

# Bird's Eye View



  
**BirdLife**  
MALTA

Annual magazine 2005





Very early on in its struggle for bird protection, BirdLife Malta (then MOS) realised that lobbying the authorities for adequate laws was going to take way too long. The Society therefore embarked on a parallel front: raising public awareness.

But those were the Sixties and the communication age was decades away. Desktop technology was typewriter, wax stencils and gallons of pink corrector fluid. No computer, no digital cameras, no Photoshop. So it was a humble sticker here and a leaflet there. Working on a shoestring budget, MOS spread the environmental gospel. But it worked, and today, more than a generation later, everybody is aware of at least some of the problems facing the natural environment. And that's good.

People have formed an opinion and practically all agree that yes, something needs to be done for the environment. But many stop there, and get on with their lives. This is why litterbugs, land grabbers, wasters of resources and bird killers are still with us. This is why we still get politicians measuring progress by the annual increase of cars per capita, or declaring that having more roads is beneficial to the environment; and why we still get hunters bragging that they are the ultimate predators and that bringing down a bird is an exciting new sensation every time. And that's not so good.

But, thankfully, we detect a modest sector of society that has started making decisions based on an environmental ethic. It seems that concern for the environment has made it to these people's list of personal values. Very good. BirdLife's job now is to keep pushing the environment further up their priority ladder.

And so it is no wonder that BirdLife targets schools a lot. With projects like Dinja Wahda, the Society tries to make green living second nature with young people and their educators. We are glad to see more schools taking up green habits. Quite a few heads of schools proudly tell us that waste separation, water conservation, feeding garden birds, visiting nature reserves, using recycled paper, growing trees and sponsoring green projects are nowadays as much school policy as giving homework...

Yes, we are definitely getting there!

**Victor Falzon**  
Editor



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. 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 Ghadira and Is-Simar.

BirdLife Malta publishes *Il-Merill* (a scientific bulletin), *Bird's Eye View* (the members' annual magazine), *BirdTalk* (the members' bimonthly newsletter), *Il-Huttafa* (the junior bimonthly magazine) and a newsletter for school delegates. The Society also produces educational material including books, teaching aids, 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.

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BirdLife Malta is a charity organisation, and depends on subscriptions and donations. Membership is Lm4 (overseas €20) per annum for adults, Lm3 for juniors and Lm6 for families. Online subscription, renewal and donations can be made on the website.

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John J Borg

# Land for Birds

## A look at Malta's Important Bird Areas

### beginnings

In 1989, BirdLife International (then known as the International Council for Bird Preservation) launched the first inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Europe. The main aim of this exercise was to identify and form a protection network of sites critical to the conservation of birds. This first inventory provided key information on 2444 high priority sites in 39 countries or autonomous regions.

The IBA programme targeted four categories of birds, whose dependence of a particular site would qualify the area for inclusion as an IBA. These were:

- **species** that occur regularly, concentrate at and are dependent on particular sites for breeding, migrating or wintering
- **species** that are globally threatened (at risk of extinction)
- **species** and subspecies threatened throughout their Europe range but not globally
- **species** that have small world ranges, with important populations in Europe.

With the passage of years, BirdLife increasingly recognised the importance of IBAs in bird protection. It was also becoming increasingly evident that

many of the sites were not just important for their birds, but also harboured ecosystems with a high degree of biodiversity. Although the IBA network is defined by its bird fauna, the conservation of these sites would ensure the survival of a correspondingly large number of other animals and plants.

In 2000, BirdLife Partners from 51 countries in the European region updated the inventory, increasing the list to 3619 sites.

The IBA programme was extended to most regions on the planet. More than 9800 sites in over 170 countries have so far been identified as IBAs.



Eleonora's falcon helped qualify Buskett IBA

### natural selection

BirdLife International follows three levels of IBA selection criteria: global, regional and sub-regional. Within Europe, the sub-regional level corresponds to the EU's geographical territory.

Sites are selected according to a number of set criteria. During the preparation of the 2004 Malta IBA inventory, the selected sites were approved, as they satisfied the following C level criteria:

#### Criteria applied to Malta IBAs

##### C2. Concentrations of Annex 1 species.

Under this criterion, 2 species are used as qualifying species: Cory's Shearwater and Yelkouan Shearwater

##### C5. Migratory bottleneck

Under this criterion, 4 species were used as qualifying species: Honey-buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Common Kestrel, Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon

##### C6. Best breeding sites for Annex 1 species

Under this criterion, 3 species were used as qualifying species: Cory's Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater and European Storm-petrel.





Il-Kullana

After years of field research, data collation and analysis, BirdLife Malta identified and proposed 11 sites for inclusion as IBAs of international importance. Five of these are of Global Importance and six are of EU Importance.

The sites cover a total area of 480.2ha, which is about 1.5% of the surface area of the Maltese Islands. This small percentage is due to the fact that most of the sites are seabird colonies located along vertical cliff faces. However, when designating these sites, the foraging requirements of the species breeding on these sites were also taken into consideration. If one were to include an area appropriate to satisfy the ecological requirements of the seabird colonies, the area of IBAs will be considerably bigger, as it would include a great deal of sea.

A further six sites have been identified as IBAs of National Importance.

**Mt001 Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs**

GI

Ta' Ċenċ cliffs support a large breeding colony of ca.1000 pairs of Cory's Shearwater, ca.150-300 pairs of Yelkouan Shearwater and a small colony (>25 pairs) of European Storm-petrel.

**Mt002 Kemmuna**

GI

The cliffs and caves along the shoreline of Kemmuna support colonies of Yelkouan Shearwaters (50-80 pairs) and is a bottleneck site for trans-Saharan passerine migrants.



L-Ahrax tal-Madonna

**Mt003 Filfla**

GI

The offshore islet of Filfla holds a large colony of European Storm-petrels (5000-8000 pairs) and 100-200 pairs of Cory's Shearwaters.

**Mt004 Buskett**

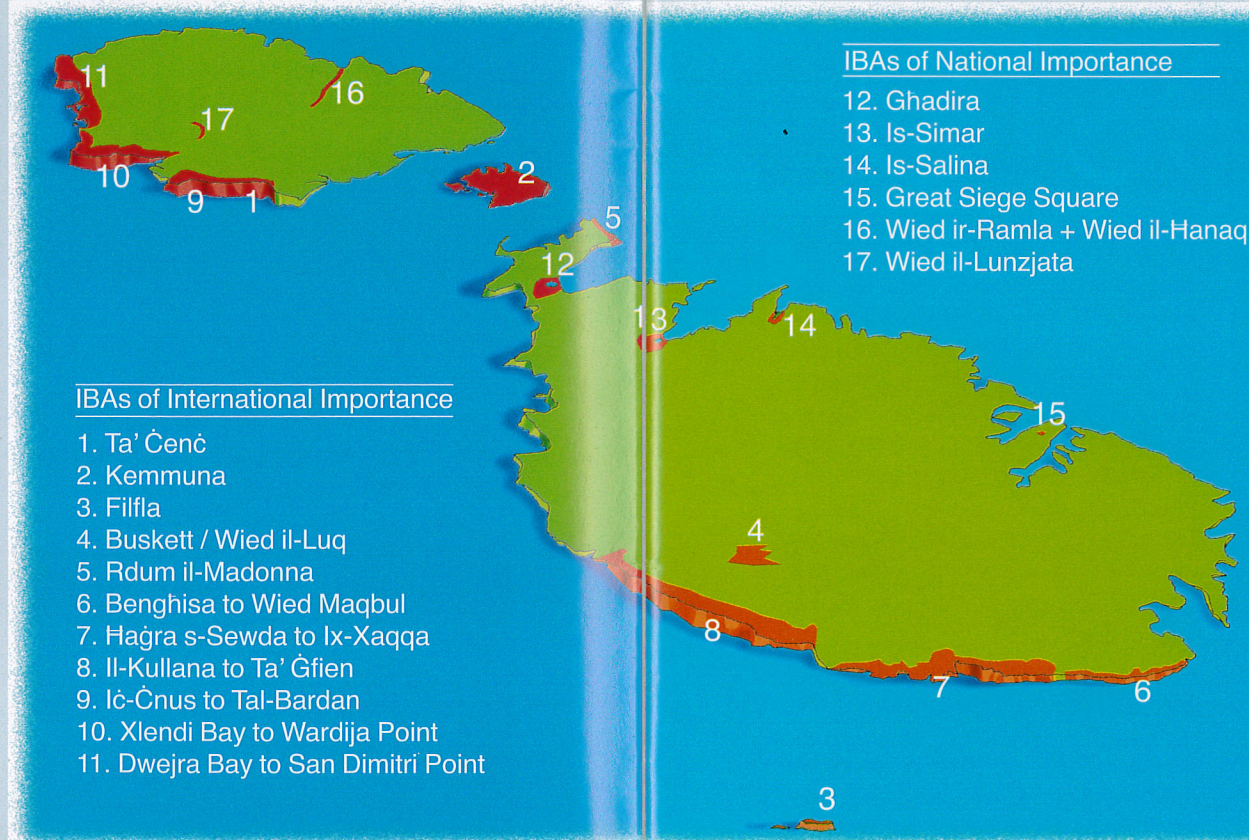
GI

The only non-seabird site. Buskett is an important flyway and roosting site for raptors, mainly Honey-buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Hobby and Eleonora's Falcon during the autumn migration.

