

# *Bird's Eye View*



  
**BirdLife**  
MALTA

Annual magazine 2000



# Editorial



I had to take some display boards down to the RaptorCamp base at Buskett last September, to have them ready for a press event later on in the day...

I get there at 8am, early for most, so for a few minutes I have the woodland to myself. A weak sunlight slowly invades the valley as I wait.

A hobby streaks across my view, lands in a dead mulberry tree. I lift my binoculars, but other urgent movement craves my attention. Four bee-eaters on a wire are stretching their wings and preening their psychedelic livery. I feast on the spectacle. Then the marsh harriers begin.

First one female sweeps across the valley, shearing the terraced fields. Then three more, flapping heavily, metres above my head. Others are lifting out of the pines where they have spent the night. Seven, eleven. I rapidly lose count so I push numbers from my mind and enjoy the magnificent male specimen now sailing overhead. Slowly the harriers gain height, join ranks, then glide away squadron-fashion towards Dingli cliffs, the sea, Africa. A hoopoe flashes past, and a Cetti's warbler echoes down in the valley...

I wrote a similar description about Buskett some years ago. On that occasion I had finished it - pathetic, I know - something to the tune of "Then I woke up: it was a dream..."

But this time it was no dream. This was actually Buskett in September 2000. Buskett - the very name that rings horror to anyone even remotely connected with bird protection. So what happened? Has the Maltese mentality finally had a change of heart?

Hardly! Not with millions of birds still dying over this land. But Buskett 2000 was the delicious fruit of massive effort by BirdLife Malta over the year, effort with government, ministries, departments, efforts with the Police and with the hunters themselves. And sometimes it wasn't exactly the kind of effort that made BirdLife Malta very popular either. But in spite of what has been said, written and done against its good name, BirdLife Malta has survived to see another year.

As did the four thousand raptors that safely passed over Buskett last autumn.

**Victor Falzon**  
Editor



## BirdLife MALTA

*BirdLife Malta was set up in 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) and is today the largest environmental group in Malta, with over 3000 members.*

*BirdLife Malta's mission is the protection of birds and their habitat, and through this to work for biological diversity. With this directive in mind, the organisation has over the years used various approaches to achieve adequate bird protection. Such activity has ranged from the creation of nature reserves to street protests against wanton bird killing. Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves are direct results of far sight and sheer hard work by BirdLife Malta volunteers.*

*BirdLife Malta publishes various educational material, such as books, posters, leaflets and stickers, for use by schools and other institutions. It also publishes Il-Merill (a scientific bulletin), Bird's Eye View (the members' annual magazine), Il-Huttafa (the young members' magazine), Woodchat (the birdwatchers' magazine), BirdTalk (the members' newsletter) and a Ringing Newsletter (for bird ringers). The organisation is also active in the press, especially during the migration seasons.*

*BirdLife Malta is a charity and depends on subscriptions and donations.*

*BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International.*

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# BIRDFEST IL-HADD 1 OTTUBRU · BUSKETT

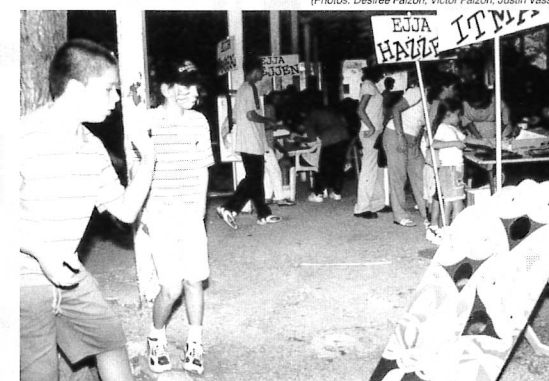
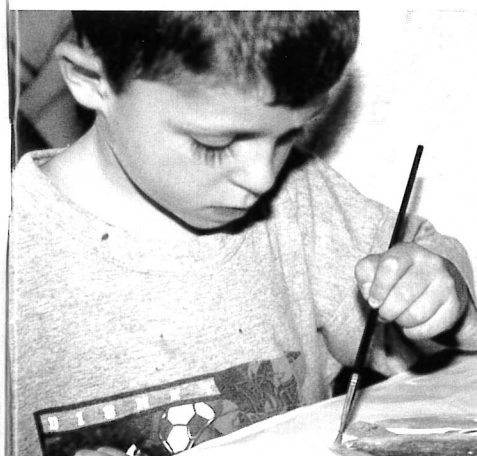
## FunDay

For the second year running, BirdLife Malta organised BirdFest, a day-long family event at Buskett. Board games, face-painting, a jumble sale, jigsaw puzzles, a raffle, information boards, plaster plaque painting, even a snack and drink counter all helped to draw the crowd. And, for winners and participants, small prizes all around. BirdFest 2000 also coincided with World Birdwatch Day, so our birdwatchers were on hand to help the public make the best of what feathered visitors were around.

A success story, thanks to our ever-helpful volunteers.

Some sick mind *did* try to mar the event by visiting the area early in the morning and littering the ground with tacks. It takes rather more than nails to puncture BirdLife Malta, but several car tyres did change shape...

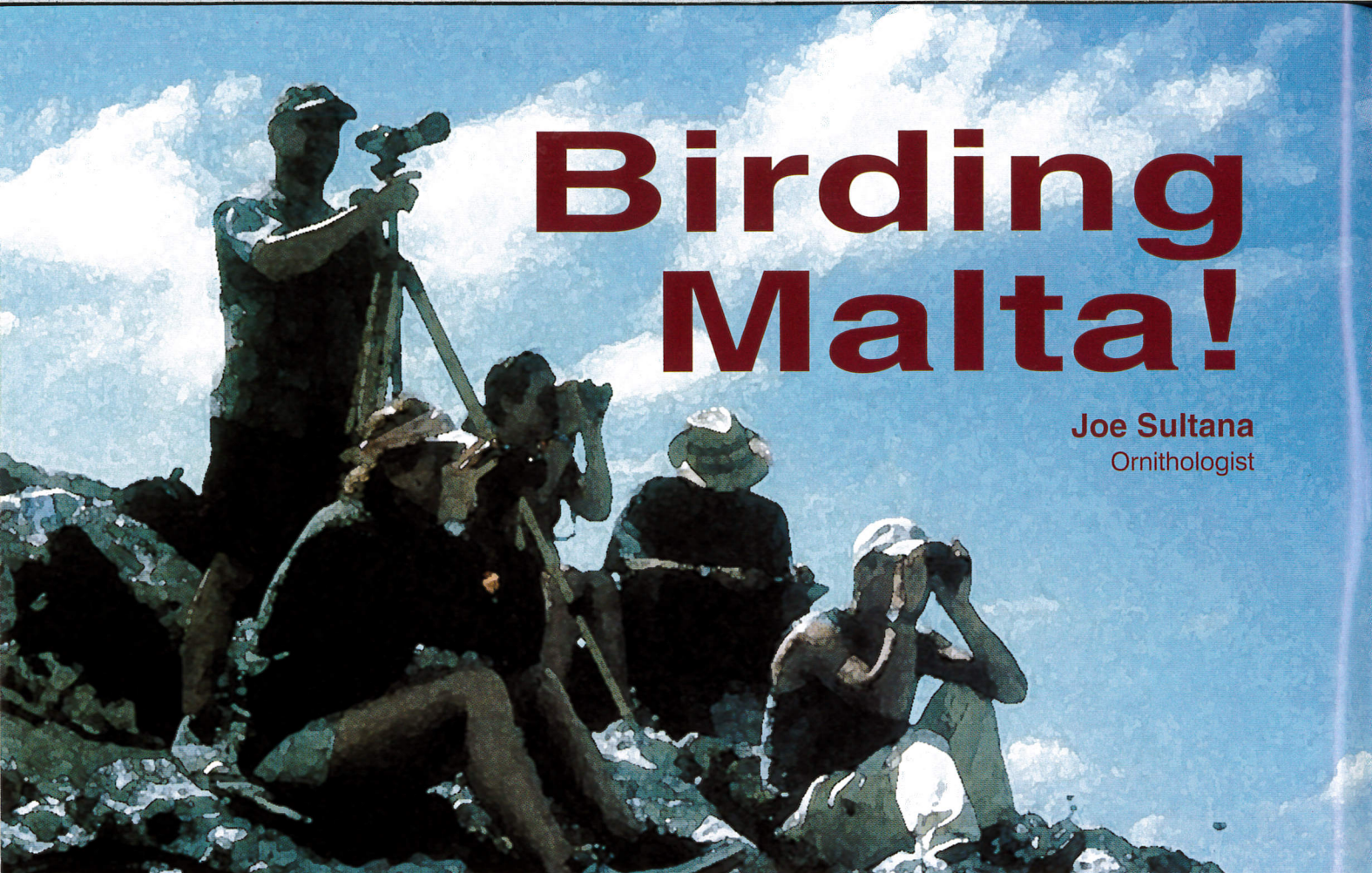
(Photos: Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon, Justin Vassallo)



Not game! Using an electric magnet, police collect metal tacks and nails from the area, after someone tried his feeble best to disrupt BirdLife Malta's activities.







# Birding Malta!

Joe Sultana  
Ornithologist

In the past, the cropping of migrant birds was an important source of food in the countries bordering the Mediterranean. Today of course there is no more vital need for catching birds in this part of the world. Yet birds around the Mediterranean shores are still hunted and still caught in their millions. Traditions are apparently much harder to kill than birds, so the killing is now carried out for the fun of it! This self-centred mentality has precluded that other, much less intrusive culture - the gentle art of birdwatching.

In a country as densely populated as Malta, birds are under severe pressure from human activity. Hunting and trapping are widespread, but so also are building and road development, quarrying, agriculture, the use of chemicals, marine pollution and so many other human factors which daily encroach on what little countryside is left. Still there are pockets of natural beauty, especially in the west and north of the country and in the sister islands of Gozo and Kemma. Here one finds steep rocky ridges and maquis slopes, garigue areas and small valleys choked with vegetation.

Characteristic mild winters mean that nature never shuts off for the cold season, so plants proliferate and flower early. Insects move in for the feast, and these in turn bring in the birds!

In the first days of March the widespread Sardinian warbler is already busy, singing and building its nest. Cetti's warblers vent their staccato



Ta' Ċenċ cliffs - best for Cory's shearwaters

outbursts of song from densely-vegetated valleys, while blue rock thrushes display their songflight along the limestone seacliffs.

