

LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija LIFE14 NAT/MT/991
Securing the Maltese Islands for the Yelkouan Shearwater
Project Closing Webinar 9-10 June 2020

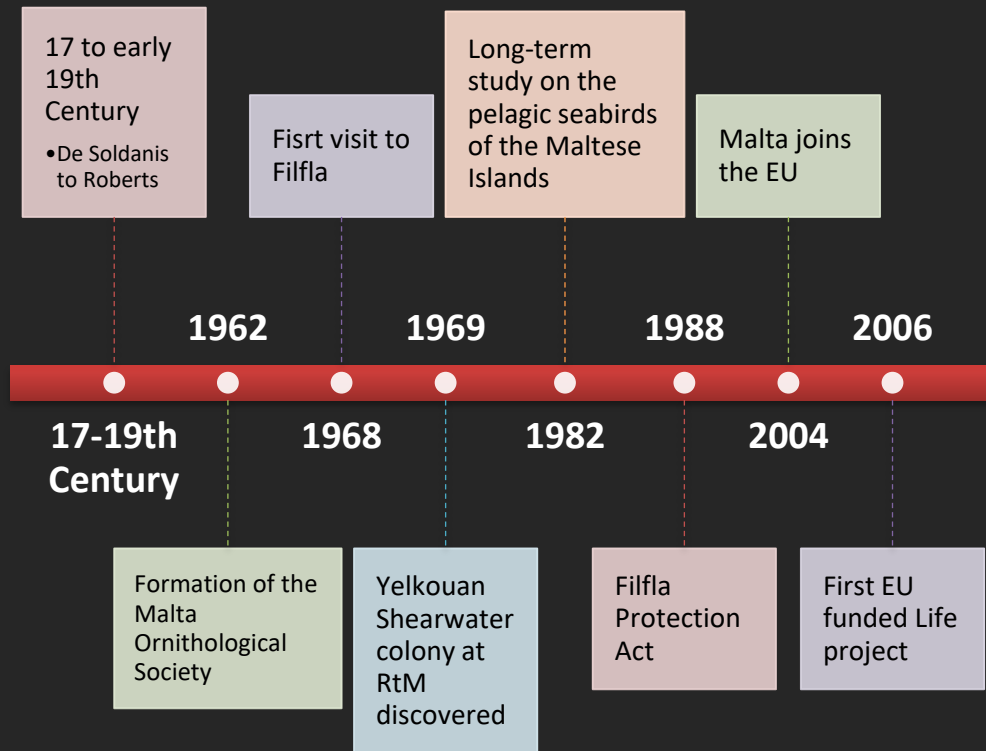
History of Seabird Conservation in Malta



