

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 71 • March 2022



 60
BirdLife
1962 MALTA 2022

It's been 60 years!

You may have heard it by now: BirdLife Malta turned 60 this year!

This milestone made me look back to the beginning of the organisation. I browsed through old Council minutes and faded photographs, and I realised how many people have contributed to what we are today, and to all the achievements we have had over the decades: a solid educational programme in schools, the eradication of Robin trapping, the creation and management of four nature reserves, a scientific bird ringing scheme, relentless advocacy mainly focused on hunting, trapping and overdevelopment. And more than 50 years of studying our beloved seabirds. Not to mention the thousands of injured birds rehabled and released back into the wild.

My respect to all those involved – from the founders of the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS), past Presidents and Council members, CEOs and their teams, and hundreds of

volunteers and supporters, both Maltese and foreign – is immense. This respect shifts into responsibility because our mission is still very relevant today. We need to continue working with improved efficiency and effectiveness in our education work, our scientific studies and stakeholder engagement, with proper advocacy skills to keep having a positive impact for nature, biodiversity and people.

I am honoured and privileged to lead a very dynamic team, and I appreciate the trust of the Council who are instrumental in the strategic and directional decisions taken from time to time. BirdLife Malta is confident because of its values, its team and its supporters; because of its partnership with BirdLife International and support from other Partners, like RSPB (UK), NABU (Germany) and VBN (Netherlands).

One other vital part of BirdLife Malta is our valued members. There aren't enough words to emphasise the importance of our membership. Our members are not only the



backbone of BirdLife Malta, they also play a motivational factor, as well as contribute with financial support.

In view of all this I trust you will sustain your membership and support in BirdLife Malta for many years to come, and to urge others to join. Thank you.

Mark Sultana
CEO

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Back into the wild!



Short-eared Owl



Eurasian Sparrowhawk

In February, BirdLife Malta's conservation team released a fully rehabled Eurasian Sparrowhawk at Għadira Nature Reserve, and a Short-eared Owl on Kemmuna. Both protected raptors had been shot during the last autumn hunting season and had sustained broken wings. The female Sparrowhawk was rescued on 1 November 2021 in Ramla (Gozo) and was the first of this species to be successfully rehabilitated. The female Short-eared Owl was found in Birżebbuġa on 19 November. In December we also released four protected Common Kestrels at Għadira. The birds had been found in Birżebbuġa, Wied is-Sewda, Haż-Żabbar and Ramla (Gozo), all with shotgun injuries. These releases highlight the vital work of our dedicated conservation team, a deserving relief after a long autumn full of tragedy, as hunters continue to decimate our birds.

Belinda Hodder

BirdLife Malta Council Darryl Grima (President) • Norman Chetcuti (Treasurer) • Denise Casolani (Council Secretary) • James Aquilina • Kathleen Galea • Nicholas Galea • Eurydike Kovacs • Caldon Mercieca • Paul Portelli • Raphael Soler • Steve Zammit Lupi (members) **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) • Many Russo (LIFE PanPuffinus! Project Manager) • Janet Borg (Office Coordinator)

A year of rampant killing

Illegal killing of protected birds in Malta remained rampant in 2021. Records show that in 2021 the number of protected birds known to BirdLife Malta as having been shot stood at 181. This figure is only a small fraction of the actual amount, as it only represents injured or dead birds found by members of the public and passed to us or the police. Thousands more were shot down and retrieved by the culprits, mainly for taxidermy. The figure confirms an upward trend in the past four years (604 birds) when compared to the previous four (190 birds). This confirms that the Prime Minister, his Cabinet and the relevant authorities are not taking illegal hunting and trapping seriously, even though the European Commission began legal action against Malta on this issue and on the scam 'scientific research' finch-trapping derogation. In a press release issued following the end of the autumn hunting season (which ran from 1 September 2021 to 31 January 2022), we called on both main political parties to stop being spineless with law-breakers and to address illegal killing and trapping seriously.

Dead Little Egret – one of last year's hunting casualties



Trapping seasons closed

The autumn 2021 trapping season for Golden Plover, which started on 1 November 2021, ended on 3 January 2022, seven days before it was due. In a statement, the Wild Birds Regulation Unit announced that the bag limit for Golden Plover had been reached and the season was being closed with immediate effect. Meanwhile, another trapping season for Song Thrush that ran from 20 October ended on 31 December, while a third season was the infamous smokescreen finch 'scientific study'. The scam ran from 20 October to 20 December, and landed Malta again in hot water with the European Court of Justice.



For our Environment: from Words to Action!

In the first week of March BirdLife Malta joined other eNGOs to put forward nine key environmental demands which were sent to all political parties and candidates running for office in the 2022 General Election. The proposals presented by a united front of environmental NGOs were followed up with press releases, articles and press conferences, to highlight the lack of tangible and practical solutions in electoral manifestos to safeguard the quality of life of all residents of the Maltese Islands. The nine topics covered by these demands are: Governance, Climate Change, Sustainable Mobility, Urban Development, Rural Policy, Habitat and Biodiversity, Marine Areas, Agriculture and Food Systems, and Waste Management. The full text can be found in the news section of our website.



