

Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 77 • September 2023





The Four Seasons of a Conservationist

The BirdLife Malta family is saddened by the recent passing away of one of our founders, Dominic Cutajar. The first meeting of the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) took place at his family residence in Sliema on 25 January 1962. On hearing the news, I made

an online search and one of his past writings titled *The Four Seasons of a Conservationist* came up.

The PDF was a scan of a typewritten text, which added to the nostalgia. The story is about a visit he made to “Għadira Pool”, where he and his companion saw a rail species at the water’s edge, which then hid in the undergrowth. They poked about and waited but the rail stayed hidden, so they couldn’t identify it and only logged it as “rail” in their notes.

This was in itself a lovely story, and I could well picture the scene, but Dominic was using the story for a wider message. To quote his words “The time of the season brings out these depressing recollections, for often the times suggest the mood. Therefore, I will permit myself a single diffident reflection. True conservationists just cannot afford to lie low or shrug the responsibility of publicising their convictions. Although it means that we, conservationists, may have to step on other people’s toes and possibly make enemies in quarters where we would rather not, still we cannot hide in the undergrowth like the rail and risk remaining an unidentified nucleus of progressive thinkers. If that were to happen, it could only mean that we have failed through fear of exposure to the

world outside where our ideal of toleration to nature is twisted purposely, or at best, is misunderstood.”

These words were written in 1968. Fifty-five years on, they are as relevant – if not even more today – as they were back then. It is unfortunate that the battle to protect nature continues and doesn’t relent.

On Gozo Minister Clint Camilleri’s watch, our bird protection laws are constantly being watered down and rendered ineffective. There is massive lack of law enforcement: witness the recent killing of a young Greater Flamingo in full public view.

The voice of nature-caring individuals in the Labour Cabinet seems to be moving from Critically Endangered to Extinct!

We cannot depend on the European Commission to take action against Malta to save our environment from ourselves. As Dominic said, we “cannot afford to lie low or shrug the responsibility of publicising our convictions”.

Some months ago we held the national protest *Xebbajjtuna!* Since then, barring lip service from the Prime Minister, nothing happened. The uncontrolled destruction of our countryside for greed continues. Together we are stronger and louder. Let’s make ourselves heard *ghaliex xebbajjtuna!*

Darryl Grima
President



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The culprits in this list were all brought to justice after being observed and reported by BirdLife Malta teams.

Jun 2023. Hunter received 1yr prison sentence (suspended for 3yrs) + 4yr hunting licence suspension. CRIME: Allowing underage persons to use a loaded firearm (Mellieha, Apr 2020, Apr 2021).

Jun 2023. Trapper fined €1,800 + 2yr trapping licence suspension. CRIME: Finch trapping out of season (Mellieha, Jan 2022).

Jun 2023. Trapper fined €3,500 + 4yr trapping licence suspension. CRIME: Using a mist net illegally (Qormi, Sep 2022).

Jun 2023. Trapper fined €2,500 + 2yr trapping licence suspension. CRIME: Finch trapping on unregistered site (Mtaħleb, Nov 2022).

Jun 2023. Hunter fined €600. CRIME: Hunting within 200m of a residential area (Xghajra, Apr 2023).

Jun 2023. Pet shop owner fined €1,500 + had Turtle-doves confiscated. CRIME: Illegally selling European Turtle-doves (Għaxaq, Apr 2023).

Jul 2023. Hunter fined €1,200 + 2yr hunting licence suspension. CRIME: Hunting a Eurasian Collared-dove, a protected species (Nadur, Apr 2022).

