

# Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

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# New government, same old tactics!



Since my last comment, Malta has a new government and a new Minister for Environment. New beginnings, one would hope. Unfortunately, not! We still have the same Minister for Hunting & Trapping in the Minister for Gozo. He was assigned the same role, including the control of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU) even if the law explicitly calls the Minister for Environment.

If the affront to nature and conservation was simply a matter of pride and portfolio it wouldn't really matter. It isn't. Days

after the election, a hunting season for Turtle-dove was opened, ignoring the fact that this bird is declared Vulnerable by the IUCN. Science and the EU Birds Directive were put aside for votes and political gain. After nine years in power, the Government failed to take action to verify the status of half a million stuffed birds that hunters had "declared" to hold in their possession. So the Government chickened out and gave the hunters an amnesty!

We will now see the attack on bird ringing re-ignited. WBRU will create a new ringing scheme, which will have the sole purpose of hiding yet another trapping frenzy under a pseudoscientific study.

The silver lining to all that is happening on a political level is that we are seeing a seismic shift in popular support. We see this in actions like the Save Wied Żnuber campaign, with not just NGOs but also local voices shouting against the plans

to build a mini-airstrip in Wied Żnuber. People are disenchanted by the lip service and political greenwash. They realise that concrete gardens cannot replace the wild spaces that are daily being eroded in ODZ permits handed out to speculators.

The threat to nature is real and unrelenting, but so is our resolve to protect it. This year we have already taken a number of legal actions against the Government and we plan to sustain this line of action. Similarly, we will keep lobbying within EU corridors, pushing European institutions to take action against the policies and decisions that are destroying our natural heritage.

Sixty years have passed since BirdLife Malta was set up and it is (unfortunately) more relevant today than ever before. A true voice for nature and conservation!

**Darryl Grima**  
President

## Saving Wied Żnuber



In May, BirdLife Malta joined a front of 16 NGOs to save Wied Żnuber from being turned into an airstrip for flying model aircraft! The area in question is right next to a Natura 2000 site where hundreds of pairs of Scopoli's and Yelkouan shearwaters nest, species that are highly sensitive to sound and light. We called on Prime Minister Robert Abela to honour his electoral pledge, ensure that no development takes place in Wied Żnuber and declare the area around the valley as ODZ. We participated in a joint press conference near the cliffs and also joined two public protests held on site.

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### Editorial Board

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## Spring Slaughter

Spring Watch team retrieving illegally shot Marsh-harriers

The spring hunting season 2022, which ran from 10-30 April, was an indiscriminate massacre of protected species including the European Turtle-dove. It was a season riddled with illegalities, which should warrant immediate scrutiny by the European Commission (EC). Minister Clint Camilleri knows the EC is not happy with his decision to open a spring season on the Turtle-dove; he also knows this move breached the EU Birds Directive, which specifically prohibits Turtle-dove hunting in spring due to its Vulnerable status. Without any scientific basis (but conveniently on the eve of general elections), the 2016 moratorium was lifted and 8,000+ hunters allowed to shoot Turtle-dove from 17-30 April. During the three-week season we recorded over 200 illegalities in Malta and Gozo; this was mostly possible thanks to

the efforts of our Spring Watch teams who monitored the countryside every day. A summary of the season's illegalities was issued in video form and sent to the media. Members of the public handed BirdLife Malta no less than 18 shot birds of 15 protected species; and at least another 16 birds recovered by police.

The most serious illegal hunting episode occurred on the night of 18 April with the slaughter of Western Marsh-harriers roosting in a field in Delimara. Our teams witnessed the horrible destruction of a flock of these protected birds of prey; more dead birds were later found by CABS in the same field. Within a week from the opening of the season on the red-listed Turtle-dove, we stated that the national hunting bag limit of 1,500 was exceeded, prompting the

Gozo Ministry to respond that they were monitoring the situation and that the quota had not yet been reached.

The sheer hunting intensity seen by our teams, however, indicated otherwise. The use of illegal electronic callers led to further killing. While it is a known fact that hunters deliberately under-declare shot birds so the season stays open, hunters this spring actually claimed publicly on Facebook that they could not even log in their catches on the WBRU game reporting system. No wonder there is no control on quotas. The Government's data gathering system is a total shambles, no wonder illegalities are on the rise. Comparing the number of illegally shot birds in the 2018-2022 period to the previous five years (2013-2017) the number has nearly trebled.

