

Bird's Eye View



The Magazine of the Malta Ornithological Society
AUTUMN 1990

No. 13 Autumn 1990

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Cattle egret, a frequent victim of Egyptian
massacre tours
(photo: *Richard Cachia Zammit*).

Back cover:

Top photo – *Richard Cachia Zammit*
Bottom photo – *Joseph M. Mangion.*



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COMMENT

The Cory's shearwater was the 1990 bird of the year.

This particular bird was chosen because its very existence is threatened in the Maltese Islands. We wanted to highlight the threats to this majestic breeding bird.

Cory's shearwaters are shot in large numbers by the hundreds of sea birdshooters who in ever increasing numbers are decimating the populations of this bird.

It was for this reason that in spring of this year MOS initiated a campaign to abolish the shooting of birds at sea.

Another even bigger threat is caused by development near the breeding colonies of our shearwater.

The major threat comes from the proposed building of a new village at Ta' Ċenċ.

Two years ago MOS started a campaign to stop the building of a mega tourist complex that was planned to cover the whole area above the cliffs. The proposals have been modified but the threats to the colony which contains 12% Malta's shearwater population are still there.

At the time of going to print the threats to Ta' Ċenċ have not diminished. No environment impact assessment has been conducted and a judicial protest lodged by six environmental societies has not been countered.

Ta' Ċenċ is of such importance to Malta's birdlife that MOS has offered to buy the area to manage as a nature reserve.

It is hoped that the cry of all those concerned at the destruction of Malta's prime nature area is heard and that common sense prevails.

Because we need a strong front to fight such threats, MOS has to keep growing rapidly. MOS must increase its membership and funds, if Malta is to be made a safer place for birds.

Paul Portelli
Director

EDITORIAL NOTE



The revenue from advertisements in Bird's Eye View pays for less than half its printing and production costs, hence the rest has to be paid out of the Society's funds, most of which accrue from members' subscriptions and donations. With the ever increasing costs of running the Society, and the change-over to colour in our magazine, one cannot do without advertisements, sponsorships and fundraising activities.

More sponsors and adverts are required for our publications. This will leave much desired funds to sustain a professional administrative setup to cater for the protection of birds and their habitats.

Our aims are to increase the frequency of this magazine and

include more interesting articles, apart from Society news. This will enable our members to know better about what is going on around them.

If you have any suggestions or you think that you can help in some way or another, please do not hesitate to write at the Society's address. Your suggestions are more than welcome.

Joe A. Doublet
Editor

The Ornithological Society (MOS), which was founded in 1962, has as its aims the study and protection of birds and their natural environment. MOS has a policy of conservation through education and runs an extensive educational campaign. The Society publishes educational material regularly, including the award winning books "A New Guide to the Birds of Malta" and "L-Aghsasar". It organises various activities for its members, which presently number over 2000, as well as for the general public. MOS has been instrumental in setting up Malta's national nature reserve and runs the Valletta Bird Ringing Scheme. The Society publishes its scientific ornithological magazine "IL-MERILL" and its annual magazine "BIRD'S EYE VIEW", which focuses on the activities of the Society. MOS has an active Youth Section (MOSY) with its own publication "IL-KANGU".

God made Ta' Cenc - Real Finanz Claim to Improve it

Ta' Cenc is still under threat. Following the article in the previous issue of BEV several events have taken place.

Last July, Real Finanz A.G. presented new proposals for the project. These followed a letter of Intent by the Minister of Infrastructure dated 18th April 1990.

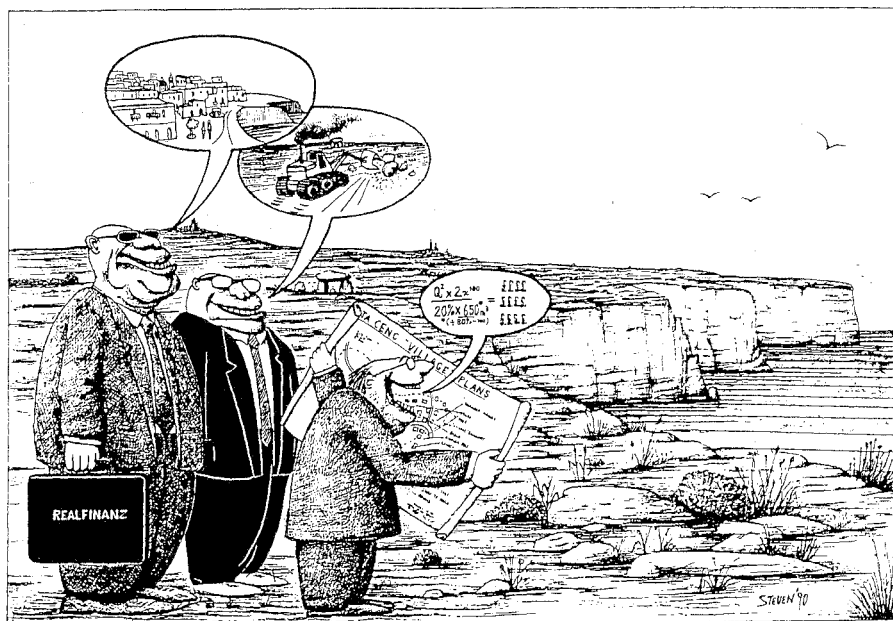
Real Finanz A. G. put up an impressive marketing exercise. However, it was full of misrepresentations which could only be intended to mislead the public and its representatives in Parliament.

Such claims that "the garigue areas are in the main beyond the site of the proposed development" and that "garigue areas can be retained intact within the development layout proposed" cannot but be termed as fake and contradictory especially when one considers that all the area (with the exception of a few fields) at Ta' Cenc is garigue of great ecological importance.

The plan, published by the Ministry of Infrastructure was not detailed. Hence the magnitude of the project was condensed. In fact in the reports presented by the Company and laid down on the table of the House, one could note that in the extension to the hotel, a new village for Maltese people plus leisure facilities, including a massive swimming pool and a golf course, were proposed. Real Finanz A. G. emphasized that the project is up to Southern European standards!!

In a press conference held on 10th July 1990, five local environmental Societies, including MOS, joined forces to counteract the pretentious arguments made by Real Finanz. The Societies made it clear that they are not against development, but they are against the totally unnecessary development of an ecologically sensitive area.

Further to this press conference, several letters appeared in the press. The vast majority showed their concern and dismay at the project.



One of several cartoons used as adverts in the campaign for saving Ta' Cenc.

During the months of August and September, a number of adverts appeared in The Times. These were paid for by the five local environment groups, which were Arbor, The Ornithological Society, *Movement għall-Ambjent*, Society for the Study and Conservation of Nature and *Din l-art Helwa*.

On the 17th September 1990 the environment groups filed a judicial protest in the registry of the First Hall of the Civil Court against the Minister of Development of the Infrastructure, Mr. Michael Falzon. The groups claimed that by his actions, the Minister was violating various parts of the Maltese Law and called upon him to immediately retract the plans for the development of Ta' Cenc. The protest was given extensive coverage in the press.

In late September, the MOS Council, in a final bid to save Ta' Cenc, contacted the company, Real Finanz A.G. in Rome and asked them to consider selling, leasing or giving on trust their land to MOS to be managed as a nature reserve. A copy of this letter was sent to the Press and to the Ministers concerned.

On the 17th September 1990, the Minister of Education and Interior,

Dr. Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, who is also responsible for the Secretariat for the Environment stated in a Public discussion that the project will not go ahead without an impact assessment.

