

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 70 ■ December 2021





A summit that failed the world

Just a few weeks ago COP26 ended. What was supposed to be the start of a new global green era turned out to probably be the most expensive exercise in greenwashing. It ended with the President of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference Alok Sharma fighting tears and saying to the audience and the world “I am deeply sorry”.

Even the UN chief António Guterres recognised that COP26 failed the world and stated that it is time to go “into emergency mode”. On the key issues of ending fossil fuel subsidies, phasing out coal, putting a price on carbon, protecting vulnerable communities, and delivering the \$100 billion climate finance commitment, Mr Guterres was clear: “we did not achieve these goals at this conference”.

BirdLife International actively represented the partnership of 117 partners around the globe at COP26. They made us proud. Unfortunately, it wasn't the enormous coalition of environmental NGOs, indigenous people and youths that failed the world at the summit. Locally, during our last AGM held in November, we reaffirmed climate change as a key priority for BirdLife Malta. Our commitment and determination to protect and safeguard habitats and biodiversity is stronger on this issue.

With COP26 over, we now need to set our sights on COP27 in Egypt along with the Biodiversity COP15 in Kunming (China) in April 2022. These two issues are intertwined. Climate and biodiversity are two sides of the same coin. Losing one is losing both!

Darryl Grima, President



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Alexandr Krushlinsky

Malta's Ironman athlete fundraises for BirdLife Malta

Fabio Spiteri is a triathlon athlete and coach who has managed to participate and succeed in different Ironman challenges in various countries. He has become a popular personality amongst sport enthusiasts and animal-lovers, and has recently cycled 980km around Sicily in 47 hours and 41 minutes (with only one hour of sleep!) to collect funds for animal welfare charities. Malta's Ironman athlete managed to collect just under €43,000 and all the funds have been distributed to various NGOs, including €1,100 which he donated to BirdLife Malta. These funds are going towards our rehabilitation work which enables us to get injured or stranded birds released in good health back into the wild. On 22 October we had the pleasure to host Fabio Spiteri himself for a visit at Ghadira Nature Reserve where he released a rehabilitated juvenile Greater Flamingo following the presentation of his donation to BirdLife Malta.

BirdLife Malta Council Darryl Grima (President), Norman Chetcuti (Treasurer), Denise Casolani, James Aquilina, Kathleen Galea, Nicholas Galea, Eurydike Kovacs, Caldon Mercieca, Paul Portelli, Raphael Soler, Steve Zammit Lupi (members) **BirdLife Malta Senior Management Team** Mark Sultana (CEO), Nicholas Barbara (Head of Conservation), Mark Gauci (Head of Land Management), Stefania Papadopol (Education Manager), Nathaniel Attard (Communications Manager), Arturo Palomba (Finance Manager), Manuel Mallia (Salina Park Manager), Manya Russo (LIFE PanPuffinus! Project Manager), Janet Borg (Office Coordinator)



Malta is now again subject to legal action against finch trapping

Back to the ECJ on finch trapping

The European Commission (EC) announced on 12 November that it will be taking Malta once again to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) over finch trapping. This is a result of the smokescreen 'research' trapping season which was opened for the second consecutive year this autumn under the false guise of a 'scientific project'. The EC has seen through the ploy by the Maltese Government to first repeal last year's Framework Law to re-enact it again just a week later, and was not fooled by this attempt to buy time with the hope that a new Infringement Procedure is initiated from scratch. Following the first two warnings on the breach of the European Birds Directive issued in December 2020 and last June, legal action was inevitable. Following the announcement, BirdLife Malta called on the Government to immediately close the ongoing finch trapping season. The Commission clearly stated: "The trapping licences for the 2021 season had already been issued on the basis of the repealed 2020 framework, and new rules have been swiftly adopted with only minor changes compared to the previous legal regime. The Commission therefore considers the reply by the Maltese authorities to both the Letter of Formal Notice and the Reasoned Opinion as unsatisfactory, and is therefore referring Malta to the Court of Justice of the European Union".

More casualties this autumn

The autumn hunting season for 2021 began on 1 September and is open until 31 January 2022. The first illegal hunting casualty was an Eleonora's Falcon which was shot in Gozo before the season even began. Unfortunately, this marked

the start of a massacre of protected birds over September and October, with victims including Osprey, Honey-buzzard, Marsh-harrier, Night-heron and Greater Flamingoes, to name but a few. The season actually closed early for European Turtle-dove, since the bag limit of 500 birds was reached 19 days ahead of the date it was supposed to end. To monitor



Common Kestrels were among the illegally shot species mostly retrieved this year

any illegalities, BirdLife Malta set up its annual Raptor Camp which saw a host of volunteers out in the field on watch duties. The camp ran over three weeks in September, and our volunteers completed a total of 284 shifts, witnessing a total of 194 illegalities across Malta. Shooting at protected species accounted for one in every five illegalities, with the main target being birds of prey. Birds of prey also constituted the majority of birds found either injured or dead. Over half (54.6%) of all illegalities detected were the use of electronic bird callers; further illegalities included hunting after hours and using illegally modified shotguns. Police presence was notably low during Raptor Camp and the Environmental Protection Unit (EPU) were not seen out as often as they were needed.