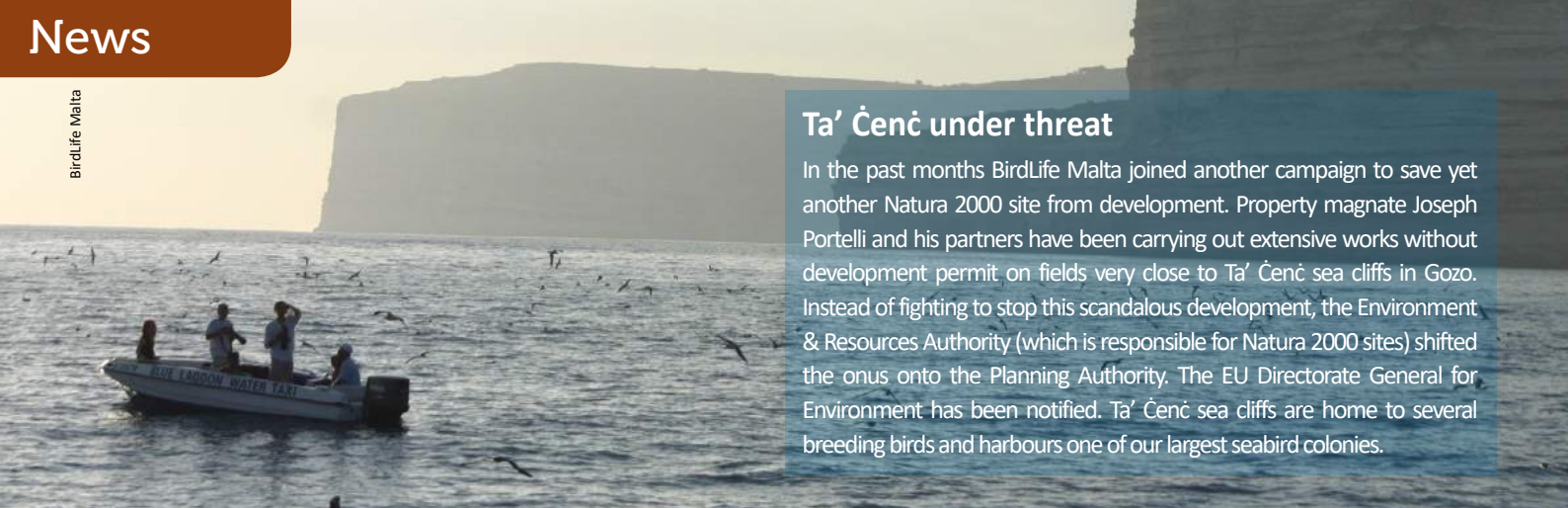
### Court action to stop spring hunt



Media briefing after filing the Warrant in Court

Following the announcement of the opening of a spring hunting season on Turtle-doves, BirdLife Malta filed a Warrant of Prohibitory Injunction in Court, requesting a judicial assessment over the manner in which this season was being permitted, and requesting an immediate closure of the season until the assessment was carried out.

We maintained that, given the IUCN's Vulnerable status of the species and the EU experts' request not to hunt Turtle-dove, Malta's Government had ignored the science simply to please the hunters. Initially the Court upheld the Warrant and set a hearing for 19 April. But the hearing was brought forward after the Government filed an urgent Court Application through the State Advocate. The case was heard just two days before the planned start of the season. The Court accepted the Government's argument that the season could not be suspended as the legal notice had already been issued and was already in force. The Court also refused our request to refer the case to the ECJ for an Opinion. While a request by FKNK to appear as party to the case was thrown out by the presiding judge, a strong presence of hunters was nonetheless noted in Court. The Warrant was revoked by Madame Justice Audrey Demicoli and the season opened as planned.



## Ta' Ċenċ under threat

In the past months BirdLife Malta joined another campaign to save yet another Natura 2000 site from development. Property magnate Joseph Portelli and his partners have been carrying out extensive works without development permit on fields very close to Ta' Ċenċ sea cliffs in Gozo. Instead of fighting to stop this scandalous development, the Environment & Resources Authority (which is responsible for Natura 2000 sites) shifted the onus onto the Planning Authority. The EU Directorate General for Environment has been notified. Ta' Ċenċ sea cliffs are home to several breeding birds and harbours one of our largest seabird colonies.

## Scandalous decisions on eve of elections



BirdLife Malta: ORNIS is a political tool in Government hands

On 16 March, an ORNIS Committee meeting was called to discuss the spring hunting season for Turtle-dove and changes to the law on taxidermy. Just hours before the meeting, however, the Government blatantly published a legal notice that practically granted an amnesty to those in possession of stuffed birds. This clearly proved that ORNIS is nothing but a tool in the Government's hands, and only there to rubber stamp decisions already taken. Above all, it ignored the legal principles of the European Directives and all scientific data and arguments. Following this scandalous move, when the Committee came to discuss this point, BirdLife Malta walked out of the meeting. In an urgent press conference the following day, we condemned ORNIS and promised a relentless campaign to stop the outrageous decisions. We will be taking all action needed to ensure the EC receives all the details about how PM Robert Abela – on the eve of general elections – ignored the country's environmental obligations and instead pandered to the hunters' greed. We will be insisting with the Commission to hasten the Infringement Procedures against Malta on spring hunting, and call on our European Partners for support to put more pressure on the Government on an international level. We will also be evaluating all legal action we can take in order to contest the Government's decisions in Court, and we will work to reopen the discussion about a second abrogative referendum on hunting.