**Mt005 L-Ahrax tal-Madonna**

GI

The cliffs support one of the largest known colonies of Yelkouan Shearwater in the Mediterranean, with an estimated 500 pairs.

**Mt006 Benghisa to Wied Maqbul**

EI

The seacliffs from Benghisa to Wied Maqbul hold colonies of Cory's Shearwater (500-800 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwater (100-150 pairs).

**Mt007 Haġra s-Sewda to Ix-Xaqqa**

EI

This stretch of seacliffs holds colonies of Cory's Shearwater (150-200 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwater (80-100 pairs).

**Mt008 Il-Kullana to Ta' Ġfien**

EI

Popularly known as Dingli Cliffs, these natural bastions support breeding colonies of Cory's Shearwater (200-300 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwater (100-200 pairs).

**Mt009 Iċ-Ċnus to Tal-Bardan**

EI

These cliffs west of Ta' Ċenċ are important for Cory's Shearwater (100-300 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwaters (ca.30 pairs).

**Mt010 Xlendi Bay to Wardija Point**

EI

Seabird colonies located just outside the mouth of Xlendi Bay westwards to Wardija Point. The breeding population includes Cory's Shearwater (300-350 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwater (30-50 pairs).

**Mt011 Dwejra Bay to San Dimitri**

EI

The seacliffs along the northwestern coast of Gozo holds Cory's Shearwater (100-300 pairs) and Yelkouan Shearwater (30-50 pairs).



Buskett

**Mt015 Great Siege Square - Valletta**

NI

An unlikely place for an IBA. The mature ficus trees in this square support the only known winter roost (several 1000s) of White Wagtails in Malta. A smaller roost exists in Gozo.

**Mt016 Wied ir-Ramla and Wied il-Hanaq**

NI

These two valleys facing the north coast of Gozo are important bottlenecks for passage migrants, namely raptors, warblers and hirundines (swallows and martins).

**Mt017 Wied il-Lunzjata**

NI

The largest verdant area in Gozo, with mature trees and permanent water stream. Important feeding and resting site for a variety of species throughout the year. Exceptionally good during the migration seasons.

Heath MF, Evans MI et al (eds). 2000. Important Bird Areas of Europe: Priority Sites for Conservation, BirdLife International.

John J Borg is BirdLife Malta IBA Co-ordinator

GI Global Importance EI European Importance NI National Importance

**Mt012 Ghadira**

NI

A managed, partly man-made saltmarsh wetland. An important resting and feeding site for waders. The only breeding site in Malta for Little Ringed Plover.

**Mt013 Is-Simar**

NI

A managed, partly man-made wetland with tracts of common reed that provides habitat for water birds. The site holds nesting Reed Warbler and Moorhens. Little Grebe and Little Bittern have also nested here.

**Mt014 Is-Salina**

NI

Abandoned salt pans that provide feeding and resting habitat for waders and herons.



Hal Far



## groundwork

The year 2005 was dominated by tree planting. After a successful previous season, a green carpet is already beginning to show on what was formerly a bare and eroded area at It-Taflija. Another 3100 trees went into the ground this year, bringing the total of planted trees and shrubs to over 9000.

Most of this year's trees were planted in January and February, sometimes with help from groups like Klabb Huttat (BirdLife's junior members) or by schoolchildren through events like Arbor Day. Such involvement gives not only a physical helping hand but, more importantly, it gives the participants a sense of belonging to the project and generates a love for trees.

Planting gave way to grass control in March-May, which is done to minimise damage in case of fire. From June onwards, irrigation of the young trees was top priority. The older pines and lentisk are now established and need no further watering to see them through the summer period. Irrigation was therefore concentrated on the vegetation planted in the last two years. In summer, almost 1km of new water mains was laid to prepare for the new saplings. This extension will ensure that the new trees and shrubs are now all within watering reach.

Tree planting resumed in November. With the help of six employees from PARK, one of our project partners, most of the trees were put in the ground in the crucial eight-week period when most of the rain falls. When planted in autumn, the young trees have time to acclimatise and will need less watering by the time the rainy season wanes.



This year the Corpo Forestale d'Italia donated another 3000 trees, namely aleppo pines, kermes oaks, strawberry trees, lentisks and Mediterranean buckthorns. A further 50 pines were donated by Dr Joe Azzopardi, and the remainder were holm oaks from our own nurseries.

PARK staff continued building rubble retaining walls and also helped in maintaining the erosion control barriers, which took up most of December. These barriers have now eliminated soil loss and erosion, and the deep gullies which used to result from years of four-wheel drive and motorcycle activity are no more.

## growing

The first holm oaks planted in 2004 are growing vigorously along the verges of It-Taflija and already competing with

the pines planted in the previous year. A number of perennial maquis species like narrow-leaved rock-rose and spiny asparagus were planted especially along the base of the old terraced fields to add to the biodiversity. Aleppo pine is adapting well to the area, while slower growers like western strawberry tree and kermes oak are also taking hold in some of the areas. Mediterranean buckthorn is by far the fastest-growing shrub planted, many of which are already producing berries, only after a year of planting.

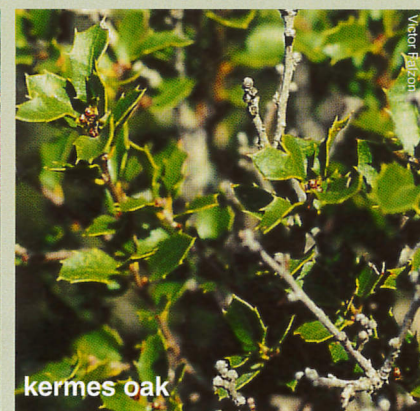
## wildlife

As the young trees grow, more wildlife is attracted to the area. Weasels, wild rabbits, chameleons and western whip snakes are commonplace.

Wintering birds like greenfinch, goldfinch, starling, robin and blackcap



western strawberry tree



kermes oak

Western strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo* and kermes oak *Quercus coccifera* are species of Mediterranean woodland and maquis. Both are strangely missing from the Maltese flora. With botanical advice, it was decided to introduce these species at Foresta 2000.

are more in evidence. Nest-boxes are in the pipeline for next year, hopefully to attract spotted flycatchers to breed. In summer, a small flock of collared doves established itself in a mature grove on site, but were shot as soon as

the hunting season opened, despite the fact that the area is off-limits to hunting.

We hope someday to have the entire northwest part of Malta declared a national park. This idea is being pursued by BirdLife and Din l-Art Helwa.

## problems

Problems this year amounted a few stolen trees, some small-scale vandalism and one or two hunters intruding in the area. Several instances of unauthorised camping were noted further west along the slope. If this becomes a regular habit, we may encounter problems when we come to planting those sectors.

## kids on site

Through Dinja Wahda 5, launched in October in primary schools (see pg 15), many children fostered trees at Foresta 2000. This tree-adoption scheme raises much-needed funds for the running of the project. Fostering trees has also had another effect: schoolchildren who adopted trees were asking to see the project with their own eyes. BirdLife had foreseen this and offered free guided tours in the Dinja Wahda Action Guide. Several schools have taken up this offer, and a number of school visits to It-Taflija were organised. Din l-Art Helwa, our project partner, also organised a number of visits. A total of 440 children visited Foresta 2000 by the end of the year.

Ray Vella is the ranger at Foresta 2000.

