

# Bird's Eye view



issue 42 • mar 2014

  
BirdLife  
MALTA



# making a difference

One of the most common questions I am asked as BirdLife President is: 'Where is our Organisation heading?' Exciting times call for exciting plans and 2014 is certainly a year for big plans.

Doubtlessly, a main challenge ahead is to maintain the momentum we have achieved on the spring hunting referendum. The number of signatures exceeds the 10% of registered voters required by law. That, in itself, is a fantastic achievement. However, the fact that this is the first referendum pushed by the people of Malta, and not by government, really drives home just how fed up the public is with spring hunting. Importantly, since this is a referendum called for

by the people, government will be constitutionally obliged to hold it.

While spring hunting is a massive problem facing our wildlife, BirdLife Malta is not just about spring hunting. Over the next year we aim to strengthen our core activities, as well as build large-scale conservation projects to develop habitat and species regeneration. If these plans succeed BirdLife Malta will once again be raising the bar for conservation in Malta.

On the education front BirdLife's plans are equally ambitious. Our new education manager will strive to keep Dinja Wahda a household name among primary schools while strengthening the programme with new ideas. Additionally we will be seeking to grow the secondary programme from a pilot project to a national programme.

To conclude, the organisation is in its current strong position thanks to the dedication of our Executive Director and staff, Council, members, and volunteers over the years. The organisation's strong position places us well to continue doing what we do best - make a real difference on the ground for Malta's wildlife and habitats.

Last but not least, a special note of thanks to my predecessor Joseph Mangion, for helming Malta's largest conservation NGO for 12 years, and for seeing so much good brought about through the organisation.



**Geoffrey Saliba**  
President

**BirdLife Malta** was set up in January 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS). It is the oldest and largest environment movement in Malta, with over 3000 members.

**BirdLife Malta's** mission is the protection of wild birds, their habitat and biodiversity. To this end the organisation has over the years used approaches including street protests, educational campaigns and habitat restoration projects.

**BirdLife Malta** spearheaded the creation of the wetland nature reserves at Ghadira and Is-Simar - which it manages today - as well as Foresta 2000, a woodland restoration project on Marfa Ridge.

**BirdLife Malta** publishes various educational material such as books, posters and leaflets for use by schools and other institutions. It is also active in the media, as part of its effort to raise public awareness. The organisation issues regular magazines/newsletters for its membership.

**BirdLife Malta** studies migratory and breeding birds to expand scientific knowledge and to further establish the ornithological value of the Maltese Islands. It also studies threats to birds and ways to mitigate these problems. As part of its research, the organisation runs the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme.

**BirdLife Malta** is a Partner of BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of bird and nature protection organisations, with over 10 million members and supporters in more than 100 countries and territories.

**BirdLife Malta** is a not-for-profit organisation and depends on subscriptions and donations.

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## editorial



With the referendum campaign currently at the forefront of our bird protection lobby, this issue dedicates a four-page spread to explaining the nitty gritty of spring hunting and what led to the campaign. We also present highlights of BirdLife's work and as well as a feature about the iconic Maltese falcon.

Included with this *Bird's Eye View* you will find a questionnaire

which has been designed to find out how we can improve our membership service. Please take the time to help us develop our communication, events and publications.

From the next issue *Bird's Eye View* will also be produced electronically, meaning you can opt to view your magazine through email in a more environmentally friendly way. The *e-Bird's Eye View* will contain the same content as the printed version. If you prefer this format, all you need to do is go to the BirdLife Malta website and



click on the *Bird's Eye View* banner on the front page. The magazine will continue to be sent to members who prefer to receive a hard copy. We hope you enjoy this issue.

**Desirée Falzon**  
Editor

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The turtle dove would breed regularly were it not ruthlessly hunted in spring.  
 Photo David Tipling



**Do not disturb.** The sign put up by BirdLife at the wagtail roost site in Valletta.

## winter roost protected

The winter wagtail roost in Great Siege and St John Squares provides a fascinating wildlife watching opportunity for anyone visiting Valletta at sunset between October and March. In January, more than 7400 white wagtails were counted in Valletta by BirdLife birdwatchers and members. Valletta is the only known roost site for these small insectivorous birds in mainland Malta. In 2006 the city was designated a National Important Bird Area specifically because of this roost. But in 2012 the ficus trees that form the roost were subjected to unauthorised pruning right in the middle of the winter, displacing thousands of the birds. BirdLife reported the incident to MEPA, and to prevent a similar disaster this year, it installed signs informing the public of the trees' importance for the birds, and why pruning needs to be carried out sensitively, outside the winter months, and only when necessary.

