

# Bird's Eye View

EUROPEAN ROBIN Guido Bonetti



**Nature Learning**  
Check out the news to see what's in store for schools



**Spot a Sparrow**  
Get Inspired by citizen science



**Chadwick Lakes**  
Listen for Malta's top carol singers



## Robin Redbreast

In religion, in literature, in your garden?

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BirdLife Malta is an environmental NGO working to protect Malta's wildlife by managing natural spaces, inspiring the new generation, opposing illegal hunting and undertaking research.

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WHITE STORKS ON MARSA CRANE Nicholas Barbara

## Closing the net on hunting and trapping



Steve Micklewright  
Executive Director

As 2014 draws to an end, there is growing optimism in BirdLife Malta that the net may be closing in on the worst excesses of hunters and trappers against birds.

Following a week when a large flock of White Storks rested in Malta on their long migration, only to be targeted by hunters, the Prime Minister took the unexpected decision to close the autumn hunting season for 3 weeks. The closure coincided with the grilling of Maltese government Minister, Karmenu Vella, by MEPs on his suitability to be European Commissioner for the environment. The Prime Minister's decision ensured safe passage for migrating birds during the peak migration period. After more than 18 months of giving more and more concessions to the hunting community, recent events have been a wake-up call for the government. We expect more action against illegal hunting as a result.

### > Read more in the press release

The European Commission has also issued a letter of formal notice against Malta for opening a finch trapping season, despite banning being part of the treaty that Malta signed so that it could join the EU. Two more letters are required from the Commission and then finch trapping will be halted until it goes before the European Court of Justice. Thanks to many BirdLife Malta supporters writing to their MEPs, there are now over 30 wanting to meet Karmenu Vella now he is the Commissioner in Brussels. With BirdLife Malta, they will put pressure on him to act quickly to prevent the opening of a finch trapping season in 2015.

Meanwhile, the referendum to abolish spring hunting should be announced soon after you receive this magazine. The constitutional court is considering the objections made by hunting organisations and we are confident that they will be rejected. Once the court has made its decision, the President must set a date. Thank you if you donated to our appeal for funds for a bird rehabilitation centre to be set up at Buskett. Thanks to your generosity, we have raised nearly €10,000, and with other promises of support, we need just €9,000 to set up the centre. If more money is donated, birds like this Pallid Harrier that was shot in Malta and sent to Sicily for rehabilitation, will be treated in Malta, increasing their chances of survival. Please support this project by making a donation if you can.



Pallid Harrier shot in 2013 in Malta, released by the Azienda Foreste Demaniali in Sicily this year.

Turn to the back page to find out how to donate to our rehabilitation centre

## Bustling British BirdFair

In August we attended the BirdFair, and received a great response. Thanks to the continued support of our followers in the UK, we raised a huge total of £2755.79. In addition, Chris Packham's talk on Malta was so popular, there was not enough room for everyone! A big thank you to our dedicated volunteers who helped over the weekend.

## A Very Hungry Shearwater

With the last field season complete, the EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project is now analysing 3 years worth of data to map marine Important Bird Areas. 'Ghawdxija' was the last Scopoli's Shearwater to be gps-tracked and the map here shows the amazing foraging trips she performed in August. > [Read the blog](#)

## Starting The School Year

Thanks to EU funding and support from partners in Education BOV a new Dinja Waħda Action Guide has been produced this year. It provides teachers with ideas on how to teach children about nature in fun ways. Desiree Falzon has joined our education team to work on secondary education.

## Flamingo Fever

Two juvenile flamingos, separated from their flocks during September, are recovering at Ghadira Nature Reserve. Nicknamed Floyd and Fanny, they are now inseparable, and favourites at Ghadira.

## VIPs Visit Is-Simar

During their annual visit to Malta in October, European Commission environment officials were accompanied by officials from MEPA and MSDEC to visit Is-Simar Nature Reserve. Warden Charles Coleiro spoke about the positive conservation work that takes place on the islands.

