

MISCELLANY

Bird Sites

In October, 1971, the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries requested a list of sites (in order of priority) which the M.O.S. wishes to see added to the schedule of Bird Sanctuaries. In the M.O.S. Secretary's communication the following list was recommended.

Malta: (1) The Pool at Ghadira with a protective belt of 500 yards around it; (2) Filfla with a one mile belt around it; (3) The Salt-pans and all the area known as is-Salina to be added to Kennedy Grove; (4) Ta' Qali; (5) Wied il-Luq to be added to Buskett; and (6) Chadwick Lakes.

Gozo: (1) Ta' Ċenc Area; and (2) Marsalforn Valley.

It was pointed out that 'protected' areas should include a non-shooting and a non-trapping belt around them of at least 100 yards. This should also be added to those sanctuaries which are already on the schedule, e.g. Buskett, Kennedy Grove, etc. (Comino Island has a non-shooting belt of one mile around it). It was also recommended that the Bird-shooting should be prohibited from all bays, inlets and from sea-craft.

Importation of Wild Birds

In 1970, £6,698 worth of wild birds were imported. The value of birds imported between January and May of 1971 was £1,174. A large number of imported birds comprise finches. These are used by locals to re-stock their decoy-birds. In October, last year, the Minister

of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Tourism banned the importation of the following species: Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serrin, Siskin, Hawfinch, Linnet, Brambling, Ortolan Bunting and Jackdaw. This was apparently done to safeguard the interests of the long-standing trappers so that the price of finches remains high. Nevertheless such banning helps to decrease the trapping of these birds from the countries from which they are imported, mainly Italy and Tunisia.

The Secretary congratulated the Minister for taking such action. It was pointed out to him that the M.O.S. pleasure was not derived from the point of view that the interests of the local trappers were safeguarded, but because wild bird importation entails inhuman activities. It was also recommended that the list should have included more imported species.

Ringed or Chained Pellets

In January, this year, the Prime Minister made the Ringed or Chained Pellets (Prohibition) Regulations which prohibit any person to import, manufacture, store, keep, distribute or use any explosives consisting of ringed or chained pellets. This praise-worthy action will save many a large bird migrating high over the islands. These chained pellets cartridges were being used by some of the shooters to shoot at out-of-range targets, usually Birds of Prey and Herons.

Debate in Parliament

As we go to the Press, bird-shooting was the subject of a debate in Parliament. Whilst the Prime Minister denied the rumours that the new Government was going to ban shooting totally, he said that the Government wished to see all the shooters in an Association which would formulate bird regulations so as to safeguard their own game. The Prime Minister said that the shooters themselves are destroying their own sport because as it now stands there soon would be no birds to shoot at. He said that birds not only enhance the country-side but also help us to get rid of pests such as harmful insects. The Prime Minister continued that the Government wished that every sportsman should have certain regulations to abide by not only just a shooting licence. He also said that he knew how this sport is carried out in other countries where there are adequate bird protection regulations which are respected and that we should follow suit. The Prime Minister continued by saying that we are still doing what our forefathers used to do, cutting down trees and killing birds. Because of this we have a country without trees and without birds. The M.O.S. congratulated the Prime Minister on his speech and offered its help in advice on this matter.

On the Screen

On behalf of the M.O.S., J. Sultana prepared two programmes — 'Breeding Birds' and 'Bird Migration over Malta' — for the Malta Television's popular series 'Wirt Artna' (Our National Heritage).

These programmes which were screened in February were a success in propagating the Society's message to the general public. In the same TV series, in April, Dr. Anton Buttigieg, The Minister of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, being the national poet of nature, was the guest of the programme where he spoke of the need to conserve nature especially birds. In another TV programme 'Malta u lil hinn Minnha', Labour MP Dr. Philip Muscat in April pointed out at length the need to update the present legislation in order to bring it in line with that of other countries. He also mentioned the M.O.S. appeal not to molest the birds of prey.

In the Papers

Both 'L-Orizzont' and 'Maita News' had leaders condemning the way bird shooting is carried out in Malta. 'It-Torċa' had a whole page article on Birds and the Environment and praised the M.O.S. for the latter's initiative in distributing the birds of prey leaflet.

At the R.S.P.C.A. Meeting

One of the motions tabled for the Annual General Meeting of the R.S.P.C.A. (Malta Branch) urges the Government to set up a national commission composed of members from interested animal welfare organisations and others to examine the existing laws on the shooting and trapping of birds and to introduce revised legislation aiming at better protection of wild birds.

Blue Rock Thrush Photographs

M.D. England, O.B.E., who is one of Britain's finest bird photo-

graphers has kindly donated six photographs of the Blue Rock Thrush to the M.O.S. He also gave his kind consent to use them in M.O.S. publications.

Course at Ghadira

The Education Department held a three-day field course at Ghadira for Science Teachers in Secondary Schools with the help of the British Council. The course was run by Mrs. P. Wolseley and Dr. S.M. Haslam. During the course all those present realised the potentialities of this area as a field cen-

tre where school children can learn how to appreciate nature in its natural wild state.

Filfla

The bilateral agreement which was signed by the Governments of Malta and Great Britain does not give permission to the Services to use Filfla during the breeding season of the sea-birds. It is also hoped that Filfla will be declared a nature reserve. Its importance is documented in 'Bird Studies On Filfla' which was published by the M.O.S. in 1970.

BIRD PROTECTION

By Brother Edmund

~~There is a very laudable movement throughout Europe, and even the rest of the world, for countries to come closer together for various reasons such as trade, defence and culture. This is, in fact, an extension of Donne's saying that, "No man is an island". Just as individuals need each other in order to live sanely, so also do countries for self defence against threats such as pollution and destruction of the environment. In other words, if we are to survive, then we must come closer together to save our common heritage and culture. The seas surrounding our countries do not belong to us only but to all mankind. If the Mediterranean becomes heavily polluted and fishless, this is the concern of all the countries in the area. So also we can argue that if one country is allowing its flora and fauna to be destroyed it is also destroying those of neighbouring countries, especially in the case of migrant birds which belong to all the countries over which they fly.~~

~~It was thus interesting to hear Dr. Mansholt, president of the Common Market Commission, at a recent conference in Venice, speak, "with horror of the destruction in Italy of millions of migratory birds." This, he declared, "is destroying the natural balances in this part of Europe. We respect Italy as the cradle of civilization. It is essential that this horrifying practice stop immediately." Not a very tactful thing to say as a guest in Italy, but how courageous and true! He emphasised that the killing of migratory birds is banned in all other countries of the Common Market and this was another reason why the ban should be fully imposed in Italy. There have indeed been noteworthy and constant attempts in Italy to introduce some control and when we were just about to experience the~~