

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 62 ▪ December 2019



BirdLife
MALTA

We just got bigger!

As you will probably have noticed *Bird's Eye View* just got bigger. Yes, our quarterly magazine has grown from 12 to 16 pages!

We had been contemplating this move for several months, as more content keeps coming in as our work at BirdLife Malta increases. So here's the first issue with four extra pages, which we hope you'll enjoy. We have now dedicated more space to our news section, our nature reserves and our events. We've also made some changes in other pages as part of a minor revamp.

All this obviously comes at a cost, so any help is most welcome. There are many ways to support us: you can make a donation or get friends and colleagues to become members. If you would like to make a purchase from our online shop – for which we've dedicated another one of the new pages – we now have a bigger selection of merchandise to choose from. So do browse through our products and take your pick. Some items make ideal Christmas presents.

On behalf of the editorial board I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The Editor

Comment	2
Water Rail	3
News	4
Nature at our reserves: Għadira	6
Dinja Waħda, One World of Fun!	8
Autumn 2019 bird ringing	10
season on Kemmuna	
Campaign	11
Up and down Marfa Ridge	12
Events and activities	14
Back into the wild!	16

Editorial Board

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Contact BirdLife Malta

57/28 Marina Court, Abate Rigord Street, Ta' Xbiex XBX 1120, Malta
+356 21347645/6
info@birdlifemalta.org
www.birdlifemalta.org

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Focusing to be effective

My dad once told me "If you hold a magnifying glass over a pile of dry leaves on the hottest day of the year with the sun shining overhead, nothing will happen, as long as you keep moving the magnifying glass. But as soon as you hold the magnifying glass still and focus the rays of the sun on just one leaf, the whole pile of leaves will erupt into flames." The lesson in this analogy is clear.



During the past months, I have met with volunteers, employees, management team, Council members and external supporters to figure out what BirdLife Malta should be all about in the next three years. Of course, we want to do a lot of things and in a nutshell, we want to save the planet, biodiversity and our quality of life as human beings.

One thing that struck me in various experiences I have had working with NGOs is the lack of focus on the things that matter. We tend to want to do everything ending with doing a lot but nothing as good as one would expect. Many call it the '*Jack of all trades and master of none*' syndrome. This is what the Council, the management and myself want to change in the years to come. We want to focus on the areas where we can be fully effective and while supporting any other initiatives that come along from time to time, we remain focused only on what we need to do. Bird protection, legislation, seabird research, education and engaging with people, while advocating for positive changes in what happens in our country.

One other focus should be on memberships and fundraising. Another thing I heard from my dad was that conservation without funds is just conversation. We need members to strengthen our lobby group and we need to generate funds to achieve the goals we have set up in our next three-year strategy. I urge you to be a catalyst in bringing in more people to join our organisation and encourage you to visit our website, Facebook and other platforms to join our campaigns or purchase your gifts from our online shop.

I wish you, your families and close friends a merry Christmas and a new year full of health and happiness.

Mark Sultana
CEO

Water Rail

Maltese name: Gallozz tax-Xitwa

Scientific name: *Rallus aquaticus*

Length: 23-26cm

Wingspan: 38-45cm

Conservation Status: IUCN list this species as Least Concern but with Decreasing Population trend (IUCN, 2016). The European population is estimated at 157,000-346,000 pairs or 314,000-693,000 mature individuals (BirdLife International 2015). European populations cover around 50% of the global population, which is estimated between 630,000-1,400,000 mature individuals (IUCN, 2016)

Local Status: Autumn migrant and winter visitor with some return passage towards February and March

Call: A long drawn croaking call similar to a piglet's squeal (hence its Italian name Porcillione), often heard at daybreak. Also reveals its presence with a high pitched ticking call

Behaviour: Hides in thick marshland vegetation close to water's edge. It often emerges into the open during rainy weather. Feeds on a variety of aquatic invertebrates but also takes frogs, small fish and aquatic plants

Habitat: Wetlands, inland marshes, saltmarshes, shallow lakes, valley beds and river deltas

More often heard than seen, the Water Rail is an elusive bird of which we often get only short glimpses as the bird takes brief moments out of vegetation cover to cross from one patch of sedge into another.

