

Bird's Eye View




BirdLife
MALTA

BirdLife Malta
Annual Magazine
1999

Editorial



Looking over last year's events in the life of the Society (p21-22), it is hard to believe that so much can be done in the space of twelve short months.

But to anyone who has known and worked in BirdLife, it's easy to understand! BirdLife is run by people determined to make things better for nature. Moreover, they are people who know that just by sitting back and shaking one's head in dismay will not help birds one single bit. And of course, underlying all the activity is a loyal and steady membership that supports BirdLife's ideals and fuels its projects.

BirdLife needs all that support, because the odds are formidable: ignorance, machismo, puerile politics, red-tape, laissez-faire and the ever-present I-Me-and-Myself syndrome! In such a unique 'ecosystem', nature stands to lose out every time.

But BirdLife has never given up. With research, education and awareness as our main weapons, the Society has made substantial inroads on the Maltese mentality. Gone are the days when hunters, trappers and young boys with caged robins were just another accepted feature of the countryside. Now we all have an opinion, and the killing of birds has become a highly volatile topic, and a recurrent headache for the authorities.

Hunting and trapping are of course still around, but nobody takes them for granted anymore. What's more, the hunting groups themselves are feeling the subtle pressures of a changing attitude. They know that they must brush up their act, change their ways. The tide is turning.

This issue of Bird's Eye View is a testimony of BirdLife's continuous struggle to keep that tide on the move.

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 about 3000 members.

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

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

BirdLife is a charity and depends totally on subscriptions and donations.

BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International.

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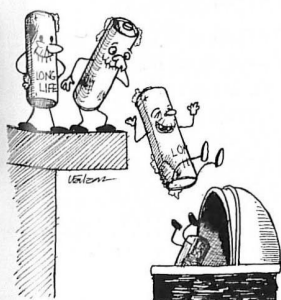
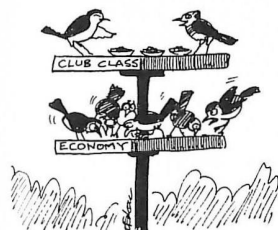
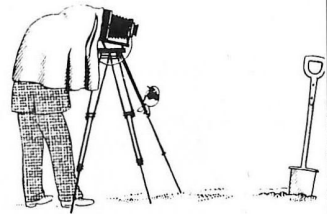
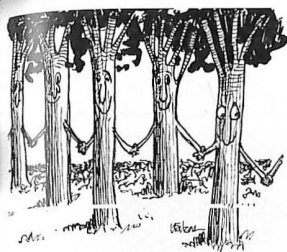
Backpage: **Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs** by Joe Sultana

Printed at Gutenberg Press

This is the 17th issue of Bird's Eye View

BirdLife's
secret
weapon:
the younger
generation!

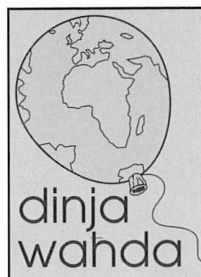




One World of Fun!

BirdLife's Dinja Wahda educational project

Desirée Falzon



The bulk of BirdLife's educational work in 1999 was the preparation and launch of Dinja Wahda, our millennium educational project. Dinja Wahda (meaning *One World*) is an exciting award-winning project which encourages school children and teachers to do environmental activities in and around their school.

Dinja Wahda proved itself popular when BirdLife launched it for the first time in the scholastic year 1994-1995. That time it was geared for primary schools, of which more than half took part.

For Dinja Wahda 1999-2000, BirdLife's Education Committee, led by Angèle Pulis, decided to widen the project's scope to allow secondary schools to join in. There are also more activities, more variety and more fun!

Accompanying the project is an *Action Guide*, containing all the information needed for each of Dinja Wahda's 20 activities. Some activities are straightforward enough: putting up and maintaining a notice board of green news, taking photographs of nature, erecting bird tables and building nest boxes.

Other activities aim to make children aware of the consequences of human action on the environment. Activities such as growing trees, clean-ups, collecting used batteries for separate disposal and making compost all promote a greener way of life. Other tasks require students to pass on the green message to others - these include

writing letters to the press, designing promotional stickers about solar power and raising money for conservation projects.

Dinja Wahda has its competitive element as well. All activities carry

points according to their level of difficulty, so that the more activities completed, the more points are gained by the school. At the end of the year, totals are drawn up and schools awarded accordingly.

The project kicked off well. Dinja Wahda 1999-2000 was launched on 26 October 1999 at the Radisson SAS hotel, and more than 80 schools attended the occasion. Since then, the BirdLife office has been busy dealing with all the queries and requests from enthusiastic schools. BirdLife has in fact engaged a person, Sandra Mifsud, specifically to co-ordinate Dinja Wahda. As part of her work, Sandra also visits schools to monitor the progress of Dinja Wahda as well as to talk to teachers and children involved.

As one might expect, a project like Dinja Wahda doesn't come cheap! BirdLife is therefore very grateful to *Nos Oiseaux*, a Swiss bird organisation, which is the main sponsor of this year's project. BirdLife is also indebted to the other sponsors, namely HSBC, Sunkist and Fuji Film.

By involving children in practical environmental work, BirdLife hopes to create a future generation of adults to whom 'green' isn't just another colour, but a way of life. ●



Say it with...

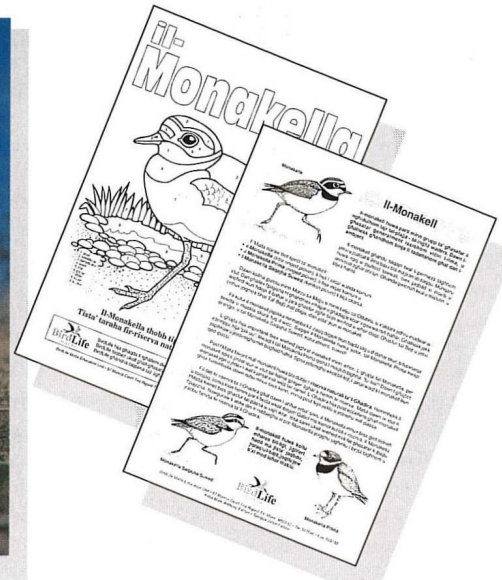
BirdLife material issued in 1999

When you are trying to reach a variety of audiences, you have to use a wide spectrum of materials to strike home! The following is some material that BirdLife produced in 1999.

Spring Campaign

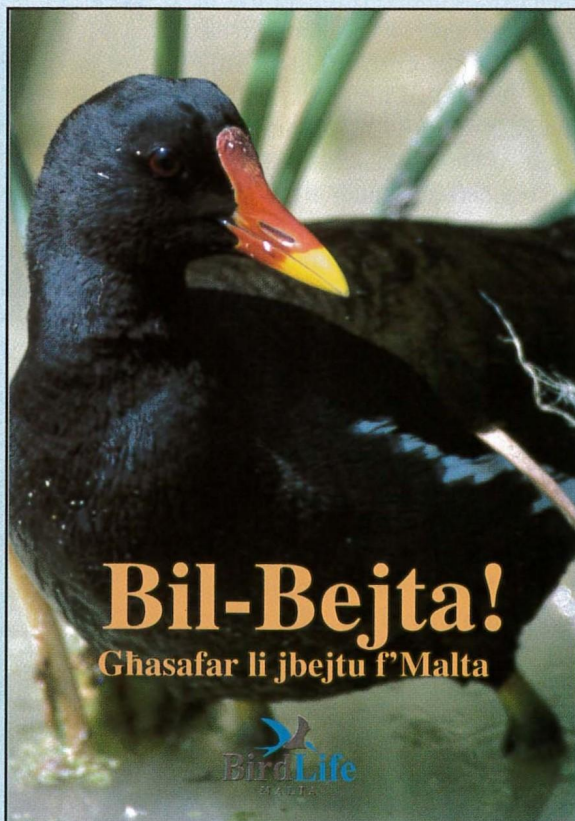


The Little Ringed Plover poster (above) was issued in March 1999 to co-incide with spring. As a wader and a relatively new breeding bird at Ghadira, this bird was chosen by the BirdLife Education Committee as mascot to the Spring Campaign in schools. This campaign highlighted both migration as well as Ghadira nature reserve. The poster was accompanied by a factsheet and a colouring sheet (right) about the little ringed plover, both articles being new material. Poster photo is by Denis Cachia.



The items shown in these pages are not a complete list. Many more items, such as leaflets, flyers, forms, lists, newsletters and other paper material were produced, not to mention the adverts used on television and in the cinemas.

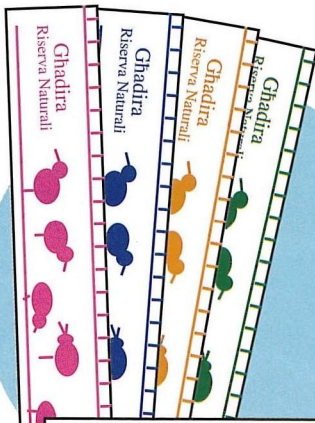
Ed.



Breeding Birds Book

Bil-Bejta! (left) is the latest book published by BirdLife Malta. It is a full-colour 28-page publication about Malta's breeding birds. Regardless of whether the bird is rare or common, the book allots a page to each and every one of the 22 species that regularly nest or have recently began breeding in Malta. Every bird is described, with details of size, colour, habits and habitat, clutch number, colour of eggs etc. All birds are illustrated by colour photographs. A special page is also dedicated to 10 birds which have bred irregularly, and another to 6 birds which formerly bred but which were exterminated by hunting.

The printing of this book was made possible with financial assistance of NABU, the BirdLife Partner in Germany. Text is by Joe Sultana.



BirdLife rules OK!

Specially aimed for kids, BirdLife has produced these 30cm plastic rulers, sporting a simple bird line-up. The rulers also promote Ghadira nature reserve, and carry BirdLife Malta's logo. The items come in various bright colours!

