financially and morally the M.O.S. would not be able to function.

J. Sultana
Hon. Secretary M.O.S.