Egyptian Vulture shot down in Malta

An Egyptian Vulture landed in the Maltese Islands on 14 September to rest but unfortunately had its migration cut short over Dingli. The vulture, named 'Isabel', was a juvenile born in captivity last June and was on her first migration following release on 20 August. She was part of the LIFE Egyptian Vulture project, led by the Endangered Raptors Centre (CERM), which is based in southern Tuscany and houses the world's largest number of Egyptian Vultures in captivity, aiming to reintroduce



Egyptian Vulture 'Isabel'

them to the wild. Following the events, the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) and CERM sent an open letter to Prime Minister Robert Abela. In their strongly-worded letter, they

explained how they released four vultures this year and, while two were already in Tunisia, the other two followed an eastern route and reached Malta. According to credible information, one was shot at but luckily managed to escape and reach Libya, whilst the other one was Isabel. The letter continued that the shooting of these birds is a major blow to the conservation of the species, and the estimated cost of reintroduction is around €50,000 per bird. VCF and CERM called on the Prime Minister to take all possible action to investigate and punish this crime. They then offered a €4,000 reward for any information that could shed light on the disappearance of Isabel or the person believed to have shot it.

Malta Police Force



Shot Greater Flamingos at Qawra Point

Flamingos gunned down at Qawra Point

On 2 October BirdLife Malta volunteers witnessed four Greater Flamingos being shot down off Qawra Point. The police were called immediately and arrived with the Armed Forces who managed to retrieve three dead birds which were found at sea; the fourth was found on land. A firearm and ammunition were also seized. The Malta Police Force issued a statement mentioning

the arrest of a 23-year-old man from Gzira – Miguel Zammit, who was charged in court but pleaded not guilty. The area is renowned for illegal hunting and BirdLife Malta has, for a long number of years, called for it to be declared a no-hunting zone since it is an important area for birds flying in and out of Salina Nature Reserve and a popular swimming zone. Following the incident, Environment Minister Aaron Farrugia announced that hunting will now be banned in the area and BirdLife Malta will be asked to sign a guardianship deed to manage the site. Following the incident, we urged the Government to reinstate the verification process of stuffed protected bird collections that had benefitted from two amnesties in 1997 and 2003. In these amnesties, hunters had declared over 520,000 stuffed protected birds. During the process, it became evident that most hunters had declared more birds than what they actually had, and this was purposely done so that those who still wanted to hunt protected birds after the amnesties would still be in time to list them under the forgiven lists. This led to a rampant increase in illegal hunting as clearly evidenced by the numbers of illegally shot protected birds in the past four years (2018–2021) when compared to the previous four (2014–2017). In fact between 2014 and 2017 there were 190 protected birds that were verified by the government veterinarian as being illegally shot, compared to the shameful 523 illegally shot birds so far since 2018.

BirdLife Malta AGM held, new Council elected

On 12 November BirdLife Malta held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Salina Nature Reserve, in line with COVID-19 restrictions. The agenda included the presentation of the

Alexandr Krushinsky



AGM 2021 held at Salina

financial and operational reports for last year, a tribute to the late Guido Lanfranco and Ċensu Sammut, and the launch of the new nature reserves report *Managing Land for Nature*. This year there was a significant increase in interest from several members to form part of the Council, and an election was held. The 11 candidates were elected by the members present and by those who voted during the previous two days. The newly-formed Council then met during the following week to elect the BirdLife Malta officials for the next two years. Darryl Grima was confirmed BirdLife Malta President and Norman Chetcuti as Treasurer. The role of Council Secretary for the next two years will continue to be filled by Denise Casolani.