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Editorial Board Nathaniel Attard (Editor), Victor Falzon (Naturalist & Field Teacher), Antoine Monnier (Communication Assistant), Cinzia Mintoff (Graphic Design & Digital Media Communication Officer), Murat Gelir (Photography & Film Production Assistant), Nastasya Koroleva (Events & Outreach Assistant)

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Design Cinzia Mintoff

Printing Poulton’s Print

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Contact BirdLife Malta

mailing address: 57/28 Abate Rigord Street, Ta’ Xbiex XBX 1120, Malta

tel: +356 21347645 • email: info@birdlifemalta.org • website: www.birdlifemalta.org

First casualties as autumn hunting starts

Illegally shot Eleonora's Falcon (left) and Common Hoopoe recovered during the first days of the autumn hunting season

The autumn hunting season opened on 1 September 2023, and will run for five months until 31 January 2024. Even before the season opened, a Greater Flamingo was shot in front of tourists in Xwejini (Gozo), and already in the first week, reports of shooting of protected species began coming in. Hunting in autumn is allowed on 40 species on land and on 12 species at sea. Hunting for European Turtle-dove is only allowed in September, with a total bag limit of 500. From 15 September to 7 October, hunting is allowed from two hours before sunrise to 7 pm. For the remainder of the season, hunting is allowed from two hours before sunrise to two hours after sunset. On Sundays and public holidays, hunting is prohibited after 1 pm. Hunting at sea is only allowed from 1 October. Anyone witnessing illegal activity should report it at once to the Environmental Protection Unit (police) on 119 and to BirdLife Malta on 2134 7645 or the emergency number 7925 5697.



The Turtle-dove population is declining



Dr Axel Friedrich conducted air quality measurements at the Grand Harbour

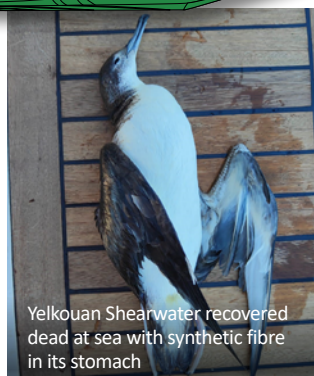
"No choice but to take legal action" – Sinkevičius

The European Commission (EC) had "no choice but to take legal action" on hunting and trapping in Malta. With all of Malta's hunting and trapping derogations currently subject to Infringement Proceedings by the EC, European Commissioner for the Environment Virginijus Sinkevičius did not mince his words when asked about this during a visit to Malta. Commenting about spring hunting of Turtle-dove, he explained that the species is in decline and the recommendations to reverse the trend are clear: hunting activities, especially during the migration period, should be prohibited. "Unfortunately, Malta did not prohibit and that left the Commission with no other choice except to refer Malta to the European Court of Justice until the required actions are taken and the European Birds Directive is fully implemented."

Call for better air quality laws

On 23 August, German BirdLife Partner NABU and air quality expert Dr Axel Friedrich conducted air quality measurements at Malta's Grand Harbour. The project aims to raise awareness about cruise ship pollution in the Mediterranean and has lobbied for a Mediterranean Emission Control Area (ECA) since 2016. The Mediterranean became a Sulphur Emission Control Area (SECA) in December 2022 but now BirdLife Malta and its partners are calling for support to a revised EU Ambient Air Quality Directive and the establishment of a Nitrogen Emission Control Area (NECA). Measurements showed harmful health impacts due to ship-related pollution, emphasising the need for action.





Yelkouan Shearwater recovered dead at sea with synthetic fibre in its stomach

Seabirds face plastic threat

A recent study published in the scientific journal *Nature Communications* reveals that the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea are among the highest risk areas for seabirds to plastic pollution in the world. The Maltese Islands are home to three seabird species,

which formed part of this study (Scopoli's Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater and European Storm-petrel), and about which BirdLife Malta contributed extensive datasets. The authors also found that another threatened seabird – the Balearic Shearwater (currently one of the focus species of our LIFE PanPuffinus! study) – has a greater exposure risk.



Xebbajtuna! protest

Xebbajtuna! ENGOS meet PM

BirdLife Malta and other Xebbajtuna! coalition ENGOS met with Prime Minister Robert Abela after the national protest for environmental reform. We called for urgency in addressing Malta's environmental issues, planning policies and enforcement. We stressed the government's lack of understanding about people's anger. Discussions covered planning policies favouring developers, Malta's economic model, and quality of life concerns. PM Abela seemed to agree that some policies need to change, but still does not understand the environmental and quality of life emergency we're going through.