T-shirt & Cap

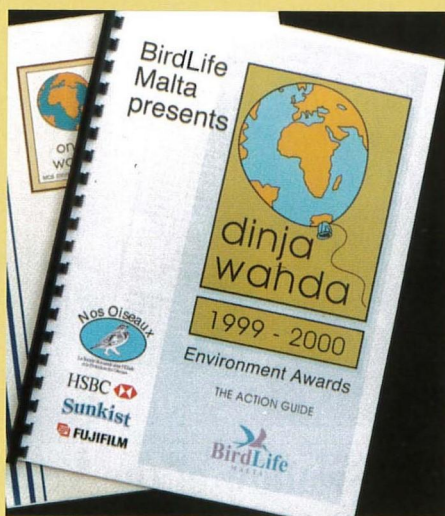
T-shirts are ever popular. Luckily, they are also an excellent way of getting a message across. So T-shirts have always been on the list of BirdLife's sale items. The one shown at right is the latest. It was produced specifically to promote Ghadira nature reserve, and therefore features not only the reserve's name, but also a picture of little ringed plover. The T-shirt is available in various sizes. Colour black.

Another item is the cloth cap, also shown at right. It is blue and white and sports the Ghadira nature reserve logo.



BirdLife Malta Pictures

Dinja Wahda



The Dinja Wahda Action Guide (above) was issued in October. The 32-page document explains in step-by-step detail each and every activity of the 1999-2000 edition of Dinja Wahda. A copy of the Action Guide was sent to the participating schools. Text by Education Committee. The Action Guide was accompanied by a special Points Chart.

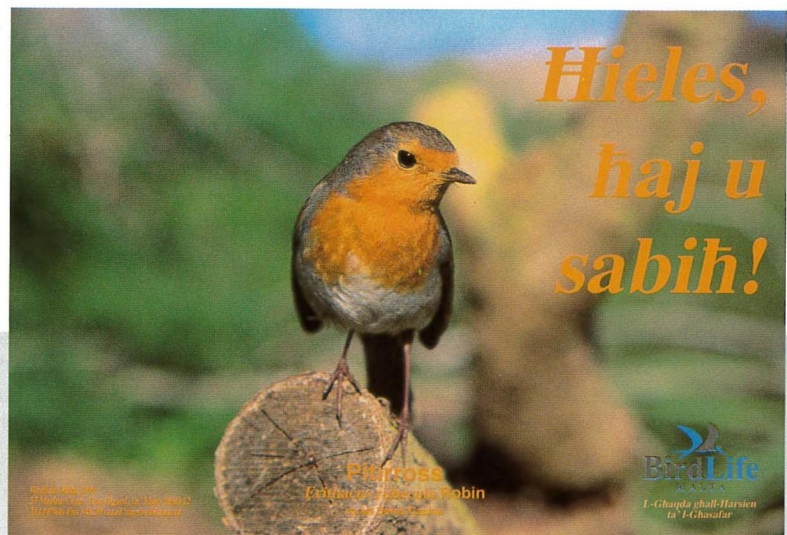
The Robin poster (right) was published in October primarily to be used with one of the Dinja Wahda activities, namely *Free Robin*. However it is also being used as incentive for young members who renew their subscription in 2000. It is also being sent to schools on request. Photo is by Denis Cachia.



Bagged!

Cloth bags are cheap, convenient, long-lasting and can be attractive. What's more, they're good news for the trash mountain, because each time we use the cloth bag, it means one less disposable plastic bag in the bin. So BirdLife has produced its own special bag, made from thick, hard-wearing cloth. The BirdLife bags sport a large picture of a blue rock thrush surrounded by local vegetation.

Rulers, T-shirts, caps and cloth bags are all for sale from Ghadira nature reserve.



Robin Campaign

Catching them young!

Klabb Huttaf - BirdLife's youngsters

Jason Aloisio

Klabb Huttaf co-ordinator



Klabb Huttaf logo

If you joined BirdLife as an adult... well, sorry but you've missed most of the fun of being a conservationist! In a country beset with all sorts of environmental constraints, it may be hard to imagine how one can enjoy being a conservationist. Yet this is what Klabb Huttaf is all about.

Victor Falzon



Klabb Huttaf (The Swallows Club) is the junior section of BirdLife Malta, catering for members under sixteen years old. What started 30 years ago with a handful of youths has evolved into a club boasting over 1400 members. Over the years, this section nurtured most of BirdLife's present leaders and activists. Indeed, without Klabb Huttaf's infusion of new blood, BirdLife manpower would today be seriously crippled!

Victor Falzon



So the club aims to forge not just armchair naturalists, but active conservationists. Activities are held regularly - members attend hikes and visit nature reserves, where helping hands are always welcome. Nature trips to Kemmuna are nowadays standard fare in spring, coinciding with the Piccole Isole (see p7) project.

Desirée Falzon



Club activities are not limited to outdoor experiences. Craft evenings, talks, quizzes and even Christmas parties are equally popular, and all of them somehow nature-oriented!

More adventurous outings are also organised for the 13yr+ age group. These include bikehikes, night hikes, camps and summer nights-out at Ta' Ċenċ listening to the ghostly Cory's shearwaters. This group is co-ordinated by youth leader Justin Vassallo.

In 1999 Klabb Huttaf held 11 activities.

In 1999 the club published six more issues of its bi-monthly *Il-Huttafa* (The Swallow), packed with information about birds, nature and conservation issues. The magazine's popularity is set to increase as plans are in the pipeline to give it a permanent colour cover sometime in 2000.

From time to time, members also receive treats such as stickers, posters and badges. In 1999, club members who renewed their subscription received a stunning full colour

Swallow of the Year

To further encourage active membership, the club launched in 1999 a special new competition called *Il-Huttafa tas-Sena* (Swallow of the Year). This was a points race based on how active a member is within Klabb Huttaf. Points were awarded for attending activities, sending drawings and letters to the magazine, getting new members, helping out in fairs etc.

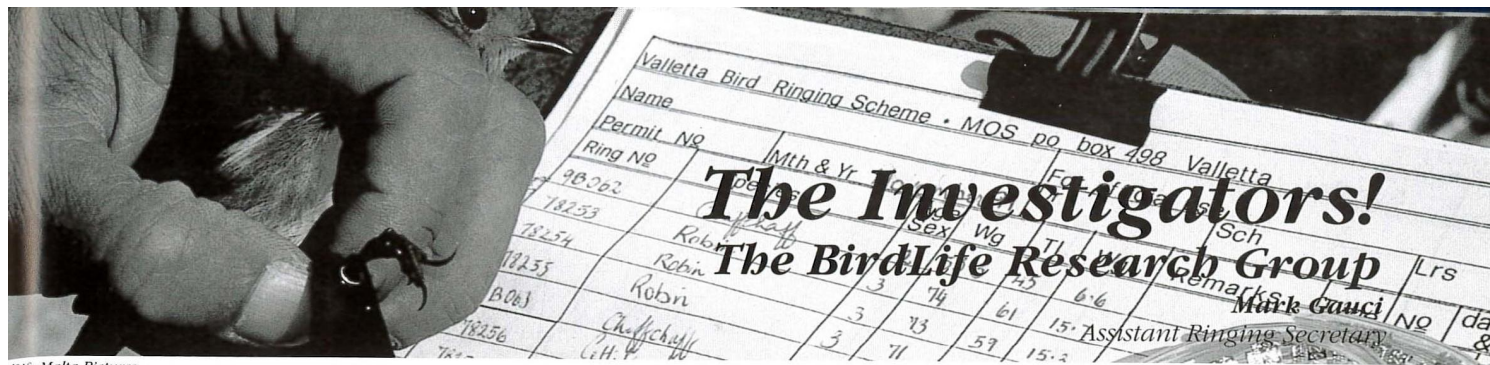
It was a complete success with hundreds of members taking part. The 1999 winner was Jürgen Pavanello, who won a pair of binoculars and a bird guide!

poster featuring little ringed plover (see page4).

In 1999 Klabb Huttaf was managed by a working group of youth leaders, co-ordinated by Desirée Falzon. Jason Aloisio took over in October. ●



BirdLife Malta Pictures



Life Malta Pictures

BirdLife's Research Group is mainly composed of twelve licensed bird ringers. These people carry out all the Society's research activity, aided by several helpers and birdwatchers. Several important study projects were once again managed by the Research Group in 1999.

Small Islands

The *Progetto Piccole Isole* (PPI) in Malta has been held annually since 1991. For an entire month (15 April - 15 May) the spring migration is closely monitored from dawn to dusk, through bird ringing.

The Research Group uses Kemmuna as the Malta project site. The island is a bird sanctuary and is relatively undisturbed. It therefore has the right conditions for certain bird species, which would otherwise be very hard to study due to hunting and human interference. A case in point is the woodchat shrike, of which only an average of five birds used to be ringed in pre-PPI years. The annual average for the same bird is nowadays more in the region of 100.

PPI is held in conjunction with other small Mediterranean islands. The aim is to determine migratory routes and the importance of such islands as resting places during migration.

Ringing

Apart from the PPI, the group in 1999 also maintained several other ringing activities.

The ongoing monitoring of

breeding seabirds went on unabated, carried out by John J Borg.

Trips to Filfla were organised in order to ring yellow-legged gull chicks and European storm-petrels. On 5 May 1999, the group recovered a storm petrel which had been ringed in 1978! For a sparrow-sized bird to brave the rough sea life for at least 21 years is quite remarkable!

Several foreign-ringed birds were recovered in 1999, namely two common chiffchaffs from the Czech, a siskin from the UK, a dunlin from the Ukraine, a willow warbler and a blackcap from Italy and a barn swallow from Germany.