John Joseph Borg, Senior Curator
National Museum of Natural History, Malta



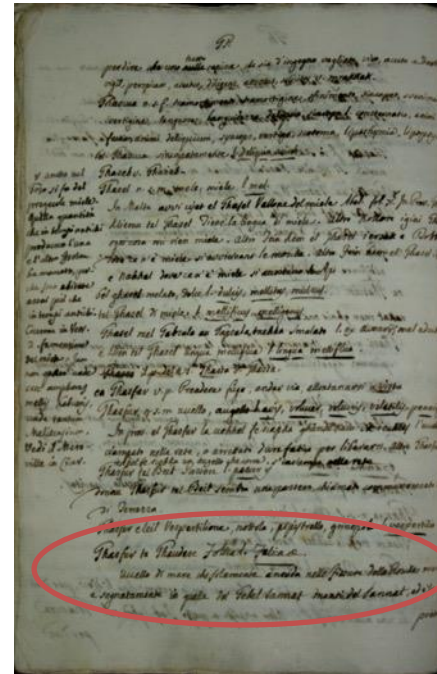
Some key dates



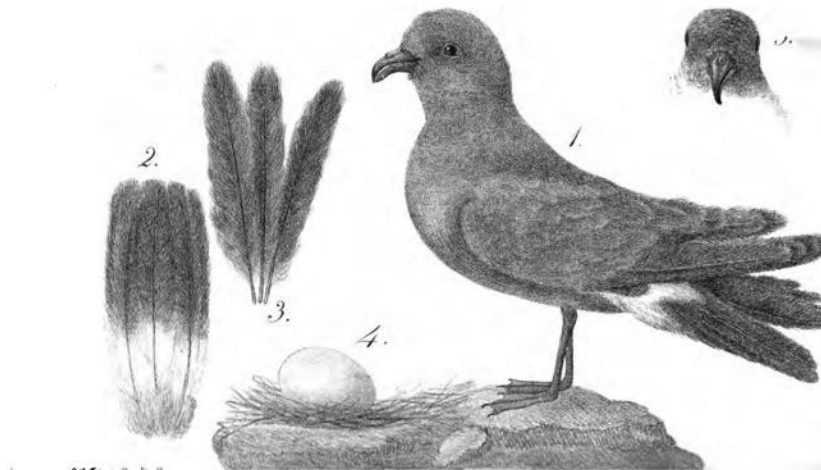
Ghasfur ta Ghawdesc – *Thalassidroma melitensis*



MS of 1746



Cat Orn
1843



British Military Personell

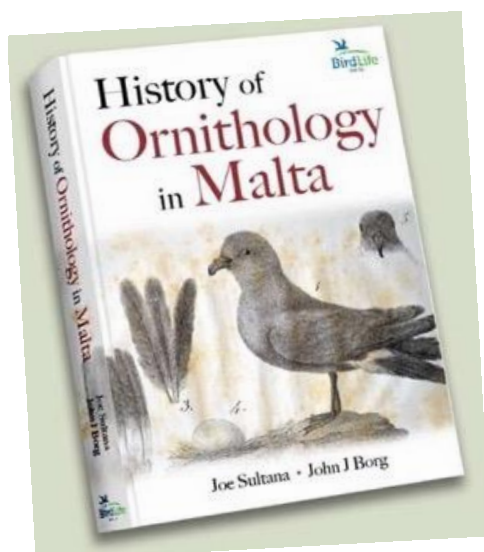


Rear-Admiral John Hutton Stenhouse

“This bird breeds all round the Maltese islands and the fishermen take their eggs and it is said, sell them as Hens eggs! They nest in the cliffs as well as under the herbage. We found them behind the herbage at the top of St. Paul’s Islands but they are chiefly on the southern side”.
(1890s)



Date	Species	Remarks (as written in Stenhouse's letter to Jourdain)
03.04.1893	Yelkouan Shearwater	13 eggs – weighed 803–676grs [= grains] – average weight – 742grs, one fresh, others partly incubated. Measured – 2.32"–2.06" long by 1.62"–1.46" broad. Biggest egg 2.32" x 1.62" – Smallest 2.06" x 1.46"
30.06.1894	Scopoli's Shearwater	22 eggs taken – 2 only were fresh probably others considerably incubated. 1 egg measured 2.9" x 1.9"
	Storm-petrel	One egg hard sat. 100 grains. 1.15" x .84" – another infertile rotten – shell falling to pieces & yet bird sitting on it.
31.03.1895	Yelkouan Shearwater	13 eggs – 2 fresh. Some far advanced in incubation. Measured – 2.42"–2.05" long by 1.64" to 1.56"
17.03.1896	Yelkouan Shearwater	70 eggs found – fresh
05.04.1901	Yelkouan Shearwater	9 eggs. All more or less incubated. Others were left as too incubated to blow. 3 eggs measured – 60x43 – 56x40, 55x41 millimetres.
26.05.1901	Yelkouan Shearwater	One egg very hardest. Many young in blue grey down – as big as adults
	Scopoli's Shearwater	Ten eggs found all fresh. Eggs 69 x 43 – 68 x 46, 67 x 47 – 65 x 45mm – My note says main body of <i>P. kuhli</i> will lay in about a week.
	Storm-petrel	Egg quite fresh. 1.2" x .8" – found 4 pairs but only one egg – others unstable in holes.





