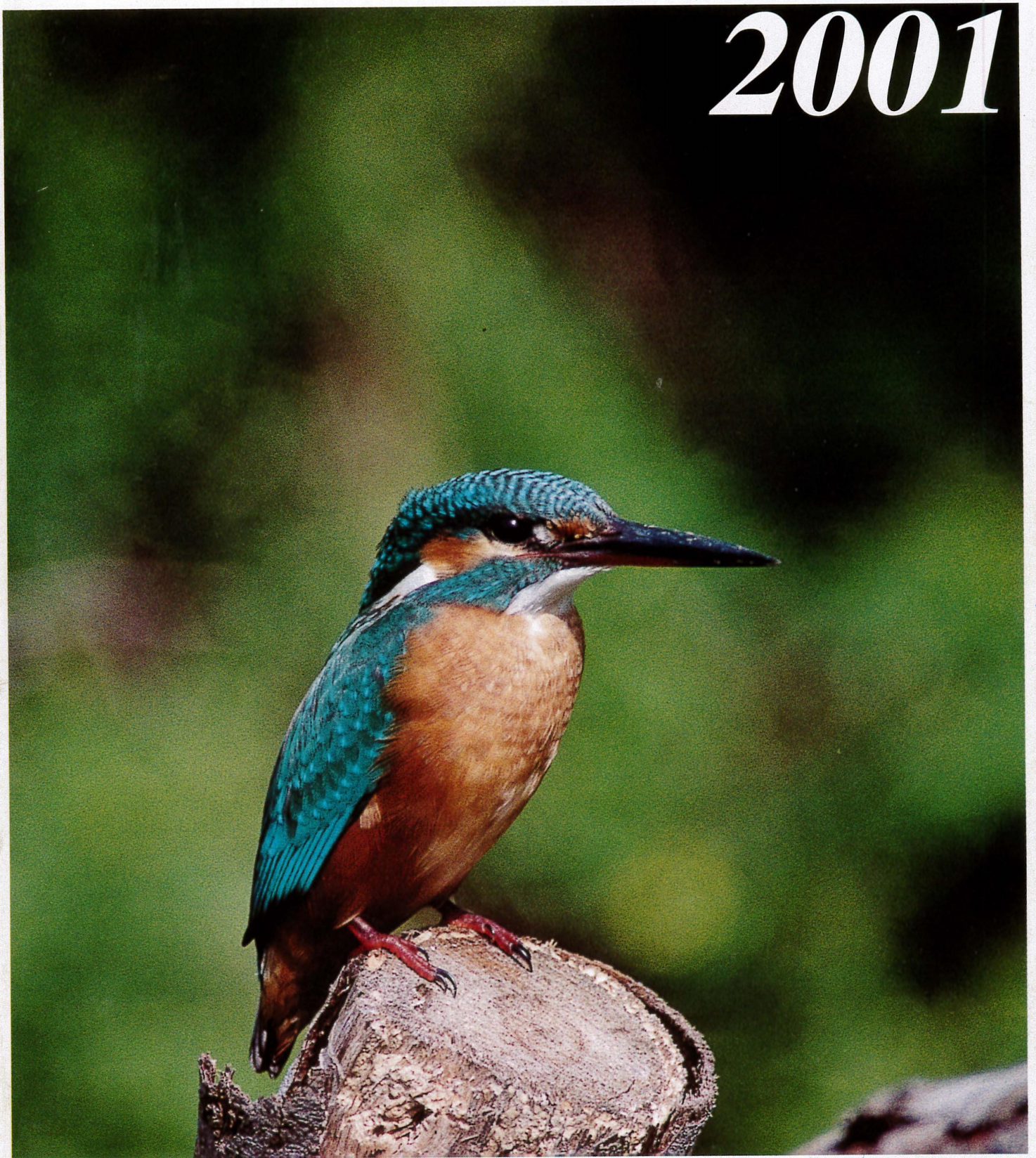


Bird's Eye View

2001




BirdLife
MALTA

Annual magazine 2001

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

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

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

BirdLife Malta is a Partner of BirdLife International.

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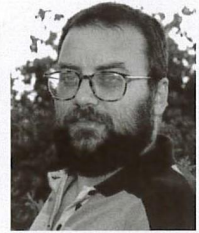
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BirdLife Malta is a charity organisation and depends on subscriptions and donations. Subscription in BirdLife Malta is Lm4 per annum (EUR20 for overseas) for adult members. One can now join, renew membership or make a donation online at www.birdlifemalta.org

This is the 19th issue of Bird's Eye View

Unless otherwise specified, the name **BirdLife** in this publication refers to **BirdLife Malta**

editorial



Every nation should guard the things which make it unique. This is especially important when a nation is precariously small and very restricted in territory, such as is the case with us Maltese. But protecting one's culture and national identity does not translate into freedom to destroy nature!

Birds have no political frontiers: a kestrel shot down in Malta is a kestrel lost to the world. This is one situation where we can't wave the national flag and shout sovereignty at any who dare criticise what we do.

So hunters need not protest nor statesmen bristle when foreign flak blows holes in our country's image. This is no skeleton-in-the-cupboard, no family matter. Birdcrime is an international matter, birds don't just belong to us.

Yet, incredibly, instead of coming down strongly against the wasters of wildlife, key politicians still choose to wax lyrical and describe the killing of birds as part of our culture and tradition!

Authorities would do well to stop being nice to these environmental vandals, and show some serious alarm at the mounting criticism that is levelled at Malta from all over the world - isn't it disturbing that so many people nowadays first hear of Malta through our dismal bird protection record! How long will our postcard image of sea, sun and friendly people outshine the reputation we're getting for what we do to birds?

Surely this isn't the best strategy for the survival and well-being of any self-respecting nation.

Victor Falzon
Editor



This issue of *Bird's Eye View* is being published in 2002, the fortieth year of BirdLife Malta's struggle for bird protection.



Embracing the Birds' Directive

Saviour Balzan

It is not difficult to understand why the Birds' Directive remains one of the more charged issues in the European Parliament. For over 20 years the Directive has served as the basis for eradicating age-old traditions. Changing is always a tough cookie, as the rookies say.

Singular aim

The Directive was introduced in 1979 with the singular aim of bringing some order to the indiscriminate killing of birds during their migration and breeding season.

It was not to be an easy task - indeed many member States within the European Union still flout the Directive. But the vast majority have fallen in line. Others choose to interpret the Directive in their own bizarre way. Some take ages to present their annual reports, while others are more respectful to the spirit of the Directive.

Demands protection

But what does the Directive really ask for?

First and foremost it affords full protection to some of the more threatened birds, and this also includes their habitat. More importantly, it controls the methods used in hunting birds. And, very significantly, it bans the taking of wildlife in the period which directly precedes the breeding season.

The Birds' Directive has the support of the majority of the Members of the European Parliament but a small but

significant minority vociferously opposes the Directive, calling it an imposition from Brussels.

This opposition has led to many political shifts in European countries, so one should not be too surprised that the same has happened in Malta.

The annexes

The Birds' Directive contains four important annexes.

Annex One refers to all those birds that are afforded full protection

(including their habitats) in the geographical region of the EU.

Annex Two is subdivided into two sections. The first talks of those species that can be hunted in any of the member states of the EU.

The second section includes only those species, which have been requested by the member state and subsequently accepted. For example if Malta wishes to hunt the turtle dove it must specifically request this.

Annex Three relates to the trade of species.



The Birds Directive bans the taking of wildlife in the period which directly precedes the birds' breeding season

Annex Four lists the methods which may be applied in pursuing hunting activities.

Local context

In many ways Malta does not have major or significant problems with the annexes, though there are one or two points which probably need clarification. But again, one must distinguish the commitment Malta has on paper from what happens in reality, which is often a far cry from the real thing.

The crucial issue which concerns Malta and all interested parties is Article 7, which outlines clearly that hunting in spring goes against the Directive.

On this matter, Article 9 is seen as a probable solution, since it allows for the judicious taking of animal species under supervised conditions. This comes as an exemption, does not need to be

requested but has to be notified to the Commission.

This is obviously open to interpretation and monitoring. The process is undoubtedly a transparent one and one cannot simply fool around with figures and facts.

Understandably both the Commission and BirdLife Malta are concerned that the real issue is that many hunters and trappers have no respect for the present laws, and therefore it may be too much to expect "judicious" taking of birds! The hunters' representatives are aware of this, and one must admit that they have been trying hard to change their image.

The truth is, that despite the strong commitment by the EU towards nature conservation and protection, the abolition of hunting practises is not on the cards of the Commission (or the present administration).

Key tool

The Birds' Directive allows for the monitoring of Malta's conservation implementation in an international framework. It provides for checks and balances. This has been the tool that brought to an end so many illegal hunting activities in Spain, Italy and other European nations.

The directive allows for hunting but not in the unrestricted form it is presently practised in Malta.

All naturalists and bird lovers have good reason to embrace the realisation of this Directive in Malta and Gozo. Likewise, hunters who have little respect for the laws have good reason to worry!

Saviour Balzan is technical advisor to the government on the EU Birds & Habitats Directive. He is an environmentalist and a former BirdLife activist.

On the education front...

