

THE 10TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 10th Annual General Meeting was held on Tuesday, 29th February, 1972, at the British Council in Valletta. Following is the Presidential Address and the highlights from the Secretary's Report.

Presidential Address

I have great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Malta Ornithological Society on this tenth anniversary of our Society. Though no trumpets were blown and no ceremonies were held to commemorate this occasion, we thought it more practical and useful to pool our energy and resources towards contributions that would strengthen and spread our scope. The latest issue of "Il-Merill" covering the Ringing Report for 1967 to 1970 and Recoveries in Malta of Birds Ringed Abroad is in itself a contribution to European ornithology. 'L-Ghasfur', the leaflet issued by the Young Members' Section of the M.O.S. has met with substantial support especially in the schools. The Society has also published an appeal to Maltese shooters for the preservation of Birds of Prey. This was done jointly with the Birds of Prey Working Group of the I.C.B.P.

In this tenth year of struggle and survival, we felt ourselves striving with greater hope to see some of our dreams turned into reality. It is, therefore, my great pleasure to announce today, that through the personal efforts of the Hon. Minister of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Dr. Anton Buttigieg, who is Malta's national poet of nature, a new law is being drafted on bird sanctuaries. Let the poet live by his word and let his word live for ever by nature.

I must also express our great appreciation to Sir Anthony Mamo, our Governor-General for accepting to be the Patron of the Malta Ornithological Society and for this we feel greatly honoured. We know how much Sir Anthony appreciates the work that the Society is doing and we are sure of his full support and sympathy.

I must also take the opportunity to thank the Government for prohibiting the importation of finches from abroad and the manufacturing, importation and use of any cartridges consisting of ringed or chained pellets. As you know well the trafficking of wild birds is being condemned the world over and in 1970 a resolution was passed at the XV World Conference of the I.C.B.P. urging Governments to stop this trade which has always been the cause of high mortality of wild birds. The ringed or chained pellets were being imported from Italy and Belgium and used in Malta on birds of prey and flocks of migratory birds normally out of range of the ordinary cartridge shot.

'Il-Merill' continued to be published and reached our members regularly with a progressive standard in presentation and material. In Number 5 issue we have brought up to date the Maltese nomenclature of bird names together with the present status of our birds. This is now the accepted standard Maltese nomenclature and we are glad to say that it has

already been accepted by Prof. Aquilina, Head of the Maltese Dept. at the Royal University of Malta.

During the last year the Young Members' Section was re-organised and through their hard working committee they are taking initiative to organise their own outings, lectures and publications. It is the aim of this section of the Society to propagate our message in the schools and the younger generation of Malta and Gozo by distributing 'L-Ghasfur' and seeing that this pamphlet is regularly published in the most interesting way.

The campaign launched by the M.O.S. last year on the protection of the Robin was a great success and here I would like to thank the Department of Information and the Director of Education for their co-operation. Our long cherished wish to see a set of Maltese stamps bearing items of natural history has at last arrived. Our national bird and the Emblem of the Society — The Blue Rock Thrush — was depicted on two stamps of different values in a set of four.

Last year we also took part in an exhibition organised at Zurrieq by the Zurrieq Civic Committee on the history and fauna and flora of this village to commemorate the birth of Prof. Stefano Zerafa, father of Maltese Natural History. On our initiative a seminar was held on "the future of our Environment", and with the co-operation of other local societies interested in this very important matter, it was a real success.

Lectures and outings were organised by the M.O.S. and assistance and advice to local members and foreign ornithological bodies was always willingly forthcoming from the Society. Continuous contacts with foreign ornithological and bird protection societies were made and my recent holiday in Italy brought me into contact with Prof. Edwardo Moltoni of the Milan Natural History Museum, Dr. Robin Chanter, Secretary of L.E.N.A.C.D.U. and members of the Swedish Bird Observatory on Capri.

In 1972 falls the first centenary of the death of Antonio Schembri, father of Maltese Ornithology and I hope that the incoming Committee will commemorate this event in a proper and desired way. Before I end this address I would like to thank all the members of the outgoing Committee for the confidence and support that I have found from each and everyone of them and for all those members, persons and societies who have supported our cause and co-operated in our activities.

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

From The Secretary's Report For Feb. 1971 — Jan. 1972.

1971 has been the busiest year since I was elected Secretary of the M.O.S. in 1966. On our Society's initiative, a seminar on 'The Future of Maltese Environment' was held on 4th July, 1971. This was held jointly with 'Din l-Art Helwa' Association, the Malta Geographical Society and the Natural History Society of Malta. The Seminar was opened by the M.O.S. with an illustrated talk — The Future of Bird Habitat — by J. Sul-

tana. One of the main resolutions passed at the end of the Seminar urged the Malta Government to create an official body to be responsible for the protection of nature and the environment of our islands, to create a field centre at Ghadira and to enact new legislation for adequate bird protection.