Likewise, birds ringed in Malta and recovered abroad included two barn swallows and a willow warbler in Italy, a yellow-legged gull in Hungary and a sand martin in Finland. Bird ringing studies have also determined that most common autumn migrants remain loyal to their wintering areas. Blackcaps and meadow pipits ringed in 1993 have been recaptured in 1999 in the same locality where they were first ringed. The same goes for a resident Cetti's warbler, ringed in Buskett in 1990 and retrapped in 1999, still in Buskett!

In 1999 the Research Group ringed a total of 10,213 birds of 91 species.

Barn Swallows

Another project carried out by the Research Group is the EURING Barn Swallow autumn project. This project studies a common migrant - the barn swallow, which has declined in recent years. It is hoped that this study, being held in most European countries, will determine why. Locally the birds are studied at roosts, which is where the birds gather in flocks in the evening to sleep. The four sites used are Ghadira, Is-Simar, Rabat and Lunzjata Valley in Gozo.

Breeding Atlas

An atlas of the breeding birds of Malta is being painstakingly co-ordinated by Denis Cachia, and is currently entering its third year. This project involves mapping all the Maltese Islands and marking wherever birds are noticed displaying breeding behaviour. Based largely on observation, the breeding atlas will hopefully be concluded in the coming year or two. ●

Editor's note
Mark Gauci co-ordinated the 1999 PPI in Malta.

Il-Merill 29

The Research Group also published in 1999 the 29th issue of *Il-Merill*, BirdLife's scientific publication (editor Mark Falzon). The 68-page issue contains several papers and short notes relevant to birds in Malta, as well as a systematic bird-list for the years 1993-1995.



Woodchat shrike features more on ringers' log nowadays.



Filfla - once a bombing target, now a unique nature reserve.

Rocks of Life

Joe Sultana

People first settled in Malta 7000 years ago. Since then, the human population has grown to about 383,000. However the land grew no bigger, but remained a steady 316km²! These figures render Malta the most densely populated country on earth. To all this one must add the million-plus tourists who annually visit! Little wonder, therefore, that human pressures on the countryside, particularly on the coast, is intense. Despite all this, there are still a number of uninhabited spots of land. Among these are three small islands, namely Filfla, Haġret il-Ġeneral and Selmunett. These islets are all of historical or cultural importance. However they also harbour a number of interesting species of flora and fauna, some of which are endemic. For this reason, these three rocks of life have some years ago been given legal protection.

Filfla

Filfla is a 2ha island, rising like a natural bastion and forming a plateau 65m above sea level. Its limestone cliffs rest on a layer of clay and they are surrounded by rubble and boulder screes, formed by erosion as well as by the islet's use for many years as a bombing target by the British military services. Members of BirdLife Malta have been visiting the islet regularly to monitor its seabird populations.

Bombing was stopped in 1971 and the plateau gradually became covered with low vegetation which includes a dominant large form of wild leek. Scattered vegetation has also mushroomed beneath the cliffs in shallow pockets of clayey soil.

These changes have no doubt helped the population of the nominate *filfolensis* subspecies of the endemic Matese wall lizard to increase on the plateau surface up to one male per 4m². Three, possibly four, other subspecies of this animal occur on other Maltese islets.

However destructive the military activity was, the practice had some unexpected effects. The rubble resulting from the years of bombing created extensive and excellent breeding habitat for the European storm-petrel. This bird, nowadays regarded as a separate Mediterranean *melitense* race, nests in holes and crevices among the boulders. Filfla supports one of the largest known

colonies of European storm-petrel in the Mediterranean. The bombing also kept man away from the islet and controlled the Filfla population of yellow-legged gull, a voracious predator. Fortunately rats never made it to Filfla either.

However, all is not well today. In the early Seventies the Filfla population of storm-petrel was estimated at about 10,000 pairs. Nowadays it is probably less than 5000 pairs.

The main reason for this decline is that in the last 15 years the rubble screes have gradually eroded or been washed away by the sea, reducing the storm-petrel's habitat. The yellow-legged gulls, which today number over 120 pairs (less than 30 pairs in the Sixties),

are a threat to the storm-petrels, as they often prey on the smaller bird.

The Cory's shearwater is another seabird that breeds on Filfla in rock crevices and beneath boulders. Its population also increased when military practice ceased, but in recent years it too has been suffering loss of nesting sites as the rubble gets washed away.

Very little can be done in the management of such a site except to control the human presence. While it would not be difficult to control the yellow-legged gull population, saving the rubble habitat from further degradation is an impossible task.

Strict legislation was enacted in 1987, making it illegal to visit Filfla without permission. Such permission is only given for educational and scientific purposes.

"However destructive the military activity was, the practice had some unexpected effects."



On the decline. The European storm-petrel is fast losing ground on Filfla.

Joe Sultana

Joe Sultana



Left: Hagret il-Ġeneral at Dwejra, Gozo. Right: The Malta 'fungus'.

Hagret il-Ġeneral

Along the Maltese coast one finds a number of circular or semi-circular inlets. These are called subsidence structures and are the result of underground caverns, the roofs of which were eroded by groundwater until they collapsed. At the mouth of one such inlet at Dwejra in Gozo there is a small stack, with a surface of less than 1ha. This islet is known as Hagret il-Ġeneral (also Fungus Rock).

This is the home of the famed Malta fungus, which is not really a fungus but a strange parasitic flowering plant which thrives on the roots of salt-tolerant plants. It does occur in other parts of the Mediterranean, but was

first described from this rock. In Malta this plant occurs only on this rock and just one other inaccessible spot in the high southern cliffs of mainland Malta.

On Hagret il-Ġeneral there is also a fine population of the endemic Maltese everlasting, as well as the endemic *generalensis* subspecies of the Maltese wall lizard.

Less than 20 specimens of the lizard were counted on the islet a few years ago. The low number could be due to the presence of rats. Being so close to the coastline of Gozo it was not difficult for the rodents to establish themselves there. Rats also feed on the Malta fungus.

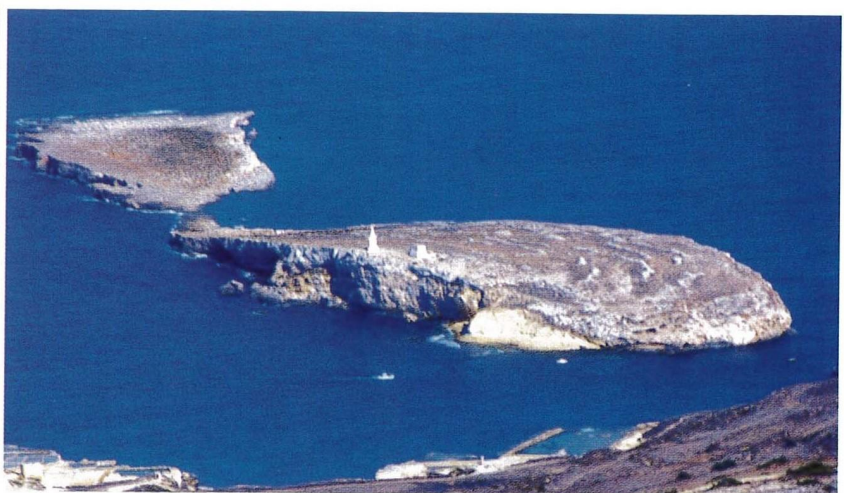
Access to the islet is forbidden.

Selmunett

Selmunett, also known as St. Paul's Islands, is the reputed shipwreck site of St. Paul, hence the name and the large statue of the saint dominating the site. In the past, Selmunett used to be leased to a Maltese nobleman to release rabbits and hunt them. The islet is the home of the endemic *kieselbachi* subspecies of the Maltese wall lizard, and the only site for the Cretan pelliory.

On Selmunett, all flora and fauna are protected. Access to the islet is restricted to designated footpaths and activities such as camping and barbecues are prohibited. ●

Joe Sultana



Victor Falzon

Left: The Selmunett subspecies of Maltese wall lizard. Right: Aerial view of Selmunett islets.

Species mentioned in the text

Wild leek *Allium commutatum* Kurrat Selvagg

Maltese wall lizard *Podarcis filfolensis* Gremxula ta' Malta

European storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* Kanġu ta' Filfla

Yellow-legged gull *Larus cachinnans* Gawwija Prima

Cory's shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* Ċiefa

Maltese everlasting *Helichrysum melitense* Sempreviva t'Ghawdex

Maltese fungus *Cynomorium coccineum* Gherq Sinjur

Cretan pelliory *Parietaria cretica* Xeht ir-Rih tal-Gżejjer

Black rat *Rattus rattus* Far Iswed

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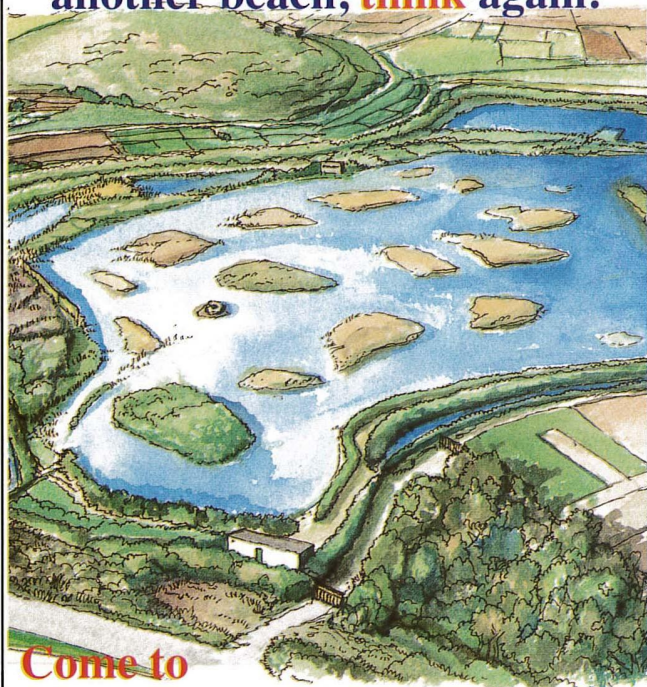
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Lufthansa constantly researches and adopts new technologies to reduce fuel consumption, emissions and aircraft noise. The airline also sponsors nature conservation projects, such as the threatened Hula Valley, a bird paradise in Northern Israel.