## A Little Help From Our Friends

BirdLife Malta has teamed up with BirdLife partners in Ireland, Poland and the UK to develop a new Lifelong Learning Through Nature project. With funding from Erasmus+, it will work out how we can improve educational achievement through more contact with the natural world. > [Find out more on the blog](#)

## Happy Ending For Stranded Seabirds

During October, 17 stranded shearwaters were found by members of the public, lost inland due to the effects of light pollution. Thanks to the public response we were able to release these stranded birds back to the sea cliffs at night. > [See the press release](#)



VOLUNTEER, ROGER LUCKEN, AT THE BRITISH BIRD FAIR Holly Forsyth



GHAWDXIJA'S FLIGHT PATH AROUND MALTA Malta Seabird Team

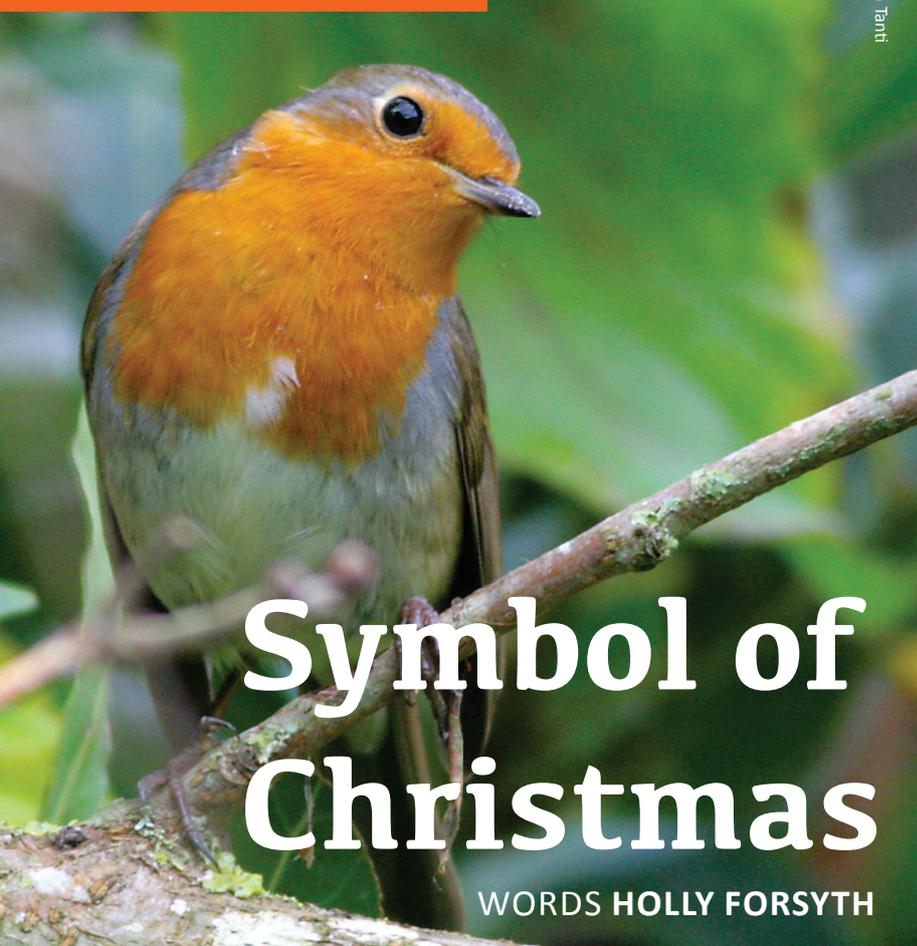


FLOYD AND FANNY AT GHADIRA NATURE RESERVE Aron Tanti

Take a trip to our reserves to meet our flamingos and other visiting birds

OPENING TIMES:

Is-Simar: Sunday 10 - 4 Ghadira: Saturday and Sunday 10 - 4



## Robin Pittiross

The European Robin is a yearly reminder that Christmas is on the way. Most likely this association with Christmas stems from Victorian Britain, when the postmen wore red jackets and were nicknamed “Robins”. A robin featured on a Christmas card is said to represent the postman delivering the card.