Robert Spanning



**Standing proud.** Students from Haz-Zabbar Primary show off their Gold Award and Blue Banner to Education Minister Evarist Bartolo and all present.

## record year

Dinja Waħda set several records for BirdLife's environmental education programme in 2012-2013. More than 90 primary schools in Malta and Gozo used activities from the Dinja Waħda Action Guide to help pupils learn about nature, with field trips to BirdLife's nature reserves and other Natura 2000 sites giving classes the chance to see and experience wildlife at some of Malta's important natural areas, as well as getting hands-on with conservation work.

Teachers and students from participating schools attended the annual prize-giving event in November 2013, and received their awards from Education Minister Evarist Bartolo; a record 43 schools achieved Gold this year. This year was also the first time schools received the Dinja Waħda Blue Banner: 32 schools lined up for their hard-earned banner, having reached Gold three years in a row.

To find out more about Dinja Waħda visit the Dinja Waħda pages on our website, or email [dinjawahda@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:dinjawahda@birdlifemalta.org)



BirdLife Malta

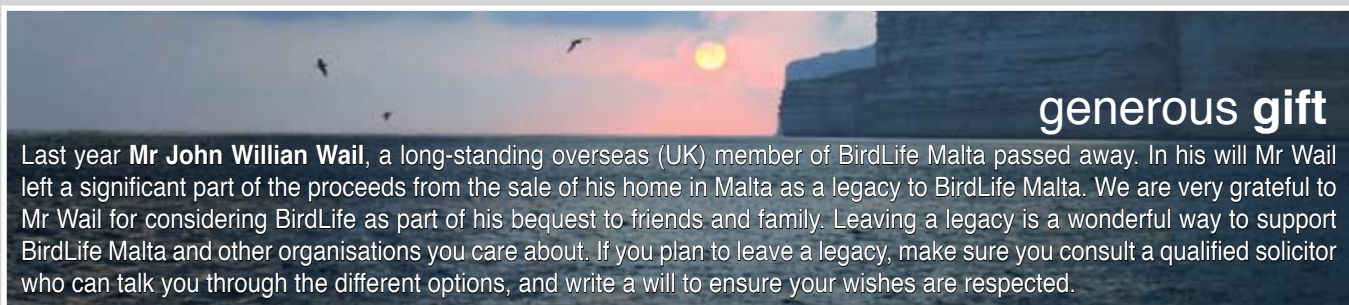


**Survivor.** This booted eagle survived its shotgun injury and was later sent to a raptor rehabilitation centre in Sicily.

## prosecution pending for eagle killing

The killing of more than 14 short-toed and booted eagles last October shocked many in Malta and abroad. The incident clearly showed that there is much work still to be done before the killing of protected birds truly becomes a thing of the past. In the wake of the killings, a series of raids by the authorities uncovered several illegal hoards of carcasses of protected birds, no doubt destined for the black market and private stuffed-bird collections. Although just one man has been convicted from the widespread slaughter that took place in October, the resulting investigations will likely lead to further prosecutions as more evidence is gathered and cases built.

Aron Tanti



## generous gift

Last year **Mr John Willian Wail**, a long-standing overseas (UK) member of BirdLife Malta passed away. In his will Mr Wail left a significant part of the proceeds from the sale of his home in Malta as a legacy to BirdLife Malta. We are very grateful to Mr Wail for considering BirdLife as part of his bequest to friends and family. Leaving a legacy is a wonderful way to support BirdLife Malta and other organisations you care about. If you plan to leave a legacy, make sure you consult a qualified solicitor who can talk you through the different options, and write a will to ensure your wishes are respected.

Raymond Galea

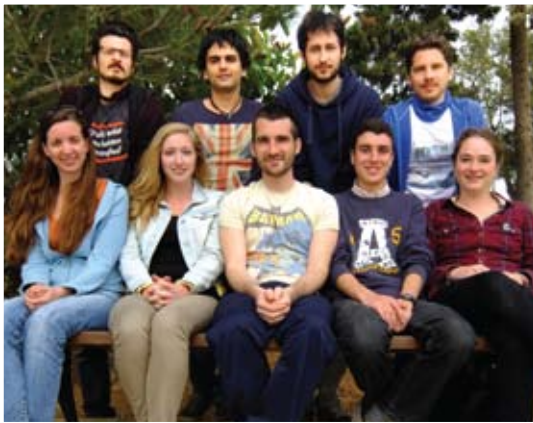


**Prize target.** In Malta, hunters are still given free rein to kill turtle doves. A referendum will put an end to this.