## Assault on WBRU chief

On 11 May, an ORNIS Committee meeting was suspended after FKNK CEO Lino Farrugia physically attacked WBRU head Richard Lia. BirdLife Malta showed its solidarity with Lia and urged the Ministers concerned to suspend Farrugia permanently from ORNIS. In this way, we wanted to make clear that such obnoxious behaviour is not acceptable in modern society, let alone in government-appointed bodies. The safety and serenity of members of the Committee should be guaranteed, including those representing BirdLife Malta, who deserve to feel safe at such meetings. Farrugia eventually suspended himself from ORNIS and the hunting lobby said it would discuss the incident internally.

## Disappointing electoral campaign



BirdLife Malta press conference about the main parties' electoral proposals

A few weeks before the 2022 General Elections (26 March), BirdLife Malta stated its disappointment at the way the two main parties were focused only on fishing for hunters' and trappers' votes. They did this to the country's detriment, risking Malta being hauled again in front of the European Court of Justice about spring hunting, trapping and illegal killing of birds. For the Partit Laburista and Partit Nazzjonalista, nobody seems to matter except hunters and trappers. In a press conference held in front of the Office of the Prime Minister in Castille, BirdLife Malta briefed the media about the ORNIS Committee that was to meet later that day, during which ORNIS had clearly been instructed to remove the moratorium on Turtle-dove hunting in spring – all suspiciously close to the general elections. While all Europe protects this vulnerable bird from extinction – some countries banning its killing even in autumn – Malta insists it's okay to shoot it dead on its way to nest. Our only hope is that the EC comes down on the Government like a ton of bricks and forces us to stop these shameful antics.

## Bird ringing law in jeopardy

In May BirdLife Malta urged the Prime Minister to revisit a proposed change to the law that could jeopardize scientific bird study. The proposed change had been placed by FKNK on an ORNIS Committee meeting agenda, suggesting the formation of other bird ringing schemes in Malta that would not necessarily be affiliated to EURING. In Malta the law stipulates that licensed ringing schemes can only be those affiliated to EURING. BirdLife Malta's Ringing Scheme, set up in the mid-1960s, is affiliated with this reputable European-wide network. In a press release we stated that PM Robert Abela was being misled and we warned that non-affiliated schemes will not benefit science at all. On the contrary it will open another opportunity for abuse by third parties who just want to keep trapping birds at all costs. Following previous changes to the law, hunters and trappers can now also become licensed bird ringers after they go through the necessary training. In view of this we called on the Prime Minister to suspend further amendments to the law until there is a thorough discussion with all stakeholders. It would also avoid putting Malta into yet another embarrassing spotlight with the EC.

WORDS **Ilaria Marchiori** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant



**MALTESE NAME:** Gallozz Iswed**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Gallinula chloropus***LENGTH:** 27–31 cm**WINGSPAN:** 50–55 cm**CONSERVATION STATUS:** Secure**LOCAL STATUS:** Regular breeding resident and frequent Spring and Autumn migrant**CALL:** A variety of calls in quick, sharp bursts but also a short 'chuck' and 'kittick'**BEHAVIOUR:** Secretive, nods head while swimming; flicks tail when walking**HABITAT:** Mainly aquatic

Charles Coleiro

# The Common Moorhen

Moorhens are more often heard than seen and their call often gives away their presence even when they are hidden in dense vegetation. Although largely secretive, the Common Moorhen often ventures out to 'graze' and swim in open water. It uses various ways to find food and can be seen climbing trees, wading in shallow waters, surface feeding and even diving. Moorhens are omnivorous and feed on a variety of plant and animal material, including insects, seeds, fruit and aquatic vegetation. Due to its skulking behaviour, the Moorhen is rarely seen in flight, preferring to run into hiding, especially when disturbed.

Moorhens have a slate black plumage with browner underparts, with a white line along the flanks. Seen from the rear, a white patch is visible when the bird flicks up its tail. The most striking feature of the adult bird is the bright red yellow-tipped bill and frontal shield (a flat structure on the bird's forehead). Legs are long and green with long toes. Juveniles are grey-brown with a dirty white chin and throat and a greenish yellow bill. The downy young are black and have a red bill.

Moorhens have a widespread breeding range and occur in temperate and tropical zones of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. It is mostly a lowland species and concentrates mainly in aquatic habitats including rivers, streams, canals, ditches and lakes. It has a large European population of more than 900,000 pairs, where the overall populations are stable. The bird's conservation status has been declared Secure by BirdLife International. Southern and western populations in Europe

are mainly resident birds while those in the northeast are mostly migratory.

In the Maltese Islands the Moorhen is a frequent spring and autumn migrant. Migratory birds settle in various habitats, sometimes unrelated to water, and are not easy to spot in the countryside due to their secretive behaviour. In recent decades it established itself as a breeding resident and since the first breeding records in the 1980s the population is now about 60–80 pairs. They generally breed in localities with fresh water in Malta and Gozo but good numbers are also found in the brackish environment of Simar and Ghadira Nature Reserves.