The open countryside is full of the incessant call of zitting cisticolas, which frequently stoop above their nesting site in the tall grass, where one of their harem busily weave the purse-like nest. By contrast the shy, scarce spectacled warblers are less evident. Their presence in the remote treeless parts of the countryside is betrayed by a low churr, and a careful scan should soon show up one or two perching on a low bush. For a birdwatcher from the north on his first visit to the Mediterranean, this bird (and probably the Sardinian warbler too) could easily be a new tick.

There are more new species to see. In March short-toed larks start arriving. They occupy every part of the open Maltese countryside and males sing all the time, high up in the sky above their territory, from early morning. They are summer visitors to the islands, where they remain until September. Then they flock and move south again. Cory's shearwaters are also summer visitors. For these birds, one has to look out at sea, especially in the evening before it gets dark. Post yourself at any spot above the high southern and western cliffs of the islands, particularly in Gozo,

and you may see the shearwaters rafting in large groups two or three kilometres out at sea, waiting for darkness. At nightfall they fly to the cliffs, where they sail around wailing before settling on the ledges in front of their cliff-face burrows.

The good thing about birdwatching in Malta is that you don't need to travel far to get to the diverse habitats of all these birds. Different habitats are close to each other, providing contrasting scenery, with different bird species in relatively close proximity. This advantage is more in evidence with migrant birds which may appear all over the countryside irrespective of habitat!

In the Maltese Islands, more than anywhere else, the ornithological calendar is dominated by bird migration. Of the 375 species recorded in the islands, about 50 are winter visitors, about 112 regular migrants and another 180 rare and irregular migrants or vagrants. While the summer months are rather quiet for birdwatching, you cannot be in the field enough in spring and autumn. Although there is a consistent migration of birds throughout the islands in both seasons, weather conditions greatly affect quantities. On some days the islands may be flooded with migrants, while at other times there may be very little movement in evidence.

Migrants include species which winter south of the Sahara as well as those which go no further than the Mediterranean basin. By late summer, one may already spot herons, raptors, waders, hirundines, tree and tawny pipits, several warblers, chats and many others, which increase dramatically in September and October. In November the migration of trans-Saharan birds is replaced by influxes of the wintering species, like plovers, finches and other passerines. In spring



Sardinian warbler - year-round resident

Buskett woodland - a magnet for raptors



a similar progression happens between early March and late May, but in reverse order.

Hoopoes, marsh harriers, grey and night herons and swallows and martins in transit are among the first to appear in spring. They are followed by small passerines like subalpine, great reed and icterine warblers and later by golden orioles, bee-eaters, woodchat shrikes and the occasional roller. Several waders occur along the coast, at the few remaining waterpools in the valleys or in the marshy areas at Ghadira and the recently restored Is-Simar. What is sometimes lacking in quantity is well made up for in quality!

Successful birdwatching in the islands depends largely on knowing when and where to look. While there is generally no lack of suitable habitat for birds of the open countryside, there is very little woodland and wetland. Where these exist, such as at Buskett, Ghadira and Is-Simar, they always provide good birdwatching sites. So do the overgrown valleys, like Wied il-Luq and Wied il-Lunzjata. During migration, birds tend to funnel through these valleys.

Hunters and trappers are unavoidable in the countryside, and birdwatchers should always avoid clashes with these people. It is always best to know what is legal and what is not. Several good sites for birds, such as Kemma and Buskett, are protected bird sanctuaries, but in most parts of the countryside hunting and trapping of a number of species is legal. It is always best to keep to the footpaths,

which intersect the countryside well and lead along most valleys which are among the best areas for birdwatching - there are hardly any birdwatching spots which cannot be reached by car or by foot. Most of the coastline is equally accessible, and the coastal areas on the sheltered side from wind direction are always amongst the best for birdwatching during migration.

## Best sites

### Malta

Bahar iċ-Ċagħaq/Għallis • Bahrija/Fommir-Rih/Gnejna • Buskett/Wied il-Luq • Dingli cliffs • Girgenti, Ghadira nature reserve • Is-Simar nature reserve • L-Ahrax • Mtahleb/Selmun • Qammieh • Salina • Wied il-Qlejgha,

### Gozo

Ta' Ċenċ • Wied il-Lunzjata • Wied Marsalforn, Wied Mgarr ix-Xini, Wied ir-Ramla, Wied San Blas.

### Kemma

All the island.

Short-toed lark - breeding summer visitor





# Looking Ahead!

**Desirée Falzon**  
Council chairperson

As the world turned its eyes to the new millennium, BirdLife Malta took a look at the past: what had 38 years of campaigning for birds achieved? A list of successes chalked up bird protection laws, widespread awareness, bird sanctuaries, nature reserves etc. Not a bad show at all. But birds? Why were birds still being massacred all over the place?

Banners, letters of outrage and protest marches had left an indelible mark on the Maltese nation and its legislation, but apparently this was not enough. Why weren't the bird laws doing their job?

It was time to tackle the very people who could translate written law into action. It was time to tackle the government.

When in government, both PN and MLP had given concessions to hunters in face-losing efforts to win their favours (and their votes). Never mind BirdLife Malta's outcry at the shameless U-turns and inroads into the bird protection laws. No amount of protest was reddening any faces - the government washed its hands of the problem.

So BirdLife Malta decided to take another, much tougher route: talk to the hunters themselves! If we could get the hunters at least to agree on the need

to abide by the law, then BirdLife Malta would have cooled a very hot potato scorching government's hand, and scored a victory for law enforcement.

Easier said than done! BirdLife Malta knew that talking to the traditional enemy would take courage and a great deal of calm. But BirdLife Malta was never one to give up. In August 1999 BirdLife Malta began informal talks with FKNK, the main hunters' federation.

A year of discussion later, BirdLife Malta and FKNK had agreed on one principle: the law is there to be enforced. In June 2000, the informal discussions were given the stamp of an official body, the Foundation for Wild Birds Conservation.

Hell broke loose! It came mainly from other environment groups, who

are used to the traditional strategy of confrontation. Needless to say, the press vultures also homed in! BirdLife Malta had to weather storms of disagreement, misinformation and outright slander. At the same time it had work to do.

The Foundation next discussed a package that would be acceptable to

both groups. This package would then be presented to the government for implementation. Top priority for BirdLife Malta was

persuading government to implement a strategy for the control of hunting abuses. The Foundation obtained the approval and some financial backing from the government, and BirdLife Malta was now hopeful that any resulting agreement should be for the better. Yet it was under no illusion that there would be drastic overnight changes.

In July, the agreement between BirdLife Malta and FKNK was made public. The two organisations would supervise three projects:

a) the government would set up a monitoring board to ensure that hunting regulations were respected.

b) BirdLife Malta would work on a project to reintroduce the barn owl, a species which had been exterminated from Malta.

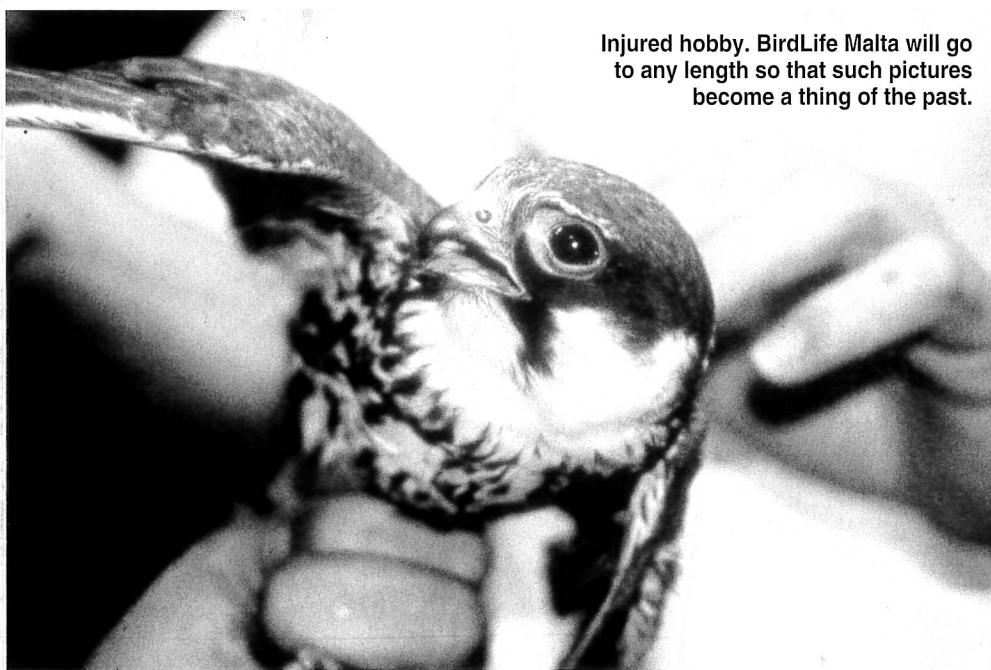
c) FKNK would start farming quail as a game bird to ease pressure from wild populations.

As the news made headlines, BirdLife Malta once again had to take the flak from other environment groups. This was too avant-garde for some to be comfortable with, and many accused BirdLife Malta of throwing



**No amount of protest was reddening any faces - the government washed its hands!**

**Injured hobby. BirdLife Malta will go to any length so that such pictures become a thing of the past.**



away its principles. But once again our organisation pushed on, keeping the longterm goal in sight through this difficult period. The future would prove whether dialogue was a more effective strategy than head-on collision.

In July, the government launched the Environment Monitoring Board (EMB). BirdLife Malta, the hunters and the Environment Protection Department would sit on the EMB together with the Police and the Armed Forces to discuss a strategy for law enforcement. The Board was not only detailed to plot a strategy for enforcement but also carried the responsibility of seeing it through.

The EMB was soon to face its first test: the imminent autumn migration. The place: Buskett, notorious for the annual mass slaughter of protected birds. That the woodland was a bird sanctuary had never stopped hunters from shooting down entire flocks of honey buzzards, marsh harriers and other "manly" trophies.

This time, however, we were promised that things would be different.

BirdLife Malta's birdwatchers waited anxiously as the first trickle of raptors appeared over the treetops.

No shots!

Eventually, wave after spectacular wave of raptors settled in the trees every evening, taking off the following morning to continue their migration. Marsh harriers, bee-eaters, honey buzzards, kestrels, short-toed eagles,



swallows - not a feather touched. And no wonder: the police were patrolling Buskett from dawn to dusk, the Armed Forces were throwing road blocks in the evenings and BirdLife Malta's activists were constantly present to see that the watch was kept up. The effort paid off! We had saved the lives of at least 4000 birds of prey! The Board had done it!

