

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 68 • June 2021



A victory for those who love nature



The recent communication by the European Commission (EC) to the Maltese Government regarding trapping derogations is a clear victory for all those who love nature and wildlife in Malta. The EC is asking Malta to correctly apply the European Birds Directive.

It would be wrong to state that we are happy to see the EC take this stand. This is because it means the Malta is back to its old habit of trying to bypass regulations to water them down and make them ineffective, along with exercising poor or in-existent enforcement on environmental and bird-related laws – we all know that this is the case. Things are so bad that the Commission has had to intervene.

The excuse by the Gozo Minister – himself a hunter and trapper – to allow finch trapping under the guise of a scientific study did not fool anyone. It just shows how far the Government will

go to appease the hunting and trapping lobby. Fortunately for Maltese nature and birds, we are members of the European Union. We are additionally lucky that the current EU Commissioner for the Environment Virginijus Sinkevičius, who is also responsible for birds (unlike in Malta), will not close an eye or two to environmental infringements coming from Malta.

On this issue BirdLife Malta has again been proved to be on the right side of bird conservation. On the other hand, our two main political parties have chosen to ignore the warning from the EC and persist in defending the indefensible.

It is in circumstances like these that you can further understand why your membership and support for BirdLife Malta matters.

Darryl Grima
President



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Printing Poulton's Print

Front cover photo Black-winged Stilt by Aron Tanti

Reg. Vol. Org. VO/0052

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European Commission sees through 'research' ploy

BirdLife Malta welcomed the news on 9 June that the European Commission saw through the finch trapping 'research' ploy and issued the Maltese Government a final warning in what is known as a Reasoned Opinion. This was in response to the farcical finch trapping derogation invented by the Gozo Ministry under the guise of a scientific study. This excuse to reopen finch trapping was rejected by the Commission, which gave Malta a month to remedy the situation or possibly face another case at the European Court of Justice. This communication is also a stern warning to the Maltese Government that the EU will not tolerate any more the abuse of the Birds Directive. In a reaction, BirdLife Malta CEO Mark Sultana stated: "The Government has a decision to take. The right decision would be to stop finch trapping once and for all. If this does not happen, Prime Minister Robert Abela will lead Malta back to the European Court to defend the indefensible and apart from further discrediting our international reputation on environmental matters, it will be a waste of taxpayers' money for a handful of votes at a time when the Government should be investing in transforming Malta into a green economy. We urge the Prime Minister to see the writing on the wall, and act accordingly."

Turtle-doves shot during quail hunting season

The hunting season ran from 10 to 30 April this year and with an average of just two small teams (due to COVID-19 restrictions) out in the field every morning, rampant hunting illegalities were observed across the areas covered in Malta and Gozo. As widely anticipated, the smokescreen hunting season supposedly open only for Common Quail had again the vulnerable European Turtle-dove as its main target.

BirdLife Malta



► One of the shot European Turtle-doves recovered by BirdLife Malta this spring

On 20 May, we published a video summary of the illegalities witnessed this spring. Throughout observations, not one single hunter was seen trying to flush a quail, which was the only legally huntable species this spring, and instead hunters were openly shooting turtle-doves and other protected species on a daily basis. All footage in the video released was filmed from public spaces, despite hunters' claims that our teams were trespassing on private property and violating their rights. The video has been presented to the European Commission as part of the evidence of how Malta's derogation for the hunting of Common Quail in spring has again been used to allow hunters to target the protected European Turtle-dove.

FKNK Secretary General's brother filmed hunting with minor

On 30 April, the last day of the spring hunting season, BirdLife Malta filmed a hunter allowing a child to handle a shotgun at Mizzieb, a woodland now managed by FKNK. The hunter was none other than the brother of the FKNK Secretary General. This same hunter was also filmed last year doing the same with another child. BirdLife Malta issued a photo of the incident, which was followed by threats of legal action by the FKNK. So we then published the footage of the incident. The footage clearly showed the hunter instructing the child to shoot, a misfire which nearly hit the child and a lot of threatening and abusive behaviour aimed at our team. Commissioner for Children Pauline Miceli issued an official statement insisting that teaching children to handle guns and shooting is not only abusive but in clear breach of the Arms Act. The Commissioner called on Parliament to amend the law to address the situation. Following these comments, the FKNK threatened the Government with legal action and street protests if it didn't remove Pauline Miceli and Commissioner for Animal Welfare Alison Bezzina because they both highlighted that allowing children to accompany hunters puts them at risk and desensitises them to animal cruelty. BirdLife Malta supported the position taken by both Commissioners and wrote to the Government asking for a ban on the presence of minors during hunting.