Air pollution reaches alarming levels

On 25 October, measurements of air pollution taken at shipping activity hotspots in Malta revealed concentrations up to 100–200 times higher than the air levels expected of areas not exposed to any pollution sources. The results were presented during a press conference by Danish scientist Kare Press-Kristensen, from EU LIFE-funded project LIFE4MEDECA. He also spoke about the effects and the solutions to air pollution in the Maltese Islands. BirdLife Malta has been for the past years an active member of the *Together against Air Pollution from Ships* network which raises awareness about



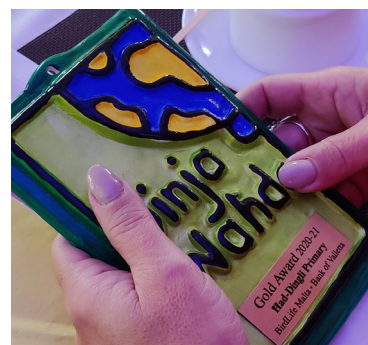
Alexandr Krushinsky

Danish scientist measuring air pollution in Valletta

damaging air pollution generated by maritime transport in the Mediterranean and promotes solutions on how this can be reduced. This partnership shares the same goal of establishing an Emission Control Area (ECA) in the region, with tangible benefits to public health and the environment in the Maltese Islands.

Dinja Waħda Awards 2021

At the end of November, 85 schools were awarded for connecting children with nature during BirdLife Malta's Dinja Waħda 2021 Awards Ceremony which was this year held at Chateau Buskett. The event, organised together with sponsors Bank of Valletta, celebrated the success of all the schools involved in our flagship environmental education programme during the scholastic year 2020–2021 and marked the launch of a new year of engagement. Despite a year like no other due to the pandemic challenges when school outings were not permitted, over the past scholastic year a good number of schools still engaged their students in the programme and participated in over 1,000 online nature sessions delivered by BirdLife Malta's education team. During this year's ceremony we also promoted our newest educational programme Dinja Waħda+.



Alexandr Krushinsky

85 schools were awarded for connecting children with nature during this year's Dinja Waħda Awards ceremony

WORDS **Belinda Hodder** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant

Black-necked Grebe

MALTESE NAME: Blongun Sekond
 SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Podiceps nigricollis*
 LENGTH: 28–34 cm
 WINGSPAN: 52–55 cm
 CONSERVATION STATUS: Least Concern
 LOCAL STATUS: Fairly common autumn migrant/winter visitor
 CALL: Largely silent in winter, occasional 'tu-iii' territorial call or fast trill
 BEHAVIOUR: Swims duck-like, dives frequently. Nocturnal migrant
 HABITAT: Wetlands, e.g. saltmarsh, brackish lagoons, large reservoirs

Ray Vella



Now you see it, now you don't! Black-necked Grebes are avid divers, one minute they slowly swim on the water surface and in an instant vanish underwater in pursuit of aquatic prey, re-surfacing several metres away. Resembling ducks to the layperson, grebes are a completely different family of aquatic birds, which have evolved a streamlined body with feet placed far back for efficient diving, hence their scientific name *Podiceps* (from Latin *podicis* = rear part, and *pes* = foot). The feet are not webbed but have lobed toes. Owing to the position of their feet, they walk extremely clumsily and so grebes rarely venture onto dry land.

The Black-necked Grebe has a widespread breeding area with migratory populations covering an extensive range of Eurasia and North America while a resident population is also found in subtropical Africa. IUCN list the Black-necked Grebe as having Least Concern status, with a global population estimate of around four million individuals (Wetlands International, 2015). The European population is estimated at 46,400-77,500 pairs (BirdLife International, 2015).

This gregarious wetland species breeds in freshwater marshes and lakes with reed fringes and extensive shallows with submergent vegetation. Black-necked Grebes build a floating nest made of twigs and rotting vegetation in which the female lays three to four eggs which take 21 days to hatch. The chicks leave the nest almost immediately once hatched and are first fed by their parents which initially feed them on feathers. This may protect their stomachs from sharp fish spines. The family stick together for around 10 days following which parents split the number of chicks between themselves. Adult grebes keep the chicks close by and tend to carry them on their back until

the chicks get the hang of diving. In 10 more days the chicks are all fledged and independent.

The Black-necked Grebe winters in saline lakes and saltmarshes with high densities of brine shrimp and other macrozooplankton in coastal areas around the Mediterranean including the Maltese Islands. This species is often encountered in the three main wetland bird reserves of Għadira, Simar and Salina and also in sheltered ports and bays as in Marsaxlokk and Msida, often spending from late November till early April at their wintering sites. During this period birds occur in winter plumage but in spring a few individuals may sport their extravagant breeding plumage with black head, neck and back, golden ear tufts and dark orange flanks. Adult birds have bright red eyes in all plumages becoming more brilliant in spring. Occasionally, early migrants turn up in late August and in September.

Migratory Black-necked Grebes fly up to 6,000km to reach their wintering grounds. Once they arrive in their wintering abodes, they cease flying for around two months during which they moult and fatten up. In early spring, the moment comes for the birds to start flexing their wings again...they practise flight runs on the water, flapping their wings rapidly, and usually migrate back north that same week.

