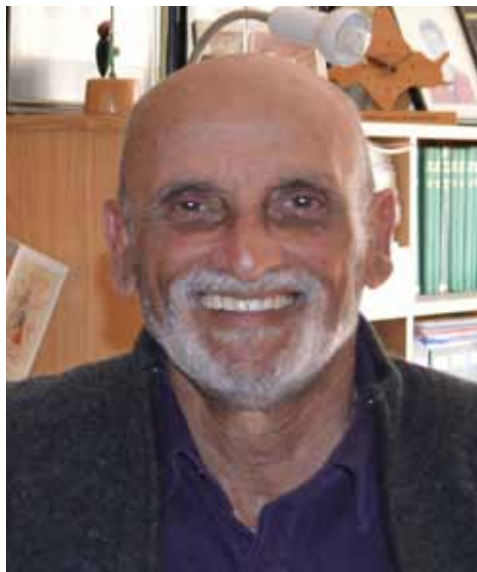


Remembering...

Joe Sultana

11 November 1939 – 11 September 2018

Written by John J. Borg



On 11 September 2018 Joe Sultana passed away at the age of 78 on his home island of Gozo.

Joe was continuously involved in the Malta Ornithological Society since its inception in 1962. He was the Society's secretary for ten years and its president for a further 12 years. He was Malta's first bird ringer and helped in the setting up of the Malta Bird Ringing Scheme in 1965. He was instrumental in the setting up of the two nature reserves Ghadira (1980) and Is-Simar (1993); and for over 45 years he organised and led bird ringing visits to the island of Filfla, where he was also involved in the protection of the islet, which was being used as a bombing target by the British Forces up until 1970.

Joe served as Chairman of the European Section of BirdLife International as well as council member of the BirdLife International Executive Committee for six years. Since 1982 he represented the Maltese Government on the Steering Committee on Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where he was also appointed Chairman of the Naturopia Centre as well as a member of the

Organising Committee for the European Conservation Year 1995. Joe was also Chairman of MEDMARAVIS for over 20 years.

Throughout his life, he worked tirelessly and meticulously. His countless achievements are testimony to this. Joe was an accomplished author of numerous publications including several scientific papers as well as major publications such as *A Guide to the Birds of Malta* (1975) together with Charles Gauci and Mark Beaman, *L-Agħsafar* (1975) and *A New Guide to the Birds of Malta* both co-authored with Charles Gauci. Together we also wrote *The Breeding Birds of Malta* with Charles Gauci and Victor Falzon (2011) and *History of Ornithology in Malta* (2015). In 2018 BirdLife Malta published a compendium of Joe's articles about the natural environment of Gozo.

Throughout his life, Joe Sultana was the recipient of many awards, including the Maltese Best Publication award for the book *L-Agħsafar* (1975), the Maltese literacy award, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) medal (1996), the Gouden Lepelaar from Vogelbescherming Nederland, honorary life membership of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) (1999) and Member of Honour of BirdLife International (1999). In 2016 he was awarded Ġieħ Għawdex and in 2018 he received the Buonamico Award from the President of Malta on behalf of the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA). Later this same year he was also awarded Ġieħ ix-Xagħra, an honour bestowed by his home town of Xagħra.

One of Joe's many gifts was his ability to touch people's lives and their choices. He inspired many of us youngsters to invest our time and energy – for some our entire careers – in the pursuit of nature protection. He had the ability to make you stand up and fight to make this world a better place and he made it sound like the biggest and most rewarding adventure you would ever embark on. His personality, his energy and untiring enthusiasm changed the bigger choices people made, and by changing people's minds and hearts he brought about real, lasting change.

Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife Lucy, his daughter Ruth, his son Mark and four grandchildren.

Tributes received from other friends of Joe:

Denis Cachia:

"My 40-year contact with Joe Sultana is full of admiration for his never-ending enthusiasm for bird study, bird protection and the organisation he co-founded and dedicated his life to – BirdLife Malta. He was an outstanding person who inspired so many more people to follow his vision of appreciating birds the proper way."

Desirée and Victor Falzon:

"Joe was a constant inspiration in all we did and do for nature. We are honoured and grateful to have known him, worked with him and shared with him the joys and frustrations that come with fighting for nature protection. We shall always remember Joe's passion for learning and teaching, his fierce protection of our beloved BirdLife, his infectious laughter and his great hospitality. He was our mentor, our teacher, our guide, and a true friend. May his love for nature live on and spread among the people whose hearts he touched."

Richard Cachia-Zammit:

"In 1973, I had a school projects and contacted BirdLife Malta (then MOS) for some information. I received a reply from Joe Sultana, who at that time was Secretary General of the organisation. He sent me a copy of the latest ornithological journal *Il-Merill* as well as a free membership for a year. I attended my first outing on 1 May of that year and suddenly I had found a new hobby. From then on Joe first became my mentor when I started to train as a bird ringer but this evolved into a real friendship. We might have not agreed on everything but we always respected each other's opinion. Definitely Joe Sultana is one of those people in my life whose influence reflects the person I am now."

Mario Gauci:

"I consider Joe Sultana as the father of bird conservation in Malta. His energy and determination to push his ideals as president of the then Malta Ornithological Society achieved positive results in the field of bird protection. But perhaps most importantly, he was an inspiration to so many young people, with whom he unselfishly shared his knowledge and who today form the bulk of the conservation movement in Malta. I have known Joe for the past 44 years, when as a sixteen

year old I started to train as a bird ringer under his guidance and will forever be grateful to him for his friendship and for instilling in me the strong ideals that make me what I am today.”

Victor Cilia:

“My greatest tribute to Joe is not grief but gratitude for injecting me with the love of birds and nature. RIP Joe.”

Mark Gauci:

“When my dad stepped down as ringing secretary of the then Malta Ornithological Society ringing group, Joe Sultana, who at the time served as Head of the Ringing Scheme, was instrumental in ushering me and training me in this new role. As a newcomer to this role I looked to gain as much experience as possible from Joe and listened and observed in awe at Joe's interventions in the various EURING meetings I was lucky enough to attend with him. I cannot forget the occasional disagreements we had and the pure passion with which he defended his opinion... passion which lest we forget was instrumental in the setting up of the local ringing scheme and fending off the various vicious attacks on the same scheme. Ringing meetings, visits to the island of Filfla and BirdLife Malta annual general meetings will never be the same without Joe, who was always at the centre of a gathering recounting past events and finding the time to share his knowledge and expertise. Rest in peace dear friend and mentor.”

Raymond Galea:

“Joe was an energetic person, transmitting his energy to all of us who knew him. I learned a lot from his knowledge about the birds of Malta. One of his passions was to travel all around the world to watch, study and learn about his beloved birds. I remember my first birding trip abroad with him in Tunisia in 1979 when I was still a teenager. From there onwards I was hooked to travelling myself all around the globe to watch birds and other wildlife. His enthusiasm when ringing, watching birds and wildlife, during meetings, writing articles, papers and books was inspirational to me and to others who knew him well. He was behind the publication of *Il-Merill* and was always involved in its editing in every issue since its inception in 1970. Joe was a good companion and a true friend, which I will cherish and miss. Thanks Joe.”