

Bird's Eye view



issue 37 • february 2012


BirdLife
MALTA

50
YEARS
1962 - 2012



50 years young

This year BirdLife Malta turned fifty. On 25 January 1962, seven men met around a table and set up the Malta Ornithological Society. Half a century later, we celebrate that day. Many things have changed in those fifty years.

In 1962, killing and catching wild birds was just another hobby. Today, most people look at it as a national outrage and embarrassment. BirdLife was the driving force behind this change.

In 1962, the country had no infrastructure - or indeed interest - to protect nature. Today we have laws, international obligations and government bodies for environmental protection. BirdLife had a strong hand in placing the environment on the national agenda.

In 1962, there wasn't a square metre in Malta where nature was given protected status. Today we have nature reserves, bird sanctuaries, Natura 2000 sites, SACs, SPAs and other designations for site and species protection. BirdLife set that ball rolling, with Ghadira.

In 1962, you never heard the word "environment". Today even small children will admonish you for trapping robins or for not recycling, and tell you how to look after their natural environment. BirdLife is proud to have sown that seed.

Of course, BirdLife could just sit back and rest on its laurels. But sitting around is not our style. As this issue of *Bird's Eye View* shows, we are forging ahead and exploring new territory. For example, our new Life+ project will point the way for the protection of areas at sea that are critical for our seabirds' survival. But not just for birds: it's for all of nature, and for people too.

Happy birthday, BirdLife. Here's to another fifty years!


Desirée Falzon
Editor

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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 charity and depends on subscriptions and donations.

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A Spectacled Warbler perches on a flowering shrub of Mediterranean Heath (photo by Aron Tanti)

BirdLife Malta



Part of the group of participants at the 2011 EURING General Assembly held in Malta. Justin Vassallo and Mark Gauci (kneeling 1st and 2nd from left) organised the event.

EURING general assembly

On 13-18 October 2011 Malta hosted the EURING General Assembly. EURING (European Union for Bird Ringing) is the central body that co-ordinates scientific bird ringing schemes in Europe. The biennial assembly was well attended, with 55 delegates from 34 ringing schemes (representing 29 countries). The event, held at Mount St Joseph, provided delegates with the opportunity to exchange results and information about current European and regional projects, and also served to launch new projects. This was the second EURING GA held in Malta, the first being in 1992. The BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme currently has 18 licensed ringers, and is the only such scheme in Malta recognised by EURING.



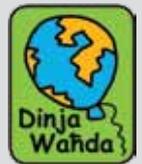
Victor Falzon



BirdLife Education Co-ordinator Desirée Falzon addressing the audience at the launch of Dinja Wahda 2011-2012

dinja wahda prize-giving

On 23 November 2011, BirdLife launched Dinja Wahda for the scholastic year 2011-2012. Following a craft activity for the children present, BirdLife's Education Co-ordinator Desirée Falzon gave a short illustrated talk about the value of teaching biodiversity. Other speakers were Edward Muscat Azzopardi (BOV Head of Marketing and Public Relations) and Desirée Scicluna Bugeja (EO Biology). Also present for the event was Environment Minister Dr Mario de Marco, who praised the initiative. The event, held at Pembroke Primary School, also presented awards to the 83 schools who took part in last year's edition. Dinja Wahda is BirdLife Malta's and Bank of Valletta's environmental education programme in primary schools, run in collaboration with the Education Directorate (DQSE).



Aron Tanti



The White Wagtail is a common wintering bird.

five thousands strong

On 14 January 2012, BirdLife Malta held its annual White Wagtail roost count in Valletta. Pjazza Assedju is the largest known winter roost for this species in the country, a site that was seriously compromised two years ago when the ficus trees in the square were heavily pruned. Due to the reduced foliage, part of the roosting community was seen to have spilled into the trees in an adjacent street. This year's total was an encouraging 5554 birds, a much lower figure than the high totals registered in recent years (7761 in 2009, 7600 in 2010), but significantly higher than last year's 2299. The roost count was organised by Denis Cachia, with input from 13 other observers spread around 11 observation posts.