1. Haż-Żebbuġ primary school kids visiting.
2. New water mains being laid.
3. Arrival of new trees from Italy.
4. Timber pole thanking a big benefactor.
5. Tree-planting by First Insurance Brokers
6. Italian Ambassador Dr Alvisio Memmo and Env Minister George Pullicino pay a visit.





# Sustaining the Struggle

Joseph Mangion



If 2004 was the year Malta joined the European Union, 2005 was the year that Malta felt the first effects of EU membership. BirdLife Malta did not lose time before using the mechanisms at its disposal to fight for conservation.

## Hunting

The Maltese government's dogged insistence on retaining spring hunting, thinly disguised as a derogation, did not go down well with locals and foreigners alike, and received much criticism.

In April, the EU Commission sent to Malta a monitoring mission of its Nature and Biodiversity team, headed by Nicholas Hanley. Despite obstacles laid by the civil service, BirdLife Malta managed to have an exclusive meeting

with the delegation. In anticipation of the visit, BirdLife Malta wrote to the EU Commission highlighting the flaws in Maltese bird protection legislation. The BirdLife EU office sent over its Policy Manager Konstantin Kreiser to join Society President Joseph Mangion in the meeting with the delegation.

Meanwhile, BirdLife Malta and BirdLife International drew up a formal complaint about the issue. The document laid out in detail BirdLife's objection to the faulty transposition of the Birds Directive into Maltese legislation. BirdLife's objection was backed by scientific evidence based on analysis of many years' ornithological data. The complaint was lodged with the EU Commission in July.

In September, the President had a follow-up meeting with the cabinet of

hunting in spring. BirdLife submitted its comments on these proposals and other pressing issues within a 4-week consultation period and in due course also met the Minister to discuss the issues, but by the end of the year the said proposals had still not become law. The struggle is clearly still not over.

Meanwhile, illegal hunting was again prevalent throughout the year. Despite Malta's hunting situation being more in the limelight than ever before, law enforcement actually took a nosedive in 2005, and despite laudable effort from Administrative Law Enforcement officers, the year ended with just 289 arraignments (as opposed to 475 in 2004). When exhorted for more resources and commitment, the authorities conveniently blamed the lack on resources on the problem of illegal human immigration.

## Ornis

BirdLife Malta sustained its participation in the Malta Ornis Committee, through Norman Chetcuti and Joseph Mangion. The committee met 13 times in 2005. Among the issues discussed were the registration of trapping sites, a survey of captive-bred finches, a country code for hunters and trappers, and a request to trade in wild birds. The committee also organised a workshop on airfield bird strikes following complaints of large numbers of starlings at Malta International Airport (MIA) in winter 2004-05. The committee had authorised a culling exercise of starlings at MIA in February, which proved that shooting the birds was not the solution to the problem. Unfortunately no real progress was achieved on the timetable of deadlines set by the EU in the accession negotiations.

## IBAs

It is useless to protect birds without protecting their habitat. For this reason, it is important that every country

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BirdLife MALTA

BirdLife Malta

identifies the areas most crucial for its birds, better known as Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

In 2005, BirdLife Malta published *Important Bird Areas of EU Importance in Malta*. Compiled by John Borg and Joe Sultana, the document is an inventory of sites that satisfy the EU criteria for inclusion (see pp3-5, 22). The inventory was launched in May along with IBA inventories of several other BirdLife Partners from the new EU states. BirdLife Malta also launched the inventory in Malta.

In August, BirdLife Malta welcomed the scheduling of the cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ by MEPA. Ta' Ċenċ is one of Malta's IBAs of national, EU and global importance.

## Land use

The spectre of development on natural land raised its ugly head again. Large-scale development proposals at Ta' Ċenċ are back, including a golf course on this site and another at Xaghra l-Hamra near Manikata. BirdLife Malta denounced both projects at once, and later teamed up with other NGOs to work on a common opposition front.

In July, BirdLife Malta witnessed gross landscaping abuses at Buskett by the Environmental Landscapes Consortium and immediately raised the alarm. The consortium had been using heavy machinery to clear the valley floor, and was felling large trees for all



**Heavy stuff.** Felling of century-old trees, drastic pruning and mechanical buckets raking the valley floor make a mockery of proper woodland management.

the wrong reasons, heedless of the woodland ecology. BirdLife's reaction put an immediate stop to further felling of trees, and the Society called for the setting up of a supervising body to prevent further damage. The Environment Ministry eventually did set up a committee for this purpose. BirdLife Malta is represented on this body by Alex Casha.

## Meetings

BirdLife Malta's advocacy in 2005 involved meetings with members of parliament and participation in other meetings and events relating to environmental issues. Among these were the public consultation meetings on Structural Funds held by the Prime Minister, various meetings with Environment Minister George Pullicino, and a meeting with Malta Labour Party leader Alfred Sant on the party's environment manifesto.

In March, the RSPB Country Programmes Manager Mark Day visited BirdLife Malta to discuss various operational and funding issues. Also in March, Adri de Gelder<sup>1</sup>, Director of VBN visited Malta and witnessed the work carried out by BirdLife Malta with VBN funding. For several years, VBN has been helping the Society in various projects, including the employment of a marketing person, and will be increasing their support in 2006 and beyond.

In May, while in Cyprus on a private visit, President Joseph Mangion was invited by BirdLife Cyprus to meet the head of the Game Fund of Cyprus. Cypriot hunters are following closely

Malta's spring hunting issue. Cyprus would readily adopt the Maltese Government's stand were it not for fear of infringement proceedings.

BirdLife Malta also attended the May and December meetings of the BirdLife Europe Task Force dealing with the Birds and Habitats Directives.

In November, BirdLife Malta participated in the BirdLife European Directors' Meeting in Bratislava. Such meetings provide an excellent opportunity for networking with other Partners and are useful to update our supporters of development and progress on ongoing projects.

Other meetings in 2005 included a workshop on seabird conservation in June, with help from RSPB's Jane Devitt and Susan Robinson, and Ivan Ramirez from SPEA. In October, Ken Smith from RSPB organised a strategy development workshop for BirdLife Malta's committees, staff and volunteers.

**Joseph Mangion** is the President of BirdLife Malta and chairperson of the Conservation Committee.

### Initial explanation...

**RSPB** - The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife in the UK)

**SPEA** - Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Avas (BirdLife in Portugal)

**VBN** - Vogelbescherming Nederland (BirdLife in The Netherlands)

<sup>1</sup>It is with deep regret that we heard of the sudden and unexpected death of Adri de Gelder in July 2006. Birds have indeed lost a champion, and BirdLife Malta a friend.



## Injured Birds Unit

Another year of rampant hunting unfortunately meant that the Society's injured bird unit was again kept busy. The unit co-ordinator Ian Balzan handled and rehabilitated many injured birds, several of which were eventually return to the wild. The unit functions thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers who collect injured birds from various homes, often at very short notice; and thanks to invaluable support from the unit's veterinary surgeon Eurydike Kovacs.

Ian Balzan

Victor Falcon

Victor Falcon



# mark gauci reserve resumé

The Reserves Committee's top priority for 2005 was to keep the positive momentum at the reserves going. Be it for physical work, educational activities or meticulous planning, the year can be considered a successful one, with all the goals set out for 2005 more or less achieved.

## at work

Several new projects kicked off in 2005. The new 5-year (2004-2008) plans contain no fewer than 60 actions/tasks. These include the regular, daily management, but also a number of one-off projects with specific targets.

One such project materialised at Ghadira in summer 2005. An artificial nesting site was set up in the west pool area, with which we hope to encourage kingfishers to breed. A small number of kingfishers regularly spend six or seven months at Ghadira, showing up as early as late August and staying through the winter. Come March, however, they migrate to Europe to breed. As kingfishers are known to have used man-made nesting holes, and as Malta is within their breeding range, managing warden Charles Gauci thought it worth a try.

The construction is basically a wooden board with a number of round holes cut

into it. The board was erected vertically, close to the water's edge, and packed behind with sand. The round holes look like kingfisher nest entrances - kingfishers nest in holes dug horizontally into river banks. Similar nesting sites for sand martins are planned for 2006.

Concurrently, work on the removal of shrubby orache from the north embankment ran into its fifth year, as yet another stretch was cleared of the highly invasive species and replaced with native shrubs and trees. Meanwhile, the vegetation planted in the "old" sections is fast maturing and filling out.

