

Bird's Eye view



issue 36 • november 2011


BirdLife
MALTA



It is a fact that the EU Birds Directive has made a significant difference in protecting many of Europe's most threatened birds. According to a paper in *Science* journal

(2007) the Directive has been so effective that in the EU, the most threatened species are now actually faring better than other species. In particular, it is the obligatory designation of Specially Protected Areas in member states that has provided proper protection for vulnerable species. SPAs have brought birds such as the Eurasian Spoonbill back from the brink. Unfortunately, Malta continues to throw a damper on these success stories.

This year's RaptorCamp logged over 400 cases of illegal hunting activity, and witnessed birds from lesser spotted eagles to barn swallows plummet from the sky. The teams' presence were a strong deterrent to further illegality, but the moment the birds strayed from areas under BirdLife and police surveillance, they came under fire; many failed to make it out alive.

In March of this year, BirdLife launched a Citizen Activism Campaign encouraging the public to report hunting and trapping crimes.

The response was overwhelming, and BirdLife's effectiveness doubled with the public's vigilance. One case that made the headlines last month was the white storks that settled on the floodlights of a football ground at Mġarr. Community response was impressive as people offered to keep vigil and families peered through BirdLife's telescopes at the three visitors from Hungary. The ground owner himself – a BirdLife member – ensured that the floodlights stayed switched off for as long as the birds used them. Such events further confirm the collective positive message from the non-hunting community. Sadly, the three birds were shot at the next day, one was definitely injured, and may all have been eventually shot down.

I urge you, our members, to show the authorities that the great majority of us expect our European obligations towards birds to be taken seriously. Hunters must be shown that laws exist, and that our birds are not theirs to kill.

Desirée Falzon
Editor

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A common kestrel soars over Buskett
(photo by Raymond Galea)

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BirdLife Malta was set up in January 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS). It is the oldest and the 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 charity and depends on subscriptions and donations.

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Raymond Galea



Lures like this wooden turtle dove decoy will not be deployed this autumn.

no trapping this autumn (so far)

For the first time ever in Malta, the autumn trapping season was not authorised by the government. On the basis of several reports that BirdLife Malta has been compiling since 2009, the European Commission in June issued a Letter of Formal Notice to Malta, questioning the legality of the trapping season for turtle dove, common quail, golden plover and song thrush. The reports were funded through BirdLife's EU LIFE+ Project on bird migration and trapping. While not a permanent ban, this is a significant step forward in the campaign to bring national trapping legislation in line with the Birds Directive. Government has asked the Ornis Committee to draw up scientific recommendations that would justify trapping, before proposing a future trapping season. We await further information on these studies in order to establish how to counter such proposals.

BirdLife Malta



BirdLife Malta President Joseph Mangion and Bank of Valletta Chief Officer Operations Michael Galea activate another scholastic year of joint Dinja Wahda activity.

partners in education

Bank of Valletta have for several years supported BirdLife Malta in our national environmental education initiatives. On 19 September, Bank of Valletta and BirdLife renewed their joint agreement as partners in education for Dinja Wahda 2011-2012. Dinja Wahda is a 30-activity green initiative tailored to Maltese primary schools, that puts special emphasis on green living, awareness of and respect for biodiversity. A regular participation of over 80% of schools is registered every year. The programme is run in collaboration with the Education Directorate (DQSE) through which a teacher is released to visit and help schools with Dinja Wahda (see also page 5).



Hadram Shirihai / The Tubenoses Project



The European storm-petrel will be one of the direct beneficiaries of marine SPAs.

marine iba life+ project

BirdLife Malta has been awarded a new EU-funded LIFE+ project. The aim of this project will be to identify Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) around the Maltese Islands. It will focus on sites for three species: yelkouan shearwater, Cory's shearwater and European storm-petrel. Data from the four-year project will be used to establish several Marine Specially Protected Areas (SPAs), which will become part of the EU-wide marine Natura 2000 network. BirdLife Malta's main partners in this project are the Office of the Prime Minister, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal), and will run on a budget of €874,000 (of which over 40% is EU-funded). The project kicked off in September. BirdLife Malta is the first Maltese NGO to have been awarded a third LIFE project. The others were the Yelkouan Shearwater Project (2007-2010) and the Bird Migration and Trapping Project (2008-2011) (see also page 6).