Danny Schmeils



From left, Benjamin Metzger (Head of Research), Laura Bambini (Project Manager), Dr de Marco (Environment Minister) and Joseph Mangion (BirdLife Malta President).

seabird project launched

On 27 January 2012, BirdLife and the Ministry for Tourism, Culture and the Environment launched the new **EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project** at the Phoenicia in Floriana. The Hon. Dr Mario de Marco, Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment attended the event and congratulated BirdLife and partners on securing funding for this important project. Project Manager Laura Bambini presented results from a public awareness survey, which revealed that 92% of respondents considered the protection of marine areas around Malta as important. The Project's main aim is to identify Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Maltese waters for Cory's and Yelkouan shearwaters, and European Storm-petrel, for designation as Special Protected Areas (SPAs) in the Natura 2000 network. The project will also raise awareness about these seabirds, and the international importance of their breeding colonies in the Maltese Islands. The other Project Partners are RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal). See also page 7.



Ms Sheila Pratt from Sussex (UK), who passed away recently, has bequeathed a legacy of £2000 to BirdLife Malta, for which the Society is very grateful.

Five-a-side. Aerial view of a five-way finch-trapping site at Ta' Cenċ (Gozo). Three sites were actively trapping, with nets laid out; trapper also visible (photo taken 18 Nov 011).

trapping Still alive

nicholas barbara

Autumn 2011 was another milestone for trapping in the Maltese Islands, not least for the illegal aspect of it. Despite Malta being issued a warning in June 2011 from the European Commission, questioning the legality of trapping seasons since EU accession, the government surprised us on 30 October by announcing a two-month trapping season for Song Thrush. This season has only served as a backdoor to allow trapping of other species, and BirdLife's work in the field proved this.

made evident in a report commissioned by BirdLife Malta. The EC also noted that the continuation of trapping of these four species was clearly creating a loophole for illegal activity.

wide open

Despite the message being clear that Malta had failed to satisfy the derogation conditions, in autumn 2011 a trapping season was again opened, this time for Song Thrush only. The season was announced just a day prior to its start, and it allowed the trapping of Song Thrushes from 1 November 2011 to 10 January 2012. There was no bag limit whatsoever and no extra enforcement measures - so much for the obligatory conditions for derogation!

the story so far

Trapping is not permitted throughout the EU under the Birds Directive. The main reason for this is because trapping is a large-scale and very effective method of catching birds. To join the EU, Malta had to adopt the Birds Directive, but the government had negotiated a four-year phasing-out period for finch trapping, which had to stop by the end of 2008.

The trapping of finches was indeed disallowed from 2009 onwards, but an exemption (derogation) was made to allow trapping of Quail, Turtle Dove, Song Thrush and Golden Plover. Derogating from the Birds Directive, however, is only acceptable if it fulfills a strict set of criteria, such as proper enforcement of the trapping season, control on the number of birds trapped, and a justification that no alternative exists for the taking of these species.

The European Commission (EC) in fact warned that Malta had failed to justify these criteria when it allowed trapping of these four species, especially with regards to enforcement and control. It also pointed out that illegal finch trapping was still widespread in Malta, as was



Ugly gash. Sticking out like a sore thumb, an active wader-trapping site at Ta' Lippija (Malta), with six nets and a pond; trappers and their cars are visible at lower left (photo taken 18 Nov 2011).

Nicholas Barbara



Caught in the act. (left) One of seven active finch-trapping sites discovered at Żurrieq (Malta). (right) A trapper at Qala (Gozo) removing Golden Plover decoys from his trapping site, after having replaced them with Song Thrush cages (both photos taken 26 Nov 2011).



Nimrod Mifsud

If previous seasons had left loopholes for illegal trapping, this new season was no less accommodating. As expected, it resulted in widespread abuse.

lawless

As in previous years, BirdLife Malta monitored the scale of illegal trapping through aerial and land surveys, as well as by checking reported trapping sites, using co-ordinated teams of volunteers.