Roving Exhibition

The year 2001 saw the start of a new project: the School Roving Exhibition. In January, an animator was engaged to tour primary schools. Armed with new exhibition boards and a new set of visuals, Marvic Attard Gialanze met different classes and led discussions about birds and the natural environment. The discussion was illustrated with large laminated pictures, and followed up by a quiz-and-jigsaw-puzzle game. The project also partly served to recruit more members in Klabb Huttaf. This project was sponsored by Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening (SOF - BirdLife Partner in Sweden).

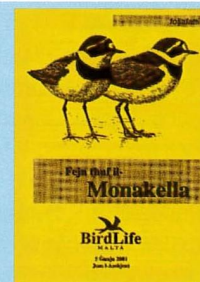
Environment Day et al

For World Environment Day, the committee prepared a leaflet about the little ringed plover to distribute to students who visited the BirdLife stand at Valletta. In July, members of the Education group gave talks to summer-school children visiting the Imax theatre. BirdLife also participated in the Science and Technology Fair at Bay Street.

One World Three

During the summer months, the education working group started preparing for another launch of Dinja Wahda (One World), scheduled for October. This was going to be the third generation of this popular environmental action awards scheme in schools, and work was under way to make it even more successful and popular than before. Dinja Wahda is a collection of environmental activities that can be done by students and teachers in and around the school. The activities are compiled in the form of a competition whereby schools can win an award depending on their level of participation. Dinja Wahda III is being sponsored by BirdLife International, Nos Oiseaux and SOF.

Project co-ordinator Cecily Rizzo began distributing the Action Guide (see page 8) to all primary schools in the country - by the end of October, Dinja Wahda had taken off well.



An educational leaflet promoting the little ringed plover and Ghadira nature reserve was distributed free to children on 5 June 2001

School response wasn't long in coming, but the real momentum was expected in the second term.

That would be in 2002...



The new set of mobile panels that formed an integral part of the roving school exhibition

BirdLife Malta Pictures

A year in the life...

BirdLife's calendar of events for the year 2001

January 2001

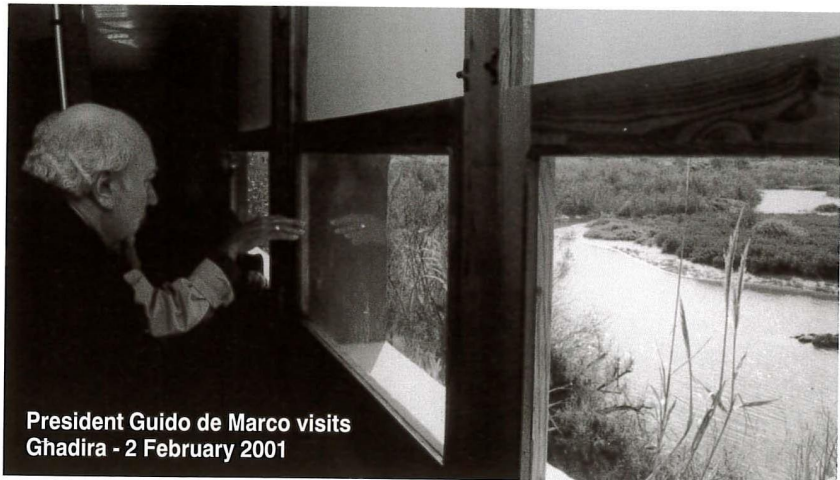
- 09 Start of field teacher at Ghadira
- 10 Education committee mtg
- 11 Conservation committee mtg
- 13 Pied wagtail Valletta roost count
- 16 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 18 Council mtg
- 20 Falko bike hike
- 22 Start of Roving School Exhibition
- 23 RaptorCamp mtg
- 24 Education committee mtg
- 25 Council mtg

February 2001

- 02 Wetlands Day - Open day at Ghadira
- 12 Rarities Committee mtg
- 12 Wild Birds Conservation group mtg
- 13 Meeting with ALE
- 17 Work at Kemmuna ringing station
- 20 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 21 Education committee mtg
- 22 Council mtg
- 23 *BirdTalk* 63 out
- 27 Annual General Mtg - new Council
- 28 Education committee mtg

March 2001

- 01 Conservation committee mtg
- 02 Rarities committee mtg
- 03 *Il-Huttat* 42 out
- 07 Mtg with architect icw Is-Simar
- 10 Falko outing to Qammieh
- 11 Falko outing to Qammieh



President Guido de Marco visits Ghadira - 2 February 2001

- 14 Foresta 2000 committee mtg
- 15 Council mtg
- 18 Klabb Huttat marathon hike
- 20 Start of field teacher at Is-Simar
- 22 Council mtg
- 25 Falko outing to Ghawdex
- 27 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 28 Education committee mtg
- 30 Research Group mtg

April 2001

- 06 Talk to BirdLife school delegates
- 09 Mtg with Environment Minister
- 10 Council mtg
- 16 Donation from Environment Ministry
- 17 Conservation committee mtg
- 21 *Il-Huttat* 43 out
- 24 Mtg with Min of Interior, Min of Env and Police Commissioner
- 26 PR icw law enforcement

- 27 Mtg with EU Env Commissioner
- 29 Klabb Huttat outing to Ghadira
- 29 Falko outing to Kemmuna

May 2001

- 01 Klabb Huttat outing to Ghadira
- 02 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 03 BirdLife at Greenweek 2001
- 04 BirdLife at Greenweek 2001
- 05 BirdLife at Greenweek 2001
- 06 BirdLife at Greenweek 2001
- 07 PR icw Ghadira break-in
- 14 *BirdTalk* 64 out
- 14 Research Group mtg
- 17 Council mtg
- 18 Research visit to Filfla
- 18-21 ALE + BirdLife in Calabria
- 21 Work starts on Is-Simar workshop bldg
- 23 Education committee mtg
- 29 Research Group mtg
- 31 Research visit to Filfla

June 2001

- 05 BirdLife stand at Env Day event
- 05 Klabb Huttat committee mtg
- 08 Adult members outing to Hal Far
- 10 PR icw police visit to Calabria
- 14 Council mtg
- 18 Course for enforcement personnel
- 19 Course for enforcement personnel
- 20 Course for enforcement personnel
- 21 Course for enforcement personnel
- 21 PR icw enforcement personnel course
- 22 *Il-Huttat* 44 out
- 25 Talk at MTA ecotourism seminar
- 25 EMB mtg
- 26 Research visit to Ġebbla tal-Ġeneral
- 26 RaptorCamp mtg



BirdFest 2001 at Buskett
21 October 2001

Desirée Falson

- 27 Conservation committee mtg
- 28 Klabb Huttatf talk and quiz event

July 2001

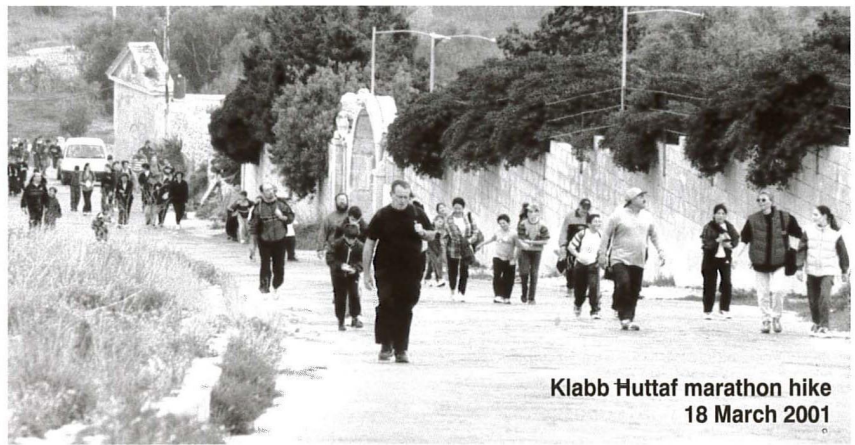
- 02 Dinja Wahda II report out
- 03 *BirdTalk* 65 out
- 04 Conservation committee mtg
- 05 Adult members info meeting
- 07 Falko work at Ghadira reserve
- 09 RaptorCamp mtg
- 11 Education committee mtg
- 12 Council mtg
- 18 Research visit to Filfla
- 19 Council mtg
- 21-22 Falko nightout at Ta' Ċenċ
- 24 Talk at Imax Theatre
- 25 EMB mtg
- 27 Work at Ghadira
- 30 RaptorCamp mtg

August 2001

- 01 Nine new bird postcards out
- 01 Meeting with ALE
- 03 Falko talk at Imax theatre
- 06 RaptorCamp mtg
- 08 Conservation committee mtg
- 11 Talk to Marsa Scouts Camp
- 17 *Il-Huttatfa* 45 out
- 21 Meeting with MLP personnel
- 22 Meeting with MLP personnel
- 23 Council mtg
- 27 Conservation mtg



Six more issues (63-68) of *BirdTalk*



Klabb Huttatf marathon hike
18 March 2001

- 28 Klabb Huttatf committee mtg
- 31 Falko work at Ghadira and Kemmuna

September 2001

- 01 *Bird's Eye View* 2000 out
- 03 Nature reserves wkg group mtg
- 04 Foresta 2000 Group mtg
- 05 Conservation committee mtg
- 06 *BirdTalk* 66 out
- 07 Volunteers barbecue
- 08-25 RaptorCamp 2001
- 16 Meeting with Euronatur
- 21-23 Falko camp
- 24 Meeting with Env Minister
- 27 Council mtg