BirdLife Malta



Surveillance equipment bought with SOF's generous donation.

sof funds to combat illegal hunting

SOF (BirdLife in Sweden) has donated €15,000 to help BirdLife Malta in its 2011 campaign against illegal hunting. Part of the funds have been used to purchase and upgrade surveillance equipment used during monitoring of illegal hunting in the countryside. The new equipment includes three telescopes with camera attachments, all of which were used during this autumn's RaptorCamp (see page 7) to observe and record illegalities. Film and photographic evidence is often crucial in leading police to apprehend hunters and trappers who break the law. BirdLife Malta is very grateful to our Swedish Partners.



John J Borg



Yelkouan shearwater chicks often fall prey to marauding rats.

rodent round up

An agreement signed in September between BirdLife and MEPA provides €2392 funding for a rat eradication programme designed by BirdLife. The yelkouan shearwater population that breeds at L-iRdum tal-Madonna - estimated at 3% of the global population - is vulnerable to rat predation. Rats often cause massive mortality in cliff-nesting seabirds, raiding nests and devouring both eggs and chicks, sometimes also attacking brooding adults. The programme will reduce this threat to the breeding success of these seabirds in 2012.



Traffic on the BirdLife Malta website peaks in September.

web hits

In just one month (10 Sep - 10 Oct 2011), the BirdLife Malta's website was visited 18,000 times. An overwhelming 13,000 of these hits were from local viewers, but there were visits from 88 countries. Page views always peak during RaptorCamp, which is a statement about the widespread concern over the fate of our migratory birds. On PageRank, an international rating site that ranks websites on a 1-10 popularity scale, our website ranks a respectable 6, which is at par with top Maltese sites (such as The Times website).

Aron Tanti



BirdLife President Joseph Mangion addressing the audience at the launch, flanked by other speakers and three of the authors.

new book launched

On 5 September 2011, BirdLife Malta's new book *The Breeding Birds of Malta* by Joe Sultana, John J Borg, Charles Gauci and Victor Falzon was launched at the National Museum of Natural History. The event was introduced by BirdLife President Joseph Mangion, after which author Joe Sultana outlined the book methodology. Naturalist Dr Mark Anthony Falzon then gave a brief appraisal of the work, followed by the Hon. Mario de Marco, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, Environment and Culture, who addressed the audience (see also page 10).



BirdLife Malta meets Environment Commissioner Potočnik.

meeting with commissioner

On 14 September, BirdLife Malta President Joseph Mangion and Executive Director Paul Debono met European Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potočnik during a meeting for NGOs. BirdLife drew the Commissioner's attention to the intensity of illegal hunting going on in Malta during the spring open season, in contrast to hunters' under-reporting of their catch. The brief was well received and the validity of BirdLife's reporting noted. The delegation also presented Commissioner Potočnik a copy of BirdLife's latest book *The Breeding Birds of Malta*.

Mark Sultana

Join BirdLife's Citizen Activism Campaign



Be informed! Be alert! Be active! Help us rid our countryside of abuse, by reporting illegal hunting and trapping activity. Our website is geared to help you do this. It will direct you

- to inform yourself on what's illegal
- how to report illegalities to the police
- where to share by email the outrage that you witnessed

www.birdlifemalta.org



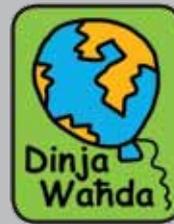
Next year will be BirdLife Malta's 50th anniversary. Make sure to keep **Sunday 4 March 2012** free. More details in next issue of *Bird's Eye View*.

All Creatures

Desirée Falzon

Exposing children to nature

BirdLife's Dinja Waħda programme in schools kicked off with the start of the new school year. Through Dinja Waħda, thousands of children will be learning about nature through a variety of fun green activities. Several of these activities help children discover the fascinating lives of the plants and animals that liven up our countryside. Here are three of these activities.