Arriving in the autumn, the robin overwinters in Malta. During these winter months, they can be found throughout the countryside and in urban areas too. They migrate from mainland Europe, especially Italy, and some continue all the way to Africa. They then return through Malta on their way back to mainland Europe in the springtime.

The robin is one of the few birds in Malta that will visit bird tables. They usually feed on a variety of foods including berries, worms, insects and seeds.

Often recognised for their beautiful song, European Robins have a lovely chattering warble that consists of a melodic rippling of notes. However in autumn and winter, their song becomes more sad and mournful.

The Maltese name, *Pitiross*, comes from the Italian name for the species, which means red breast. Legends tell the tale of how the robin gained his distinctive red breast. Singing into the ear of Jesus to comfort him whilst on the cross, the blood from his wounds stained the bird’s breast, leaving it forever bearing the mark of Christ’s blood.

Robins and robin trapping feature rather frequently in Maltese literature and are a popular subject both in poetry and in short stories. The practice of robin trapping began in the early 20th century and was a hobby for young boys. However, due to intensive campaigning by the Malta Ornithological Society, now BirdLife Malta, in the 70’s and 80’s, robin trapping had practically disappeared by the early 1990’s.

Look out for robins at Buskett Gardens, or in your own garden!

- > **Body: 12-14cm**
- > **Wingspan: 20-22cm**
- > **Can be seen October - March**
- > **Sings frequently**
- > **Very territorial**
- > **Sexes similar**
- > **Bright red breast**



### Make a Christmas Bird Feeder

This fun and easy family activity will help to attract urban birds to your gardens and balconies. Tempt Spanish Sparrows, Sardinian Warblers and even robins with this yummy bird treat!

#### You will need:

- > Pine cones
- > Peanut butter
- > Bird seed
- > String

1. Start by collecting a few pine cones on a walk. Remember to only take pine cones from the ground as the Aleppo Pine is highly protected.
2. Coat your pine cones in a generous layer of peanut butter. This acts as the glue but is also high in fat and very nutritious, which is really important for wintering birds.
3. Then dip your peanut butter covered pine cones into the bird seed, ensuring a good layer.
4. Attach string to the top, and your bird feeder is ready to be hung outside for the birds to enjoy!

Remember to place at height out of reach of cats and replace your pine cone regularly, as the peanut butter will start to separate.

Listen out for the robin’s song while collecting pine cones at Chadwick Lakes, Page 9

Holly Forsyth is the Events Communications Assistant at BirdLife Malta



## Mediterranean Heath **Erika**

The Mediterranean Heath is an easy to spot shrub which typically grows along cliff tops and on garigue in Malta. You can identify it by the stunning pink flowers with violet anthers, and the short, needle-like leaves, usually dark green in colour. Being a hardy plant, it can survive in poor conditions, with little water. This is a common plant which you can look for at Salina and Dwejra

## Painted Frog **Żringġ**

Being the only Maltese amphibian, the highly protected painted frog is easy to identify. The skin colour of this frog can be very different in individuals, ranging from green to yellow to brown. The best places to look for the painted frog are areas of fresh water. You can often see their eyes peeking out of the top of the water, and especially keen spotters might see their tadpoles beneath the surface. We recommend looking out for these hoppers at Foresta 2000 and Wied Il-Luq, but remember not to touch or disturb them.