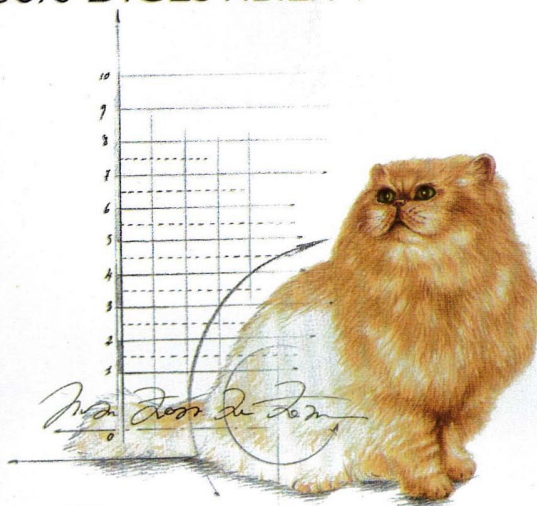
BirdLife Malta congratulates Lufthansa for its commitment.

If you think Ghadira is just another beach, *think* again!



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RESPECT THEIR DIFFERENCES.

Shadow in the rushes

• The shy moorhen •

by Joe Sultana



A moorhen's nest may contain 13 eggs. (photo Joe Sultana)



Moorhen feeding downy chicks. (photo Ray Galea)

Give habitat and some protection, and birds will move in! It's what the moorhen did in Malta!

Following a good rainy season, some abandoned softstone quarries hold water for several months, sometimes throughout summer. With water present, reed, bulrush and similar vegetation grow along the fringes of such pools. In time the place may become the ideal breeding habitat for some birds.

Freshwater habitat is very rare in Malta. Where it is present (and hunters absent), moorhen may move in. This is what happened in 1984, when the first moorhen nest was located in a flooded old quarry at Hal Kirkop. In 1987 the bird bred in Gozo at a large irrigation waterhole in Għajnsielem. Since then, moorhen has bred at several other localities, particularly at the Għadira and Is-Simar nature reserves. Is-Simar is by far this bird's stronghold in Malta.

The moorhen is normally secretive, but may venture out of the dense vegetation to feed in the open. As it moves about, the moorhen constantly cocks its tail, exposing the white undertail feathers which contrast with the overall dark grey plumage of the adult bird. Also evident are the bright red and yellow bill and the green legs with long toes. The juveniles are grey-brown and the bill lacks the adult livery. The downy young are black with a red bill.

The nest is well hidden among the reeds or similar dense vegetation. It is like an almost roofed basket built of twigs and coarse vegetation lined with fine dry strands of grass. Sometimes it is built floating amongst the reeds with a slight ramp towards the usually deep cup. Clutches may have up to about 13 eggs, generally buff-coloured with various dark spots. The young leave the nest soon after hatching, and join their parents in the water.

The moorhen is one of the more recent additions to the regular breeding birds of Malta.



The adult moorhen is unmistakable. *(photo Denis Cachia)*



A quiet, country freshwater pool with fringing thick vegetation draws moorhen like a magnet. *(photo Joe Sultana)*

INDIVIDUAL RATES

**AIRPORT TRANSFERS
NOT INCLUDED**

GROUP RATES

- **HOTELS WHILST ON TOUR ARE ON HALF BOARD BASIS**
- **HOTELS DURING THE TOUR ARE 4 or 5 STAR WITH FACILITIES ENSUITE**
- **HOTELS “OFF” TOUR DAYS ARE ON BED & BREAKFAST BASIS**
- **HOTELS IN LONDON ARE 3 or 4 STAR**
- **THE EXTRA DAYS ARE SPENT IN LONDON**
- **SIGHTSEEING TOURS IN LONDON ARE OPTIONAL (ON REQUEST)**
- **APT/HTL/APT TRANSFERS ARE ONLY INCLUDED WITH GROUP BOOKINGS**

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> OTHER DATES MAY ALSO BE ORGANISED FOR GROUPS

• GROUP BOOKINGS WILL ONLY BE ORGANISED WITH 45 PERSONS OR MORE

Day 1. After a comfortable journey we met after dinner for a slide presentation outlining the trips to be taken over the duration of the holiday.

Day 2. After breakfast we headed for Snettisham on the Wash. On arrival, Black-headed and Common Gull were taking advantage of the heavy rain in the car park! With the migration season an unusual number of Robins were in evidence. Waders proved to be a spectacular sight, also several thousand Knot, Dunlin and a few Turnstones. After lunch, an increasing number of dark-bellied Brent Geese flew down to graze. On our return, a pair of Stonechats proved to be the "star birds". In the afternoon we made our way to the Wildfowl and Wetland reserve at Wetley. In a large, centrally-heated hide we spotted Swans, Whoopers and hundreds of Lapwings, Stint, Snipe and Dunlin. Others even caught sight of a Long-billed Dowitcher. After dinner we sat for a review of the birds seen. Seventy species in all.

Day 3. Today's venue was Halkham Woods. Because of high winds, smaller birds kept in the vegetation, but we did spot Egyptian Goose and some grebe. Higher up we found grazing Wigeon, Heron and a few Shoveler. After this exhilarating walk, it was off to the RSPB reserve at Titchwell. After a delicious lunch it was time to settle down for an afternoon of excellent birdwatching. Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Godwits and Brent Geese were just a few birds we sighted. Top of the bill today were 3 Avocets, Grey and Golden Plover, Ruff, Redshank and Greenshank, and a mass of ducks and gulls were simply a wonderful sight. Seventy-eight species were seen today. Again, after dinner, a slide presentation.

Day 4. We said our goodbyes to new friends, hoping to meet again on another excellent birdwatching holiday. A while after, everyone was sent a checklist of birds seen to round off an excellent holiday.

This itinerary was taken from the diary of one holiday maker.

If you want to share your enthusiasm and birdwatching experiences with a keen and friendly group whilst finding out more about different parts of the country, this is the holiday for you.

RAY W. MIZZI

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Not just reeds!

A look at Is-Simar nature reserve

*John F Borg
former managing warden*

2 Sultana

The engineering scars made in the mid-1990s have now healed. What was a few years ago a rat-infested dump has become a unique wetland habitat in Malta.

Is-Simar is today a flourishing ecosystem. The mixture of microhabitats, from reedbed to olive and tamarisk groves, provides ideal refuge to some hard-pressed Maltese flora and fauna. The many native trees planted along the embankment offer shelter and food for several animals.

Is-Simar is a restored wetland area. As wetlands are a very rare habitat in the Maltese Islands, BirdLife feels this project is helping to maintain and enrich precious biodiversity.

Dragonflies abound in the reserve: ten out of the eleven recorded species have so far have been noted at Is-Simar. **Butterflies, moths** and several **beetles** and **spiders** occur as well. Micro-mammals are represented by no less than 12 species. **Bats** flutter over the water at dusk and dawn, and there is a thriving community of **Algerian hedgehog**. With luck one may also glimpse **weasel**. The **Mediterranean chameleon** is common in the reserve as is the **Western whip snake**, the **ocellated skink** and the **Moorish** and **Turkish geckoes**. **Painted frog** is also present.

The climax of the ornithological year is migration period. Is-Simar



offers food and safety to numerous birds - so far, about 175 species of birds have been recorded from the reserve. The reserve also provides unique breeding habitat for a number of specialised birds. Seven bird species have so far bred at Is-Simar. The reserve has lately become a stronghold for **reed warbler**, with around six pairs nesting in 1999. Outside the reserve, this bird has only been known to breed, very irregularly, at one other site. The number of breeding **moorhens** is annually increasing - more than 10 pairs bred in 1999. The reserve made headlines in 1997, when not one, but two pairs of **little bittern** bred in the reedbed of the reserve - the first breeding record of this bird in Malta. Such events no doubt make all our efforts worth the while. Another pair of little bittern probably nested in 1999.