## 45,000 signatures

In February the number of signatures on the petition for a public referendum to stop spring hunting passed the 45,000 mark, and is still growing. We would like to say a big thank you to the many members who helped by gathering signatures and sharing the petition in their workplaces, at home, with friends and family. The widespread support for this call to stop spring hunting since the petition was launched in July is one of the most promising signs for the future of wildlife conservation in Malta, showing that a huge number of people value nature and feel more should be done to protect it and ensure it can be enjoyed by everyone.

BirdLife Malta



**New blood.** Our new EVS volunteers (back row, from left): Matteo Lattuada, Nick Piludu, Juan Mula Laguna, Christian Tiller; (front row, from left): Rebecca Pullinger, Holly Forsyth, Tomas Loyante Barea, Timothy Micallef (Maltese vol), Ella Beeson.

## new faces warm welcome

Since the last issue of *Bird's Eye View*, we have had to say goodbye to some key staff members as well as a dedicated group of volunteers who spent a year in Malta as part of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme making a huge contribution to various areas of BirdLife Malta's work. **Nicolette Falzon** steered the Dinja Waħda education programme for several years and raised participation to its highest level. **Mandi Bennetti**, our finance administrator also spent several years with BirdLife during a period of rapid development. We wish them well in their new endeavours. At the same time we welcome **Hannah Chisholm**, who has taken up the reins as Education Manager, and **Gianmarco Santirocco**, in the roles of Finance Officer and Life+ Malta Seabird Project Administrator. The start of this year also saw the arrival of eight new EVS volunteers from Italy, Spain, Germany and the UK, who all bring skills, expertise and enthusiasm to help birds and nature in Malta. We hope many of you will get to know them over the next 12 months.

Victor Falzon



**Picture it.** The Natura 2000 poster

## natura 2000 support



BirdLife has for decades been involved with Natura 2000 sites. Places like Ġhadira, Is-Simar, Foresta 2000, L-Irdum tal-Madonna, Buskett, Filfla and Kemmuna are all sites of ecological value that BirdLife has studied, helped protect or even created from scratch. Today these and other sites form part of a pan-European network of nature hotspots known as Natura 2000. Now, thanks to the support of the European Commission Representation in Malta, primary school teachers can tell students about our Natura 2000 sites from a large wall poster produced by BirdLife and distributed at the Dinja Waħda launch. The poster forms part of BirdLife's programme to bring children closer to Maltese nature. Other printed matter supported by the Malta EC Representation includes a children's colouring book focusing on individual species of local flora and fauna, and two sets of leaflets about Natura 2000 sites. BirdLife is very grateful for this support.



## Call for volunteers for Spring Watch 2014

Despite the success of the spring hunting petition, it is still likely that there will be a spring hunting season this year. In April, many thousands of birds – most of them protected species and many of them threatened or endangered – will stop over in Malta on their way to Europe, where they breed. At the same time, around 10,000 hunters will prowl the Maltese countryside to shoot turtle doves and quail. Apart from the impact that killing these birds in spring has on their populations, which are already declining in Europe, the spring hunting season also brings with it widespread illegal hunting of protected birds. Every spring BirdLife organises a volunteer camp to help deter illegal hunting by maintaining a visible presence in the countryside. If you would like to help, please send an email to [springwatch@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:springwatch@birdlifemalta.org) and visit the Spring Watch pages on our website to find out more.

# time to stop spring hunting

steve micklewright

Since August 2013, BirdLife Malta and a coalition of twelve other organisations have been working together to bring about a referendum so people can vote to abolish spring hunting on Malta. Steve Micklewright explains why now is the time for this to happen.

## gross injustice

Malta is on the central Mediterranean bird migration flyway between Europe and Africa. Every spring and autumn, countless birds fly over the islands on their long migrations between the continents. Many exhausted birds use Malta to rest

and feed, but each spring about 10,000 Maltese bird hunters are waiting to shoot them out of the sky.