## Sweet Almond **is Sigra tal-Lewż**

The almond nut is featured in many Maltese dishes including figolli (almond pastries), as well as being a great source of vitamin E. The tree itself can be found growing in valleys and maquis, reaching heights of 7 metres. The first bloom of the almond tree appears in the New Year, decorating the countryside with white and pale pink flowers. The fruits, known as drupes, appear later and split to reveal the shell of the almond nut inside. Take a trip to Wied Il-Faħam or Chadwick Lakes to find this tree.

## French Daffodil **Narċis**

The Maltese name Narċis comes from the latin “narcissus”, meaning numb, associated with the daffodil because of the narcotic effect produced by the bulbs of the plant. The poison found in the bulbs is toxic if consumed in large quantities, and so the plant is protected from nibbling animals such as rabbits. Blooming in autumn and winter, the French Daffodil can be found growing in clumps in valleys and steppes, usually on sloping ground. Why not try Qammieħ or Wardija to spot these beautiful wild flowers?



# Island Life

WORDS HOLLY FORSYTH

**Islands have long been recognised for their rich biodiversity. Their surrounding marine habitats and separation from the mainland provide them with unique animal and plant life with large numbers of endemic species.**

This year International day for Biodiversity focused on island biodiversity, raising awareness for the additional need to conserve species found on islands. Due to their small size islands have more fragile ecosystems and because of their isolated populations, animal and plant species are much more susceptible to the impacts of human activity.

## The Potential

With over 4500 species of plant and animals on the islands, Malta has great biodiversity. Of these 4500 species, 78 are endemic species, meaning they are



RUBY TIGER MOTH Stephen Mifsud

not found anywhere else in the world. 23 of the endemic species are plants, and 55 are animal species; examples include the Maltese Wall Lizard, the Maltese Sea Lavender, and the Maltese Ruby Tiger Moth. The potential for Malta to be a bustling hub for wildlife is there. With no large mammals present, birds, reptiles and small mammal species should be able to thrive.

## Island Birds

With Malta situated on one of the major bird migration flyways, Malta attracts numerous birds during the spring and autumn migration seasons. A total of 384 bird species have been recorded in Malta, and of these, 170 occur regularly during spring and autumn migration periods. Not only are these birds a great addition to an already diverse island, but they also have the potential to attract numerous eco-tourists to the islands to watch and enjoy these birds on their journey.



WALL LIZARD (FILFLA) Tim Micallef



SEA LAVENDER Alex Casha

## Following an example

Peter Smith of the UK, has long been a member and supporter of BirdLife Malta. After meeting Peter at the British Birdfair 2014, he spoke to us about his island life experience elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Menorca is a Mediterranean island that shares a lot of similarities with Malta. About twice the size of Malta, they too see good numbers of birds passing through during the migration periods, along with the same common resident species: sparrows, Sardinian Warblers, and in winter: robins, Starlings and Song Thrush. However they also have a great number of species which could and should be seen in Malta. Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Linnet are all common species there which can be seen flocking together daily, and the locals regularly get to enjoy flamingos visiting their Salini. The Barn Owl breeds successfully every year, something which has not been seen in the wild in Malta since 1988.

Never in the 41 years of living there has Peter heard a gunshot in the Spring. Instead, over this time, he recalls how the Wood Pigeon has increased over the years from being rare and local, to very common and widely distributed. Similarly the Collared Dove populations have risen from absent to common around urbanised areas.

The hunting community in Menorca gets on well with the ornithologists, whose organisation, Societat Ornitològica de Menorca (SOM), carries out similar work to BirdLife Malta including undertaking research, campaigning, conservation and more. Apparently conflicts between the two groups are amicably resolved and they even have joint social gatherings.

Peter has been recording the dawn chorus in Menorca for 41 years, and during this time he has seen a remarkable change in its make up. Surprisingly, over the past decade the strength of the Turtle Dove in the dawn chorus has risen. In fact SOM found the percentage of nesting Turtle Dove increased by 12% from 2003 to 2008, and similarly the nesting Common Quail by 16%. There these birds can thrive without the threat posed by spring shooting. Could Menorca be the ideal Malta should be striving for?