*The story isn't over, of course. This was only one migration season, and there are several other hunting hotspots in Malta and Gozo. A permanent strategy will have to be drawn up for future seasons. Will the forces of law and order show the same commitment?*

*The work of the EMB last autumn has given BirdLife Malta hope. It is a clear indication that dialogue can yield results. But it is much too early to cry victory. Before this kind of action becomes the order of the day, BirdLife Malta cannot*



**Top: Police removing illegal vertical nets from Buskett. Above: Hunter caught red-handed within the sanctuary limits.**

*for a moment relax its vigilance. Its work on the EMB will get harder as it moves on to turning its first victory into a watertight enforcement plan that no lawless hunter will slip through.*



**Left: Hunter feeling hunted! Below: Police officers on patrol at Buskett last September**





# That birds may live!

## BirdLife Malta's RaptorCamp 2000

Justin Vassallo Camp Co-ordinator

Watching a flock of marsh harriers circling over the aleppo pines at Buskett in the gathering dusk is one great spectacle for any birdwatcher, and a pity if enjoyed by only a few people! Watching these birds being blown apart by trigger-happy criminals is equally unforgettable, and sheer shame that it is allowed to happen! Hence BirdLife Malta's raptorcamps!

Raptorcamps have two main aims. One is to get foreign birdwatchers to share with us the wonder of raptor migration over Buskett; the second is to do something about the annual bird massacre in the Buskett area.

In 1998 we gave it a first try. Attendance then was not too high, but the enthusiasm shown by those few sowed the seed for RaptorCamp 1999 and beyond!

We publicised RaptorCamp 2000 on a special website on the Internet (raptorcamp.birdlifemalta.org) and the response was good...

Based at the YTC premises in the very heart of Buskett, we started off on 6 September with the German participants, sponsored by Naturschutzbund Deutschland NABU (BirdLife in Germany). Over the next few days the rest of the 23

participants had arrived and settled in. We got to know each other rapidly, and one thing became evident - we weren't here just to have fun birdwatching, but we were also here for the birds' sake!

Enforcement within Buskett looked good from the beginning. The presence of Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) personnel was very evident, and a number of local



A German television crew joined the camp to make a feature about birding and hunting in Malta.

police were also being daily posted in and around the woodland to help the ALE officers. A core of BirdLife Malta's birdwatchers were keeping up a daily vigil on high ground overlooking the valley. In the evenings, the Armed forces were also

making several road blocks.

Seeing that the situation in Buskett was under close scrutiny, we moved with the foreigners to watch from other posts, starting with

Dingli Cliffs. A very different picture awaited us there - since the cliffs did not fall within the range of the Buskett sanctuary, hunters there apparently felt more at ease, and were shooting raptors with relish!

We kept records of the birds we saw, but were not too sure all of them were leaving the Maltese shores. At Dingli the hunters rarely dared shoot while we were there. They did so

once early on during the camp, but we called the police at once on our mobiles, and within minutes they were on the spot, checking licenses and looking for hidden bird carcasses. Of course, once the hunters realised what we were doing there, we were thereafter subjected to daily insults, and on one occasion actually shot at. But once again we called for assistance and the hunter was promptly arrested. We knew we were running a bit of a risk here, denying these men what they believed was their god-given right. But then, to see a flock of honey buzzards sail over unscathed thrilled us all and made it all worthwhile.

Once we felt that Dingli was secure, we moved on to the next post - Girdenti. A tough nut indeed. Hunters

Black kite over Buskett. One raptor that made it!



have been killing honey buzzards since they were boys, so now no amount of education would change them. There was really no other way to control these people but to hunt them down in return.

Girdenti has several valleys around it, and the density of hunting huts here is much higher. This made it hard for us to tell who was shooting, and harder to see what the hunters were doing with the dead birds. We called the police to this area several times, but to little avail. One evening, during the peak period, we saw 23 protected birds (including an osprey) being killed in just one hour. But returning to camp that evening it was heartening to learn that in Buskett over 200 raptors, mostly marsh harriers, had settled without one shot being heard. Things unheard of! We were getting there, slowly.

Every evening, camp activities and bird records were emailed to interested people all over Europe.

During their stay, the camp participants had important meetings with various bodies and people in authority. These included the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Environment, the Opposition spokesman for the environment, the Assistant Police Commissioner and the chairperson of Alternattiva Demokratika (Green Party). A stand was set up to explain Malta's importance on the migration route, and several dignitaries who visited the



BirdLife Malta activists pointing out to the ALE areas where hunters were spotted. BirdLife Malta kept up daily surveillance at Buskett throughout September and October.

birdwatching station experienced the spectacle and majesty of raptor migration as honey buzzards glided low over their heads!

The camp participants didn't miss a chance to tell these people how raptor-watching at Buskett could be the perfect source of ecotourism, and how hunting was the only problem standing in its way!

Thanks to the co-ordination between BirdLife Malta activists and the enforcement people, bird protection at Buskett in September-October was virtually complete! Coupled with the fact that it was a magnificent migration, with over 4000 raptors logged, we all agreed that this camp was one unforgettable experience.

**"We were subjected to daily insults, and on one occasion actually shot at."**



Environment minister Francis Zammit Dimech and MLP environment spokesman Joe Mizzi visited Buskett's birdwatching station, with camp co-ordinator Joseph M Mangion (left) and BirdLife Malta president Antoine Vella (right).



## The Calabria experience

In holding with BirdLife Malta's belief in environmental education, BirdLife in February 2000 organised a visit for 22 Junior College students to spend a week at the bird protection camp in Calabria, Italy. Accompanied by three teachers and Justin Vassallo for BirdLife Malta, the group experienced the beauty of migration and saw how longterm dedication by the Italian police forces has virtually wiped out the once widespread illegal hunting in the region. The students' visit was funded by Federazione Mediterranea Falchi (FMF/HMF).

BirdLife Malta also believes that enforcement of the environment law is vital. So two weeks after the students' visit, BirdLife organised a second visit, this time for enforcement officers. Assistant Commissioner of Police Josie Brincat and two ALE sergeants were hosted by FMF/HMF and NABU at the same camp in Calabria, accompanied by Joseph M Mangion for BirdLife Malta. The Maltese delegation was shown how co-operation between birdwatchers and the Italian Police helped both parties, reducing illegal hunting on one side and facilitating law enforcement on the other. The Maltese delegation also met various officers of the Italian police and were taken for a patrol of the area on one of the Guardie Forestale helicopters.



# at the reserves

Mark Gauci  
Reserves supervisor

Panorama of Is-Simar

Many who visit Ghadira and Is-Simar are surprised at how rich Maltese nature can be. Some reasons are obvious: wetlands are generally richer in wildlife than dry habitats. Moreover, our tiny nature reserves are sheltered from disturbance and exploitation. But there's another reason. The two sites are managed in such a way as to offer maximum biodiversity. And this always entails work - of the hard, manual kind!

## The right stuff

Little bittern began breeding at Is-Simar in 1997. Why not before? Easy, you might say: because the area is now hunter-free and protected. That is true and vital, but still this tiny heron species would never have moved in just because the area was fenced off and guarded. The main reason was that there just wasn't the right habitat for the bird. Little bitterns need a reedbed where to hide, and pools of water where to fish - such habitats did not exist at Is-Simar a few years ago. But foresight and management has seen to that. Careful excavation remodelled the site into a patchwork of ditches and depressions, which soon filled with rain and seawater. Phragmites rapidly took over and proceeded to colonise!

## Reed riot

Reeds, however, tend to overdo it! Left to its own devices, Is-Simar would in a few years become one uniform reedbed, with no open water. Dead reed material would slowly pile up into a bed of sediment which would eventually push out all the water and the entire wetland would dry out. To keep water present, one

has to manually check the spread of reeds - the single most daunting job for the warden at Is-Simar.

Charles Coleiro, the managing warden, has the unenviable task of clearing entire stretches of reeds to maintain areas of open water. Not only is open water an extremely rare habitat in Malta, but in such areas, water-loving plants and animals can feed and grow, not least birds like moorhens, ducks and herons. Open water also attracts plenty of insects, something which doesn't go unnoticed, if the autumn hordes of yellow wagtails, swallows, house martins and sand martins are anything to go by. Wagtails and hirundines roosting in large



yellow wagtail

numbers at Is-Simar have become an annual autumn spectacle.

## Trail blazer

Another task that has taken a great deal of the warden's time was preparing a nature trail to allow visitors to make a tour of the reserve while keeping disturbance to a minimum. The trail at Is-Simar is different from the one at Ghadira in that it lies on the outside perimeter of the embankment. This was done purposely to keep the pool area as people-free as possible. Along the trail the visitor can make use of three birdwatching hides. Each hide looks over a different habitat: reedbed, deep pool and a mixture of shallow pool and reedclump.

The trail will also run through the olive grove, very popular with wintering starlings and thrushes, and over the canal - a magnet for squacco herons - that links the wetland to the sea.

The basic trail will be completed in 2001, when the reserve opens for school visits.

## Daily visits

At Ghadira, life has been equally busy for managing warden Charles Gauci and his assistant Mark Vella. Daily visits by schoolchildren means that the tranquillity of the nature reserve is daily exposed to a potentially disruptive group, which can be very harmful to wildlife. School groups are therefore carefully supervised and never left alone by the reserve personnel. The students are immediately made aware of this disturbance factor - learning to harmonise with wildlife is an education in itself. In 2000 Ghadira was visited by no less than 2926 students.

Weekend visitors were not in short supply either. A total of 4424 people visited Ghadira at the weekends. As usual this was made possible thanks to the commitment of a group of BirdLife Malta guides who show visitors around the site.

Since the reserve is visited every day, the nature trail has to be kept safe and fully accessible, while screening it off from the core

area. Screening is done either by reed fences or by planting vegetation along the trail. All plants are indigenous species grown on site in a well-tended nursery which today houses 3000 young trees and shrubs.



little ringed plover

## For LRP's sake!

The little ringed plover is a special bird for Ghadira, not only because the reserve has typical habitat for this small wader but also because a pair have annually nested at the reserve since 1995. A new breeding species is a major

achievement for biodiversity (and for Ghadira's reputation), but one pair is still much too tenuous a foothold for a new breeding bird. In 2000 the reserve management started preparing the way to create some other areas of shingle, very much favoured by the plovers for nesting.