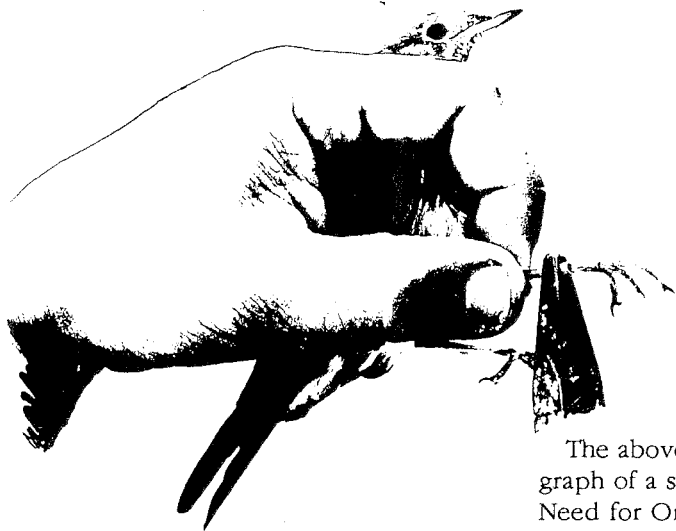
Prior to the opening of Parliament from the summer recess, the environment groups sent a memorandum to all the members of Parliament, the Hon. speaker of the House and to all political parties.

The memorandum stressed again the importance of Ta' Cenc and why it should be conserved. It also highlighted the misrepresentations put forward by Real Finanz A.G. In a covering letter addressed to the Parliamentarians, the Societies asked the Hon. members to vote against the destruction of another important gem of the Maltese Islands.

On going to print the go ahead for the project has not been given by the Cabinet.

The project requires Parliamentary approval before it can commence.





25 Years

"Malta, with its new ornithological society and unique position, makes for an ideal central Mediterranean ringing station, and members of the new society would do well to bear in mind all possibilities of establishing regular trapping and ringing of migrants on their islands. For where do Malta's numerous migrants breed? Where do they winter? Do they pass through Malta in subsequent seasons? How long do they live? What percentage die or are killed annually? It is questions like these that ringing and ringing alone can answer."

The above is the concluding paragraph of a short article entitled "The Need for Organised Bird Ringing in Malta" which was written by R. E. Scott, then warden at Dungeness Bird Observatory in Kent. It was sent on the 24th May 1962 to Joe M. Attard, co-founder of MOS at his request when the latter met Bob Scott while visiting Dungeness early in 1962 — MOS foundation year.

Barely had three years passed. On the afternoon of 6th September 1965, the first bird ringing session was taking place in an uncultivated field, half of it overgrown with fennel, above Pergla Valley in Xagħra, Gozo. History of Maltese ornithology was in the making. Mont Hiron, a ringer of the British Trust for Ornithology, which runs the ringing scheme in UK, was giving a bird ringing demonstration to Joe Sultana, the first MOS ringing trainee. The first bird ringed was an icterine warbler, a migrant.

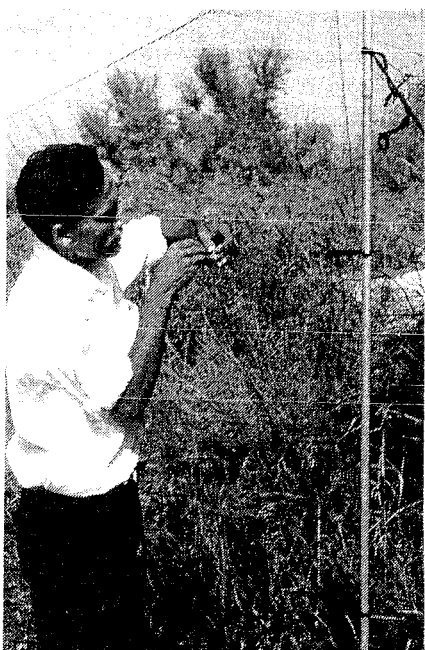
No one would have thought that a holiday in Malta by Mrs. Elizabeth Coxon in 1962 would eventually lead to this event and 25 years of bird ringing. Betty, as she is affectionately known by her long standing MOS friends was introduced to Joe M. Attard by Mrs. Veer Greer, a British resident and today a veteran MOS member. This reaped a lot of benefits including the setting up of the MOS bird-ringing scheme.

On Mrs. Coxon's initiative, together with the help of colleagues in the Banbury Ornithological Society as well as the support of Robert Spencer, then Head of the Ringing and Migration Section of the BTO, the British ringers namely Mont Hiron, Glyn Davies, Joe Hardman and David Rushford trained the first MOS ringers Joe Sultana and Victor Vella Muskat in autumn 1965 and Charles Gauci in spring 1966.

In 1966 Mrs. Coxon went on to set up the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee, MBROC, with the main aim of supporting MOS efforts in birdringing and conservation (BEV No. 4).

Since then MOS has worked in close co-operation with the BTO which gave its consent to use its rings and to help MOS with subsidized rings and equipment. The MOS ringing scheme never looked back. Gradually but steadily, it earned a reputation for efficiency among European ringing schemes.

However it was not always plain sailing. In 1977 an officer at the Natural History Museum started a rival ringing scheme. The unscientific and unethical methods used were throwing birdringing in Malta in disrepute. But MOS efficiency and perseverance finally won the day. In January 1979 the Government accorded official recognition to the MOS ringing scheme and an agreement was reached with the Minister responsible for the Museums that there should be one ringing scheme in Malta.



Joe Sultana, the first ringer, taking the first robin out of the net during his training period in Autumn 1965.



A recent photo of the MBROC Committee. L to r (sitting) H Middleton, E Coxon, G Davies and A Hardman; (standing) J Hardman, M Hiron and J Middleton.



Mont Hiron weighing the first bird ringed — an icterine warbler.

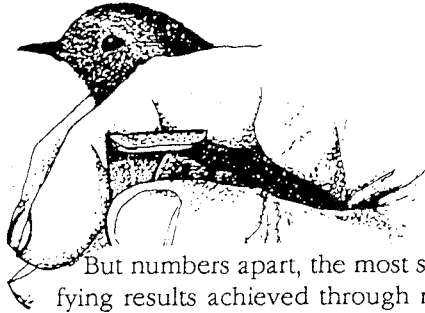
of Bird Ringing

Bird ringing is a method used to mark birds, devised to obtain facts about their life history. It helps to provide an answer to many questions and has proved to be a valuable scientific tool for the advancement of ornithology. By adding a new dimension to the study of migration and population dynamics it yields information which can be vital in planning measures of bird conservation.

By then MOS had already introduced bird rings bearing the MOS address and had been enrolled as full member of EURING, the European Union for Bird ringing.

Along the years the MOS scheme, which is run by the Ringing and Research Committee, has accumulated a mine of scientific data and has put the islands in a prominent place on the ornithological map. MOS publishes its ornithological journal *Il-Merill* which serves as a medium for the publication of the annual systematic list of birds, the annual ringing report as well as papers and short notes related to the ornithology of Malta.

At the time BEV is going to press, the grand total of birds ringed since that first icterine warbler in 1965 stands at about 200,000 of about 160 species. Up to the end of 1988, the ten species of birds most often ringed were robin, chiffchaff, swallow, storm petrel, spanish sparrow, Sardinian warbler, blackcap, sand martin, garden warbler and house martin, in that order.

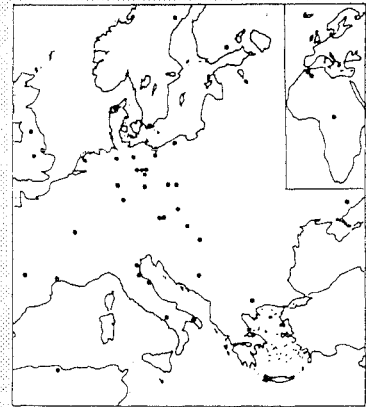


But numbers apart, the most satisfying results achieved through ringing were the various studies on the life habits of a number of breeding bird species. Birds' faithfulness to winter quarters is highlighted by a large number of interesting retraps. These include several wintering species, mainly robin, chiffchaff and blackcap.