Imagine, the island with the vast biodiversity we have now, and the amazing addition of more breeding birds in the spring.

Imagine being able to hear a full dawn chorus in the Maltese countryside, made up of Turtle Dove instead of gunshots.



TURTLE DOVE Denis Cechia

## The next steps

If we can abolish spring hunting, we can offer a safe stop over for migrating birds, and potentially even provide the birds with suitable breeding habitat. We have already witnessed the positive effects of a closed spring season. When the spring hunting season was closed in 2008, the Common Swift and the Collared Dove had their best breeding seasons on record, and even Turtle Doves were recorded carrying out courtship displays.

Whilst we can never be sure what would settle in Malta, with the Referendum on Spring Hunting coming up in 2015, and with our chance to raise our voices for wildlife in Malta, wouldn't this be a great opportunity to find out?

**Holly Forsyth** is the Events Communications Assistant at BirdLife Malta

Find out how to donate to the referendum campaign on the back page

# Chadwick Lakes

WORDS ELLA BEESON

CHADWICK LAKES Andrew Hill

**Chadwick Lakes is the perfect spot for a winter walk, and with children off school for Christmas holidays, it offers families a picturesque location to get outside and engage with nature.**

Found between Imtarfa and Mosta, these lakes were originally built in 1890 by British engineer, Osbert Chadwick, to provide local farmers with a source of fresh water to irrigate their fields. Now, the rain collected in the lakes also provides a watery habitat for many species of plants and animals.

For the public, it offers tranquil green space away from the hustle and bustle of urban areas for walkers, cyclists, photographers and families to get up close to Malta's diverse wildlife.

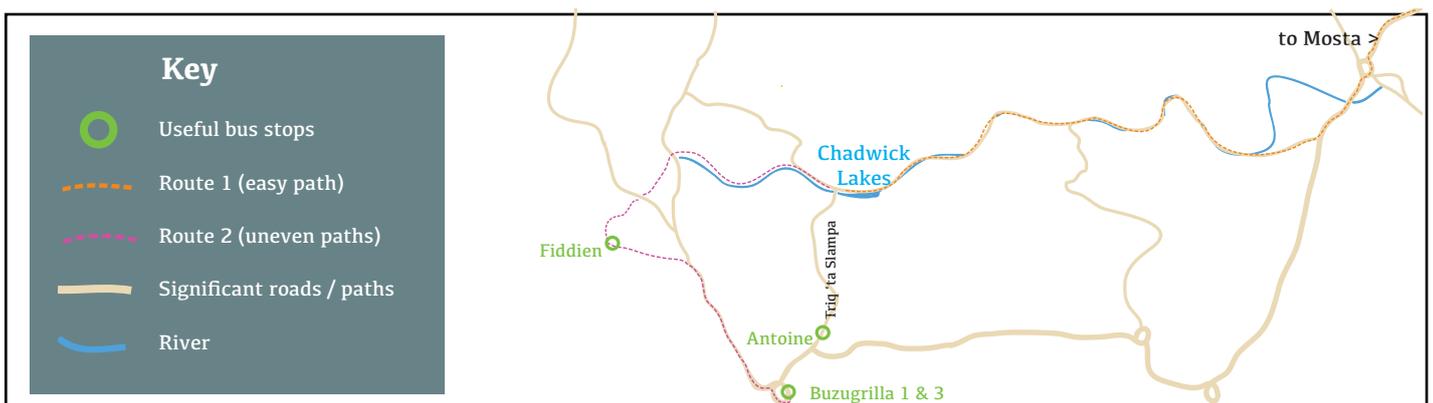
## how to get there

Get bus 51 from Valletta to 'Antoine', walk to the bridge at the end of Triq 'ta Slampa.

**Route 1:** Turn right at the bridge and take the main Chadwick Lakes path until the end, then continue for 15 mins until Mosta for a return bus.