Hunting in the spring is very damaging to wild birds because the birds flying over Malta at this time are the strong birds that have survived the winter in Africa. They

are returning to mainland Europe to nest and breed. Shooting migrating birds in spring threatens the survival of birds like the turtle dove because it means fewer of them survive to breed.

The hunting of migrating birds in spring is forbidden by the EU's Birds Directive. Malta is now the only country in the EU that applies a derogation from the EU's rules to allow it to happen. Derogations from the Birds Directive are usually only allowed for public health and safety, or the protection of food crops. But, although the European Court of Justice ruled that Malta had repeatedly and illegally allowed spring hunting to take place, the European Commission (EC) is refusing to take action to stop it now.

**It is unbelievable that something that puts wild birds at risk and is expressly forbidden by the EU is still allowed to take place and that the European Commissioner is content for his Director to act as though there is not a problem.**

The spring hunting season usually lasts about three weeks in April. During this time nearly 10,000 hunters occupy the countryside, making much of it a virtual no-go area for families, ramblers, tourists and anyone else who might want some fresh air. Spring is the best time of year to go outdoors, but bullying and harassment



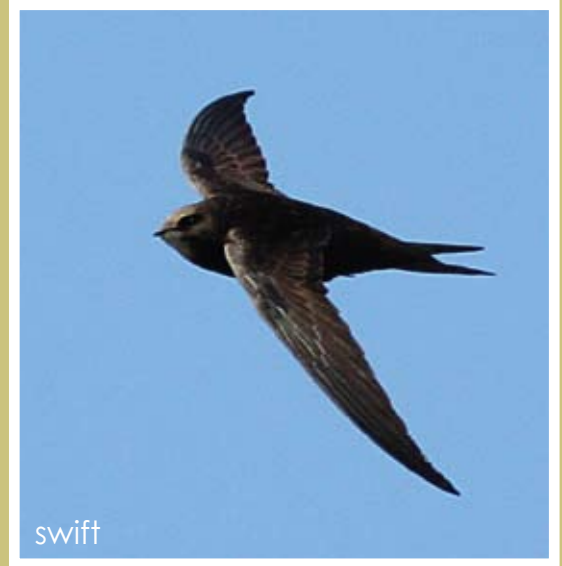
**Terminator.** With virtual impunity and with even less restrictions than in the previous year, a hunter sets out early on a spring morning to kill whatever takes his fancy.