The next time you visit a wetland reserve in winter, look out for the Black-necked Grebe and check how long it can stay underwater!

WORDS **David Attard** Għadira Nature Reserve Warden

Nature at our reserves

Ghadira

© Alexander Krushinsky



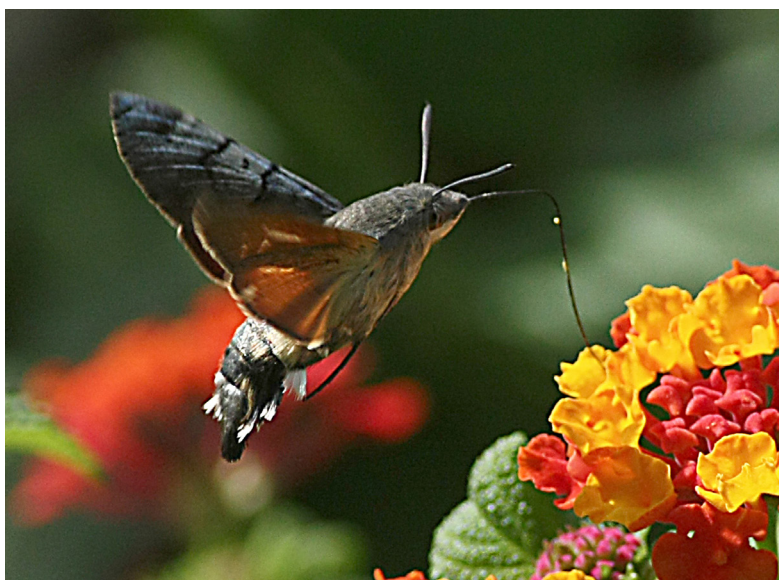
Opening hours
September to May
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday
2pm-7pm
Saturday & Sunday
10am-4pm
Entrance free (donations welcome!)
More info at
<http://bit.ly/GhadiraNatureReserve>



Hummingbird Hawkmoth

Habbara *Macroglossum stellatarum*

Hawkmoths are large, fast and streamlined insects that look like they came off a fighter aircraft engineer's drawing board. About six species occur in Malta, the smallest of which is the Hummingbird Hawkmoth. It's fascinating to watch this day-flying moth 'working' a flowering shrub, going diligently from flower to flower, stopping over each to insert its long hair-thin tongue to syphon sweet nectar, hovering all the while without landing for one second (hence the English name). But for all its beauty, this gem hasn't escaped persecution. In a throwback to the Dark Ages, many still believe large moths bring misfortune (hence the Maltese name). But at Ghadira it's of course safe from human disturbance.



Victor Falzon

Hummingbird Hawkmoth

Northern Pintail

Silfjun *Anas acuta*

Malta sits on one of the main migration flyways across the Mediterranean, so our birdwatchers often see thousands of wild duck on passage. Among them is the Northern Pintail, one of the larger duck species that occur. Pintails have a characteristic long pointed tail, especially evident in males. A little sea-gazing in the Fliegu especially in spring can reward you with lines of wild duck flying fast and strong low over the waves, or bobbing at rest on the surface. Such flocks can include hundreds of pintails, and one or two sometimes drop in to check out Ghadira, especially when the lake is nice and full, like it currently is thanks to the recent heavy rains.



Raymond Vella

Northern Pintail

Tamarisk Bracket

Lixka tal-Bruk *Inonotus tamaricis*

Most people think that fungi are plants, but they're actually so different that scientists place them in a separate kingdom of living organisms. The main part of a fungus lives underground as a network of threadlike structures, and the familiar mushroom is only its fruiting body. But not all mushrooms have that umbrella shape. Some grow like shelves on the exterior of tree trunks, so they are known as bracket mushrooms or bracket fungi. Like many fungi species, brackets can be very particular to the tree species on which they grow. One of these is the Tamarisk Bracket, which in particularly wet autumns (like this year's) start appearing on many of the African Tamarisk shrubs at Ghadira.



Victor Falzon

Tamarisk Bracket

WORDS **Victor Falzon**

Naturalist and BirdLife Malta Field Teacher

Teachers making simple bug hotels from reed cuttings and string, in an effort to make their school minibeast-friendly



ENHANCING SCHOOL GROUNDS FOR NATURE!