Moorhens build a rather bulky nest, using mainly stems and leaves of reed and other vegetation, and it is normally well hidden among vegetation near water. Mating starts as early as February and continues through spring depending mostly on water levels. Resident birds often hold territories throughout the year and with the onset of the breeding season territorial 'disputes' regularly take place. Nest building is carried out by both sexes and clutch sizes vary from 1 to 15 eggs. Eggs are normally greyish/greenish white with spots and incubation lasts 18–20 days. Chicks are precocial, leaving the nest a few hours after hatching. The young stay with the adults for 6–8 weeks.

WORDS Charles Coleiro Simar Nature Reserve Warden





# Nature at our reserves

# Foresta 2000



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**More info at**

<http://bit.ly/Foresta2000NatureReserve>







Common Stonechat

## Common Stonechat

Buċaqq tax-Xitwa *Saxicola torquatus*

The Common Stonechat is a tiny bird of open countryside. But despite its diminutive size you're often made aware of its presence because its call is easy to pick out. If you hear a bird going wss-CHAKK! wss-CHAKK! look for high points around you, like a prominent stone on a rubble wall, the top of a shrub or a dry fennel stalk, and you may spot the caller. If it's a male (and if you have binoculars) you'll notice the black head and rusty breast typical of this species. Stonechats are not year-round residents in Malta but only spend winter here, foraging for insects in open fields, meadows and garrigues. A winter walk in the steppe areas of Foresta should almost guarantee a sighting – or at least a hearing.



Maltese Ferule in bloom

## Maltese Ferule

Ferla *Ferula melitensis*

The Maltese Ferule is one of our most conspicuous flowering plants. It stands head and shoulders over most other countryside flowers, indeed it often towers over us humans too. It is also very visible as it grows this profusion of ball-shaped, bright yellow flower clusters. In this way the plant advertises its pollen and its nectar to all nearby insects. The promotion seems to work, as the plant is rarely without attendant bees, ants, wasps, hover flies and small beetles. The leaves too are an eye-catching glossy green lacy affair but, unlike the related Fennel (*buzbież*), they are not scented. At Foresta, the Maltese Ferule largely grows in steppe and along the paths. Recent studies have confirmed that this species is endemic to Malta, hence the name.



Leopard Snake in its natural habitat

## Leopard Snake

Lifgħa *Zamenis situla*

Four species of snake occur in Malta. They're all harmless to us, indeed they are protected and considered beneficial (they eat lots of mice). The Leopard Snake is so called because of the handsome amber patches all over its otherwise pale body. The Maltese name *lifgħa* comes from the Arabic *afa*, a viper species that's very different from the Leopard Snake. It's a misidentification that has given Leopard Snakes bad press, since the mention of *lifgħa* reminds every Maltese brain of one unlucky snake's encounter with a certain Paul from Tarsus, whereupon the topic of venom invariably comes up and everyone shudders. The Leopard Snake occurs at Foresta, happily hunting mice and lizards, oblivious to the silly myths around it.



# Moving with the times

## A new Action Guide for Dinja Waħda



Thirty-odd years ago children found it amusing to lay traps for Robins in a special cage known as a *trabokk* which contained a live decoy. On hearing the caged Robin calling within its territory, a free Robin would fly towards the ‘intruder’ with the intention of chasing it off... and get itself trapped as it stepped onto the cage’s trigger. BirdLife’s education unit targeted this cruel practice through a schools-wide campaign that involved Robin stickers, leaflets, and a poignant slogan appealing for Robins to be left free. Ten years of sustained campaigning in schools practically wiped out the Robin trapping habit. The children of the 1980s are now adults who know how to simply enjoy the privilege of hearing a free Robin sing.

*“The children of the 1980s are now adults who know how to simply enjoy the privilege of hearing a free Robin sing.”*

The success of the Robin campaign taught the education unit how to reach children, and crucially, their teachers. A whole action guide of activities was born in 1994, targeting a variety of plants and animals and aiming to show children the other side of the coin: how to enjoy our nature without catching it, killing it, or destroying its habitat. The action guide was called One World and it went into every classroom in our primary schools. The next edition changed the name into Maltese, and since then Dinja Waħda has become

a household name among schools. By 2010 we had produced 11 editions of the action guide, sharing nature appreciation and supporting it with paper and online resources for teachers.

### Times change

Six years ago we evaluated our Dinja Waħda Action Guides to see how effective our current approach was. The popularity of our programme remained high, with plus or minus 80% of primary schools taking part, but something was missing. Research led us to realise that today’s children need much more than classroom material extolling the beauty of our plants, animals and habitats. Today’s children live indoors and have no experience of the creatures or plant life we lovingly illustrate in our action guides. This process spawned a new action guide, tailor-made for 21st century children living urban lifestyles very disconnected from nature.

The COVID-19 lockdown period meant that we could not switch to the new guide within a short time, since teachers already had a lot of new things to deal with. Nonetheless, training and trialling have been ongoing for the past two years and next scholastic year should see the phasing out of the old action guide. The new guide, for now being called Dinja Waħda+ to distinguish it from the previous edition, has moved online in sync with today’s classroom processes, making Dinja Waħda+ modern and environment-friendly.