Aron Tanti



peregrine falcon

Victor Falzon



swift

Raymond Galea



cuckoo

Ian Balzan



barn owl

Aron Tanti



kestrel

Denis Cachia

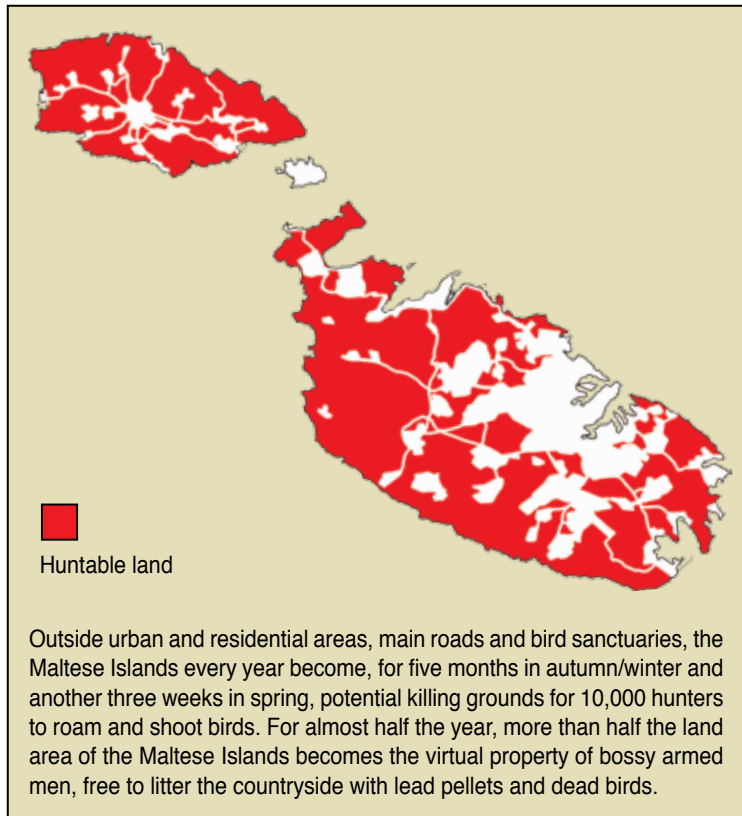


turtle dove

## they would breed and multiply

A problem with hunters is that many of them break the law and shoot protected species. An open spring hunting season would hurt not only the turtle dove and quail populations, but many other migratory species, including birds that, if left unmolested, would even stop and nest here. With no hunters roaming the countryside in spring, the **peregrine** – the famous Maltese Falcon – would return to the seacliffs that are its ideal breeding sites (see pp10-11), and the **barn owl** would again silently patrol the Maltese countryside at dusk and at night, searching for rats and small mammals to eat. **Kestrels** would hover overhead for lizards and mice, and the elusive **cuckoo** would return too. Birds that have recently been trying to gain a foothold – like **swallows**, **swifts** and **pallid swifts** – would establish a more regular summer breeding population. Even the **turtle dove**, that bird most desired by hunters, would breed.

BirdLife Malta



David Tipling

**No fun.** One Local Council even prohibited people from using a campsite for the entire duration of last year's spring hunting season.

from hunters rob the public's chance to enjoy it.

### frustrated efforts

BirdLife Malta has been many years campaigning to end spring hunting. Using the evidence gathered at its annual Springwatch camp, it produces a detailed report that highlights how Malta is breaking the rules, and uses this to encourage the EC to take action. Every year the bureaucrats in Brussels listen politely to what we say, but not enough political pressure is put upon them to ensure that they take decisive action.

Locally, BirdLife Malta is constantly bringing the negative impact of spring hunting to the attention of the government. But sadly, governments of both main political parties have believed the claims of the hunters' federation that 10,000 hunters can affect the results of general elections, even though opinion polls show that 66% of the Maltese population want to see spring hunting abolished.

### last resort

On the eve of the 2013 general election, the current Labour administration signed a deal with the hunters' federation, agreeing to take away many of the controls

that exist on hunting. True to their word, they removed the €50 registration fee for spring hunting in 2013 which resulted in 50% more hunters in the countryside last April than in spring 2012. They also removed the requirement for registered hunters to wear identification armbands, making it easier for illegal hunters to shoot birds with impunity.

**With the Maltese government in the pocket of the hunting community and the EC unwilling to act, BirdLife Malta and its coalition partners have asked the Maltese people to sign a petition to call for a referendum to abolish**

**spring hunting. Over 45,000 people have signed the petition. This is more than enough to call for a referendum.**

### a spring for all

Many birds would nest and breed in Malta if spring hunting did not take place (see box), but people would benefit too. Spring is the most beautiful time of year, but with 10,000 hunters occupying up to 80% of the countryside, most people are too afraid to go out and enjoy it. An end to spring hunting would mean that school groups could visit and study the amazing diversity of plants and animals



Desirée Falzon

**Peace and quiet.** Without threatening hunters or loud bangs from shotguns, people will regain possession of the countryside and start to enjoy an outing in spring.

David Tipling



**End of the road.** A dead wryneck, a protected species shot down by a hunter in spring last year. A successful referendum will reduce this wanton destruction.

Annaliese Falzon

that can be seen in spring. Walkers and rambles could explore the countryside and families could have picnics without feeling they were in a war zone.

Many tourists will not visit Malta because of the hunting that takes place here. While cases of illegal hunting and trapping of birds would remain, a ban on spring hunting would show potential visitors and the wider world that Malta is serious about tackling these problems.

More people would therefore be likely to visit, benefiting the economy.

Abolishing spring hunting through a referendum would end generations of blackmail from the hunting community by finally ending the vote-catching deals that are made behind closed doors between politicians and hunters.

**Abolishing spring hunting would replace gunfire with birdsong. The**

**countryside would be transformed from violent killing fields to a tranquil place where birds can safely nest and families can enjoy this very special time of year.**

Together we can end spring hunting on Malta – for birds, for people, for good!

*Steve Micklewright is Executive Director of BirdLife Malta and chairperson of the Coalition for the Abolition of Spring Hunting.*

## How YOU can help

### Donate

The referendum will take place within the next 12 months. It will call for people to vote YES to abolish the legislation that allows spring hunting.

