

Yelkouan Shearwaters need your support



Yelkouan Shearwaters have suffered a drastic decline in recent decades and the species is now considered **VULNERABLE** on the IUCN Red List. It is also listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, which gives the bird special protection wherever it occurs in EU countries. Its breeding sites are also protected as Natura 2000 sites under the EU Habitats Directive.

You can make a difference

Despite this, however, Yelkouan Shearwaters are still threatened by human activity. We can make a difference by reducing our impact on these birds. Here's how:



Never leave litter (especially organic waste) when you visit coast or cliffs



Reduce noise and light at night when you visit cliffs



Do not drive your boat into sea caves where seabirds breed



If you find a stranded, injured or dead Yelkouan Shearwater call BirdLife Malta (+356 21347646)

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LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija LIFE14 NAT/MT/991

The aim of the LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija Project is to make the Maltese Islands safe for Yelkouan Shearwaters. Actions to reach this aim include:

- **Controlling** predators (mainly rats) at the principal colony sites
- **Closing** knowledge gaps in population estimates and colony locations
- **Raising** public awareness to reduce threats (e.g. littering) in areas near nesting colonies
- **Reducing** light pollution from the Ċirkewwa ferry terminal, which lies close to important colonies
- **Assessing** the effect of light pollution from bunkering (ship fuelling) close to colonies, and taking concrete conservation actions
- **Reducing** disturbance of colonies from recreational and commercial boat activity
- **Ensuring** wider support among the Maltese population for the protection of this species.

The Project is being carried out by BirdLife Malta over five years (Sep 2015 – Aug 2020) and is part-funded (60%) by the EU.

Project Partners



The project is co-funded by



Keep in touch

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Yelkouan Shearwaters spend most of their life at sea.

Home to a tenth of the world population

The **Yelkouan Shearwater** is a seabird that occurs only in the Mediterranean region. **Around 10% (1370–2000 pairs) of the global population of this species breeds in the Maltese Islands.** For this reason, the conservation of the Maltese population of this bird is critical for the global survival of Yelkouan Shearwaters.

The Maltese people should feel rightly proud that our islands host such a large number of breeding shearwaters, but this also makes us responsible for their conservation.