Children creating art with seeds

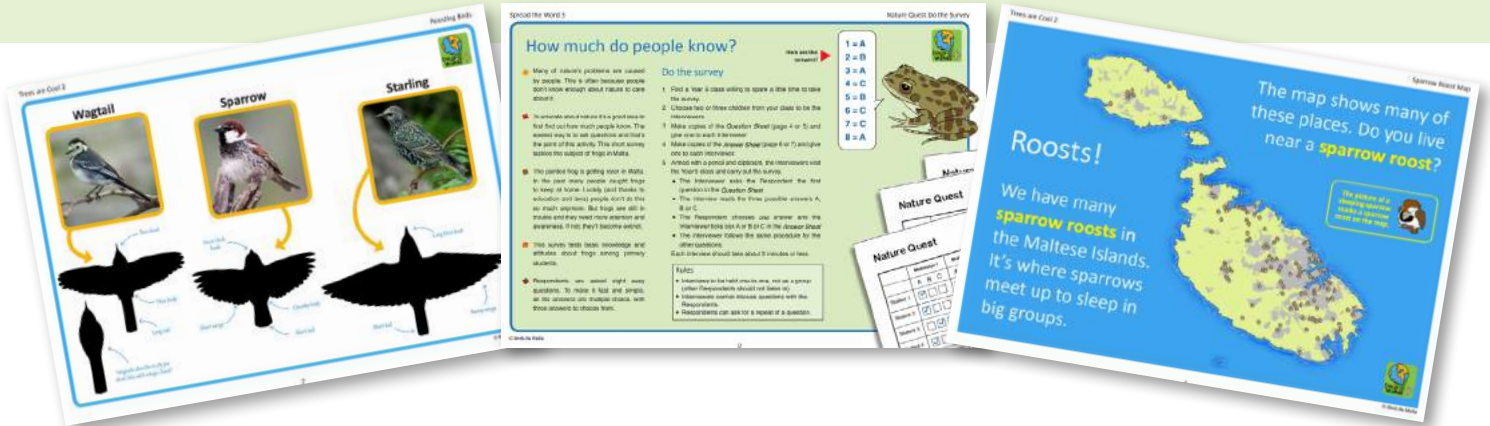
# What we did...

The biggest change we made was to take children out of the classroom regularly. The majority of activities now have a part to be carried out in the school grounds or in nature outside the school. In this way, BirdLife is supporting the growing worldwide movement to connect children with nature. Since our school grounds are mostly concrete-dominated spaces, many Dinja Waħda+ outdoors activities focus on making school grounds better nature homes.



# 42 activities...

The 42 activities in the new Action Guide are now divided into specific year groups, with each set of activities designed for that particular age group. Activities are also matched with curriculum requirements to support teachers in integrating the topics into their syllabus. Being totally online, activities can easily be added or replaced.



Each set of activities is supplied with a wealth of resources: slide features about local flora and fauna, illustrated info sheets, animal sound clips, short film clips, photos, hands-on action tips for teachers and students. Resources are bespoke for the Dinja Waħda+ programme and based on Maltese nature.



Stocking the bird table

# Action For Nature...

The activities in Dinja Waħda+ are no longer stand-alone. We created two or three activities and grouped them into topics to be carried out together. In each topic children and teachers take some form of action for nature. Through this we are aiming to equip children with the skills and positive attitude they will need to tackle the environmental crises we are facing. The Dinja Waħda+ philosophy is to connect with, learn about, enjoy, and help nature.

WORDS Desirée Falzon Naturalist and BirdLife Malta Field Teacher



# BIRDS & NATURE

## NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET!

Want to get yourself a cool memento and help our nature reserves at the same time? Then look no further! From keychains, pencils and magnets, to mugs, soft toys and so much more - you are sure to find something to remind you of the natural treasures to be found in our nature reserves!



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# Research is creating new knowledge



The site that will house the new research centre at Simar

## New Simar Research Station seeks to showcase the different research work carried out on site

An inspiring quote on the importance of research comes from astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first person to walk on the moon. Put simply he had said that *research is creating new knowledge*. Knowledge is indeed important when planning ahead, which is why ongoing research is vital when managing sites like our nature reserves.

Since the 1960s, BirdLife Malta has pioneered ornithological research, with fascinating results obtained over several decades. When BirdLife Malta was entrusted with the management of sites of unique natural habitats, we came to realise the need of a holistic approach to research so as to ensure that work plans are drawn up based on the best knowledge available. In an initiative to showcase our work with the public, we are opening a small research station at Simar Nature Reserve, where to inform visitors about the studies we do as well as to share facts and curiosities.