The other, regular jobs, like tending the tree nursery, watering, removal of alien trees, trail maintenance etc were

sustained. Managing warden Alex Casha assisted in all this work.

Over at Is-Simar, managing warden Charles Coleiro continued clearing acacia trees from the pool area. In summer, a grove of 17 acacia was cleared from one of the islands. Apart from having freed the island of alien vegetation, the newly cleared foreshore on the island attracted good numbers of moorhen and coot to forage on the low grass now dominating the island. The target is 90+% acacia clearance by 2008.

The reedbed was given due attention, with reed-cutting in March, May, July and August.

Throughout the second part of the year, the warden was busy applying the finishes touches to our biggest project



**Home for the King.** (Left) The artificial kingfisher nest site. (Right) Kingfisher with kill ...a killifish!

for the year: the new Is-Simar visitor centre. Following excavation and the laying of a deep concrete platform to stabilise the soft ground, building proper started in late summer. Once this was completed, the centre was plastered, tiled, whitewashed and had fittings and furniture installed. The centre was opened on 30 October, in the presence of Environment Minister George Pullicino and Tourism Minister Francis Zammit Dimech. Visiting schoolchildren now have a proper venue where to begin their reserve experience. The centre will also enable BirdLife to open Is-Simar regularly to the public.

After years of effort and fundraising, another dream had come true, thanks also to financial support from the project's main sponsor APS Bank, as well as the Malta Tourism Authority, Vodafone and UNESCO.

## problem solved

A strip of dune running between Ghadira's east perimeter and the main road had been an embarrassing eyesore for many years. Every summer the area had been used as a convenient latrine by many beach-goers too lazy to walk to the public toilets. The place was also a perfect litter trap every time a strong north-east grigal blew all garbage inland from the beach and road.

BirdLife obtained the necessary permits and, with funding from the Malta Tourism Authority and HSBC Earthwatch, fenced off the area. Once off-limits, the place was given an intensive clean-up, and several alien trees were removed. The area will be gradually restored and allowed to revert to typical saltmarsh and sand dune vegetation.

## logging

The scientific work at the reserves now includes daily logging of flora and fauna observations, bird ringing, keeping weather records and regular recording of water levels and salinity. All records, studies and findings are published in the annual Reserves Reports, now in their third year of issue.

A new project, begun in mid-2004 with the Marine Ecology Research Group (University Biology Department), made a comparative study of the

aquatic macrofauna at Ghadira. The study, which was the basis of a Bachelor of Science dissertation, was concluded in 2005. The results will be published in a forthcoming reserve report.

## for the kids

Bookings at the nature reserves were constant, although a dip became evident towards the end of the year, as the world braced itself for the avian influenza pandemic. Field teachers Jason Aloisio and Victor Falzon were busy with new ideas to make the visits ever more interesting. One initiative at Is-Simar saw students doing a half-day of manual work at the reserve in order to help the warden. Tasks varied from painting of benches to cleaning of birdwatching hides - a novel way of teaching nature appreciation!

## agreed

The year ended on a high. After two years of meetings, the new agreement for the management of Ghadira and Is-Simar was concluded and signed by the

**Mark Gauci** is BirdLife's nature reserves supervisor



**Centre forward.** The new visitor centre at Is-Simar, finished at last.



**Clearance.** Clearing the islands of invasive acacia stimulates native growth and frees up more feeding ground for rails, like the moorhen.

Nature Protection Unit (MEPA), the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, and BirdLife Malta. Through this agreement, BirdLife will continue managing the reserves, with MEPA as adviser, with MRAE funding the running of the reserves.



# Secretive from the seafarer<sup>the</sup> levant

The yelkouan shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* is a typical seabird of the tubenose family, a group that includes shearwaters, petrels, fulmars and albatrosses.

Photo Joe Sultana



Joe Sultana  
fills us in on the

## yelkouan shearwater

Yelkouan! The strange name derives from a Turkish word that means "wind-chaser", a fitting name for this streamlined wanderer of the high seas.

The yelkouan shearwater is a Mediterranean bird. And since Malta is in the middle of this Sea, our shores are graced with this beautiful, mysterious seafarer.

The yelkouan (garnija in Maltese) is endemic to the central and eastern Mediterranean Sea. Breeding surveys from the eastern Mediterranean and

from North Africa are lacking, but it appears that this bird's main colonies are in Greece, Italy and Malta. Malta's share is about 5% of the total population. There are probably less than 30,000 breeding pairs of yelkouan shearwaters in existence.

In the Maltese Islands, the species is widely scattered along sea cliffs, with the largest concentration of at least 250 pairs nesting at Rdum il-Madonna. For this reason, this site is an internationally recognised Important Bird Area (see pp 3-5).

The yelkouan shearwater has blackish upper parts, white underparts and a wingspan of up to 90cm. It is smaller than the similar Cory's shearwater, with whom it often shares the same cliff habitat.

Yelkouans are mostly breeding visitors to the Maltese Islands. The adults are present all year round in the surrounding waters, but are mainly seen from December to July.

The first birds arrive at the colonies from mid-November, sometimes even as early as October.

The birds come to land only after dark, and locate their burrow in the cliff face. The birds communicate by emitting loud, hoarse coughing calls. They are especially vociferous on moonless nights from late January to mid-February, and again from March to early April, when the non-breeders arrive.

Due to its secretive nature and the inaccessibility of the colonies, very little is known about the breeding biology of this mysterious bird. It breeds in caves, crevices and burrows of varying depth in sea cliffs and on offshore islands. The laying period extends from late February into March, when the female lays a single, chalky-white egg. The young fledge and fly from mid-June to early July. Ringing data indicate that some first-year birds of the central Mediterranean population disperse into the Aegean and the Black Sea after fledging. After about two years at sea, the young birds return to the colonies, but do not breed until their fourth year.

The main threats to yelkouan shearwaters are predation of nests by rats, loss of breeding habitat, human disturbance (particularly by hunters out hunting and ferreting for rabbits),



**Down under.** The chick is at first covered in fluffy down. Photo John Borg

entanglement in fishing nets, light and sound pollution (both onshore and offshore) near the colonies and, possibly, oil pollution.

Such threats pose a danger to the survival of this bird. They are all a result of human activity (yes even the rats were introduced by man!). It is therefore our responsibility to take

measures to protect this species, especially its breeding haunts. If not, this pelagic wanderer may soon chase the wind no more.

Joe Sultana is an ornithologist.

**Face value.** At least 250 pairs of yelkouans breed in the cliffs at Rdum il-Madonna. Photo John Borg





# Band of Watchers

Mark Gauci

Nowadays the battles for the environment are not won on sentimental arguments alone. Scientific backing is increasingly becoming indispensable to give credibility to the struggle for environmental protection. This is why research has become so vital to our campaigns for bird protection.

## watching

Although very much a hobby, birdwatching and monitoring can be much more. Birding today is getting more organised, as birders select the best sites according to time of the year and "work" those areas intensively. A typical year would be as follows:

**Jan-Feb:** to Buskett to check wintering birds like dunnocks, possibly redwings.

**March:** duck migration in full swing - the usual posts in Cirkewwa are bustling with eager birders counting flocks of ducks passing through the channel.

**spring:** birders spread out, logging many species migrating across the country on their way north.

**summer:** the first waders arrive. Salina and Ghadira focal points.

**Sep:** the raptor month - all birders converge on Buskett or Dwejra (Malta).

**autumn:** focus on Is-Simar, as coots, black necked grebes and kingfishers steal the show.

Bird records are nowadays stored on a computer birdlog databank, which is very helpful for efficient data analysis and access.

## rare thing

The Rarities Committee is a core of experienced birders who go through the

species	ringed	retrapped
robin	Slovakia (Apr 04)	Buskett (Feb 05)
blackcap	Germany (Aug 03)	Rabat (Mar 05)
blackcap	Germany (Jul 96)	Buskett (Feb 05)
swallow	Croatia (Aug 04)	Rabat (Apr 05)
nightingale	Is-Simar (Apr 03)	Tunisia (Apr 05)
moorhen	Ghadira (Nov 97)	Italy (Apr 05)
swallow	Rabat (20 Apr 05)	Italy (27 Apr 05)
marsh harrier	Czech Rep (Jun 00)	Delimara (Oct 05)*
garden warbler	Mdina (Oct 04)	Finland (Jun 05)

\*shot by hunters

**Indicators.** A selection of the more interesting retraps in 2005.

descriptions of the very rare and scarce birds in order to verify their occurrence. The group meets regularly, as the list of pending species awaiting verification is never poor or dull!