► Still from footage showing the hunter and his young son in the hide

BirdLife Malta

Top government man caught trapping illegally

A high-ranking Government official broke the law on 26 March and went trapping for birds during the spring migration. The Minister with whom he works as an advisor shrugged off the incident and said no further action will be taken against the perpetrator. Trapping is already illegal in the European Union, and Malta applies unjustified trapping derogations in autumn that are presently heavily challenged by the European Commission. But many trappers in Malta still catch birds in spring, to then sell them to other trappers to use as decoy birds in autumn. BirdLife Malta congratulated the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) for their sterling work documenting and presenting the evidence of this illegality and made it clear that it will continue working to expose evidence of illegalities. Illegal finch trapping was never so rampant during springtime as this year, mainly thanks to the message sent by the Government that it intended to reopen a finch trapping season this autumn against the will of the European Commission.

LIFE PanPuffinus! launched

On 18 June, BirdLife Malta, together with a number of local and international partners, launched another EU-funded scientific study which aims to improve the conservation status of two endemic seabird species in the Mediterranean Basin – the Yelkouan Shearwater and the Balearic Shearwater. The €3.45 million LIFE PanPuffinus! project, which was launched at Salina Nature Reserve, is co-funded by the EU's LIFE programme and Malta's Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal

Alexandr Krushlinsky



► Project Manager Manya Russo giving an overview of the project

Rights. The five-year project brings together BirdLife Partners and governmental organisations from France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Malta to address the threats that these two seabirds face at land and at sea. More about the project on page 10.

BirdLife online in classrooms



► Title page of one of the Year 5 online presentations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the popular school visits to BirdLife Malta's nature reserves were suspended this year. To make up for the students' missed opportunity to connect with nature, BirdLife Malta offered schools and class teachers a

range of tailor-made online lessons. For this purpose, our three field teachers created several PowerPoint presentations based on relevant curricular material for all years from Year 3 to Year 11. The service proved to be very popular, with bookings from 66 grateful schools. From November 2020 to June 2021 our field teachers delivered a total of 921 online sessions in real time.

Walk for Nature with a difference

Due to COVID-19, this year's Walk for Nature could not take place in person. However we still hosted the event virtually and during March and April successfully raised funds to buy a satellite tag for a rehabilitated bird of prey. The event was a huge success, with a



BirdLife Malta

► Bird of prey satellite tag

high number of participants. This was done by offering Walk for Nature packs on our online shop which included a set of nature walk maps and entry into a prize raffle to win either a private tour of Simar Nature Reserve, a private bird ringing session or the opportunity to watch the release of the tagged bird. Satellite tags are vital for tracking migrating birds and help us uncover more secrets of birds on migration.

More birds set free

During May we released back into the wild no less than 12 birds, most of them illegally shot birds of prey, which were successfully rehabilitated. Following record numbers of illegal hunting incidents, many injured birds were rescued by BirdLife Malta and police thanks to alerts from the public. Some of these birds made a complete recovery – most of the birds had injuries to their wings, legs and body, requiring anywhere from six weeks to six months to be fit enough for release. The birds released were four Marsh Harriers, a Pallid Harrier, a Black Kite, an Eleonora's



Adrien Alos

► Rehabilitated Common Kestrel

Falcon, four Common Kestrels and a Little Bittern. It is only thanks to the public reporting of injured birds to BirdLife Malta and the police that these birds were able to return back to the wild.

WORDS Belinda Hodder
BirdLife Malta
Communications Assistant



David Attard

► Pallid Harrier released back into the wild on Kemmuna

Black-winged Stilt

Summers at Ghadira Nature Reserve are historically rather quiet with the wetland offering little in terms of birds in the lull between spring and autumn migration. This all changed in recent years, when as a result of management works, the habitat attracted new breeding species, namely the

Little Ringed Plover and the even more charismatic Black-winged Stilt.

The Black-winged Stilt is an elegant bird belonging to the wader species. Its identification is quite unmistakable due to the unique black and white plumage complemented by long pink legs which give this bird the advantage of wading in slightly deeper waters where it feasts on a number of small crustaceans and fish.