Perhaps the main line of research at our wetland reserves is understandably the monitoring of the water bodies. Regular water sampling gives us information on the salinity and oxygen levels, pH, nitrate and phosphate content and other parameters. When logged in conjunction with water levels and rainfall, this data provides a fairly complete picture of the seasonal changes in the lagoon and canal waters. The basis of several food webs at our wetland reserves

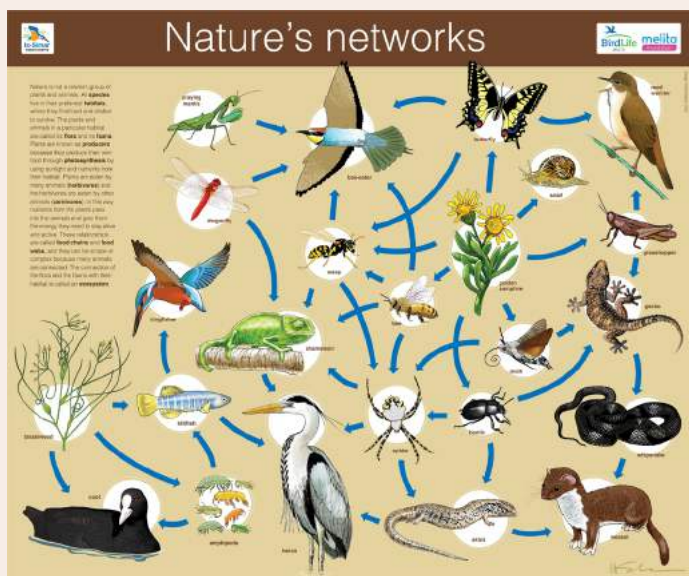
are the aquatic organisms in the form of algae, invertebrates and fish. The vegetation growing at the sites is also regularly mapped, identified, logged and monitored using GPS. This helps us identify trends and patterns about which species are thriving and which species possibly require intervention. This is crucial information that helps us plan works to improve the status of the rarer wetland plants.

Other species that are studied in detail include moths, bats, Mediterranean Chameleons and Vagrant Hedgehogs. Moths are trapped monthly using a Robinson mercury-lamp trap. Prior to their safe release, the specimens are photographed for subsequent identification by a lepidopterist. The species' host plants are then researched and prove useful when planning which vegetation to plant along the trails. Similarly, we study and ring bat species, which in turn feed on the moths. Several bat species are suffering declines across Europe, and conservation efforts are essential to ensure their survival.

The research station initiative at Simar Nature Reserve would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of the Melita Foundation.

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

Victor Falzon



Display panel illustrating aspects of biology at the Simar Research Station



Melita Foundation supports and collaborates with non-profit organisations, individuals, and other stakeholders in order to enable the development of the digital skills and creativity which Malta needs for future growth. They do this whilst respecting and preserving our cultural heritage and environment.



# Gifts from the east

A snorkel along a busy and accessible part of the coast of Malta turns up a range of marine creatures

The stretch of coast from Baħar iċ-Ċaġħaq to Pembroke might not look like much of a prospect. It is elbowed by roads, buildings and a so-called camping site where year-round huts send out shameless delegations of elaborate front porches to encroach on the shore. While all of this does take its toll, it does not quite make the place a write-off. Nature is not limited to 'wild' places; on the contrary, it can thrive in densely populated ones. I've spent many a morning snorkelling along that shore, and there were times when the sea and marine life felt pristine and endlessly giving.

## Life on the rocks

Like much of the east coast of Malta, the shore is gently sloping and easily accessible. The first couple of metres tend to consist of very shallow and well-lit rocky platforms which generations of wave action and burrowing animals have shaped into an alveolar micro-landscape of ridges, crevices and overhangs. Not much of it is lifeless. Look closely and you will see limpets, chitons and barnacles: animals that citadel themselves against the waves and graze on the fine algae or filter-feed on whatever the sea brings.

This habitat, known in Maltese as *il-ħâfa*, shelters scores of other invertebrate species that are too small to easily spot, or that hide among the fronds of algae. It is also home to many types of fish. Blennies in particular are confiding and easy to observe at close range, as are gobies, scorpionfish and triplefins. While some are brightly coloured, others are cryptic. So confident in their camouflage are the latter, that they will tolerate an observer, or a camera lens, a few centimetres away.

## Watery meadows

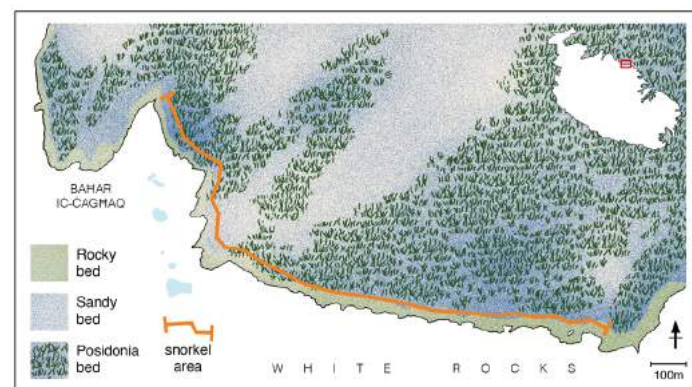
The list of fish species grows longer as the rocky platform gives way to deeper water within a couple of metres from shore. The seagrass known in Maltese as *alka* is not an alga at all but rather a flowering plant that has adapted to life in the sea. It grows all along this coast and forms very dense patches on sand or sediment. It attracts sea breams such as the Salema, which gathers in large and impressive shoals, as well as many types of colourful wrasses. Combers and groupers hover motionlessly along its fringes to ambush prey, and above it columns of shoaling Damselfish constantly protrude their jaws to Hoover up plankton. The bare patches among the *Posidonia* are home to sand-dwelling species such as stingrays, flatfishes, weevers and the charismatic Flying Gurnard (not a flying fish at all but more likely to be seen using its modified fins to 'walk' on the bottom

and sift the sand for prey). The area known as White Rocks is an excellent place to observe all of these.