Giuseppe Despott



Eliot Langley Roberts

Year	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>
1954	Less than 30 pairs on Filfla. No longer breeds on Malta	Seen offshore in ones or twos or in small parties	On 29th June 1952 after a thorough search on Filfla, found only 2 nesting pairs.





1962
Formation of the
Malta Ornithological Society

1965
Bird Ringing Group

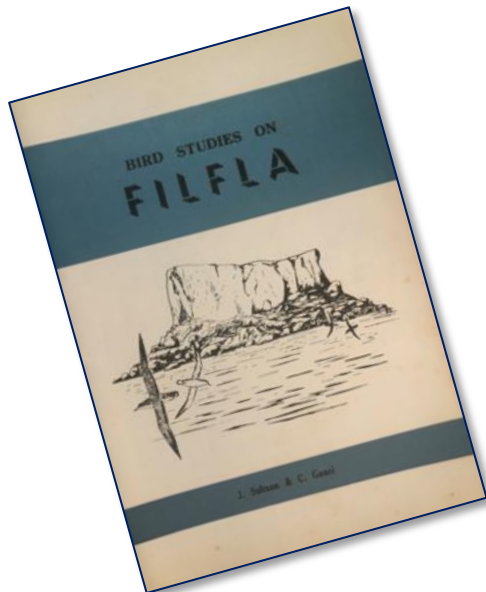
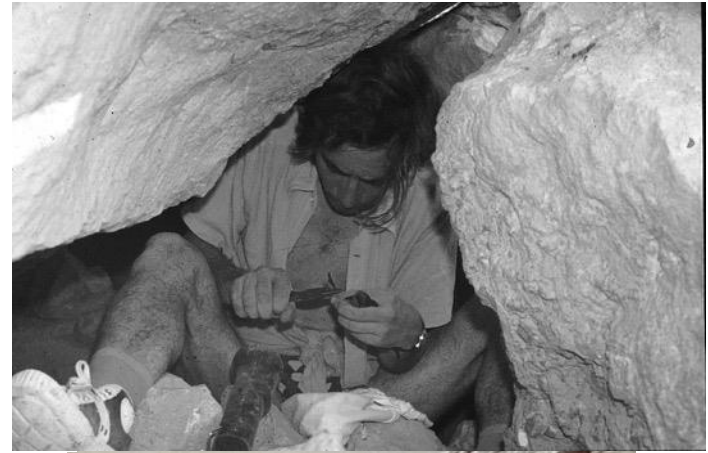


Filfla islet

First visits to Filfla Island



Filfla was still being bombed when the first visits were carried out.



29th June 1968

Filfla – Sleepless nights

- Around 25,000 Storm-petrels have been ringed on Filfla.





Annual visits to monitor the breeding success of the Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* are also carried out to the island's plateau.

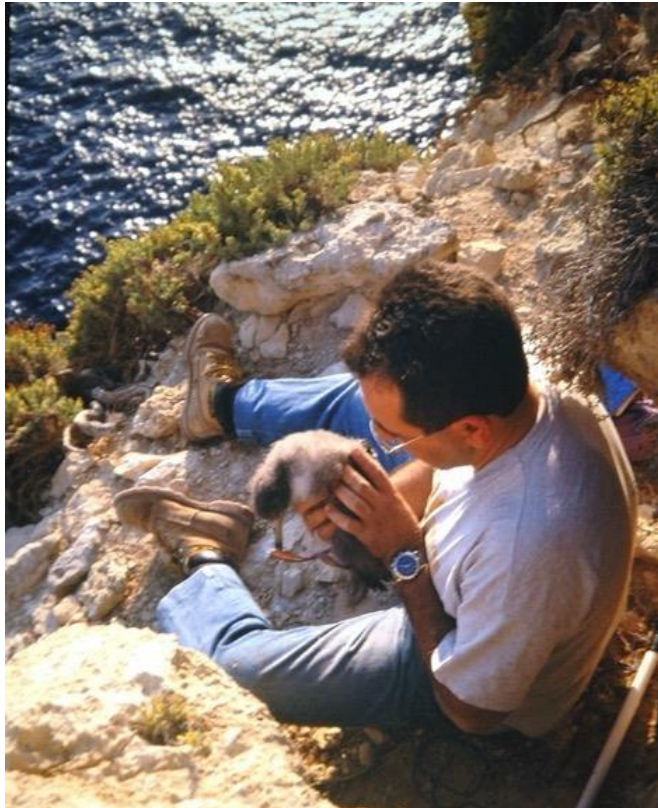


Searching for new sites
(1968-1969)