BirdLife Malta turns 60!

In 2022 BirdLife Malta celebrates 60 years of work and achievements. On 25 January 1962 BirdLife Malta (then known as the Malta Ornithological Society, or MOS) was born. In a press release – appropriately issued on 25 January this year – we expressed how this year will be a time to reflect on the past 60 years, to reinforce our success stories, to celebrate the beauty of birds and nature, and to look to the future and what challenges it will bring. As the oldest and largest environmental organisation in Malta, BirdLife Malta pledges to remain the flag-bearer of nature protection and to be at the front line to push for improvements in the country's approach to biodiversity. We also launched a special anniversary logo that we will be using throughout this year.



An empty promise?

Following the massacre of protected Flamingoes at Qawra Point last year, Environment Minister Aaron Farrugia publicly stated the site will be made off limits to hunters. It seems, however, that he failed to find support from the rest of the Government to push this pledge through. The site remains a bird-killing black spot to this day.

Hands off school green spaces!

BirdLife Malta joined the Marsaxlokk community in opposing plans by the Local Council to build a community centre right inside their primary school's garden. For many years BirdLife Malta has helped schools create nature-friendly green spaces within their grounds. Studies show that such spaces provide opportunity for outdoor learning through nature and are linked with students' mental and physical health and well-being. Our *Gonna Dinja Waħda* projects in schools connect children with nature, which is the exact opposite of the Marsaxlokk Council plans. Following our participation in a protest held by Marsaxlokk residents, children and other NGOs, we formally submitted our objection to the development application and called on the Council to withdraw the plans and leave the school alone. We also objected to ERA's weak position on the issue.

STOP PRESS

Thanks to overwhelming pressure from civil society these obscene plans have now been withdrawn!

Desirée Falzon



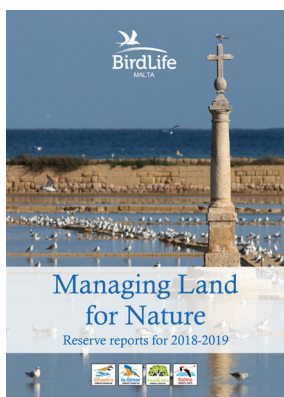
BirdLife Malta has partnered with several schools to set up nature-friendly enclaves within their grounds

Major loophole in hunting penalty system

In February 2022, the Government announced a penalty point system for certain hunting and trapping offences. Law breakers who accumulate 12 points or more over a two-year period will forfeit their licence for one year. At first glance this looked like a good move that would deal with those who constantly break the law. But unfortunately the Government accepted the hunting lobby's suggestion that not all licences be suspended, but only the one on which the penalties are incurred. This of course creates a gaping loophole that benefits poachers. Unlike the driving system, which bans a person from driving any vehicle on accumulating 12 penalty points, the new hunting system will only ban a poacher from practising that particular licence: yet another gift from a Government that continues to bend backwards to please hunters.

Reserves Report out

BirdLife Malta has published its *Managing Land for Nature* comprehensive report in relation to work at the four sites under our management, i.e. Simar, Ghadira, Foresta 2000 and Salina. Managing a site for wildlife while at the same time maximising its educational potential is a fine balancing act, and one that BirdLife Malta has done successfully for many years. The document covers the period 2018–2019 and includes reports on land management and improvement, education work and visitor activities, bird sightings and ringing. The report is for sale (€6) from our nature reserves (also available on our online shop).



An SOx-free sea

At a COP22 meeting in Antalya in December 2021, Mediterranean countries agreed to submit a proposal to the International Maritime Organisation to designate the Mediterranean Sea a



Alexandr Krushinsky

Air pollution from ships at Grand Harbour

sulphur-oxide (SOx)-free area for ships. In 2025, the Med is set to become an Emission Control Area (ECA), which will oblige ships entering the Med to switch to a cleaner fuel. The agreement was reached thanks to the great work of the Barcelona Convention parties and civil society pressure. Having for years been on an international team of NGOs advocating for an ECA in the Med, BirdLife Malta welcomes the decision. We also support a plan that will lead to the Med also becoming a nitrogen-oxide (NOx)-free ECA. While Malta did not declare its position on the motion, we sent a letter to Environment Minister Aaron Farrugia prior to the vote, requesting that Malta be on the right side of history and support the motion.

Archbishop at Simar



Ian Noel Pace (Archdiocese of Malta)

Mgr Scicluna meeting volunteering assistants at Simar Nature Reserve

Environmental protection through nature reserves was discussed with the Archbishop of Malta during a visit by H.E. Mgr Charles J Scicluna to Simar Nature Reserve. On 5 December 2021 His Excellency was welcomed by BirdLife Malta President Darryl Grima, CEO Mark Sultana, Head of Land Management Mark Gauci and Communications Manager Nathaniel Attard. Apart from details on habitat restoration at the reserve, Mgr Scicluna was very interested to hear about the work we do in environmental protection and awareness through our many initiatives and programmes in the conservation, research and education fields. The Archbishop was taken on a tour of the nature reserve, where he showed a keen interest in the reserve flora. He met families and children visiting the reserve, as well as our volunteering assistants. He also spent time in the birdwatching hide and the bird ringing station, where he was given an explanation of bird ringing and its aims. At the end of his visit Mgr Scicluna was presented with a copy of our *Managing Land for Nature* report and our latest bird photography book by Aron Tanti.