## More than fish

While fish will be the star attraction to most, it is worth taking some time to look closely at invertebrates. It helps that most are slow-moving or attached to rocks or stones. The Snakelocks Anemone is possibly the commonest species of anemone, and gets its green colour from the microscopic algae that it houses in its body. Starfish are frequent in the area, as are urchins and many types of sponges. Molluscs are a large and diverse group which includes snails, limpets, clams and slugs, among many others. It also includes cephalopods such as octopus and cuttlefish. Both are common but not easy to spot – which, given the constant persecution by humans, is just as well.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **Mark-Anthony Falzon** Anthropologist with a passion for nature



Victor Falzon



*Fishes and other Marine Animals of the Maltese Islands*, written by Mark-Anthony Falzon & Patrick J Schembri and published in 2021, is a photographic guide for snorkellers. It is available in bookshops and online at BDL.





Salema (Xilpa)



Black Scorpionfish (Skorfna Sewda)



Common Starfish (Stilla Ħamra)



Flying Gurnard (Bies)



Snakelocks Anemone (Artikla Ħadra)



Red Black-faced Triplefin (Budakkra Rasha Sewda)



Painted Comber (Burqax)



Common Cuttlefish (Siċċa)



Ilaria Marchiori



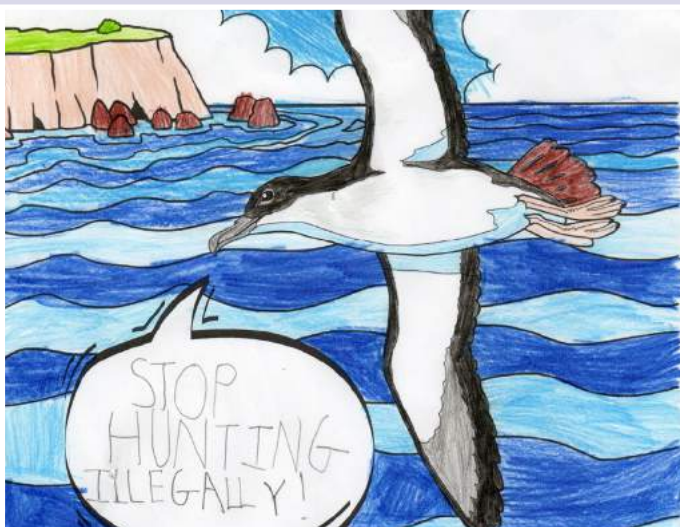
**2 Apr 2022** Our LIFE PanPuffinus! team led our Falko youth group on a night hike at L-Irdum tal-Madonna. The team presented an informative talk to raise awareness about light pollution on the Maltese Islands. An activity held jointly with Din l-Art Hejwa.

Abbie Ferrar



**3 Apr 2022** BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team joined our long-term partner Walk and Talk for an exploration of the beautiful Vincent's Eco Estate on the outskirts of Mgarr. A delightful morning of nature-based tranquillity and togetherness.

Seabird artwork by Giuliano Pace Tommen – Malta



**3 Apr 2022** Following our creative campaign to raise awareness about the threats to our seabirds, all submissions were exhibited at Salina Nature Reserve. We had submissions from all over the world, so a huge thank you to all involved and helped spread the word.

Ben Chircop



**10 Apr 2022** Our Events and Activities Committee organised a nature walk at Wied il-Ghasel and Burmarrad. Everyone had a wonderful time exploring some of Malta's best nature spots on this glorious April day.

Milena Beretta



**16 Apr 2022** Easter EggCitement was back after a two-year hiatus! This popular, light-hearted event was enjoyed by the many families who came to Foresta 2000 in search of chocolate eggs hidden among the luscious foliage. After the egg hunts, families moseyed down to Ghadirra Nature Reserve where they collected some gifts, enjoyed our nature trail and birdwatching hide and became transformed with animal-themed face paints! A joyful day for all involved.

Giada Lampitelli



**21 Apr 2022** Esplora invited BirdLife Malta to host a stall at their STEM Careers Fair. Our education volunteers enjoyed spreading awareness and inspiring the young generation about the possibilities of a career in conservation.