By the end of 1988, there have been 959 reported recoveries of birds at least 5 km away from their site of ringing. 174 of these, belonging to 34 species, were recovered in foreign countries. A robin 150 miles north-east of Moscow, a tree pipit in Finland, two manx shearwaters in the Black Sea, a spotted flycatcher in the Congo, a whitethroat in Egypt, a rustic bunting on Rhodes, swallows and sand martins in UK — these are a few of many interesting foreign recoveries.

Some notable records:

- The first bird to be recovered was a robin ringed on the 16th October 1965 at Ramla Bay in Gozo. It was recovered the following February at St. Paul's Bay.
- The first bird to be recovered abroad was a little stint ringed at Ghadira on the 9th April 1966. It was shot at Messina, Sicily, ten days later.
- 27 robins have been recovered abroad (9 in Tunisia, 4 in Algeria, 2 each in USSR, Czechoslovakia, Italy and single recoveries in Finland, Sweden, Hungary, Bulgaria, San Marino, Greece and Libya).



- 40 swallows have been recovered abroad (see map).

The oldest ringed seabirds are:

- a manx (Yelkouan) shearwater ringed at 1-Ahrax Point on 19th May 1976 and retrapped on 22nd June 89 — 13 years later;
- a Cory's shearwater ringed on Filfla on 28th June 1969 and retrapped on 2nd August 1976 — 17 years later; and
- a storm petrel ringed on Filfla on 16th August 1969 (the islet as then still used for bombing practice) on and retrapped on 28 July 1990 — 21 years later.

- Out of several hundreds of retrapped wintering chiffchaffs, one of the most interesting was ringed at Xemxija on 12th January 1980 and retrapped in March 1981, in January 1983 and again in February 1985 always at the same place.

- A Sardinian warbler survived at least 11 years. It was ringed at Wied il-Luq in August 1975 and retrapped in January 1986.



The present MOS 15 ringers with the year when started ringing. L to r (squatting): Mark Falzon (1990), Joe M. Mangion (1988), Denis Cachia (1979), Joe Sultana (1965), Charles Gauci (1966), Richard Cachia Zammit (1975); standing: Victor Cilia (1974), John Grech (1971), Brian K. German (1971), Charles Coleiro (1987), Mario V. Gauci (1975), Raymond Galea (1979), Manuel Mallia (1988), John Borg (1981) and John Attard Montalio (1977).

Paul Portelli

Marathon for the Redbreast



The participants at the end of the marathon.

Richard Cecilia Zammit

Their visit to Malta often ends tragically in an illegal, diabolical, triangular robin trap. Traditions die hard. But at least in this case, education is gaining ground especially with the younger generation.

During the last few years MOS has intensified its campaign against robin trapping by organising annual campaigns in schools. Although such campaigns have yielded positive results, their need is still strongly felt each year.

Last autumn was no exception. The campaign was launched with a new item to the usual format: a sponsored "Marathon Walk for the Robin", which took 150 children from primary and secondary schools on a 20 kilometre hike through various towns, villages and neighbouring countryside.

Lm250 were raised by the participants. The money was used for the 1990 Robin Campaign.

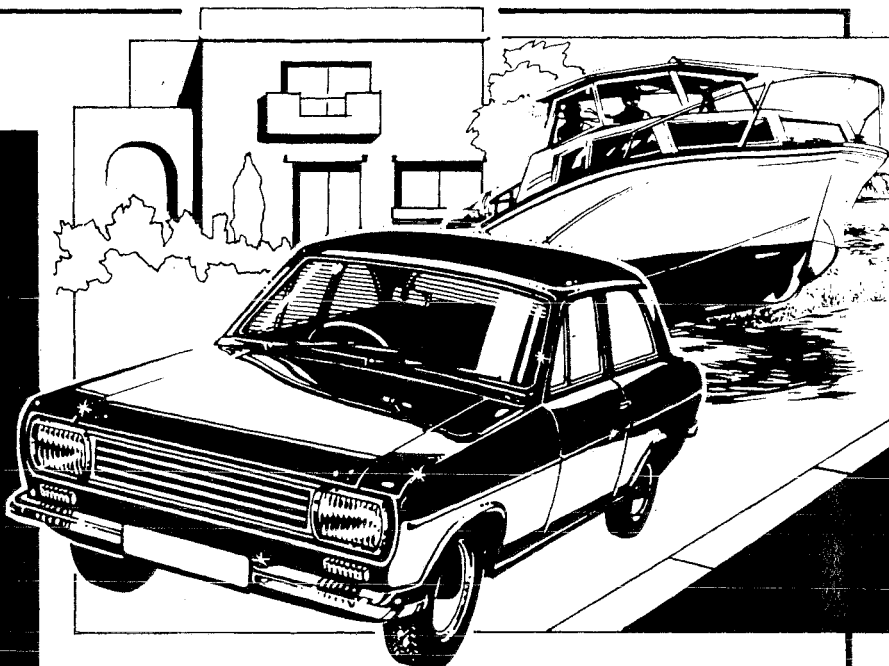
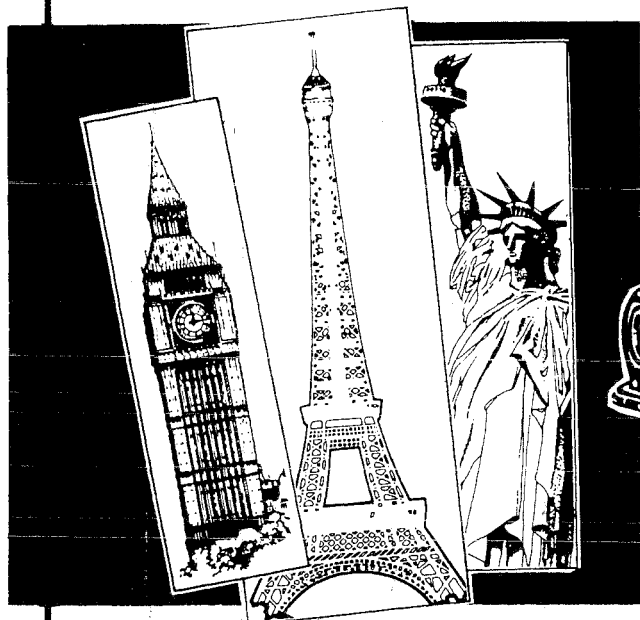


Sticker used for the campaign.

Every year in October, the robin sticks to his schedule. Birds move into the Mediterranean from all over Europe. By November, they are all settled in various countries to spend the winter.



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Killing at Sea Must STOP



Victor Falzon



Max Farrugia

MOS Youths protesting at Bahar ic-Caghaq against bird shooting at sea. Banner reads: When will shooting at sea stop?

A bird was flapping into an easterly headwind. It did not seem to be covering a lot of ground. All of a sudden, speeding below it was a high-powered dinghy. Two shots ... and the bird was dead. It was a marsh harrier on its first journey towards the south in autumn. It was trying to reach land on the sheltered side of Gozo, at Dwejra. Like all birds of prey, the marsh harrier is legally a protected species. It is also illegal to shoot within 3 kilometres off-shore. But that is how things stand! This sad story repeats itself over and over again.

Migration is one of the difficult phases in a bird's life. The peak of endurance during such time is reached at seacrossings, where neither food nor resting places are available. To many of those birds which use the mid-Mediterranean route, Malta could provide a much needed rest.