What has been achieved so far is very encouraging, considering that this is only the fifth year of Is-Simar as a nature reserve, before which the area was virtually a refuse tip. However,

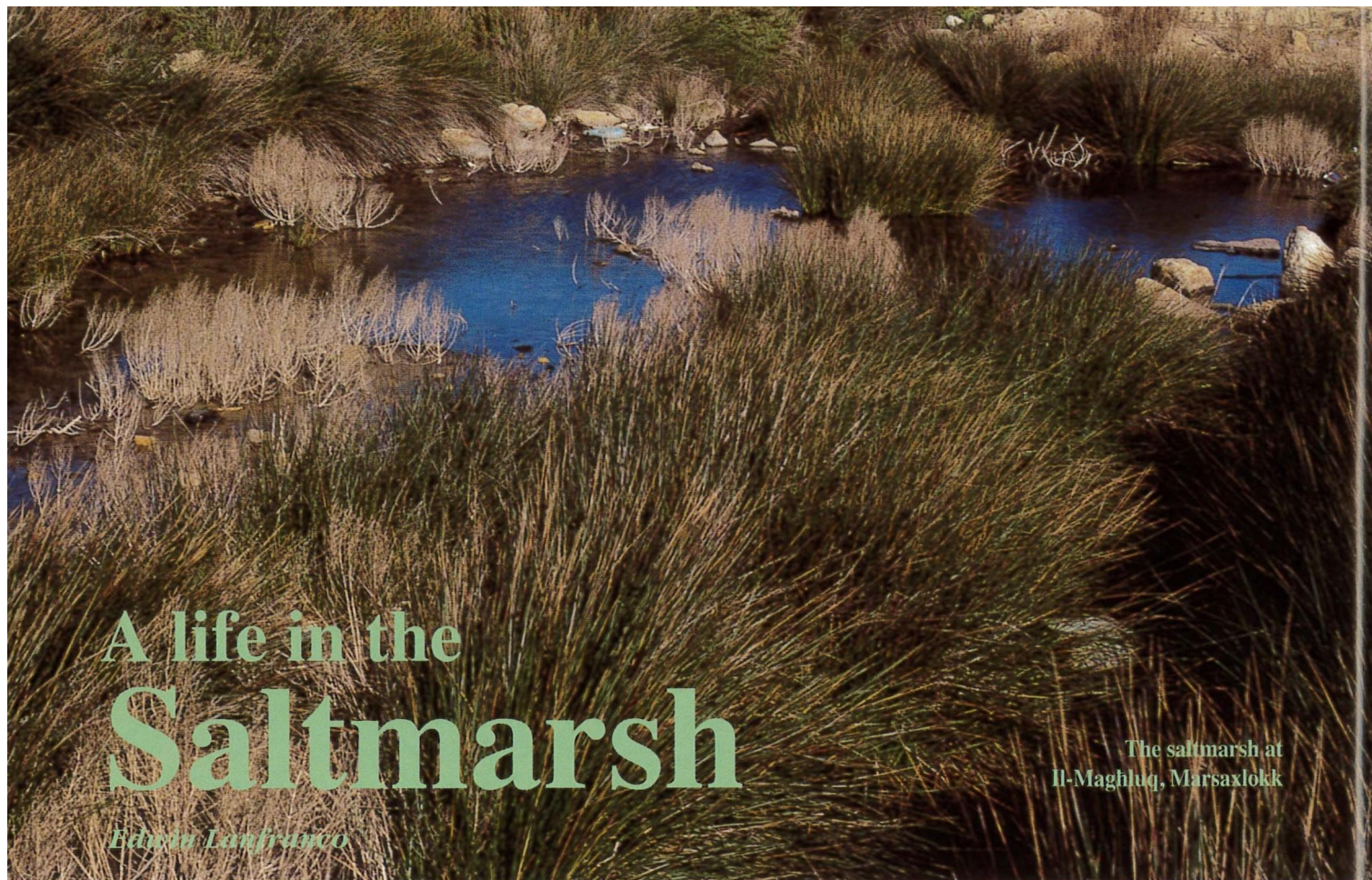
there is still much to achieve. The reserve still lacks an interpretation/visitors centre, but BirdLife already organises visits to the reserve, especially for schoolchildren. The nature reserve plays a very important role in environmental education. Students learn about biodiversity, ecology and understand the concepts of nature conservation and site management through direct interaction with nature.

Is-Simar is presently co-managed by the Environment Protection Department and BirdLife Malta. The reserve is located in Xemxija Bay, in the northern part of Malta. ●



Kay Galea

Chicks of little bittern - Is-Simar, 1997



A life in the Saltmarsh

Edwin Lanfranco

The saltmarsh at
Il-Maghluq, Marsaxlokk

Saltmarshes are a harsh and demanding habitat. They dictate very specific requirements from the lifeforms that eke a living from them. Nonetheless, saline marshland teems with life!

Among the several habitat types which occur in the Maltese Islands are the saline wetlands. These are mainly found in the estuaries of the main watercourses such as at Marsa and Salini, or they may be low-lying coastal depressions which fill with water in winter such as Ghadira and Ghadira s-Safra. They also occur at abandoned salinas and fish ponds, as in the case of Il-Ballut at Marsaxlokk and Il-Maghluq of Marsaskala and, more remotely, Ghadira itself.

also in freshwater marshlands, such as common reed, African tamarisk, chaste-tree and hollow-leaved rush.

Salt assault

One problem which halophytes have to solve is water availability. Their habitat may be wet, and many plants are actually rooted in the wet mud, but the presence of salt makes it difficult for the plants to extract water. Many halophytes have therefore evolved

adaptations which we usually associate with plants of dry conditions. Many are succulent, that is they store water in fleshy leaves or stems. Glassworts, sea-blites and saltworts are all fleshy plants.

Some halophytes such as sea-heaths, sea-lavenders and tamarisks have salt-glands through which they get rid of excess salts. This adaptation also cools the plant, since the extruded salt attracts water vapour.

Halophytes also have to be firmly

Can cope, will live!

What mainly characterizes these wetlands is their salinity. The plants which inhabit such sites are adapted to cope with the high salt content. Such plants are called halophytes (literally: salt plants). Few of them actually require salt in their environment but, due to their high tolerance, they are very competitive where the salt content is high. One plant group which is well represented in saltmarshes is the Chenopodiaceae. Other groups frequent in this habitat are the rushes and the grasses. Some species occur



Sharp rush and golden samphire are typical of saltmarsh habitat

rooted, due to the unstable mud in which they grow. In fact many species have intricate systems of rhizomes (creeping buried stems). Saline marshlands undergo considerable fluctuations in water depth. Because of this, the plants that grow in this environment can withstand long periods of partial submergence.

Due to their high soda and potash content, several succulent plants have been harvested and burned to ash in order to extract the products used, for example, in making soap or glass. This accounts for some strange names like *haxix ta' l-irmied*, glassworts and soda plants.

A rich world

Some plants in saline marshes grow permanently submerged. The most important is the tassel-pondweed of which at least two species occur in the Maltese Islands, though they are all rare and endangered. There are also several species of algae, including the genera *Cladophora* and *Enteromorpha*. A very interesting recent discovery is that of a submerged aquatic liverwort at Ghadira s-Safra. This is a species with highly restricted Mediterranean distribution and is in fact protected under the Bern Convention as well as by Maltese law.

Apart from the rich and varied flora, there is also a diversified fauna with numerous insects, amphipods, isopods, mollusks and many others, often with highly restricted distributions.

Saline marshes are also greatly attractive to birdlife, especially wading species like sandpipers, stilts, shanks and godwits. These birds find a great deal of animal food which they dig for in the mud with their long, sensitive bills.

Man vs Marsh

Unfortunately, most of Malta's saline marshes have suffered tremendously through the ages. They

have been classed as unhealthy habitats where mosquitoes (and hence malaria) breed. This stigma has doomed marshland to destruction all over the world.

The major loss in Malta has been the draining of the extensive marsh at Marsa, which began in 1861. Numerous species have been lost as a result of that episode. Other important losses are the marshes at Spinola Bay and Ta' Xbiex.

The most recent loss is that of an extremely interesting small marsh at Delimara, known as Ras iċ-Ċaghaq, which was obliterated to make way for the new power station, and before it could be properly studied faunistically. This site harboured the last population of the sea purslane on the island of Malta - there is still a sizable population in NW Gozo - as well as a possibly new species or subspecies of sea-lavender.

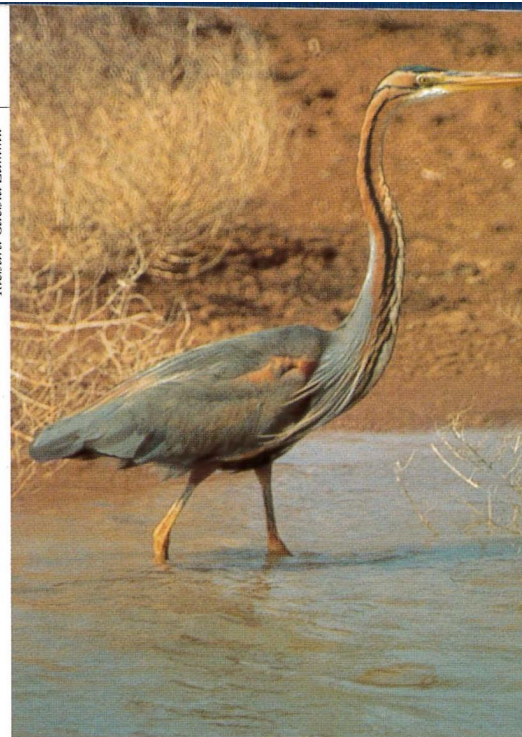
"Saline marshes have been classed as unhealthy habitats where mosquitoes (and hence malaria) breed."

Combined efforts by members of environmental NGOs carried out a rescue operation and the sea purslane was transplanted to Il-Ballut marsh which is close to the Delimara site, and to Ghadira reserve. In both cases the plant responded well to the transplant and there are now thriving populations at both sites. The sea-lavender was transplanted only to Ghadira where it persisted for some years before disappearing. It was not transplanted to Il-Ballut because another, closely related, species of sea-lavender grows there and it was feared that hybridization would result in genetic erosion.

Looking up

On the credit side, efforts have been made to rehabilitate saline marshes into nature reserves. Fortunately these habitats are sufficiently resilient to be rehabilitated and managed. The main rehabilitated sites are:

- Ghadira reserve at Mellieha
- Is-Simar reserve at Xemxija
- Il-Ballut at Marsaxlokk



Purple heron, a rare visitor.

Attempts to rehabilitate Il-Magħluq at Marsaskala have however been frustrated. Ghadira s-Safra, close to Bahar iċ-Ċaghaq, is protected but not managed, and has been deteriorating at a fast rate - in fact some of its unique flora and fauna have disappeared within the last few years. Our largest remaining marsh, Salini, while technically protected, has been allowed to degenerate considerably, which is a great pity since several species now occur only at that site. Attempts should also be made to upgrade the saline wetland at Il-Qawra near Dwejra in Gozo.