WORDS **Ilaria Marchiori** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant

The Common Kestrel

Maltese name Spanjulett

Scientific name *Falco tinnunculus*

Length 31–37 cm

Wingspan 68–78 cm

Conservation status Least Concern

Local status

Common spring and autumn migrant. A few winter and a handful of pairs breed annually

Call

Main call a fast series of short 'kee-kee-kee-kee' notes

Behaviour

Hovers frequently with hanging tail spread like a fan

Habitat

Can occur in various habitats including open countryside, farmland, woodland and urban areas



The Common Kestrel is a medium-sized falcon with long wings and tail. Males have a grey head with a dark moustachial stripe, a grey tail lacking narrow bars, and is brick-red on the back. Females and juveniles are very similar, but the adult female is more distinctly marked above and has more heart-shaped spots which are also repeated on the sides of the belly, the juvenile being more streaked below. The Common Kestrel flies with rapid wingbeats, making occasional short glides with frequent periods of hovering, head into the wind.

The Common Kestrel is by far the most common falcon in Europe, and also widespread across Asia and Africa. In Malta it is a common spring and autumn passage migrant. A few birds winter in the Islands and every year a handful of pairs breed (or try to) in inaccessible cliffs in all three main islands. The nest is usually in a hole in the cliff overlooking the sea, where a brood of 3–5 young are raised. The breeding season is from March to July.

If left unmolested, Common Kestrels will surely breed and winter in larger quantities in Malta. Although protected, hundreds of

Common Kestrels are still shot in Malta every year, especially during migration seasons. Indeed, most of the shot injured birds brought to the attention of BirdLife Malta are of this species. Birds with slight injuries are rehabilitated by trained staff from BirdLife Malta's conservation department, and released back into the wild when fully recovered.

Common Kestrels feed mainly on small rodents, ground-living birds, frogs, lizards and large insects like beetles and grasshoppers. They are frequently seen eating their prey on the wing or on electricity poles or other roadside structures, especially in rural areas.

In Malta, the Common Kestrel can only be confused with its cousin species, the similar Lesser Kestrel (Spanjulett Sekond *Falco naumanni*), which also migrates through our Islands in spring and autumn. Lesser Kestrels are slightly smaller with shorter wings and tail, which look broader when fully spread. The call is also very different.

WORDS **Ray Galea** Field ornithologist and naturalist

Nature at our reserves

Simar



Opening hours

September to May

Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 2pm-7pm

Sun 10am-4pm

Entrance free (donations welcome)

More info at

<http://bit.ly/SimarNatureReserve>



Banded Argiope

Brimba Rrigata *Argiope trifasciata*

Spiders are statistically one of the things that humans fear most. Pity, considering what silk-spinning marvels these animals are. Hundreds of species occur in Malta, one of our largest being the Banded Argiope. The female's body can grow to a respectable 25mm, not including the long spindly black-and-orange legs. They spin large sturdy orbs – usually in gaps in leafy shrubs – in which they trap a variety of flying insects, their favourite prey appearing to be wasps. If winters are not too wild, females can survive into the following spring. But just in case tragedy strikes, they wisely lay one or two batches of eggs, which the mother diligently encloses in neat silk pouches and suspends on an extension of the web nearby.



Victor Falzon

Female Banded Argiope on her orb

Borage

Fidloqqom *Borago officinalis*

Borage is a beautiful plant that in (not too) olden days was much sought for its medicinal properties. Borage starts out life in autumn by growing a huddle of rather large, bristly dark green leaves on equally bristly stalks. You would naturally expect this bulky shrub to have large bulky flowers too, but instead it opens these small, dainty down-facing flowers of the most delicate blue. Due to the nature of our soil, blue is a scarce colour in our flora – no wonder blue flowers catch the eye of nature lovers. Apparently, Borage flowers also catch the eye of nectar-seeking insects, especially Honey-bees, which seem to hold Borage nectar in very high regard.



Desirée Falzon

Borage

Common Reed-warbler

Bufula tal-Qasab *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

The Common Reed-warbler is a tiny but amazing bird. It doesn't just migrate across the Med, it also crosses the entire Sahara desert to spend winter in Central Africa; and then flies all the way back to Europe in spring. But a very few pairs don't fly all the way to mainland Europe. Instead, they stop and nest . . . in tiny Malta! Now there's very little suitable habitat for Reed-warblers in our dry overcrowded island, as these birds like marshy places with ponds and reedbeds. But that's exactly the kind of habitat that flourishes at Simar. Since the early 1990s BirdLife Malta has managed this site in a way that affords reed-loving species such as Reed-warblers a spot where to rest and shelter, and perhaps raise a family in peace.