1975-1982
Systematic ringing of
Scopoli's Shearwaters in a
site on the SE coast of Malta





1981 – A visit to a shearwater colony in the south of Gozo was the catalyst for initiating a self-funded study on the ecology and breeding biology of our seabirds was initiated.



A total of 155 Scopoli's Shearwater nests found on Malta and Gozo were annually monitored.

Visits to the sites started in mid-February and ended in early November. Each study sites was visited once a week on average.



Calonectris diomedea



Longevity – 30+ years

Arrival at colonies – last 10 days of Feb.

**Age of First breeding – 2nd year in males
3rd to 4th year in females**

Site Tenacity

Mate Fidelity

Incestuous behaviour

Philopatry

Incubation lasts 55 days

Low Breeding success

**Fluctuating numbers in breeding
population**

**Eggs and young susceptible to predation
by rats and cats, adults killed by
humans**

**Fledglings susceptible to excessive lights
and sound**



Puffinus yelkouan



Pre-Life studies (1968-2006)

- **Between 1969 and 1984 3-5 annual visits were carried out to the largest colony situated on the NE coast of Malta.**
 - **From 1985 onwards, regular visits were carried out.**
 - **In September 2006 an EU funded LIFE Nature project was initiated.**
- 



Arrives at the colonies in October

Single egg laid (Feb-Mar)

Chicks hatch in May

Fledges (end of June – 3rd week of July)

Colonies deserted August-September

Moult in surrounding waters

Young start to return back to the colony in their 2nd year

High mortality rate

Low successful fledging

Eggs and chicks predated by *Rattus rattus*

Re-occupy old abandoned nests if colony is predator free



*Hydrobates pelagicus
melitensis*



**Arrives in February and last young depart
in early October**

Extended egg laying season

Two breeding peaks

Long lived (27+ years)

**Some movements by adults between
colonies (Marettimo-Filfla)**

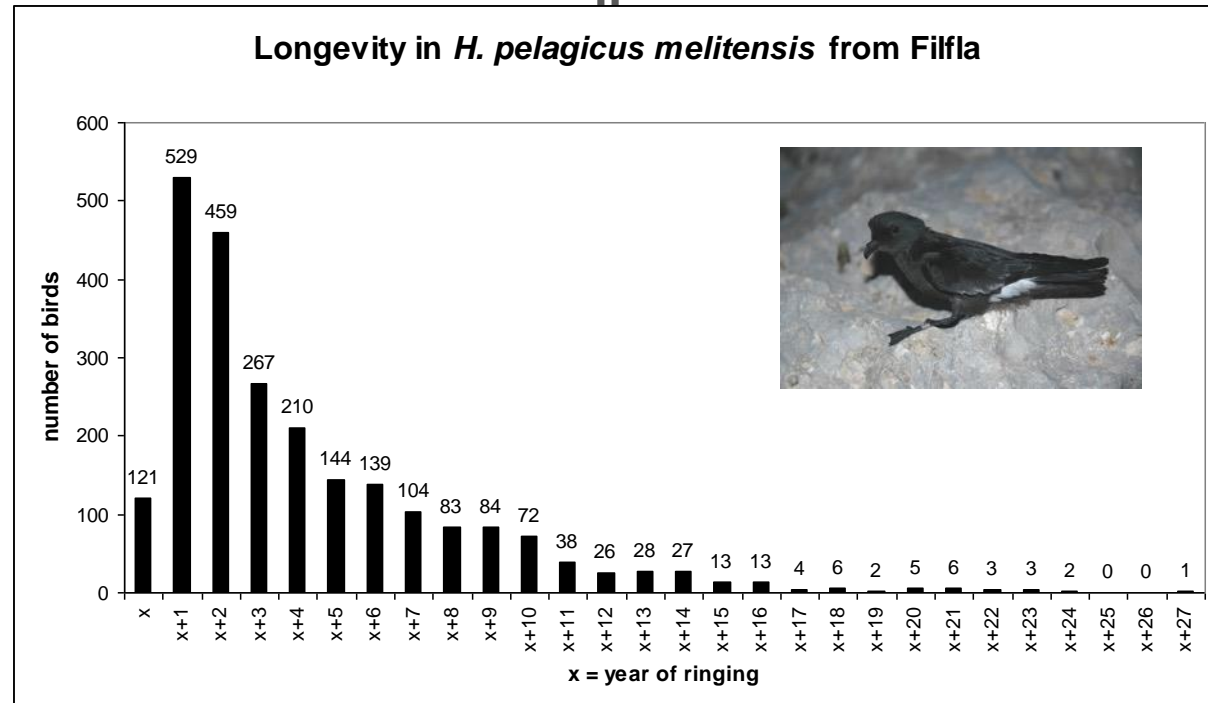
**Recoveries outside the Mediterranean: 1 at
Cote Sauvage, Atlantic coast of France
1 washed on a beach in the Netherlands**