This species is much tied to wetlands and is never found far from the water's edge. The Water Rail belongs to the Rallidae family. Rallidae also comprises species like the Moorhen and the Common Coot which are easier to observe, as well as various species of smaller crakes such as the Baillon's and Spotted Crake which share its secretive habits.

The Water Rail has a long, slightly downcurved reddish bill and when it takes short flights into cover, it reveals short rounded wings, flying rapidly, legs dangling. Legs are flesh coloured with long toes typical of rails and crakes. The plumage is striking with a dark slate bluish hue on the sides of its face, throat and breast. The flanks have black and white barring while the undertail coverts are conspicuously white. Upperparts are olive brown with black streaking.

The Water Rail breeds throughout Europe with its northernmost population in Iceland, though absent in northern Scandinavia. Its breeding range extends eastwards into Russia and northern Kazakhstan reaching Mongolia. It is also found in China and northern India, with fragmented populations in the Middle East countries and Turkey. In the Mediterranean it is resident mostly in the western basin increasing in winter as migratory populations from northern, central and eastern European countries migrate to winter in Mediterranean wetlands.

In Malta the Water Rail is found in suitable habitat from September to March. One can get good views of the bird at the BirdLife Malta nature reserves of Ghadira and Simar where the birdwatching hides give the opportunity to wait for the bird till it shows up...so be patient!

WORDS **David Attard** Ghadira Nature Reserve Warden

85 known illegal hunting casualties so far in 2019

Since the start of the autumn hunting season, BirdLife Malta and police have recovered no less than 38 known illegally shot protected birds whilst the total of shot birds recovered so far this year now stands at 85. Among the autumn casualties were Grey and Night Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets, Yellow-legged Gulls, Marsh Harriers, Honey-buzzards, a large number of Common Kestrels but

BirdLife Malta



► Not even the national bird of Malta, the Blue Rock Thrush, was spared!

also a Hobby, a Merlin, a Eurasian Nightjar, a Stone Curlew, a European Bee-eater and even a Blue Rock Thrush the national bird of Malta. Following the flock of Greater Flamingos shot down just before

the start of the season, in November a flock of highly protected and rare Short-toed Eagles were also targeted. The flock of around 15 eagles was spotted settling down to roost on 2 November in the outskirts of Siggiewi and Rabat, and BirdLife Malta volunteers witnessed one them being shot down at Girdgħeni. Various reports were subsequently received of other eagles being witnessed shot down. The next morning our staff monitored the area but only one eagle was seen leaving Buskett. As usual during this year's autumn hunting season we organised our annual Raptor Camp to monitor the peak of the season for illegalities. This year we were joined by international volunteers from the United Kingdom, Austria, Australia and the Netherlands.

Trapping season opens, with changes in legislation

This year's trapping season opened on 20 October with changes in legislation which were based on trappers' demands, not facts. The trapping season was increased by 10 days for the trapping of Golden Plover, and trappers are now being allowed to use nets with a smaller mesh size for Song Thrush. In the meantime, no new changes have been introduced with respect to enforcement and the creation of a Wildlife Crime Unit remains just on paper. With the opening of this trapping season, Malta risks being referred again to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The trapping derogation for both trappable species is still under Infringement Proceedings initiated by the European Commission in 2011. In the meantime, despite last year's landmark ECJ ruling making finch trapping illegal, rampant trapping for songbirds is still taking place across the Maltese Islands this trapping season. In just 10 days of monitoring the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) reported no less than 38 cases of illegal trapping within the first weeks of the season. Once again, thanks to support secured from the Oak Foundation and BirdLife International, we will be issuing the results of monitoring of the trapping season in due course.