## worth a ring

The Ringing Group had 14 licensed ringers and three trainees in 2005. Ghadira and Is-Simar were worked as constant effort sites (daily ringing sessions), weather permitting. Other sites regularly manned included Buskett, Rabat, Mellieha and Lunzjata Valley (Gozo). Several rare species were ringed, including our first pallid harrier and spoonbill; other interesting species included rufous-tailed scrub robin, ring ouzel, semi-collared flycatcher and yellow-browed warbler.

Ringing is of course at its most rewarding when analysing retraps, i.e. ringed birds that are re-caught. A blackcap ringed in 1999 in Buskett was back at the same place in 2005! A moorhen ringed in 1997 at Ghadira was still there eight years later.

Most exciting of all is when ringers handle retraps with foreign rings. Such birds (known as controls) always

reveal another little secret about that most mysterious of bird activities: migration! The table below gives some of the more interesting recoveries and controls from 2005.

## watch that nest

Special attention was given during the nesting season, with close monitoring of the breeding success of Sardinian warbler and zitting cisticola. BirdLife's ringers also visited Filfla three times to ring yellow-legged gull pulli (chicks) by day and storm-petrels at night.

Mark Gauci is a bird ringer and Ringing Secretary of the Research Group



**New bird.** Pallid harrier was new to the ringing list.



# Educationally speaking...

Victor Falzon

Education takes time but its effects are long-lasting. BirdLife believes that through a sustained educational campaign, people will learn to appreciate the intrinsic value of the natural environment and its diversity.

## Of course

As teachers are the dominant players in a child's formal education, it is important to ensure that teachers themselves have a healthy environmental ethic. For this reason, the end-of-year in-service course for teachers has become an annual event on the Education Committee's agenda.

BirdLife's aim in this course is twofold: to inject a dose of green values in its participants, while at the same time introducing them to Maltese biodiversity - an initiative aimed to dispel the widespread impression that Malta is very poor in nature.

The theme this year was, as in previous years, Sharing Nature With Children. Talks included natural habitats, invertebrates, popular misconceptions about various fauna, and creating nature areas in schools. The third morning was devoted to fieldwork at Buskett, where teachers played several games aimed at developing children's perceptions of nature through the use of various senses. Lecturers were Jason Aloisio, Michael Grima and Joe Sultana. Michael Grima, chairperson of the Education Committee, co-ordinated the course.

## One World the Fifth

Meanwhile, the Committee worked on a new edition of Dinja Wahda (DW). This was going to be the fifth edition, again sponsored by APS Bank.

Desirée Falzon produced a set of green activities, which were expanded into a detailed 36-page Action Guide (see p22), produced by Victor Falzon. The Guide is the main tool to help teachers through the 18 activities. In past editions, BirdLife printed one or two Action Guides for every school. This year we printed copies for all primary school teachers.

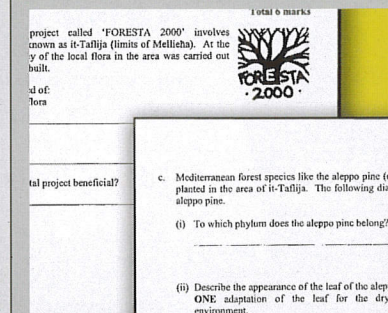
Once again, the running of DW5 was placed in the hands of Theresa Cremona, who had co-ordinated DW4 with great success.

DW5 activities included a number of old favourites (like putting up nature boards, bird tables and taking groups to Ghadira and Is-Simar) and some new activities, like having an econews slot in class, and taking part in a children's hearing.

By the end of 2005, over 30 schools were participating in DW5.

Victor Falzon is a member of the Education Committee.

## It's in the paper...



BirdLife's projects have found their way into student examination papers. The 2004-2005 Matsec Form 5 Biology Annual paper (above) included a number of questions directly relating to Foresta 2000.



## ...and on site!

Dinja Wahda 5 and visits to Is-Simar featured simultaneously on www.skola.gov.mt (above, arrowed), which is the Education Department's website. This gives our activities good exposure.



**Play.** Pembroke Primary kids playing a Dinja Wahda 5 game.



**Field day.** The in-service course included nature study at Buskett.



# the juniors...

desirée falzon

Six issues (Nos 66-71) of *Il-Huttafa* were published in 2005. The magazine is in its twelfth year of publication

Klabb Huttaf's 2005 was a mix of outings for all Under 18s, with special activities for the Over 13s (see Falko opposite) and with the magazine *Il-Huttafa* arriving regularly at 1000+ junior members' homes.

## the activities

Following the success of last year's tree-planting activity, our juniors were once again taken on site to plant saplings at Foresta 2000. As outings have become popular with the whole family, it was great to see up to three generations working side by side sowing a greener future.

Another highlight was the marathon hike in March, attended by over 100 members. With the proceeds from the walk, BirdLife bought a much-needed generator to power the irrigation system that waters the young trees and shrubs planted at the Kemmuna Ringing Station.

Supporting these and other club activities, leader training continued with outings designed for improving leaders' field knowledge.

## the mag

In all our outings we don't just show nature to the members - we also try to make them conservationists at heart. Most activities are attended by 30-odd members. So how do we reach the rest?



**Walkabout.** Club leaders studying garrigue flora at Xaghra l-Hamra.

The answer lies in 12 pages of nature conservation-packed information that is sent to all club members and their family every two months. Edited by Victor Falzon, *Il-Huttafa* has been in print since 1994, and hence was in its 71st issue by the end of 2005. The magazine is the backbone of the club, reaching into our members' homes with the BirdLife conservation message.

*Il-Huttafa* doesn't simply talk or teach birds. BirdLife's education arm integrates birds with their habitats and the other creatures they share a world with. The magazine thus contains green local news that ranges from habitat destruction to the discovery of new species of minibeasts. Green news goes worldwide on the foreign news page, with snippets about environmental highlights or outright disasters happening around the planet. A new hotspots section describes a nature haven abroad, while the activity pages talk about outings to local places of interest and give details of forthcoming events. The magazine's interactive section contains members' letters and drawings, as well as information about child-oriented websites about the natural world. Full of illustrations, *il-Huttafa* carries a strong conservation message throughout. It aims to touch the green centre of our members' hearts and remain embedded until, as adults, it can change the world we live in.

Text contributors to *Il-Huttafa* in 2005 were Jason Aloisio, Stefan Azzopardi, Matthew Borg Cardona, Alison Buttigieg, Oliver Cardona, Sean Caruana Webster, Elisabeth Conrad, Mark Anthony Falzon, Victor Falzon, Janet Gerardi, Denise Grima and Justin Vassallo.

**Desirée Falzon** is a member on the Klabb Huttaf Committee and Leader Co-ordinator.



**Listen-in.** A group waiting for darkness... and shearwaters.



**Handy work.** Falko members doing manual work at It-Taflija.



**On high.** Falko members on an outing to Ta' Ċenċ.

# ...and the youths

stefan azzopardi



The year 2005 was another hectic year for Falko, BirdLife Malta's youth section, with several changes taking place during the course of the year. Justin Vassallo, who for several years practically ran Falko single-handedly, began involving some of the long-