Giada Lampitelli



**22 & 30 Apr 2022** Our Klabb Huttaf members became mini-ecologists on a two-day special event. The junior naturalists learnt how to set up camera traps at Foresta 2000 and enjoyed exploring the woodland with the reserve warden. A week later, we all met at Salina to view the footage caught by our camera traps and identify the species. We hope this experience inspired the next generation of Maltese ecologists!





**23 Apr 2022** BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team collaborated with Earth Day Green Fair to host a mindfulness nature walk around Majjistral. Everyone had fun connecting with nature and finding zen in the gorgeous natural surroundings.



**7 May 2022** BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team joined Walk and Talk for an enlightening sunrise walk around Spinola Bay, watching the world turn from night to day. Emerging from darkness and embracing the light is an inspiring metaphor for the process of mental health recovery.



**7 May 2022** Our LIFE PanPuffinus! team led an exciting night walk around the stunning Dwejra cliffs in Gozo in order to listen for the distinctive calls of Yelkouan Shearwaters as they flew to the cliffs after sundown to nest. Prior to the walk, we enjoyed a tour and talk at the Dwejra Marine Environmental Education Centre. An informative and enjoyable evening for all.



**8 May 2022** BirdLife Malta livestreamed a bird ringing session from Ghadira Nature Reserve as part of our Spring Alive project. Many tuned in to watch our qualified bird ringers do what they do best.



**8 May 2022** Our Events and Activities Committee hosted another popular and circular nature walk from Simar Nature Reserve to Manikata and back. Everyone who attended enjoyed traversing some of Malta's loveliest nature spots. An excellent way to conclude this season of nature walks before the heat gets too much.



**14 May 2022** Our Ghadira Nature Reserve hosted a tour of the reserve with interpretation for the Deaf community, as part of the Deaf People Association Malta's Erasmus+ BANOFFEE project, of which BirdLife Malta are partners. It was an informative and inspiring opportunity to learn how we can improve accessibility of our nature reserves for the Deaf community.



**18 May 2022** Following the previous event at Ghadira, representatives from Malta's Deaf community and environmental organisations met to discuss improving accessibility of nature space and birding to the Deaf community. On top of some talks and presentations, we enjoyed a guided tour of Salina.



**21 May 2022** To mark the occasion of European Maritime Day, we hosted a fair at Salina, where our LIFE PanPuffinus! team, EcoMarine Malta and Sharklab-Malta exhibited their inspiring work and engaged with the public about the marine environment. An informative day for all who came along.



**27 May 2022** Our Events and Activities Committee hosted an enjoyable evening at Salina Nature Reserve, where members and staff listened to an informative presentation about Salina, followed by a chance to mingle over drinks kindly donated by our sponsor Delicata Family Winemakers. A lovely evening, enjoyed by all.



**5 June 2022** BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team joined forces with the incredible mental health charity, Walk and Talk, for yet another outing around the breath-taking Ghajn Tuffieha. This supportive community always help to lift each other up and support one another through thick and thin. A truly uplifting event.

## Upcoming Events

**26 Jun 2022**

Our Falko youth group is getting together for a creative morning of nature-inspired free-flow art at our Salina Nature reserve, as part of the Erasmus+ It's Time! project.

**30 Jun 2022**

As part of the BANOFFEE project, which aims to make birds and nature more accessible to the Deaf community, we are premiering new signs for bird species at Salina Nature Reserve.

**3 Jul 2022**

To mark the occasion of World Seabirds Day, our LIFE PanPuffinus! team will lead a night walk along the cliffs of Rdum tal-Madonna. Prior to this, participants will be given a tour of the nearby historical White Tower.

**8 Jul 2022**

We will be holding the closing event of our Erasmus+ BANOFFEE project at Salina Nature Reserve. The Inclusion Toolkit for Deaf people in Nature Reserves will also be presented on the day.

**15-16 & 29-30 Jul 2022**

Our annual Shearwater Boat Trips to Ta' Ċenc Cliffs in Gozo are nearly fully-booked, with only a few spaces left on some of the trips. Book now, this is a unique opportunity to see Scopoli's Shearwaters up close and personal!

**Want to join an event?**

Get more details at <http://bit.ly/joinevent> or email [events@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:events@birdlifemalta.org) or call +356 2134 7646

**19 Jul 2022**

Falko youth group meet again as part of the Erasmus+ It's Time! project. Location details to be announced later.

**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>



# Giving them a better home



Avon Tanti

Our biggest annual event, the **Walk for Nature**, was held on Sunday 27 March 2022. Despite it being the general election weekend, we were still joined by many families who trekked the 9km walk with us from Buskett to Dingli Cliffs and back via s-Salib tal-Għolja and Girgenti. Apart from being an easy-going and refreshing hike in natural setting, this walk also traditionally raises funds for a special BirdLife Malta project. This year's walk raised **€850**, which will be used to improve the breeding grounds for Little Ringed Plovers, especially at our Għadira Nature Reserve where they nest every year. Children who raised money were given a goody bag at the end of the walk, and the highest three fundraisers won awards for the extra effort.

*Inset shows a very young Little Ringed Plover chick at Għadira.*