Spring migration heralds the arrival of these birds, at times seen in rather large flocks. The reserve

comes to life when the breeding pairs arrive at the end of their migration and start setting up territory, a process which will see them become aggressive towards most other bird species, irrespective of size. In most cases the pairs arrive together and following a brief courtship ritual the pair identify their preferred nesting site. These birds, like most waders, do not construct complex nests. All they do is find a small depression in the earth on one of the islands, normally hidden and sheltered next to some stones or vegetation. A few small twigs are taken to the area and the female then lays an egg a day. Normally four eggs are laid, though in recent years we had a nest with five eggs.

Once the eggs are laid the parents help each other out with the incubation. Whilst one of the birds is busy keeping the eggs warm the other is keeping a lookout for predators and fending off anything which dares venture too close. After three weeks of incubation the eggs hatch and the real hard work starts for the protective parents. This is because

upon hatching, the young birds – who even at this early stage have large legs – leave the nest and start foraging for food with their parents. In fact, within a few hours from hatching the young are already swimming from one island to another following their parents around, learning the life skills required for them to grow into adult birds and gain their independence.

The sites managed by BirdLife Malta play a crucial role in providing the right habitats for such species to start breeding in the Maltese Islands. The results obtained give us the impetus to keep on working hard to bring you more success stories.

WORDS **Mark Gauci** BirdLife Malta
Head of Land Management

MALTESE NAME:

Fras-servjent

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Himantopus himantopus

LENGTH: 33–36 cm

WINGSPAN: 70 cm

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Least Concern

LOCAL STATUS: Common spring migrant with 1–3 pairs breeding annually

CALL: Very vociferous call of kyik-kyik-kyik or kreek-kreek

BEHAVIOUR: Social bird often seen in flocks. Elegant bird with very long legs

HABITAT: Prefers areas of low water, salt pans and muddy shorelines where it feeds on small crustaceans and fish

Nature at our reserves

Foresta 2000



Foresta 2000
nature reserve

Opening hours
Open all year round
and accessible 24 hours a day
Entrance free

More info at
<http://bit.ly/Foresta2000NatureReserve>



Mediterranean Stonecrop

Sedum *Sedum sediforme*

It cannot be fun for a plant to live fully exposed in the blistering heat and glare of the sun. Indeed, many plants use various devious ways to avoid this, some wither their exposed parts and sleep off summer as a bulb, others live in the shade, and others seed and wither before the mercury really creeps up. Not the Mediterranean Stonecrop! This hardy plant of rocky places braves it all, and its secret is in its succulence. This plant stores rainwater in its leaves during the wet season, and then slowly uses up the store over the dry period – like a plant version of the camel. In early summer stonecrops produce a lovely splash of lemon yellow flowers on tallish stalks.



► Mediterranean Stonecrop

Fennel

Bużbież *Foeniculum vulgare*

Another hardy plant that takes the punishing summer drought in its stride is the Fennel. Many country lanes are lined with swathes of this tall, spindly aromatic plant, including some footpaths at Foresta. As the heat braces, the Fennel opens its many crowns of yellow flowers. Many creatures like the taste of Fennel, not least that king among butterflies, the Swallowtail, which lays its eggs on Fennel for its young to feed and fatten on. Fennel (and all its dependents) is increasing coming under threat, as kerb ‘cleaners’ regularly spray entire roadsides into oblivion. The Fennels at Foresta, naturally, are spared this needless onslaught.