## In our hands

The year 2000 was a landmark year for BirdLife Malta. After literally creating Ghadira and giving more than 20 years of voluntary work at the site, (and a decade at Is-Simar) the Society's contribution has at last been acknowledged. In July BirdLife Malta signed a contract with the Environment Protection Department through which the management of the two nature reserves passed into BirdLife Malta's hands, with an annual grant of Lm5000 to spend on the upkeep and development of each site. A part-time supervisor was immediately employed to co-ordinate all present and future works at the two reserves.

Ghadira in spring







Joe Sultana

Little bittern "bittern" for maximum camouflage

When the heavy excavation machinery moved out of Is-Simar, where a wetland was being re-created, nature began to take over. It did not take long for the site to be enhanced with a mosaic of thick clumps of common reed, thickets of tamarisk, brackish-water pools and flooded ditches. Birds moved in too - moorhens soon settled down and migrating reed warblers, attracted by a perfect habitat, stayed on and bred. The little bittern did that too!

The little bittern is a reed-haunting species, breeding in overgrown reedy pools, ponds and ditches. It is a European summer visitor that winters in Africa. It was therefore surprising to catch frequent glimpses of this bird and hear its muffled croaking calls at Is-Simar throughout the winter of 1996-1997. Two pairs eventually nested there the following spring, the first breeding record of this species for Malta.

There is no exception: give adequate habitat and some protection, and birds will respond!

The little bittern is the smallest heron in Europe. It is very secretive - its nasal calls are

## A rustle in the reeds

### The secretive little bittern



Joe Sultana

The nest, which may contain 5-6 eggs, is well hidden in the reedbed



Dennis Galea

The male little bittern's colour scheme make him easy to identify

usually heard at night, but the bird itself is rarely seen. During the day it hides in the reeds, feeding in the overgrown ponds, but it also walks out to forage at the edges of reed clumps. If disturbed, the bird will more likely retreat into the vegetation than fly off. When it feels exposed, it often assumes the "bittern stance", sitting motionless with its beak pointing upwards to look as reed-like as possible! If it does fly off, the whitish wing patches on the adults' dark wings are unmistakable. The adult male has black upper parts and a black crown, which contrast with the cream neck and buff-white wing patch. The female is duller, while the juveniles are streaked.

Food is mainly small fish, frogs and insects, which the bird picks from the waterlogged reedbeds. Its nest is usually a compact platform of reed stems and leaves built just above the water surface among the reeds.

The little bittern is the latest addition to Malta's breeding birds.

Joe Sultana



Raymond Galea

The young birds hatch after two weeks' incubation, and grow quickly. Note bittern instinct even at this early age.



# Klabb Huttaf

The BirdLife Malta juniors... in pictures!



Not just birds! Klabb Huttaf is about all the environment, not only birds. This activity, for instance, dealt with things solar: the sun as the giver of life on earth, solar power as a clean source of energy, and threats from UV rays. The game above is part of a quiz. After the game, it was hot dogs and drinks for everyone! (June 2000)

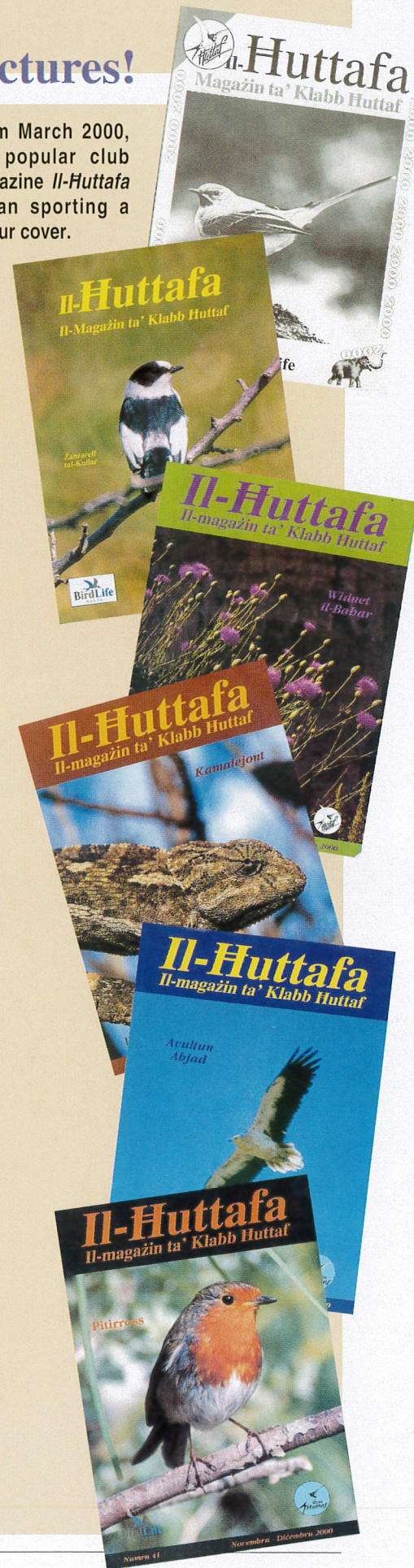


Prize winner. Jürgen Pavanello once more clinched the Huttafa of the Year 2000 award. The award encourages members to be active in as many club activities as they can and to help the club by getting new members. This award is given every year during the Christmas party. Above, Council chairperson Desirée Falzon has just presented the award to the beaming youth, while club chairperson Jason Aloisio looks on. (December 2000)



Job for the big boys! The club has a precious section that caters for teenagers. For this group, the 13+ section of Klabb Huttaf organises special activities. Special because they are more adventurous or more demanding, like bike hikes, night hikes, camps and manual work at nature reserves. The group above is giving a much-needed helping hand in clearing excess vegetation at Ghadira. (July 2000)

From March 2000, the popular club magazine *Il-Huttafa* began sporting a colour cover.



# Dinja Wahda

## Environmental Education Extravaganza

Victor Falzon Education Unit

On 24 October 2000, Dinja Wahda 1999-2000 came to a close in the very same hall where it had been launched a year before. As the neatly uniformed delegation from De La Salle College walked up to collect its gold trophy, the members of BirdLife Malta's Education Unit let out a deep breath: another year-long campaign was over, and it was worth every effort.

Dinja Wahda (meaning *One World*) is BirdLife Malta's idea of environmental education. It's varied, it's action-packed, and most of all it's good, clean fun! It is a big event: big because it spans an entire scholastic year, and big because it is a national event. This was the second edition of Dinja Wahda (the first was held in 1994-95) and for the 1999-2000 edition, 31 schools took active part.

The campaign revolved around 20 environmental activities with varying degree of organisation - the harder the project, the more points. Activities included collecting used batteries, producing vegetarian recipe books, promoting solar energy, writing to the press, organising fundraising walks, making bird tables and nest boxes, clean-ups, writing to the press, petitioning for the protection of narcissus, growing oaks for afforestation and putting up a nature board. Through all this, we hope that Maltese children will grow out of the idea that *environment* just means keeping the floor spotless!

BirdLife Malta is hugely grateful to Nos Oiseaux, a Swiss bird protection organisation, for footing most of the costs, as well as to the other sponsors, namely HSBC, Sunkist and Fuji Film.

A published report of Dinja Wahda 1999-2000 is available from BirdLife Malta.

**vegetarian day**

**Litter survey**

**Gardening**

**bird table**

**Making nest-boxes**

**Clean-up**

**Nature board**

**Growing oaks**

**Going solar**

**battery banking**

**GREEN CLUB AT WORK**





The Cory's shearwater is one of four seabirds which breed in the Maltese Islands. The bird has very secretive habits - they spend all their life at sea, and only visit land at night. So shearwaters come into very little contact with people, which is why many do not even know of the existence of this cousin of the albatross. Last year BirdLife Malta set out to do something about this lack of awareness, and launched its Adopt a Shearwater campaign.

# Ma Shearee!

## Shearwater adoption campaign

The idea was to get people learning about shearwaters and helping out in their study and protection. The scheme was set up to encourage groups or individuals to sponsor research of Cory's shearwaters.

Nothing new really - similar schemes are popular overseas, where groups raise funds for tigers, elephants, rhinos, chimps, oranges, whales etc. The question was: how popular was this going to be in Malta?

We needed a mascot! So BirdLife Malta had a shearwater chick specially made for this campaign by renowned Dutch soft-toy makers Anna Club Plush.

Shearwater expert John J Borg chose a number of

shearwaters which he had been individually monitoring for a number of years. Little did these birds know that their life was soon to be the focus of families, classes, entire schools!

BirdLife Malta produced factsheets and life histories of every bird selected, plus photograph. Each "parent" was given a special adoption certificate, with promise of future updates about what "their" bird was up to. And of course a shearwater soft toy! All this for a one-time payment of Lm6. BirdLife Malta also produced a colour leaflet and a poster to promote the scheme.

Response was most encouraging, and requests for info and adoptions had poor Liz Curmi at the office besieged - one school alone adopted 36 birds! The soft-toy was particularly magnetic, and we had children hanging on to the chicks on display at the BirdLife stalls, and refusing to let go!

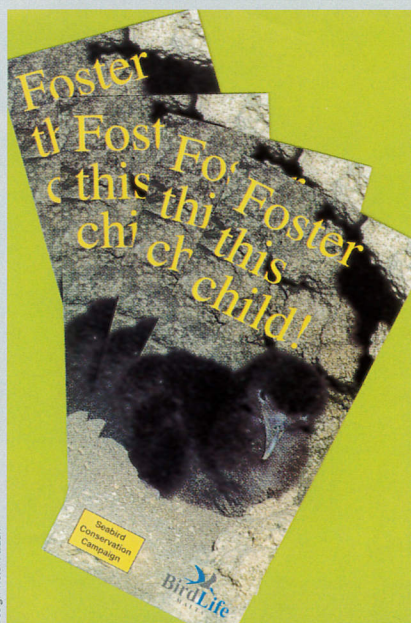
So far, more than 500 adoptions have been made. With the profits, BirdLife Malta is upgrading its research of Maltese breeding birds, with special focus on shearwaters.

They deserve it!