Avon Tant

Common Reed-warbler

Making nature accessible to everyone

Did you know there are 466 million people who are Deaf or hard of hearing in the world? Did you know that a further 300 million people are blind or have a visual impairment? Thanks to increased economic and social integration, people with disabilities nowadays participate more regularly in nature-related activities, but there are still many barriers in their way. Despite numerous commendable initiatives, more needs to be done to achieve universal accessibility – this is especially so when exploring nature.

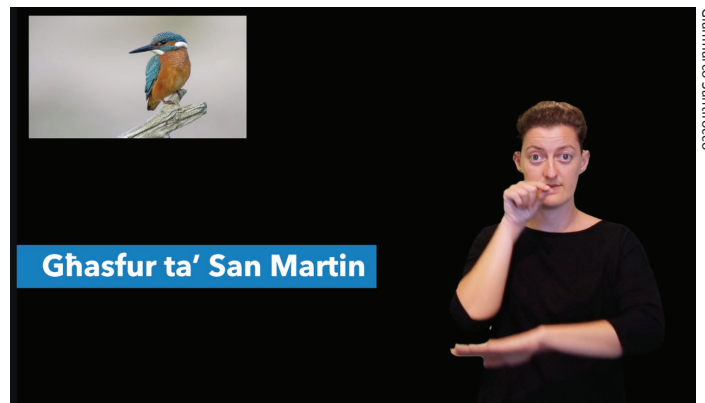
In collaboration with our European partners, BirdLife Malta is working to alter this. This year, we will be concluding two Erasmus+ projects aimed at making nature more accessible to Deaf people and blind or visually impaired primary school children. These projects have been a step forward in ensuring that everyone has equal access to learning and connecting with nature. Furthermore, they will increase teachers' and nature reserve wardens' confidence in their ability to offer sensory activities using nature as a tool.

Providing Deaf people with ecotourism options

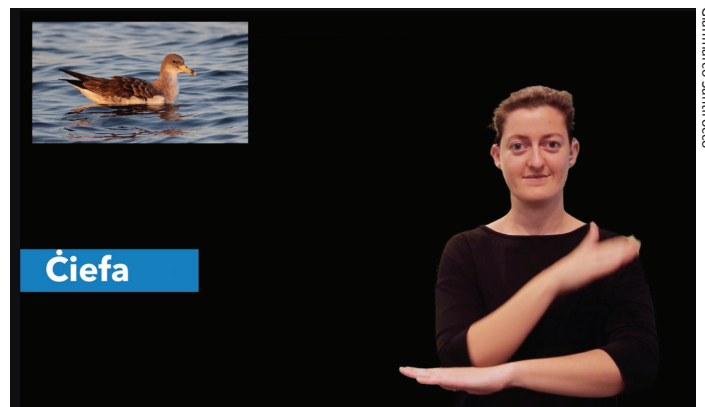


After three years of intensive and interesting collaboration with the Deaf People Association Malta and foreign partners, *Birds and Nature Open for Full Fruition, Empowering Everyone* (BANOFFEE) will come to an end. This project is significant for accessibility because each participant has brought their area of expertise. SEO (BirdLife Spain) specialises in nature education, LPO (BirdLife

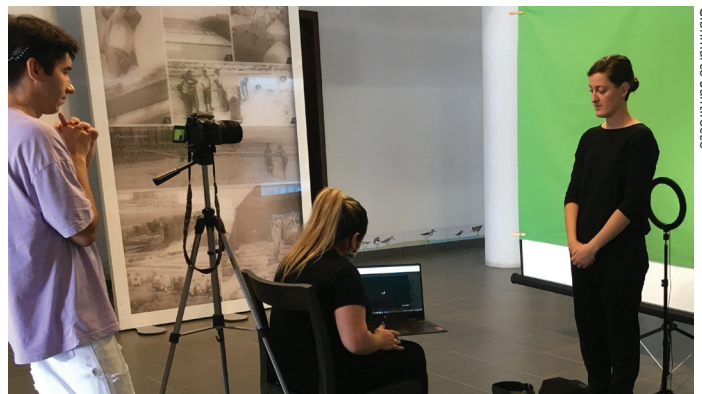
France) specialises in making nature reserves accessible to the Deaf, and HOS (BirdLife Greece) specialises in nature education and nature reserve conversions. And Spanish (AVSiE) and Italian (Abile Mente) Deaf associations have the expertise in developing sign language in their native tongues.



Sign for Common Kingfisher in Maltese



Sign for Scopoli's Shearwater in Maltese



All signs were filmed at our Salina Nature Reserve

The project aimed to improve the training of nature tourism professionals by developing the essential resources needed to allow nature to reach its full potential. Each country has its own native sign language, which is the mother tongue for Deaf people, much like spoken language is for hearing people. There were no precise signs in sign language to identify all bird species prior to this project. To address this, we collaborated with the partnership to design signage for 60 Mediterranean bird species, as well as videos for nature reserves.

We've also been hard at work developing instructions for nature reserve workers so that they can make their locations more accessible to Deaf people while also learning more about their culture. Anyone interested in learning more can access online for free all the manuals and videos created during this project.