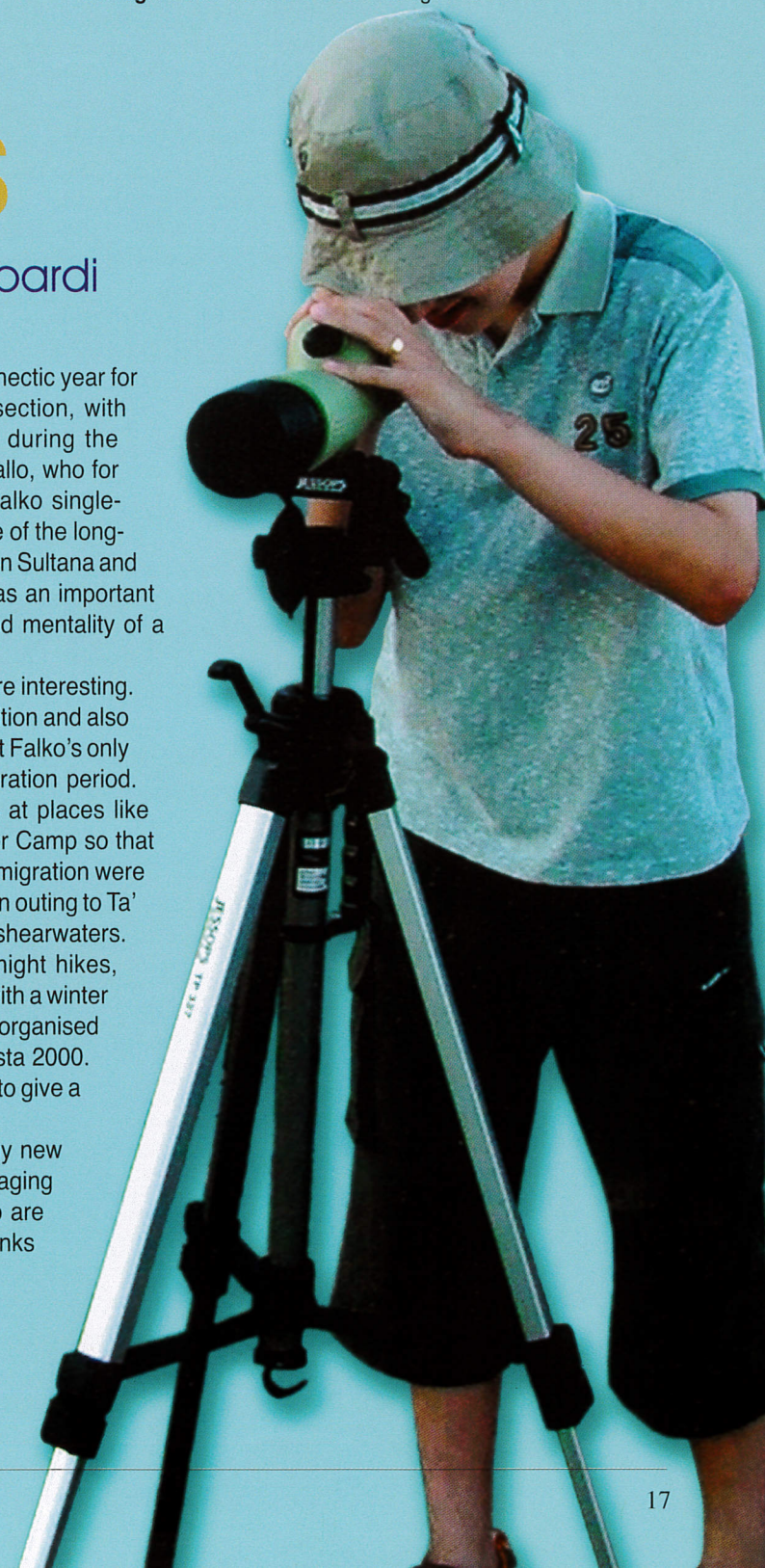
standing members, namely Matthew Borg Cardona, Simon Sultana and myself, to help co-ordinate the teenage section. This was an important move since it combined experience with the energy and mentality of a younger generation within the members' age range.

Last year Falko's activities were as varied as they were interesting. These included several annuals that have become a tradition and also some innovations. Although birds and birdwatching aren't Falko's only focus, bird-related activities take priority during the migration period. During this time we join the more experienced birders at places like Qammieh for sea-watching, or Buskett during the Raptor Camp so that we can learn from their expertise. Other activities during migration were an outing to Kemmuna to watch and help in ringing, and an outing to Ta' Ċenċ by boat and by land to watch and listen to Cory's shearwaters. Outside the migration period, there were always the night hikes, country hikes and bike hikes to keep us occupied, along with a winter camp in Gozo to enjoy the greenery. In autumn Falko also organised a survey of lichens in Buskett, and tree-planting at Foresta 2000. Such activities involve members in hands-on experience to give a feeling of concrete contribution.

All in all it was a very rewarding year. Although many new faces appear and disappear for the activities, it is encouraging to see that there is a group of interested members who are committed, and who we hope will take their place in our ranks as volunteers and activists.

Just like we did really, when you think about it...

**Stefan Azzopardi** is a Falko co-ordinator





# Shady characters

Malta may be short of woodland, but not of woodland birds. Mark- Anthony Falzon explains.

The Maltese Islands are hardly renowned for their woodlands. As happened in other small Mediterranean islands that supported agricultural populations and boatbuilding-related activities, most virgin growth was felled several centuries ago. Grazing further contributed to the longterm dearth of woodland.

With a very few notable exceptions, such as the venerable holm oaks of Wardija, there is nothing 'natural' about our contemporary groves. The patches of woodland at Miżieb, L-Ahrax, Ta' Mreġnu, Xrobb l-Għagin, Xewkija, Has-Saptan etc. were all planted in recent times. Buskett, which is home to various mature groves of aleppo pine, holm oak, white poplar and other Mediterranean species, is again mostly man-made, although it probably retains some earlier old growth. Also notable are the stands of aleppo pine growing around the fortifications of the Harbour area and the Victoria Lines, and the clumps of non-native eucalyptus planted by hunters. It is fair to say that woodland has generally increased in the last 30 years or so. The trend is set to continue,

with various afforestation projects in progress, notably BirdLife's Foresta 2000 and the park at Ta' Qali.

Given this scarcity of mature forest, we cannot really claim any significant resident populations of woodland birds. Rather, our groves provide temporary havens for migratory birds to rest, roost, or feed in order to put on the fat reserves that are so pivotal to a successful journey. These oases are described as 'staging posts' and in this sense our woodlands, albeit small, are ornithologically very significant. To a substantial number of migratory birds, they make the difference between life and death.

Migration being both seasonal and largely unpredictable, successful woodland birdwatching in Malta is very much a matter of being in the right place at the right time. The spring migrations hold much promise, not least since birds are usually in their best plumage. Hoopoe, turtle dove, cuckoo, nightjar, scops owl and woodchat shrike are among the more spectacular candidates, while the various species of leaf (*Phylloscopus* sp.) and Sylvia



Little cover. Only 0.87% of the Maltese Islands is afforested.

BirdLife Malta Maps

warblers make life interesting for the birdwatcher. Willow warblers, wood warblers, whitethroats and to a lesser extent subalpine warblers may all be found in wooded areas. In densely wooded areas such as Wied il-Luq at Buskett, dawn often breaks to the hauntingly beautiful song of nightingales. Gems include the Bonelli's warbler - a prized, rare find - and the more frequent icterine warbler. From late April to mid-May garden warblers and golden orioles feast on the ripening fruit of the fig, white mulberry and loquat. I have observed as many as eight golden orioles in one particularly bountiful mulberry tree at Wied l-iSperanza.

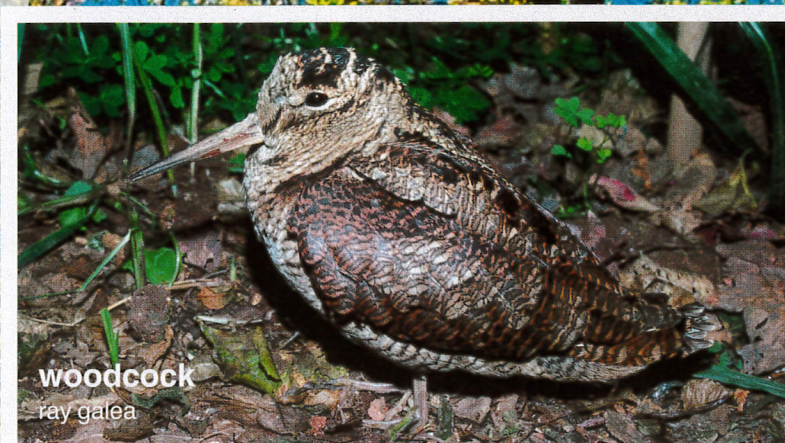
Various species of flycatchers are commonly seen during both the spring and autumn migrations. Autumn migration spans from mid-August to early November, during which period we come across the same species as in spring, with autumn specialities such as red-backed shrike, red-breasted flycatcher and lesser whitethroat always a possibility.