► Fennel

Black Whipsnake

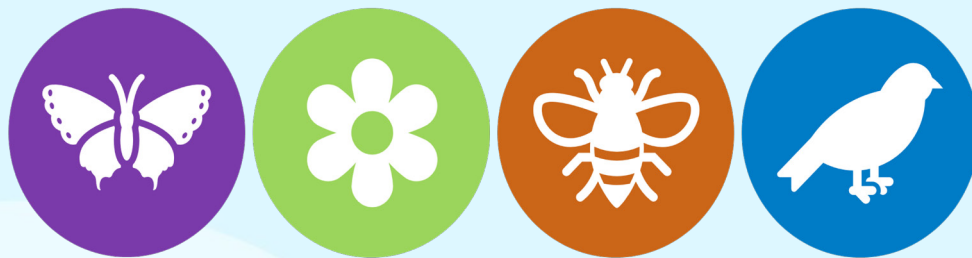
Serp Iswed *Hierophis viridiflavus*

Of the four snake species that occur in the Maltese Islands, the Black (or Western) Whipsnake is probably the only native species. It is certainly the most widespread, and the one most likely to be seen at Foresta (though cat and leopard snakes live there too). The snake’s famous run-in with a certain Biblical shipwreck survivor in 60AD gave it very bad and lasting press, and still suffers for it today. For all its notoriety, the Black Whipsnake doesn’t – and never did – come equipped with venom glands. Its prey is killed by constriction. Since its victims are mostly rodents, snakes are considered beneficial and are in fact protected species.



► Black Whipsnake

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



NATURAL NATIONS

Nature-friendly schools

In December 2019, BirdLife Malta started an exciting international **Erasmus+** funded project called Natural Nations. The project is led by our long-term partner Learning through Landscapes from the UK who built this beautiful partnership which also includes SEO BirdLife Spain, Lund University and Naturskolan i Lund in Sweden.

However, there are many other important pollinator insects that we should keep in mind such as: butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps! And it is not just the insects that do the work! Pollinators come in other forms too such as birds, bats and even little reptiles like lizards!

The more diversity the better for a healthier ecosystem! Sadly, the number of pollinators is drastically decreasing due to human activities such as: habitat loss in the detriment of buildings, pests and diseases, climate change and extreme weather, pesticide use and even competition from invasive species.

BirdLife Malta



► Kick-off partners' meeting in Winchester

To begin with, Natural Nations is providing teachers and students with tools to survey their school grounds to find out what pollinators they already have or if they are present.

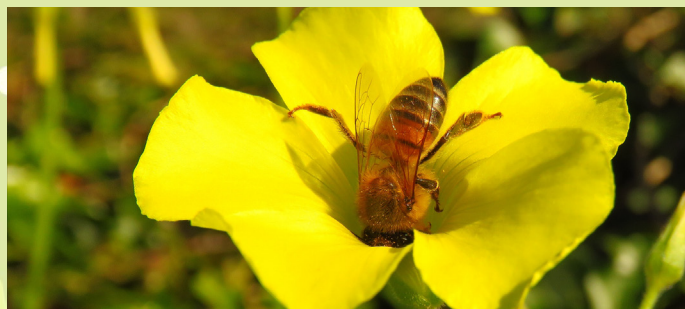
But what are pollinators?

Pollinators are animals that move pollen from one flower to another, enabling plants to make seeds and reproduce, thus ensuring a great way to sustain life!

And who are the pollinators?

If asked to mention pollinators, many people will think of bees. Which is perfectly correct! Bees pollinate 80% of the world's plants and they are responsible for one out of every three bites of food we eat! We could definitely say that we greatly rely on bees!

Jonathan Caruana



► "Can't get enough of this!"



Aron Tanti

► Swallowtail butterfly

How can we help pollinators?

Natural Nations is looking at potential solutions to support biodiversity, engaging teachers and students to take action on their school grounds. They will first do a set of four surveys to understand and assess their school grounds.

Following the survey results, the next steps will be to offer support and transform the school grounds into more pollinator-friendly and nature-friendly habitats.

Pollinators need different habitats to thrive, feed, nest, and shelter. So why not plant some wildflowers, native trees and shrubs? Or build a bug hotel, set a bird feeder, create a pond, make a compost heap, or log pile?

Bird
survey

Pollinators
and
flowering
plants
survey

School
grounds
and
habitat
survey

Minibeast
and
leaves
survey

Innovative

Natural Nations is an unique project as it is also producing activities and guidance for schools on ways to investigate their local heritage using traditional names, story-telling or songs related to plants, insects and birds, thus increasing interest about different species through folklore of one's country.

Thanks to this popular rhyme however, everyone started calling it Grandmother Ladybird (*Nannakola*):

Nannakola mur l-iskola. Aqbad sigġu, ibda oġġla.

Grandmother Ladybird, go to school. Grab a chair and start jumping.

In Maltese folklore, a story set at the Christian crucifixion scene tells of the Virgin Mary who was holding a rose under the cross and pricked her finger. A black insect zoomed under her finger and caught the drop of blood full on her body, then flew under Mary's face and caught some of her tears. And so was born the ladybird, red for the blood except some spots where the tears washed the blood away.