EP votes to water down Nature Restoration Law

On 12 July the European Parliament (EP) voted in favour of the Nature Restoration Law, acknowledging the resounding appeal from citizens, businesses and scientists to restore nature. Malta's MEPs all voted in favour. Despite a disinformation campaign led by conservative politicians and lobbying groups, the European Green Deal and Nature Restoration Law triumphed. The win, however, came at a very high cost. To reach a compromise, MEPs sacrificed many critical obligations and targets, which resulted in a substantially weaker deal than the initial proposal: another step backward from the climate and biodiversity urgency.



BirdLife Malta press conference on the developments affecting Simar

Simar under threat again

Simar Nature Reserve is under threat again! Following the insensitive approval of two high-rise planning applications, in July we objected to yet another application to convert a nearby bungalow into a seven-storey apartment block. We called on the Planning Authority to prioritise our natural heritage and make sensible decisions about its future. We also asked the Environment & Resources Authority (ERA) to make its position known, but ERA only insists on light pollution concerns and fails to address all potential impacts.



Deckchairs on the Kemmuna garrigue

New deckchair site on Kemmuna garrigue

A deckchair operator has set up a new site on protected garrigue on Kemmuna, sparking renewed outrage. The site emerged as summer began, a year after protests against private business intrusion on public spaces. The entire island is a Bird Sanctuary and a designated Special Protection Area and Area of Conservation in the Natura 2000 network. Moviment Graffiti criticised the lack of action from ERA and Environment Minister Miriam Dalli, stating that this threatens our natural heritage. We also demanded the prompt removal of the deckchairs and refusal of future concession requests.

BirdLife Malta founder passes away

Dominic Cutajar, one of the founders of the Malta Ornithological Society (MOS), that later became BirdLife Malta, passed away at the age of 85. Born in Sliema in 1938, Dominic was one of the seven founders of MOS. It was at his Sliema family residence that the founders held their first meeting on 25 January 1962. Apart from being an avid bird and nature lover, Dominic also studied art history and the history of the Mediterranean and Malta. From 1981 to 1987 he was Curator of the Museum of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, and from 1987 to 2000 he also served as Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts.



Dominic Cutajar

WORDS **Antoine Monnier** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant

Common Kingfisher

The Common Kingfisher is a regular sight at the wetland reserves managed by BirdLife Malta. During migration, it is also encountered along the coast as it moves around looking for suitable fishing spots.

It is small and plump with a large head and beak. Without doubt, it is one of the most brightly coloured birds that we encounter in Malta, with an orange breast, iridescent blue-green wings and head, bright blue back and some white markings to top it off! The beak is long, stout and pointed with serrated inside edges so the fish don't slip once caught; the legs are particularly short. Males and females are very similar with only small differences.

The Kingfisher's style of fishing is to perch on a stick or branch about a metre above the water surface and look out for small fish. Once the fish is in its crosshairs, the bird dives headfirst into the water, grabs the fish and flies back to the same branch.

The fish is smacked unconscious against the branch and then swallowed head first.

Migration for this species typically starts in mid- to late August when it is common to see several Kingfishers chasing each other in the reserves. At this time, they are very territorial and do not tolerate competition. The best way to find a Kingfisher is to listen for their shrill call and quickly scan the water for a small bright blue bird racing low over the surface, usually chasing another Kingfisher. These birds often move between reserves as they look for suitable fishing spots. Later in the season, it is more common to see Kingfishers sitting on their favourite fishing perches projecting over the water.

A few Kingfishers spend all winter in Malta. Each wetland reserve usually has its one or two winter residents, where they normally stay till early spring. The birds then migrate back to their breeding grounds in Europe, where they seek slow-moving streams with vertical sand banks. In these banks, the Kingfisher excavates a tunnel about a metre deep to a nesting chamber where it lays its eggs and rears its young.

This species has not yet been recorded nesting in Malta, as suitable breeding sites are not available. BirdLife Malta's land management team has taken this into consideration, and in the restoration of the wetland area at Salina Nature Reserve vertical earth banks have been created specifically for this species. We hope one day to add Kingfisher to the regular breeding birds of Malta and make it a resident species to be enjoyed throughout the year!