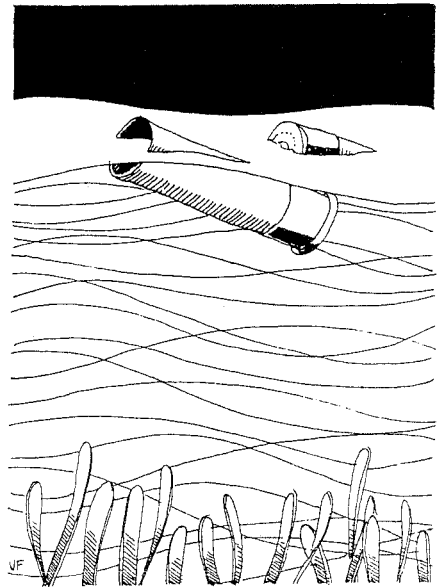
Over the past few years, the number of Maltese birdshooters who switched their killing fields from land to sea has been on the increase. High-powered seacraft, efficient shotguns and long range cartridges result in the massacre of many migrant birds.

Breeding birds have also lost their ground due to shooting at sea. Shearwaters are easy victims. The last few Maltese seaciff breeding peregrines went the same way, while the number of yellow-legged herring gulls has been greatly reduced. Some of their colonies have been totally wiped out.

Effective steps need to be taken urgently to protect Malta's birdlife.

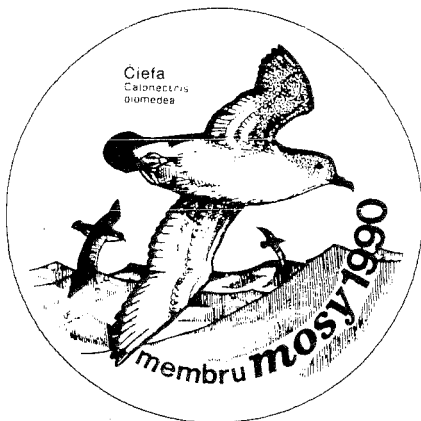
Being aware that a few hundred sea birdshooters are killing thousands of migratory birds and what is left of Malta's breeding sea birds, MOS launched a campaign for the abolition of shooting at sea.

In an open letter to all members of Parliament, attaching a number of press cuttings on the subject, MOS

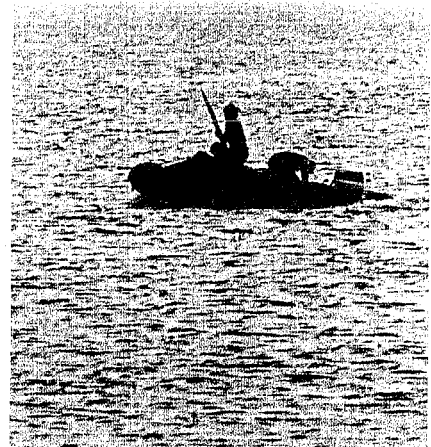


expressed its concern at the amount of illegal killing of birds which goes on at sea and urged them to do their utmost to help put a stop to this wanton destruction.

Youth members of MOS last spring organised a symbolic protest on the coast, at Bahar ic-Caghaq. A huge banner condemning shooting at sea was carried by several youths and a large effigy of two birdshooters on a dinghy was set on fire.

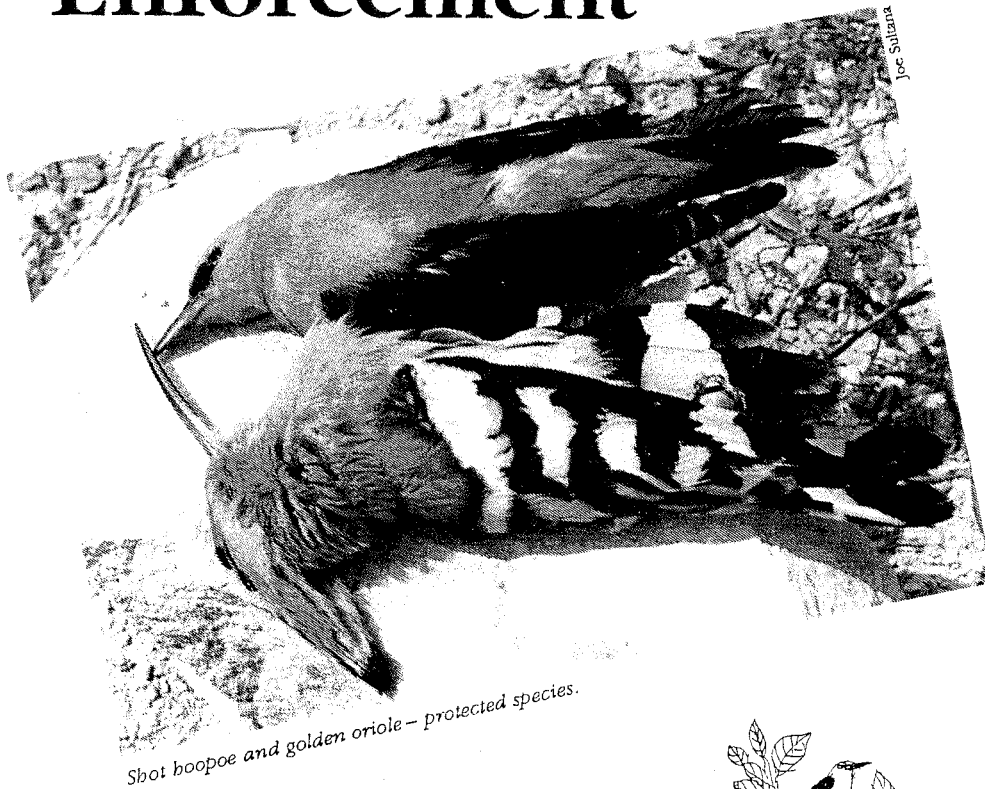


Cory's shearwater - MOSy's Bird of the Year - common victim at sea.

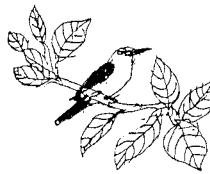


Joe Doublet

Bird Laws Cry for Enforcement



Shot hoopoe and golden oriole - protected species.



In Malta, Bird laws are rarely enforced; when they are, they make the headlines. This year, spring migration brought a deluge of birds to the islands, on their way to their European breeding quarters. The docile turtle dove, which in Malta is considered as the main legal game bird, was one of the protagonists.

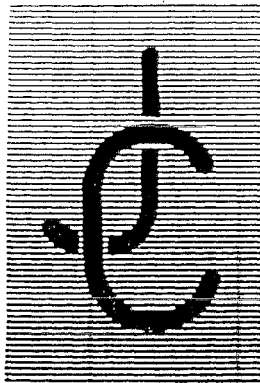
Under the heading "Hunters enjoy Turtle Dove galore", The Times of 2nd May, 1990 wrote "Game hunters had one of the best days in many seasons, last Monday, when migrating turtle doves made an unusually strong appearance over Malta that day" and "one trapper is reported to have caught over 100 on that day alone."

But it was not just turtle doves that made a good appearance. Many other species which are protected by law, such as the golden oriole, arrived in substantial numbers and hundreds were shot. To add insult to injury, many were shot and killed at Buskett, a bird sanctuary, where some 100 birdshooters were present on that particular day.

The lack of enforcement of the Bird Laws is unbelievable. When laws are not enforced, they lose credibility and respect from many of the several thousand birdshooters and trappers.

MOS has been continually calling for law enforcement. During this year's Annual General Meeting, one of the resolutions urged the authorities to set up and organise an enforcement unit to uphold the law and requested Police to take bird protection laws seriously.

In one of the frequent public statements, MOS also condemned the shooting and trapping of birds during the closed season. The Society received frequent reports of shooting in bird sanctuaries and protected areas, such as Buskett and Kennedy Grove. MOS insists that the problem will only be solved when the authorities decide to set up a squad of enforcement wardens to deal with environmental laws.



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The Review Committee at a meeting with Dr Stanley Zammit, Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment.

From the Streets to the Table

On 11th March 1990, the hunters and trappers marched through the town of Qormi, during a protest organised by their association. They expressed disapproval of the White Paper on the Environment, accused MOS of using foreigners, such as tourists, to aid its bird conservation cause. They also referred to the Ministry of Education's proposed Park at *Hagar Qim* and *Mnajdra* prehistoric area and said that they could not accept that every patch of land to be closed for hunting.