Dinja Waħda is BirdLife Malta's environmental education programme for primary schools. It is run together with Bank of Valletta, partner in education, with the collaboration of the Education Directorate (DQSE).

Flower Detectives!



This Activity provides information about twelve common wild flowers, as well as colour-in drawings of each flower, which teachers use as a guide for their children. Learning about these flowers is a fun game of hide-and-seek where children follow a trail of clues to discover and complete an identikit of each of the 12 flowers.

Trees Are Cool!



This Activity provides a variety of actions children can do to learn about the value of trees. Bark rubbings draw attention to different characteristics of different trees around us, while a dice game shows what helps trees and what hurts them. In another part of the activity, children use their imagination to create displays of the range of benefits trees provide.



On Reserve!

Outdoor learning features strongly in Dinja Waħda, and is particularly evident in this Activity. Peering at nature through a magnifying lens, children get an intimate view of the creatures and their homes at BirdLife's nature reserves. By discovering and observing the finer details of nature, children become aware of the biodiversity around them. At Ghadir, Is-Simar or Foresta 2000, they learn about the needs of plants and creatures, and realise how much our lifestyles can affect them.

Desirée Falzon is Education Coordinator of BirdLife Malta.

Is Trapping on the way Out?

Geoffrey Saliba

In 2009 and 2010, BirdLife carried out a survey of trapping sites in the countryside. This was done as part of the EU LIFE+ Project on Bird Migration and Trapping. The survey found out that only 24% of the 4787 trapping sites surveyed were active or maintained in 2010. Is trapping on the way out?

The result of the survey was a significant and very welcome decrease over the situation in 2008. The good news was dampened by the fact that of the active sites identified, a staggering 96% were set for trapping finches, which is illegal. BirdLife passed details (including GPS locations) of all the surveyed trapping sites to the police, which is crucial information for effective enforcement.

action

The Maltese government has permitted the trapping of four non-finch species under what is known as a derogation on the Birds Directive. Derogations are the EU's 'safety net' which caters for exceptional circumstances and, subject to specific conditions, allow activity that is normally not permitted.

To prevent member states using derogations as loopholes to bypass uncomfortable legislation, the European Commission requires that member states present annual reports, explaining and justifying all the derogations they have applied. If the Commission feels a

derogation is unjustified it may take legal action against the member state.

In a recent communication to BirdLife Malta, Joseph Hennon, spokesperson for EU Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik, stated that the Commission does not feel that Malta's present derogation permitting autumn trapping meets these criteria. In fact, an infringement case against Malta for allowing bird trapping in autumn was opened in June 2011.

reaction

In reaction to this legal action, the government this year did not open a trapping season, making 2011 the first year that no trapping season was opened since Malta joined the EU.

The government has asked the Ornis Committee, its advisory body on hunting




Trapping and the EU

Under the Birds Directive, bird trapping is prohibited throughout the EU. When Malta joined the EU it negotiated a five-year period (until end 2008) in which to phase out finch trapping. Since 2009, the Maltese government has not opened a finch trapping season. However, in 2009 and 2010 it opened an autumn season allowing trapping of turtle dove, common quail, golden plover and song thrush. This gave trappers the perfect excuse to keep their *mnasab* active and continue to trap finches, although this is now illegal. The European Commission has taken exception to this move.



Aron Tanti

Birds of contention. The song thrush is one of four species that may land the government in trouble with Brussels again.

and trapping matters, to prepare an assessment justifying a trapping derogation in line with the Birds Directive, before any future trapping season can be recommended. At the time of going to press, the Committee has not reacted.

the future

The Commission's legal action has exposed as insufficient the government's hitherto justification to open a trapping season. Although trapping licences are still renewable, only 2643 trappers (as opposed to 4616 in 2008) had renewed by September of this year. Since no new licences are being issued, once a licence is not renewed it is permanently lost. These figures are a clear sign that many trappers have read the writing on the wall.

Geoffrey Saliba is Campaigns Coordinator of BirdLife Malta.



Desirée Falzon

The Watchers

Many birds of prey migrating south in autumn take a short single-night rest in Malta before continuing their journey to Africa. Sadly, these birds are highly prized by trophy hunters, and despite being protected, are often pursued relentlessly and shot. For many years, BirdLife Malta has been organising RaptorCamps in September to coincide with the peak period of this migration. This year, a record 66 people from 11 countries took part in RaptorCamp.