Other stories in Europe say that during the Middle Ages, pests were destroying the crops. The farmers prayed to the Virgin Mary for help. Soon after, the ladybirds came, eating the pests and saving the crops. (No wonder! Ladybirds like feeding on aphids and mites!). The farmers called these beautiful insects "The Beetles of Our Lady" or "Lady Beetles". The red wings were said to represent the Virgin's cloak and the black spots were symbolic of both her joys and her sorrows.

There are some similarities already between the two stories. In the spring, if numerous ladybirds are seen flying around, British farmers say it forecasts a bountiful harvest.

In Norway, it is said that if a man and a woman spot a ladybird at the same time, there will be a romance between them, whilst in Belgium people believed that if a ladybird crawled across a young girl's hand, she would be married within a year.

Overall, nearly all cultures believe that Ladybirds are talismans of good fortune, love, abundance or health, but one thing is definitely true: ladybirds are great defenders of plant life in the natural world, and they are always welcome in our gardens!

WORDS **Stefania Papadopol** BirdLife Malta Project Coordinator



► "Grandmother" Ladybird!

Moreover, each nation will identify a selection of heritage links from their own environment, and students from different countries will be able to see similarities and differences in cultural heritage across nations. This approach increases creativity and innovation, creates a sense of belonging to the community and it also celebrates the beauty of cultural diversity.

Let's now explore the example of ladybirds or ladybugs, a type of beetles which are well-known and appreciated all over the world! In Maltese, the Ladybird is translated as *kola*.

BirdLife Malta Council 2021/2023 elections

During this year's BirdLife Malta Annual General Meeting (AGM), a new Council for the term 2021-2023 will be elected.

By Council decision of 26 May 2021, an Electoral Commission has been appointed to conduct the upcoming elections. The Commission, led by Joseph Mangion, is receiving applications from those interested in contesting the election. To be eligible, applicants:

- need to be fully paid-up adult members residing in Malta,
- must not be active in the administrative setup of any political party,
- must not be involved in leisure or work activities that create a conflict of interest unless declared to the Electoral Commission,
- must not be employees of BirdLife Malta.

Completed application forms will be received by post at BirdLife Malta, 57/28 Abate Rigord Street, Ta' Xbiex XBX 1120 or by email to info@birdlifemalta.org by not later than Monday 16 August 2021. Each application form needs to be seconded by two fully paid-up members.

The 2021 AGM will be held in October or November and more details will be announced in due course.

To avoid cutting up your magazine, scan or photograph the completed application and send us that instead.



Council Member Application Form

Applicant details

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel no: _____

ID No: _____ Membership no: A _____

I hereby declare my nomination to contest BirdLife Malta Council elections

Signature _____

Nominated by:

Name: _____ ID no: _____

Membership no: A _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ ID no: _____

Membership no: A _____ Signature: _____



LIFE19 NAT/MT/000982

Our new seabird project
LIFE PanPuffinus!
has now taken off

The project aims to improve the conservation status of two endemic and threatened Mediterranean seabirds, the Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters, by addressing threats both at land and sea.

Follow the project:
Webpage <http://bit.ly/LIFEPanPuffinus>
Facebook @PanPuffinus
Twitter @MaltaSeabirds



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES,
FOOD AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

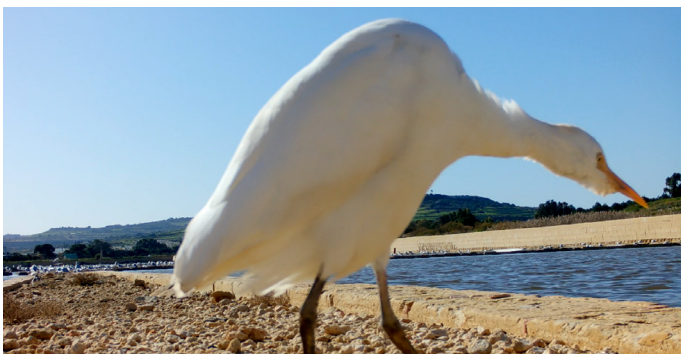
Experimenting with remote nature cameras

Wildlife watching and photography can be tough. Animals and birds are often skittish and will get spooked if they spot, or hear, a human lurking nearby. What's more you can spend hours or days without seeing anything, especially if you are after some elusive animal or some nocturnal creature.