**Route 2:** Turn left at the bridge and follow the more uneven path along the river to the 'Fiddien' bus stop. You can also walk up to 'Buzugrilla' at the roundabout for regular buses. (Remember your sturdy shoes.)

If driving, you can park by the main bridge at Chadwick Lakes.



Chadwick Lakes, known in Maltese as *Wied il-Qlejgha*, is best visited at this time of year as the lakes rely on heavy winter rainfall to fill up to the banks. When the water levels are high, the water cascades down the series of dams and trickles through rocky streams, making you forget it is an artificial structure.

Walking alongside the water gives you a chance to enjoy some of Malta's best native trees. Beautiful pink and white winter blossom can be seen on the Almond tree (*is-Sigra tal-Lewż*) from December onwards. White Poplars (*Sigra tal-Luq*) are frequent along this route and easy to see when a breeze rustles through the leaves, giving the impression of a glittering tree, due to the dark green leaf surface contrasting with the soft white undersides.

Holm Oaks (*Is-Sigra tal-Ballut*) are believed to have once covered large areas of the island, now there are very few of these left, but you may spot one on your route – look out for the small acorns and lower leaves that resemble the spiky European Holly.

Look for pine cones on the ground to identify Malta's only native pine – the Aleppo Pine (*Is-Sigra taz-Żnuber*). You can collect these to make a Christmas bird feeder with (see page 4) - remember not to pick them from the tree as they are protected.

The abundance of trees and water makes a perfect place for some of Malta's breeding birds such as the Sardinian Warbler and Cetti's Warbler, as well as winter visitors like the robin. You may notice them hidden in the branches or simply enjoy their songs as you stroll along the path.

If you take the main path towards Mosta, keep an eye on the rubble walls for geckos and the Maltese Wall Lizard. Another elusive critter is the painted frog, if you look at the surface of the water you might see its eyes peeping over the top.

However you decide to travel to Chadwick Lakes, it's in easy reach of both Mosta and Rabat, which make a great stop-off point for a warming winter drink after your walk.

**Ella Beeson** is the Media Communications Assistant at BirdLife Malta

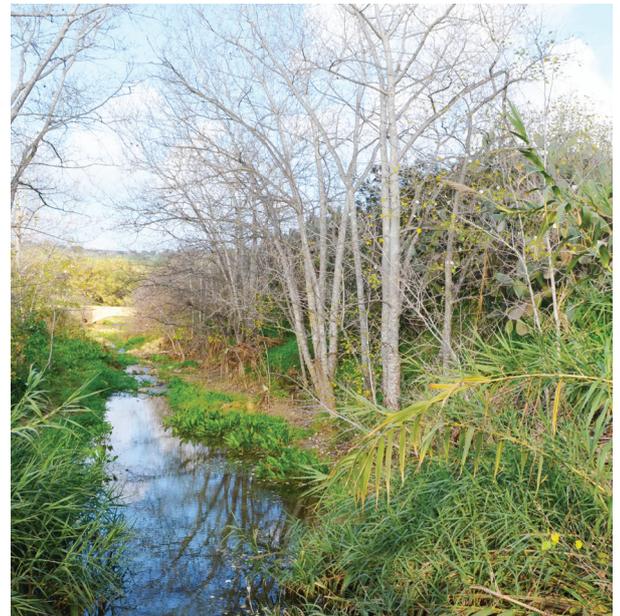


PAINTED FROG Holly Forsyth

**The Painted Frog is at home in large areas of fresh water. Winter is the perfect time to look out for them and their tadpoles. Please note this species is protected by law, it is illegal to disturb, touch or capture them.**

**> Click here for details from MEPA**

**Turn to page 5 to find out how to spot a painted frog**



CHADWICK LAKES Andrew Hill

## what to listen out for

### Sardinian Warbler (*Bufala Sewda*)

Song: Fast and rattling chatter with short musical notes. Call: "che-che-che"