The results show that an average 77% of active trapping sites in autumn 2011 were not targeting Song Thrush at all, but species not permitted by law: 53% were targeting finches, and 24% were targeting waders (mostly Golden Plovers). From a total of 150 active trapping sites observed by the BirdLife teams, just two were legally targeting solely Song Thrush.

The teams also observed at least another two sites - one equipped for finches, the other for Golden Plover - where the

trappers switched decoys with live Song Thrushes to disguise their illegal activity.

in short

The law that allowed a trapping season in autumn 2011 specified no extra measures to cater for enforcement of proper trapping activity, and placed no limits on the number of Song Thrushes that could be caught, in direct and clear defiance of the rules that govern derogation from the Directive. And all this at a time when infringement procedures are already ongoing with the European Commission. Once again, and predictably, trappers have abused the season, to trap unknown quantities of finches and waders.

So who is to blame? Surely not the Song Thrush.

Nicholas Barbara is Conservation and Policy Officer of BirdLife Malta.

Bethan Hull



Undercover. A finch trapper at Benghisa (Malta) covers himself with a blanket as he hurries to clear finch cages from his trapping site before the police arrived (photo taken 26 Nov 2011).



Aron Tanti

Quarry. The autumn 2011 open season for Song Thrush trapping led to another free-for-all that resulted in yet another illegal harvest of finches and waders.

A typical day in the 2011 trapping season

26 November 2011

Four BirdLife Malta volunteer teams (3 in Malta, 1 in Gozo) set out to survey trapping activity. Following are sites reported to police:

7.30am Miġra Ferġa (Malta)

2 active finch-trapping sites located and reported to police. Trappers collect cages and run away, one seen hiding in bush. Police arrive and directed to area, 1 trapper apprehended.

7.40am Qala (Gozo)

Team locates Golden Plover trapping site, alerted by use of illegal electronic lures. On seeing team, trappers switch off lure, hurry to replace plover decoys with live Song Thrush in cages. Video evidence passed to Gozo police.

7.50am Benghisa (Malta)

Team revisits active finch-trapping site raided by police some weeks before. Trapping site found trapping finches again, with a second trapping site close by. Both trappers (faces disguised with balaclava and blanket) hurry to retrieve decoy finches, and flee scene. Police unable to attend as they are responding to another report.

8.00am Dañlet Qorrot (Gozo)

Team locates active finch-trapping site. Trappers collect finches and flee scene prior to police arrival. Police arrive, dismantle nets from site, find Goldfinch (later released).

9.55am Xgħajra (Malta)

Trapper at active finch-trapping site, spots team, quickly dismantles equipment, leaves scene prior to police arrival. Police confirm trapper was using nets with mesh size typical of finch trapping.

Total sites surveyed (26.11.11): 70

Number of sites active: 40

Sites targeting finches: 24 (60%)

Sites targeting waders: 13 (32.5%)



Kathleen Mamo

kid club

kathleen mamo

Klabb Futtaf - along with Dinja Waħda - is BirdLife Malta's investment in the education of our younger generations. Children join Klabb Futtaf because they already have empathy with nature and birds, and that is why our main aim is to nurture this love and to encourage these young people to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with friends and family. Our hope for a brighter future for natural habitats and the creatures that share the world with us lies with these young citizens.

So what do our *Futtaf* get from being members?

the mag

Il-Futtafa is a bi-monthly magazine that is produced and mailed exclusively to our young members (and some subscribed school libraries). It is almost the only - certainly the most regular - junior magazine in Malta devoted entirely to nature. *Il-Futtafa* focuses on local flora and fauna, nature news from around the world, local natural habitats and, obviously, birds! Its colourful pages, educational content and unique format make it a must-have for any young nature lover, and even older ones at that: many of our adult members switch their membership category to Family just so as to receive *Il-Futtafa* (along with *Bird's Eye View* of course).

the outings

A variety of outings are organised for Klabb Futtaf members and their families. These include nature walks to different locations around our Islands, visits to nature reserves, and tree-planting activities.