In October, an active campaign was carried out to stop the annual craze among young people to trap Robins. Though the Robin is protected, thousands are trapped annually during the influxes in October and November of this wintering species. Most of these die in captivity in less than a month. Posters with an appealing picture of a Robin overprinted with Maltese captions reminding people that the trapping of Robins is illegal and ends in the death of the birds were displayed in all the boys' Primary, Secondary and Private Schools, with the kind permission of the Director of Education. The posters were also displayed outside all the Police Stations in Malta and Gozo through the co-operation of the Department of Information. All the expenses involved were covered by the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee. The Malta Television, the Rediffusion and all the local papers supported our campaign by publishing our press releases. Support was also forthcoming from the school broadcasting magazine — 'The Young Listener' — a publication of the broadcasting authority. The latter, jointly with the M.O.S. Secretary, prepared a programme on Rediffusion for school children on the Robin. The Secretary was also interviewed re the Robin Campaign on Rediffusion in October.

At the end of the year the M.O.S. printed 10,000 leaflets appealing for the preservation of birds of prey. With the kind permission of the Commissioner of Police these were distributed by the Police to all the local shooters when they called to renew their shooting licence for 1972. The leaflet, illustrated by two photographs by Eric Hosking, with the latter's kind consent, gives an account of the characteristics of these species; the important part they play in the balance of nature; and the reasons for their alarming decline, one of which being the shooting of these birds on migration. It gives also information as to what is being done in European countries to safeguard these birds, and stresses that Malta is in duty bound to co-operate, pointing out the damage that is being done not only to Malta's but also to Europe's wild birds by local shooters. The cost of the leaflets was met by the M.O.S. and a donation of £15 from the Emergency Fund for the Protection of Birds of Prey, set up on the initiative of Monsieur J.P. Terasse (France) and Dr P. Geroudet (Switzerland). To advertise this campaign, the M.O.S. Secretary spoke on this matter on the Rediffusion.

The M.O.S. also prepared one of the stands at an exhibition which was organised by the Civic Committee of the Zurrieq village. The motto of the M.O.S. stand was 'protect the birds which enhance your village'. Part of the stand was also dedicated to show the ornithological importance of the Islet of Filfla. The Zurrieq Civic Committee has always supported the M.O.S. to stop Filfla being used as a bombing target by the Services.

Activities for members were held regularly. Four coloured films — Severn Wildfowl Trust, Winged Aristocrats, Birds of a Hampshire Garden and Jungle Feathers — were shown to members at the British Council. A successful day outing was held on Comino while two afternoon walks were held to Buskett and Girgenti. Eight talks were also given at the British Council and at the 4Ts Headquarters. All the members were regularly informed about the activities by circulars. Outings for young members were organised separately by the Young Members' Section.

The Malta Television, the Rediffusion and the local papers were frequently used to air the M.O.S. aims and to educate the public in conservation ideals. Three more numbers of *Il-Merill* were printed, with numbers 5 and 6 as special issues. Number 5 carried a Systematic List of Birds noted in the Maltese Islands during 1967-70 while number 6 reported on Bird-ringing for 1967-70. The first number of 'L-Ghasfur' appeared in January. 1,500 copies of this leaflet for young members were sold to young people in Secondary Schools. Contacts were regularly held with local societies and with most of the European bird societies to which the M.O.S.' publications were sent regularly. Communications were also frequently held with various Government departments re Society matters and scope. A sub-committee was formed to prepare a draft for better bird protection laws to be presented to the Minister concerned. (As we go to the press, the Agricultural Department has asked for a copy of this draft).

The M.O.S. Bird-ringing Group was again very active during 1971. Over 7,500 birds of 91 species were ringed. A daily log of all birds noted was also kept by this group.

...
J. Sultana, M.O.S. Secretary.

~~RAPTORS IN MALTESE SKIES~~

~~By C. Galea~~

~~(This is the third of a series of articles on diurnal birds of prey. The first article appeared in 'Il-Merill' No. 3, Dec. 1970).~~

~~Buzzard *Buteo buteo*~~

~~*Kuccarda prima*~~

~~Buzzards, though they come annually, are scarce but irregular in the time of year they appear. They do not occur from June to late September.~~

~~Their plumage varies but it is generally dark brown on the back, while the under-parts are a variable brown. Their tail is buffish, with narrow, regularly spaced bars and a dark subterminal band.~~

~~Like so many other birds of prey, it is seen mostly on the hill-ridges. Its food consists of small mammals, insects, reptiles, carrion and occasionally small birds.~~

~~This bird of prey, though of a sluggish flight, makes optimal use of thermals, soaring and wheeling on motionless wings for long periods. On migration they do not appear to mix with other birds of prey and seem to appear singly or in pairs.~~