► Common Kingfisher

Nature photography is well established in our nature reserves, but the use of remote nature cameras is a new area we have started delving in only of late. Good quality nature cameras or trail cameras, as they are also known, make the job easier by acting as a remote pair of eyes, or rather, remote image capture device.



► Cattle Egret

Such cameras are relatively inexpensive, are small and are able to withstand inclement weather. Hence they are ideal to capture pictures or videos that would be impossible with traditional hand-held cameras.

Unlike your standard digital camera, trail cameras are activated by a subject's movement and even body heat – so you don't have to physically be in the location to get the shot you want – indeed a shot that wouldn't otherwise be possible.



► White Wagtail

They'll also be able to capture images whether it's day or night, without getting cold or exhausted, protected by a rugged build that will resist moisture or damage should the camera slip from its perch or get drenched in heavy rain.

So after having found a suitable spot for the camera, and waited for a sufficient period of time, maybe a day, or even more, it is



► Black-headed Gull

exciting to hook up your camera to your computer to see what was captured. Our experiments with Little Egrets and especially with gulls at Salina Nature Reserve gave very good results as the gulls chose to roost all around the camera. However, the initial sensation on checking the memory card was shock. Not that there was anything wrong with the memory card or with the camera, but the card contained 1,918 short videos! It is not difficult to imagine that deciding which videos to keep was not an easy or quick task.

WORDS **Manuel Mallia** Salina Nature Reserve Manager



► Common Sandpiper



► Mediterranean Gull

Take the Plunge

If you're not already in the snorkelling club, this must be the summer when you take the plunge. Consider it your new hobby – a present to self after being cooped up for so long. It's easy, inexpensive, and, best of all, will open a window onto yet another treasure trove of nature in Malta. Just get a mask and snorkel and you're good to go.

Mellieħa Bay

Anywhere and everywhere is a good place for marine life and you'll find most variety in the first three metres of water. Mellieħa Bay just opposite the Għadira Nature Reserve hosts a variety of life across its many habitats from the bay itself along the south coast at Is-Sellum and Għajn Żejtuna.

Sandy bottom

The shallow water in the bay makes this a convenient spot for children and beginners, but its exposed stretches mean that creatures apply all the tricks in the book to avoid being seen. This includes the camouflage of fish like the Sand Goby that turns into seabed the instant it stops moving, or the Sand Sea Star walking on its stubby arms and leaving a trail of pretty star-prints. Small shoals of Striped Sea Bream create mouth-shaped depressions in the sand where they forage for food, and bivalves lie buried in the sand with pairs of siphon holes staring up at you. But the stealth prize must go to the Greater Weever, which buries all but its eyes in the sand. The trick here is to look carefully and enjoy the 'hunt'.

the bottom: you might chance upon the telltale diamond shape of the Common Sting Ray – a gentle animal that snuffles around in search of buried bivalves, worms and small fishes. Cuttlefish and Flying Gurnard are scarcer but rewarding finds in these spots.

Rocky shore

Rock exploration is a totally different game. Shallow rocks are the haunt of hole-seeking blennies: small, curious, multi-coloured fish that half pop out of their hidey holes if you scratch the rock surface or tempt them out with a morsel of bread. Their turbulent life-in-the-splash-zone gives blennies unique ventral fins that hold onto rocks rather like hands.

A rocky shelf or bed is where the variety of life in the sea really hits home: red, green and brown algae spread their feathery fronds while hydroids, anemones and sponges catch or siphon tiny animals from the passing current and daub the rocks with subtle or startling colour. The common Elysia sea slug – easy to overlook because of its tiny size – nibbles alga and steals green chlorophyll for supplementary nutrition. The Warty Crab warns off the curious snorkeller with strong claws and hug-me open arms.