Barely a month had passed, when their representatives were sitting round the table with MOS officials to discuss the chaotic bird-shooting and trapping situation and to try to find ways and means to ameliorate it.

The first meeting was held on the 25th April 1990 at the Calypso Hotel in Gozo, under the auspices of the Centre Naturopa of the Council of Europe and in the presence of observers from the International Council for Bird preservation (ICBP) and from the EEC's Federation of Hunters' Association (FACE). An agreement was reached to create a joint Review Committee, under an independent chairman, to examine the current Maltese laws on hunting and trapping and see where these can be improved.

In a joint statement the two bodies, amongst other recommendations, called upon all hunters and trappers to respect the provision of the Maltese legislation relevant to bird species in need of protection. Additionally, they are to bear in mind the elements of the Council of Europe's "Code of Conduct for Hunters".

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Ferdinando Albanese, head of the

Environment and local Authorities of the Council of Europe, assisted by Mr. Hayo Hoekstra, head of Centre Naturopa and attended by the Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer of the Association of Hunters and Trappers, by Paul Portelli and Richard Cachia Zammit, Director and Assistant Secretary/Treasurer respectively of MOS, and by Joe Sultana and Yves Lecocq representing ICBP and FACE respectively.

The Joint Review Committee, under the chairmanship of Magistrate Michael Mallia has been meeting regularly since last July. Agreement on several points has been reached and although difficulties are frequently arising on others, both sides are determined to continue dialoguing to find the best solution.



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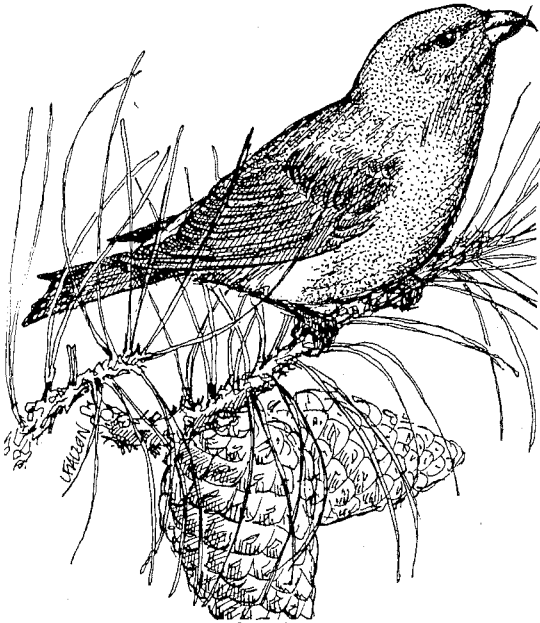
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When the Crossbills arrived...



Some were red, others were greenish. Strange looking, cross-billed birds they were. You could hear them "chipping" merrily most of the time at

Buskett. They flew about nervously in small flocks from one pine grove to another. Word quickly spread — the crossbills have arrived. It was late June, this year.

To have reached Malta in such numbers, the crossbills must have had one of their exceptional irruption years. They could have flown all the way from the most northern Scandinavian forests.

Such irregular influxes have probably always been characteristic of crossbills. The first such influx recorded in Malta was reported by A. Ċaruana Gatto in the *Archivium Melitensis*. He mentioned that at least 200 birds were caught by trappers in 1909. Since then, there were other recorded influxes, the largest being in 1930, when G. Despott and T. Conti

Meli, writing in the *Rivista Italiana di Ornitologia*, reported over 550 crossbills caught from various localities.

The same fate has fallen on this year's crossbills. The characteristic 'kjiip... kjiip' calls were soon silenced at Buskett, at the Addolorata Cemetery and other places. Most birds ended up in cages. Armed with nets and other catching paraphernalia, including cassettes with crossbill calls, the trappers soon killed the atmosphere which these birds created at Buskett.

Some shooters had the cheek to kill some to add to their mounted stuffed collections. To add insult to injury, the crossbill saga happened

- in bird sanctuaries
- during the close season and
- in spite of the fact that these birds are protected by Maltese law.

MOS condemned these acts publicly on the media.

POWER PRODUCTS

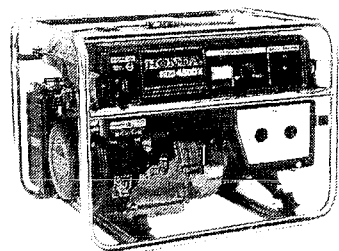
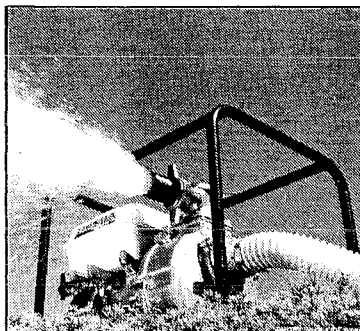
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Egypt Clamps down on Illegal Hunting

Since highlighting the killing of birds in Egypt by Maltese organised hunting tours in BEV No. 12 and other media, there have been some encouraging developments. The Egyptian authorities, bombarded by protests from several organisations, decided to regulate the chaotic situation and to clamp down on illegal hunting.

In a letter addressed to the MOS President, the Undersecretary of State for Environment Affairs, Ali Hindy thanked MOS and other organisations which brought the whole matter to the attention of the Egyptian authorities. He wrote that the Minister of Tourism, Mr. Fouad Sultan, shares MOS's concern over the conduct of some foreign hunters while on Egyptian soil and is especially displeased with the type of hunting which is taking place during Maltese hunting tours in Egypt.



Black-shouldered kite – an easy target for Maltese bird-shooters.

In his letter the Undersecretary announced various restrictions, including the setting of hunting seasons and bag limits, and penalising foreign hunters and tour companies who break the Egyptian bird protection laws.

The Minister of Tourism has also asked the Minister of Interior not to allow Maltese hunters to bring guns into the country (they can still however be hired in Egypt). In addition the Ministry of Tourism hopes to promote more birdwatching tours to Egypt, which generates tourism without destroying birds and wildlife.

This initiative follows a campaign organised by MOS to draw the attention to the slaughter of birds in Egypt by foreign hunters, Maltese in particular.

In the meantime, MOS continues with its boycott against those companies which organise such hunting tours to Egypt. Hopefully thousands of birds will now be spared.



Spur-winged plovers were not spared.

Richard Cachia Zammit

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THE STUDY GROUP

These lectures will be held also in Maltese.

RSPB CONNECTION

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) of UK feels committed to help and support other bird protection organisations; this it does in various ways. In September 1989 it organised a course dealing with membership recruitment and fund raising. Directors of several European bird societies were invited to attend. Paul Portelli, MOS Director, was among the participants. RSPB's



Paul Portelli

Trevor Gunton with Desirée Falzon, MOS Education Officer, at Mriebel Junior Lyceum.

support for the MOS has been forthcoming since the early years of the latter's foundation. Sometimes RSPB offers help in the form of advice. Only recently Trevor Gunton, former Head of Development at the RSPB and presently with the International Department, visited Malta twice to help MOS in matters of development. In the meantime, RSPB is also giving financial help to the MOS to the tune of £Stg 3,500 for the further development of the Society.

Membership

MOS has now over 2000 members and their number is still increasing. This is the result of a greater awareness of the need to protect birds and a membership recruitment campaign throughout 1990. More MOS members mean better protection for birds.



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Secretary

Mrs. Anna Caruana was employed as a part-time secretary with the MOS. Mrs. Caruana started work in January 1990. She is assisting the Director in the administrative work of MOS.

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ITALIAN REFERENDUM

In Italy, it is lawful for a hunter to enter private property – even bird-watchers' gardens.