WORDS **Manuel Mallia** Salina Park Manager

MALTESE NAME: Ghasfur ta' San Martin

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Alcedo atthis*

LENGTH: 17–19.5cm

WING SPAN: 25cm

CONSERVATION STATUS: Least Concern

LOCAL STATUS: Common spring and autumn migrant, with some wintering. Protected

CALL: Short sharp whistle

BEHAVIOUR: Perches motionless on exposed spots to dive into the water to catch small fish

HABITAT: Marshy areas with still or slow-moving water with lots of small fish

Nature at our reserves

SALINA

Part of the newly extended wetland habitat at Salina Nature Reserve



Opening hours
Nature Reserve: Daily 7am–6pm
Visitor Centre: Mon–Fri 8am–2pm
Entrance free (donations welcome!)

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



Lesser Emperor

Sultan Sekond *Anax parthenope*

The Lesser Emperor is one of our largest dragonflies, only comparable in size to the closely related Blue Emperor. It's fairly easy to identify: it's big and blue (females are green). Like all dragonflies, the Lesser Emperor needs fresh water – ponds, lakes, reservoirs – in order to breed. They lay their eggs in water, and their aquatic young spend a predatory life hunting small pondlife. Then they emerge from the water, break out of their old skin, unfurl their new wings and take to an action-packed (albeit short) life in the air, feeding on flying insects, looking for mates and chasing off rivals. Whenever you spot a dragonfly always show respect: while we humans have been around a mere 1.5m years, these guys' pedigree stretches back 300m years.



Victor Falzon

Lesser Emperor

Grey Plover

Pluviera Griża *Pluvialis squatarola*

The Grey Plover is one of our less common visitors, turning up in small numbers during spring and autumn migrations. They usually stop for short stints on their marathon journeys north to the arctic tundra to breed, or south to tropical Africa, where many spend the winter. Others, especially males, skip the terrible Sahara crossing by wintering in lands around the Mediterranean. Some try to do this in Malta but sadly the Grey Plover is on the official hunting hitlist, so any stopping here for winter generally stop for good! Grey plovers are not particularly colourful but despite the monochrome palette they still sport an eye-catching pattern, as did the one that turned up at Salina some weeks ago.



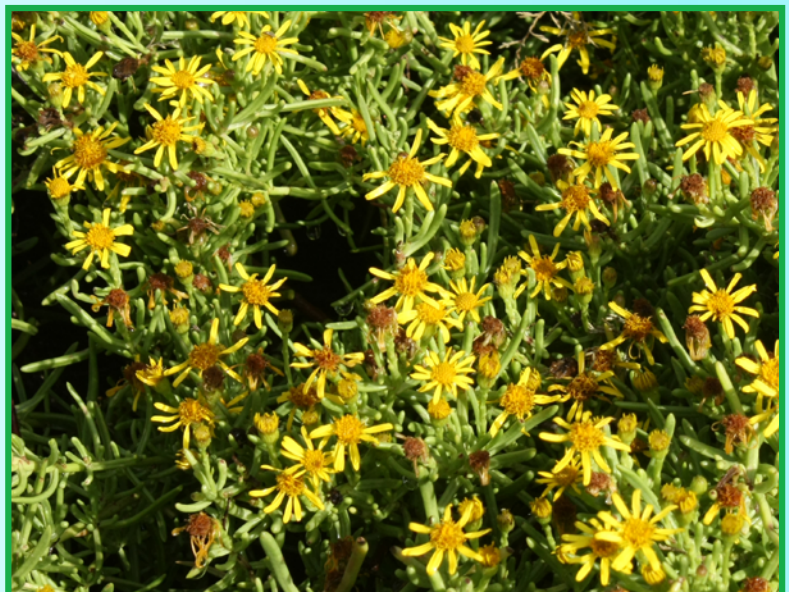
Arion Tanti

Grey Plover

Golden Samphire

Xorbett *Limbarda crithmoides*

Most of our plants flower in spring, but several opt for the other seasons; the Golden Samphire is in the autumn team. It's a coastal shrub, braving sea spray and constant exposure that would defeat a less hardy plant. The trick that helps this rugged perennial survive the odds is its succulent leaves. In botany, succulent means a thick fleshy part of the plant (usually the leaf) that stores water. This store is vital in a habitat like Salina, where conditions get very dry, and where the nearest water source is usually salty. But a few good showers of rain will recharge the Golden Samphire's reservoirs that would see it through the summer drought. And come October, it explodes in gorgeous masses of yellow flowers that insects find irresistible.