► An adult male Rainbow Wrasse showing off its namesake

Swim out where the bottom is just out of reach and look for places where sea currents corral patches of dead Eel Grass on



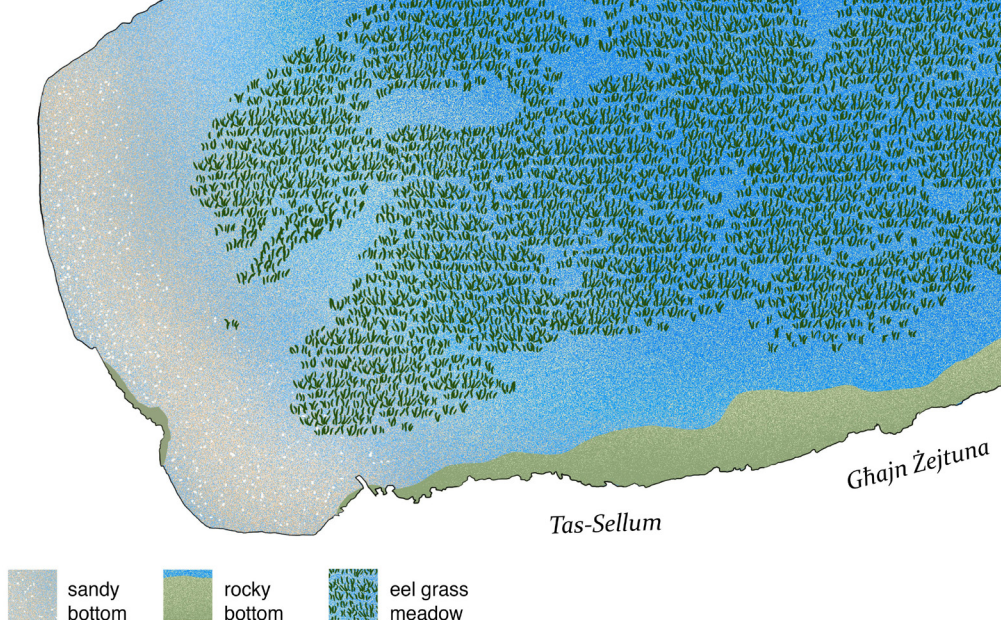
► Red and Pink Sea Squirts hang on to rocks and siphon the water for food



Plans are currently under way to extend the Għadira beach and construct an artificial reef. The dredging, pumping, sand shifting and proposed groyne construction will totally change the ecology of the beach and destroy the delicate ecosystem for decades to come.

Open water

Your swim along the coast will produce the common shore fish, such as the delightful Ornate and Rainbow Wrasses, sea breams, alga-nibbling Salema and bottom-feeding mullets. Shoals of silvery Sand Smelt twist away from you at the last nanosecond while small groups of Blue Runners snatch prey as they swim past at impossible speeds. Don't forget to check out the submerged bricks used to anchor swimming zone lines, for gobies and scorpionfish.



► Mellieħa Bay has the most extensive sandy beach in Malta



► A Dalmatian Blenny curiously checks out the neighbourhood

Before heading back to shore, look down at the seabed and take in the meadows of Eel Grass: marine life nursery, anchor of the seabed and shore buffer. Many of the open water fish you meet will have taken their first swim here.

WORDS **Desirée Falzon** Naturalist and BirdLife Malta Field Teacher
 PHOTOGRAPHS **Desirée Falzon** and **Victor Falzon**
 MAP **Victor Falzon**



► A Sand Goby in perfect camouflage with the sandy bottom



► Pairs of siphon holes watch you from the seabed



Alexandr Krushinsky

► **22 May 2021.** We were excited to take part in *withNature 2020*, an international event to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity. This was a global collaborative artwork event seeking to engage people with biodiversity and to urge for its protection. Our staff created a giant image of the Yelkouan Shearwater at Golden Bay out of donated clothing to highlight the importance of Malta for this species. More details about this event on the back page!

BirdLife Malta



► **23 March 2021.** Former Foresta 2000 Nature Reserve Warden Raymond Vella led a virtual Zoom event organised by the BirdLife Malta Events & Activities Committee. He talked us through his time in Costa Rica which is also known as the 'Birdwatching Republic'. Some amazing facts and photos were shared, which was followed by a short Q&A session.

Alexandr Krushinsky



► **6 & 10 April 2021.** In April BirdLife Malta ran two Facebook Live events from our nature reserves as part of the spring #onthemove campaign. COVID-19 restrictions forced us to close the reserves to the public, so our live events ensured everyone could still enjoy the wonders of spring. From Simar we celebrated the breeding birds, including a look at a new nest! From Ghadira we enjoyed some wonderful bird ringing with Nicholas Galea and Nimrod Mifsud.