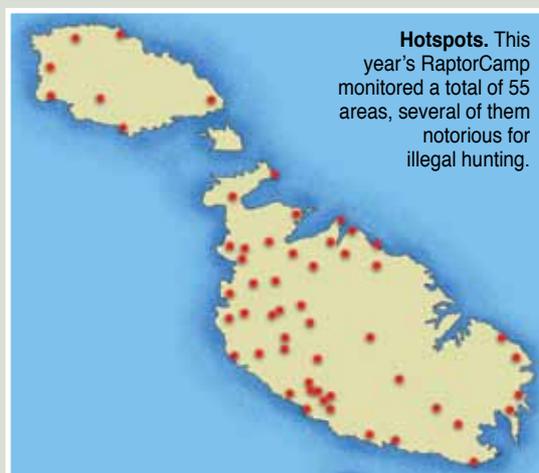
During their 18-day vigil, our RaptorCamp volunteers worked around the clock to follow the movements of these birds. They did this not just to observe and enjoy the spectacle of migration but also - more importantly - to deter hunters from shooting these birds, in which case they would photograph, film and report the case to the police.

As in other years, this year's RaptorCamp has been vital to safeguard large numbers of raptors where the arm of the ALE was too short to reach the thousands of hunters that swarm the countryside every autumn. Camp volunteers often spent nights guarding roosting raptors (and, increasingly, storks) to keep them safe from hunters who converge on such spots waiting for an opportunity to kill the sleeping

birds (see Camp Diary). The moment these birds distance themselves from the watchers and the police, they invariably came under fire.

This year's RaptorCamp logged 405 illegalities, which included 83 cases of shooting at protected birds. A further 90 protected birds with shotgun injuries were seen in flight. Out of 55 migratory species recorded, 33 were illegally shot at, including rare birds like black stork and short-toed eagle, but also common birds like barn swallows and European bee-eaters.

While international support and action from the general public are inspirational, the same cannot be said of the government. Its insistence on keeping the ALE short-staffed shows there is little will to control illegal hunting in autumn.