The conservation movement there, led by the *Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli, LIPU*, tried to rectify this situation and introduce other restrictions. However, three Italian referenda failed to do this because of a low turnout. Only 42.6% of eligible voters turned out to vote, in the face of a massive "no-vote" campaign by the hunters, who were backed by the arms companies. Although 20 million Italians went to vote, their number was below the required 50% + 1 minimum dictated by Italian law to make a referendum valid.



The conservationists were disappointed with the low turnout, but they were pleased to note that 90% voted in favour of controls on hunting. This was a moral victory. The Italian authorities must listen to the views expressed by over 18 million people and bring Italy in line with the EEC Birds Directive.

COXON AWARD

Prizes were presented by Victor Falzon, MOSY Officer, to several young members during the youths' AGM. The most prestigious prize went to Joe Dunlop, a hard-working young member for initiating the setting up of a small nature reserve in the school he attends.



Victor Falzon MOS Youth Officer, handing out the Coxon's Award to Joe Dunlop.

UNUSUAL CLIENT

One of several injured birds which have been cared for by Max Farrugia at his 'bird hospital' at home. The bird



was an injured short-eared owl, found at the petrol station at Gzira in October 1989. The owner, Joe Muscat, found the injured owl when he went to open his station in the morning. Being a member of MOS, Mr Muscat immediately contacted the Society and handed in the bird to be looked after by Max. The short-eared owl has been twice recorded breeding in Malta this century.



EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

MOS is fully aware of the fact that education is a major tool which can bring about a change, albeit a gradual one, in the mentality concerning the appreciation of bird conservation. The Education Committee leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to reach the members and the public in general, and organises a variety of activities.

One of the main events is the annual educational Teachers' Course, which is usually held at the Headquarters of the Malta Union of Teachers. Through its network of school delegates, MOS strives to bring up a generation of youths sensitive to nature and its problems. Apart from such courses, MOS produces material for use in schools and also gives advice to teachers on various matters. This year's teachers' course had "Maltese habitats" as its theme and consisted of lectures, fieldwork sessions and outings, including a boat trip round Filfla islet.

MOS youths have also been active organising a variety of activities including camps during which young members studied and observed nature.

European Seminar

As a result of a meeting of representatives of European bird protection societies during the ICBP European Section Conference held in Adana in 1989 (BEV No. 12), the Deutsche Bund für Vogelschutz, (DBV) of Germany organised a seminar dealing with fund raising and public relations in April 1990. MOS, which was represented by Director Paul Portelli, was among the sixteen European bird protection societies taking part.

Donation

Mrs. Jane Urwick of Tauton, England raised £Stg.161 for MOS during a coffee morning on behalf of MOS.

Mrs. Urwick who has been an MOS member since 1978 said that she sent the money because she knew that "it would be put to very good use".

SPONSORS

Recl-Proef of Udenhout, Netherlands (Dir. Mr. Jan van Derseraatan) were the official sponsors of this year's Birds of Prey and Robin Campaigns.

Visitors

Jean Patrick Le Duc of the Secretariat for the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species based in Geneva made an official visit to the MOS office. During the meeting he met MOS officials who were briefed on the Convention and the work of the CITES Secretariat. MOS was then asked to monitor the implementation of the Convention in Malta.



Jean Patrick le Duc Alistair Gammell

Alistair Gammell, Head of International with RSPB, visited Malta with his family for a holiday. He also visited the MOS office and discussed various bird conservation matters with the Council.

Plight of the Parrots

Hundred species of parrot in danger of extinction

"The bird talks, you know? It also swears!"

This is how the owner introduced his pet parrot to a wide-eyed tourist who was closely examining an African grey parrot hanging in a cage, outside a shop at Mellieha. The parrot, unperturbed, continued biting at its prison bars with its massive curved beak.

This bird is one of probably several thousand parrots of various species which have been imported to Malta at some time or another. On becoming party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) last year (1989), Malta began contributing towards the protection of certain wildlife species, including the parrots. At least one foreign parrot trader who had chosen Malta as a base for his lucrative trade in these exotic birds, had to start packing up.

Various wildlife species support one of the biggest money-spinning black markets in the world. A patchwork of national laws can never regulate the flow of international trade, because what is illegal in one country may be legal in another.

When 21 nations signed the CITES treaty in Washington D.C. in 1973, it was the first major step to regulate international trade of endangered species. This Convention does not provide the whole solution, but it restricts the trade of certain species among member countries, which now number 109. However, there is still a long way to go before all loopholes are plugged. While some member countries do not seem to scrupulously abide by the CITES' provisions,

the non-members still undermine the Convention's efforts.

So long as there is a demand for exotic pets and animal products, this shameful trade will not cease. Education can play an important part in consumer countries. A notable fall in demand in some wildlife products, such as tiger and leopard skin, has been registered in western countries. So there is a ray of hope.

Parrots have had to pay the price for having so many good qualities as pet companions. Being so colourful, talkative and playful, they have always fascinated man. No fewer than 600,000 parrots have been recorded in international trade in 1986 alone. Along with unrecorded legal trade, internal trafficking in large countries

*Snatched from home –
blue and yellow macaw.*

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and smuggling on a grand scale, the true number probably runs into several million parrots a year.

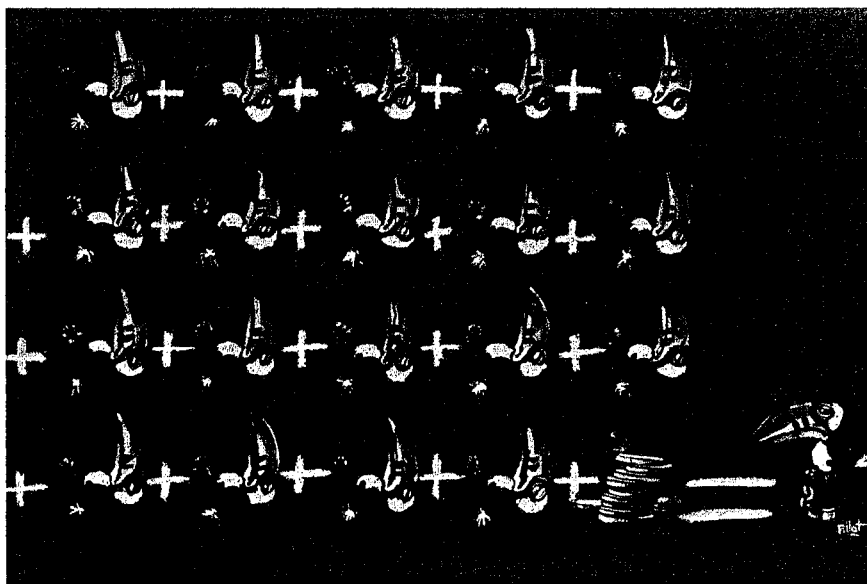
It is assumed that for each pet parrot which reaches a home, four others pay the price of death somewhere between their forest home and the petshop.

Apart from the unscrupulous trade, parrots face a greater threat – the destruction of their tropical forest home. The clearance of trees throughout the tropics is one of the greatest challenges to the conservation of wildlife. 22 threatened species of parrot still hold on in what remains of Brazil's unique Atlantic forest. The same goes for several other species in other parts of the world – the Caribbean, the Andes and Indonesia to mention a few.