(Videos of the signs will be available free on www.banoffee.eu)

Resources for blind and visually impaired children



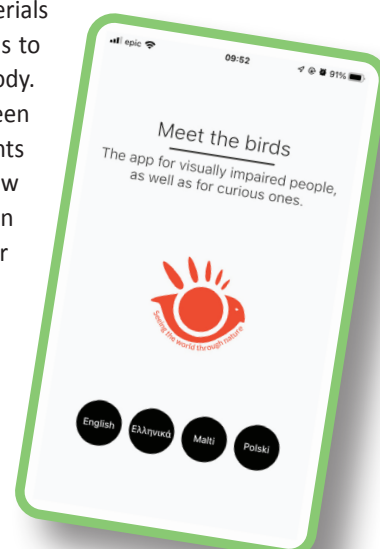
After two years of outstanding work to aid teachers of blind and visually impaired students, the *Seeing the World Through Nature* (StWtN) initiative will come to an end. OTOP (BirdLife Poland), BirdWatch Ireland and BirdLife Cyprus, all experts in nature education and

teacher training, collaborated on this initiative. This is due to their involvement with the Spring Alive project. Spring Alive is an ongoing multi-national environmental education project focused on migratory birds. Thanks to the Polish Association of the Blind

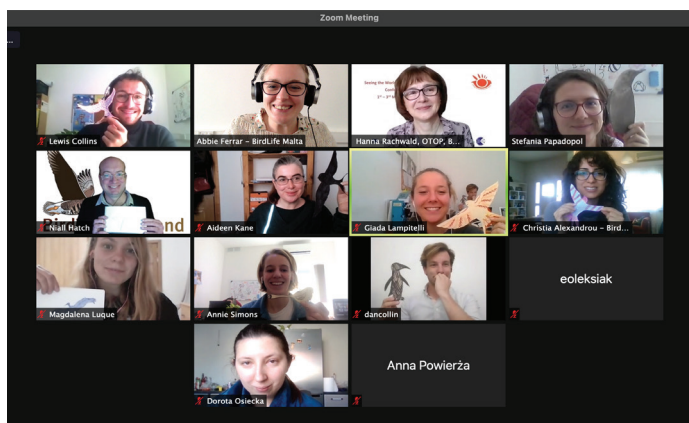
and their invaluable experiences and knowledge, we have learnt how to adapt nature-based educational resources accordingly.

Thanks to this motivating and inspiring relationship, we were able to successfully build curriculum-based nature resources for teachers concentrating on children using their other senses. Workshops have been held to promote these materials and show educators how easy it is to make nature accessible to everybody. A free smartphone app has also been created to help anyone who wants to learn more about birds and how to identify them. It's easier than ever to recognise the birds in your neighbourhood by following a few simple steps and listening to their calls!

Meet the Birds is a free app that can be downloaded on any IOS or Android phone.



The *Meet the Birds* app



Inclusivity is easy if you have the tools and knowledge on how to do so

Nature accessible to all

Nature influences our moods and our nervous and immune systems, and by simply seeing or hearing it can help us relax. The most important lesson we have learnt from these projects is that although experiencing the world differently than a hearing or seeing person, connecting with nature is still possible and important for Deaf and blind or visually impaired people. Sensory activities in nature are simple to set up and can be enjoyed by anybody.

Thanks to Erasmus+ funding, we have been able to create the necessary materials to give these communities more access to nature.



Seeing Nature

Reduces anxiety and stress levels



Hearing Nature

1 minute = 30% more relaxed



Smelling Nature

Can lower heart rate and restore focus



Touching Nature

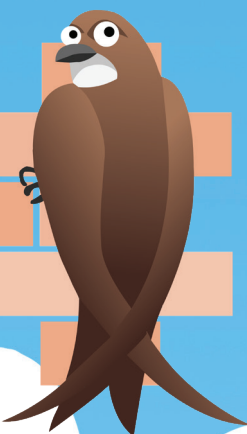
Stimulates your brain and calms you



Tasting Nature

Lifts your mood and triggers memories

WORDS **Abbie Ferrar** BirdLife Malta Education Officer



Spring Alive is our campaign in collaboration with BirdLife International Partners from 40 countries. Spring Alive encourages people to take interest in nature and conservation through the arrival of spring.



It's easy to take part. All you need do is observe and record the spring arrival of any of these six migratory bird species:

**White Stork Barn Swallow
Common Swift Sand Martin
Common Cuckoo European Bee-eater**

Spring is Alive in Malta

By reporting your sightings of our Spring Alive birds you will help conservation by helping us create a real-time map of the incredible journeys these birds make every year. Report your sightings here:

<https://bit.ly/SpringAliveSightings>



Check out our events pages for upcoming Spring Alive themed events to learn more about migration.



project sponsor
HEIDELBERGCEMENT

Surveying the flora of Foresta 2000

Situated on the south-facing slope of Marfa Ridge overlooking Mellieha Bay, Foresta 2000 is spread over 23ha and stretches almost from the east to the west coast. The area is the result of an afforestation project aimed to restore Mediterranean woodland, a habitat sorely lacking in Malta. A management plan provides for the creation of a mosaic of different habitats which include woodland and maquis, and the preservation of existing areas of garrigue, clay and rocky steppe, and small pockets of farmland for a richer biodiversity.