Teach, Inspire and Protect (TIP) is an Erasmus+ project which is now coming to an end after three years of intensive and interesting work. The project primarily focused on teacher training for early years educators and enhancing the school grounds for the benefit of both children and nature. Young children require a different approach to learning which is exploratory, sensory, and interactive and an outdoor space with nature around provides a great setting for this. Early childhood education also plays a vital role in the development of values and skills, which makes this age ideal to instil care for nature! To achieve this approach, we also need to inspire and build the confidence of teachers to do outdoor and nature-based learning activities and support them with ideas to integrate these topics within their class. Besides teacher training and an accredited course available annually, we will make available different online interactive modules on school spaces, how to observe and explore birds, minibeasts and plants. To give you an insight on the modules, here is some content that you might find useful in your practice to protect and discover nature!

OBSERVING BIRDS!

Not everyone is a bird expert, so here are some tips and tricks on how to identify and observe a bird!

Shape and Size

The shape and size of a bird tells us a lot about which species it could be!

TIP: Compare the size or shape to a bird you already know, for example a Sparrow.



Colour

Some birds have bright colours and are easier to identify, other birds have simpler colours but have beautiful unique patterns.

TIP: Why not count how many colours the next bird you see has?



Beak, legs, and feet

Birds have adapted their beak, legs, and feet to suit their dietary needs. Depending on these, you can work out what the bird feeds on!

TIP: Check out this foot, the sharp claws are used for catching prey!



Wings and tails

Wings and tail are very characteristic to a bird species, and they determine the way a bird flies. By looking at the shape and size of the bird's wings and tail, they can help you determine the species.

TIP: Ask yourself, are the wings slender? Broad? Is the tail forked? Wide?



Habitat

Different bird species are found in different habitats. For example, if you are in woodland, it is very unlikely you are going to see a seabird. Knowing the habitat you are in can help you find out what bird species you have seen!

TIP: Ask yourself, what can you see around you. Trees? Ponds? Buildings? Sand? Bushes? This is a hungry Little Egret that is found mostly in wetlands.



OBSERVING MINIBEASTS!

The term **minibeast** is a more child-friendly and exciting term for any small **invertebrate**. Invertebrates are animals that **don't have a backbone**. Some invertebrates have soft bodies, like worms, slugs, and jellyfish. Other invertebrates, like insects, arachnids, and crustaceans, have a hard outer casing called **exoskeleton**, protecting their body like a suit of armour. Here are just few ideas how to help and where to look for minibeasts!

Log and stone piles

These also create dark, damp environments that many kinds of minibeasts love, including woodlice and slugs. Put a log or large stone in an earthy corner and wait for different minibeasts to move in. Lift and replace the log or stone very carefully so minibeasts do not get squashed. Better still, place logs on top of one another to create a log pile, providing a larger habitat for more minibeasts!

Wildflower gardens

Plant a patch of colourful wildflowers to attract bees and butterflies. They love lavender, wild fennel, poppies, or herbs such as Mediterranean Thyme and Rosemary. Growing fruits, vegetables and herbs is a good practice as well. It also provides affordable and delicious food, but it is also a therapeutic activity that allows children to relax and connect with the natural world, while develop valuable skills.

Leaf piles

Leaf piles provide food, shelter, and nesting material for lots of different animals. They are the perfect places for caterpillars to spend the winter, along with earthworms, snails, and slugs if the leaves are damp enough! Leaves also break down to create a natural mulch which fertilizes the soil.

We hope this feature sparked your curiosity and persuaded you to be one of the users to delve into these online modules. We are grateful to the Erasmus+ funding for making the creation of these resources possible.

We would also like to thank St Nicholas College Mġarr Primary school, the Ministry for Education and Employment, and the international partners: BirdLife Spain, Learning through Landscapes in the UK and INAK from Slovakia.

WORDS **Stefania Papadopol** BirdLife Malta Education Manager
CARTOONS **Victor Falzon**

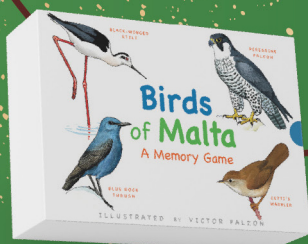


Erasmus+

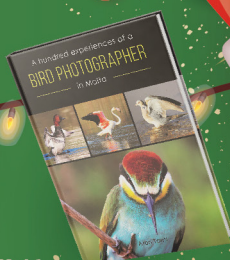


Christmas 2021

Fill your Christmas Stocking today with a selection of gifts from our online shop! Order your selection and we'll deliver it straight to your doorstep!



When you purchase BirdLife Malta merchandise, you'll be supporting the work we do across the Maltese Islands!



http://bit.ly/BLM_OnlineShop

Possibly the most important tool in birdwatching, apart from patience, is a good set of binoculars!