Given the comparative ease with which saline wetlands, and other wetlands, can be rehabilitated or reconstructed, efforts should be made to save the few which remain. ●



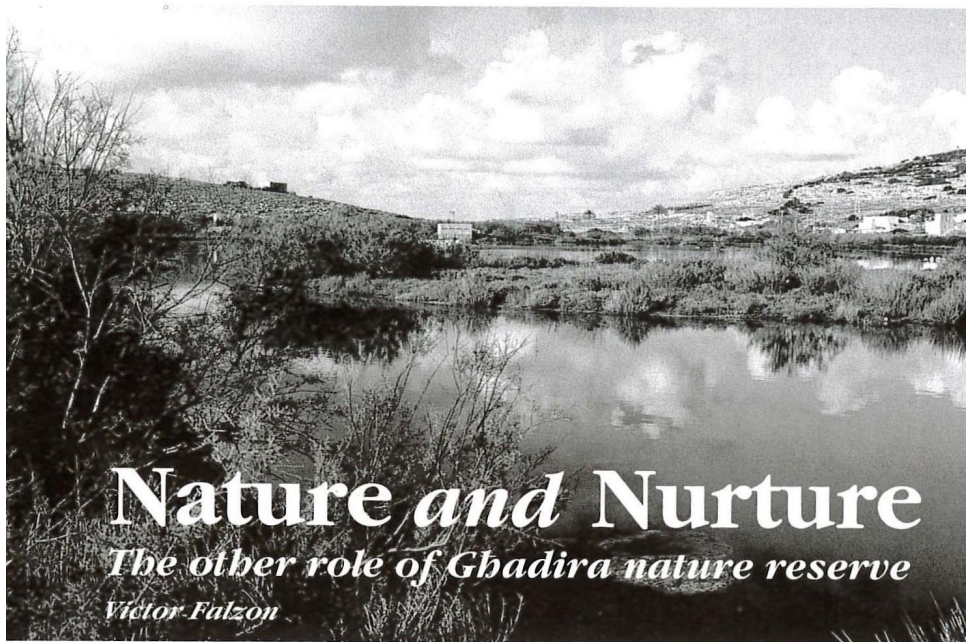
Sea purslane, saved in time.

Plant species mentioned in text

Common Reed - *Phragmites australis* Qasbet ir-Rih
African Tamarisk - *Tamarix africana* Bruka
Chaste-tree - *Vitex agnus-castus* Siġra tal-Virgi
Hollow-leaved Rush - *Juncus subulatus* Simar ta' l-Ilma

Seablites - *Suaeda* sp. Swejda
Glassworts - *Salicornia*, *Arthrocnemum*, *Sarcocnemum*, Almeridja
Saltworts - *Salsola* sp. Haxix ta' l-iRmied
Sea-heaths - *Frankenia* sp. Frankenja

Sea-lavenders - *Limonium* sp. Limonju
Tassel-Pondweed - *Ruppia* sp. Ruppja.
Aquatic Liverwort - *Riella helicophylla* Maltese Name?
Sea Purslane - *Halimione portulacoides* Bjanka tal-Bahar.



Ray Galea

Ghadira is not just a nature reserve. It is also a great educational tool. So along with making the reserve a place for nature, BirdLife has also geared Ghadira to render it people-friendly.



Victor Falzon

A hide, a nature trail and a reception centre have over the years been built to see to the needs of visitors. All these features were designed to provide maximum appreciation of nature, with minimum disturbance to the wildlife. The idea worked.

A day in the life...

Virtually every day of the scholastic year, children and teachers come to Ghadira for an exciting morning with nature. Managing warden Charles Gauci and assistant Mark Vella introduce the children to the idea of the web of life and about the need of nature conservation. They are shown how to observe wildlife without disturbing it. This is vital if nature is to survive in an overpopulated country like Malta.

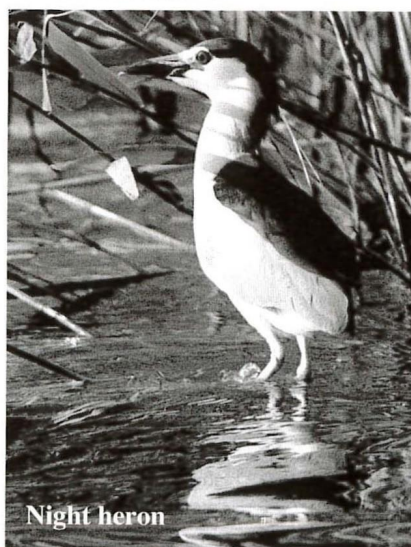
In 1999 a total of **2825** schoolchildren from 104 schools visited Ghadira.

A weekend in the life...

As if weekdays are not enough, Ghadira is just as busy at the weekends. For several years now, BirdLife has every year opened Ghadira at the weekends. This it has done with financial backing from the Environment Protection Department, but also with massive volunteering.

Under the co-ordination of Audrey Chetcuti, a team of BirdLife volunteers guide weekend visitors and help them make the best of their stay at the reserve. Visitors get a memorable impression of Maltese biodiversity in a place where nature is afforded proper protection. This way, BirdLife hopes to kill the traditional view that Malta has no wildlife except weeds and twittering sparrows!

From January to December 1999, BirdLife guided a total of **3967** weekend visitors. ●



Ray Galea

Night heron

It's a warden's life!

Nature trail

The Ghadira nature trail gives visitors access to the hide and infocentre. But the trail is also an educational tool in itself. To meet both ends, the trail has to be regularly maintained. 1999 was no exception...

- Some tamarisk planted in recent years had to be removed as they were obstructing the trail. The cleared areas were replanted with shrub species.
- The shrubby orache alongside the flight of steps was cut back.
- The ground parallel to the culvert was slightly raised and more trees were planted.
- A low fence made of stakes and reeds was put up to fence off some restricted areas.
- Six boards with drawings and information about the wildlife of the area were set up along the trail.
- Several laminated drawings of trees, bushes and other vegetation were fixed on short stakes along the trail to help with identification.

Embankment

In 1981-82, most of the embankment around the reserve was planted with shrubby orache to reduce disturbance and deter intrusion. The embankment soil was at the time too saline for most vegetation. But years of rain flushed out most of the salt, and the earth now permits more variety...

- In the summers of 1998-99 sections of the north embankment were cleared of the orache and replanted with various rare species like buckthorn, myrtle and hawthorn.
- Dead logs from felled eucalypts and acacias have been embedded in the embankment to reduce erosion and avoid collapse.

Tree nursery

Rather than rely on the whims of the Government nurseries, Ghadira set up its own tree production in the early Nineties. The nursery has since raised thousands of new trees, outstripping the needs of the reserve. In 1999...

- Several new trees were raised from seed, mostly sandarac and olive.
- Many seedlings from 1998 were repotted.
- Hundreds of mature seedlings of various species were forwarded to the Gaia Foundation to plant at Ghajn Tuffieha. Trees were also passed to the Mellieha Local Council for planting in various parts of the village.

Charles Gauci
Managing Warden

In the name of birds...

Early in 1999 Azzopardi Fisheries proposed a tuna-penning project right underneath the cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ, metres away from the country's largest colony of Cory's shearwater. BirdLife protested with all concerned, not least with the Planning Authority. In August, BirdLife took the press for a boat trip right to the foot of the cliffs. This way BirdLife publicised its arguments against the project and the studies that supported it. The PA listened to BirdLife's concern and is redirecting the project to another site out at sea and far from ecological hotspots.



Ray Galea

Owe Arnaldsson



In September, a vigorous youth camp was organised at the YTC centre in Buskett. Focus was on birds of prey. The main aim of the camp, which included participants from Malta, Germany, Italy, Austria and Sweden, was to bring to the authorities' attention the atrocities that annually happen in this wooded valley. Apart from walks and talks, the camp also staged a cartridge-collecting stunt, joined the BirdLife group monitoring the raptor migration, and had several meetings with people in high places, including ambassadors, ministers, the police and EPD officials. Police patrol visibly increased soon after.

BirdLife International

In October 1999 BirdLife Malta attended the 1999 BirdLife International (BI) Global Partnership Meeting and World Conference, held at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. BirdLife Malta was represented by Liz Curmi (marketing co-ordinator) and Joe Sultana (World Council member).

The Conference ran several intensive workshops, which gave participants excellent grounding and hands-on experience in what BI does and works for, its targets and obstacles.

Liz also made several important contacts, which should help her in her work as BirdLife Malta's new marketing co-ordinator.

During this Conference Joe Sultana received the Member of Honour Award, a fitting tribute to a hard-working conservationist. Joe is a past president of BirdLife Malta and has also held several BI posts, including World Council member.

BirdLife Malta's participation in this Conference was sponsored by Vogelbescherming (BirdLife Netherlands).



BirdLife International

Joe and Liz at the BirdLife Malta stand in Kuala Lumpur



Scarlet Ibis

Destination Venezuela

To the birding enthusiast, Venezuela offers just about everything. A land of huge contrasts: endless savannah, snow-capped peaks, lush cloud forest, sun-baked desert, waterlogged deltalands, it's all there. Plus a fairly good road system, giving easy accessibility.

A total of 1346 species of birds have so far been recorded in Venezuela.

Henry Pitier National Park, Venezuela's oldest park, on a coastal mountain range, with a variety of habitats: semi-dry deciduous woods, evergreen rainforest and dense cloud forests. Birds include tanagers, honeycreepers, parrots and oropendolas. A paradise for plants and insects, especially butterflies.

Santo Domingo Valley - at the northern extent of the Andes. A place of huge contrasts in landscape, from lush cloud forests, with bromeliads and humming-birds, to dry cactus desert with soaring vultures!

Hato El Cedral - Llanos: the heart of Venezuela. Immense, flat, open plains which dry out in summer and flood over in the wet season, when the rivers spill their banks. Teeming with water birds. And caimans!