Two Egyptian Vultures spotted in Malta

At the beginning of September a rare and highly protected Egyptian Vulture from a conservation reintroduction programme in Italy landed in the south of Malta for a pit stop during its migratory journey to Africa. The vulture, nicknamed Leonardo, was being



Aron Tanti

► Egyptian Vulture Leonardo in flight over Malta

tracked with a satellite tag. This helped BirdLife Malta to get his position and to request police protection round the clock for the bird. The vulture had been released at Parco della Murgia Materana (Matera), Basilicata, as part of the LIFE Egyptian Vulture project. We kept a watch on the bird during the night at the site where it roosted until it safely left the Maltese Islands. A few weeks later, a second Egyptian Vulture was observed roosting near Buskett. This time, the bird didn't have a tracking tag and it arrived unannounced. BirdLife Malta volunteers who were participating in our annual Raptor Camp monitored the bird until its safe departure.

BirdLife Malta AGM & Nature's Hero 2019

During this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 18 October BirdLife Malta members approved a Resolution calling on the Government of Malta to establish a Wildlife Crime Unit, and refrain from opening next year's spring hunting season even for Quail. Apart from the 2018 Operational Report and Financial Statements, CEO Mark Sultana presented to members the renewed BirdLife Malta Strategy 2020-22. Members then assisted to the presentation of a special award to Raymond Vella, who has just retired following 15 years of sterling service as a ranger and warden at BirdLife Malta's nature reserves. Vella was honoured with BirdLife



Nathaniel Attard

► Raymond Vella is BirdLife International's Nature's Hero 2019

International's Nature's Hero award for 2019 – an award bestowed in recognition to outstanding commitment to conservation and helping local communities work in harmony with nature. The AGM also approved the new BirdLife Malta Council for the upcoming two years.

New BirdLife Malta Council

In the weeks following the AGM the newly-formed Council met for the first time and confirmed Darryl Grima as BirdLife Malta President, Saviour Balzan as Secretary General and Norman Chetcuti as Treasurer. Denise Casolani, a new Council member, was elected Council Secretary. From a media expert to a maritime transport specialist, from a financial adviser, a banker and a teacher to an IT graduate, from a plant-based food activist to an actress, from a

museum curator to a veterinarian and even an airline captain, and of course an ornithologist...our Council members represent a wide cross section of



Mark Sultana

► The newly-formed BirdLife Malta Council

society. We would like to congratulate all the members (see list on page 2), especially the three new ones which have joined the team, and thank outgoing Council members Christian Debono, Maurizio Fenech, Irene Mangion and Geoffrey Saliba for their service in the past term.

18 birds released back into the wild

Thanks to the help of our members and supporters, BirdLife Malta's Conservation team can take care of injured birds, most of which are hunting casualties. Others had been recovered after being found weak from their migration. Following a period of rehab these birds are then released back into the wild. Since the start of the autumn migration we released four Greater Flamingos, five Honey-buzzards,



Kristina Govorukha

► Juvenile flamingos released at Għadira Nature Reserve

two Marsh Harriers, a Little Bittern, a Song Thrush, a Turtle Dove, a Pallid Swift, a Cattle Egret, a Little Egret and a Stone Curlew. Of particular interest is the story of two of the Honey-buzzards. These had been shot during the 2018 hunting season and had been under our care for more than a year. After being given the green light by the government veterinary service, all these birds were ringed and released to continue with their migration. More about the Honey-buzzard releases on the back page.

Stranded Scopoli's Shearwaters

Since mid-October which marks the peak period for stranded Scopoli's Shearwaters, we've recovered a total of 19 stranded Scopoli's. They were collected from different parts of Malta and Gozo, mostly from coastal areas. The hotspots remain Pembroke, Birżebbuġa, Ғal Far and Ċirkewwa in Malta; and Xlendi and Mġarr in Gozo. Just before the strandings period started, our LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija project team issued its annual press release calling on the public to look out for any newly-fledged shearwaters that may have become disorientated by bright coastal lights and ended up on land. We are thankful to all who helped to rescue these vulnerable birds!