October 2001

- 01 Is-Simar re-opens for school visits
- 04 Education committee mtg
- 09 Foresta 2000 Group mtg
- 11 School delegates newsletter out
- 17 Mtg with Env Minister + Police Assistant Commissioner
- 17 Falko talk at Imax Theatre
- 17 Education committee mtg
- 19 *Il-Huttatfa* 46 out
- 21 BirdFest 2001
- 22 Dinja Wahda III Action Guide out
- 23 Research Group mtg
- 23 Dinja Wahda III launched
- 25 Council mtg
- 26 Klabb Huttatf slide talk

- 27 Ghadira opens for weekend visitors
- 28 Is-Simar on MTV - *Naturambjent*
- 29 Ghadira re-opens for school visits
- 30 Calendar 2002 out
- 30 EMB mtg
- 31 BirdLife on MaxTV

November 2001

- 01 Falko social activity
- 02 BirdLife on TV - *Baraxx*
- 06 Klabb Huttatf committee mtg
- 07 BirdLife on Channel 12 TV
- 09 Talk to school delegates
- 10 *BirdTalk* 67 out
- 11 Two new bird posters out
- 13 BirdLife meets President of Malta
- 14 Education committee mtg
- 16-21 BirdLife delegation to Brussels
- 17 PR icw Is-Simar open day
- 18 Is-Simar open day
- 25 Youth Leader outing to Mtaħleb
- 29 Council mtg
- 30 New set of greeting cards out

December 2001

- 05 BirdLife at St Theresa Junior Lyceum
- 06 New President for BirdLife
- 07 *Il-Huttatfa* 47 out
- 12 Parents' outing to Is-Simar
- 12 Education Committee mtg
- 13 Falko outing to Ghawdex
- 19 Klabb Huttatf Xmas Party



Ghadira volunteers

Victor Falson

Saviour Ellul

The word is not enough!

BirdLife Malta material produced in 2001

Sometimes words are just not enough to get the beauty and variety of birds across to an audience, especially a young audience. These are some of the educational/promotional products that BirdLife Malta issued in 2001.

membership form

A much-needed membership form for the recruitment of junior members was printed in 2001, thanks to financial assistance from BOV Young Savers Club. The robin in the picture says: "Hey there! Would you like to join Klabb Huttaf?"



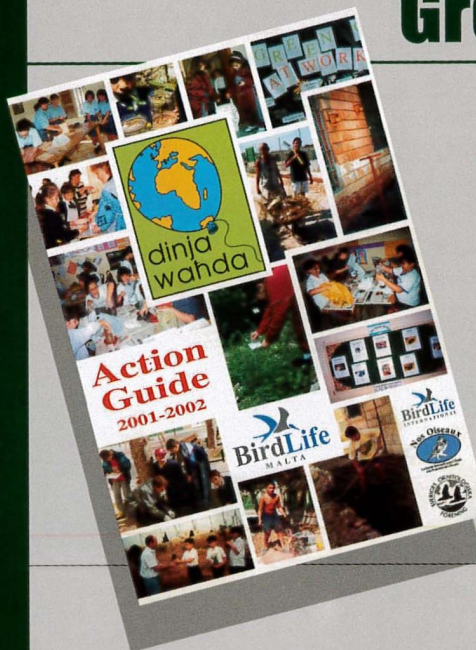
all-occasion cards



Two great photographs by Michael Sammut grace the front of this set of all-occasion cards. BirdLife hopes to produce more of this series in the future.

more postcards

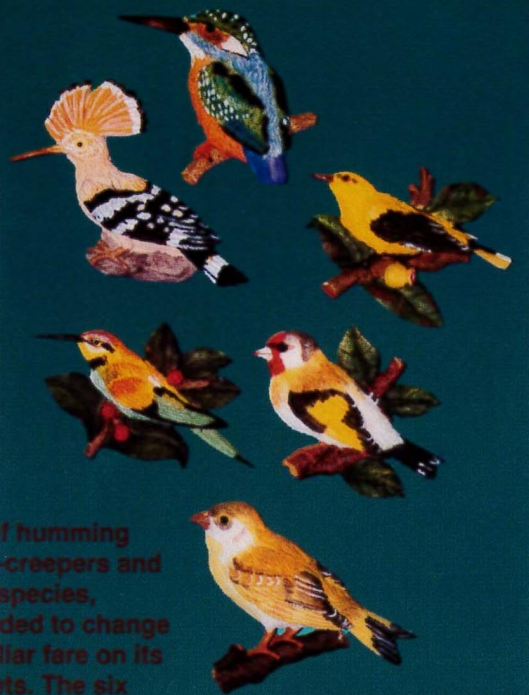
A set of nine new bird postcards were issued to resume the collection started way back in 1984. The new set include some of the more colourful and popular species such as robin, goldfinch and kingfisher. Bird pictures are in great demand especially by children who use them for their school projects. This is why BirdLife decided to retain the original price-tag of 5c!



Green Guide

The third edition Action Guide was produced by BirdLife's Education Unit to be the main teaching aid in the running of Dinja Wahda III. The 32-page guide is packed with ideas, projects, tips and other useful information to render Dinja Wahda a truly environmental education experience. The Action Guide was distributed free to all primary schools in the country.

magnetic birds



After years of humming birds, honey-creepers and other exotic species, BirdLife decided to change to more familiar fare on its fridge magnets. The six birds in the new set are hoopoe, common kingfisher, goldfinch, golden oriole, greenfinch and European bee-eater.

This spread does not display all the material produced in 2001, but only a selection of perhaps the more colourful items. Ed.

The fifth and sixth in the *Hieles, haj u sabih!* bird poster series were issued in 2001 with financial assistance of the EPD. The posters featured the chaffinch, a songbird unfortunately very popular with trappers; and the hoopoe, a protected bird much sought-after by hunters. These posters are used mainly as incentive for junior members to renew their subscription in Klabb Huttat. The other four posters in the series feature kingfisher, blue rock thrush, little ringed plover and robin.

Hieles, haj u sabih! means: Free, alive and beautiful!



new posters

Calendar for 2002



A very popular item was the 2002 Bird Calendar, the first calendar that BirdLife has produced in several years. The calendar was of the desk flip format, with 13 stunning photographs all taken by BirdLife photographers. The printing was high quality, yet BirdLife put a very low price tag on this product. Not surprisingly, it sold out in a matter of weeks.



Sustainable hunting?

Joe Sultana

Sustainability has become a household word. It is fashionable nowadays to stick the sustainability label to a variety of human activities, especially the kind that normally have a negative impact on the environment. Development, tourism, agriculture, forestry, land management, fishing etc: they are all potential monsters which can (and too often do) cause unfathomable environmental damage if left unchecked. Sustainability involves rigorous monitoring of an activity to ensure not only the future of the activity, but also the well-being of the natural resource. Too often, however, the sustainability factor is simply pasted on to sweeten a bitter pill. And if you try to apply sustainability to Malta-style hunting, it becomes ridiculous.

Bad joke

In a place where uncontrolled carnage of migrant birds takes place every spring and every autumn migration, talk of sustainability makes no sense. For those of us who witness the regular slaughter of raptors, herons, golden orioles, hoopoes, bee-eaters and many other non-game species, the very idea of sustainable hunting is a very bad joke.

A law for one and all

In a continent where most birds are migratory, and where the resident species have ranges extending into several countries, legislation at national level can never be sufficient for effective bird protection. You need pan-continental legislation.

In Europe there are two main international laws governing the shooting and trapping of birds. One is the Council of Europe's Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, better known as the Bern Convention; the other is the European Community Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds, better known as the Birds Directive. The overall aim of these two legal instruments is to ensure that all wild birds are afforded some basic protection wherever they occur across the European territory. To achieve this they try to

- regulate legitimate game shooting
- ensure that key habitats are protected to safeguard the more threatened species
- minimise activity that would impair or degrade important bird areas
- outlaw all methods of large-scale killing of birds
- ban the exploitation and trade of most species

Governments wishing to comply then have an obligation to adapt their

own national laws to the above international legislation.

Ratify... and retreat!

Malta has ratified the Bern Convention and is in the process of accession negotiations to get in line with the Birds Directive. Following the relatively "good" bird protection laws that came into force in 1993, the EC *avis* on Malta stated unequivocally that "even though the Maltese authorities have enacted regulations to control bird hunting more strictly, these are not sufficient to comply with Community legislation. Considerable efforts will therefore have to be made by the Maltese authorities to implement Community provisions."

"We have today more hunters shooting more birds in more places and for longer periods than we had nine years ago."

But incredibly, the exact opposite happened! Subsequent governments repeatedly gave in to the hunters' aggressive (and sometimes violent) lobby: the hunting season was lengthened, trapping was reintroduced in spring, the minimum age to acquire a hunting licence was lowered, the list of huntable species was increased, and land formerly off-

limits to hunting was opened up to hunters. In short, we have today more hunters shooting more birds in more places and for longer periods than we had nine years ago! It is a dismal package, but more outrageous and shameful is the fact that not even such hunter-friendly laws are sufficient for most Maltese hunters! Indeed, for many hunters, the law doesn't even exist.