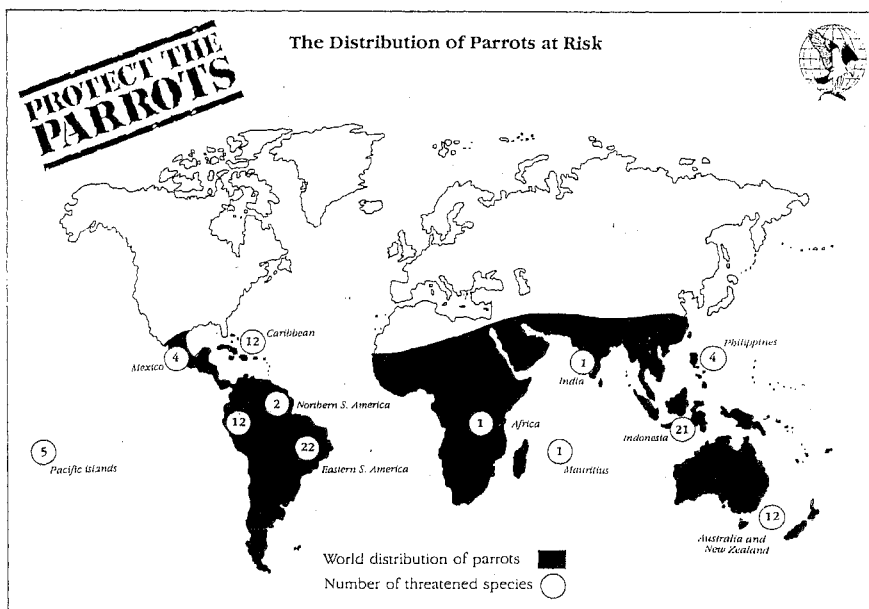
About 100 parrot species, which is nearly a third of the world's global number, are at risk of extinction through a combination of habitat loss and trade, a result of man's exploitation and greed. When a species gets rare, its price rises sky high while its trade intensifies underground. A breeding pair of the very rare hyacinth macaw may fetch up to £Stg15,000.

The International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), the world's oldest global conservation body and leading bird protection organisation, is trying to meet the challenge of saving the parrots. ICBP has launched its "Protect the Parrots" campaign to counter the serious threats facing parrot species. It has also established a parrot fund to stop the destructive trade in parrots and conserve their tropical forest habitat.

Prior to the launching of the campaign, ICBP published one of its technical publications "Birds to Watch" which highlights the scale of the parrots' crisis. It has also undertaken or supported field surveys of some of the threatened species. ICBP, amongst other things, has initiated a major project to create new reserves for parrots in Jamaica, is working with the Government of Dominica to save the country's rare imperial and red-necked amazon parrots, and has promoted a clampdown on the export of the African grey parrot from the Gulf of Guinea.

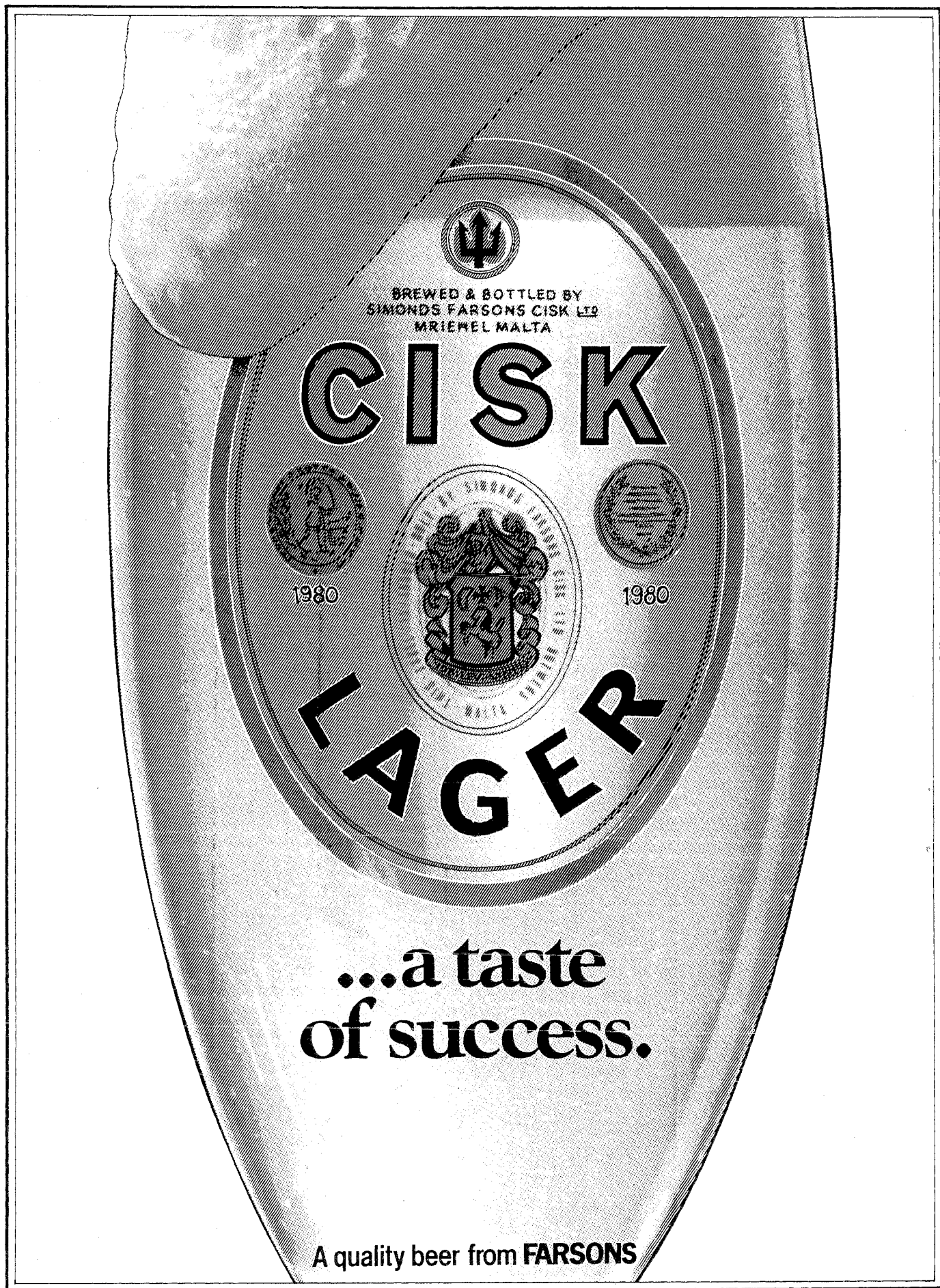


Fred Pilot - Nauropia 62/1989 Council of Europe



Victims of trade – white cockatoos.

Paul Porcelli



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A Summary

The 28th Annual General meeting was held on 8th March 1990 at the British Legion Headquarters, Valletta. The meeting was addressed by Joe A. Doublet, MOS President, who made several announcements.

During 1989 the Society took a step forward in employing a full-time Director as well as a pupil worker during the summer months. This was reflected in an increase of more than 1000 new members, thus surpassing the 2000 mark. A part-time secretary was also employed to help the Director. To facilitate decision making, an executive committee was proposed as one of the changes in the Statute.

The President stressed that the Society must turn wholly professional, reach a wider range of the public, increase its lobbying power and acquire a larger premises.

Mr. Doublet added that apart from the need to strengthen its administrative setup and image, MOS was facing other problems. One could not but mention the prevailing illegal shooting of birds, the massacre tours in Egypt and the threat to the Ta' Cenc area by development. The main problem lies with the enforcement of the law. It is only on very rare occasions

28th Annual General Meeting

that the Police take action against illegal activities. It is therefore useless to have new legislation unless this is backed by enforcement officers or wardens.

The President concluded by thanking all those organisations and people who helped MOS in various ways. A special mention was reserved for Charles Gauci and Silvio Scicluna, long standing Council members, who were not contesting the election for the new Council.

In his report, the Hon. General Secretary, Joseph M. Mangion, outlined the main events and achievements of the Society throughout the year.

There was a net increase of 676 members in the Society. The greatest increase was registered within MOS Youths with a total of 870 new members, while 160 new adult members were also registered. 398 members (mostly MOSY members) failed to renew their subscription.

At the beginning of the year there were changes in the Council posts due to the resignation of Paul Portelli as President, to assume the post of MOS Director.