Binoculars are now available for sale at our nature reserves and from our online shop. We stock Vanguard Vesta binoculars with different magnification 10x21, 8x25 or 10x25. Prices range from €40 to €80. So now that's two valid reasons for a quick visit to our nature reserves – buying and using binoculars!



Our latest nature reserves report is out!

This publication brings together reports, notes, lists, observations and other research dealing with the management and natural history of Ghadira, Salina, Simar & Foresta 2000 Nature Reserves, all four sites under the management of BirdLife Malta, covering the years 2018–2019.

Get your copy for just €6 from the nature reserve shops or from our online shop at <https://bit.ly/BLMReservesReport>.



Happy Christmas and Happy New Year to all our members!

LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

Updates on Yelkouan Shearwater movements and colonies

Understanding the breeding movements of the Yelkouan Shearwater was a key objective in the first year of the LIFE PanPuffinus! project. Over the few months of the Maltese breeding season for these beautiful seabirds, 26,496 GPS locations from 21 individuals were retrieved. This information is crucial in helping the project team to tackle their threats and help the population increase.

2021 was the first year of the LIFE PanPuffinus! project, with partners spread across five countries: France (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, LPO), Greece (Hellenic Ornithological Society, HOS), Spain (Sociedad Española de Ornitología, SEO), Portugal (Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves, SPEA) and Malta (BirdLife Malta), all focusing on research and conservation of Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters.

Part of this project is the deployment of GPS trackers in Greece and Malta on Yelkouan Shearwaters to further understand their breeding movements. The map shows all the tracks from Malta in 2021, demonstrating the wide foraging area of the species and the important of cross-country collaboration across their range. Moreover, the high resolution given by the tags used allows for more in-depth analysis and identification of specific foraging behaviours.

The GPS data from Malta this year will be analysed with previously collected distribution data and that from other project partners to create a Mediterranean-wide bycatch risk map. This map highlights what are known as conflict areas, that is areas where human activity and wildlife occurrence overlap.

Biosecurity workshop held in France



BirdLife Malta

To assess possible fisheries interactions, BirdLife Malta is working together with the local project partner – the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture within Malta's Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal Rights – to obtain fishing effort data. The aim of the bycatch risk map is to identify areas where shearwaters and fishermen interactions might be especially high. Apart from being especially productive areas, these spots would be the main areas to focus bycatch monitoring and mitigation.

The final location used by Shearwaters is their nest site. As part of LIFE PanPuffinus!, the biosecurity in colonies is implemented to prevent and detect rodent presence, and this is done through a variety of methods such as camera traps and non-toxic wax blocks. If signs are found, it means that appropriate methods can be used to control the rat population and reduce the risk of predation to the Yelkouan Shearwater's eggs in Malta. Greece and Spain are also implementing these biosecurity measures on their Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwater colonies. All partners and external expertise were trained in the principles of biosecurity by Biosecurity for LIFE hosted by LPO in France.



Hannah Greetham/Movebank

GPS tracks from the 2021 breeding season and one of the tagged Yelkouan Shearwaters

To support and implement the project objectives, various policy and advocacy related activities are being conducted, such as the assessment of national policies addressing seabird bycatch and establishing existing gaps to work on. At the same time, scientific data and project findings are the most fruitful basis



LIFE PanPuffinus!

Rat footprints in a Shearwater colony and a newly-hatched Yelkouan chick

for policy work: for example, due to available data BirdLife Malta contributed to the process of the "Conservation Objectives and Measures for Malta's Marine Natura 2000 sites" development, emphasizing the need to take stronger measures to protect seabirds and the marine environment. The research and conservation work will continue in 2022, increasing our knowledge on these endangered seabirds.

WORDS Hannah Greetham LIFE PanPuffinus! Project Warden



Rita Matos



Fisheries interactions

In the footsteps of the first Maltese

A winter nature walk with a touch of history from Għar Dalam to Wied Żembaq

Start at Għar Dalam

The starting and ending point of this walk – Għar Dalam Cave and Museum – is tucked away in a little-known gem of nature that has been polished by the forces of nature and which has remained well hidden in the industrial south of Malta.

If visiting by bus from Valletta, it is best to alight at the stop *Dalam*. If by car ample parking is available close to Għar Dalam. Take this opportunity to visit the cave and museum and savour the beauty of one of Malta's most important heritage sites. On entering the museum, have a good look at the large aerial photograph of the area and the various archaeological and historical features in Wied Dalam and Ta' Kaċċatura, where Heritage Malta will soon be creating a heritage park.

Għar Dalam takes us back to a very wet phase in the history of the Maltese Islands where large volumes of river water eroded their way through the hard layer of lower coralline limestone and hollowed out the cave we find today.