Hear the call >



Aron Tanti

### Robin (*Pitiross*)

A beautiful song - melodious, clear, fluting whistle. Call: "tik-ik-ik-ik"

Hear the call >



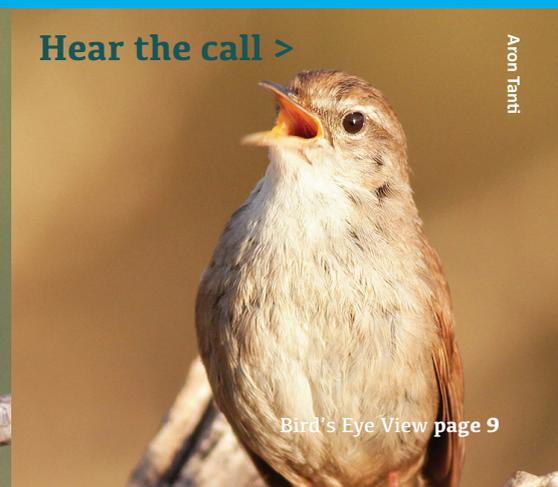
Aron Tanti

The Robin is our bird of the issue Page 4

### Cetti's Warbler (*Bufala ta' l-Gholliq*)

Song: Stunningly loud, rapid, high pitched outbursts. Call: "chit cheewit"

Hear the call >



Aron Tanti

This project is the result of a new partnership between BirdLife Malta and Inspire - the Foundation for Inclusion, and aims to engage communities in nature and wildlife.



## Spanish sparrows are among the most common and widespread birds in Malta, and have been chosen as the star of our new citizen science project: Spot a Sparrow

Many Maltese people live in urban areas, and often nature is not accessible for them. We hope Spot a Sparrow will increase awareness and appreciation for wildlife in city dwellers by focusing on a species even the most urbanised Maltese families can see every day.

The project launched in November, with the new website [www.spotasparrow.org](http://www.spotasparrow.org) and a sparrow-themed event for school children. Through a series of supporting activities in primary and secondary schools, training opportunities, and the involvement of BirdLife Malta's youth clubs, Spot a Sparrow is empowering urban communities to be their own researchers, taking responsibility for their urban wildlife.

Citizen scientists are going out in their neighbourhoods, recording sparrow sightings and the location of sparrow roosts. Reports are then submitted to BirdLife Malta through the new website to be checked.

As the idea of community is one of the core concepts of the project, we've teamed up with Inspire to help us with the project. People with disabilities working with Inspire have been trained to be the leading researchers of the project, and go out and check the roosts reported by the community. We hope the process will ultimately result in stronger community ties and integration between different groups.

Through the website, we will be able to collect data for at least two different roosting seasons, 2014 and 2015, enabling us to study potential change in habitat use. The data collected during the project will be collated in a report and made available to local councils and developers, to ensure the sparrows and their roosts are protected.

I spoke to Alison Bezzina, Senior Manager at Inspire, about why they chose to get involved in the project:

“Inspire believes that everyone has a right to equality and inclusion, and through our work with children and adults with disabilities we try to give them the chance to achieve this. OUTREACH is one of our programmes which focuses on giving our clients better social, communication and community skills, and Spot a Sparrow fits perfectly with our aims. Through this project, they are discovering new interests, whilst also enhancing skills necessary for future employment, such as numeracy, accuracy and responsibility. Spot a Sparrow also lets our clients be a part of larger society.”



CLIENTS FROM INSPIRE Donatella De Gaetano

Nick Piludu is the Development Assistant at BirdLife Malta

Log on to [www.spotasparrow.org](http://www.spotasparrow.org) to find out more and record your first sighting. You can also follow the project on Facebook and Twitter.



# what's on

**New  
Website  
arriving  
early 2015**

## Adult Members:

### December Walk

*Sunday 7th December*

We'll be undertaking a circular walk around Dingli cliffs, joined by a local council guide to point out historical sites of interest along the route.