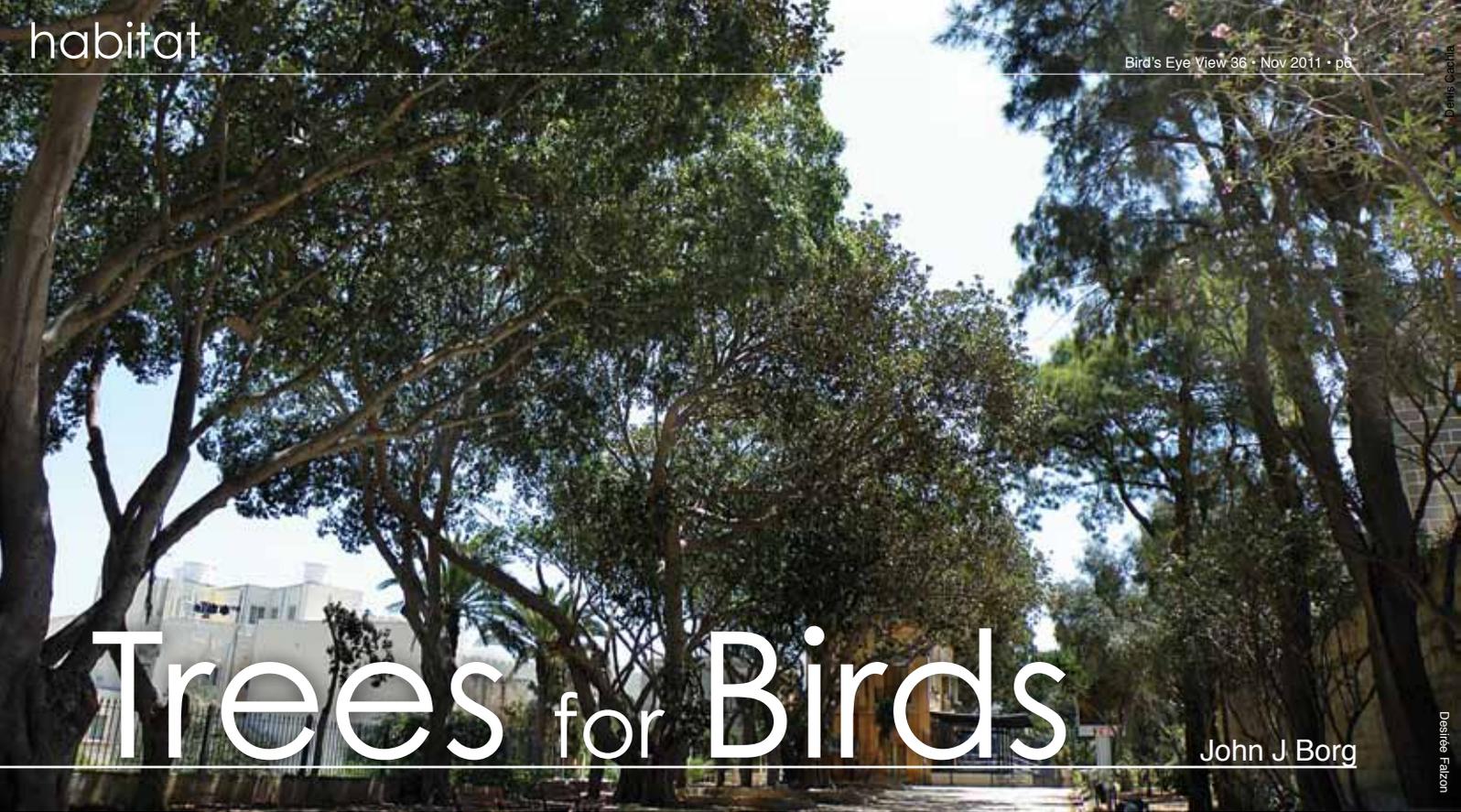


From camp diary...

- 15 Sep.** A small flock of honey-buzzards roost in San Niklaw area. One shot down as flock approached roost. Police were called but although the team waited till dark no police presence was noted. Almost every team reported illegal shots after hours.
- 16 Sep (pm).** Teams deployed for all-night watch on two roosting black storks. Tomorrow's update will record their fate.
- 17 Sep.** Night watch successful, no shooting on black storks recorded last night. Birds sighted outside roost area early am, having probably left roost before first light. Most of yesterday's birds kept migrating without stopping over and this morning's migration was a steady trickle of birds leaving Islands.
- 18 Sep (pm).** Excellent raptor passage this afternoon: rare raptors and multiple black kites, ospreys, pallid harriers and Eleonora's falcons. One Eleonora's shot from tree while resting at Buskett, soon after which a vehicle was seen speeding from the scene without collecting bird. Several honey-buzzards shot down elsewhere.
- 18 Sep (night).** Nightwatch records 88 marsh harriers roosting at Fiddien. Shortly after dark, an offroad vehicle arrives, begins sweeping area with torchlight, with shots heard shortly afterwards. Police are called but vehicle departs by the time they arrive.
- 21 Sep.** Common kestrel shot down at Benghisa. Swallows shot at near Laferla Cross.
- 22 Sep.** Marsh harrier shot down as it leaves roost near Qrendi. Police are called but find nothing.
- 23 Sep.** Short-toed eagle shot down at Mtarfa. First seen over Mtaħleb late pm, less than 1hr later flew near Mtarfa team, where it was shot down while flying low looking for place to roost.
- 24 Sep (am).** Good numbers of raptors leave roosts this morning, mainly honey-buzzards and marsh harriers, also an osprey and a black kite.
- 24 Sep (pm).** 5 black storks followed by teams over Dingli as they pass over safely. Lots of marsh harriers roost at Mtaħleb, watched over by BirdLife teams during the night.
- 25 Sep.** Honey-buzzard shot down at Dingli while trying to leave Island. Santa Katarina team subjected to verbal abuse.
- 26 Sep.** At Has-Saptan, yellow-legged gull shot down and honey-buzzard and common kestrel shot at. Police are called and arraign 2 hunters, 1 for having unlicensed shotgun and 1 for leaving shotgun unattended. A 3rd hunter flees scene.
- 27 Sep.** Mtarfa team sees Northern wheatear shot, calls ALE; 2 men caught and dead bird retrieved; police confiscate electronic lures and wader decoys from near artificial lake.
- 28 Sep.** Black stork seen flying near airport, later shot at Żurrieq. 3 white storks roost in Mġarr. Watched by police and BirdLife teams throughout night. Birds remain undisturbed at their roost atop football ground floodlights.
- 29 Sep (am).** Mġarr white storks take flight at about 8.45am, closely followed to the coast, where they depart Islands safely. Reports later received that the birds returned, flying low, 1 of which was shot at and injured.