Imataca Forest Reserve: a rain forest, said to be the best place in the world to see harpy eagle.

Escalera & Gran Sabana: famous for its table mountains (*tepui*s). Vast, open savannah, with scattered areas of moriche palms. A magical place where you feel the immensity of the continent! The Tepuis themselves are dramatic, especially Mount Roraima, which inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. This is also a landscape of immense forests and waterfalls, including the tallest in the world: Angel Falls.

Michael Sammut

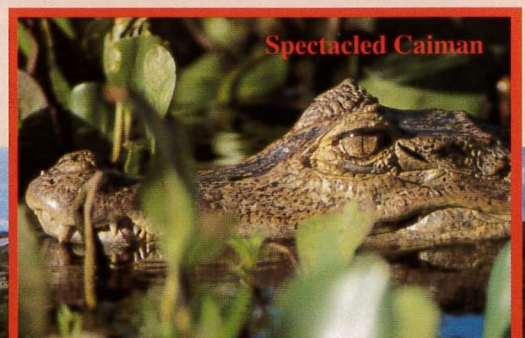
In 1998 Venezuela was visited by avid birders Ray Galea, Michael Sammut and Simon Suda. They say they couldn't get enough of it!



Hotspots (just a few!)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Henri Pitier NP | 5 Imataca Forest |
| 2 Andes (Sierra Nevada) | 6 La Gran Sabana |
| 3 Llanos | 7 Amazonas |
| 4 Orinoco Delta | |

Not just birds...



Spectacled Caiman



Owlet Butterfly



Kama Meri Falls

It all happened in 1999...

January

- 07 Jan Council mtg
- 15 Jan BirdLife meets Prime Minister
- 16 Jan Pied wagtail roost count
- 19 Jan Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 22 Jan BirdLife on *Protagonisti*
- 28 Jan Klabb Huttat at Naxxar Primary school
- 29 Jan Birdwatchers Club mtg

February

- 03 Feb *Il-Huttatfa* 30 published
- 04 Feb Council mtg
- 07 Feb Birdwatchers hike to Qammieh
- 09 Feb BirdLife meets Env Ministry officials icw Foresta 2000
- 10 Feb *BirdTalk* 51 published
- 14 Feb Klabb Huttat outing to Ċirkewwa
- 17 Feb Education Committee mtg
- 21 Feb Klabb Huttat outing to Burmarrad
- 23 Feb Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 25 Feb Talk: *Birding in Venezuela*
- 28 Feb Birdwatchers hike to Qammieh

March

- 04 Mar Council mtg
- 11 Mar Council mtg
- 12 Mar Little R. Plover poster published



- 15 Mar BirdLife meets Johanna Winkelman (Vogelbescherming) re sponsorship of marketing staff.
- 16 Mar BirdLife meets Foreign Policy Minister
- 17 Mar BirdLife meets AFM Commander
- 18 Mar Education Committee mtg
- 20 Mar Educational campaign launched in schools
- 22 Mar Foresta 2000 Group mtg
- 22 Mar Conservation Committee mtg
- 22 Mar Policy mtg
- 23 Mar Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 25 Mar Council mtg
- 26 Mar New Marketing staff
- 27 Mar *BirdTalk* 52 published
- 28 Mar Klabb Huttat outing to Ta' Ċenċ
- 29 Mar Volunteers meet Shane Cormie (RSPB)
- 30 Mar Foresta 2000 Group meets Mellieha Local Council

April

- 05 Apr Klabb Huttat camp at Kemmuna day 1
- 06 Apr Klabb Huttat camp at Kemmuna day 2
- 07 Apr Klabb Huttat camp at Kemmuna day 3
- 08 Apr Annual General Meeting
- 09 Apr *Il-Huttatfa* 31 published



- 14 Apr GreenWeek 99 day 1
- 15 Apr GreenWeek 99 day 2



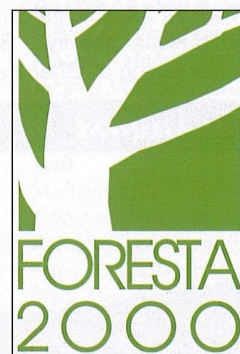
- 15 Apr Start of 30-day Small Islands Project (Research Group) on Kemmuna (ends 15 May)
- 16 Apr GreenWeek 99 day 3
- 17 Apr GreenWeek 99 day 4
- 18 Apr GreenWeek 99 day 5
- 25 Apr Klabb Huttat outing to Ghadira
- 26 Apr Start of 2-week exhibition at Birkirkara Primary School
- 28 Apr BirdLife in *Junior News*
- 29 Apr BirdLife attends tuna-penning public hearing, Sannat

May

- 02 May Klabb Huttat outing to Kemmuna
- 03 May Eden Century advert starts
- 04 May BirdLife meets EPD Director
- 04 May Foresta 2000 on *Voices* magazine
- 04 May Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 05 May Day stand at University
- 06 May Council mtg
- 08 May Stand at Flower Show day 1



- 08 May Prime Minister visits Ghadira
- 09 May Stand at Flower Show day 2



- 09 May Foresta 2000 Group visits Taflija site
- 10 May *Il-Merill* 29 published
- 12 May Klabb Huttat Feature in *Junior News of The Times*
- 13 May Education Committee meets Education Ministry officials
- 15 May End of Small Islands Project (Research Group)
- 20 May Council mtg
- 27 May Education Committee mtg

June

- 01 Jun *BirdTalk* 53 published
- 02 Jun Klabb Huttat Committee mtg
- 04 Jun Stand at Valletta icw World Environment Day
- 05 Jun Stand at *Body, Mind & Spirit Fair* day 1
- 06 Jun Stand at *Body, Mind & Spirit Fair* day 2
- 11 Jun *Il-Huttatfa* 32 published



Robert Borg receiving 1999 Coxon Award

Ray Gatt

Victor Falczon

Roy Galea

Joe Sultana

Victor Falczon

- 15 Jun Education Committee meets
Joe Pace (Education
Ministry)
17 Jun Education Committee mtg
24 Jun Council mtg
25 Jun Klabb Huttatf activity - quiz

July

- 01 Jul Conservation Committee mtg
06 Jul Klabb Huttatf Committee mtg
08 Jul Council mtg
08 Jul E. Coxon Award presented to
Robert Borg
12 Jul Conservation Committee mtg
17 Jul Klabb Huttatf outing to Ta' Ċenċ
20 Jul *BirdTalk* 54 published
26 Jul Council mtg
27 Jul Conservation Committee mtg
29 Jul *Il-Huttatfa* 33 published
30 Jul Klabb Huttatf activity - BBQ
31 Jul Adults outing to Ghar Hasan

August

- 02 Aug Council mtg



- 03 Aug Boat Action at Ta' Ċenċ icw
tuna-penning
10 Aug BirdLife takes Studiosus to
Buskett



- 21 Aug BirdLife at UK *Bird Fair* day 1
22 Aug BirdLife at UK *Bird Fair* day 2
23 Aug Conservation Committee mtg
31 Aug Conservation Committee mtg

September

- 01 Sep *Bil-Bejta* book published
02 Sep Council mtg
03 Sep BirdLife meets Police
Commissioner
06 Sep Conservation Committee mtg
07 Sep Klabb Huttatf Committee mtg

- 07 Sep BirdLife takes Studiosus to
Buskett
13 Sep Conservation Committee
meets foreign camp
participants



- 14 Sep Birds of Prey Camp at
Buskett day 1
14 Sep Camp participants meet
German Ambassador
14 Sep Camp participants meet
Italian Ambassador
15 Sep Camp participants meet EPD
Director
16 Sep Camp participants meet
Tourism Minister
17 Sep Camp participants meet Ass.
Police Commissioner
17 Sep BirdLife meets Env Minister
and Ass. Police Commissioner
18 Sep Birdwatchers Club activity to
Buskett
20 Sep Conservation Committee mtg
20 Sep BirdLife advert on Super 1 TV
21 Sep BirdLife advert on PBS TV
22 Sep BirdLife advert on NET TV
24 Sep BirdLife/Australian High
Commissioner reception
25 Sep Birdwatchers Club activity to
Buskett
25 Sep BirdLife at European Union
for the Prevention of Cruelty
to Animals - Switzerland
26 Sep Birdwatchers Club activity to
Buskett
27 Sep BirdLife advert on Super 1 TV
28 Sep BirdLife advert on PBS TV
29 Sep BirdLife advert on NET TV
29 Sep *BirdTalk* 55 published
30 Sep *Il-Huttatfa* 34 published

October

- 01 Oct Talk to German Univ students
02 Oct BirdLife meets MEUSEC and
EPD icw EU



- 03 Oct BirdFest at Buskett
04 Oct Conservation Committee mtg
06 Oct BirdLife meets Env Minister
08 Oct Adults activity: Talk *Birding in
Britain*
08 Oct BirdLife on Super 1
09 Oct Klabb Huttatf on RTK
12 Oct BirdLife on Education 22 (1)
12 Oct BirdLife on RTK
15 Oct Mtg for Ghadira volunteers
14-17 Oct BirdLife attends BI World
Conference in Malaysia
17 Oct Ghadira reserve reopens
19 Oct Klabb Huttatf Committee mtg
19 Oct BirdLife on Education 22 (2)
20 Oct Conservation Committee
meets NTOM
21 Oct Council mtg
25 Oct Talk to German Univ students
25 Oct Conservation Committee mtg



- 26 Oct Launch of *Dinja Wahda*
26 Oct BirdLife on Education 22 (3)
26 Oct Robin poster published
27 Oct Talk to German Univ students

November

- 02 Nov BirdLife on Education 22 (4)
09 Nov Conservation Committee mtg
09 Nov BirdLife on Education 22 (5)
12 Nov Education Committee mtg
13 Nov BirdLife on PBS icw *Dinja
Wahda*
15 Nov Conservation Committee
meets NGOs icw golf course
16 Nov Klabb Huttatf Committee mtg
16 Nov BirdLife on Education 22 (6)
18 Nov Council mtg
22 Nov BirdLife to RSPB (UK) icw EU
training workshop (end 26th)
22 Nov *BirdTalk* 56 published
23 Nov Education Committee mtg
23 Nov BirdLife on Education 22 (7)
24 Nov Meeting with EPD icw nature
reserves
25 Nov *Il-Huttatfa* 35 published

December

- 01 Dec *Woodchat* 11 published
14 Dec Klabb Huttatf Committee mtg
15 Dec Adults activity - Talk *From
Humming Birds to Puffins*
16 Dec Council mtg
19 Dec Volunteers get-together
20 Dec Klabb Huttatf Christmas party

They made it happen...