Euring General Assembly

BirdLife Malta's ringing group represented by Mark Gauci and Ray Galea – both Euring-licensed ringers – and BirdLife Malta CEO Mark Sultana, participated in the Euring General Assembly in



Kaarel Kaisei

► Euring General Assembly in Serbia

Serbia. This year's meeting of the European Union for Bird Ringing Schemes focused on the development of a Europe-wide bird atlas which will gather all historical records and compile bird movement information onto one set of maps, shedding new light and theories into the fascinating world of birds. This meeting is held once every two years to share knowledge on the latest scientific research being developed and also discuss best practice methodologies for bird ringing.

Blooming Minds project's first year

A year ago BirdLife Malta and Richmond Foundation received initial funding from the Social Impact Awards to start a joint ecotherapy project for people with mental health problems which we called "Blooming Minds". The pilot year is almost over and we are now searching for more funding to be able to continue with this social project. We launched a media promotional campaign and also a crowdfunding campaign to raise much-needed funds but still lack the amount needed to be able to continue with this programme. Apart from a lot of preparatory work that included a number of staff trainings, we ran seven ecotherapy sessions and practised at least four different ecotherapy activities. With these sessions, we reached more than 49 clients of the Richmond Foundation. We hosted an ecotherapy workshop at this year's The Bubble festival, organised a Walk for Well-being that was attended by 30 participants and held a conference...all this to promote ecotherapy for a wider public. Follow the project updates if you're interested to join – just look up Blooming Minds on Facebook! And don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you wish to help in any way.

WORDS **Svitlana Shevchuk** BirdLife Malta Communications Assistant

New extended opening hours for our nature reserves!

We want to remind our readers that as from November our nature reserves' visiting hours changed to the winter schedule, and we've kept the extended opening hours during selected weekends:



Tuesdays & Fridays 2pm-6pm, Sundays 10am-4pm



Mondays & Thursdays 2pm-6pm, Saturdays & Sundays 10am-4pm



Monday to Sunday 7am-6pm (Reserve), Monday to Friday 8am-4pm (Visitor Centre)



Open all year round and accessible 24 hours a day

Entry to all our reserves is free of charge and there is no need to book to visit during opening hours. One-hour slots at one of the photography hides at Għadira Nature Reserve can also be booked by sending an email to photography@birdlifemalta.org.

Nature at our reserves

Ghadira

Little Stint *Tertuxa Calidris minuta*

Being largely a coastal lagoon, Ghadira attracts many species of birds that love to keep their feet wet. One of our smallest shorebirds is the Little Stint, a regular bird that often drops in at the reserve – singly or in small flocks – for a bite and maybe a nap. Little Stints are sparrow-sized, but their longish beak and legs make them very un-sparrowlike in shape. Their haunts are shorelines of sea or lakes, where they probe about for hours on end for tiny worms, crustaceans or insect larvae from the wet mud or sand. Like most wading birds, Little Stints don't sport eye-catching colours, which is understandable considering their habitat does not offer much place where to hide from predators. They often mix with larger waders, which brings out their small size even more. Little Stints only stop with us for rest and sustenance; to breed they travel far north and nest in coastal arctic tundra.



Ray Vella

▶ Little Stint

Plain Tiger *Danaws Danaus chrysippus*

Nothing to do with a tiger that lost its stripes, the animal here is a butterfly, and it's only plain in name! Indeed the Plain Tiger is one of the most stunning lepidopterids (science-speak for members of the butterfly family) that visit our shores. It's arguably the biggest too. Although it occurs more or less every year, the Plain Tiger – also known as African Monarch – is rare in Malta. It's a great migrant, some years occurring in good numbers with many sightings, usually in autumn. There are very few local breeding records of this species, however, and that's because the plants the caterpillar feeds on do not occur naturally in Malta. Unlike the adult butterflies, who drink from many kinds of flowers, the larvae are generally particular to one or a few plants. So the female butterflies only lay where they find those particular species, which they won't find at Ghadira or anywhere else in the Maltese countryside.