From November to late February, our groves provide a haven for many of our wintering species. Conifer-dominated areas are preferred by goldcrests and firecrests, whose sibilant calls are a common feature of woodland birdwatching in winter. Blackcaps and starlings tend to prefer olive groves, partly because of the dense cover afforded and also to feast on the ripening fruit. The song thrush is another common winter woodland resident; blackbirds, fieldfares and redwings may also be encountered in places like Buskett. Wintering flocks of linnets and serins roost in the groves of the Harbour area, and chaffinches often graze beneath the trees in places where trapping is absent. Winter woodland specialities include wryneck, woodcock and wren.

None of our common residents are strictly speaking woodland birds, even though species like Sardinian warbler regularly breed in the various forested patches. Spotted flycatcher, collared dove and woodchat shrike are rare and localised breeding species, and sometimes the odd pair of surviving turtle doves attempts to breed. It is hoped that the various afforestation projects will attract new breeding species. In summer, woodlands tend to offer good birdwatching, not least since they offer both birds and birders some respite from the parched heat of the surrounding countryside!

Woodland birdwatching requires particular skills: the element that attracts birds in the first place - foliage - also makes it difficult to spot. As clear views are compromised in woodland, sound takes priority, so knowing the various calls and song becomes essential. It takes years of patience to master this skill but it is all part of the fun really. The Internet is of great help in this respect, since many sites provide downloadable birdcalls that can also be stored on portable mp3 players, and call-guides on CD are also available. Nothing, however, beats the company of an experienced local, or learning by trial and error. The best way to 'work' woodland is to sit quietly and become part of the landscape. The birds will soon approach and go about their business, as you sit and enjoy them close up.

Mark-Anthony Falzon has been interested in birds and natural history since 1982.



woodcock  
ray galea



wood warbler  
denis cachia



blackcap  
denis cachia



spotted flycatcher  
denis cachia





# events 2005

## January

- 03 Council mtg
- 03 Talk + treeplanting @ San Andrea sch
- 06 Env Minister and Italian Ambassador @ F2000
- 07 Get-together for volunteers
- 13 Ornis Committee mtg
- 13 Talk at St Joseph (Sliema) junior sch
- 13 Council mtg
- 14 Talk at Teresa Nuzzo primary sch
- 15 Tree-planting at F2000 by First Insurance Brokers
- 15 White wagtail roost count in Valletta
- 17 Reserves Committee mtg
- 17 Arbor Day @ F2000
- 18 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 19 Attended MEPA meeting re State of the Environment report 2005
- 29 Mellieha LC tree-planting @ F2000
- 30 Youth Leader outing to F2000

## February

- 03 Council mtg
- 09 Education Committee mtg
- 18 *Il-Huttat* 66 out
- 19 Falko Committee mtg
- 21 Ringing Group mtg
- 22 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 26 Falko night hike
- 27 Klabb Huttat tree-planting @ F2000

## March

- 02 Talk (*Man's attitude towards nature*) to Bournemouth University Students @ FIS
- 03 Council mtg
- 09 Education Committee mtg
- 09-13 Participation in Fiera Ambient
- 12 Talk (*Wildlife of Buskett*) to Paola sec boys @ YTC Buskett
- 15 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 20 Klabb Huttat marathon walk
- 21 School Delegates Newsletter out
- 21 Ornis Committee mtg
- 24 Ornis Committee mtg

- 25 *BirdTalk* 87 out
- 26 Falko night hike
- 30-31 Visit from Vogelbescherming (BirdLife Netherlands) director

## April

- 01 Vogelbescherming director @ F2000
- 03 Council mtg
- 05 Ornis Committee mtg
- 06 Ghadira and Is-Simar 2004 reps out
- 07 Annual General Mtg
- 11 *Il-Huttat* 67 out
- 13 Meeting with EU Commission Monitoring Team
- 13 Education Committee Mtg
- 14 BirdLife Int EC Office visits F2000
- 14 Council mtg
- 15 Kemma Piccole Isole project begins
- 15 Interview by *L-Orizzont*
- 16 Falko hike
- 18 Council mtg
- 19 Ornis Committee mtg
- 20 New poster (little bittern) out
- 22 Talk @ St Michael sch Pembroke
- 23 Falko Committee mtg
- 24 Klabb Huttat outing to Kemma
- 24-25 EcoMedia France film hunters around F2000
- 26 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 29 Talk @ Maria Assumpta girls sec sch

## May

- 02 Reserves Committee mtg
- 03 HSBC Earthwatch @ Kemma
- 03 Meeting with Env Minister
- 04 Ornis Committee mtg
- 06 *BirdTalk* 88 out
- 07-08 Falko camp at Kemma
- 09-11 Launch of BirdLife Malta IBA book, Water Framework Directive seminar & Birds & Habitats Directives Task Force mtg @ BirdLife office, Brussels
- 11 Education Committee mtg
- 16-20 Participation in Agribusiness Open Week @ MCAST
- 19 Council mtg

- 23 School Delegates Newsletter
- 23 Launch of Malta IBA book @ the National Museum of Natural History
- 24 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 24 Filfla visit to study yellow-legged gulls
- 31 Ornis Committee mtg

## June

- 04 Led Klabb Xummiemu members @ Buskett icw Environment Week
- 04-05 Participation in EcoFest
- 09 Council mtg
- 10 *Il-Huttat* 68 out
- 14 NGOs mtg re Ta Cenč development
- 15 Education Committee mtg
- 16 Council mtg
- 16 Ornis Committee mtg
- 20 Reserves Committee mtg
- 21 Klabb Huttat mtg
- 23 Conservation Committee mtg
- 23 Mtg with Agriculture Institute @ University
- 27 Press release icw Buskett
- 29 Falko night hike

## July

- 01 *BirdTalk* 89
- 03 Falko manual work activity @ F2000
- 06 Klabb Huttat outing to Ghar Hasan
- 06 Mtg re Xaghra I-Hamra golf course
- 07 Participation @ forum *Malta fl-Ewropa*
- 07 Council mtg
- 13 Education Committee mtg
- 16-17 Filfla visit to study seabirds
- 18 Visit by Polish Scouts on eco study
- 19 Klabb Huttat mtg
- 20 Adult indoor activity - 3 talks
- 21 Press Briefing re BLife's EU complaint
- 22 Mtg @ Buskett with MRAE official
- 22-23 Visit by RSPB official
- 25 Mtg re Xaghra I-Hamra golf course
- 28 BirdLife as project partners with HSBC launch 34U @ Wied Gholleja
- 28 Council mtg
- 30 Env Minister @ F2000
- 30 Falko outing to Ta' Cenč

## August

- 01 Ringing Group mtg
- 03 PARKS Director @ F2000
- 05 *Il-Huttat* 69 out
- 05 New membership forms out
- 05 F2000 flyer out
- 07-11 In-service course *Sharing Nature With Children* for kindergarten assistants and primary tchrs
- 09 Mtg with Commissioner of Police re law enforcement
- 09-10 Filfla visit to study seabirds
- 10 Education Committee mtg
- 11 Ornis Committee mtg
- 15 Falko help @ F2000
- 15-18 Marketing workshop *Communications, Membership & Unrestricted Funding*
- 18 Council mtg
- 19 Mtg with Alternattiva Demokratika
- 19-21 Participation in British Birdwatching Fair @ Rutland Waters
- 23 Buskett Consultative Committee mtg @ MRAE
- 30 Participation in Ornis Committee's *Bird Strikes at Airport* workshop

## September

- 01 Klabb Huttat mtg
- 08-14 Falko Raptor Camp and fieldwork @ Buskett
- 10 *BirdTalk* 90 out
- 13 Conservation Committee mtg
- 14 Mtg with HSBC Earthwatch re Ghadira project
- 14 Education Committee mtg
- 18 F2000 Partners on-site mtg
- 20 New membership cards out
- 22 Council mtg
- 24 Bird-ringing with Welsh TV crew
- 26 *Bird's Eye View* 2004 out
- 28 Council mtg
- 29 Mtg with Welsh tv crew re filming hunting in Malta

## October

- 04 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 05 *BirdTalk* 91 out
- 05 Education Committee mtg
- 06 Council mtg
- 07 EuroBirdwatch activity @ Buskett
- 09 Falko hike to Gozo
- 12 Press conference re proposed golf course @ Xaghra I-Hamra
- 18 *Il-Huttat* 70
- 19 Education Committee mtg
- 19 Adult indoor activity - 3 talks
- 20 Kemma autumn migration project begins
- 20 School Delegates Newsletter
- 21 Mtg with St Paul's Bay LC re Is-Simar
- 23 *Strategic Planning & Development* workshop by Ken Smith (RSPB)
- 24 *Dinja Wahda* 5 Action Guide out
- 26 Interview by *Xarabank* (tv) re avian flu
- 27 Launch of *Dinja Wahda* 5
- 30 Opening of Is-Simar Visitor centre