Around the year 2000, BirdLife Malta's brainchild started becoming a reality and, with help from Parks Malta and Din l-Art Helewa, led to the planting of over 23,000 native trees and shrubs. Twenty-odd years later the results are self-evident. Foresta today has several areas of densely settled slowly-maturing forest. Not only are the young trees and shrubs flourishing autonomously, but natural seed dispersal by wind, rain and animals is resulting in self-regeneration of the woodland! Together with the older specimens, the young trees and shrubs play a key role in providing perfect ecosystems for many invertebrates but also for several birds, reptiles and mammals.

Flora surveys

Foresta 2000 falls inside a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within the European Natura 2000 network. To assess the conservation status of the flora, BirdLife Malta carries out regular systematic flora surveys. With the support of botanist Timothy J. Tabone, we tackled two areas at Foresta in our most recent surveys. In May 2021 we focused on the clay steppe at It-Taflija, while in February 2022 we surveyed Is-Sdieri, an area characterised by steep abandoned terraced fields. Both monitoring exercises produced species of ecological interest.

It-Taflija (May 2021)

During this survey we found specimens of **Hairless (or Smooth) Goatsbeard** *Geropogon hybridus* (Lehjet il-Bodbod). It is a native

and scarce annual species that occurs in clay steppe habitat. Its flowers are pink to purplish-pink and are produced in April. In May, the ripe seeds are clustered in a pappus (seed head), and dispersed by the wind.

Is-Sdieri (February 2022)

In February we made an unexpected discovery: a few specimens of the rare **Chickling Vetch** *Lathyrus cicera* (Ġilbiena tas-Serp), a member of the pea family. From Feb–Apr this native low-growing annual produces legume-shaped flowers tinged brick red and purple. The characteristic leaves are each made up of two leaflets 3–6cm long. This plant prefers rocky ground, rich in soil, and occurs in fallow fields or field tracks, in garrigues and in waste ground. This species is declining in Malta due to loss of habitat.

Another increasingly scarce species we discovered in the terraces is the **Hairy Plantain** *Plantago bellardi* (no Maltese name), another native annual. This plant blooms from March to May and has very inconspicuous flowers. It grows very close to the ground and its leaves can reach 20cm in length. It occurs in degraded grounds, mainly on dry and sandy soil. It is very rare and is in fact listed in the *Red Data Book of the Maltese Islands*.

Such discoveries are testament to the importance of assessing the ecological status of our nature reserves, especially in a period characterised by ecological threats like climate change, habitat loss and anthropogenic pressure. This makes it ever more necessary to track the development of delicate ecosystems such as the ones at Foresta 2000. BirdLife Malta aims to assess the potential impact and shape the management plan accordingly.

WORDS and PHOTOS **Alice Sicoli** Foresta 2000 Managing Warden



Seed head of Hairless Goatsbeard



Chickling Vetch in flower



Foliage of Hairy Plantain

Life on the rocks

The garrigue haven of Pembroke

Spring is here! The cold is behind us and the unbearable heat is yet to come, so now is the perfect time to explore one of the island's best and most accessible walking spots, which is also rich in Maltese history. And if you're brave enough, a dip in the sea!

Typical coastal garrigue at Pembroke, with Madliena Tower dominating the area

Albeit a stone's throw away from the urban hustle and bustle of Paceville, the Pembroke coast boasts a vast landscape of protected nature. Nestled in the garrigue lies a plethora of wild flora, which lures an abundance of insects which, in turn, attract a wide range of birds. Springtime provides us with blooming flowers, buzzing pollinators, and the famous northward migration of birds from Africa to Europe.

Flowers

At first glance, the Mediterranean garrigue habitat may look rocky and barren, but on closer examination you will notice an array

of wildflowers of various colours, shapes and sizes. These would include the gorgeous Greater Snapdragon (*Papoċċi Hamra*), the fragrant Mediterranean Thyme (*Sagħtar*), the medicinal blue-flowered Borage (*Fidloqqom*), the intricate Branched Asphodel (*Berwieq*), the endemic Maltese Spurge (*Tengħud tax-Xagħri*) and various bindweeds (*leblieb*). Pembroke is also famed for its abundance of wild orchids, such as the Fan-lipped Orchid (*Orkida Hamra*), the Milky Orchid (*Orkida tat-Tikek*) and the Common Pyramidal Orchid (*Orkida Piramidali*). A new species of orchid was recently discovered at Pembroke, and so far nowhere else in the country.

