

# Bird's Eye View

2003



  
**BirdLife**  
MALTA

Annual magazine 2003





BirdLife Malta was set up in 1962 as the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) and is today the largest environment 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. To achieve its mission, the organisation has used various approaches, ranging from anti-hunting street protests to the setting up and management of nature reserves, such as at Ghadira and Is-Simar.

BirdLife Malta publishes *Il-Merill* (a scientific bulletin), *Bird's Eye View* (the members' annual magazine), *Il-Huttafa* (the junior bimonthly magazine) *BirdTalk* (the members' bimonthly newsletter), and newsletters for ringers, school delegates and youth leaders. The Society also produces educational material including books, teaching guides, posters and leaflets for use by schools and other institutions. The organisation is also active in the press.

BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International.

BirdLife Malta can be reached at:  
postal address  
**57/28 Triq Rigord**  
**Ta' Xbiex MSD 12 Malta**  
tel (356) 21347646  
fax (356) 21343239  
email [info@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:info@birdlifemalta.org)  
website [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)

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Bird's Eye View was first published in 1977. This is the 21st issue.



Birdwise, Malta's strength lies with migration. We have neither huge wetlands or forests

with masses of breeding species, nor endless grasslands where clouds of geese or cranes stay out the winter. Our only claim to figures like the ones we read about in overseas reports are the colonies of storm-petrels and shearwaters. But these are shy birds who wisely keep out of sight of most people.

For the rest, the only quantity in number and in kind that we can enjoy in birds is during the short weeks of spring and autumn, and for that we have our geographical position to thank. Birds don't migrate haphazardly. Their journey is long and arduous, so birds do their best to soften the odds - one strategy they use is to cross as little sea as possible. This is why their flyways across the Mediterranean tend to bottleneck at three main spots where land almost bridges the sea: Gibraltar, the Bosphorus... and Sicily-Malta.

Thus, Malta lies on one of the few routes along which millions of birds shuttle between their winter to their breeding quarters, twice every year. Yet, few Maltese people are aware of this - perhaps we are too absorbed in our hectic lives to look up at the sky every once in a while. Whatever the reason, we are missing out on what the experts agree is among the most spectacular shows of wildlife on the planet. For many Maltese, this miracle of nature passes right over their heads. Even the country's promotional machinery consistently fails to mine what could be a rich vein, and this is surprising, considering the spread of ecotourism. While rightly extolling our unique megaliths and our rich history, tourist brochures never promote the Islands as one of the migration hotspots of the Mediterranean.

But then again, perhaps it is no wonder that Malta promoters think twice before mentioning birds to foreigners. Thanks to hunters, too many foreigners already associate Malta with birds, but for sadder reasons!

BirdLife Malta promotes the beauty of free and living birds with the hope that the miracle of bird migration will someday rank among the top prides of this country.

**Victor Falzon**  
Editor



# Lords of the Rings

## News from the Research Group

Charles Gauci

### Ringling

Although the complement of ringers went up by two at the beginning of the year (Justin Vassallo and Jean Paul Farrugia), the number of birds ringed in 2003 was just over 9300 - down by about 3500 from the previous year. The reasons for this decrease were a poor autumn migration and long periods of inactivity by several ringers.

Ghadira and Is-Simar, being constant-effort sites, were again the main ringing sites. Buskett was also very well covered throughout the year, and other main sites were Lunzjata Valley in Gozo and Rabat in Malta. Wied l-Ahmar on Kemmuna was again used for the Progetto Piccole Isole in spring, while a trial autumn ringing period there gave encouraging results, despite the poor migration.

Six Malta-ringed birds were recovered or controlled (netted and released by a ringer) abroad - see table below.

Hunters also took their toll on ringed birds - a common kestrel and a golden oriole ringed on Kemmuna in April were both shot the following day in Gozo, while a common kestrel and an osprey, both with Finnish rings, were reported shot in autumn.

Members of the ringing scheme also controlled a number of foreign-

ringed birds. Of special interest were two Hungarian-ringed barn swallows, both controlled on the same day (9 April) but at different sites - one at Ghadira and the other at Lunzjata. Others were a Danish-ringed willow warbler on Kemmuna in May, an Italian-ringed sedge warbler at Is-Simar in October, a Belgian-ringed blackcap at Buskett in November and a German-ringed common chaffinch at Is-Simar, also in November.

One of a flock of 17 Eurasian spoonbills which spent a few hours at Ghadira on 8 Apr 2003 was carrying a numbered plastic ring. Since the number was legible from a distance, it was possible to trace its origin to the Coto Doñana (Spain), where the bird was ringed on 7 Apr 1994.

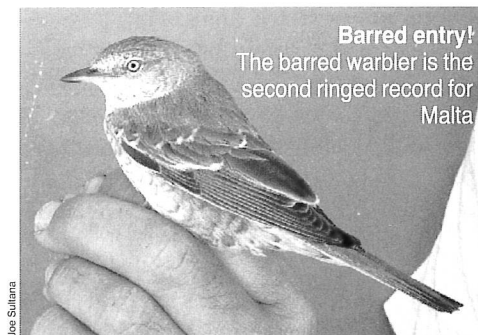
### Seabirds

John J Borg continued his ongoing longterm study of Cory's shearwater, visiting various breeding colonies several times between March and October. Filfla was visited twice - once during the day in May to ring the chicks of yellow-legged gulls breeding on top of the islet, and one night in early August to ring (and record moult) European storm-petrels and Cory's shearwaters.

### Birdwatching

As is recent years, Edward Bonavia co-ordinated raptor counts, especially in autumn at Buskett. Several other spots were regularly monitored, with particular attention to duck migration across the Kemmuna Channel.

**Charles Gauci** is a bird-ringer and member of the Research Group.



species	ringed on	recovered/controlled on
<b>dunlin</b>	28 sep 1997 at Ghadira	04 jan 2003 in N Scotland
<b>sedge warbler</b>	08 may 2001 at Is-Simar	07 may 2002 in Turkey
<b>common kingfisher</b>	19 oct 2001 at Ghadira	13 apr 2003 in NE Italy
<b>barn swallow</b>	08 apr 2003 at Is-Simar	25 apr 2003 in Slovenia
<b>common redstart</b>	19 apr 2003 at Ghadira	16 jun 2003 in NW Russia
<b>garden warbler</b>	22 apr 2002 at Ghadira	23 aug 2003 in Croatia



mark gauci

# matters of reserve

Going through the lists of flora and fauna recorded at the nature reserves is a source of pride for anyone involved with the sites. With hard work, we have regenerated a living habitat from what was little more than a seasonal carpark and a sewage-logged wasteland. Hard work is the key phrase in managing Ghadira and Is-Simar, and 2003 was no exception.

## manning the sites

Charles Coleiro, managing warden at Is-Simar, again had reedbed control high on the agenda. A



golden samphire

Victor Falzon

delicate job, done manually with a garden lopper, this task is carried out in tricky situations, whether it's wearing uncomfortable thigh-boots, or rocking precariously while standing in a small wooden boat. But the results justify the hardship - birds thrive in this created habitat, composed of open water areas interspersed with clumps of reed and random stretches of open shoreline. In the migration period several heron species spent longer periods at the reserve, proving that the managed reedbed is becoming increasingly attractive to such birds. Wader species numbers showed a significant increase too. In the winter months, remaining bare patches of the northern and north-western embankment were heavily planted with chaste-tree, tamarisk and poplars. These trees should eventually provide important refuge to birds flushed from cover by hunters at nearby Mizieb.

Another section heavily planted was the area near the main entrance. Here several shrub species like hawthorn were used. Other works included a large sign above the

entrance gate and the screening of the entrance of the middle hide.

For the third summer in a row, managing wardens Charles Gauci and Alex Casha at Ghadira concentrated on replacing shrubby orache along the northern embankment with a variety of trees and shrubs attractive to various fauna. The areas cleared in the previous summer are already showing signs of vigorous growth, and this is a great incentive to tackle further areas.

As from this year, rainfall and water temperature started to be taken on regular basis, as well as water salinity and oxygen levels, apart from the daily records of birds and other fauna.

## educating the kids

The other very important aspect of the reserve - that of educating the future generation - was again in the hands of field teachers Jason Aloisio and Victor Falzon. The environmental experience shared with the schoolchildren was well-received, and all showed great appreciation and

teachers report great enthusiasm about the activity. This approach of teaching and educating about nature appreciation in the field is an important part of our mission to ensure a brighter future for the environment. Education packs were handed out to visiting students and a variety of small activities organised along the nature trail to help point out the various species and aspects of flora and fauna that inhabit the reserves.

In 2003, a total of 4182 students visited the reserves during school hours.

## teaming up

In 2003, the nature reserves committee held eight official meetings to discuss issues relating to the running of the reserves. The mix of experience and enthusiasm shown at such meetings are vital for the budding of new ideas to improve the reserve, both habitat-wise as well as a product for the general public to enjoy. The most notable outcome this year has definitely been the Reserves

Report for 2002. A 40-page report for each of the reserves was published, with detailed material relating to works and observations carried out at the reserves. The group intends to make the publication of such reports an annual commitment.