Borġ in-Nadur

The entry ticket to Għar Dalam allows you to also visit the prehistoric site of Borġ in-Nadur which was in use during both the late Temple Period (3150–2500 BC) and the Bronze Age (2400–700 BC). Borġ in-Nadur is 500 metres down the road from Għar Dalam.

After visiting Borġ in-Nadur, walk along Birżebbuġa's St George's Bay and at the bottom of the road follow Triq Birżebbuġa for a few metres and turn left into Triq id-Dar ta' Pultu. At the end of this narrow alley, you find the start of the Dar Ta' Pultu Trail.

Paul Portelli



Għar Dalam

Paul Portelli



Casa Ippolito

Aron Tanti



Spectacled Warbler



Mediterranean Heath



Olive-leaved Buckthorn



European Robin



Sardinian Warbler

Dar ta' Pultu Trail

The trail is easily accessible and provides a pleasant stroll. When walking along this path you could easily be walking in the same footsteps of the first people known to have lived in the Maltese Islands along Wied Żembaq. This valley is one of several that have been hewn by millennia of violently-flowing water that rushed over the land when the Maltese Islands were much wetter than they are today.

Wintering birds at Wied Żembaq

You will need to walk along Wied Żembaq at different times of the year to truly appreciate the fauna and flora of the area.

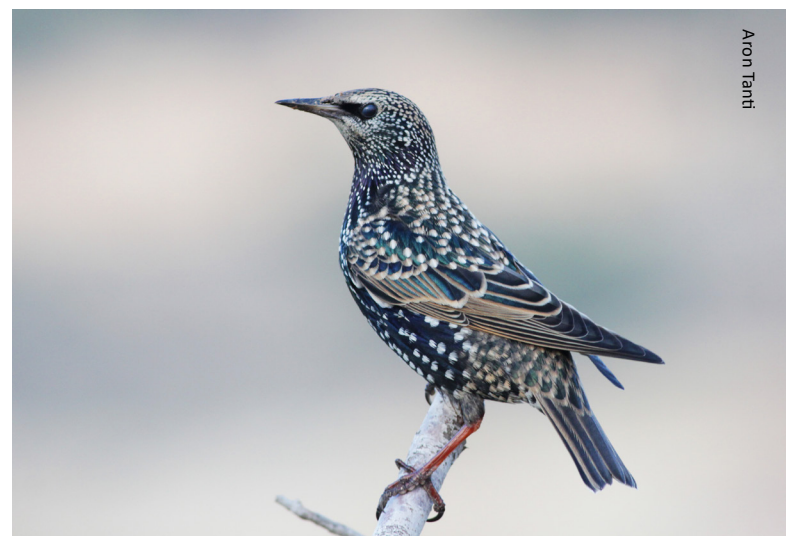
In the colder months you will meet many of the wintering species. Common Stonechats call from the top of a bush or stalk while Cetti's Warbler calls but keeps well hidden in the vegetation at the bottom of the valley; and Common Starlings travel in small flocks from one feeding area to another.

European Robins keep you company all along the trail, while the resident Sardinian Warbler and the much rarer Spectacled Warblers surprise you with their loud song.

A valley rich in flora

Wied Żembaq is rich in flora. Look out for the winter-flowering Mediterranean Heath with its dense inflorescence of tiny, bell-shaped, pink flowers, and the dark green foliage of Olive-leaved Buckthorn.

The trail ends at Casa Ippolito, the ruins of a typical 17th-century Maltese aristocratic country residence with an enchanting history. At the ruins, turn right and follow the road along agricultural land towards Triq Wied Haş-Saptan, which takes you to Triq Għar Dalam. A short walk down the road will take you to the bus stop to Valletta or back to the Għar Dalam car park.



Common Starling



Cetti's Warbler

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MAP **Victor Falzon**

2-3.10.2021. We hosted two events to mark the EuroBirdwatch21 weekend. The first was a bird ringing demonstration at Ghadira Nature Reserve. Once the stormy weather cleared, we managed to capture a Common Kingfisher that had been ringed in Slovakia. Our second event was a family picnic and birdwatching afternoon at the popular birders' spot at the top of Buskett woodland, where we saw Honey-buzzards, Marsh-harriers, a Sparrowhawk and an exceptional number of Hobbies.



Alexandr Krushinsky

Alex Brozhko



18.09.2021. To mark World Clean-Up Day, BirdLife Malta joined the Ministry of Environment's Saving Our Blue campaign for a beach clean-up at Malta's largest, most populous sandy beach, Ghadira Bay. We sifted the sand and found lots of microplastics, recyclables, general waste and thousands of cigarette butts!