Lewis Collins



Greater Snapdragon

Lewis Collins



Branched Asphodel

Victor Falzon



Maltese Spurge



A flock of migrating Greater Flamingoes

Birds

With its rich biodiversity of flora and insects, this Natura 2000 site attracts a variety of migrating birds, such as Northern Wheatear (*Kuda*) and Black-eared Wheatear (*Kuda Dumnikana*), maybe even a Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush (*Ġanbublu*). Waders often frequent the coastline, such as Eurasian Oystercatchers (*Gallina tal-Baħar*), Black-winged Stilts (*Fras-servjent*) and Common Sandpipers (*Pispisella*). Greater Flamingoes (*Fjamingu*) are also sometimes seen migrating, and of course plenty of gulls along the coast too. Pembroke is also a good – and often under-rated – location for sea-watching. Recently a plunging of Northern Gannets (*Sula*) were spotted from here, causing quite a stir.

Pembroke is also home for resident birds, including the Blue Rock-thrush (*Merill*), our national bird, which often nests in historical and other old buildings. The area is also excellent for Sardinian Warbler (*Bufula Sewda*) and Spectacled Warbler (*Bufula Hamra*), which breed in the thick shrubs.

History

The area boasts historical significance too. Madliena Tower stands halfway through this walk, making it the perfect place for a break and refreshment. This De Redin tower was built in 1658 by the Order of St John and was used as a watchtower. In 1741, a fougasse



A male Northern Wheatear

was dug into the ground next to it. This would have been used as a primitive but effective cannon to protect the Maltese coast from unwanted arrivals, such as pirates. There are information boards near the landmarks with more detail.

WORDS **Lewis Collins** BirdLife Malta Events & Outreach Assistant



20 Feb 2022 For the very first event of our newly formed **Kids Birding Club** we welcomed children aged 8–13 to Salina Nature Reserve to watch bird ringing and learn more about gulls at our reserve. This club will give keen young bird enthusiasts a chance to learn about birdwatching and becoming nature protectors. It's a great way for these kids to meet like-minded children of their own age. We hope these young birders will grow into a strong group of friends who meet regularly and help us fight for a better tomorrow. If you know a budding young birdwatcher who would like to join this group, contact us on education@birdlifemalta.org.

Lewis Collins



11 Dec 2021 BirdLife Malta's Falko youth group went on a wild and windy walk around the stunning Majjistral Nature and History Park. The views from atop the headland are breathtaking – paired with the luscious greenery of native flora, this makes Majjistral the perfect spot for a weekend hike. Regardless of the blustery and changeable weather, we all thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon spent in nature.

Belinda Hodder



12 Dec 2021 Our Blooming Minds team partook in a wonderfully festive Walk and Talk event. Hosted at our Salina Nature Reserve, we had some insightful, heartfelt and powerful talks about the inspiration and origins of Walk and Talk, as well as the proven benefits of nature on mental well-being. Also, a raffle was organised with a variety of prizes donated by Walk and Talk, BirdLife Malta, ReRoot and Holy Wines. A truly inspiring occasion.

Abbie Ferrar



16 Jan 2022 Our Blooming Minds team participated in the first Walk and Talk of 2022, this time in the beautiful south of Malta. We met at St Thomas Bay and headed off along the Munxar path towards Xrobb l-Għagin to admire the view of Il-Hofra l-Kbira. Walking along the coast we welcomed the warm winter sun, songs of wintering birds and stunning views.



Giada Lamprelli

24-28 Jan 2022 We were delighted to team up with Esplora in a virtual storytelling event for their STEM Careers Fair. We engaged children with a story of a newborn Osprey named Belle who, step by step, faced her first migration. This fed the curiosity of the children who asked lots of questions about birds and nature.

Lewis Collins



30 Jan 2022 BirdLife Malta's Events & Activities Committee successfully led a 7.5km nature walk from Birzebbuga through Has-Saptan Valley, then on to Il-Kappella ta' Loretu in Gudja and back to Birzebbuga. The walk was fully-booked and everyone who attended enjoyed very much the country walk in the warmth of the winter sun.

Alice Tribe



05 Feb 2022 We invited people along to our Ghadira Nature Reserve to showcase the importance of protected wetland habitats in Malta and their global significance. This activity marked the international occasion of World Wetlands Day. We gave guided tours, which were extremely popular with the many visitors who joined us. We had over 150 people come and revel in the thriving biodiversity of Ghadira. Be sure to visit our other protected wetlands at Simar and Salina Nature Reserves.



13 Feb 2022 February's Walk and Talk took place along the Dar Ta' Pultu Trail located not far from Ghar Dalam Cave and Museum. Everyone who joined were surprised to see this little-known nature spot. We started the walk along the main road from Ghar Dalam before making our way to the trail. We were welcomed with breathtaking green views and wintering bird song.



19 Feb 2022 Our Falko youth group came together for a wildflower walk along the coast from Pembroke to Baħar iċ-Ġaħħaq. Along this stretch of coastland is an expanse of coastal garrigue habitat that harbours a variety of wildflowers, including orchids and aromatic shrubs. With the help of a wildflower ID guide we identified a variety of flowers and enjoyed a nice walk along the coast.



26 Feb + 02 Mar 2022 Making Homes for Foresta 2000! This two-day event allowed children to get directly involved with conservation and reserve management. With the help of our Salina staff, the kids built their own nest boxes, which were then installed at our Foresta 2000 Nature Reserve. They were given a tour of the reserve and watched their nest boxes installed, and enjoyed some fun activities in nature.