Victor Falzon

▶ Plain Tiger

Sea Daffodil *Pankrazju Pancretium maritimum*

When you're walking on a sandy beach, you may expect to find dead seaweed, flotsam, plastic bottles. The last thing you expect to see is a bunch of large white lily-like flowers simply begging to impart their delicate fragrance. Yet there it lies, the Sea Daffodil, growing from a tangle of curly bluish-green leaves. Well almost, since leaves and flowers of this plant are rarely seen at their prime together – by the time the flowers are in full display mode (summer), its leaves are largely yellow and withered. The Sea Daffodil is rare because its natural habitat – undisturbed coastal sand dunes – is also rare. At Ghadira we make very sure that the flora is not disturbed, so the Sea Daffodil has regenerated vigorously over the years. It now reigns supreme in several patches of open sand, a showcase success story that clearly demonstrates the role of nature reserves in protecting our flora and fauna.



Victor Falzon

▶ Sea Daffodil

WORDS **Victor Falzon** Naturalist and BirdLife Malta Field Teacher



Opening hours
September to May
Mon & Thu 2pm – 6pm
Sat & Sun 10am – 4pm
Entrance free



Dinja Waħda,

► Dinja Waħda awards 2019

An outstanding scholastic year

This scholastic year was an outstanding one in terms of performance for our environmental education programme in schools. Thanks to the Dinja Waħda coordinators and teachers, nearly 100 schools received the annual Dinja Waħda awards at the end of the 2018/2019 scholastic year.

Every year we celebrate the success of the schools with an awards ceremony, to which all schools are invited. This year the event took place at Esplora Interactive Science Centre where BirdLife Malta also inaugurated a Dinja Waħda garden. Approximately 200 teachers and students received their well-deserved award, enjoyed the facilities of the wonderfully modern Science Centre, explored the garden and had some nature fun!

In the primary sector, 64 schools this year received a Gold award, three schools received a Silver award, six schools were awarded with Bronze and 19 schools with a Certificate. Three schools received the Blue Banner, an award for schools who maintain the Gold award three years in a row, and 40 schools retained the Blue Banner.

In the middle and secondary sector, the schools received Gold and Bronze awards for the “Connecting with Nature” and “Action for Biodiversity” categories. Most of them received an award for both categories.

Dinja Waħda motivates teachers and students to have an impact, not only in their schools, but also throughout their communities. This year alone, whilst completing our tree activities (learning about the importance of trees for the environment) the primary schools involved in Dinja Waħda have collected nearly €5,000. This amazing amount of money will be used to help maintain BirdLife Malta’s Nature Reserves. We thank everyone involved for contributing to the conservation of nature!

Dinja Waħda is spread across 75% of primary schools in Malta and Gozo and five middle and secondary schools. BirdLife Malta strongly believes in the importance of continued environmental

education to aid development. Our programme for early years and primary schools is extremely successful. However research shows that interest in the natural world is often lost through secondary education. We are striving to create an outdoor activity programme that begins with the early years and continues throughout the child’s education all the way to adulthood. By pushing our secondary education programme, we aim to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood in the coming years.



