

Code of Conduct for Commercial Boat Operators

[EU-funded LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija Project](#) aimed at reducing the land-based threats to the breeding Yelkouan Shearwater in the Maltese Islands. Yelkouan Shearwater (Garnija) is a seabird species with high risk of extinction due to several threats and its global population lives only in the Mediterranean. Under LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija, we assessed the impact of commercial boat activities on Yelkouan Shearwater around breeding colonies, which located along the coast of Maltese Islands. Our results showed that commercial boats making regular visits to caves and cliffs are one of the major sources of disturbance to nesting seabirds. Disturbance is caused by noise of boats themselves (due to high-speed approach, strong engines) and activity on-board (music or voice speakers), by light pollution (especially from boat parties at night), and by fumes.

Besides presenting proposals to be implemented by the relevant authorities, we present a voluntary code of conduct for commercial boat operators who want to follow a series of simple and clear indications to reduce the disturbance to the Yelkouan Shearwater colonies and make their activities more environmentally responsible. Operators who demonstrate their adherence to the code of conduct will be given a project symbol, “shearwater-friendly vessel” sticker and flag that will enable visitors to choose more environmentally responsible services. These operators will also be promoted through BirdLife Malta's communication channels.

This code of conduct does not require a major change in the activities of the boat operators, rather it aims to provide guidance for commercial boat operators as to what is deemed most significant and desirable in their activities around seabird breeding areas. It should be applied in nesting and rafting areas of Yelkouan Shearwaters, but also other seabirds which include the Scopoli's Shearwater (Ċief) and Mediterranean Storm-Petrel (Kangu ta' Filfla). It is especially relevant for the cliffs and caves in L-Irdum tal-Madonna, St. Marija Caves in Comino, Cominotto- Blue Lagoon, St. Paul's Islands (Selmunett), Majjistral NHP, Miġra l-Ferħa, Blue Grotto, Ta' Ċenċ, and Dwejra (See below map).

- Keep to a speed limit of 10 knots within 100 meters from cliffs and caves where seabirds breed
- Stop playing music or producing any other non-compulsory noise when passing or anchoring close to cliffs and caves where seabirds breed
- Use only compulsory lights at night when passing or anchoring close to cliffs and caves where seabirds breed
- Make a slow approach to the caves where seabirds breed, without producing noise and light and not to enter these caves
- Inform passengers about disposal points for their litter and ask them not to leave litter around seabird breeding areas