27 Feb 2022 Our Events and Activities Committee led another successful and enjoyable walk along a circular route around Gharghur, visiting Wied id-Dis, Madliena Heights, San Giovanni Battery, Wied il-Faham, Wied Anġlu, Victoria Lines and Top of the World. Everyone enjoyed this lovely Sunday morning stroll.

Upcoming events

2 Apr 2022

Our seabirds team will be leading an exciting night hike for Falko and hosting an informative talk to raise awareness about light pollution in Malta at L-Irdum tal-Madonna. An activity in collaboration with Din l-Art Helewa.

22+30 Apr 2022

Calling all mini scientists! Join us for a two-day workshop for Earth Day where you will learn about camera traps and other wildlife watching techniques.

24 Apr 2022

Another Events and Activities Committee nature walk. Join us on this circular walk around Xemxija and Majjistral.

3 Apr 2022

Come to Salina Nature Reserve and have a look at all the seabird artwork we have received from the public, helping to raise awareness of the threats that seabirds face.

7 May 2022

Join us for a night walk in Gozo and learn about the effects of light pollution on local wildlife.

3 Apr 2022

Our Blooming Minds team joins our longterm partner Walk and Talk for a trip to Gozo to walk along the stunning Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs.

13-15 May 2022

Join our reserve staff this weekend and help make Malta and the Mediterranean cleaner.

10 Apr 2022

Our Events and Activities Committee are organising a nature walk to Wied il-Ġħasel and Burmarrad. These walks are always popular so book a place quickly!

14 May 2022

Families are invited to join us for bird ringing demonstrations and to learn about this research technique.

16 Apr 2022

Our Easter event is back! Join us for some Easter EggCitement!

21 May 2022

Falko youth group will be venturing across to Gozo to walk among the wildflowers before the summer sun dries out the land.

Want to join an event?

Get more details at
<http://bit.ly/joinanevent>
or email
events@birdlifemalta.org
or call
+356 2134 7646

21 May 2022

We will be joined by other environmental NGOs at Salina Nature Reserve for a fun-filled open day event to celebrate European Maritime Day and International Day of Biological Diversity.

Want to help us continue our work?

Join at <http://bit.ly/joinBLM>
Donate at <http://bit.ly/donate-to-birdlifemalta>
Support at <http://bit.ly/Becomeasupporter>
Volunteer at <http://bit.ly/volunteerwithBLM>

Do not disturb!

Many people from around the world flock to Valletta to enjoy its history and art. But it's not only people who make Valletta their destination. Every year, thousands of White Wagtails spending winter in Malta flock to Valletta every evening to sleep in the large trees nestled in St John and Great Siege Squares. BirdLife carries out annual counts of this large roost – the latest census, on 22 January 2022, logged over 13,000 birds!

Many people are not aware of this annual phenomenon occurring right over their heads, so for many years BirdLife Malta has raised awareness about this site, which is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) of National

Importance. The spreading of this knowledge is not only for its intrinsic value, but for the sake of the birds too. When people are informed, there is a better chance they will learn to care – perhaps care enough to reduce noise and bright lights in the area and, hopefully, prune the trees less drastically.

In recent weeks this awareness campaign reached its high point. With the support of the Valletta Local Council, BirdLife Malta put up several colourful information signs on some of the ficus trees where the White Wagtails find nightly shelter.

1

Hawnhekk jorqod iz-Zakak!

Wagtails sleep here!

- Binhar iz-Zikka Bojod jinfirxu fil-kampanja jfittxu l-ikel, imma filghaxija jingabru fi gruppi biex jorqdu f'sigar kennija. Dawn il-postijiet tal-irqad jissejhu **roosts**.
By day White Wagtails spread out in the countryside to find food. In the evening, however, they gather in groups to sleep in sheltered trees. Such places are known as roosts.
- Minn Ottubru sa Marzu, kuljum ma' nżul ix-xemx hafna Zikka Bojod jingabru fis-sigars tal-fikus li hawn f'dawn iż-żewġ pjazeż. Peress li mdawrin bil-bini dawn is-sigars jaghtu kenn tajjeb lill-ghasafar.
Every day at sundown from October to March many White Wagtails gather to sleep in the ficus trees that grow in these two squares. The trees give the birds excellent protection as they are surrounded by buildings.
- Misrah L-Assedju l-Kbir u Misrah San Ġwann huma l-ikbar roost taz-Zakak Abjad f'Malta. Hawnhekk fix-xitwa spiss jingabru iktar minn 10,000 ghasfur. Dan il-post huwa Sit Importanti għall-Ghasafar (IBA) ta' valur nazzjonali.
Great Siege Square and St John Square are the largest White Wagtail roost in Malta. In winter often more than 10,000 birds gather to sleep. The site is an Important Bird Area (IBA) of national value.

BirdLife
MALTA

VALLETTA
Città d'Iniziativa

Zakak Abjad
White Wagtail
Motacilla alba

www.birdlifemalta.org



Aron Tanti