Add this to the fact that Malta has the highest hunter density in Europe, and it's no wonder that millions of birds reach a dead end in Malta.

No residents

But let's for the moment forget about the mass slaughter that knows no control nor method.

Even if all else were perfect, sustainable hunting in Malta is just as impossible, for the simple fact that *resident game birds are totally absent*. This is no well-managed deer population on some private moor, where monitoring is almost child's play and realistic projections easy to make. Nor is it a pheasant-rearing project, where the birds are raised and released on an estate for hunters to shoot down. In such cases, exact numbers of game are known and therefore hunting quotas can be set accordingly. We are here talking migration, a group of birds that appear suddenly on a group of islands, more often than not seeking refuge from adverse weather conditions. Their numbers fluctuate notoriously from year to year. How can you even *begin* to monitor the exact populations when so many other factors beyond your control or knowledge are in force? How can you set sensible and sustainable quotas when you have no idea what the current populations are?

What we do know for sure is that many birds are seriously on the decline!

Game not in progress

Apart from a few duck species, the main game hunted in Malta are turtle dove and quail. Both species are migratory.

In the last 30 years, and particularly in the last 15, turtle dove has declined throughout most of its European range. Habitat destruction, land mismanagement, changes in its subtropical African wintering grounds and hunting are all to blame for this decline. This is why less and less turtle doves are turning up with every successive migration season.

The quail, Europe's only migratory galliform, has also declined across its European range. Agricultural intensification in its breeding areas, habitat degradation in its Sahel wintering quarters and excessive

hunting and trapping have drastically reduced its population. Hunting in the Mediterranean

region has mushroomed over the past 30 years, and surely this has not helped to improve the quail's situation.

When a species is in decline, you don't talk sustainable hunting - you talk hunting moratorium! It's only common sense that when a bird population is dwindling, the only sensible thing to do is to stop killing it, if only for a while, until numbers

"When a species is in decline you don't talk sustainable hunting - you talk hunting moratorium!"



Turtle dove - in decline all across Europe

recover and stabilise. Moreover, you pay particular attention to the protection of that species during its most crucial period - the breeding season. This is of course why BirdLife Malta has always insisted on a total hunting ban in spring.

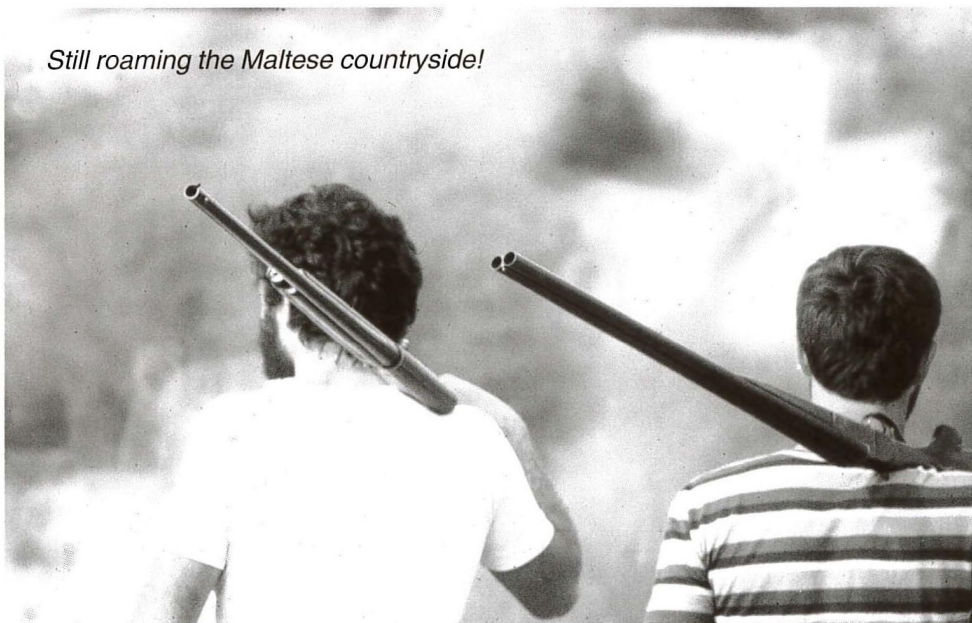
No place for Rambo

Ultimately, true sustainable hunting requires thought, planning, study, monitoring, self-discipline, self-control and a sporting respect towards your quarry. Trigger-happy, mindless, devil-may-care macho behaviour plays no part in it.

Unfortunately this is by far the kind of hunter that still roams the Maltese countryside today.

Joe Sultana is an ornithologist and author of several bird-related books and papers, co-ordinator of BirdLife's Research Group and for many years a member on BirdLife's Council. He is a past President of the Society.

Still roaming the Maltese countryside!



Victor Falzon



The adult little ringed plover has a striking head and breast pattern.

The Pied Piper of Ghadira

• The little ringed plover •

The sandbanks and islands at Ghadira, as well as the shelter of the site provided the perfect setting for little ringed plovers.



Dennis Cook

*They sprint eight feet and -
stop. Like that. They
sprintayard (like that) and
stop.*

*They have no acceleration
and no brakes.*

Top speed's their only one.

*They're alive - put life
through a burning-glass, they're
its focus - but they share
the world of delicate clockwork.*

*In spasmodic
Indian file
they parallel the parallel ripples.*

*When they stop
they, suddenly, are
gravel*

Norman MacCaig

Over the years Malta lost several breeding birds, such as jackdaw, peregrine and barn owl - all sad stories. Hunting and trapping and habitat destruction have taken their toll on Malta's birdlife. So when a new bird begins to breed in these overcrowded islands, it is indeed time to rejoice!

To breed, many birds need special habitats where to find food and shelter. The recreation and revitalisation of the wetland at Ghadira nature reserve provided just these requirements for the little ringed plover. Moreover, BirdLife volunteers and reserve personnel carefully created areas of shingle and gravel on some islands specifically to attract this plover. It was back-breaking work, but the trick worked: what was once just a migrant visitor to Malta is now an established and annual breeding bird at Ghadira. The liquid calls of this cute, petite plover are nowadays a regular feature at Ghadira in spring and summer.

The first pair settled at the reserve in spring 1995. Three eggs were laid, two of which hatched in late June. Since then a pair has bred every year. In 2001 the number increased to two pairs, with a total of 12 young successfully fledged.

The nest is a shallow scrape on bare sand, shingle or gravel, often at lake edges or islands. The bird also breeds in man-made habitats such as saltpans, gravel pits and reservoirs. The male makes a few scrapes during courtship and the female selects one, in which she lays three or four buff-coloured eggs, with dark spots and streaks. The young hatch after about three weeks, and instantly run off to explore! Although protected by the adults for several days, they feed on their own. The female often leaves the rearing of the young to the male so that she can lay a second clutch.

Little ringed plovers belong to the family known as Charadriidae, a group of short-billed waders, often with variegated markings. They are quite vocal, particularly in flight and have a characteristic feeding behaviour, running for short stretches rapidly and then standing dead still to peck at the ground, this motion being repeated over and over. The little ringed plover has a striking head and breast pattern of black, white and brown, a yellow eye-ring and a black bill. It has brownish upperparts and wings, shining white underparts and mud-coloured legs.

Little ringed plovers are summer visitors to Europe, returning to Africa to spend the winter. In Malta they are mainly seen from March to May and from late July to early November. They are often seen singly or in small flocks but have been recorded in flocks of up to 50 birds.

Joe Sultana

Charles Gaudi



Three to four eggs are laid in a shallow scrape.

Dennis Cachia



Week-old chick. Chicks abandon the nest on hatching.

Dennis Cachia



At about a month old, the young bird is more or less ready to fly.

Action in the field

Justin Vassallo

Trapping survey

The year kicked off with a survey of trapping sites around the Maltese Islands. The aim was to have an idea of the quantity and distribution of these notorious hotspots of destruction, and start along the way to quantify the damage that is done to our countryside (see box).

The Calabrian way

On the enforcement front, 2001 will be remembered for increased co-ordination with the police corps, particularly the Administrative Law

Enforcement (ALE) squad. For the second year running Naturschutzbund Deutschland (BirdLife Partner in Germany) and Fondazione Mediterranea Falchi funded and helped BirdLife organise a four-day seminar for two members of the ALE. The event took place in Calabria, Italy, in May, near the end of the spring migration. ALE Inspector Alex Miruzzi and Sergeant Brian Scicluna, accompanied by Justin Vassallo from BirdLife, met the major of the Guardie Forestali in charge of the anti-poaching squad in Reggio Calabria. The 70-strong platoon of police officers is seasonally deployed in the

area during the migration season specifically to control illegal hunting. The Maltese delegation learned about the history of poaching in the region, which until a few years ago was notorious for the mass slaughter of protected birds, especially raptors. The delegation was taken on patrols of the area both in the Guardie's land vehicles and helicopters. The patrols helped the Maltese group appreciate the extent of the work involved, and to understand the strategies used by the Guardie in their work. Through the sustained efforts of the Guardie Forestali, illegal hunting in Calabria has been virtually wiped out.