These were the people who manned the various BirdLife Malta sections or positions in 1999

Honorary President Joe Attard

President

Antoine Vella

Secretary

Denis Cachia

Treasurer

Anita Aloisio (Jan-Oct)
Norman Chetcuti (Nov-Dec)

Council

Chairperson: Desirée Falzon
Secretary: Denis Cachia
Anita Aloisio
John J Borg
Alex Casha
Norman Chetcuti
Victor Falzon
Raymond Galea
Ian Mifsud
Joe Sultana
Antoine Vella

Conservation Committee

Co-ordinator: Joseph Mangion
Secretary: Audrey Chetcuti
Alex Casha
Raymond Galea
Antoine Vella

Education Committee

Co-ordinator: Angèle Pulis
Secretary: Victor Fiott
Anthony Cordina
Anne Marie Gatt
Fiona Laferla

Klabb Huttaf Committee

Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon
Secretary: Jason Aloisio
Audrey Chetcuti
Norman Chetcuti
Victor Falzon
Chris Pulis
Justin Vassallo

Research Group

Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana
Ringing Secretary: Mark Gauci
Ringers: John Attard Montalto,
John J Borg, Denis Cachia, Victor
Cilia, Charles Coleiro, Raymond
Galea, Charles Gauci, Mark Gauci,
John Grech, Manuel Mallia, Joseph
Mangion, Joe Sultana

International

Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana
Ian Mifsud

Birdwatchers Club

Co-ordinator: Michael Sammut
Edward Bonavia
Marvic Sammut

Nature Reserves Committee

Co-ordinator: Joe Sultana
John Borg
Audrey Chetcuti
Raymond Galea
Charles Gauci
Ian Mifsud

Volunteers

Co-ordinator: Desirée Falzon
Co-ordinators (Ghadira):
Audrey Chetcuti, Manuel Mallia

Finance Committee

Anita Aloisio
Norman Chetcuti
Desirée Falzon

Webpage

Konrad Pizzuto

Office Management

Norman Chetcuti
Desirée Falzon



Victor Falzon

Presswork

Co-ordinator: Audrey Chetcuti
Victor Falzon
Joe Sultana
Antoine Vella

Publications Editors

Bird's Eye View - Victor Falzon
BirdTalk - Ian Mifsud, Antoine Vella
Il-Huttfa - Victor Falzon
Il-Merill - Mark Falzon
Ringing Newsletter - Mark Gauci
Woodchat - Michael Sammut

Staff

Marketing: Liz Curmi
Admin Sec: Victoria Caruana
Asst Sec: Catherine Abela
Dinja Wahda: Sandra Mifsud
Shop: Maria Donaldson,
Paula Hannon

... plus many other volunteers who have helped out with the various tasks of an active organisation. To them all, BirdLife is grateful! Thank you.

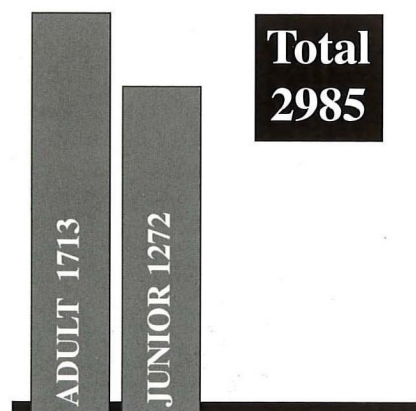


With a little help from our friends!!!

BirdLife Malta is grateful to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), our BirdLife Partner in the UK, for further increasing our manpower! In March **Shane Cormie**, marketing co-ordinator (nature reserves), came over to guide our staff and volunteers on how best to promote BirdLife through nature reserves and at fair stands. He also helped out a great deal with the Green Week stand and at San Anton. In October **Nathalie Pillow** came to spend her sabbatical helping out at the BirdLife premises, putting her computer software experience at our disposal. Nathalie also helped out with the launch of Dinja Wahda. In November **Norman Holton**, expert reserves manager, was sent over to help BirdLife draw up management plans for Ghadira and Is-Simar.

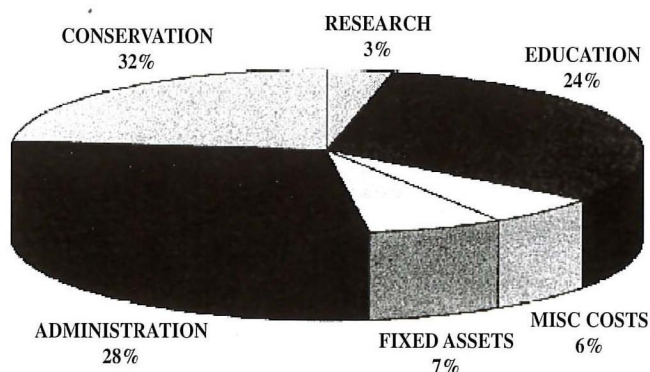
Members Numbers

This is how BirdLife Malta membership stood at the end of December 1999.

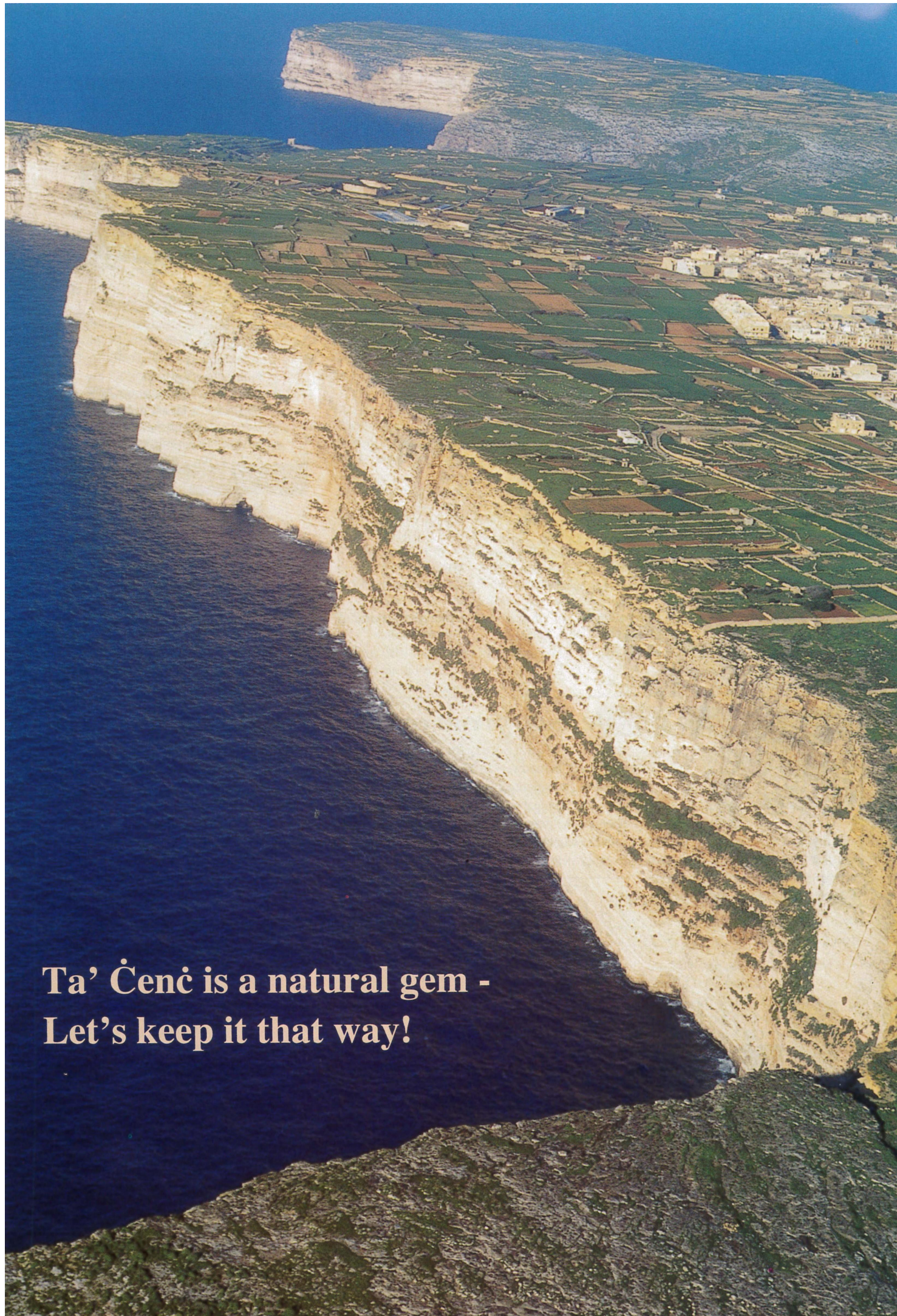


How BirdLife spent it!

The piechart gives a simplified account of how BirdLife allocated its funds in the period Jan-Dec 1999.



Piechart by Norman Chetcuti



**Ta' Ċenċ is a natural gem -
Let's keep it that way!**