Bethan Hull





Trees for Birds

John J Borg

How often have we heard that trees are the earth's lungs, and that the oxygen they emit sustains life on earth? But trees are much more than that. They are nature's power stations, supermarkets and housing estates at the very least. One particular group of animals has learned to make use of all forms of trees and shrubs: birds.

Birds feed on and from trees, they build their nests on branches or inside tree trunks and they also use trees as shelters, dormitories and hideouts. There is hardly a family-group of birds that doesn't have a tree-loving species in its ranks. Even seabirds like noddies and tropicbirds nest in trees. You wouldn't expect pelagic species to be tree dwellers, but Japan's streaked shearwater uses trees as a launching pad when it leaves its colony in the morning.



Rooster. Spanish sparrows form huge roosts.

new and exotic

During the last Ice Age, tree cover in Malta was much more extensive, and the diversity of woodland birds much higher. The fossil record shows that during this period various species of trees grew here, and they attracted raptors, thrushes and small woodland birds, sometimes in very large numbers. Down the millennia we lost most of the original tree cover, and it is only afforestation projects that have given us the few woodland groves we know today, including Buskett. Tree-planting ventures in the 1970s covered places like Miżieb and L-Ahrax with trees, but unfortunately these projects provide limited benefit to our birds, since the dominant species planted were exotic acacia and eucalyptus, both aliens from Australia.

One introduced species of tree that adorns our streets and village squares, however, has become a mecca for birds: the *Ficus nitida*. This tree throws out a thick foliage all year round that provides shelter to both resident and visiting wintering birds. This species is a favourite roost for our most common resident bird: the Spanish sparrow. Several thousand sparrows fly into these trees every evening to spend the night securely hidden in the dense canopy of leaves. In winter, ficus roosts are shared with other species such as common starlings and white wagtails (see page 9).

ravaged roost

It is most unfortunate that in the last couple of years a number of local councils have destroyed many of these trees either by drastic pruning that reduced them to bare stumps or, worse, by uprooting and removing them completely. A recent case in point is the stand of ficus trees in front of the law courts in Valletta. This site - a listed national Important Bird Area - has been a regular winter roost for white wagtails since at least the early 1970s. Yet in 2009, the trees were savagely, illegally and repeatedly pruned, and with apparent impunity.

major project

BirdLife Malta's Research Committee is planning a major project to start in 2012. The main aim will be to map all the trees providing roosts for Spanish sparrows. These could be single trees (e.g. the large holm oak under Mdina Bridge), or entire squares (e.g. Pjazza San Duminku in Rabat) or gardens (e.g. the old train station in Birkirkara, pictured above).

Armed with this knowledge, BirdLife will be in a better position to provide guidance and assistance leading to the protection and conservation of these trees. And, of course, the birds that depend on them.

John J Borg is Head of the BirdLife Malta Research Committee.

The Winter wagger

Joe Sultana

The bird seems to dance along the water's edge of the stream as it picks off flies and mosquitoes, head jerking to every step of its brisk walk. It stops abruptly to snap up a worm, but its long, slender tail never stops bobbing. No wonder the Italians call it *ballerina bianca* (the white dancer). It is the wintering white wagtail, and its distinctive *tsee-tsick!* call gives us the *zakak* in its Maltese name *Zakak Abjad*.

autumn arrivals

October heralds the arrival of Malta's winter visitors, among them the white wagtail, a slender, elegant bird with black, white and grey plumage. Flocks of them - many of them hatched that same year - fly in for the winter. They are already in their drab winter colours, but by the time they leave in March, many of them will have started changing into their summer dress: the black breast band extends all the way to the chin, and the dull winter grey turns a richer hue. Then off they fly to their European breeding quarters, only to keep their appointment the following autumn.