On the last day of the visit a press conference held in the Prefettura of Reggio Calabria was well-covered by the media.

Course for the force

The visit was soon followed up in Malta by two four-day training courses for members of the ALE, the Armed Forces of Malta, Maltese Customs, Environment Protection Department and Malta International Airport security.

BirdLife believes that wildlife law enforcement in Malta cannot be properly managed without a constant flow of information between the various entities involved. One of the aims of the courses was therefore to strengthen relations for better co-operation and more effective enforcement. With funding and organisational help from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB - BirdLife Partner in the UK), BirdLife made arrangements for Mr Dave Dick and Mr Alan Stewart to come over from Scotland to deliver the course. Dave Dick works at the RSPB Investigation Department, while Alan Stewart is a Wildlife Liaison Officer with the UK's environmental police. Both these officers are



Trapping sights

Trapping sites are well-known for the damage they cause, and not just for the annual harvest of hundreds of thousands of songbirds. Trappers tear out natural vegetation from their (their?) rectangle of land and regularly spray herbicide to keep the patch sterile and free of any plant which could entangle their precious nets. Add to this the unsightly huts, poles and pillars, the network of access footpaths, the myriad RTOs splashed on whitened stones everywhere, and the often abusive behaviour of the trapper towards any walker in the vicinity.

In January 2001, BirdLife carried out a survey of trapping sites in Malta. The survey was carried out by direct counting of trapping sites from high-definition aerial photographs of the Maltese Islands - trapping sites show up only too well on photographs! A total of **5317 sites** were identified, mostly concentrated within 1km of the coast, especially in the west: in some areas they are so densely packed that they form an almost uninterrupted trap for songbirds flying in for food and rest.

This survey was sponsored by BirdLife International.

veterans in the field of birdcrime investigation.

The two courses ran parallel. The morning course had participants from all the entities involved. The themes were surveillance at points of entry (airports, seaports etc), illegal bird trade and CITES issues, with special focus on how co-operation between entities can facilitate monitoring and investigation of related crimes. The aim here was to tackle illegal importation of live song birds and skins of protected species.

The afternoon course was designed for ALE staff and focused on illegal taxidermy, surveillance and prosecution of illegal hunting and trapping. The aim was to facilitate the enforcement of environmental laws and the CITES Convention in Malta.

RaptorCamp 2001

The 2001 International RaptorCamp was held in September at Buskett, with 30 participants from Europe attending the three-week live-in. At Buskett, BirdLife birdwatchers annually record the autumn passage of European honey-buzzards, marsh harriers, common kestrels, lesser kestrels, hobbies, ospreys, black kites and eagles, several of which come down to rest in the trees in the evening. In autumn 2001, a total of 3000 birds of prey were observed from Buskett alone.

A notable improvement was observed at Buskett, but things were far from satisfactory in adjacent valleys such as Girgenti, where illegal hunting was still predominant. Camp participants monitored these sites, much to the irritation of the hunters there. In fact, on two occasions, groups of hunters surrounded our birdwatchers with not the nicest of intentions, but prompt action by the police patrolling the area avoided nasty incidents.

As in previous years, MPs and other VIPs, as well as the press, were invited to visit BirdLife's raptor-monitoring post at Buskett.

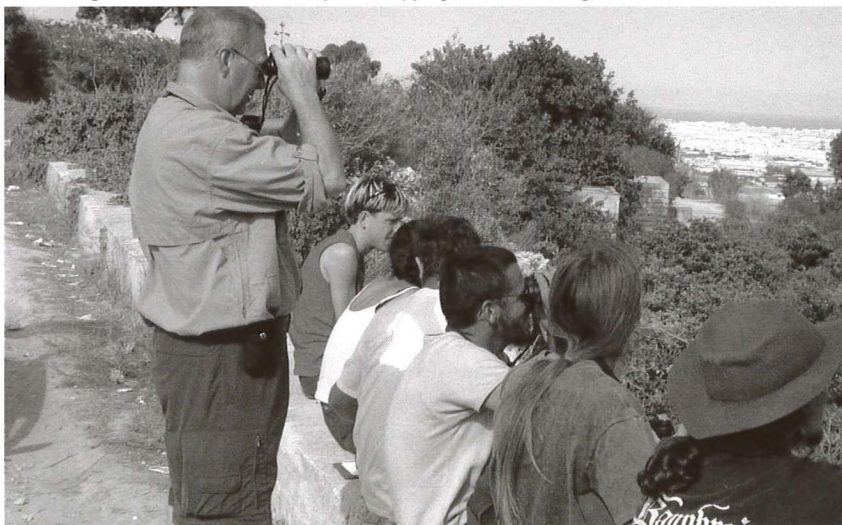
Justin Vassallo is a member of the Conservation Committee and sits on the BirdLife Council. He is also a co-ordinator of the International RaptorCamp in Malta.



On course. ALE course participants, with Alan Stewart (1st from left) and Dave Dick (2nd from right).



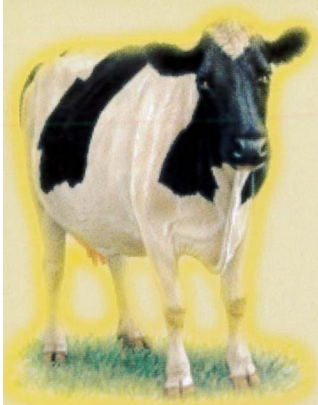
Site-seeing. EPD and ALE officers inspect a trapping site at Had-Dingli.



Spywatch. RaptorCamp participants monitoring illegal hunting at Wied il-Girgenti.

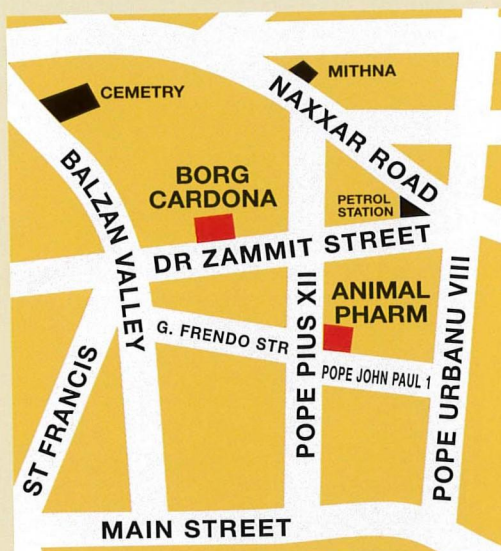


Another one bites the dust. A hunter caught red-handed at Buskett.



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Coastal dunes

Edwin Lanfranco

A unique type of community which is widespread in the Mediterranean is that of coastal sands, which typically form dunes. In Malta, coastal dunes are rare and highly threatened. The specialised plant communities which thrive in this rare habitat are consequently themselves endangered, and several have already been lost.

To live in sand, plants need particular adaptations. In view of the mobile nature of sand, a well-developed anchoring system with far-ranging roots and often rhizomes are vital. Moreover, since sand does not readily hold water, sand-living plants (psammophytes) are usually xerophilic: their leaves are small or narrow, often covered in wax or hair, and occasionally succulent - all adaptations to economise on water. Since the water to which they have access is often saline, psammophytes are also halophilic.

Ecologically, the most important plant species are the sand-binding grasses. These are plants with an extensive system of roots and rhizomes forming dense tufts of leaves and culms (stems). These leaves and culms trap shifting sands, thus building a mound. As a result of this, a dune is built and the land behind the dune is stabilized so that other types of plants can grow.

A typical Mediterranean dune consists of the so-called yellow dune (= white dune) which is the highest point of a dune built up by the principal sand-binders of which the most characteristic is **marram-grass**, which no longer occurs in Malta. In front of the yellow dune is the primary dune, typically dominated by lower sand-binders such as the **sand-couch** and **dropseed grass**. In front of the primary dune, closest to the sea is the foreshore community, often characterised by the **sea-kale**. Yellow dune, primary dune

and foreshore community form what are known as the mobile dunes because of the mobility of the sand. Behind the yellow dune lies the grey dune which is dominated by small to medium-sized shrubs such as **bushy restharrow**, **tamarisks** and species of **juniper** (junipers do not occur in Malta). Behind the grey dune is the brown dune which is essentially a Mediterranean evergreen wood with **oaks** and **pines**. Grey and brown dunes are fixed dunes.

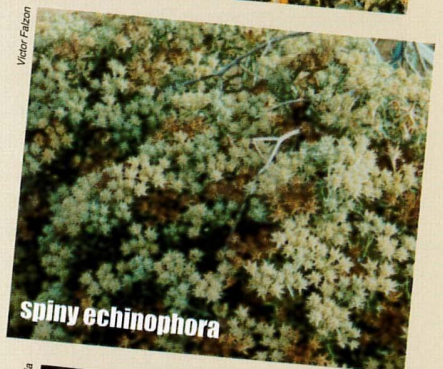
Because of the nature of the topography, Maltese dunes are very small ("pocket" dunes) and occur in several bays and inlets. No true brown dunes exist any more, though they presumably did in the past. True grey dunes only occur at Ramla in Gozo with some remnant at Santa Marija on Kemmuna. The best Maltese dunes are those of Ramla in Gozo and Ramla tat-Torri, the latter fast declining. Other dunes which still carry some typical psammophyte vegetation are Mellieha Bay, Armier and adjacent inlets, Ramla tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay), Santa Marija in Kemmuna and Xatt l-Ahmar in Gozo.