Edward Mayer



► **27 April 2021.** Swift and Urban Wildlife Conservationist Edward Mayer joined us from the UK for a virtual Zoom event organised by the BirdLife Malta Events & Activities Committee. He gave an insightful presentation on how to support and attract beneficial wildlife in our urban areas.



Abbie Ferrar

► **30 April & 1 May 2021.** Our education team organised an evening event for our Klabb Huttaf & Family members at Foresta 2000 Nature Reserve. Families joined us for a self-led nature night walk. Armed with survey sheets from the activity packs we provided, the families searched for chameleons before heading down towards nearby cliffs to listen out for the call of two seabird species – the Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters.



Alexandr Krushinsky

► **8 May 2021.** One of two events held to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day 2021 was another Facebook Live bird ringing session with Nicholas Galea and Nimrod Mifsud. This day is a global event which aims to raise awareness of migratory birds. Ghadira Nature Reserve is a popular stopover for migrating birds in Malta, which was highlighted in this well-attended live session and which also concluded #onthemove campaign.

Want to help us continue our work?

Join: <http://bit.ly/joinBLM>

Donate: <http://bit.ly/donate-to-birdlifemalta>

Support: <http://bit.ly/Becomeasupporter>

Volunteer: <http://bit.ly/volunteerwithBLM>



- **8 May 2021.** Another event to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day 2021 was an afternoon children's photography workshop held at Salina Nature Reserve. This event also linked with our Spring Alive campaign, which aims to encourage children's interest in nature and the conservation of migratory birds.



- **25 May 2021.** Head of the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme Nicholas Galea joined us for a virtual Zoom event following the popularity of our bird ringing Facebook Live sessions. He spoke in detail about the record findings from a year of bird ringing in Malta in 2020. He explained how in 2020 our licensed bird ringers ringed over 23,000 birds across the Maltese Islands!



- **30 May 2021.** Heritage Malta invited us to join them for an open day at Ta' Bistra Catacombs. After being closed for quite some time due to an ongoing project, they opened their doors for the general public to

enjoy. Three BirdLife Malta volunteers were on site all day with leaflets and information, all about our reserves, our work, and all the exciting plans for the upcoming months.



- **5 June 2021.** In June we were again joined by Edward Mayer for another informative online talk all about swifts to help us celebrate World Swift Day. This day, commemorated each year on 7 June, is a global celebration of the swift – this most fascinating and mysterious bird whose survival is threatened. Swifts are frequent visitors to our islands but they are in trouble. Edward talked us through a variety of complex reasons why, and explained how we can help.



- **8 June 2021.** World Ocean Day is celebrated annually on 8 June, so this year we hosted a film screening of the film 100 Days of Vitamin Sea – a film that celebrates the ocean as well as highlighting the physical and mental health benefits of blue spaces. During this event we also launched our partnership with the Saving Our Blue campaign which was launched by the Environment Ministry to educate and encourage the public to stop littering, reduce waste and opt for alternative products to single-use plastics.

Want to join an event?

More details: <http://bit.ly/joinanevent>
Email: events@birdlifemalta.org
Call: +356 2134 7646



- **19 June 2021.** This was another exclusive Klabb Huttaf & Family members event. Our education team celebrated the real-life wildlife that inspired Pokémon characters! A variety of activities were placed around Simar Nature Reserve, including a scavenger trail and some arts and crafts!

An aerial photograph of a sandy beach crowded with people and colorful beach umbrellas. A large, white and black seabird, made of many small pieces of cloth, is laid out on the sand. The bird is facing left, with its wings spread. The ocean is visible at the bottom of the frame.

Big bird on the beach!

On 22 May 2021, a gigantic seabird greeted all who visited Golden Sands! The image – made from over 500 pieces of cloth laid out on the sand – was created for the live broadcast with Nature2020 held to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity. This global stunt encouraged people from all over the world to create giant images of endangered species and the tapestry of species was documented live on YouTube in a special full-day online broadcast. Here in Malta, we chose the Yelkouan Shearwater (Garnija) as our featured species. BirdLife Malta staff and volunteers joined forces with Majjistral Nature & History Park to participate in this global collaborative artwork, which seeks to engage people with biodiversity and urge for its protection. Drone footage of our big bird was shown as part of the live stream and will also feature in a forthcoming BBC documentary.