## November

- 06 Leader outing to Xaghra I-Hamra
- 07 Reserves Committee mtg
- 08 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 08 3000 trees and shrubs arrive from Corpo Forestale (Italia) for F2000
- 08-09 European BirdLife Partners mtg for Directors @ Bratislava
- 09 Education Committee mtg
- 11 Talk @ Little Angels sch
- 12 Falko hike
- 15 Talk to University Communications students
- 16 Talk @ Paola primary sch
- 17 Talk @ Msida primary sch
- 18 Env Minister and Italian Ambassador @ F2000
- 22 Talk @ Teresa Nuzzo sch
- 23 Report on Buskett presented at Buskett Consultative Committee mtg
- 24 Council mtg
- 24 Talk @ Birzebbuga A primary sch
- 27 HSBC Earthwatch activity @ Ghadira

- 28 Tree-planting @ F2000 by pupils from Chiswick House + St Martin's College
- 28 Mtg with Env Minister

## December

- 01 Avantech donates fax machine
- 01 Council mtg
- 01-04 Participation in Book Fair
- 02 Participation at MEPA *Coastal Zone Integrated Management* workshop
- 04 Tree planting @ Kemma
- 05 Talk @ Senglea primary sch
- 05 Ornis Committee mtg
- 06 St Joseph sch @ F2000
- 06 Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 07 On RTK radio re education work etc
- 07-08 Participation in *Workshop on Marine IBAs* @ ECO office, Brussels
- 08 Falko Committee mtg
- 09 *BirdTalk* 92 out
- 09 BirdLife *Birds & Habitats Directives* mtg @ Brussels
- 14 Education Committee mtg
- 14 Adult indoor activity - 2 talks
- 15 Council mtg
- 17 Falko Committee mtg
- 19 Ornis Committee mtg
- 19 Meeting with MLP
- 19 Talk @ St Francis sch, Birkirkara
- 20 St Michael's sch @ F2000
- 21 Ghadira and Is-Simar management agreements signed with MRAE & MEPA
- 21 Donation of 60+ trees to F2000 by Dr Joe Azzopardi
- 22 Ghadira + Is-Simar contracts signed
- 23 On PBS radio *Familja Wahda*
- 23 *Il-Huttat* 71 out





# Out in 2005

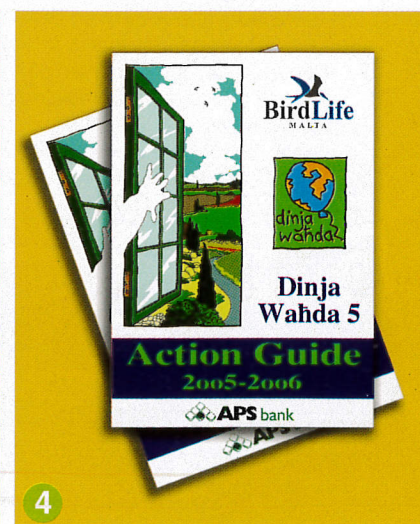
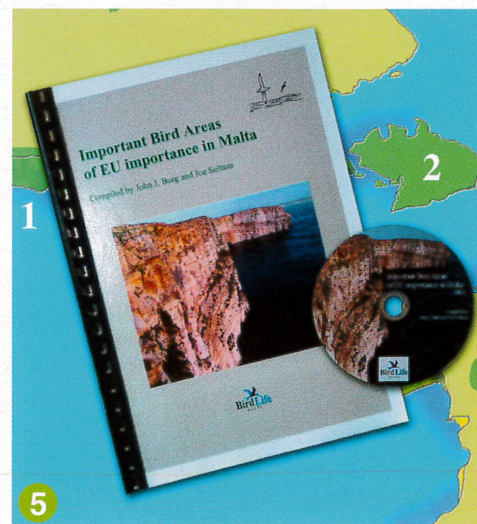
Educational, promotional and sale items issued by BirdLife in 2005

This is only a selection of the more colourful or labour-intensive items. It is not possible to list everything...



Clockwise...

- 1 **2005 Calendar** A handy desk flip-calendar with bird and fact file for every month. Photography by Denis Cachia, Raymond Galea, John Borg, Victor Falzon, Charles Gauci and Joseph Mangion.
- 2 **Reserve Reports** The second in the series of annual reports for Ghadira and Is-Simar. Compiled by the Nature Reserves Committee.
- 3 **Kitchen Apron** A two-colour cloth apron. Artwork by Victor Falzon, production by Pauline Cauchi and Doreen Camilleri.
- 4 **Dinja Wahda 5 Action Guide** The fifth Action Guide in the series (see also pg 15). Text by Desirée Falzon.
- 5 **IBAs book and CD** Details, criteria and maps of all 11 IBAs of international importance identified in Malta. Compiled by John J Borg and Joe Sultana, printed by RSPB.
- 6 **Membership Form** Made for use at the British Birdwatching Fair. Photograph on front flap by Ian Balzan.
- 7 **Bird poster** Another poster in the *Hieles, Haj u Sabih!* series, featuring a little bittern. The poster is sent free to junior members on renewing their membership. Photograph by Denis Cachia.



Items 2, 4, 6 and 7 were produced by Victor Falzon.

## 2005 who's who

**Honorary President**  
Joe Attard

**President**  
Joseph Mangion

**Secretary**  
Denis Cachia

**Treasurer**  
Norman Chetcuti

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

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

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

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

**Finances**  
Anita Aloisio  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon

**Education Committee**  
Chair: Michael Grima  
Secretary: Victor Fiott  
Jason Aloisio  
Ray Bonnici  
Anthony Cordina  
Victor Falzon  
Felix Gerardi

**Falko Committee**  
Chair: Justin Vassallo  
Secretary: Stefan Azzopardi  
André Callus  
Matthew Borg Cardona  
Simon Sultana

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

**Klabb Huttaf Committee**  
Chair: Jason Aloisio  
Secretary: Sylvia Falzon  
Norman Chetcuti  
Desirée Falzon  
Victor Falzon  
Justin Vassallo



Youth leaders shortly before leading an Environment Day activity for children at Buskett: (from left) Jason Aloisio, Sylvia Falzon, Stefan Azzopardi, Simon Sultana, Joseph Mangion, Denise Grima, Kathleen Mamo, Victor Falzon and Desirée Falzon.

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

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

**Injured Birds Unit**  
Co-ordinator: Ian Balzan

**Volunteers**  
Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon

**Website**  
Webmaster: Denis Cachia

**Publications editors**  
Bird's Eye View: Victor Falzon  
BirdTalk: Victor Falzon  
School Delegates Newsletter: Tony Cordina  
Il-Huttafa: Victor Falzon  
Il-Merill: John Borg, Joe Sultana

**Staff**  
Marketing: Audrey Abela  
Administration: Victoria Caruana  
Field teachers: Jason Aloisio  
Victor Falzon  
Reserves supervisor: Mark Gauci  
Dinja Wahda: Theresa Cremona  
Foresta 2000 ranger: Ray Vella

These are the people who occupied the main BirdLife Malta posts. There are many other helpers, youth leaders, birdwatchers, ringers, photographers, rescuers, assistant wardens, school delegates etc. to whose commitment the Society is very grateful.

## rural horrors

Those of us who like to walk in the Maltese countryside, especially in coastal areas, often come across bird-trapping sites. This is no surprise, as there are over 5000 of them presently scarring our diminishing countryside. Since part of the trapper's grisly game is to hide in wait for his feathered victims, a shelter of sorts is always in order. Largely built of a mix of dressed and rough stonework, these *duri* are often roofed or reinforced with hideous scraps of metal scavenged from a variety of sources - no prizes for guessing where the dura pictured here got its roof!

It is hoped that, come 2009 - when bird trapping becomes illegal - all such monstrosities presently gracing our ridges and hillsides will eventually go the way of the dodo.



Denis Cachia



objective:

## restoring lost habitat

The wetland that was recreated at Is-Simar encourages more birds of reed and lake to visit and to stay longer, long enough perhaps... to breed.