Since marram-grass became extinct in the 1970s, the dominant sand binder which forms the yellow dune is the sand-couch, with the dropseed grass being the main binder in the primary dune. The more characteristic species of Maltese dunes, besides those mentioned above, include the sea-kale, the **sea daffodil**, **sea holly**, **yellow thistle**, **coast spurge**, sand



Designe Falcon

bushy restharrow



Vicor Falcon

spiny echinophora



Dennis Cichla

sea daffodil



Vicor Falcon

red campion

storksbill, sand fern-grass, sea knotgrass and sea medick. Although these species may be found in more than one of our remaining dunes, by their very nature they are rare species and most of them are declining. There are also several species which are not exclusive to dunes but may occur also in other, usually saline, habitats. Among the commoner species are **coastal medick, red campion, bulbous hawksbeard, saltwort** and a sand dwelling variety of the **grey birdsfoot trefoil.**

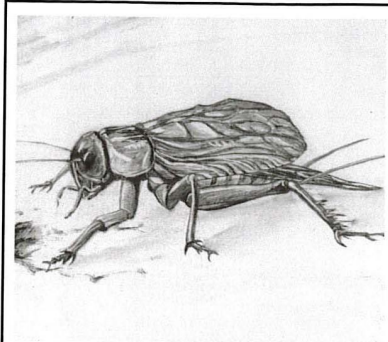
Coastal dunes are the most seriously threatened of all Maltese natural communities. They all occur in sites of great recreational value, a situation which has put great stress on this habitat. The full development of dune ecology has been destroyed by the construction of roads and paths at the back of the sandy beaches, as well as reclamation for agricultural purposes of the fixed dunes. Most damaging of all are the so-called "boat-houses", all of them illegal but tacitly sanctioned, which have grown into permanent settlements such as has happened at Armier and Ramla tat-Torri. In summer, cars are driven onto the dune at Ramla tat-Torri, with the result that the dune vegetation in the area fails to develop, or grows stuntedly. The sand dune system at Mellieha bay was once one of the best developed in the country, but has been severely degraded since the present main road bisected the area; subsequently, reeds and planted acacias have overrun what remained of the dune, which is now less than a shadow of what it used be. Scrambling and camping on the dunes, now illegal, have also caused considerable damage, and beach establishments have encroached on the dunes. Dune vegetation has been bulldozed, as at Ramla tat-Torri, to plant non-typical trees, and spiny plants have been deliberately removed from the sand by government employees.

Numerous species have had their populations drastically reduced or have gone extinct in the past 25 years as a result of these interventions. Thus marram grass, the importance of which was stressed above, is now extinct from its previous two remaining haunts: Armier and Ramla tat-Torri. Also extinct is the **small-fruited cornsalad.** The **sand carrot** and **sand restharrow** which used to grow at Ramla in Gozo, have not been seen for the past few years and may be extinct. The **purple spurge, sea spurge, spiny echinophora, sand galingale** and **cottonweed** now occur, as few individuals, in one or two sites.

Most remaining dunes are now legally protected and efforts have been made by the government departments and NGOs to try and reverse the degeneration progress.

One hopes that such efforts are not too late to save the last remnants of this special habitat.

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



Victor Falzon

Ground dweller

Since sand dunes are a threatened habitat in Malta, all species restricted to this ecosystem are vulnerable. One such species is the **burrowing sand cricket** (*Brachytrupes megacephalus* Grillo tar-ramel), which according to the Red Data Book (1989) is restricted to the Ghadira area, although it has also been recorded from Ramla l-Hamra. The species is frequent at Ghadira nature reserve.

The animal has a characteristic continuous call which it emits at dusk while stationing itself in front of its burrow entrance, possibly for sound amplification purposes.



Victor Falzon

Tamarisk is typical of coastal sandy habitat, here pictured at Santa Marija Bay, Kemma.

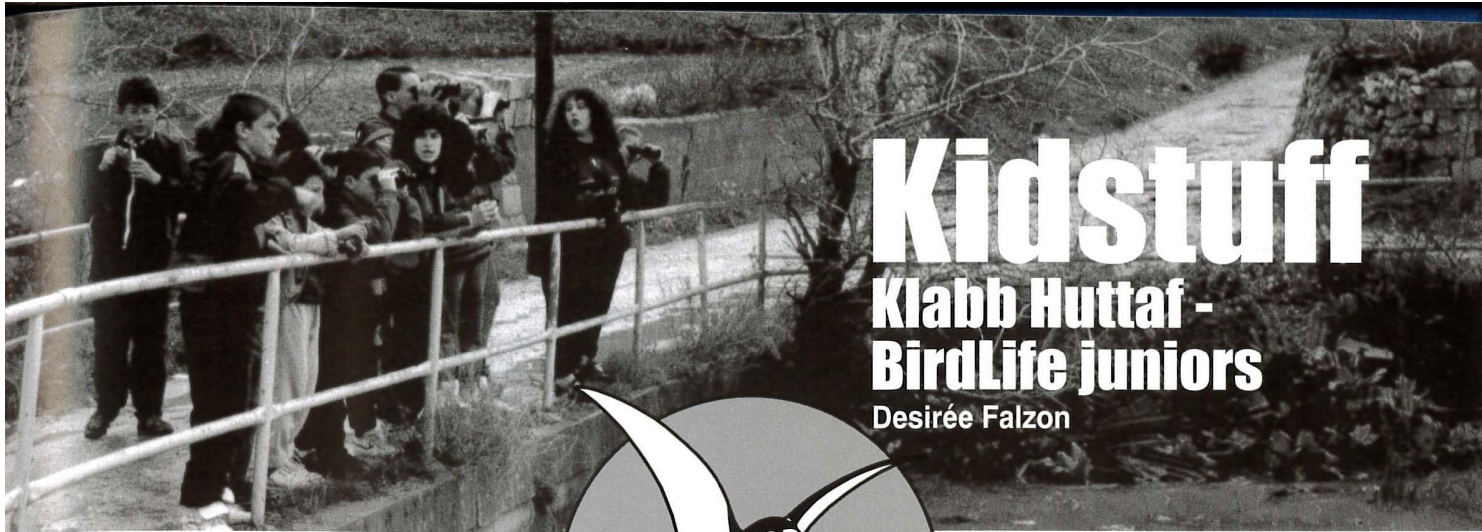
Scientific and Maltese names of flora mentioned in text

Marram grass - *Ammophila littoralis*, Birru
 Sand-couch - *Elytrigia juncea*, Sikrana tar-ramel
 Dropseed grass - *Sporobolus arenarius*, Niġem tar-ramel
 Sea-kale - *Cakile maritima*, Kromb il-bahar
 Bushy restharrow - *Ononis natrix*, Broxka
 Tamarisks - *Tamarix* spp., Bruk
 Juniper - *Juniperus* spp., Ġnipro
 Oaks - *Quercus* spp., Ballut
 Pines - *Pinus* spp., Żnuber
 Sea daffodil - *Pancratium maritimum*, Pankrazju
 Sea holly - *Eryngium maritimum*, Xewk ir-ramel

Yellow thistle - *Scolimus hispanicus*, Xewk isfar
 Coast Spurge - *Euphorbia teracina*, Xewk tax-xatt
 Sand storksbill - *Erodium laciniatum*, Moxt tar-ramel*
 Sand fern-grass - *Cutandia maritima*, Kutandja
 Sea knotgrass - *Polygonum maritimum*, Lewża tal-bahar
 Sea medick - *Medicago marina*, Nefel tar-ramel
 Coastal medick - *Medicago littoralis*, Nefel tax-xatt
 Red campion - *Silene colorata*, Lsien l-ghasfur
 Bulbous hawksbeard - *Aethiorhiza bulbosa*, Żigland tal-basla*
 Saltwort - *Salsola kali*, Haxixa ta' l-irmied xewwikija
 Grey birdsfoot trefoil - *Lotus cytoides*, Ghantux tar-ramel

Small-fruited cornsalad - *Valerianella microcarpa*, Valerjanella tar-ramel
 Sand carrot - *Pseudorhiza pumila*, Zunnarija tar-ramel
 Sand restharrow - *Ononis variegata*, Broxka tar-ramel*
 Purple spurge - *Euphorbia pepis*, Gemmugha tar-ramel
 Sea spurge - *Euphorbia paralias*, Tenghud tar-ramel
 Spiny echinophora - *Echinophora spinosa*, Busbież xewwieki tar-ramel
 Sand galingale - *Cyperus capitatus*, Bordi tar-ramel
 Cottonweed - *Otanthus maritimus*, Santolina tar-ramel*

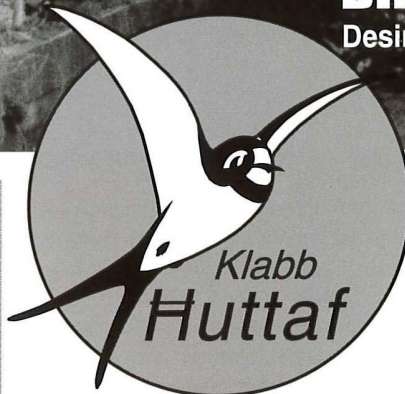
*Maltese name newly coined for this article by the author.



