

THE GREEN SIEG



Rubbish accumulating on a rocky seashore

Of all the creatures alive on earth, man is the most destructive. From the time that man set foot on this island, its land has been subjected to change. Human activities profoundly change the face of the land and can irreparably damage or destroy the natural resources on which human well-being and, indeed, human survival depend.

Man needs to satisfy his basic needs of food and shelter. To achieve this, our ancestors stripped the native flora and levelled the ground to make way for agriculture, thus limiting the space in which the endemic flora can grow. They also built rubble walls to prevent soil

run-off with heavy rains. Nevertheless, rubble walls are now annually being subjected to the 'snail fever season', in which whole families demolish rubble walls for the sake of a snail or two. Modern agricultural practices also entail the use of pesticides and fertilisers which slowly pollute our underground water table and water courses, generating an oxygen deficient environment for organisms which live in ponds.

Some citizens illegally collect protected fauna and flora from our islands such as the Narcissus and then sell them on the Sunday market. Others deem it more interesting to keep the poor animals as pets until they die an ago-

nising death from handling and exhaustion by lack of food. Frogs, tadpoles, the freshwater crab and the chamaleon can do little to prevent children's hands from depriving them of their liberty. It seems as though Maltese people cannot appreciate nature as it is. They want it all for themselves. Wild thyme is still uprooted in large quantities over the Christmas period mostly by crib lovers, while hunters seem to be proud of the product of their pastime: dead, stuffed birds. Unquestionably, this prevalent arrogant attitude is doing much to deprive future generations of our natural heritage.

Maltese wild flowers are often baptised as 'weeds' (haxix hazin!) and are deemed as unsightly by some. Few people know and even less care, that these 'weeds' sustain our native fauna, which include particular ones that live only on the same species of plant.

With Malta's high population density an incredible pressure is exerted on our ever decreasing land. I still wonder how certain villas, or may I say persons, were awarded permission to build in the midst of the countryside, although in particular cases these infringements have been ended. Certainly I find it more and more difficult to take photographs of butterflies such as the swallowtail, and other organisms simply because they are harder to find and quickly disappearing due to our quickly vanishing countryside. The ever-increasing loss of plant and animal species represents a major conservation concern. Buildings are built with one of our few natural resources: Globigerina Limestone. Its excavations leave gaping holes in the landscape, some even near ecologically sensitive areas such as 'Wied il-Ghasel' in Mosta. Only some are covered with soil and replanted with trees; the majority are left barren.



Buildings are engulfing much of our decreasing

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Abandoned quarries are left as gaping holes in the Maltese landscape

In 1809 man brought over to Malta the Cape Sorrel (il-Haxixa Ingliza) from South Africa. This plant adapted so well to local conditions that it is competing successfully with local endemic plants, and in the process, displacing them from their niches.

Another area of concern is air pollution. I am not suggesting to scrap the power station but the authorities concerned should not be alarmed to invest in environmentally friendly technology, which reduces the amount of Nitrogen Oxides emitted from the power station. Likewise, few cars run on unleaded fuel.

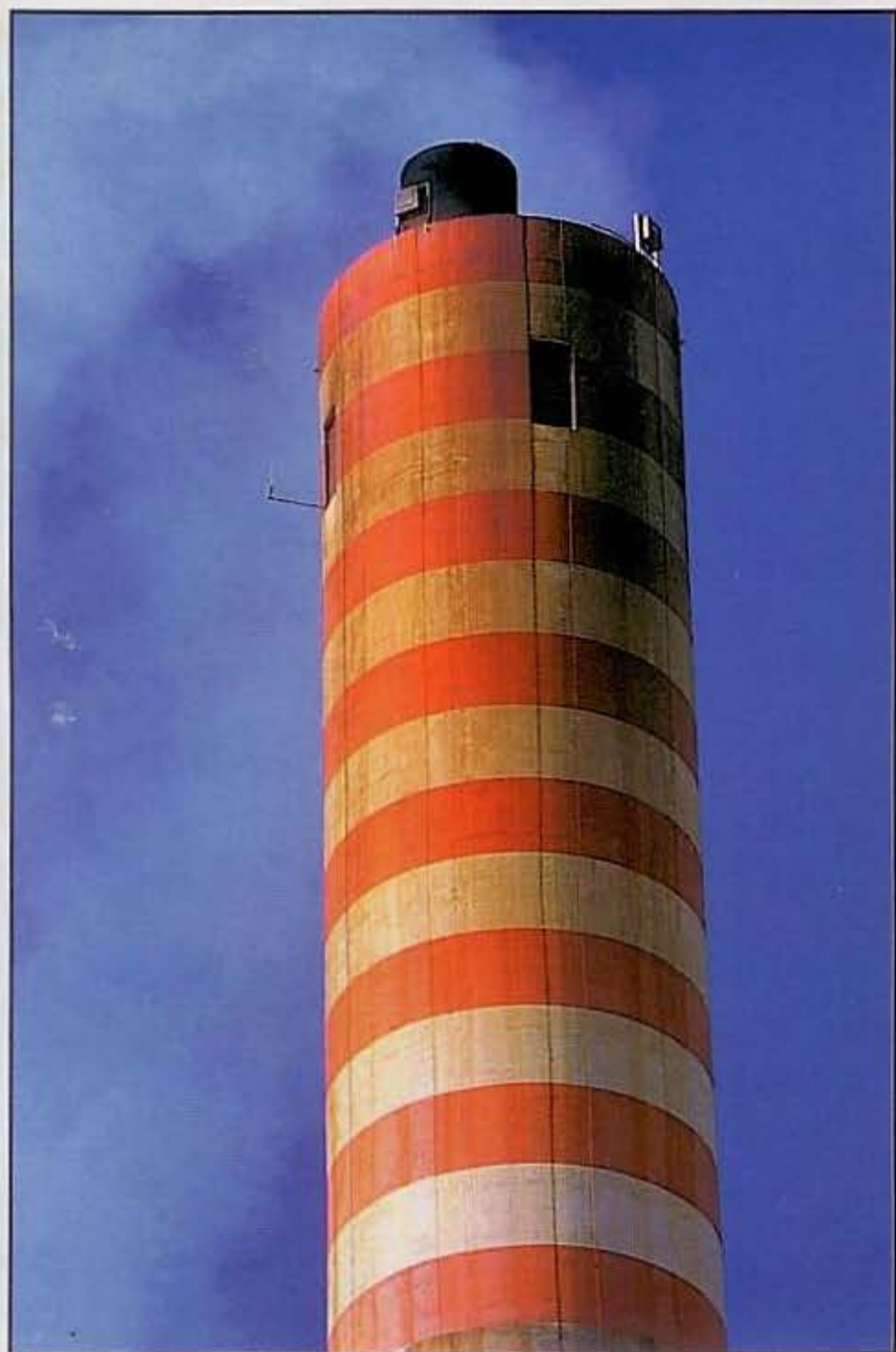
Finally, to add to this already interesting concoction, local researchers have also found out that antifouling liquids used on boats cause a condition in marine snails known as imposex, in which the female develops a male sex organ, the size of which depends on the degree of concentration of antifouling in the sea. Swimming in such areas as Msida Marina is entirely up to you, although its effect on humans is still unknown!



What can common mortals like us do? Becoming more aware of the fragile environment in which you live is already a step in the right direction. And please, do use glass bottles instead of plastic ones - plastic bottles take hun-

dreds of years to disintegrate and in the process can suffocate numerous turtles that mistake them for jellyfish!

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Polluting gases emanating from the power station at Delimara

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