Victor Falzon

Golden Samphire

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

Restoring the Salina wetland

Another success story

Part 1

The existing pool will be enlarged and the banks engineered to create feeding habitat for wading birds

Covering less than 0.5% of the Maltese Islands, wetlands are among our rarest habitats. Wetlands are home to a large and often unique flora and fauna.

Malta's largest wetlands are associated with BirdLife Malta, as it is the organisation responsible for restoring and managing Ghadira and Simar Nature Reserves, both Natura 2000 sites. Given the success achieved at these sites, it was no surprise that in 2018 BirdLife was handed the management of another wetland: Salina, another Natura 2000 site. Salina includes the country's largest salt pans, a canal, a degraded marshland and an area of garrigue.

Degraded wetland

Years ago, large quantities of debris and construction waste were dumped on a marshland that once existed along the northern border of Salina. This activity created large mounds of earth that obliterated the habitat so that the area no longer supported open water save for a small pond. In the process, many plants and animals (including a number of endangered species) were destroyed, including several African Tamarisk shrubs, a typical coastal species. Invasive alien species like acacia trees took over most of the site. Littering, arson and vandalism were the order of the day, and the area was subject to constant disturbance, not

least from people walking their dogs without leash, and anglers clearing the reedbed to access the water's edge. Restoration of this wetland was clearly at the top of BirdLife Malta's agenda at Salina.

Planning and funding

Before taking any steps, BirdLife Malta undertook several studies to gather important information that would guide us in drawing up proper restoration plans. A hydrologist was contracted to study the water flow in the area and whether there was any



The area earmarked for the wetland restoration project



The dumping of material on site meant that no permanent water body remained



The area was heavily degraded, with parts of it having overgrown alien tree species including Acacia species



After pruning the Acacia trees, machinery was used to remove the roots and prevent re-growth



Several surveys of the flora and fauna were carried out on site prior to commencement of works

interaction with the adjacent seawater channel known as *Is-Sukkursu*. At the same time, accurate flora mapping of the area was conducted on a seasonal basis, so that suitable mitigation measures would be taken during the ensuing works to protect important and rare species of flora in the area.

After carrying out these studies, the exciting phase began: planning for the restoration of the wetland. Countless meetings and site visits, often accompanied by an architect, led to the final plans for major landscaping and the creation of a 2,000m² water body.

The next challenge was securing funding for the entire project. An application submitted to DIMFE Foundation (see box) met with success – DIMFE agreed to cover most of the projected expenses.



Putting up a chain-link fence was one of the first tasks



Created in 2021 by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, the MAVA Foundation and Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, the Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE) is an initiative dedicated to the conservation and restoration of freshwater ecosystems in the Mediterranean.



The restoration begins

The first tasks involved fencing off the area. While admittedly not aesthetically pleasing, a fence is important in an area that's under constant human pressure from the urban sprawl and a playground encroaching on three sides of the site. At least in this small section, the fence will ensure that nature is left as unhindered as possible.

Part 2 will feature in next issue of *Bird's Eye View*

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



€260 per
child all inclusive:
Saturday morning
x 12 sessions
between October
2023 and
January 2024



TO LOVE NATURE'S FLORA & FAUNA IS TO PROTECT IT!

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Knowledge through colour

Initial results of colour-ringed gull observation

This juvenile Audouin's Gull ISTJ ringed as a chick in Italy on 19.06.2020 was observed at Salina nine times in winter of 2020

Bird ringing is the science of marking wild birds for study purposes. This is usually done by attaching uniquely-coded light metal rings to one of the bird's legs. The code helps re-identify the bird if it is ever caught again. Ringing has greatly increased our knowledge

about birds' lives, especially migration. One branch of ringing involves the use of colour rings with a letter-and-number code. The advantage of using colour rings is that birds need not be re-caught, as their ring colour and code can be read with the use of optical equipment. Moreover, anyone with binoculars or camera can spot and report colour-ring sightings without needing to be a qualified ringer.