Kidstuff

Klabb Huttaf - BirdLife juniors

Desirée Falzon



Curbing the dropout was the challenge taken up by the Klabb Huttaf Committee in 2001. Klabb Huttaf (meaning Swallows Club) is BirdLife's under-16 membership. The main aim of Klabb Huttaf is to teach as many young people as possible to love and understand nature. Through the club, BirdLife strives to create a generation of adults with a positive mentality towards birds and nature. So naturally, the committee bends over backwards to recruit and retain as many young members as possible.

In 2001 this effort was stepped up.

Swallow of the Year

The first job was to improve the **Huttafa of the Year Award**. Club members have the opportunity to win points for a variety of actions, such as attending club activities, recruiting members, writing in their magazine or doing environmental action in their school. From having just one winner as in previous years, the scheme was broadened to award the top ten members. The idea immediately gained popularity and by the end of the year 180 members had joined the points race!

Falko revival

Next on the agenda were the over-13s. For several years, separate activities were being organised for the Klabb Huttaf youths but something more exciting was needed. It was time to give the group an identity. The name **Falko** was revived from the past when BirdLife had an active teenage group. The idea was to re-awaken Falko with a new team. A core of active teenagers was picked for the job of forming a new youths' committee to look after their own activities. The effort paid off, and by the end of the year, a group of youths was meeting regularly and helping out with a programme of birdwatching, conservation and social activities which bonded the group with new strength. Falko was once again up and running!

Mags and more

Back at the main committee, more ideas were thought up for keeping non-

active members interested in Klabb Huttaf. The magazine, *Il-Huttafa*, now with colour cover, was in its eighth year of arriving bi-monthly on the doorstep with unfailing regularity. Members' letters, emails and parents' comments confirmed that the children really looked forward to their mag.

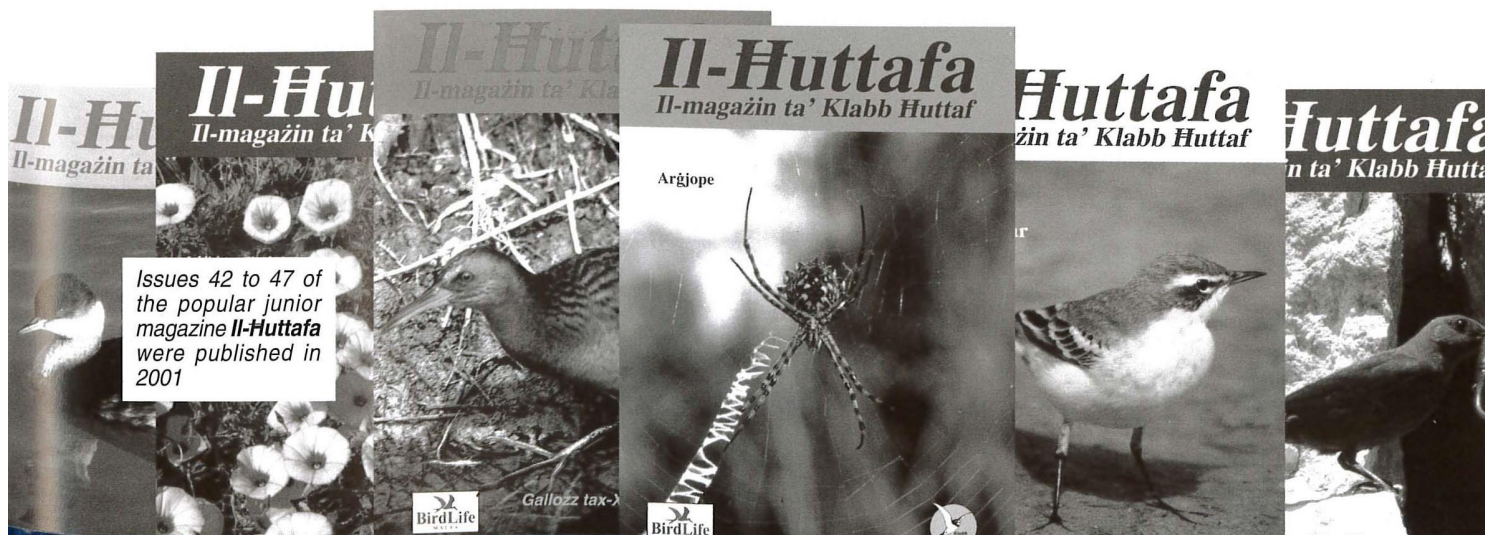
A new poster in the *Hieles, Haj u Sabih* series had also to be produced - a different poster is sent out every year to Huttaf who renew their membership. The chaffinch was chosen as the bird of the year and the poster was printed (see page 7) with sponsorship from the Environment Protection Department.

Scope for a walk

Halfway through the year a club activity boosted morale, as well as funds! It was an 11km marathon walk, and the very good turnout had collected Lm314! Klabb Huttaf could now buy a spotting scope and donate it to the Ghadira Visitors' Centre.

It is very encouraging to see one's efforts paying off. A bigger, stronger Klabb Huttaf can mean only one thing - a brighter future for nature.

Desirée Falzon is Chairperson of BirdLife Malta's Council, and a member on the Klabb Huttaf Committee.





Reserve Roundup

Mark Gauci

It is late on a Sunday afternoon. After accompanying the last group of people out of Ghadira nature reserve, I return to the hide to enjoy the last rays of sunlight on the pool. My eyes rest on a male little ringed plover, busily defending his territory on a new patch of shingle. I recall that day in summer 2001, when a group of volunteers spent an evening carrying shingle to one of the islands in the main pool. Yet, such a job is only a small fraction of the work which running the reserves involves in order to create the habitat we are so proud of today.

field teachers

Education-wise, the year 2001 at the reserves was a milestone: full-time teachers Victor Falzon and Jason Aloisio were posted at Ghadira and Is-Simar respectively with the aim of educating school children visiting the reserves. Teaching children to care about our fragile environment is of primary importance to BirdLife Malta. For this purpose, the educational potential of the reserves has now been increased, with Ghadira taking primary school visits and Is-Simar catering for secondary schools. Students are briefed about the reserves with special reference to their importance as unique habitats for birds during migration and breeding. They are then guided along a nature trail along which they have the opportunity to see various species of flora and fauna. Finally the most awaited moment of the tour arrives and the children enter the birdwatching hides. The reaction is always the same: a sense of wonder at the variety of birds.

site managers

The presence of the teachers has also meant that the managing wardens have more time on their hands for manual work, which is all summarized in a five-year management plan of the reserves drawn up in 2001 by BirdLife. Down at Ghadira, Charles Gauci has now turned his attention to controlling the spread of the highly invasive shrubby orache.

Way back in the early 1980s the northwestern perimeter embankment of the reserve was planted with this bush, which was the only species that could thrive on the then hypersaline soil. The bush grew thick and created a semi-natural barrier to help deter intrusions from hunters, which back then were

newly-cleared areas are being replanted with other native shrubs, which can now grow on the much less hostile soil.

Other jobs included the laying of a new patch of shingle on an island, in a bid to augment the number of breeding pairs of little ringed plover. For the first time since the species started breeding, two pairs of little ringed plover nested at the reserve and successfully fledged twelve out of the twenty chicks which hatched. Encouraged by this success,

a group of twenty volunteers met at the reserve to help the warden in this task. A human chain was formed in the muddy water (picture at top) and in a matter of hours the job was well and truly completed. The rest is now up to the little ringed plover...

Over at Is-Simar, the organized cropping of the reedbed, being undertaken by warden Charles Coleiro, is fast having the desired effect. Many more bird species, such as grey heron and little egret, which were finding the pool too densely overgrown with reeds, are now spending more time fishing and resting in the newly-cleared areas. This task

chameleon



Desirée Falzon



Field teacher Jason Aloisio with biology students from St Theresa Junior Lyceum at Is-Simar



Field teacher Victor Falzon with a class from St Edwards Junior School at Ghadira.

Alex Casha

required intensive activity and hours of sweat since the warden was armed only with pruning scissors and thigh boots.

Also in summer, with all the necessary permits in order, heavy machinery was brought in to build a much-needed office and store. So far, one of the three birdwatching hides has been doubling as office, workshop and store, but it was now overflowing with all kinds of tools. This is now being seen to, and 2002 should hopefully see this problem solved and the hide returned to its original purpose - birdwatching!

weekend guides

One cannot fail to commend the great effort made by the group of weekend guides who, week in week out, are making sure that Ghadira

opens for the public to enjoy the place. In summer the visitors' centre at Ghadira was given a long-overdue re-wiring, re-plastering and re-painting as part of an effort to make the place as visitor-friendly as possible.