The Dinja Waħda Coordinators

The amazing change facilitated by Dinja Waħda would not be possible without our Dinja Waħda Coordinators. Each school involved in the programme has a designated Dinja Waħda coordinator. These dedicated people are BirdLife Malta’s main point of contact within the schools. Through yearly training and contact with our education team, our Dinja Waħda Coordinators are specialists on our action guide and the importance of outdoor education to create happy, healthy and inspired children. The role of the coordinator is to aid the schools teachers in their queries and to help promote regular use of the action guide and outdoor spaces. However,



Mgarr Primary

► F-Ant-astic ants activity



► The wall activity



One World of Fun!

we always love to see it when our coordinators go above and beyond in ensuring that the students of their school get meaningful and regular connection with nature, taking the future of their children and the planet into their own hands.

d of fun!



► Tree collage

Mosta A Kindergarten

Activities

Natural spaces are great for the mind, decreasing stress, increasing curiosity and creativeness. The freedom of being outdoors allows us to think in different ways and gives our brains a welcome break from the monotony of classroom learning.

The Dinja Waħda Action Guide was designed to showcase the full potential of nature-based learning. The natural world can be used for science, creative art and writing, and exercise, and is also a brilliant way to liven up curriculum learning and make it more engaging. We

believe children learn in different ways, as by teaching all our children in the same classroom setting we may be limiting the potential of our little learners.

Our Action Guide shows educators how to take the classroom outdoors and also bring the outdoors into the classroom.

Specifically designed with a focus on Maltese flora and fauna, the activities increase the children’s knowledge of the unique Maltese habitats and the animals found living in them. Our hope is that this increased connection to the natural world will help inspire future generations to care for and conserve the astounding natural spaces that are under threat.



Field visits

BirdLife Malta’s field visit programme is the shining jewel in the Dinja Waħda crown. This unique service allows students and educators to access expert teaching in the islands’ most pristine natural habitats. For many of the students, this is their first time exploring a completely wild and natural space. This can be a very powerful experience when paired with specialist knowledge on local fauna and flora, provided by our field teachers.

The field teachers work tirelessly from October to May to ensure as many children as possible get to experience the enchanting nature this island has to offer. Our field visits can be catered towards Year 2, all the way up to Form 5 students and are something to look forward to for many of the students who attend yearly. First-hand connection to the natural world is the main aim of our Dinja Waħda programme, and it doesn’t get much better than being immersed in the magic of a nature reserve!



St Michael Junior School



► Nature Watch

Mgarr Primary

WORDS **Angus Wilkinson** BirdLife Malta Education Assistant
Stefania Papadopol BirdLife Malta Project Coordinator

Autumn 2019 bird ringing season on Kemmuna

Over 1,400 birds of 33 species ringed



Nicholas Galea

▶ Blue Rock Thrush ringed at Kemmuna

▶ Eurasian Scops Owl ringed at Kemmuna

Kemmuna is an ideal location to monitor bird migration and to perform bird ringing in Malta for different reasons. Firstly, since it is a small, relatively treeless island, the ‘funnelling effect’ is often observed in the few areas with abundant vegetation. This means that birds landing on different parts of the island will eventually ‘funnel’ through the few vegetated valleys found on the island. Putting up nets in these areas therefore leads to a higher capture rate than in areas where birds can be ‘lost’ in the abundance of vegetation like in, for example, Buskett. Furthermore, Kemmuna is one of the few sites in Malta where human disturbance is very low and is mostly contained within the area of Blue Lagoon. Birds are less likely to be flushed or scared away by humans and tend to stop for a longer time.

years, using the same number of nets, having nets in the same positions, etc. Factors such as weather conditions that have an effect on the effort made, and therefore on the number of birds ringed, are also recorded.

During this period, a total of 1,441 birds of 33 species were ringed. Out of these, 66% or 949 were Robins. This is not a

birds greatly outnumbered adults since this migration period follows the breeding season. Through natural selection, the best (genetically speaking) specimens survive winter and spring migration and then breed in spring.

Apart from the regular species such as the Robin, Song Thrush, European Stonechat, Black Redstart, Blackcap and Common Chiffchaff which make up the bulk of the birds ringed every autumn on Kemmuna, each year brings a number of rare birds, welcome rewards for the ringers’ efforts!