Another annual event is the sponsored marathon walk, which will run its ninth consecutive year in 2012. Numerous primary school children participating in Dinja Waħda join our members and their families in this 10km walk. The funds generated are

spent on the purchase of useful and practical items, be it a grasscutter for Foresta 2000, a telescope for Is-Simar, nest boxes for swifts, a generator for BirdLife's ringing station on Kemmuna, etc. This year's funds will be used to install "nest cameras" at the nature reserves.

Another outing organised for our young "swallows" is the summer boat trip to the area beneath the cliffs of Ta' Ċenċ. Our members get to enjoy the spectacular beauty of our natural land- and seascape, learn more about Cory's Shearwaters and experience the magic as rafts of shearwaters gather at sunset.

follow the leader

Klabb Futtaf outings would not be possible without our invaluable team of youth leaders - all volunteers - who guide our young members and their families during the outings and help them strengthen their bond with nature as they experience nature first-hand. Through games, maps, quizzes and information sheets about nature, our leaders help make Klabb Futtaf outings an experience not to be missed.

Kathleen Mamo is Co-ordinator of Klabb Futtaf and chairs the Klabb Futtaf Committee



Where do they go?



Laura Bambini

Malta holds internationally important breeding colonies of three species of seabirds: Yelkouan Shearwater, Cory's Shearwater and European Storm-petrel. In recent years these birds' numbers have declined across their range. While the Maltese breeding colonies on land are protected, areas at sea - where these birds spend a large proportion of their lives - still need to be identified, and protected.

Unknown ground

Most seabirds spend their first few years out at sea, and only return to land to breed. For example, Cory's Shearwaters start breeding when they are over six years old. They are long-lived but slow breeders, producing just one young in a breeding season. Numbers of breeding pairs of Yelkouan Shearwaters and Cory's Shearwaters have declined across the Mediterranean. Less is known about the European Storm-petrel, but it too is thought to be in decline.

The EU LIFE Yelkouan Shearwater Project, completed in 2010, found that the highest mortality of these birds occurred at sea and outside the breeding season. It is therefore very important to find out where these birds forage and rest while out at sea, and to ensure these areas are protected from damaging human activities. As an EU member state, Malta is obliged by the EC Birds Directive to protect all habitats used by the seabird breeding in the Islands.

Tracking the trekkers

The new 5-year EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project will use the latest tracking technology to study these three species at sea.

The birds will be equipped with different types of loggers, which record locations of birds at sea. These will help us find out where the birds go during the breeding season when they depend on foraging and resting grounds closer to their colonies in Malta. After the breeding season, the loggers will help us discover where the birds spend their winter.

Until now, these types of tags were too heavy for the tiny storm-petrels, which only weigh around 30g, but new very small loggers have just become available, and will now be used for the first time in Malta. Another way to follow these birds is by using radio-transmitters which emit a signal that can be detected from several kilometres away, allowing researchers to locate birds even when they are far out at sea. These devices will also be fitted onto the storm-petrels and observers will search for them onboard small aircraft and boats.

Direct observation of birds at sea will also be carried out on board vessels, collecting information on where the birds go, but also on their behaviour at sea. This information can be added to a growing Europe-wide database

The **EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project** is a partnership project with **BirdLife Malta**, the **Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Environment** (formerly The Office of the Prime Minister), **SPEA** (BirdLife in Portugal) and **RSPB** (BirdLife in the UK). The total budget for this project is €873,964, 50% of which comes from the EU.



(European Seabirds at Sea, maintained by the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee) and can help other research projects around the Mediterranean.

Starting this month

The EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project will go out in the field in February 2012, when the seabirds start returning to their colonies to prepare for the oncoming breeding season.

Laura Bambini is Project Manager of the EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project.



Furtive feeder. Much is known about the breeding biology of Cory's Shearwater, but very little about its foraging grounds.

on reserve

mark gauci

Little Egret by Victor Falzon

Last summer's issue of *Bird's Eye View* reported a new breeding bird - Black-winged Stilt - at Ghadira nature reserve. All of those four chicks grew up, fledged and in autumn flew off to Africa with their parents: a success story! What few people realise is that such success does not happen by chance.