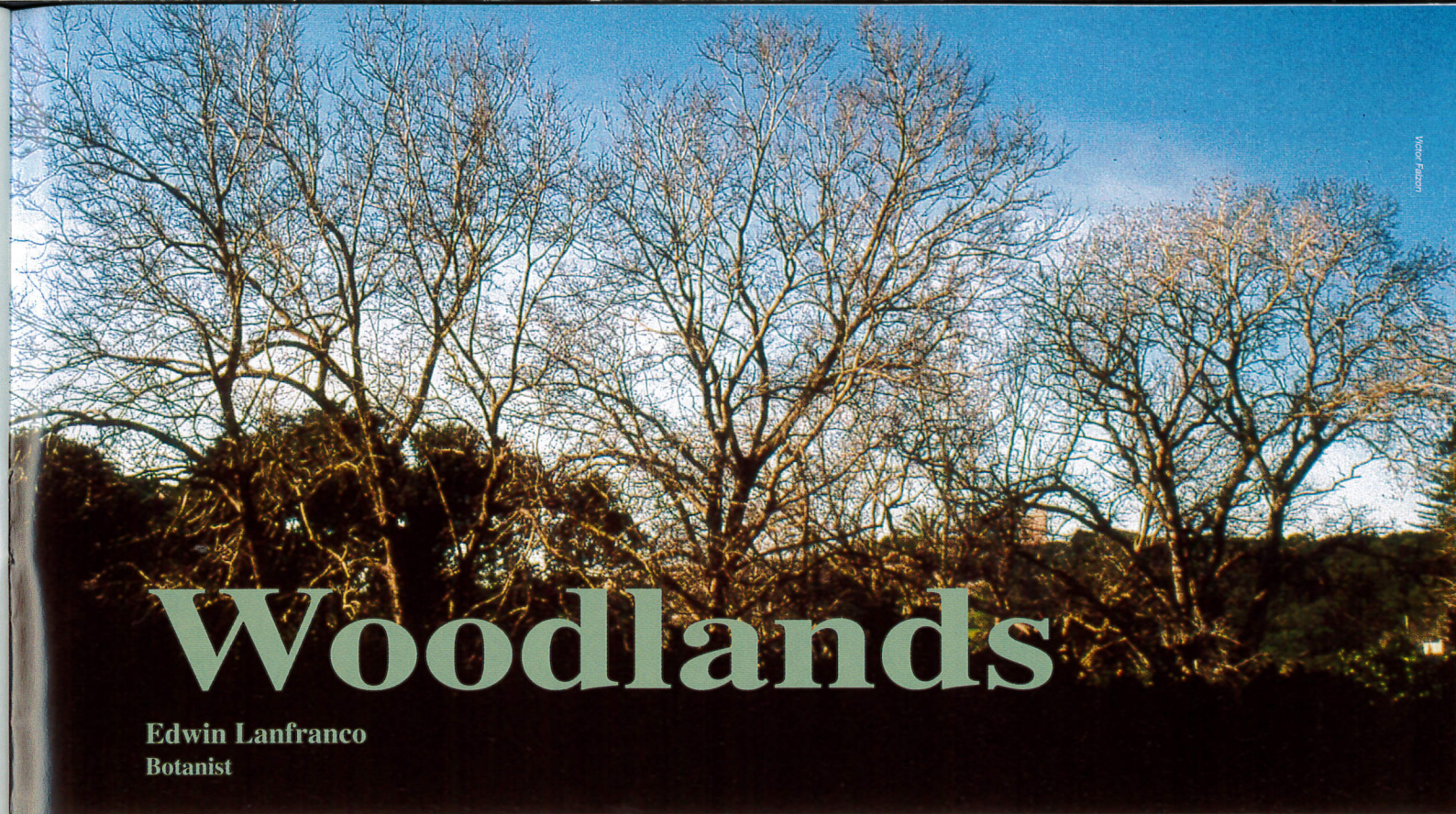
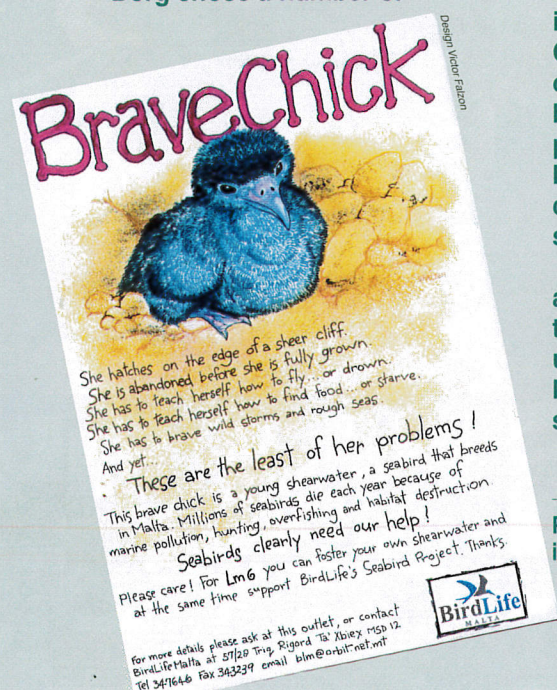
Promotional poster used in shops and in publications.



Schoolgirls fawning over shearwater soft-toys at the BirdLife Malta stall on Environment Day 2000!



A special leaflet was produced to promote the adoption scheme and to highlight Malta's seabirds and their problems.



# Woodlands

Edwin Lanfranco  
Botanist

The Mediterranean area includes several types of woodland. In fact the typical Mediterranean climax vegetation is evergreen wood dominated by species of oak and pine. Also very typical of the Mediterranean area is the maquis (makkja), a low woodland characterised by an assortment of small trees and large shrubs and a rich undergrowth of large herbs and woody climbers. In addition, there are riparian woodlands and shrublands which skirt rivers and water courses, as well as highland woods in the mountainous areas.

The Maltese Islands lost most of their woodlands over the past few hundreds of years, cleared to make place for agriculture, pasturage and urbanisation; trees were also felled for fuel and construction material.

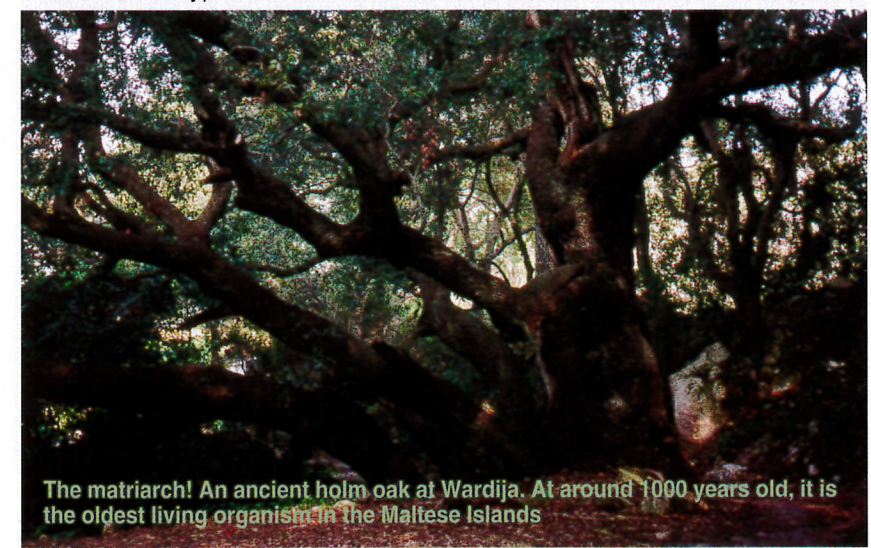
The typical Mediterranean evergreen wood is represented by remnants where some **evergreen oak** still survives. Some of these trees, such as those at Wardija, are several hundred years old. Other wild oaks can be seen at Mgġebah, Wied Hażrun/Ta' Baldu and at Buskett. Most of the Wied Hażrun trees were destroyed about a decade ago in order to clear the land for agriculture. The native **Aleppo pine** was wiped out by the 19th century, though the species has been planted for afforestation and embellishment purposes; and there are numerous cases of regeneration. A magnificent Aleppo pine at Mgġebah may be a survivor of the original population since

it is almost certainly several hundred years old.

While the woods practically disappeared, Malta still has numerous patches of maquis. Since many of the maquis species are useful, their growth has been actively encouraged and they have been cultivated over the millennia and the use of many such trees and shrubs has spread from their original native haunts to all other areas of the Mediterranean. These trees eventually integrated with native species within maquis communities. Such maquis which is dominated by trees introduced in antiquity is known as secondary maquis, while trees and plants introduced in antiquity are known as archaeophytes. Most maquis throughout much of the Mediterranean area are of this type.

In the Maltese Islands the maquis is characterised by familiar trees like **carob** and **olive**, of which some very old specimens exist at Bidnija - both are archaeophytes. True natives include the **lentisk** (or mastic tree), the rare **myrtle** and **bay laurel**, which is on the increase. Also on the increase is **Mediterranean buckthorn**, which may not be a true native. This increase in several maquis species is due to the drastic decline of agriculture and pasturage over the past two decades, allowing maquis to regenerate where soil and shelter is sufficient.

A very peculiar maquis is that dominated by Malta's national tree, the **arar** (or sandarac) of which only one sizeable population remains, in addition to a few scattered trees. Medieval Arabic accounts suggest that it was



The matriarch! An ancient holm oak at Wardija. At around 1000 years old, it is the oldest living organism in the Maltese Islands



much more widespread. The arar is a conifer rather like the **juniper** (which may once have been native) but is more closely related to the commonly cultivated **cypress**. The arar is most widespread in NW Africa where it grows on hillsides, often forming open woodland. In Europe it only occurs in southern Spain (Murcia and Andalucia) and Malta.

The maquis trees mentioned so far are all evergreen and sclerophyllous (leathery-leaved, in order to conserve water); but deciduous trees also co-exist with these. Where deciduous trees dominate, the community is known as pseudomaquis. The most common deciduous denizens of the maquis are **fig**, **almond** and occasionally **pomegranate** and **jube**, all archaeophytes. Native species include **hawthorn**, the rare **terebinth**, and **Christ's thorns** - last seen in Gozo in the mid-1970s, and therefore possibly extinct.

Maquis trees and shrub generate very nutritious leaf-litter so that their undergrowth is often rich and includes lianas (woody climbers) such as **ivy**, **spiny asparagus**, **bramble**, **madder**, **sarsaparilla** (common smilax) and **evergreen traveller's joy**, uncommon but on the increase.

The maquis undergrowth also includes a series of often large herbs (non-woody plants) with a high nutrient requirement like **bear's breeches**, **lords and ladies**, **friar's cowl**, **alexanders** and **stinging nettle**.

Exotic species frequently insinuate themselves in maquis and pseudomaquis communities, often carried by birds or water. Such exotics include the **false pepper** from South America, the invasive **castor oil tree** from southern Africa and the **prickly pear** from the Americas, also very invasive. Undergrowth lianas may include exotics such as the oldworld **grapevine** and **American grapevine**.