**For the referendum to be successful, over 50% of the electorate must vote YES.**

We know that 66% of the population want to see spring hunting banned BUT they will still need to be encouraged to actually go out and vote on referendum day. You can help by donating to our appeal to raise funds for the Referendum Campaign. We know the hunters will use every euro they have to stop spring hunting from being abolished. To counter the hunters' opposition we would need at least €150,000. With this money we can create enough publicity to ensure people turn out and vote.

You can donate via our donations page at [igg.me/at/stopspringhunting](http://igg.me/at/stopspringhunting) or via our website at [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)



### Campaign

Help us ensure the European Commission takes action to deal with spring hunting, illegal hunting and bird trapping on Malta. This means they need to feel some pressure from you and your Member of the European Parliament.

You can help by writing to your MEP. Ask them to contact BirdLife Malta for details of how they can help us put pressure on the Commission to take action.

Visit the BirdLife Malta website for tips on writing your letter



### Share

The more people know about the problems on Malta, the more chance there will be that action is taken. Please copy or pull out this article and share it with friends and family. Ask them to donate to the campaign and write to their MEP.

You can download this article from [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)





# signs of spring

annalise falzon

After the short winter, and before the daytime temperatures send people running for the sea, the occasional heavy shower and lengthening hours of sunshine combine to bring Malta and Gozo to life, turning the countryside a lush green in stark contrast to the sandy yellow of summer. The first spring flowers emerge by the beginning of February and continue to be a feature into April.

## rich flora

One place to enjoy spring is Majjistral Nature and History Park. Established in 2007, it lies in the northwest of Malta and stretches from Golden Bay to Anchor Bay. Its deceptively barren-looking (in the dry season) landscape is home to some 430 different plant species. The rocky garrigue on the plateau above the coastal cliffs is characterised by small, low-growing plants and shrubs, and is one of the best sites in Malta to see some of the island's unique plants. Between February and April, several species of orchid, including the Maltese pyramidal



**Mayflower.** The pyramidal orchid flowers in May; this flower is featured on the park emblem.

and Maltese spider orchids, can be found flowering among Mediterranean thyme and Maltese spurge (photo above). On the plateau and below the cliffs grows the Maltese sea chamomile, and everywhere you will see the tall stems and branching flower-spikes of giant fennel.

## good birding spot

Spring is also the best time to see and hear some of Malta's breeding birds, such as the blue rock thrush (Malta's national bird), the male of which perches on rocks singing to establish its territory and attract a mate. The park is also home to significant numbers of



**Endemic.** The Maltese spider orchid is an endemic species that occurs at Majjistral Park.

Yelkouan shearwaters – a seabird listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Redlist – that breed in the rocky crevices of the sea cliffs. In April and May, many migrating spring visitors returning to their breeding grounds in Europe can also be seen in the park. Noisy flocks of brightly-coloured bee-eaters announce their approach in

Spring is without a doubt one of the best times of the year to explore the wildlife and countryside of Malta and Gozo. One outstanding site to visit in spring is the Majjistral Nature and History Park.

advance, and kestrels hover overhead hunting for small rodents. The wide-open landscape allows excellent views of these and many other birds.



**Rare breed.** Majjistral is the only known nesting site in Malta for tawny pipit – an irregular breeding bird – in recent years.

**Annalise Falzon** is Communications Officer and Nature Walks Guide at Majjistral Park.



The park is freely accessible to visitors on foot, bicycle or horseback all year round. For those travelling by bus, bus No. 44 from Valletta stops next to the southern end of

Majjistral at Golden Bay.

Majjistral Park organises regular public and members' activities throughout the year, as well as joint activities with BirdLife Malta. Sign up to the Majjistral newsletter, email [walks@majjistral.org](mailto:walks@majjistral.org) or join us on Facebook to stay informed about upcoming events.

Majjistral Nature and History Park is managed by the Heritage Parks Federation consisting of Din l-Art Helwa, Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust (Malta)

You can find more information, including walking routes and guides to the wildlife and historical features of the park, on the park's website [www.majjistral.org](http://www.majjistral.org)

Annalise Falzon

Avon Terrell

Annalise Falzon



# the maltese falcon

joe sultana

Uncontested ace of the sky and marvel of evolution, the peregrine falcon has graced countless heraldic images and inspired humans across cultures and continents. Yet, of all countries, it is with our land that this bird is most associated. But do we deserve that privilege?

are migratory, but all are known for their wandering flights, which gave the species the name *peregrine* – the pilgrim falcon.