## at the weekends

Ghadira was again a preferred weekend destination for a good number of families, as well as an increasing number of tourists. Our team of dedicated weekend wardens handled around 7000 weekend visitors (including 2500 tourists). This popularity is hopefully also evidence of the public's increased environmental awareness.

After a successful marketing campaign over several years, enough funds were raised to start building the infocentre at Is-Simar. The lack of such a place has been the main reason why Is-Simar is still not open to the public. This situation should soon change thanks to financial help from UNESCO, APS Bank and MTA.



Black-necked grebe

## in the press

As in former years, the opening and closure of Ghadira was announced in the papers. In addition, a number of interesting articles appeared in the printed media in spring, to promote a special Migration Weekend which was held in April at the peak migration period. This event was also given prominence on television.

Mark Gauci is the nature reserves supervisor



Several small signs along the nature trails show names of flora

Victor Falzon



Reed monitoring is a priority job for the warden at Is-Simar

Jason Aloisio



# Last year...

## january

- 03 Vols get-together
- 04 Tree-planting on Kemmuna
- 06 BirdLife in The Times re Ghadira
- 07 Mtg with George Pullicino MP re changes in laws
- 08 Education Committee mtg
- 09 Council mtg
- 11 F2000 launch at Torri l-Ahmar
- 14 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 15 Research Committee mtg
- 17 F2000 Working Group mtg
- 18 Mtg with MLP
- 24 BirdLife on Xarabank (TVM)
- 26 PR re new hunting regulations
- 29 F2000 Working Group mtg

## february

- 04 School tree-planting at F2000
- 05 Conservation Committee mtg
- 06 Council mtg
- 11 EPD Director visits Ghadira
- 11 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 12 Education Committee mtg
- 13 BirdLife on TVM re hunting
- 13 School tree-planting at F2000
- 14 Il-Huttatfa 54
- 15 Falko Committee mtg
- 18 BirdLife in The Times
- 21 Public talk: Gozo's natural environment
- 22 BirdLife in The Times
- 26 BirdTalk 75 out
- 27 BirdLife on PBS re hunting/EU

## march

- 02 PR re killing of lesser kestrels
- 03 Teacher outing to Wardija
- 04 Work at Wied l-Ahmar, Kemmuna



Members outing to Kemmuna

- 05 BirdLife interview by Swedish TV
- 06 Council mtg
- 11 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 12 Birdwatchers' mtg
- 13 F2000 mtg
- 17 BirdLife mtg PLCS re Salina
- 19 Members outing to Kemmuna
- 19 Education Committee mtg
- 22 PR re Falko/LIPU camp in Italy

## april

- 06 Leader outing to Kemmuna
- 08 Education newsletter out
- 09 Education Committee mtg
- 12 PR re protection of Buskett
- 13 Falko Committee mtg
- 14-11 May Piccole Isole on Kemmuna
- 14 BirdTalk 76 out
- 15 Il-Huttatfa 55 out
- 19 PR re law enforcement
- 21 School delegates' outing to Wardija
- 21 F2000 mtg
- 22 Annual General Meeting
- 25 Council mtg
- 26-27 Migration Weekend at Ghadira
- 29 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg

## may

- 01 Klabb Huttat outing to Kemmuna
- 02 F2000 site mtg

- 04 Klabb Huttat outing to Kemmuna
- 09 BirdLife on Robin Hood (Super 1 TV)
- 09 PR re spring massacre of birds
- 10 Seabird expedition to Fungus Rock
- 12 LeaderActive newsletter out
- 13 Conservation Committee mtg
- 14 Education Committee mtg
- 17 Seabird expedition to Fungus Rock
- 18 Leader outing to nature reserves
- 18 PR re killing of spoonbill
- 19 Seabird expedition to Filfla
- 20 Council mtg
- 23 PR re close season
- 23 Reserves Committee mtg
- 27 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg

## june

- 03 Council mtg
- 03 PR re proposed zoo in Malta
- 05 F2000 tree-planting + MTA
- 06 PR re F2000
- 08-09 Seabird expedition to Filfla
- 09 Il-Huttatfa 56 out
- 10 BirdTalk 77 out
- 10 Ninu Zammit MP (MRI) visits F2000
- 11 BirdLife delegation to Brussels
- 11 PR re F2000
- 11 Education Committee mtg
- 14 Falko Committee mtg
- 25-27 BirdLife at Comenius seminar
- 27 Klabb Huttat Kwizz bis-Sens

## july

- 01 PR re closing of Ghadira
- 02 Education Committee mtg
- 03 Council mtg
- 04 F2000 on-site mtg
- 07-09 In-service course for Kindergarten Assistants
- 09 Launch of Ornis Committee
- 10 Reserves Committee mtg
- 15 PR re Kindergarten course
- 15 Ornis Committee mtg
- 16 Conservation Committee mtg
- 17 Council mtg
- 22 BirdLife on Qala Radio re hunting
- 23 Conservation Committee mtg



RaptorCamp outing to Ta' Ġenċ



European Directors Meeting

- 24 PR re hunting turtle/collared doves
- 25 BirdLife mtg Brig Ant. Montanaro
- 30 PR re World Conference on Raptors

## august

- 01 Il-Huttatfa 57 out
- 02 Falko outing to Ta' Ġenċ
- 06 BirdTalk 78 out
- 08 Bird's Eye View 2002 out
- 08-09 Seabird expedition to Filfla
- 11 Falko snorkelling activity
- 13 Education Committee mtg
- 13 PR re birdskin haul from Egypt
- 15-17 BirdLife at British Birdwatching Fair
- 19 PR re breeding collared dove
- 20 Mtg with EPD re reserves
- 21 Mtg with MEPA re F2000
- 22 Falko outing to Ghadira
- 23 USS La Salle crew voluntary work at F2000
- 23 PR re F2000
- 23 F2000 on TVM and Net TV
- 26 Education Committee mtg
- 28 Council mtg

## september

- 05 PR re killing of flamingoes, herons
- 05-07 BirdLife at Eur Dir Mtg in Paris
- 08-26 International RaptorCamp
- 09 Ornis Committee mtg
- 10 Education Committee mtg
- 12 ST Microelectronics visits F2000
- 21 PR re rampant hunting everywhere
- 26 PR Open letter to Prime Minister
- 28 Members' outing to Buskett

## october

- 01 Meusac mtg
- 02 BirdTalk 79 out
- 02 Council mtg Claire Papazoglou (BirdLife International ECO)
- 03 Interview by Belgian TV
- 03 BirdLife activists mtg Claire Papazoglou (BirdLife Int. ECO)
- 06 Mtg for ringers and trainees

- 18 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 20 BirdLife on RTK radio
- 21 Reserves Committee mtg
- 26 PR re International RaptorCamp
- 27 Conservation Committee mtg
- 28 LeaderActive newsletter out
- 28 BirdLife interview by French Radio

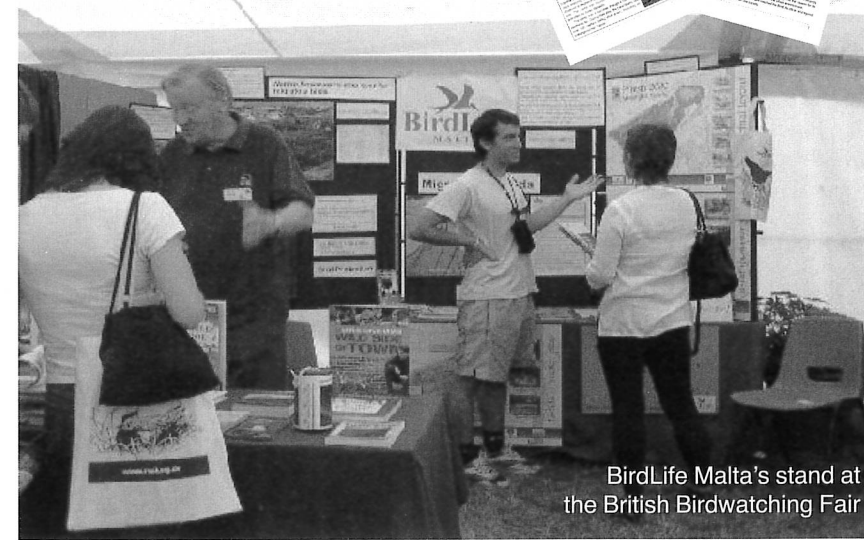
## december

- 05-08 BirdLife stand at Xmas Fair
- 05 BirdLife at waste management mtg
- 07 Leader outing to Wied Hażrun
- 10 Education Committee mtg
- 11 School delegates' newsletter out
- 11 Council mtg
- 12 Il-Huttatfa 59 out
- 15 BirdTalk 80 out
- 16 Research Group mtg
- 16 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 21 Klabb Huttat outing to Wied Hażrun
- 23 Bugz@Net (Net TV) at Ghadira and Is-Simar

abbreviations used  
PR = press release  
F2000 = Foresta 2000  
ECO = European Community Office (Brussels)  
EPD = Environment Protection Directorate  
PLCS = Parks and Landscape Conservation Section



Six more issues of BirdTalk

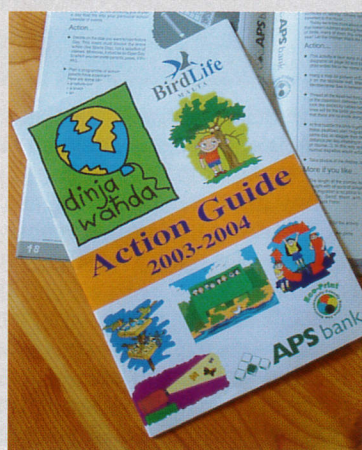


BirdLife Malta's stand at the British Birdwatching Fair



# Say it with...

Society material in 2003



## DW4 Action Guide

BirdLife's Education Unit produced the fourth generation Action Guide to accompany Dinja Wahda 4. The action guide is the main teaching aid for teachers who decide to do Dinja Wahda in their schools. The 36-page document describes each DW activity in detail, and also gives further tips, lists, contact numbers and supplementary information to make the activity a success. Text was by Desirée Falzon. Design and production was by Victor Falzon.