Riparian woodlands are all but extinct in the Maltese Islands. These are found lining the banks of water courses (widien) and permanent springs. Most trees of this community are deciduous and include **white poplar**, two species of **willow** (both very rare) and the **hoary elm**, also very rare. Non-native elm species such as *Ulmus minor* and *Ulmus glabra* occur, as well as the possibly archaeophytic **ash**. Other exotics include **pecan nut**, **walnut** and the invasive **tree of heaven**.

In water courses which open into the sea and in saline marshes, there is another community with small trees like **African tamarisk** and **chaste tree**, this last particularly in Gozo. Elsewhere in the Western Mediterranean they are joined by **oleander** which in Malta only occurs in cultivation and the occasional escape, but which may have been a true native in the past.

Finally, there are communities dominated by more or less recently introduced exotic species which have run wild. Examples are the **blue wattle** on sand dunes and **sweet-thorn** along water courses, the tree of heaven along valley sides and roadsides and the **tobacco tree** on disturbed ground.

The Maltese Islands may have lost most of their tree cover. But the fact that woodlands existed in the not-too-distant past suggests that, given the will, it is possible to re-establish these communities, particularly on abandoned agricultural land where, as stated above, maquis communities are regenerating at their own speed.

A little nudge on our part will help no end!



At Mgiebah (near Selmun) a remnant of old growth evergreen oak woodland somehow survived.

Evergreen oak - ballut *Quercus ilex*  
 Aleppo pine - Żnuber *Pinus halepensis*  
 Carob - Harrub *Ceratonia siliqua*  
 Olive - Żebbuġ *Olea europaea*  
 Lentisk or Mastic tree - Deru *Pistacia lentiscus*  
 Myrtle - Rihan *Myrtus communis*  
 Bay laurel - Rand *Laurus nobilis*  
 Mediterranean buckthorn - Alaternu *Rhamnus alaternus*  
 Arar or sandarac - Gharghar *Tetraclinis articulata*  
 Juniper - Ġnipro *Juniperus* spp.  
 Cypress - Ċipress *Cupressus sempervirens*  
 Fig - Tin *Ficus carica*  
 Almond - Lewż *Prunus dulcis* = *Amygdalus communis*  
 Pomegranate - Rummien *Punica granatum*  
 Jujube - Żinzel *Ziziphus zizyphus*  
 Hawthorn - Zagħrun *Crataegus monogyna*  
 Terebinth - Skornabekk *Pistacia terbinthus*

Christ's thorns - Xewk ta' Kristu *Paliurus spina-christii*  
 Ivy - Liedna *Hedera helix*  
 Spiny asparagus - Spraġ xewwieki *Asparagus aphyllus*  
 Bramble - Għolliq *Rubus ulmifolius*  
 Madder - Robbja selvaġġa *Rubia perezgrana*  
 Sarsaparilla - Żalza pajżana *Smilax aspera*  
 Evergreen traveller's joy - Bajda *Clematis cirrhosa*  
 Bear's breeches - Hannewija *Acanthus mollis*  
 Lords and ladies - Ġarni Arum *italicum*  
 Friar's cowl - Ġarni tal-pipa *Arisarum vulgare*  
 Alexanders - Karfus il-hmir *Smyrniolum olusatrum*  
 Stinging Nettle - Hurrieq *Urtica dubia*  
 False pepper - Bżar selvaġġ *Schinus terebinthifolius*  
 Castor oil tree - Siġra tar-riġnu *Ricinus communis*  
 Prickly pear - Bajtar tax-xewk *Opuntia ficus-indica*  
 Grapevine - Dielja *Vitis vinifera*

American grapevine - Dielja Amerikana *Vitis vulpina*  
 White poplar - Luq *Populus alba*  
 Willow - Żafzaf *Salix alba* and *Salix pedicellata*  
 Hoary elm - Ulmu/Nemmisa *Ulmus canescens*  
 Ash - Fraxnu *Fraxinus angustifolia*  
 Pecan nut - Ġewż Amerikan *Carya illinoensis*  
 Walnut - Ġewż *Juglans regia*  
 Tree of heaven - Xumakk falz *Ailanthus altissima*  
 African tamarisk - Bruka *Tamarix africana*  
 Chaste tree - Siġra tal-Virġi/ Ghadiba *Vitex agnus-castus*  
 Oleander - Oljandru/Difla/Siġra tal-wirdien *Nerium oleander*  
 Blue wattle - Akaċja *Acacia saligna*  
 Sweetthorn - Gazzija *Acacia karoo*  
 Tobacco tree - Siġra tat-tabakk *Nicotiana glauca*

# Birdwise...

## The BirdLife Malta Research Group

Joe Sultana Chairperson Research Group

BirdLife Malta's Research Group is made up of about 25 active members who carry out various ornithological studies. Some do bird-ringing while others record bird observations, ranging from simple sight records to longterm observation of breeding habits and distribution. The year 2000 was no exception.

### Recording...

As in former years, all sightings have been compiled for the year 2000, with daily records from Ghadira, Is-Simar and other areas, like Buskett (mainly for birds of prey in autumn), Kemmuna (for spring migrants), Qawra and Qammieħ (mainly for waterbirds in winter and spring), which are covered regularly by these members at certain times of the year.

Interesting records include breeding **house martins** (5th record for Malta), a small influx of the rare **Moussier's redstart** in Gozo, **Paddyfield warbler** (3rd record) at Ghadira, **duky warbler** (3rd record) which spent some months also at Ghadira, and **grasshopper warbler** (9th record) on Kemmuna. Of course, it is not only the scarce or rare migrants that are recorded - common species are also logged so that at the end of the year patterns of movement can be drawn for all species.

### Ringing...

In 2000, the 12 licensed ringers who run BirdLife Malta's Ringing Scheme ringed over 10,000 birds. These include 86 chicks of **yellow-legged gull** and 434 **European storm-petrels**, ringed on Filfla over three expeditions, where data on the moult of petrels was also recorded.

The Ringing Scheme also organised the annual spring migration studies on Kemmuna, as part of the Mediterranean Islands Project co-ordinated by the *Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica* in Bologna. It also participated in the autumn Barn Swallows Project, organised by Euring, which is the European ringing network. This study involves regular ringing of hirundines from mid-September to mid-

October at two sites, Is-Simar in Malta and Lunzjata in Gozo.

Several interesting birds were also recovered (see table). Recoveries are birds ringed and recaptured in different countries, giving invaluable data about bird-movement across continents.

### Observing...

The Research Group is presently concluding a three-year project locating

and recording the frequency and distribution of Malta's breeding birds. This atlas will be the first of its kind in the Maltese Islands, and will be published in 2001.

Various members are also carrying out specialised studies on specific species or groups of species.



After an absence of 17 years, house martins were back in the breeding business in 2000 - a pair (more exactly, a partnership of three adults!) raised a brood of chicks under the porch of a house near Had-Dingli. The resident human family were ecstatic!

Species	Year ringed and country	Where recovered
Cory's shearwater	1991 in Crete	Marsalforn, Gozo
Common kestrel	1996 in Finland	Mellieħa, Malta
Garden warbler	1997 in Malta	Italy
Yellow wagtail	1998 in Germany	Żejtun, Malta
Blackcap	1998 in Slovenia	Rabat, Malta
Common chiffchaff	1999 in Switzerland	Ghadira, Malta
Whitethroat	2000 in Malta	Sweden
Common kingfisher	2000 in Germany	Ghadira, Malta
Common chiffchaff	2000 in Malta	Italy
Barn swallow	2000 in Norway	Lunzjata, Gozo
Willow warbler	2000 in Sweden	Ghadira, Malta
Willow warbler	2000 in Malta	Poland
Common chiffchaff	2000 in Slovenia	Ghadira, Malta

Ringed and recovered. This table lists 13 birds ringed in one country and recovered in another. Such records are hugely important in the study of birds' migration patterns. All the above were recovered in 2000.



# Shaping up!

BirdLife Malta on Kemmuna

Mark Gauci Project Co-ordinator

To ring birds you need good sites. Some places, like Buskett, Ghadira, Is-Simar and Wied il-Lunzjata are well-known hotspots and are regularly "worked" by BirdLife Malta's ringers. Other sites are less often visited, either because they are not very fruitful or else because reaching them is too much of a hassle for a half-day ringing session. For many years Kemmuna fell into this latter category, and was only visited haphazardly. But all that changed in 1991, when BirdLife Malta joined the Italy-based *Piccole Isole* Project, a pan-Mediterranean study, during which ringing sessions last rather more than a few hours!

The annual Piccole Isole (Small Islands) bird ringing project (see p19) is a month-long continuous effort to study migration of birds over small islands. This project spans from 16 April to 15 May, after which all data collected is sent to Bologna University for analysis and subsequent publication. For this project BirdLife Malta needed a regular site to use every year. Being a small island, Kemmuna was the natural choice. Moreover, the island has been a bird sanctuary since 1970 and is relatively safe for birds, except for some illegal hunting by the local farmer.

The site chosen on Kemmuna is Wied I-Ahmar, a shallow valley roughly in the middle of the island. Almond trees afford some cover, while garigue species have colonised the stretches of abandoned fields lining the slope of the valley. Due to the largely bare and windswept nature of the rest of the island, Wied L-Ahmar acts like a funnel and birds tend to move through it in large numbers during migration.

For the past 10 years, ringers and helpers volunteering for the project have had to live in spartan conditions, sleeping out in tents, with little protection from strong wind, rain and an inquisitive rodent population!

In 1994, BirdLife Malta leased part of Wied I-Ahmar from the government. In the area there is an old, derelict pumphouse, made up of three small rooms. An idea began to take shape in the minds of the Kemmuna working group: what if we converted this small building into a ringing station? It would be tiny, but permanent and all-weather: a base from where local and foreign ornithologists could pursue bird studies all year round.

All that was needed was a plan, some money and plenty of hard work! Financial help came in May 2000 when Vogelbescherming (BirdLife in the Netherlands) agreed to fund the project. A plan and budget were drawn up. Work kicked off in June.

Summer temperatures soared to 40°C, but volunteers sweated it out and gave their very best. Organising the trips and carrying the material was a mammoth task in itself, as the only transport was the hotel ferry - the rest had to be carried on foot, were they tools, sacks of cement, tiles - and all the water!