The race that breeds in southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin is

## bird of history

The peregrine falcon has always been considered one of nature's supreme hunters. Historically, the peregrine was a favourite among falconers due to its



**Prized by the nobility.** Falconry was popular in medieval times, especially with the aristocracy.

powerful build, agility and speed, thanks to its long wings. In the mid-13th century, falconry was already popular in Malta. After annexing the Maltese Islands with Sicily, Frederick II (1194-1250) of

Hohenstaufen, Roman Emperor, King of Sicily and Jerusalem – himself an accomplished falconer – wanted to be regularly informed of the number of wild falcons there were on the island, how many were caught annually, and how they were kept.

The peregrine falcon secured its place in Maltese history when in 1522 Emperor Charles V leased the Islands to the Knights of St John for a nominal annual rent of one peregrine. This was probably one of the reasons why author Dashiell Hammett gave the name *The Maltese Falcon* to his 1930 detective story, later to be immortalised by the Humphrey Bogart film of the same name.

## bird of the world

The peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* is a cosmopolitan falcon, with several subspecies distributed over most of the globe. Some are resident birds, others



**In transit.** Most peregrines seen in Malta today are passage birds migrating between Europe and Africa.

Joe Sultana



### rare breed

The last two documented eyries with young were both found at Ta' Ċenċ in Gozo – one in 1968 and another in 1975. Since then, fledged juveniles, sometimes accompanied by adults, have been observed at least four times in Gozo (1977, 1978, 1979 and 1995) and twice in Malta (2010 and 2011), always along the southern cliffs of the Islands.

**Last eyrie.** An old photograph of the 1975 peregrine eyrie at Ta' Ċenċ, here with two fully fledged young ready to take their maiden flight. This was the last known and located peregrine eyrie on record in the Maltese Islands.



## Falko

*We meet the young leaders of Falko, BirdLife's group for teenagers and young adults. What do Falko do and what inspires and motivates them to promote enjoyment and understanding of nature to other people their own age?*

**Nicholas Galea.** "We've been organising Falko events for a year now and have built up a really good group of active members. Together we've done all sorts of outdoor and nature activities, including night hikes, visits to the seacliffs to listen for shearwaters, visiting the bird ringing station on Kemmuna, raptor watching at Buskett, even a beach barbecue in summer."



**Francesca Bajada.** "Youths are the ambassadors of the future. We have a chance to save the last patches of countryside on our islands and that's what we want to do, by showing our members how brilliant nature and wildlife are in Malta and Gozo and how important it is to value and defend it."



**Martin Austad.** "We try and share our passion for birds and wildlife with others. It is really great when we see members enjoying being outdoors and getting super enthusiastic for having spotted a bird they had never seen before."



**Anne-Marie Austad.** "One of Falko's greatest achievements was the Bird Race, a challenge of seeing 50 species in one day. It was the first to be held in Malta, but it certainly won't be the last. This spring we hope to organise another one, this time open to all BirdLife Malta members."



**Timothy Micallef.** "Falko's activities are an opportunity for young people to learn about the wildlife we have here in Malta by experiencing it first-hand. The better we understand nature the better it can be conserved. Hopefully we are helping to spread a sense of the importance of protecting birds and other wildlife for future generations."



the *brookei*<sup>1</sup> and it is the subspecies that has been known to breed in Malta.

### resident no more

We have no figures of the former size or distribution of the Maltese breeding peregrine population, although as a top predator the bird could never have

Whatever the peregrine's former status, however, one thing is certain: disturbance from the ever-growing human population and direct persecution by hunters and collectors took their toll, and by the mid-20th century just one or two pairs of peregrines were breeding regularly.

### persecuted

In the past, the peregrine was exploited for falconry and egg collections. Sadly there has also always been a certain hostility towards it from pigeon fanciers, as wild pigeons and doves are the peregrine's primary natural prey.

Nowadays, as in other civilised countries, the peregrine is protected in Malta. Yet the bird is still widely persecuted

by hunters for fun and to add to their Victorian-style stuffed-bird collections.

Peregrines still occur in Malta in small numbers every year, but these are almost always birds on migration. Due to widespread illegal hunting the peregrine cannot sustain a regular resident breeding population. Each time this magnificent bird tries to establish an eyrie on the sheer cliffs, the parents and young invariably fall victim to hunters.