Success stories are merely the crowning effect of years of hard work and management planning. The management plan normally covers a two- to five-year period; it seeks to maintain and, where possible, improve the habitat for the flora and fauna at the reserve. Once the work is completed, it is then left to nature to give the verdict on whether the work was effective and worth the effort. A new breeding bird, an increase in the number of birds recorded, the flourishing of rare flora: all these are signs that a project has been given the thumbs-up!

island building

The past year has been no exception to habitat improvement works. Triggered by a small group of Little Egrets who spent most of spring and summer 2010 at the reserve playing with twigs and mock-building nests, the reserve management resolved to raise the potential for this species to breed.

The plan involved the building of a small artificial island in the main pool area, but an island made up entirely of dead

branches and twigs. Herons and egrets love to rest on such islands since they feel safe from predators; at the same time these structures provide excellent nest-building material for the egrets. The work was accomplished in summer by the managing warden with the help of a group of volunteers. Over autumn and winter, the islands settled in the water and naturalised - now we await spring and hope for developments! Meanwhile, this new habitat has been welcomed by other species like Barn Swallows and Yellow Wagtails, who find these islands a safe roosting area during migration.

dune restoration

The twigs and branches used in the construction of these islands were themselves the result of habitat restoration work at the reserve.

Part of the nature reserve was once a sand dune, but this was destroyed when the main road cut through the area and isolated the dune from the sandy beach. The dune remnant was then heavily planted with acacia trees and turned into a grove of alien trees. The reserve management is now trying to restore sections of this dune by gradually removing the acacias and creating open areas of sand. The removal

of shade stimulated some dune flora that had somehow survived the acacia onslaught to start spreading again, while other long-gone species are being re-introduced.

These were just two examples of how BirdLife manages the nature reserves. Birds may be our flagship animal group, but needless to say, they do not live in a vacuum. If we want birds to thrive we must protect and improve the entire ecosystem.

Mark Gauci is Nature Reserves Supervisor.



Islanders. Site warden and volunteers constructing the twig island.



Return of the native. Vigorous new growth of Sea Daffodil flourishes in areas of sand dune newly cleared of acacias.

Mark Gauci

Victor Falzon

the golden touch

joe sultana

When spring is in the air, the countryside blooms and birds get busy. Those birds not already engaged in courting, nest-building or feeding their young, are participating in a phenomenal adventure: migration.

passing through

Migrating birds pass through our Islands singly or in flocks. Some stop for a rest or to feed hungrily, to restore their strength and to top up the 'fat fuel' expended on their tough flight from Africa; then they resume the marathon trip to reach their breeding haunts on mainland Europe. About a hundred species of these spring travellers appear in our country, and among them, one thrush-sized bird has a golden touch.

yellow flute

A yellow flash darts among the trees: it is a male golden oriole, looking for juicy spring fruit to gorge on, such as white mulberries or loquats, or searching diligently for caterpillars among almond leaves. This bird is hard to miss, even when resting among the foliage of a carob tree. The female too is relatively easy to spot, despite her more greenish, less conspicuous plumage. This contrasts with their behaviour in their breeding sites in Europe, where they keep themselves rather concealed in the high deciduous trees in which they nest.



Fruity. A female golden oriole skulks in the foliage of a loquat tree.



Flasher. The male golden oriole is unmistakable.