Breeding cycle

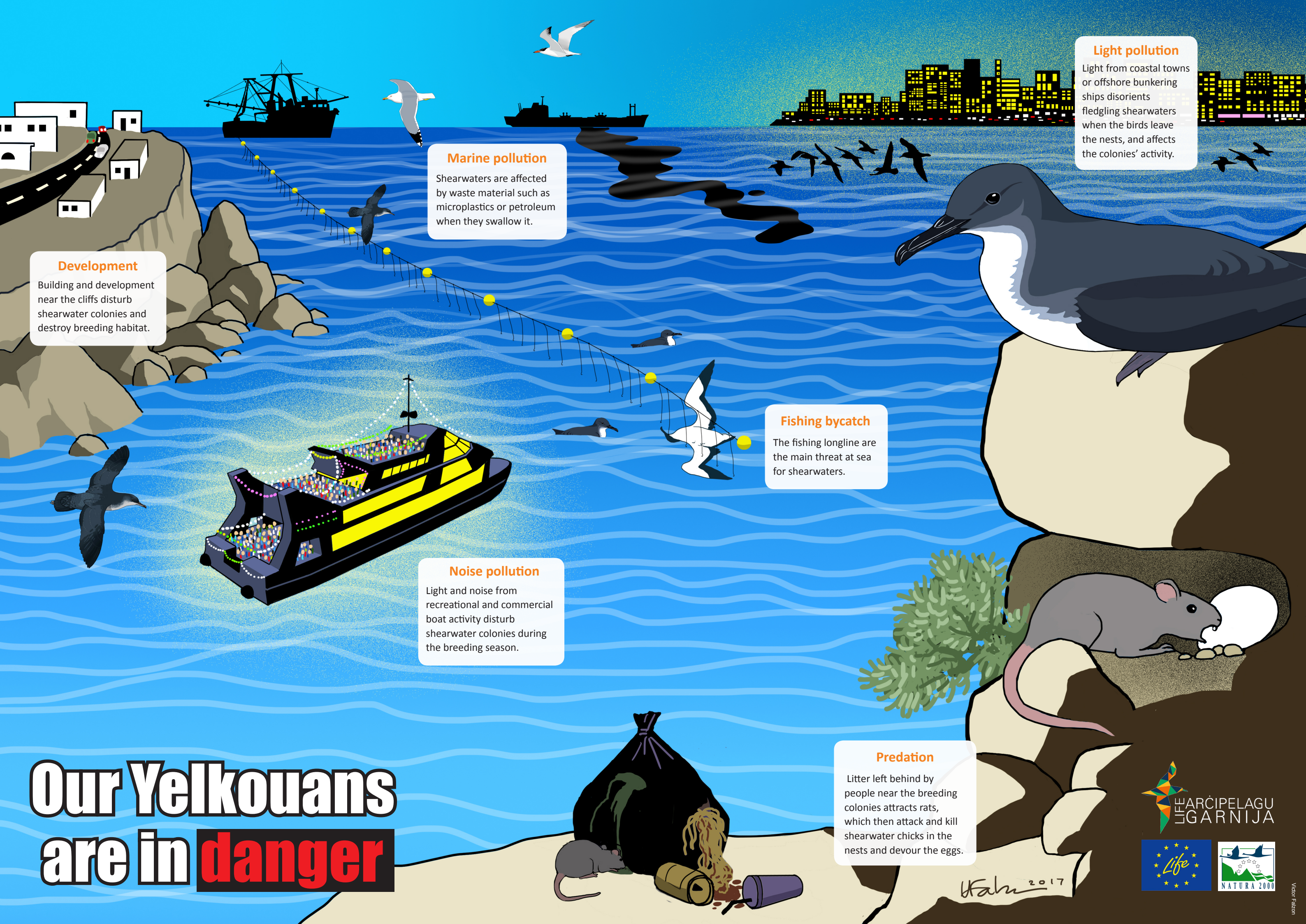
Yelkouan Shearwaters are migratory and do not stay in Malta all year round. They are present mainly during the breeding season, which is from February to July. These birds nest mainly in caves, crevices and burrows in coastal cliffs and rocky islets. Many of the western and southern seaciffs of Malta, Gozo and Comino host colonies of this species. Around March, the female lays a single egg on the bare ground of her burrow. The egg is incubated in shifts by both parents. When the chick hatches in April the parents fly out to sea to forage for fish, crustaceans and squid for their chick. They travel hundreds of kilometres – as far as Sicily, Tunisia and Libya – in search of food and can plunge up to 30m deep to catch their prey. They return to land in the dark, and find the nest by loud calling and through a well-developed sense of smell. When the chicks fledge in June–July most Yelkouans migrate to the Black Sea.



English name **Yelkouan Shearwater**
 Maltese name **Garnija**
 Scientific name ***Puffinus yelkouan***
 Body length **30–35cm** Wingspan **70–84cm**
 Description: **Streamlined body with long narrow wings, blackish brown upperparts and white underparts; slender beak with hooked tip and external, tube-like nostrils**
 Legal status in Malta: **protected**



A young Yelkouan Shearwater chick



Light pollution
Light from coastal towns or offshore bunkering ships disorients fledgling shearwaters when the birds leave the nests, and affects the colonies' activity.

Marine pollution
Shearwaters are affected by waste material such as microplastics or petroleum when they swallow it.

Development
Building and development near the cliffs disturb shearwater colonies and destroy breeding habitat.

Fishing bycatch
The fishing longline are the main threat at sea for shearwaters.

Noise pollution
Light and noise from recreational and commercial boat activity disturb shearwater colonies during the breeding season.

Predation
Litter left behind by people near the breeding colonies attracts rats, which then attack and kill shearwater chicks in the nests and devour the eggs.

Our Yelkouans are in **danger**



U. Fahn 2017