This year, the action guide also contained a sheet of DW stickers for schools to display on notice boards and classroom doors.



## not all

This page only covers the more colourful or voluminous items produced in 2003. Items like handouts, infosheets and newsletters are not included.

## shopwise

New BirdLife sale items this year were a pouch, home-made aromatic vinegar, a cloth bag and plastic rulers.



Design Desirée Falzon



Manufacture Mary Rose Vella



Design Victor Falzon



Design Victor Falzon

## wildlife postcards

Six new wildlife postcards were issued. For the first time, the set has widened subject matter to include fauna other than birds. Photos are by Denis Cachia, Ray Galea and Alex Casha



chameleon



red admiral



blue rock thrush



swallowtail



common coot



moorhen



## Reserve Reports 2002

BirdLife's Nature Reserves Committee produced the first set of annual reports about Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves. The 40-page reports cover the year 2002, and contain checklists and observations of flora and fauna of the site, with particular focus on the ornithology. The reports also carry management and educational reports for the year under review. Text was by Jason Aloisio, Alex Casha, Charles Coleiro, Victor Falzon, Charles Gauci and Mark Gauci. Design and production was by Victor Falzon.

## bus connection



For most of the year, public transport buses have been sporting two eye-catching BirdLife adverts. One (pictured above) promoted membership and featured a photo of a pochard, by Ray Galea; the other urged people to visit Ghadira, and featured an aerial view of the reserve, by Joe Sultana. BirdLife is grateful to Maltabus Ltd for its support.

# News from Kemmuna

Emanuel Mallia



At first glance, the landscape of Kemmuna does not promise much - a dry, windswept habitat, with very little tree cover, and with scars of past human disturbance. This description also fits Wied I-Ahmar, the shallow valley where BirdLife Malta has established the Kemmuna Bird Observatory.

But since the year BirdLife began studying birds regularly on Kemmuna, the place has proved to be unexpectedly good for birds - so much so, that the Maltese status of several species has had to be reviewed.

A typical example is the woodchat shrike - the figures reported on Kemmuna for this species in spring alone surpass the annual totals from all other sites in the country combined! Whinchats are also particularly evident, and icterine warblers no less. Numbers of icterine warblers handled at Wied I-Ahmar in 1997 and 2003 were 76 and 41 respectively. The corresponding figures for the rest of the country were 45 and 12.

Wied I-Ahmar has also become renowned for unusual and rare species. In 2003, the first collared dove and the first European bee-eater for Malta were ringed there. The highlight of the season was no doubt a barred warbler, a vagrant species for Malta, this being the third record of this bird (after 1955 and 1973).

One reason why birds are more evident on Kemmuna is no doubt the fact that the island is virtually hunter-free - Kemmuna is a bird sanctuary. Birds like raptors often spend days resting and hunting there, with no-one to bother them. Kemmuna is an indication of what Malta and Gozo could be like if hunting were to be brought under control.

As already mentioned, Kemmuna has been degraded by past human activity. Many acacia trees planted in the 1970s are now dying out, leaving the area alarmingly bare and exposed.

It is hoped that the system will be completed in 2004.

We are also grateful to Carlo Gavazzi Ltd for sponsoring a number of mist nets, and to Comino Hotel for reducing ferry rates for all ringers and helpers.

Kemmuna is never an experience to be missed. No wonder it is eagerly awaited from season to season by all regular participants.

Emanuel Mallia is a ringer and member of the Kemmuna Working Group

To counter this, BirdLife is planting several native species of trees and shrubs, and 2003 was no exception.

Despite the bad weather which made us cancel several expeditions, a tree-planting activity was successfully carried out, with sponsorship and volunteer assistance from HSBC. However it is not enough to just plant trees - without proper and frequent irrigation, the survival rate of the saplings is very low. SOF (Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening - BirdLife in Sweden) has generously funded the setting up of such an irrigation system.

Woodchat shrikes feature well on Kemmuna's ringing logbooks



The project includes the planting of trees, such as these sandaracs





# Seeding the Young

Desirée Falzon

Young people are relatively easy to recruit, but they just as readily drop out. This is a permanent challenge which any youth group co-ordinator has to face. **Klabb Huttat**, our junior section, is no exception.

Members come and go in droves every year. There is, however, a solid core of a few hundred members who join because they truly are budding naturalists. These young people stay on because the club satisfies their yearning for environmental knowledge, and because they can join in the activities which they find particularly stimulating. For us, this group is of great value - from its ranks will grow the next generation of naturalists and environmentalists. Most of the people who lead and co-ordinate BirdLife today trace their youthful beginnings to the hikes and camps organised by the YMS or MOSY (former names of the junior section). Likewise, several people who have made the environment their career were once junior members of BirdLife.

For us this is not just a great satisfaction, but also a great responsibility. Our main job as leaders of this section is to ensure these young minds will grow up with the kind of values that will give the environment high priority in their adult lives.

Over the year, the club organised two outings to Kemmuna, a quiz, a birdwatching hike to Mthaleb and an oak-seeding outing to Wied Hażrun. Falko, the teenage section, organised a hike to Wied iż-Żurrieq, two seawatch outings, a shearwater night at Ta' Ċenċ, voluntary work (+ barbecue) at Ghadira, and a snorkelling activity (see also page 22). Two outings for youth leaders were organised, one to Kemmuna and one to Wied Hażrun.

Klabb Huttat also published issues 54-59 of *Il-Huttat*, the junior magazine, and a new, full-colour junior membership card. The card displays a list of promises worthy of a young naturalist!

The club was co-ordinated by a committee of youth leaders, with a further sub-committee in charge of Falko. In 2003, club membership averaged at around 1300.

Desirée Falzon is a member of Klabb Huttat Committee



21 December 2003  
Oak seeding at Wied Hażrun

2 November 2003  
Audrey Chetcuti leading a hike to Mthaleb

27 June 2003  
Desirée Falzon explaining tasks for Kwizz bis-Sens



Six more issues of *Il-Huttat*

Bird's Eye View 2003

BirdLife Malta

# One World Four

Victor Falzon



The scholastic year 2003-2004 was a **Dinja Wahda** year. That meant good news for primary schools, especially those eager to get their hands busy and their boots muddy!

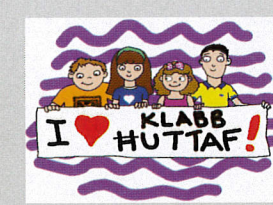
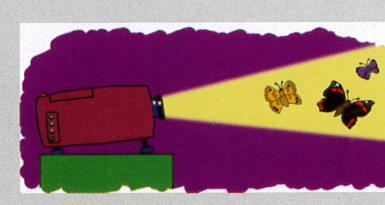
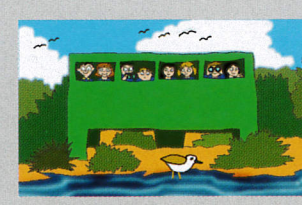
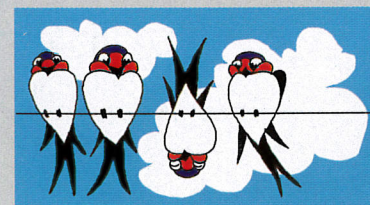
Dinja Wahda (meaning One World) is BirdLife's biennial bag of fun for schools. No waffle, no buzzwords - just a bundle of get-up-and-go action for nature, for birds and for people.

Throughout summer 2003, our Education Committee discussed and developed a number of activities proposed by Desirée Falzon. The group settled on eighteen tasks of varying level of difficulty. Next step was bringing it to the kids and making it work.



The next step produced the **Action Guide** (see pg 8), which explained the activities and gave loads of other tips and extra information. Thanks to generous sponsorship from APS Bank and EcoTrade we could print this key document and give away copies to all 160-odd primary schools in the country. BirdLife employed Theresa Cremona to be **Dinja Wahda co-ordinator**. Much of her work involved visiting the schools, interacting with the teachers, encouraging participation and generally helping out and solving problems related to the activities.