The rooms were first cleared of huge mounds of rubble. The rough-stone walls were then cleared of the old earth "plaster" and properly sealed and

re-plastered from both sides, though not smoothed or whitewashed. The roof too was cleaned and treated with sealer and compound. The floor, originally compacted earth, was installed with anti-damp plastic sheeting, cemented over and is now in the process of tiling. It is hoped that by the end of 2001 the place will have basic water and electricity supply.

Future plans include afforestation of the abandoned fields to act as shelter and forage for incoming migratory birds.

*The Kemmuna working group is composed of Mark Gauci, Joseph M Mangion and Manuel Mallia. The group would like to thank all helpers who are making this dream come true, namely Valentina Brincat, Norman Chetcuti, Audrey Chetcuti, Franco Farrugia, Jean Paul Farrugia, Stanley Gatt, Carmen Gauci, Charles Gauci, Tina Hahl, Marie Louise Mangion, Caldon Mercieca, Arnold Sciberras, Saviour Spiteri, Simon Suda, Justin Vassallo and Christian Zepf.*

Getting the mix right (below) and tiling the floor (bottom).



Mark Gauci



Mark Gauci



The old pumphouse. The building will make the perfect ringing base.

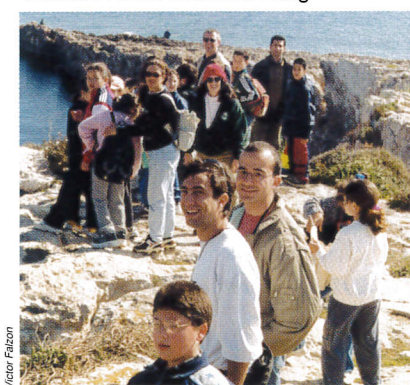
## It happened last year... BirdLife Malta's calendar of events for the year 2000

### January 2000

- 08 Council mtg
- 10 Conservation committee mtg
- 11 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 12 Education committee mtg
- 20 BirdLife at tuna-penning hearing
- 20 Education Unit workshop
- 27 Talk to Youths
- 31 Conservation committee mtg

### February 2000

- 01 Lobbying/Communications workshop
- 01 Conservation committee mtg
- 02 Council mtg
- 02 Dinja Wahda press conference
- 03 Talk to Youths
- 04 PR icw Dinja Wahda
- 07 Mtg with Environment minister
- 07 New RaptorCamp website launched
- 10 Youth Leaders' outing
- 10 PR icw Hunting in Egypt
- 14 *Il-Huttat* 36 published
- 16 Klabb Huttat committee mtg

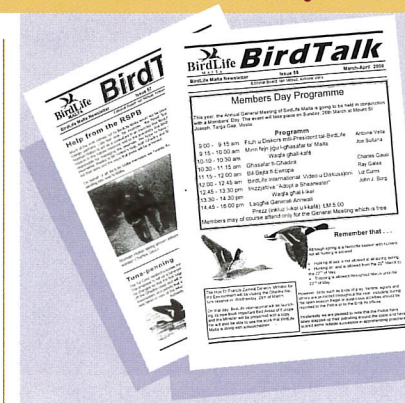


Victor Fazio

- 20 Klabb Huttat outing to Mistrà
- 23 Meeting re Kemmuna
- 24 Talk at St. Martin's College
- 26 Klabb Huttat 13+ bike hike

### March 2000

- 02 Education committee mtg
- 03 *BirdTalk* 57 published
- 04 BirdLife at Hunters' conference
- 04 Klabb Huttat at National Youths Council conference
- 08 Reserves committee mtg
- 09 Mtg with Environment Perm Sec
- 12 Klabb Huttat marathon hike
- 16 Klabb Huttat at Waste and Environment conference
- 17 Mtg with PA re Foresta 2000
- 18 Adults outing to Is-Simar
- 19 Klabb Huttat 13+ hike



- 20 BirdLife at CoE seminar
- 20 *BirdTalk* 58 published
- 21 BirdLife presentation at CoE seminar
- 22 BirdLife at CoE seminar
- 23 Council mtg
- 23 PR icw BirdLife's aims
- 24 BirdLife on TV (*Xarabank*) icw hunting
- 24 PR icw illegal hunting
- 28 BirdLife meets Barrie Cooper (RSPB)
- 29 Environment minister visits Ghadira
- 30 AGM

### April 2000

- 04 Conservation committee mtg
- 04 BirdLife on Voice of the Mediterranean
- 05 *Il-Huttat* 37 published
- 06 BirdLife at Greenweek 2000
- 07 BirdLife at Greenweek 2000
- 08 BirdLife at Greenweek 2000
- 09 BirdLife at Greenweek 2000
- 09 Klabb Huttat 13+ hike to Ras il-Pellegrin
- 10 Kemmuna working group mtg
- 12 PR re Adopt a shearwater
- 13 BirdLife meets Director EPD
- 15 Start of Small Islands Project on Kemmuna (ends 13 May)
- 16 Klabb Huttat outing to Kemmuna
- 17 New warden at Is-Simar



BirdLife Malta Pictures

- 17-24 BirdLife takes 22 students to Italy on bird migration camp
- 26 BirdLife gives talk in Messina
- 28 BirdLife gives talk in Calabria
- 30 Klabb Huttat outing to Kemmuna

### May 2000

- 07 BirdLife meets Johanna Winkelman (Vogelbescherming - BirdLife in the Netherlands)
- 09 Talk on EU by Edward Osiek
- 11-15 BirdLife takes ALE to Calabria on raptor training course
- 11 Talk to volunteers icw BirdLife International
- 12 BirdLife meets Johanna Winkelman
- 13 Last day of Small Islands Project on Kemmuna
- 15 BirdLife and ALE return from Calabria
- 18 Council mtg
- 24 Conservation committee mtg
- 25 *Bird's Eye View* 1999 published
- 25 Kemmuna working group mtg
- 29 BirdLife meets Environment perm Sec
- 30 BirdLife meets Assistant Police Commissioner

### June 2000

- 01 Education committee mtg
- 02 Launch of Foundation for Wild Birds Conservation



Dorelle Fazio

- 07 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 12 PR icw Foundation for Wild Birds Conservation
- 13 BirdLife meets Environment minister icw counter proposals
- 13 Conservation committee mtg
- 15 Council mtg
- 15 BirdLife meets Environment minister
- 18 PR icw law enforcement
- 19 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 21 BirdLife meets Assistant Police Commissioner
- 22 Kemmuna working group mtg
- 26 *Il-Huttat* 38 published
- 27 *BirdTalk* 59 published
- 28 Conservation committee mtg
- 29 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station



## July 2000

- 03 Conservation committee mtg
- 04 BirdLife meets Gozo Police Superintendent and ALE chief
- 06 Klabb Huttat indoor activity
- 13 Council mtg
- 13 Talk to Education in-service course
- 14 Talk to St Elena group
- 18 BirdLife meets Foreign Affairs minister
- 18 RaptorCamp working group mtg
- 19 BirdLife on *Radio Malta 1*
- 19 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 21 Adults outing to Ghar Hasan



- 22 Joe Mizzi (MLP) visits Is-Simar and Ghadira
- 29 RaptorCamp working group mtg
- 25 BirdLife meets Environment minister and Police
- 26 PR icw MLP visit to nature reserves
- 27 BirdLife meets Environment permanent secretary
- 27 Council mtg
- 28 BirdLife signs nature reserves contract with EPD
- 29 Klabb Huttat 13+ outing to Ta' Ċenċ
- 30 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 31 RaptorCamp working group mtg

## August 2000

- 03 BirdLife meets ALE chief
- 04 Volunteers barbecue
- 05 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 07 Education committee mtg
- 08 *BirdTalk* 60 published
- 08 Conservation committee mtg
- 09 *Il-Huttat* 39 published
- 11 Environment Monitoring Board launched
- 11 Seabirds leaflet published
- 12 Raptor Camp working group mtg
- 17 BirdLife and Police visit Buskett
- 18 BirdLife at UK Bird Fair day 1
- 19 BirdLife at UK Bird Fair day 2
- 20 BirdLife at UK Bird Fair day 3
- 23 BirdLife meets Police Commissioner
- 24 Council mtg
- 26 Adults outing to Ta' Ċenċ
- 28 Education committee mtg
- 30 Klabb Huttat committee mtg

## September 2000

- 03 Article icw raptors in Sunday Circle
- 04 Education committee mtg
- 05 Conservation committee mtg



- 06 BirdLife's Raptor International Camp begins at Buskett (ends 24 Sep)
- 06 PR icw Raptor International Camp
- 12 Environment Minister, MLP env spokesman, Italian Ambassador rep, visit Buskett birdwatching station
- 13 Asst Police Commissioner visits Buskett birdwatching station
- 14 British High Commissioner, Economic Services Parliamentary Secretary visit Buskett birdwatching station
- 14 PR icw Raptor International Camp
- 15 Tourism minister, Alternattiva Chairperson, German Ambassador visit Buskett birdwatching station
- 15 Klabb Huttat 13+ camp day 1
- 16 Klabb Huttat 13+ camp day 2
- 17 Klabb Huttat 13+ camp day 3
- 18 Press visit Buskett birdwatching station
- 18 PR icw RaptorCamp
- 24 End of Raptor International Camp
- 25 Environment Monitoring Board mtg
- 26 RaptorCamp working group mtg
- 27 *BirdTalk* 61 published
- 27 BirdLife meets new ALE chief
- 29 Klabb Huttat on Net TV

## October 2000



- 01 BirdLife's BirdFest at Buskett - World Birdwatch Day.
- 03 Raptor Camp working group mtg
- 04 BirdLife meets EPD re Foresta 2000
- 04 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 05 Raptor Camp working group mtg
- 06 *Il-Huttat* 40 published
- 12 Conservation committee mtg
- 13 Klabb Huttat indoor activity

- 16 Adults activity - talk
- 17 Education committee mtg
- 22 Klabb Huttat 13+ activity: tree-planting on Kemmuna
- 24 Dinja Wahda Award-giving ceremony. Close of Dinja Wahda 1999-2000
- 24 RaptorCamp working group mtg
- 25 BirdLife stand at Żejtun Junior Lyceum
- 30 Talk to Mrieħel Junior Lyceum

## November 2000

- 06 Adults Activity - Talk
- 08 Council mtg
- 09 Conservation committee mtg
- 10 Talk to school delegates
- 12 Klabb Huttat outing to Ghadira
- 14 Talk to Mrieħel Junior Lyceum
- 15 Education committee mtg
- 16 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 19 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 20 New RaptorCamp website launched
- 21 BirdLife meets Head of Agriculture Dept icw bird rehabilitation project
- 24 BirdLife meets vet Rydi Kovaks icw bird rehabilitation project
- 30 Education committee mtg