The adult male golden oriole has strikingly bright yellow plumage, with jet black wings and tail, both with a yellow patch on each side; the bill is reddish. When out of sight it makes its presence known by its beautiful song: a far-reaching fluting whistle, and very different from its nasal screeching calls. The female's colours are more subdued, with much less yellow than its mate, a whitish belly and throat and usually some streaking on the flanks. Juveniles and first-year birds have more streaking on the underparts.

easy target

The golden oriole's attractive plumage has always been, unfortunately, detrimental to this feathered gem during migration over Malta, where it often gets killed by men whose way of showing prowess and machismo is by shooting down these and other protected birds. In 1916, Giuseppe Despott, curator of the Natural History Museum, wrote that most golden orioles appear from April onwards, "*when it is a common occurrence to see the carob trees quite full with these birds, and when great slaughter is wrought by sportsmen, both licensed and unlicensed ones.*" It may not be as bad nowadays as it was in Despott's time, but many of these golden gems are still shot or caught every year.

Joe Sultana is an ornithologist and author of several natural history books.



BirdLife International is a partnership of bird and nature organisations in over a hundred countries. Here is news of what some of our overseas Partners have been up to recently.



SPEA - BirdLife in Portugal



Carlos Viveiros / Parque Natural da Madeira



Back from the brink

Zino's petrel *Pterodroma madeira* is the rarest bird in Europe: it is globally endangered and breeds exclusively on the small Atlantic island group of Madeira. In summer 2010, a fire ravaged and largely destroyed or exposed the main breeding colony of this species, and left the bare ground vulnerable to massive erosion, and the nests to predation by rats and cats. A team of conservation wardens was deployed and with financial

and logistic support from SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal), RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and BirdLife International, an emergency plan was put into action. The plan involved erosion control procedures, repair of natural burrows, installation of artificial burrows and predation control measures. Thanks to this action, a good number of nests were occupied in 2011 and by autumn last year, 16 chicks had fledged and joined the adults out at sea. Considering the destruction that the fire had wrought, this result was deemed very good, and conservationists are optimistic for the petrel colony's future.



BANCA - BirdLife in Myanmar



John O'Sullivan



Saving the spoon

With less than a thousand individuals worldwide, and fast diminishing, the spoon-billed sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* is one of the rarest and most endangered birds on the planet. Half the global population spends the winter in Myanmar, where the birds are regularly decimated by human hunter-trappers. To reduce this problem, BANCA (BirdLife in Myanmar) has identified most of the hunters involved, many

of whom are subsistence hunters, and with aid from BirdLife International has provided these individuals with funds to start an alternative form of income in return for giving up hunting. The project has so far been considered a success, with many of the ex-hunters registering an improvement in their livelihood. BANCA will now extend this programme to another region where more such hunters exist. Through this and a special breeding programme in its Siberian nesting grounds, it is hoped that the status of the spoon-billed sandpiper will improve in coming years.



AAO - BirdLife in Tunisia



Bustard blues

The Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* is protected in Tunisia, but for the past 20 years of Ben Ali rule, rich gulf state emirs have regularly been allowed to visit and hunt the species, which is now on the edge of extinction in the country. In November 2011, the Association Les Amis des Oiseaux (AAO - BirdLife in Tunisia) informed the authorities of new and impending poaching risks, and raised awareness

through a press conference in collaboration with other environment groups. The new authorities, however, have not yet reacted or responded to this warning. The AAO have therefore launched an online petition (visit www.aao.org.tn) to press for proper protection of the last Houbara Bustards of Tunisia. With a world population of about 50-60,000 individuals, the Houbara Bustard is rated Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List.



Nature Seychelles - BirdLife in the Seychelles



Hope for the warbler

For the very first time, a bird rated as Critically Endangered stands a good chance of being awarded happier status through sheer conservation work. Through habitat destruction and predation/competition by introduced species, the Seychelles warbler *Acrocephalus sechellensis* had, by the 1960s, dwindled to a world population of just 26 individuals, all crammed on the tiny island of Cousin. Through the work of BirdLife International

- who purchased the island - and Nature Seychelles (BirdLife in the Seychelles), the species has gradually and very carefully been re-introduced to other islands of the archipelago. The latest re-introduction has been on Frégate, with high hopes that the bird will breed and flourish there as well. This brings to five the islands that now harbour the species.



Sivie Cauchi

How did you start volunteering with BirdLife?