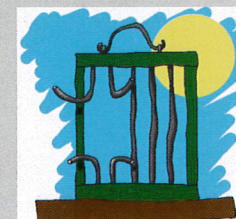
The activities included setting up a nature board, sowing acorns in recycled containers, doing a survey about hunting and trapping, writing to the press, visiting Ghadira, getting new members in Klabb Huttat, getting sponsors for small projects, doing migration games, doing robin games, organising a nature day at school, fostering a tree at Foresta 2000, making bird tables, getting BirdLife to give a talk, doing bookmarks featuring creepy crawlies and more.



Apart from the intrinsic value of every activity, Dinja Wahda also has the added fun of being a competition. Each activity carries points, which the schools add up. The schools with highest points get gold, then silver, bronze and merit awards. This year the sponsors themselves joined in the fun - APS organised a treasure-hunt, and EcoTrade made their environmental services available to the schools taking part in Dinja Wahda.

By Christmas 2003, over 40 schools were already taking part, with several more promising to join in during the second and third term - but those will be reported upon in Bird's Eye View 2004!

Victor Falzon is a member of the Education Committee



Illustrations on this page by Victor Falzon





## Small, Strange and Sea-going

### • the European storm-petrel •

An 18th Century manuscript by historian G.F. Agius de Soldanis contains an interesting reference to strange, black, foul-smelling birds breeding in a cave below Ta' Ċenċ cliffs. He did not know what species they were, but there is little doubt that the birds were European storm-petrels. That this same species has been recently rediscovered breeding in this same spot shows the amazing faithfulness of this bird to its breeding sites.

When A. Schembri described his first storm-petrels from Filfla in 1843, he thought he had discovered a new species, and named it *Thalassidroma melitensis*. This was corrected a year later by H.E. Strickland, who

found it to be identical to the *Hydrobates pelagicus* of the British seas. However recent studies are recognising a separate Mediterranean race: *H. pelagicus melitensis*.

The European storm-petrel is black with a white rump. It is slightly larger than a sparrow, with longer wings, webbed feet and slender legs. The short bill is slightly curved, and has the nasal tube characteristic of storm-petrels. Its call is a series of purrs and loud hiccups. The bird emits a peculiar musky odour, which is always present both on its plumage as well as at the colonies - no wonder the bird was once known as *bunittien* (stinker)!

The European storm-petrel has a bat-like flight, and flies very close to the sea surface. It feeds mainly on surface crustaceans, small fish, jellyfish and cephalopods. It is a pelagic species, spending most of its life at sea, and visits land only to breed. Its breeding haunts are offshore islands and inaccessible sea-caves, which it only visits at night.

There are two known colonies in the Maltese Islands: a large colony on Filfla - hence the Maltese name *kanġu ta' Filfla* - and a much smaller colony in the cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ. The Filfla colony is the largest known breeding site of this bird in the Mediterranean.

The birds start visiting the breeding ground from late February. The egg-laying period spans from April to July, but courtship is still at its peak in mid-May. Females lay their



**Old home.** The earliest breeding record is from Ta' Ċenċ cliffs in Gozo.

single egg in fissures, under boulders or on cave floors. The egg is white with faint reddish speckles around the broader end. It is nearly the size of a pigeon's egg, which is large considering the size of the bird. Incubation is carried out by both parents and lasts about 40 days. The downy hatchling is fed with regurgitated, part-digested food by both parents for about 70 days, by which time it is ready to fledge. The last young birds fledge in early October, after which the colonies are deserted.

The European storm-petrel has few enemies. Rats may raid nesting holes, while on Filfla yellow-legged gulls regularly prey on the small bird.

The European storm-petrel is a long-lived bird - some birds ringed on Filfla have been retrapped there more than 20 years later! The bird shares this longevity factor with other seabirds in its group, such as shearwaters and albatrosses. Perhaps it is nature's way of compensating for a hard life at sea.

Text and photographs by  
**Joe Sultana**

**Joe Sultana** is an ornithologist, and co-ordinator of BirdLife Malta's Research Group



**Down and out.** A downy chick, barely two days old.



**Filling out.** Two weeks later, feathers are replacing the down.

**Des res.** Filfla is the species's main stronghold in the Mediterranean. Note the yellow-legged gulls milling around the plateau.





# a botanist's look at coastal cliffs

Edwin Lanfranco

All of Malta's original natural cover has been changed by man's hand. The only areas of land possibly still untouched are the vertical cliff faces. Fortunately, a sizeable stretch of the coast of the Maltese Islands consists of such habitat.

Insofar as their scientific value, cliffs can be considered the most important habitat in the Maltese Islands. This is because they harbour so many of our endemic plants, possibly due to the hostility of the habitat, which decreases the competition.

- To survive on cliffs, plants need to adapt to several hardships, such as
- **low water availability** due to the vertical and near-vertical surfaces
  - **meagre soil presence**, limited to crevices and ledges
  - **low soil nutrient levels**, mainly due to leaching
  - **sea spray**, which reduces plants' capacity to absorb water
  - **over-exposure** to sun since most Maltese cliffs face south
  - **erosion** due to rather friable Maltese rocks
  - **low recruitment**, as much seed is lost due to lack of landing surface.

To overcome such conditions, several cliff plants have succulent, fleshy stems and leaves in which they store water, and their surfaces may be covered by scales or thick waxy layers to retard water loss. These layers are often pale-coloured, to reflect solar glare. They often have extensive root systems which lodge into narrow crevices, to ensure anchorage and to tap whatever water and nutrients are present. Seed dispersal is largely by wind, sometimes also by ants, birds and even rainwater runoff.

Cliff plants fit into three main categories:

- **species** strictly confined to cliffs - known as **cremnophytes**
- **species** which prefer cliffs, but also occur on slopes etc
- **species** which show no particular preference to cliffs

## Cliffhangers

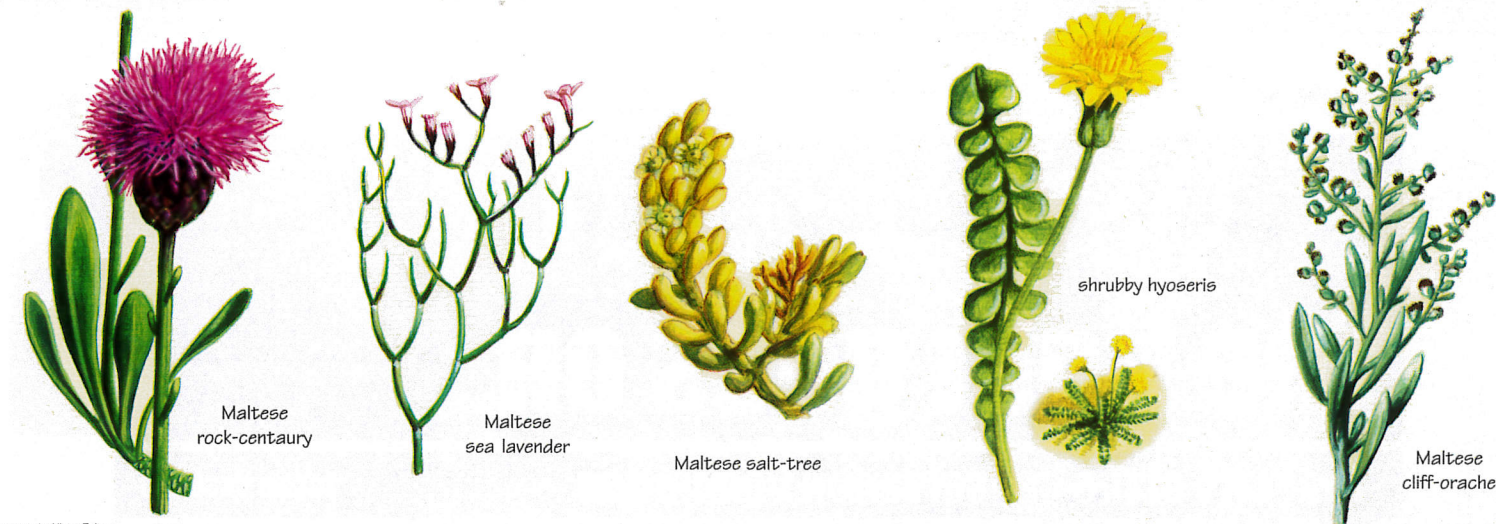
The species which are strictly tied to cliff habitats include some of the more

interesting species, these being mostly endemics. Endemic species are those which occur naturally only in a defined geographical area, in our case, the Maltese Islands.

The best known is the **Maltese rock-centaury**, a small shrub with smooth, fleshy spoon-handle shaped leaves. Its purple-red thistle-like flowerheads develop numerous tiny fruits equipped with fine bristles for better wind dispersal. It occurs almost uninterruptedly from Ghar Hasan to Fomm ir-Rih in Malta, but is scarce in Gozo. Despite its large population, very little recruitment has been observed, mainly because most of the fruits are eaten by the larvae of a moth!

The **Maltese cliff-orache** is perhaps the strictest cremnophyte, found almost exclusively on the sheer sides of lower coralline limestone cliffs, especially in the more sheltered parts. Its distribution is similar to that of the Maltese rock-centaury, but is rare and intermittent. It is a medium-sized shrub with very dense foliage of small, greyish-white leaves. Its autumn masses of tiny wind-pollinated flowers are followed by small fruits that disperse with the wind. Here too, there is very little recruitment of seedlings, and all wild plants are infected with a fungus, while many are parasitised by a kind of wasp.