Discovery of new colony in Gozo

Predation by Yellow-legged Gulls on Filfla

Highly susceptible to predation esp by *Rattus* sp.

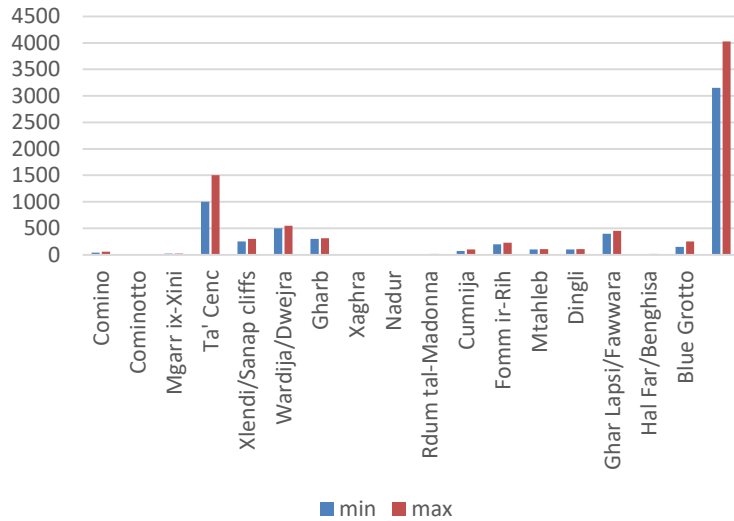
**Frequenting tuna-farms - supplementary food
source**



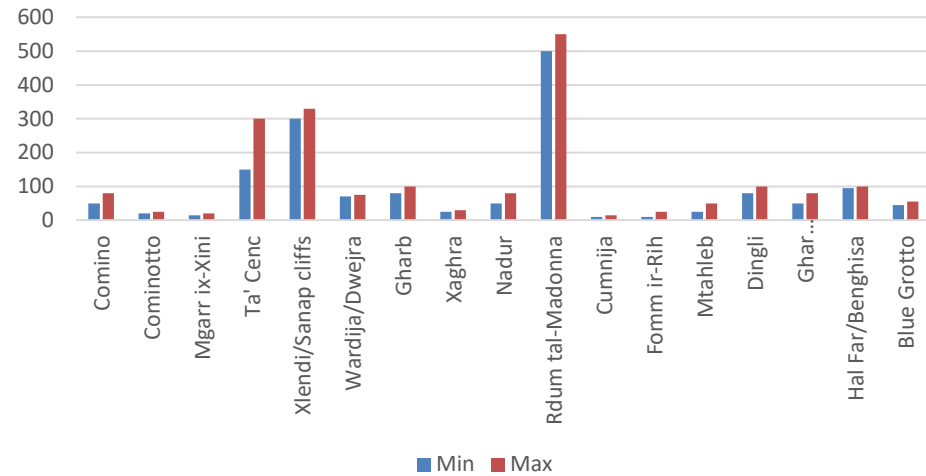
Long-lived birds require long-term studies