Several of those that arrive in early autumn spend some days in Malta, gorging on

insects by day and congregating to roost in beds of giant reed at night. But soon they resume their journey to winter in North Africa.

Many others, however, remain and spend the winter in the Islands. By day they disperse to forage singly or in pairs. They visit farmland, valleys, country lanes and open spaces, even village squares and schoolyards. But in the evenings, they all fly in to sleep in large flocks at long-established roosts, usually a sheltered clump of trees.

At some sites, such as the bus terminus at Rabat in Gozo, the ficus trees are communal roosting places, where white wagtails roost in the company of resident Spanish sparrows and wintering common starlings.

city sites

The main white wagtail roost site in the Maltese Islands is Great Siege Square, right in the heart of Valletta, a cosy spot with large ficus trees. At sundown, the wagtails start streaming in, converging from all parts of mainland Malta. They first settle on the roofs of nearby buildings,

from where they then fly into the trees for the night, where the thick foliage shelters them from wind and rain.

Since 1973, sixteen wagtail counts have been organised by BirdLife Malta at the Valletta roost. These have given us some idea of the number of these birds wintering in the Islands. The highest ever recorded number of white wagtails was 7761 in January 2009, while the lowest count was 2235 birds in January 2001.

uncertain future

The importance of these roosting sites is paramount, and the wagtails' survival of Maltese winters depends on our management of such sites. It is shameful that the Valletta roost site - a national Important Bird Area - is in imminent danger of permanent destruction.

With a little forethought and sensitivity we can continue to enjoy the spectacle of thousands of white wagtails calling the winter evening to a close.

Joe Sultana is an ornithologist and author.

Shortly before they leave in spring, white wagtails often change into their summer plumage, as this splendid individual has done.

(photo by Denis Cachia)



Nested Interest

Victor Falzon

The Breeding Birds of Malta took two years to put together, but it combines knowledge built over 170 years of study and observation. The information came from a wide range of sources, from faded 19th century manuscripts to minuscule electronic tags tracked by orbiting satellites. It is the collective input from scores of people who watched and studied birds with unflagging fascination, and made their records available.

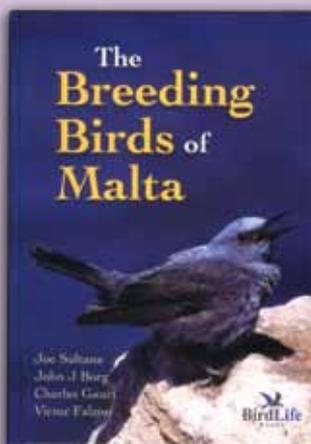
Malta is poor in breeding species, but this only renders them all the more precious, and is probably why so much knowledge has accumulated about them. The book devotes a monographic chapter to each of the 18 regularly breeding species. Some of the stories are encouraging, like that of the recent spread of collared doves; but other species, like the corn bunting, have plummeted and may soon breed no more unless drastic conservation action is taken.



Bunting blues. Corn buntings have declined sharply in recent years, as BirdLife's survey maps clearly show.

The book is lavishly illustrated with over 450 photographs, several taken by the best nature photographers in the country. The text is at once popular and scientific, often complemented with clear tables and maps. The book is profusely referenced, some records dating as far back as 1843, others coming in just days before the book went to print.

The Breeding Birds of Malta by Joe Sultana, John J Borg, Charles Gauci and Victor Falzon, is BirdLife's Malta latest book. It was published in August 2011 in conjunction with Book Distributors Ltd (BDL). The book is for sale (€33, hardback, 380pp) from BirdLife Malta, BDL and all bookshops.



Other chapters deal with birds that breed irregularly or began nesting recently (27 species); birds that nested in the past but do so no more (16 species); birds of dubious breeding record (8 species) and birds introduced by humans (8 species).