The **Maltese salt-tree** is the commonest of the cliff endemics. It is a medium to large shrub, densely covered in small, cylindrical, fleshy leaves. It occurs in most cliff habitats, including inland cliffs, particularly in Gozo, where some hillsides support large populations. Its tiny flowers are wind-pollinated, and the small fruits have small appendages to assist in wind dispersal. The genus *Darniella* occurs mainly in North Africa and western Asia - the Maltese salt-tree is the only *Darniella* found in Europe.



Illustrations by Victor Falzon

## Some like it steep

Many species, while not exclusive to cliff habitats, grow mostly on cliffs and cliff-like habitats. Among the most familiar are the capers. Two species occur in Malta: the **common caper** and the **spiny caper**. Both are Mediterranean natives, the former by far the more common here. Capers seem to prefer cliff faces, but they also grow on rocky slopes, walls and fortifications. Their flowerbuds and fruits are pickled for human consumption.

The **greater snapdragon** is a western Mediterranean species, with reddish-mauve flowers, while the white-flowered **Sicilian snapdragon** was originally endemic to Malta and Sicily, but has spread to southern Italy, Spain and Croatia. Apart from cliffs, they grow on rocky slopes, heaps of stones, rubble walls, fortifications etc.

The **Maltese fleabane** is a common endemic and grows on cliffs, but also on rocky slopes and fortifications. It is a low shrublet which produces yellow-orange flowerheads in late summer and early autumn. In winter, it grows greyish leaves covered in white cobwebby hair, replaced in summer by smaller, greener leaves covered with tiny glandular hair. It is the plant featured on the 50c coin.

The endemic **shrubby hyoseris** is a low shrublet with stiff fleshy leaves with wavy margins and dandelion-like flowerheads. It is widespread in Gozo, growing in coastal sites and cliffs, also in rubble walls; on the island of Malta it occurs only in the Marfa peninsula.

Some five species of sea lavender occur in Malta, all coastal plants with high salt tolerance. One of these is the

endemic **Maltese sea lavender**, which grows mostly on cliffs, but also on other coastal rocks and clay slopes. It is a low shrublet, with bluish flowers in late summer and autumn.

The **Egyptian St. John's wort** occurs in Malta, Lampedusa, Sardinia, Morocco, Algeria, Crete and Lebanon - but not in Egypt! It is an attractive, low shrub with many small greyish leaves and masses of yellow flowers, usually growing in the upper part of cliffs.

The endemic **Maltese stocks** is widespread in Gozo, where it grows mainly on cliffs, but also in rubble walls and stony situations; on the island of Malta it only occurs in the Selmun-Mistra area. It is a short-lived shrublet with fleshy, wavy-edged white-hairy leaves, and violet-pink flowers which are followed by long seed pods.

The very rare **white round-headed garlic** ranges from central to eastern Mediterranean. In the Maltese Islands it has so far only been found on the cliffs at San Dimitri and Dwejra, Gozo.

On cliffs and other coastal habitats one also finds species of **wild carrot**, which also grow on Lampedusa. They are larger than the common wild carrot, with fleshy, shiny leaves and bigger flowerheads. Perhaps more than one entity is involved.

## Aliens

Several plants with wider habitat preferences also grow on cliffs. Unfortunately these include a number of invasive species. Among these is the well-known **fig tree**, originally imported from the eastern Mediterranean but now spread all over the region, invading maquis, but also growing in walls,

fortifications, cave mouths and, of course, on cliffs. **Prickly pear** was imported to the Mediterranean area after the discovery of the Americas. It is highly invasive and has overrun the countryside, invading the cliffs and potentially displacing the various cliff endemics. Due to the inaccessibility of cliff faces, it is very difficult to control - in parts of the Mediterranean, vast areas of cliffside are festooned with prickly pear. Two other species, *Opuntia vulgaris* and *Opuntia dillenii*, have also naturalised in Malta and can be seen growing in cliff communities. The **kaffir fig** was introduced from South Africa as an ornamental plant and is widely used as sand stabiliser in coastal sites. Nowadays it runs wild across the Mediterranean area where it is causing much harm to native communities. It also invades cliff habitats, such as Ta' Ċenc in Gozo, where it competes with the endemic and other native species.

The Maltese cliffs offer a unique vegetational community, and stretches of coastal cliffs are in fact protected. Yet they are becoming increasingly endangered, not just by invasive alien species, but also by quarrying - in some places the cliff face is just a thin veneer, parts of which have collapsed as a result. Dumping of building debris is another problem, and proposed clifftop developments are looming threats.

Considering not only the marked richness of endemic cliff flora, but also their inspiring majesty, effective protection of cliffs is more than justified.

**Edwin Lanfranco** is a lecturer at the Biology Department of the Malta University, and the country's leading botanist.

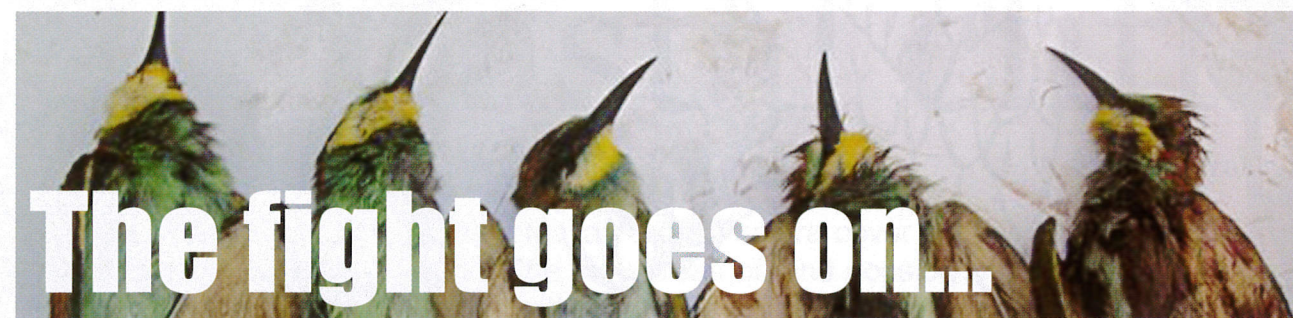
### Scientific and Maltese names of flora in the text

Maltese rock-centaury - *Palaeocyanus crassifolius*, Widnet il-bahar  
 Maltese cliff-orache - *Cremnophyton lanfrancoi*, Bjanka ta' l-irdum  
 Sea purslane - *Halimione portulacoides*, Bjanka tal-bahar  
 Maltese salt-tree - *Darniella melitensis*, Xebb or Sagra ta' l-irmied  
 Caper - *Capparis orientalis*, Kappar

Caper - *Capparis spinosa*, Kappar xewwieki  
 Greater Snapdragon - *Antirrhinum tortuosum*, Papocci hamra  
 Sicilian Snapdragon - *Antirrhinum siculum*, Papocci bajda  
 Maltese Fleabane - *Chiladenus bocconei*, Tulliera selvaġġa  
 Shrubby hyoseris - *Hyoseris frutescens*, Zigland ta' Għawdex  
 Maltese sea-lavender - *Limonium melitense*, Limonju ta' Malta  
 Egyptian St. John's Wort - *Hypericum aegypticum*, Fexfex ta' l-irdum

Maltese stocks - *Matthiola incana* ssp. *melitensis*, Gizi ta' Malta  
 White round-headed garlic - *Allium arvense*, Tewm ta' Għawdex  
 Wild carrot sp. - *Daucus rupestre*, Zunnarija ta' l-irdum  
 Wild carrot - *Daucus carota*, Zunnarija selvaġġa  
 Fig tree - *Ficus carica*, Sagra tal-lin or Sagra tal-bajtar  
 Prickly pear - *Opuntia ficus-indica*, Bajtar tax-xewk  
 Kaffir fig - *Carpobrotus edulis*, Swaba ta' tal-Madonna or Xuxet San Gwann





Illustrations by Joseph Mangion

# The fight goes on...

## The work of the Conservation Committee

Justin Vassallo

What with Malta's preparation for EU accession, the Birds Directive implementation and striking new project sponsorships, 2003 was as hectic as ever.

### Hunting and the EU

Following the conclusion of the EU accession negotiations, changes were made to Maltese bird protection legislation, in which the government retained hunting in spring. In June, BirdLife Malta wrote to the EU Environment Commissioner to highlight the divergences of this revised legislation. After another season of unabated law-breaking which included another massacre of raptors, BirdLife Malta called on the EU Commissioner to take decisive action. This was followed by a letter to the Prime Minister, asking for concrete action. Lobbying the three main political parties was another priority.

In December, the Society voiced its concerns to a visiting monitoring mission from the Environment Commission, which was here to assess the implementation of EU environmental legislation in Malta. Claire Papazoglou, head of BirdLife International's European Community Office in Brussels, also visited to witness first hand the local situation, and discussed with Society activists the implications for bird conservation in Malta within the EU perspective.

In August, the Society also participated in the BirdLife Birds and Habitats Directives Task Force meeting, and a Council delegation later went on a familiarisation visit to the BirdLife office in Brussels - the visit was funded by the TriPartite Committee.