I had been a member for a number of years but I had never thought of volunteering. Then two active volunteers came to live in my street and they encouraged me to switch to family membership. My children started to attend outings and began giving a hand with packing *Il-Fluttafa* magazine, manning stalls at fairs, etc. Eventually I too started helping out with them. From then on, I was hooked.

What do you do today as a volunteer?

Through my children, I became such a regular at Klabb Fluttafa outings that I was soon asked to become a Youth Leader. I love nature, so it was rewarding for me to share nature with others. I have been a youth leader for about ten years, and recently I also became a leader at adult outings.

What was your best experience as a BirdLife volunteer?

Volunteering for BirdLife is so rewarding that I actually feel that I gain more than I give! My greatest satisfaction is seeing young members grow into active birdwatchers and conservationists, and remembering their first outing and their first memorable experience of nature. One unforgettable experience for me was seeing the overwhelming response of hundreds of Maltese who turned up to help BirdLife replant trees at Foresta 2000 after the site was vandalised in 2007. It was an inspiring and encouraging experience.

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

Anniversary Gala Dinner



To celebrate our 50th anniversary, BirdLife Malta is organising a gala dinner for its members. Venue Westin Dragonara Resort. More details later but do keep **Friday 6 July free**



Compiled by Victor Falzon



out and about

forthcoming
member activities

richard cachia zammit

It is a year since BirdLife revived regular outings for its adult membership. Judging by the encouraging numbers that turn up for these activities, it seems these events are going down very well with our members. So here are some more!



25 March 2012 • Day-trip to Gozo

We will start with a walk along the coast between Qala and Nadur, followed by lunch. As we celebrate BirdLife's 50th anniversary this year, we thought to connect our afternoon walk with some BirdLife history: our route will take us along the area where the Society's fledgling ringing scheme ringed its very first bird way back in the 1960s.



April 2012 • Outing to Kemmuna

After last year's success, a day outing to Kemmuna is a must. As we did last year, there will be short and long walks, so everyone can enjoy the day at their leisure. Wildflowers and spring migrants galore.



May 2012 • Day-trip to Sicily

Sicily here we come! We are going on a day-trip to Sicily, to visit the **Cava D'Ispica**, a spectacular gorge rich in nature and history, maybe also a visit to the nearby **Vendicari Nature Reserve**. This will be BirdLife Malta's first overseas activity for our adult membership. Will it become a tradition?



June 2012 • Seminar Birds and Urban Areas

Think of the trees in Valletta, Msida and Sliema promenade, Mellieħa, etc. The current spate of excessive pruning or outright uprooting of mature trees from our towns and villages makes you wonder: why is the country waging a war on greenery? Why this obsession with stumps? This and more will be the subject of our discussion at this half-day seminar.

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

For more details, send an email to blmactivities@gmail.com or call **Richard Cachia Zammit** on **21672939** (5-7pm). When you join our Activity Mailing List, you will receive details and reminders by email of forthcoming events.

Unless specific expenses are involved (ferry tickets, etc.), all BirdLife activities are **FREE OF CHARGE**. At all outings there will be **experienced naturalists and birders** eager to help out with bird identification and other points of natural interest.

Remember Malta's nature

Leave a living legacy.

We have all enjoyed an experience with nature:
a flock of honey-buzzards soaring overhead,
a field of poppies swaying in the wind,
the echo of a blue rock thrush song,
or simply a sparrow scavenging on the beach.

Unfortunately, many of our treasured wild creatures are under threat. We believe it is important to leave a thriving natural world for future generations to enjoy. When you leave a legacy to BirdLife Malta you will be helping us do just that.

Your legacy will help BirdLife continue to

- protect local and migratory birds
- manage nature reserves as havens for wildlife, and for people to enjoy
- involve and inspire children with nature
- learn more about our natural heritage

Leaving a legacy to BirdLife Malta, no matter how big or small, will help ensure that our children and grandchildren can experience the wonders of nature - and create their own, special memories of the natural world.

For more information and an informal chat about how to leave a legacy, or simply to find out more, please contact our director on (+356) 21347646.

Thank you