The book is lavishly illustrated with over 450



Victor Falzon is one of the authors of the book.



Denis Cachia

A true BirdLife veteran, Denis has been a volunteer for over 35 years. Here, he gives us a very brief overview of his vast input.

How did you start volunteering with BirdLife?

My first experience as a volunteer for BirdLife was in the 1970s, running a stand at the Malta International Trade Fair. My job was handing out membership forms and stickers to people who visited the stand. In my early years with MOS (BirdLife's former name) I also used to go to the home of Joe Sultana (then MOS President) to help in the mailing of members' publications by writing addresses on 'envelopes' that we made on the spot from brown paper!

What do you do today as a volunteer?

If you had asked me what I did all the years as a BirdLife Malta volunteer I would have given you a very long list. However, since much of the work of the organisation is now done by paid staff, and since I retired from Council Secretary a few years ago, my voluntary contribution is now much reduced compared to the past. Every Sunday I am a weekend warden at the Ghadira nature reserve and guide visitors around the site. I am a bird photographer and regularly donate my photos to BirdLife for use in its media work and publications. I am a member of the Malta Rarities Committee, a licensed bird ringer and I regularly contribute my bird observation records. I also handle the Society's info email account, answering some of them and forwarding the others to the persons in charge.

What was your best experience as a BirdLife volunteer?

I was Treasurer for several years, when the society was still fully managed by volunteers. Despite its small size, the organisation was financially healthy and funds grew from year to year. I used to spend many hours every week updating financial records, using a primitive ledger-and-file accounting system. Every item sold by the organisation, even the smallest sticker, was accounted for individually! It was hard work but at the end of the day I felt the satisfaction that my work was important for the growth of the organisation.

If you would like to volunteer with BirdLife, call our office on 21347644/5 or e-mail us at office@birdlifemalta.org



Richard Cachia Żammit **Out and About**
Forthcoming member activities

Denis Cachia



Deirdre Falzon

November 2011 • Walk at Mistra

Walks are the most sought after activities by our members and now is the best time to put on sturdy shoes, grab a pair of binoculars and go out in the countryside. Our walk for this month will take us to the picturesque coastal area of Mistra.



Aron Tanti

February 2012 • Visit to Xrobb L-Għaġin

Many associate the south with power stations and the Freeport but even in Malta, we do have The Beautiful South. The areas around Xrobb l-Għaġin has breathtaking views on offer with a beautiful coast including unique chalk-white cliffs.



Alex Casha

December 2011 • Walk at Wied L-Isqof

Wied L-Isqof is a charming valley in the limits of Rabat. Water collects along the valley in winter and various interesting rushes and other aquatic plants grow there. With such a habitat, different species of wintering birds are bound to be seen.



Aron Tanti

March 2012 • Day trip to Gozo

After this year's successful trip in May, we are planning another day trip to our sister island in March. In Gozo we are spoilt for choice of walks, but the route we have chosen will definitely include picturesque coastline and valleys. Plus at this time of the year, we are likely to encounter our first migrating birds.



Victor Falzon

January 2012 • Manikata Heritage Trail

This trail will take us along old farms and cultivated fields as well as Roman tombs, a World War II beach post and more. Meanwhile we will of course be birdwatching in this wide open site. At the end of the trail we will be treated to genuine Maltese *ħobż biż-żejt* and there will be typical home-made local products for sale. Please note that this activity comes with a fee.

For further details, please contact **Richard Cachia Żammit** (email rcachiazammit@gmail.com or tel **21672939**). When you join our Activity Mailing List, you will receive details and reminders by email of forthcoming events.

Unless otherwise stated, all BirdLife activities are free of charge. On every activity there will be experienced naturalists and birders eager to help out with bird identification and other points of natural interest. Families are welcome.

Richard Cachia Żammit is Coordinator of the BirdLife Malta Activity Team.

77 birds

44 photographers

4 authors

The Breeding Birds of Malta

Joe Sultana
John J Borg
Charles Gauci
Victor Falzon

 BirdLife
MALTA

1 book

details inside