Bird ringing plays an important part of the research and data collection BirdLife Malta carries out. It involves the temporary capturing of wild birds in order to mark them with a uniquely numbered ring and take some biometrics (measurements) for scientific research. Ringers perform standardised ringing on Kemmuna, where BirdLife Malta manages a bird observatory and ringing station, to monitor the migration of passerine birds (small birds) in spring and autumn. After spending 12 days ringing birds on Kemmuna, Nicholas Galea reports on this year’s numbers.

This year’s rarer birds were a Moussier’s Redstart, a bird endemic to northwestern Africa and is only recorded in Europe (including Malta) as a vagrant (very rare) bird; and a Rustic Bunting, a bird that breeds in the extreme limits of northeastern Europe and again is a very rare bird in

The autumn ringing season on Kemmuna this year was carried out for 20 days from 15 October to 3 November. On Kemmuna, ringing is standardised such that data collected is comparable from day to day and more importantly from year to year. Ways of ringing standardisation include ringing on the same days when compared with previous

surprising percentage as over the years ringing has showed us that the Robin is actually a very common bird during migration in Malta. Furthermore, ringing, through the rates of re-capture of the same Robin specimens, also taught us that most of these birds keep going south and most likely winter in North Africa.

western European countries like Malta. On 18 October, a Meadow Pipit carrying a ring from Norway was caught. One of the main objectives of bird ringing is to be able to track, through re-captures, the movement of birds, both within a country or more importantly - like in this case - between countries. Two birds ringed in Kemmuna this season have already been re-trapped in other parts of the Maltese Islands; a Dunnock has been re-trapped in Gozo 14 days later whilst a Robin was re-trapped in Buskett nine days later.



Krishna Govorukhina

▶ The bird ringing process

Out of these 1,441 birds, only 172 were identified as adult birds. This means that over 80% of the birds ringed were all young birds, i.e. birds born this year. This again is not a surprising statistic since in autumn the number of young

The only two non-passerine species ringed this season were the European Nightjar and the Eurasian Scops Owl, two highly camouflaged nocturnal birds.

WORDS Nicholas Galea BirdLife Malta bird ringer



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UP and down | Marfa Ridge

Another summer has ended and the seasonal cycle is beginning again. The first rains of winter have brought a flush of new life to the countryside, turning the dry yellows and oranges of the landscape into fresh, vivid greens. As you walk, see if you can recognise some of the plants below.

Up

Musa bus stop is at the very north of the island, just before the Ćirkewwa Ferry Terminal. As soon as you step off the bus the climb begins. Follow the road heading south, marked as the road to Paradise Bay, which immediately heads uphill.

The road south runs parallel to constantly crumbling limestone cliffs. The boulder scree below is a clear warning of the volatility of these ancient walls. Just south of Paradise Bay the path swings west. This narrow stretch gives you sense of the scale of this shifting landscape and the uncontrollable, turbulent geology, beneath your feet.

Now the path mixes with the natural garrigue habitat of the area, keep heading uphill, but be careful not to stray onto private land. Hidden along the side of this path is Għar Tuta (1). Known locally as the climbing cave, this natural curiosity is a half-covered cave scoured into the land. The way down is very steep and should only be undertaken with caution. Moving on up the ridge the path becomes even steeper as it passes the Rdum il-Qawwi cliffs. Just keep heading up, you're almost at the top!



▶ Orchids – Growing on the garrigue



▶ Wolfbane – All along the top of the ridge, this hardy species flourishes in sun and rain



▶ Sea Squill – After losing its leaves for summer, this bulb rejuvenates its green with the first rains



▶ Sweet Alyssum – Appearing in great numbers after the first rains of winter

The ridge – 140m

As the top of the ridge comes into sight, up the rocky trail you will see a cluster of abandoned buildings growing in size on the right hand side of the path. This is the Old Radar Station (2) that sits on the far west end of Marfa Ridge. On a clear day the views are truly spectacular. South, the coast dips in and out in a seemingly endless series of bays and inlets, whilst to the north Gozo's length and Ta' Ćenc' Cliffs can be seen, with the ferries shuffling past Kemmuna and between the main islands. This old Radar Station is a brilliant sunset spot.