### Walking in Gozo

*Sunday 25th January*

Gozo offers fantastic green landscapes and diverse wildlife. Join us for a relaxed walk taking in some of Gozo's best features. We hope to see some of our further afield members!

### Birdwatching Walk at Il-Majjistral

*Sunday 15th March*

Come along to our spring birdwatching walk where we will explore Malta's only National Park, looking for avian delights.

### Spring Sicily Trip

*April/May 2015*

We're currently planning our next day trip to Sicily. If you are interested in attending, please drop us an email.

For further information please email [activities@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:activities@birdlifemalta.org)

## Public Events:

### Mushrooms in Malta

*January 2015*

The recently formed Malta Mycological Society is looking for volunteers to help with finding Malta's fungi. This introductory lecture to mushrooms is a great opportunity to learn more and get involved.

### Simar to Majjistral Walk

*Saturday 28th February*

Join us and Il-Majjistral Park guide Annalise Falzon, to explore Is-Simar reserve looking for birds and wildlife, before heading across the valley towards Majjistral itself.

### Emptying the Skies

*February 2015*

A screening of Jonathan Franzen's documentary on the poaching of song birds in the Mediterranean.

For further information or for bookings please email [events@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:events@birdlifemalta.org) or call +356 79028782



BIRDWATCHING Holly Forsyth



BRACKET FUNGI Aron Tanti

Check our Facebook pages for up to date events info:

 [/birdlifemalta](https://www.facebook.com/birdlifemalta)

 [/falkoblml](https://www.facebook.com/falkoblml)

Remember to check the members email newsletter for further event details.

WALKING IN GOZO Ella Beeson

For Klabb  
Huttfa events:

see Il-Huttfa or  
email [il-huttfa@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:il-huttfa@birdlifemalta.org)

Keep your eyes peeled for special  
Referendum events too.

# get involved

You, our members, provide vital support for our work through your annual subscriptions, but for those who want to do more here are a few ways you can get involved...



## Help spot sparrows in Malta

Our latest project, Spot A Sparrow, launched in November, and we're keen to get local families involved. Sparrow roosts are easy to spot, identified in the evening by a hive of activity and lots of noisy chirping sparrows. To report a roost, simply go to the website below and fill in the details of your sighting. Your reports will help us to monitor the Spanish Sparrow populations, and ensure their roosts are protected.

[www.spotasparrow.org](http://www.spotasparrow.org)

## Donate to our campaigns

### Stop Spring Hunting

Every spring thousands of birds are killed on their migration over Malta. Maltese people have demanded a referendum to stop this slaughter. We have so far managed to raise over €70,000 but still are in need of further funds to ensure we win this referendum and put an end to spring hunting on Malta.

### Back to the Sky

BirdLife Malta have been given the opportunity to set up a bird rehabilitation centre in Buskett Gardens, to help get injured and exhausted birds back to the sky, allowing these birds a second chance at life.

If you would like to make a donation to either of these campaigns, please visit our website on our website: [www.birdlifemalta.org/content/donate](http://www.birdlifemalta.org/content/donate) or send a cheque, addressed to BirdLife Malta, to 57/28 Triq Abate Rigord, Ta' Xbiex, Malta, XBX 1120

## ID: Winter Flowers

### Branched Asphodel *Berwieq*

Flowers January - April

Look on garigue, e.g. Dingli Cliffs or Ta' Cenc

Very Common

Find more ID tips on these flowers at: [www.maltawildplants.com](http://www.maltawildplants.com)

### Red Campion *Lsien l-Għasfur*

Flowers November - June

Look in uncultivated fields or soily garigues

Common

### Borage *Fidloqqom*

Flowers January - May

Easy to find near fields or in valleys

Very Common



5 'bi-lobed' petals, looks like 10

Can reach height of 50 cm



Edible, tastes like cucumber