### Media matters

Keeping the public informed of the realities which birds face in Malta is an

important aspect of conservation work. To this end, numerous press releases were issued and a strong presence maintained in radio and television throughout the year.

The Society also met and guided a number of visiting foreign reporters who were in Malta to witness and document the migratory birds and the illegal hunting situation. These included a South African documentary television crew and a Swedish children's television programme crew.

### Action stations

The fifth international RaptorCamp, now an annual event, was a 19-day bird of prey monitoring camp held at Buskett in September. BirdLife's presence in the heart of traditional killing fields served as a strong deterrent. Special guests of this year's camp were four Swedish youths with whom discussions were held for future co-operation.

The Society also had meetings with the police and with the AFM. Both parties were co-operative, and fruitful discussions were held vis-à-vis working together for better law enforcement.

Collection of injured birds by BirdLife activists was again a time- and energy-intensive task, especially at the height of the migration season. Meanwhile illegal hunting was constantly reported to the the ALE section of the police. The Society also set up a database of every single report of illegal hunting - such information will be useful to pursue our cause with the European Commission.

With all the work that is already being undertaken and with plans to extend our reach, more hands are needed on board. One hopes these will not be short in 2004.

Justin Vassallo is a member of the Conservation Committee

## The Ornith Committee



Honey-buzzard by Ray Galea

The revised bird-protection regulations which came into force in January 2003 included the setting up of an **Ornith Committee** to study the hunting and trapping situation, and recommend any changes to the regulations. The group, set up by government, included members from BirdLife and from FKNK, the main hunting federation.

One of the first tasks of the Ornith Committee was to draw up a list of birds for special protection status. BirdLife proposed 87 rare, threatened, vulnerable or key species. In the end, however, the agreed list included only 17 species, namely raptors, herons and the two breeding shearwaters. A legal notice in August amended the regulations to give special protection to the following species:

- Cory's shearwater
- yelkouan shearwater
- lesser kestrel
- honey-buzzard
- common buzzard
- marsh harrier
- hen harrier
- montagu's harrier
- pallid harrier
- short-toed eagle
- lesser spotted eagle
- booted eagle
- osprey
- purple heron
- squacco heron
- little egret
- night heron

Hunters caught killing any of the above are now liable to fines up to Lm2000.



**Tree by three.** January. The three partners set the ball rolling. BirdLife president Joseph Mangion, DLH president Martin Scicluna and PARK head George Buhagiar plant the first tree.



Settling in. September. Young aleppo pines.



Building barriers. July. Building stone erosion barriers, after their timber predecessors were stolen.



America to the rescue. August. Volunteers from the crew of USS LaSalle help lay the main water feed pipe.

# Foresta 2000

Victor Falzon

In some regions on the planet, afforestation is done by flying over an area in an airplane, and dropping young trees in tapered, biodegradable containers. These bury themselves on impact with the soft ground, and the trees happily grow to maturity - job done! Unfortunately this is not the case with a place like Malta...

Re-afforestation in our dry, rocky, people-packed island is much more complicated, as anyone who undertakes such a project knows. The planners of Foresta 2000 rapidly realised that years would go by before a single tree was planted! First, the land had to be made available, which meant meetings, lobbying and red tape. The land had then to be checked for suitability, and that meant soil sampling and habitat studies. Care had to be taken to protect the native flora, and that meant vegetation maps.

Once the land was acquired, it had to be protected from further destruction and degradation, so fences, rubble walls, gates, signs and erosion barriers began to appear.

Finally, the resources had to be found to make sure the project would not stall, especially when planting began. This involved fund-raising. And more fund-raising!

### This year...

The partnership of BirdLife, Din l-Art Helwa and PARK was officially launched in January 2003 with a tree-planting activity at It-Taflija. This was followed by the planting of hundreds of tamarisk along the east perimeter. These trees will eventually form a dense hedge to buffer road noise and absorb sea-spray.

Other areas of It-Taflija were planted with Mediterranean forest species like aleppo pine, lentisk, wolfbane and holm oak, taking care not to disturb the beautiful stands of steppe-loving esparto grass. Foresta 2000 will be a mosaic of

habitats, and existing patches of steppe vegetation were conserved and helped to regenerate.

Spring and summer 2003 also involved the laying of hundreds of metres of piping, connecting to the water cistern at the Red Tower - and raising funds to foot the bills!

In autumn, a tree-fostering campaign was launched to encourage people to sponsor trees at Foresta 2000. This initiative raises funds, but also raises awareness, as people begin to feel that the project belongs to them.

By December, over 1500 young trees were in place and starting to acclimatise to the new site, hopefully their home for many years to come.

Victor Falzon is a member of the Foresta 2000 steering committee



Flower power. A carpet of flowering annuals, like these crown daisy and sulla, begin the long process of scar-healing, in this case an erosion gully, which doubled as an off-roading "track".

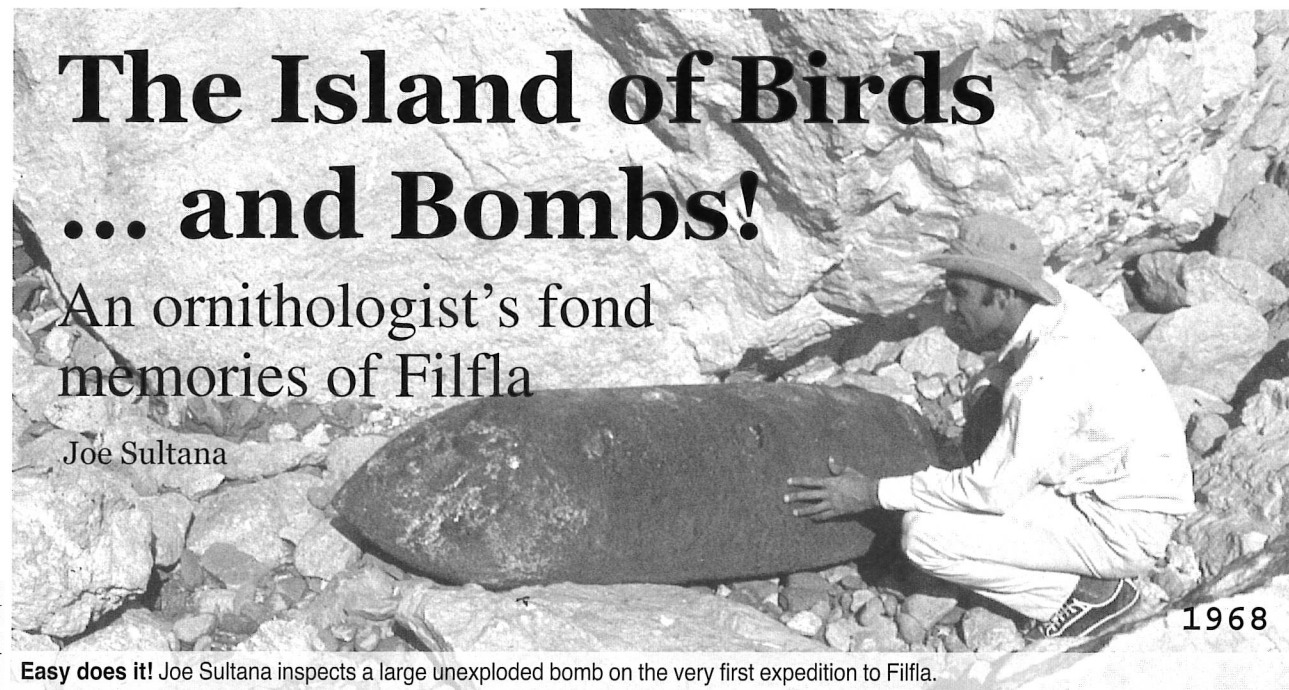


# The Island of Birds ... and Bombs!

## An ornithologist's fond memories of Filfla

Joe Sultana

Edwin Spiteri Campbell



**Easy does it!** Joe Sultana inspects a large unexploded bomb on the very first expedition to Filfla.

1968

Timmy, the fisherman from Żurriq, guided his small but sturdy fishing boat among the boulders hugging the islet. The swell made it difficult to get close, but finally we managed to jump onto the rocks. The Office of the Flag Officer of the British Services had warned us that our visit, and subsequent ones, was "considered to be extremely dangerous", as the place was still being used for target practice by the military forces. But we were not deterred. There were four of us that day: Charles Gauci, Charles Galea, Edwin Spiteri Campbell and myself, and this was our first expedition to Filfla. The date: 29 June 1968.

I had always longed to visit Filfla since I first saw it as a child on one of those rare schoolday trips to Malta, when Buskett always figured in the

itinerary of the hired bus loaded with Gozitan schoolchildren. I still remember looking with awe from Dingli cliffs at the strange barren-looking islet rimmed with foaming waves. But it was Charles Wright's account of his visit to Filfla in 1863 that aroused my interest in the natural history of the islet. Then I read Langley Roberts's book *The Birds of Malta*, published in 1954, in which he stated that the only birds breeding there were about 30 pairs of Cory's shearwaters and two pairs of storm petrels. I resolved to go there to see the birds, particularly the petrels, before they all disappeared.