Joe A. Doublet was elected President, while Joseph M. Mangion was elected Hon. General Secretary, instead of Mr. Doublet. Richard Cachia Zammit was appointed Assistant Hon. General Secretary instead of Mr. Mangion. 22 Council meetings were held during 1989 while 43 press releases, apart from a number of articles, were issued. The MOS took part in the production of a film about the protection of birds in the Mediterranean.

On the 22nd April, H.E. Dr. C. Tabone, the President of Malta, presented the Europa Nostra Award to MOS. The Society also took part in various fairs to raise funds.

A computer was bought to facilitate the ever-increasing administrative work.

MOS was asked to monitor the local situation regarding enforcement of the CITES convention, during a meeting with CITES Enforcement officer, Mr. Jean Patrick Le Duc.

Paul Portelli, Joe Sultana and Raymond Galea attended the 17th European Conference of the ICBP, at Adana in Turkey, where Mr. Sultana was re-elected Chairman of the ICBP European Section. The delegates also attended the WEBS meeting which was held at the same time. Paul Portelli participated in a management course in September, following an invita-

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FINANCIAL REPORT

BALANCE SHEET

	Lm	Lm
Fixed Assets		12,047
Current Assets	16,792	
Current Liabilities	3,134	
Net Current Assets		13,658
		25,705
Accumulated Fund	23,899	
General Reserve	1,550	
Earmarked Reserves	256	
	25,705	
Income		Lm11,867
Expenditure		9,018
Excess of income over expenditure		2,849
Transfer from earmarked reserves		1,714
		4,563
Transfer to General Reserve		1,550
Accumulated fund brought forward from previous year		20,886
Accumulated fund carried forward		23,899



Denis Cachia
MOS Treasurer

tion by RSPB (UK). Following this course, Trevor Gunton, an RSPB official, visited Malta to advise MOS in developing its strategies regarding expansion and bird protection.

MOS Youths organised an exchange youth camp in Malta with members of the DBV group from Stuttgart. Alex Casha, Charles Coleiro, Raymond Galea and Manuel Mallia attended a YEE Seminar in Belgium, on Shooting and Bird protection, while Ian Mifsud attended the YEE International Secretaries meeting in Germany.

Il-Merill (No. 25), *In-Natura* (No. 9), *Il-Kangu* (Nos. 21 and 22) *Bird's Eye View* (No. 12), were published during the year. A new membership form was also launched. A set of six stickers for use in the Herons Campaign, a small robin sticker and the MOSY 1990 membership sticker were issued. A barn owl poster was published with the help of RSPB while the wine firm Marsovin Ltd used an MOS Bird Calendar as their 1990 Calendar.

Victor Falzon and Joseph M. Mangion were Officer and Secretary respectively of the Youths section. Oliver Cardona took Mr. Mangion's post in September. The MOSY Committee met 13 times, issued 24 circulars and organised 36 activities, including an international camp.



Paul Portelli was Education Officer until May when his place was taken over by Desirée Coleiro. Mr. Portelli was however appointed School Delegates Officer with Valerie Gauci as Secretary of the nine-member Education Committee which met 11 times. Among the activities organised were the annual Robin Campaign and a campaign calling for the protection of the barn owl.

Joe Sultana and Charles Gauci were Officer and Secretary of the six-member Ringing and Research Committee which met twice during the year. The Committee issued six circulars and met several times with the Commissioner of Police regarding ringing licences. There were 14 ringers, one of whom had a special licence to ring Cory's shearwaters. A total of 12,128 of 98 species were ringed

throughout the year. The Rarities Sub-Committee met once and accepted 7 rarities from 18 submitted for approval. Raymond Galea was Chairman of the Bird Protection Committee, while Joe A. Doublet was Secretary until June. His post was taken over by Paul Portelli. The Committee was made up of six persons and met eight times. It organised the Herons and Egrets Campaign and collected further information regarding bird shooting at sea. The Bird Care Unit was managed by Max Farrugia and Raymond Galea and received 103 injured birds, 70 of which were treated and later released.

The Hon. General Secretary concluded his report by thanking all members, the ICBP, RSPB and Vogelwarte Sempach of Switzerland for their support.

The AGM accepted several proposed amendments to the Statue, including one introducing the appointment of an Executive Committee formed by the President, the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Director.

Before the meeting was closed, the members present passed three resolutions urging the authorities (a) to enforce the existing bird protection regulations, (b) not to allow the touristic development at Ta' Ċenc and (c) commending for the White Paper on the environment.

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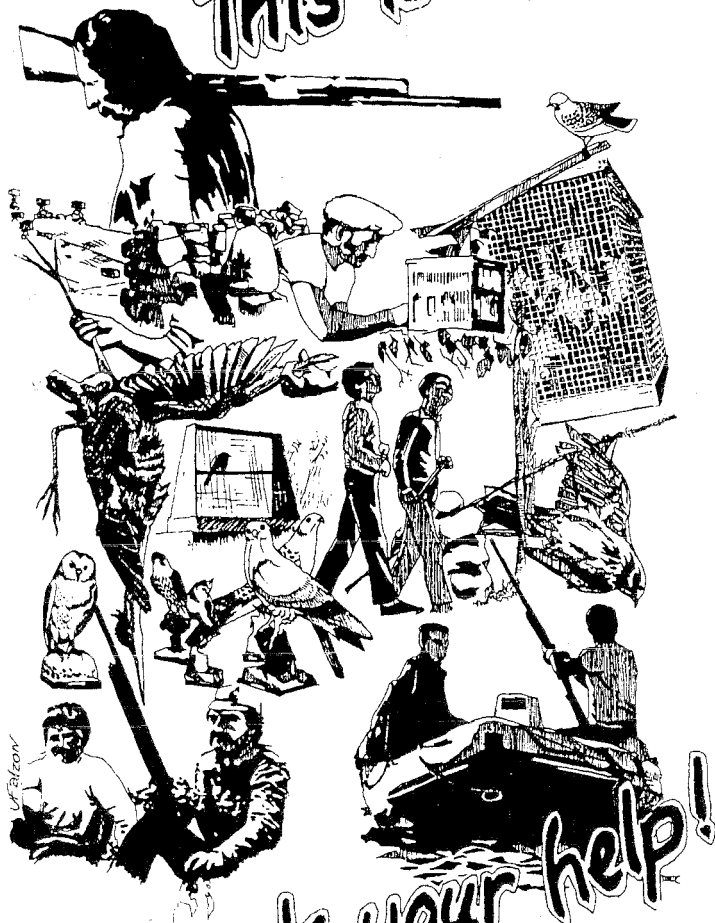


Join up!

MOS depends entirely on the strength of its membership. It needs all the backing it can get. A larger Society means a stronger lobby group. MOS wants to reach and to teach more people about the beauty of birds and about our duty to protect them. By becoming a member of MOS you contribute to the defence of our natural heritage.



This is why...



MOS needs your help!

What is MOS?

- The Ornithological Society (MOS) is the largest conservation body in the Maltese Islands, with over 2000 members.
- Founded in 1962 by a handful of bird enthusiasts, MOS is also the oldest conservation movement in the country.
- The aims of MOS are the study and protection of wild birds and their habitat.
- MOS conducts ornithological studies and publishes its scientific bulletin – Il-Merill.
- MOS runs the Valletta Bird Ringing Scheme.
- MOS organises various indoor and outdoor activities for its members.
- MOS publishes its yearly members' magazine – Birds' Eye View.
- MOS has a thriving youth section which publishes its own magazine, to cater for budding naturalists.
- MOS co-ordinates a network of teacher delegates in schools to help convey the conservation message to the younger generation.
- MOS informs people about birds and about threats to birdlife. This is done through public actions, lectures, exhibitions, films, talks, publications and use of the media.
- MOS maintains close co-operation with national and international conservation organisations both in Malta and abroad.



Need we say more?