The nature reserves hit the television screens on various occasions during 2001. An episode of the popular programme *Naturambjent* was filmed entirely at Is-Simar while another programme *Ahna Nghinu*, featuring BirdLife Malta's role as a voluntary organization, was shot at Ghadira. Several press releases were issued during the year, mainly to announce

closing and opening times, but also to highlight special events such as Wetlands Day.

Mark Gauci is BirdLife's nature reserves supervisor, a qualified ringer and assistant ringing secretary of the Research Group.



Workshop, store and office compound taking shape at Is-Simar.

Charles Gauci

People who count!

BirdLife Malta Research Group

Charles Gauci

BirdLife's Research Group is a nucleus of birdwatchers and ornithologists who carry out bird-related studies including ringing, seawatching, raptor migration counts and nest recording.

Ringing

During 2001 the Ringing Scheme had twelve licenced ringers, although some were active only sporadically. On average eight ringers were out in the field at least once in each month. Ghadira and Is-Simar were manned as constant effort sites and, together with Lunzjata Valley (Gozo) and Buskett, were the main ringing sites. Kemmuna was again used for the Small Islands Project, with ringing taking place daily from 1 April to 13 May 2001

Daily Logging

As in past years daily sightings were collected and computerised. Qammieh Point and Qawra were again well covered during the duck and seabird migration periods, as was the raptor migration, monitored mainly from Buskett and Dwejra. There was daily coverage of Ghadira and Is-Simar.

Nest Recording

This activity is a specialised study undertaken by only a few individuals.

Each nest is recorded on a record sheet charting the history of that particular nest. For the first time two pairs of little ringed plover nested at Ghadira. Moorhens again bred in good numbers at both Ghadira and Is-Simar and reed warblers fledged several broods at the latter reserve. Spotted flycatchers were found breeding at Buskett, Rabat, Ta' Qali and Addolorata while a pair of house martins bred again near Had-Dingli, in the very same spot as last year!

Charles Gauci is managing warden of Ghadira nature reserve, a qualified ringer and Ringing Secretary of the Research Group

Reed warbler now breeds regularly at Is-Simar



Ray Galea

species	year ringed and country	year recovered and country
yellow-legged gull	2000 in Malta (Filfla)	2001 in Sicily
lesser black-backed gull	1996 in Norway	2000 in Malta (Żejtun)
sedge warbler	1999 in Croatia	2000 in Malta (Kemmuna)
barn swallow	1999 Germany	2001 in Malta (Lunzjata)
common chiffchaff	2000 in Malta (Ghadira)	2001 in Sweden
sedge warbler	2000 in Hungary	2001 in Malta (Is-Simar)
garden warbler	1997 in Hungary	2001 in Malta (Kemmuna)
sedge warbler	1999 in Sweden	2001 in Malta (Is-Simar)
pie'd flycatcher	2001 in Malta (Kemmuna)	2001 in Finland
blackcap	2001 in Malta (Kemmuna)	2001 in Austria
common whitethroat	2001 in Malta (Kemmuna)	2001 in Slovakia
sedge warbler	2001 in Malta (Kemmuna)	2001 in Finland
dunlin	1999 in Malta (Ghadira)	2000 in Sweden
common chiffchaff	1999 in Malta (Rabat)	1999 in Czech Republic
greenfinch	2000 in Slovenia	2000 in Malta (Ta' Ċenċ)

Recent recoveries of ringed birds

It was their doing...

The people who made BirdLife tick in 2001



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Webmaster: Denis Cachia
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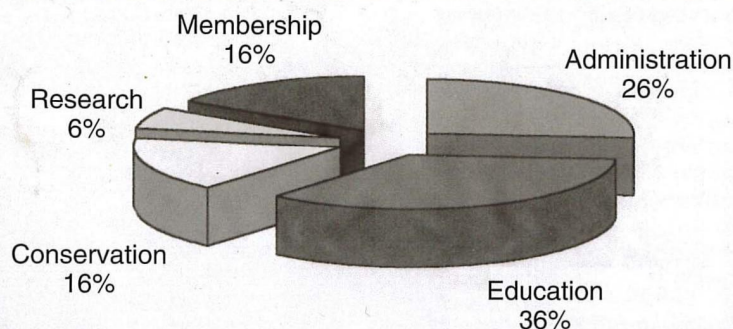
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Il-Merill: Mark Falzon
Ringling Newsletter: Mark Gauci

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Youth leader Saviour Spiteri (right) receiving the **Elizabeth Coxon Award 2000** from Klabb Huttaf co-ordinator Jason Aloisio, while Council Chairperson Desirée Falzon looks on. Saviour was awarded the prize for enthusiastic leadership in Falko activities as well as for manual conservation work in BirdLife's projects.

The financial picture



The piechart gives a simplified account of how BirdLife allocated its funds in the period January-December 2001. A detailed financial account is available on request.



Buskett? No, it's...



Land cover manipulation: Victor Falzon

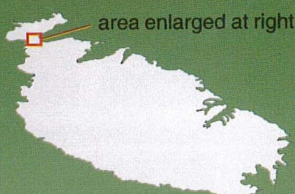
a Forest for the Future

It is believed that by the time the Phoenicians reached Malta in the 8th century BC, the islands had already lost all their original forest cover, except perhaps for a few scattered groves. Since then, the land surface has suffered the onslaught of sun, wind and rain without a shred of protection, eroded and bleached to the bone in several areas. It's time we tried to reverse the process.

In May 1996 some BirdLife people came up with a dream: what if we take a stretch of barren land and turn it back into forest? Not a dull, regimented plantation of monospecific trees, but vibrant evergreen oak woodland, which is the climax ecosystem of the Mediterranean region.

In 1997 a steering committee was set up and a site selected: *It-Taflija* (the hill slope just north of Ghadira). An MSc dissertation conducted a case study of the area, which included a detailed vegetation map. Ideas were discussed and refined, and plans drawn up. Approval and support were sought while meetings were held with key people, departments and groups.

Meanwhile, another kind of preparation began in earnest. Through collection and resale of used stamps, Klabb Huttat raised funds to buy plant pots and to establish a tree nursery at Is-Simar. Through club activities and especially through Dinja Wahda in schools, hundreds of oak seedlings were grown, transferred to the nurseries and now



await replanting on site as soon as the project is given the green light.

However, oak is not the only tree to be planted in the area - far from it! A range of habitats is envisioned, one merging into the other to form a patchwork of ecosystems to encourage maximum biodiversity. Clay steppe, garrigue, maquis and oak/lentisk woodland will be the main habitats, the rest will be allowed to intersperse and nature ultimately given a free hand.

The whole idea is not to have a place shut off to humanity. On the contrary, several footpaths will wind through the different habitats for walkers to enjoy.

The project is still years from completion - when nature is one of the main contributors, you can never really rush! But if the idea succeeds, it will be BirdLife's living gift to the millennium.

Which, incidentally, is why we named the project **Foresta 2000!**

Top: Artist's impression of what the forest could eventually look like.

Right (top): aerial view - dotted line shows general area of the project site. (middle) oak saplings, fresh from schools, arrive at Is-Simar. (bottom) Klabb Huttat members repotting saplings at Is-Simar nursery.



Planning Authority



Desiree Falzon



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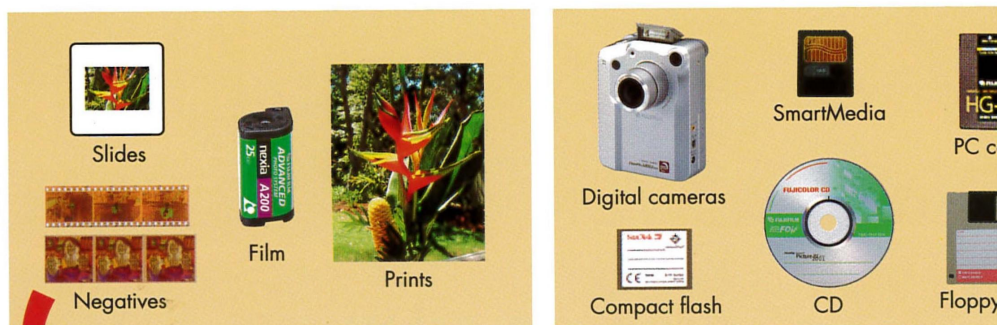
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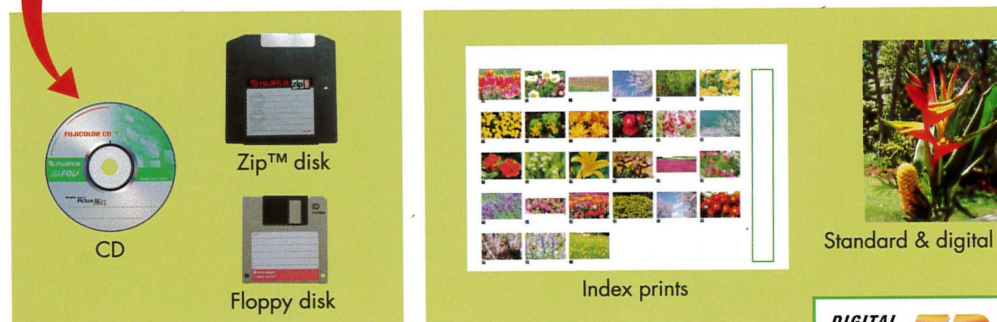
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