So we were thrilled on that first visit, despite the very real danger - the terrain was littered with bomb fragments and unexploded bombs. We ended up locating many pairs of

breeding storm petrels and shearwaters that day, and that night our small stock of bird rings was exhausted in a couple of hours.

Thirty-five years have passed. Since that first visit, with Charles Gauci in former years and recently with John J. Borg, we have been organising up to five visits to Filfla annually, usually staying overnight, mainly to monitor the breeding seabirds of the islet. We still go in a fisherman's boat, now manned by Karmnu, Timmy's grandson.

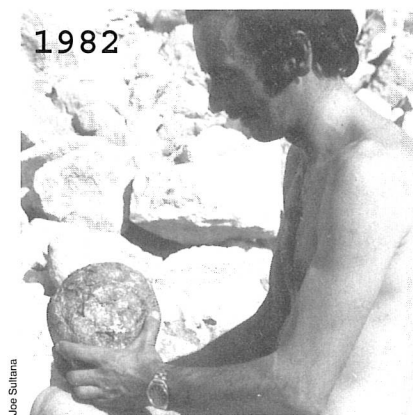
There have been times when we used different types of seacraft, from a small dinghy to an AFM patrol boat, even AFM helicopters. Each visit has its particular story, at times quite exciting. Occasionally, on our morning return we have been compelled by the swell to swim to reach the boat, holding our ringing and photographic equipment high above our heads. Most of BirdLife Malta's ringers, trainees and some volunteers have attended these expeditions, and they have all been captivated by the magic of Filfla, particularly at night, when it comes alive with the cries of shearwaters and the purring flight of the petrels.

Down the years, we have ringed more than 18,000 storm petrels on Filfla, and many of them have been retrapped in subsequent years, providing us with many fascinating glimpses into their secretive life. One bird, ringed in 1974, was retrapped in



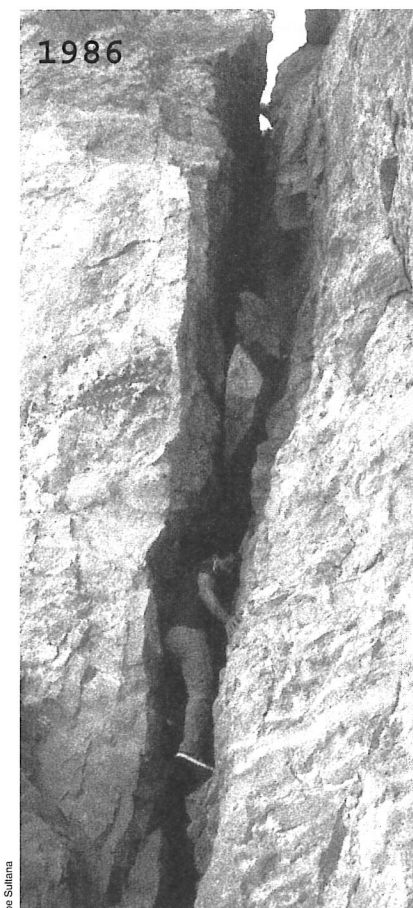
**Heigh-ho! Off we go!** Ringers, trainees and helpers leaving Wied iz-Żurriq for a night out on Filfla.

1982



**Not an egg!** Charles Gauci contemplates an old cannon ball.

2001 at the venerable age of 27 years, while a few others were at least 23 years old - I recall one night telling one of the younger expedition participants that the tiny bird he was handling was actually older than himself! Two other storm petrels bore Italian rings, ringed by our Sicilian colleagues on Marettimo Island - those were the only foreign-ringed storm petrels we handled. A few of our own ringed birds too have been recovered elsewhere in the Mediterranean, but the Olympic gold goes to the one we ringed in 1971 and



**Cliffhanger!** Victor Cilia worms his way up a rock fissure on the way to the top.

which was washed ashore after a big storm in 1989 - in the Netherlands!

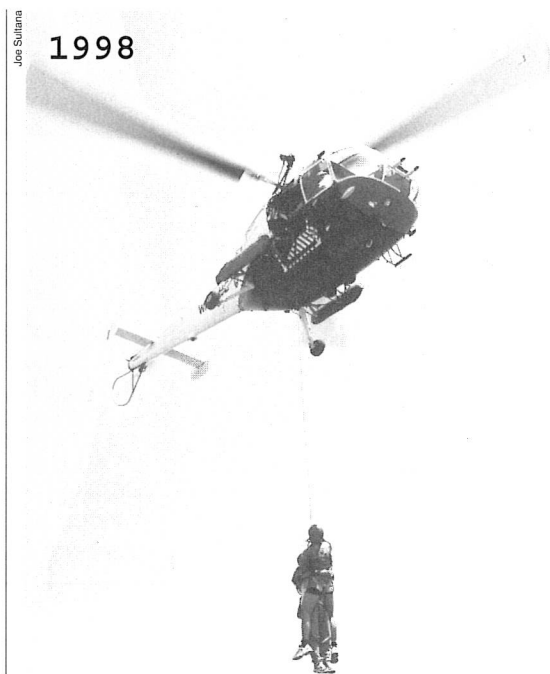
Down the decades we also ringed over a thousand Cory's shearwaters on Filfla, as well as a few yelkouan shearwaters. These also have yielded good ornithological results.

Another seabird that breeds on Filfla is the yellow-legged gull. These birds nest mainly on the plateau top of the islet, so to reach their colony was always a hazardous experience. Victor Cilia, Raymond Galea and Michael Zerafa were among those who risked life and limb to scale the crumbling cliffs to reach the chicks. Eventually it was no longer possible to reach the top, as the sides became steeper due to erosion and rock fragmentation. Happily, the Armed Forces of Malta stepped in and saved the situation, and for the past 20 years we have been air-lifted from the mainland and dropped on the plateau surface every third week of May to seek out and ring the gull chicks hiding in the low, thick vegetation. Some of these birds have been recovered in various parts of the central Mediterranean, with at least two reaching central Europe in their early years.

Nobody bombs Filfla any more - that practice was stopped in 1970. Moreover, thanks to an Act of Parliament in 1987, Filfla is today a fully protected nature reserve, and permission to land there is only granted for educational and scientific purposes.

No amount of legal protection, however, will protect Filfla from the elements which inexorably beat and eat away at its foundations. The explosions may have stopped, but because of the soft underlying clay, the boulders still crumble regularly, particularly during violent storms. I often ask myself how much more of that lone rock is destined to flake off into the sea.

1998

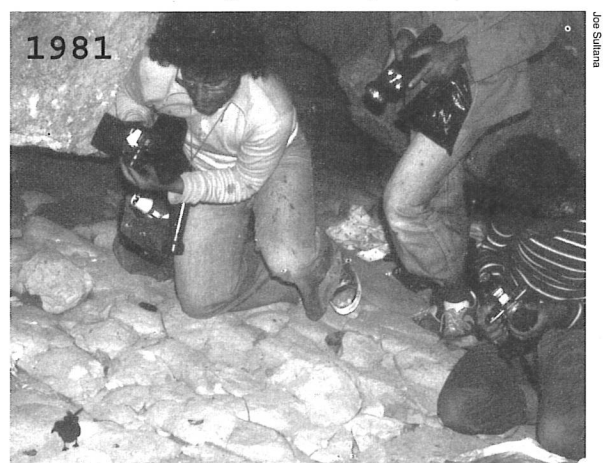


**Big bird!** An AFM helicopter airlifts participants off the top of the island.

But as long as Filfla stands, and as long as the seabirds make it their home, we will be there to watch - and to wonder.



**Got the chick!** Charles Gauci rings a gull chick on the top. Note the bombshell fragment on the right.



**Get the picture!** A storm petrel lingers conveniently, as Victor Falzon and John Borg scramble to take its picture.



# All in the Family!

## BirdLife in the EU

**Austria**



name **BirdLife Österreich**  
founded 1953  
members 2200

**Belgium**



name **BirdLife Belgium**  
founded 1951  
members 54,000

**Cyprus**  
Πτηνολογικός  
Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου



name **BirdLife Cyprus**  
founded 2003  
members 350

**Czech**



name **ČSO - Česká Společnost Ornitologická**  
founded 1926  
members 2000

**Denmark**



name **DOF - Dansk Ornitologisk Forening**  
founded 1906  
members 13,000

**Estonia**




name **EOÜ - Eesti Ornitoloogiaühing**  
founded 1921  
members 600

**Finland**



name **BirdLife Suomi - Finland**  
founded 1974  
members 7800

**France**



name **Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux**  
founded 1912  
members 33,500

**Germany**



name **Naturschutzbund Deutschland**  
founded 1899  
members 354,000

**Greece**



name **Hellenic Ornithological Society**  
founded 1982  
members 2600

**Hungary**



name **Magyar Madártani és Természetvédelmi Egyesület**  
founded 1974  
members 8200

**Ireland**



name **BirdWatch Ireland**  
founded 1968  
members 5000

**Italy**



name **Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli**  
founded 1965  
members 42,000

**Latvia**



name **LOB - Latvijas Ornitoloģijas Biedrība**  
founded 1985  
members 530

**Malta**



name **BirdLife Malta**  
founded 1962  
members 3300

**Lithuania**



name **LOD - Lietuvos Ornitologu Draugija**  
founded 1984  
members 1200

**Luxembourg**



name **LNVL - Lëtzebuerger Natur- A Vulleschützliga**  
founded 1920  
members 14,000

**Netherlands**



name **Vogelbescherming Nederland VBN**  
founded 1899  
members 124,000

**Poland**



name **OTOP - Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków**  
founded 1991  
members 2100

**Portugal**



name **Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves SPEA**  
founded 1993  
members 900

**Slovakia**



name **SOVS - Spoločnosť pre Ochranu Vtáctva na Slovensku**  
founded 1993  
members 1100

**Slovenia**



name **BirdLife Slovenia**  
founded 1979  
members 1000

**Spain**



name **Sociedad Española de Ornitología - SEO BirdLife**  
founded 1954  
members 8000

**Sweden**



name **SOF - Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening**  
founded 1945  
members 10,000

**United Kingdom**



name **RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**  
founded 1889  
members 1,037,000

25 Partners\*...

\*some are still at Affiliate or Designate stage

...1,690,580\*  
members!