Alexandr Krushinsky



24-25.09.2021. BirdLife Malta joined forces with Kids Dig Science to put on a powerful puppeteering performance as part of this year's Science in the City Festival. This combination of theatrical arts and conservation science really connected the children to the issues faced by the Yelkouan Shearwaters of Malta's cliffs in an engaging and fun way. Following the performance, the children took part in some workshops led by BirdLife Malta's education team, where we learnt more about the threats that face Malta's seabird species.

Woolchie from Hungary



30.09.2021. To mark World Turtle-dove Day, throughout the month of September we had members of the public send in their Turtle-dove artworks. We received submissions from around the world and exhibited them at Ghadira Nature reserve during the EuroBirdwatch21 weekend. This creative campaign raised global awareness of the threats faced by the European Turtle-doves.

Belinda Hodder



10.10.2021. October's Walk and Talk was the most popular yet, with around 100 people joining. BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team joined the group as we wandered the beautiful landscape of Majjistral Park in wild and ever-changing weather. Albeit often wet and windy, we all had a wonderful time being exposed to the elements in nature. We met in the visitor centre after the walk for a well-deserved cup of tea and chinwag. It was a perfect occasion for getting away from the stresses of urban life and utilise nature as a space to clear our heads. We also host Walk and Talks in our reserves; September's was held at Simar Nature Reserve and November's at Foresta 2000.

Abbie Ferrar



14.10.2021. As part of Erasmus Days 2021, BirdLife Malta took some of our European Solidarity Corps volunteers to Salina Nature Reserve to clean a small area of shrubbery by the adjacent road. Despite the area being small, we managed to collect four full black bags and one full recycling bag worth of rubbish!

Alexandr Krushinsky



27.10.2021. BirdLife Malta's FALKO youth group is back! For our first event we hosted a nature walk around stunning Buskett. Stopping at a popular birding spot to do some birdwatching. The event kicked off with an unexpected rescue mission. One of the participants spotted a Common Kestrel behaving strangely, after closer inspection it was found to be injured with a broken wing. We worked together to capture it safely and handed the bird over to our conservation team.



30.10.2021. BirdLife Malta's Klabb Huttat members joined us at our Salina Nature Reserve to celebrate Halloween. We learnt about the past of the 16th Century salt pans, as well as learning all about nocturnal wildlife, like bats and moths. Everyone had a lot of fun!



21.11.2021. Our Salina Nature Reserve Manager, Manuel Mallia, gave an informative presentation about the history and biodiversity of our 16th Century salt pans' protected habitat to a group of around 60 people. We all then headed out to the Salini and Burmarrad countryside for a lovely 8km nature walk through the valley. It was a delightful Sunday morning and everyone is looking forward to the next nature walk, arranged by BirdLife Malta's Events and Activities Group.



23.11.2021. BirdLife Malta's Falko youth group enjoyed a nature walk around the beautiful Foresta 2000 as the sun was setting. We saw a gorgeous sunset over the northern cliffs of Malta, and as day turned to night, we observed nocturnal wildlife come to life, like bats and moths. Everyone is very excited for the next nature walk!



24.11.2021. To mark our successful Teach, Inspire and Protect (TIP) Erasmus+ project drawing to a conclusion, we held a multiplier event at the pilot school, Mgarr Primary. Here we had talks from the project's leaders, and afterwards we saw the project in action as we toured the school grounds and saw the pupils enjoying all of their new outside learning spaces.



04.12.2021. To celebrate Christmas, we invited our Klabb Huttat members to join us at Simar Nature Reserve for some festive arts and crafts. Using foraged pinecones, we created some lovely Christmas decorations. We also made Christmas gifts for Malta's birds, by making edible garlands out of popcorn and apples.

20.11.2021. Our Klabb Huttat members enjoyed a stroll immersed in nature in the twilight hours of the day. We met as the sun was setting and experienced the atmospheric shift that comes with the diurnal wildlife going to sleep and nocturnal wildlife coming alive. We investigated the shrubbery for sleeping Chameleons and scanned the night sky for bats.





Caged. Uncaged.

A tall pile of squashed *gabjetti*. Gabjetti are tiny cages used to contain decoy songbirds that trappers use to lure wild birds to their infernal clapnets. Several trappers caught by the police catching birds illegally had their gear confiscated. The decoy birds were passed to BirdLife Malta to be checked for health, and then ringed and released, like the lucky Hawfinch pictured below.

This sad pile of cages – here awaiting transfer to the recycling heap – is testament to humanity's irrepressible urge to trap and imprison wildlife, a practice that should long have been consigned to history.