Annual population census

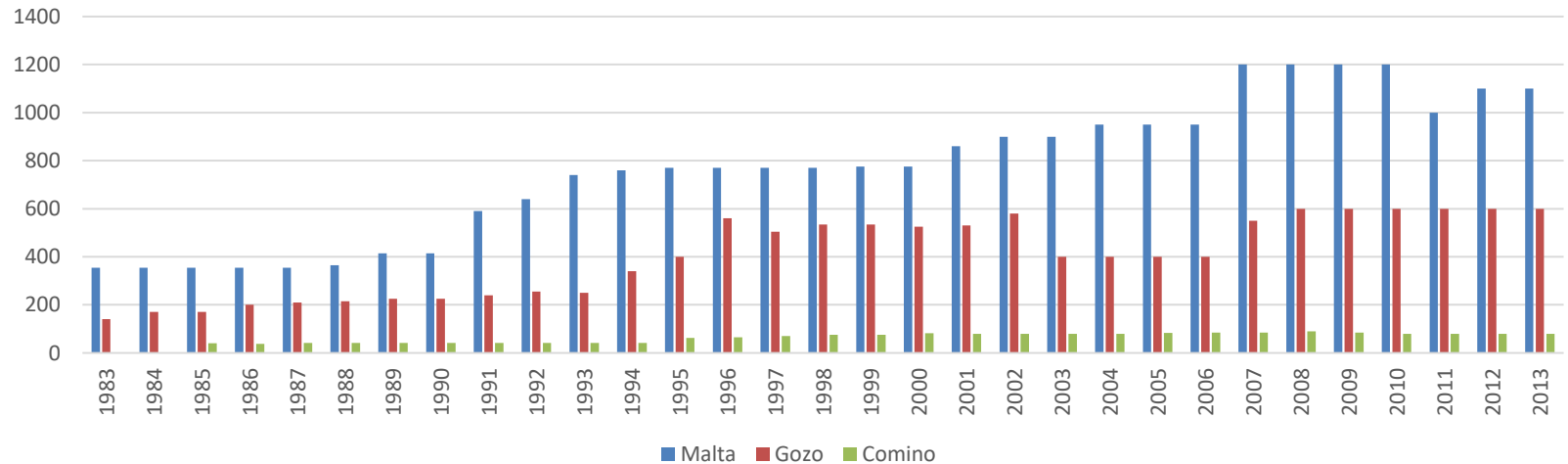
Calonectris diomedea – Breeding pairs in 2013



Puffinus yelkouan – Breeding pairs in 2013

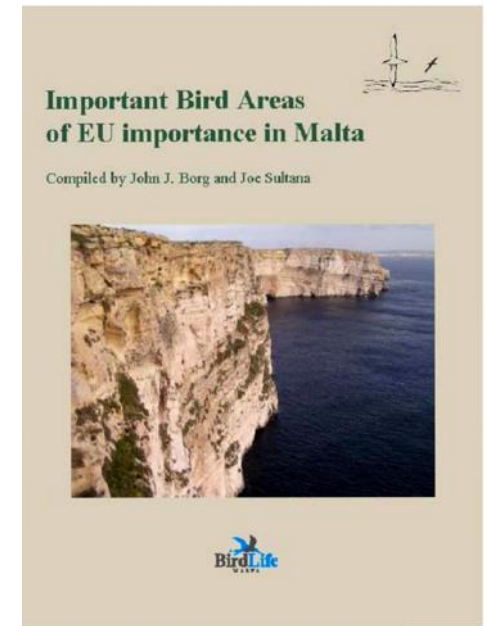


Puffinus yelkouan breeding pairs





Conservation Issues



2004 - Malta joins the EU

2007 - 1st LIFE project





Thank you