It is an indication of the resilience of nature that peregrines still try to breed in Malta. Given half a chance – if only illegal hunting were stopped – the Maltese Falcon would return to the skies of the island that gave it its legendary name.



Victor Falzon

**Old haunt.** In Malta the peregrine hunts almost exclusively along the coast and at sea. In the past, peregrines probably nested in places such as Rđum il-Bies, pictured above.

been very common. Some place names, however, may be indicative of a former haunt of the bird, including Rđum il-Bies (meaning *the peregrine's cliff*), opposite St Paul's Islands in Xemxija.

### reintroduction

BirdLife Malta is currently studying the possible reintroduction of the peregrine falcon into the Maltese Islands. This initiative is being supported by NABU (BirdLife in Germany) and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights.



<sup>1</sup>The *brookei* race was named after A. Basil Brooke, who presented two specimens taken from Sardinia to the British Museum in the third quarter of the 19th century.

*Joe Sultana is an ornithologist*

If you would like to volunteer with BirdLife Malta, give us a call on 21347644/5/6 or send us an email at [office@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:office@birdlifemalta.org)

# out and about

forthcoming birdlife activities

## Falko activities for BirdLife's youth section

### sat 5 apr 2014 • spring bird race

A uniquely fun way to watch and follow birds, both for experienced birders and novices alike. Join Falko for this one-of-a-kind experience while raising money for conservation. Prizes for the teams that see most birds, and individuals with the best photos.



### sat 19 apr 2014 • off to kemmuna

Spring wouldn't be spring without a visit to Kemmuna. Learn about bird ringing at BirdLife Kemmuna Bird Ringing Station. Watch migrating birds and other wildlife in one of the most unspoiled areas in the Maltese Islands.



### fri 23 may 2014 • shearwater evening

Join us for this sundown outing to find the mysterious yelkouan shearwater and listen for its eerie calls as the birds return to their cliffside nests after dark.



Like us on Facebook. Look up Falko BirdLife Malta and keep updated and get more information about our activities. For more details and to book for any Falko activities please email [falkoblml@gmail.com](mailto:falkoblml@gmail.com), send us a message on Facebook, or call 99214143 / 99809190.

## Klabb Huttaf activities for BirdLife's juniors

### sun 23 mar 2014 • walk for nature

Starting from Siggiewi and passing through beautiful countryside to finish at Maqluba, the annual Walk for Nature helps to raise money through sponsorship for our nature reserves. Klabb Huttaf and family members join up with Dinja Wahda schools for this activity.



### sat 19 apr 2014 • easter egg-citement!

Join us for this family event at Is-Simar nature reserve. Take part in the Easter Egg Hunt, picnic next to nature, and explore the nature trail to discover the amazing variety of wildlife hidden inside this very special wetland.



## Adult member activities

### sun 23 march 2014 • walk for nature

This year BirdLife will be teaming up Klabb Huttaf, school groups and adult members in one sponsored walk starting from Siggiewi, through beautiful countryside, to finish at Maqluba. The 7km walk will include nature activities for the young ones. Money raised will go towards equipment such as telescopes, binoculars and loupes for the nature reserves. Please email [office@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:office@birdlifemalta.org) for more information.



### sun 13 apr 2014 • trekking cava grande

A day trip to La Sicilia with a difference! Trek along the Cava Grande, and experience the beauty of one of Sicily's most breathtaking nature reserves in a spectacular canyon close to Siracusa. Participants must be at least 18yrs old and physically fit. Places are limited and will be accepted on a first-come-first-served basis.



## Activities open to non-members

### sat 29 mar 2014 • photography workshop

More and more people are using digital cameras to take photographs of wildlife and nature, but how can you get the most out of your camera? In this workshop, professional wildlife photographer **Johan Siggesson** will help you understand and use your camera better, so you can start taking amazing photos wherever you are and whatever the conditions. Fee €40. Places very limited, early booking essential. Email [holly.forsyth@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:holly.forsyth@birdlifemalta.org)



### sun 27 apr 2014 • spring at majjistral park

Enjoy a spring afternoon walk through one of Malta's most striking natural landscapes, with BirdLife and Majjistral Park. Guides will help you spot birds, rare orchids and other flora that can only be enjoyed at this time of year. Suggested donation for non-members: €5. Places limited, early booking essential. Email [holly.forsyth@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:holly.forsyth@birdlifemalta.org)