\*figures for 2003



# Maltese Falcons

Justin Vassallo

The year 2003 was another year of fun and hard work for **Falko**, BirdLife Malta's teenage section. We started off with the camp in Italy, in co-operation with LIPU-Salerno. While there, we built and fixed nest boxes, cleaned up a forest, and visited the beautiful Cilento national park. Thereafter, activities flowed, with a total of 10 over the year.

With the same members as last year, the Falko Committee put in its effort into every activity, not least in the RaptorCamp. Special thanks to Simon Sultana, Stefan Azzopardi, Joanna Ellul and André Callus.

Franco Camilleri represented Falko at two Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) events - a 10-day educational camp about wetlands, held in Romania, and YEE's AGM.

On 5 October, in co-operation with NT Youths, Falko participated in the Renewable Energies Awareness Festival, co-ordinated by YEE. Bay Street kindly made their premises available to set up our stands, which carried information about the negative effects of fossil fuels and the potential of renewable energy sources. Many passers-by stopped to learn, and colouring competitions were held for the younger visitors.

Simon Sultana won the 2003 Coxon Award (see box), with Joanna Ellul a close runner-up, for much the same kind of work.

Good contacts were also made during the RaptorCamp with the youth section of SOF (BirdLife in Sweden), and the possibilities of organising a visit to Falsterbo in Sweden in the near future were discussed. It was a good basis for fruitful co-operation, and 2004 looks bright as ever.

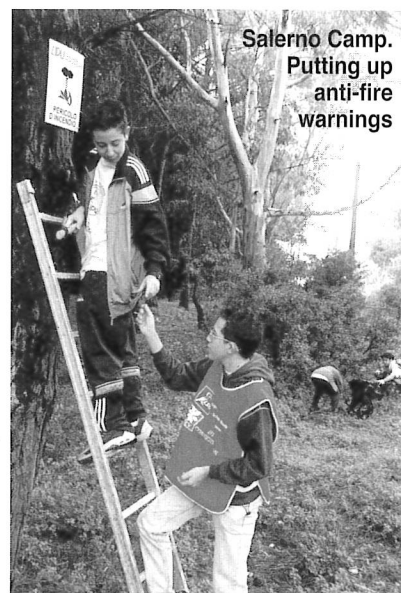
Justin Vassallo is Falko co-ordinator



Salerno Camp.  
Falko and LIPU people



Salerno Camp.  
Giving fences a face-lift



Salerno Camp.  
Putting up  
anti-fire  
warnings



Camp on Kemmuna

## ELIZABETH COXON AWARD 2003



The 2003 Elizabeth Coxon Award went to **Simon Sultana** (pictured, at left), a Falko Committee member. Simon is Falko's activities organiser and co-ordinator, so he has the tough job of chasing leaders, helpers to make sure that each activity is a success. He was also a regular helper at Ghadira nature reserve, and key to the Buskett RaptorCamp's success.

The late Elizabeth Coxon was a British staunch benefactor and supporter of BirdLife Malta. One of her many forms of assistance was the setting up of a committee (MBROC) in the UK with the specific task of raising funds for our nature reserves. The Coxon Award is a prize that she founded to reward young Maltese conservationists.

**Honorary President**  
Joe Attard

**President**  
Joseph Mangion

**Secretary**  
Denis Cachia

**Treasurer**  
Norman Chetcuti

**Council**  
Chair: Desirée Falzon  
Secretary: Denis Cachia  
John J Borg  
Norman Chetcuti  
Raymond Galea  
Emanuel Mallia  
Joseph Mangion  
Ian Mifsud  
Joe Sultana  
Justin Vassallo

**Nature Reserves Group**  
Chair: Mark Gauci  
Jason Aloisio  
Alex Casha  
Charles Coleiro  
Victor Falzon  
Charles Gauci

## people 2003

**Research Committee**  
Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana  
Secretary: John J Borg  
Denis Cachia  
Raymond Galea  
Mark Gauci

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

**Finances**  
Anita Aloisio  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Education Committee**  
Chair: Michael Grima  
Secretary: Victor Fiott  
Jason Aloisio  
Anthony Cordina  
Victor Falzon  
Jean Paul Fiott  
Sarah Jane Pulis

**Falko Committee**  
Chair: Justin Vassallo  
Secretary: Joanna Ellul  
Stefan Azzopardi  
Matthew Borg Cardona  
André Callus  
Franco Farrugia  
Graziella Grech  
Caldon Mercieca  
Saviour Spiteri  
Simon Sultana

**Ornis Committee**  
(for BirdLife)  
Norman Chetcuti  
Joseph Mangion

**Klabb Huttat Committee**  
Chair: Jason Aloisio  
Secretary: Chris Schembri  
Sylvia Falzon  
Audrey Chetcuti  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon  
Victor Falzon  
Mariangela Schembri Meli  
Justin Vassallo

**Kemmuna Working Group**  
Co-ordinator: Mark Gauci  
Ian Balzan  
Jean Paul Farrugia  
Emanuel Mallia  
Joseph Mangion

**Foresta 2000 Steering Committee**  
(for BirdLife)  
Desirée Falzon  
Victor Falzon

**Volunteers**  
Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon

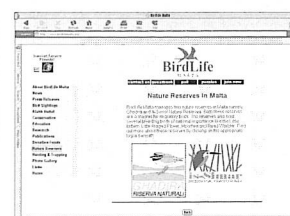
**Website**  
Webmaster: Denis Cachia

**Publications editors**  
Bird's Eye View: Victor Falzon  
BirdTalk: Victor Falzon  
Delegates newsletter: Tony Cordina  
Il-Huttat: Victor Falzon

**Staff**  
Marketing: Liz Curmi, Audrey Abela  
Administration: Victoria Caruana  
Field teachers: Jason Aloisio  
Victor Falzon  
Reserves supervisor: Mark Gauci  
Dinja Wahda: Theresa Cremona

The above is a list of people who occupied the main posts in the organisation. The list does not mention all the other volunteers, leaders, helpers, birdwatchers, ringers, assistant wardens, school delegates etc without whose time and commitment BirdLife's activity and effectiveness would be severely compromised.

## webwise



BirdLife Malta has had a website for several years. One of the site's strongest assets must be the fact that since 2000 it has been updated practically daily, with news and sightings co-ordinated by webmaster Denis Cachia. The site reports current bird-related news, as well as information about BirdLife's action in conservation, education, nature reserves, research, youth activities and publications. It also reproduces the Society's press statements in full, and gives regular reports of birding highlights. The site can be accessed at [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org)

In the 2003 edition of the Datastream Malta Web Awards, our website reached finalist in the Community, Voluntary and Non-Profit category.

**RaptorCamp Malta** is a daughter site, dealing specifically with the Malta International RaptorCamp held annually at Buskett. The site was co-ordinated by Mikko Heikkinnen, and can be accessed at <http://raptorcamp.birdlifemalta.org>

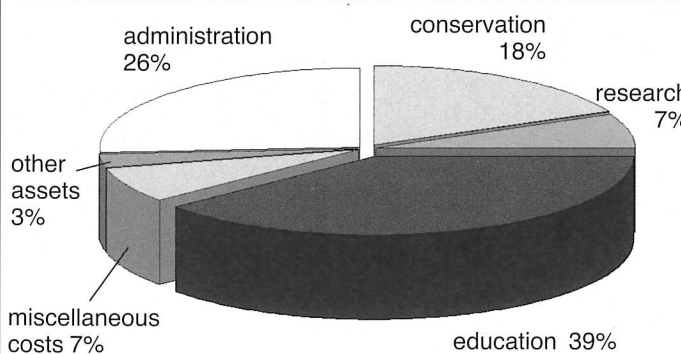


## Of course



**Looking up.** Kindergarten assistants on a field trip to Buskett, led by Michael Grima, in July 2003. This was the second in-service course for KAs organised by BirdLife's Education Unit. The first was held in 2002.

## money matters



The piechart gives a simplified account of where the Society allocated its funds in the period January-December 2003. A detailed financial account is available on request





# Ghadira

Protecting rare habitat