The human history of this ridge reaches much further back than the Radar Station. On the south side of the path lies the ancient remains of Roman bee hives (3) in the cliff face. Hidden amongst the Carob trees, the hives radiate a feeling of bygone days and will whisk you back to ancient times. Follow the path east towards the Red Tower (4) and enjoy the stunning views. Sea and sky can be seen on all sides. This is one of the highest points in the north, and it feels that way!



► 21-22 September. Children were given the opportunity to explore nature at an exclusive event held to celebrate Klabb Huttat, our wildlife club for young naturalists. The special event – which became possible thanks to BOV and the Malta National Aquarium – was held over a weekend (Saturday evening and Sunday morning) at Ghadira Nature Reserve. The children and their parents embarked on an adventure to discover what happens at a nature reserve at night, and what happens when the reserve first wakes up in the morning. The idea is to hold these exclusive events for our junior members a number of times a year for more fun-filled experiences in nature as part of an enthusiastic community



Svitlana Shevchuk

► 21 September. During an ecotherapy workshop at The Bubble festival, we explained how nature can influence our physical and mental well-being and shared information about the work we're doing with our Blooming Minds project to help people that live with mental health problems



Jose Luque

► 27 September. This year at Science in the City we focused on bird migration and the scientific tools we use to learn more about birds and the journeys they make every year



Kristina Govorkina

► 5-6 October. We celebrated EuroBirdwatch19 with a weekend of events for the public. On the first day, we had fully-booked bird ringing demonstrations at Ghadira, whilst on the second we led guided birdwatching sessions for migrating raptors at Buskett



Paul Portelli

► 6 October. We participated in this year's edition of Heritage Malta's EkoDalam with a stand alongside other local environmental organisations at Ghar Dalam



Kristina Govorukha

► 12 October. Another successful Sicily Day Trip led by our Events & Activities Committee: together with 50 nature lovers, we explored Cava d'Ispica Valley



Kristina Govorukha

► 18 October. BirdLife Malta's Annual General Meeting for 2019 held at Salina Nature Reserve elected the new Council and approved a revised BirdLife Malta Strategy. More information about the AGM can be found in the news pages.



Marcel Tellus

► 27 October. Selmun Nature Walk organised by our Events & Activities Committee



Kristina Govorukha

► 2 November. Painting workshop in aid of BirdLife Malta organised by SIP and PAINT MALTA at Simar Nature Reserve



Kristina Govorukha

► 16 November. Our LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija project contributed to European Week for Waste Reduction 2019 with a cleanup at L-Irdum tal-Madonna in Mellieħa, a Natura 2000 site that hosts the largest Yelkoun Shearwater colony in Malta



Kristina Govorukha

► 17 November. Group photo at the end of the Walk for Well-being in aid of our Blooming Minds project. In all we collected €240 in donations!



Back into **THE WILD!**

In the past weeks we've released more birds back into the wild! Among them were these four Honey-buzzards, which were all released at one go on Kemmuna – a protected bird sanctuary – following a period of care at BirdLife Malta's Injured Birds Unit. Two had been illegally shot in autumn last year and spent more than a year in our care, while the other two were recovered last summer and thankfully found to be only weak from exhaustion. All four birds of prey were found by members of the public and passed on to us for care, rehabilitation and eventual release. It is only with the ongoing support of our members and the people who report injured birds that BirdLife Malta can do this work. You can help by making a donation at <http://bit.ly/donate-to-birdlifemalta> or by becoming a member at <http://bit.ly/joinBLM>.