## December 2000

- 02 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 04 Meeting with new nature reserves supervisor
- 04 Raptor Camp working group mtg
- 07 Council mtg
- 11 *BirdTalk* 62 published
- 12 *Il-Huttat* 41 published
- 13 Manual work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 13 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 19 Education committee mtg
- 20 Klabb Huttat party



30 BirdLife volunteers' get-together

In the above calendar:  
PR is short for Press Release  
BirdLife is short for BirdLife Malta

## The people...

The members who manned the various BirdLife Malta sections and positions in 2000

**Honorary President**  
Joe Attard

**President**  
Antoine Vella

**Secretary**  
Denis Cachia

**Treasurer**  
Norman Chetcuti

**Council**  
Chair: Desirée Falzon  
Secretary: Denis Cachia  
John J Borg  
Alex Casha  
Norman Chetcuti  
Victor Falzon  
Raymond Galea  
Joseph Mangion  
Ian Mifsud  
Joe Sultana  
Antoine Vella

**Conservation Committee**  
Chair: Joseph Mangion  
Secretary: Audrey Chetcuti  
Alex Casha  
Raymond Galea  
Saviour Spiteri  
Justin Vassallo  
Antoine Vella

**Education Committee**  
Chair: Angèle Pulis/Sandra Mifsud  
Secretary: Victor Fioft/ Chris Pulis  
John J Borg  
Anthony Cordina  
Anna Maria Gatt  
Victor Falzon  
Michael Grima  
Fiona Laferla  
Glorianne Pace

**Klabb Huttat Committee**  
Chair: Jason Aloisio  
Secretary: Desirée Falzon  
Audrey Chetcuti  
Norman Chetcuti  
Victor Falzon  
Justin Vassallo

**Research Group**  
Chair: Joe Sultana  
Ringing Sec: Charles Gauci  
Asst Ringing Sec: Mark Gauci  
Ringers: John Attard Montalto, John J Borg, Denis Cachia, Victor Cilia, Charles Coleiro, Raymond Galea, Charles Gauci, Mark Gauci, John Grech, Manuel Mallia, Joseph Mangion, Joe Sultana.  
Rarities Comm: Caldon Mercieca

**International**  
Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana  
John J Borg  
Ian Mifsud  
Justin Vassallo

**Finance Committee**  
Anita Aloisio  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Nature Reserves Committee**  
Chair: Mark Gauci  
John J Borg  
Audrey Chetcuti  
Charles Coleiro  
Raymond Galea  
Charles Gauci  
Ian Mifsud

**Birdwatchers Club**  
Chair: Michael Sammut  
Edward Bonavia  
Marvic Sammut

**Office Management**  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Volunteers**  
Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon  
Ghadira vols co-ordinators:  
Audrey Chetcuti  
Manuel Mallia  
Mark Gauci

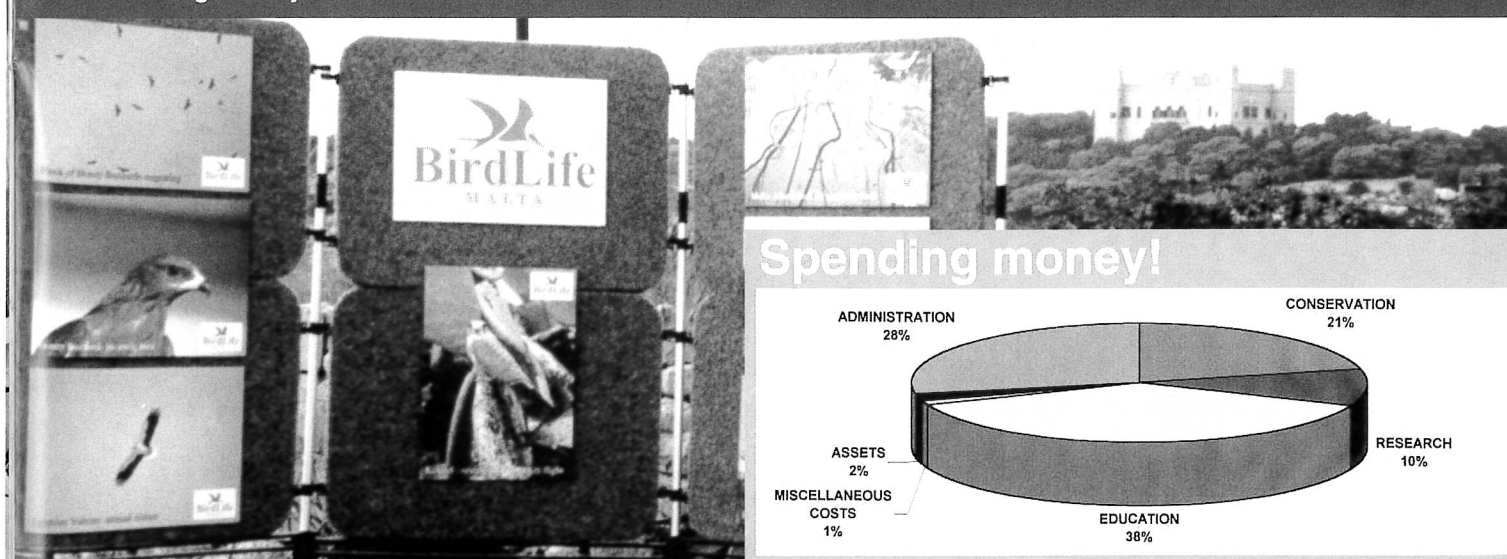
**Websites**  
Denis Cachia  
Konrad Pizzuto  
Justin Vassallo

**Publications Editors**  
*Bird's Eye View*: Victor Falzon  
*BirdTalk*: Antoine Vella, Ian Mifsud  
*Il-Huttat*: Victor Falzon  
*Il-Meril*: Mark Falzon  
*Ringing Newsletter*: Mark Gauci  
*Woodchat*: Michael Sammut

**Staff**  
Marketing: Liz Curmi  
Administration: Victoria Caruana  
Asst Sec: Catherine Abela  
Dinja Wahda: Sandra Mifsud  
Nature Reserves Supervisor: Mark Gauci

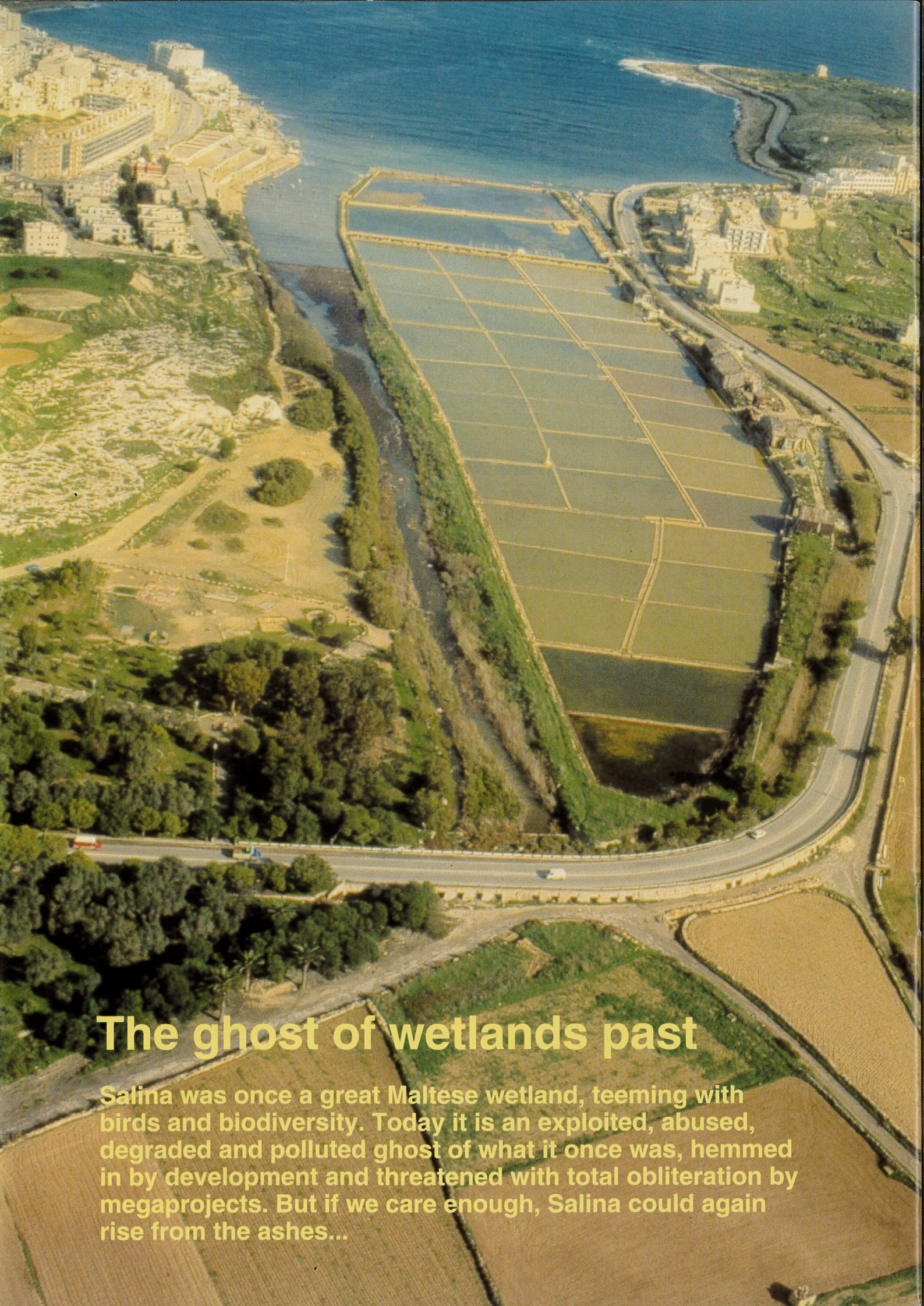


The list is far from complete. Many other volunteers have done their bit so that birds and nature may know a brighter day. BirdLife Malta is indebted to them all.



The piechart gives a simplified account of how BirdLife Malta allocated its funds in the period January-December 2000. A detailed financial account is available on request.





## The ghost of wetlands past

Salina was once a great Maltese wetland, teeming with birds and biodiversity. Today it is an exploited, abused, degraded and polluted ghost of what it once was, hemmed in by development and threatened with total obliteration by megaprojects. But if we care enough, Salina could again rise from the ashes...