Salina Nature Reserve is a hub for wintering gulls. From October to March the site attracts many gulls of various species. A six-year (2018–2023) effort to observe colour-ringed gulls yielded 47 records of seven species from 14 European countries (including three Malta-ringed birds), mostly from central to eastern Europe (see map). The Mediterranean Gull from England is interesting, being the first ringing record of this species for Malta.

From observations it was noted that several gulls spend the winter at Salina. Ten birds stayed 1–2 months, five birds stayed three months, and four birds stayed four months. Moreover, 12 gulls were re-sighted 1–4 years later. All this indicates that Salina offers good habitat for gulls.

In 2019 BirdLife Malta launched a project to colour-ring Mediterranean Gulls, a winter visitor species. Five birds have been ringed so far. One ringed on 01.12.2019 was observed the following winter on 22.12.2020. Two others ringed at Salina spent the winter in the area: one ringed on 12.01.2020 was last observed on 13.03.2020 and another ringed on 30.01.2023 was last observed on 24.04.2023. In November 2022, BirdLife also began colour-ringing Yellow-legged Gulls, a resident and winter visitor species. Over 90 birds have so far been colour-ringed, many of these being juveniles ringed on Filfla or St Paul's Island.



A colour-ringed gull is easily singled out from a group of gulls. H358 was ringed as a chick in Hungary on 29.05.2021 and observed 27 times in the winter of 2021



Map showing country of origin of colour-ringed gulls observed at Salina



Black-headed Gull U655 ringed in Ukraine as a chick on 06.06.2017 observed at Salina in winters of 2021 and 2022



Black-headed Gull TME9 ringed in Poland on 26.05.2020 observed at Salina in winters of 2022 and 2023

Several of these ringed juveniles were observed at Salina. An interesting observation is that of a juvenile ringed on Filfla and found exhausted two months later... in Serbia!

INTERESTING FACTS

- o A juvenile Black-headed Gull ringed in Croatia on 12.12.2021 was observed four days later at Salina.
- o An adult Slender-billed Gull ringed in Spain and observed at Salina on 06.01.2019 was seen six weeks later in Senegal.
- o A Norwegian juvenile Lesser Black-backed Gull observed at Salina on 8–10.01.2021 was seen in Sicily a month later on 07.02.2021, indicating wintering movement of juvenile gulls.
- o An Audouin's Gull ringed as a chick on 19.06.2012 near Napoli was recorded at Salina on 13.02.2020. From 2012 to 2021 the bird had been observed 43 times, always around the place of ringing; the Salina observation was the first outside Italy.
- o A Yellow-legged Gull colour-ringed in a former project on 18.05.2007 on Filfla was observed 11 years later at Salina on 18.02.2018.
- o A juvenile Mediterranean Gull ringed at Salina on 01.12.2019 was observed the following winter on 22.12.2020.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **Mario V Gauci** BirdLife Malta licensed bird ringer

AROUND THE "FISH TAIL"

An autumn walk around the Marfa Peninsula

Marion L'Huillier-Hunsinger

The Marfa Peninsula's eastern side beckons with its rocky shorelines and high cliffs, offering an ideal start to the hiking season. This moderately easy, three-hour walk carries little elevation gain and is easily accessible with public transport.

Scenic views of Kemmuna and Gozo

Start this walk with open views of the dry habitats of Kemmuna and the tall cliffs of Gozo. Autumn is the perfect season to spot raptors in Malta, so keep an eye out on the channel for potential European Honey-buzzards or Western Marsh-harriers crossing over on their migration. Follow the coastline to pass hotels and holiday huts but be aware that parts of the path may be submerged in days with rough seas. While this area can feel somewhat deserted, you could well be greeted by zigzagging Barn Swallows weaving through the buildings.



Aron Tanti

European Honey-buzzard

The rocky shoreline of It-Torri I-Abjad

Also known as the White Tower, It-Torri I-Abjad stands amidst a rocky shoreline adorned with marine rockpools. Nature enthusiasts will discover hidden treasures here, from the subtle purple hues of Sea Lavender to the peeping calls of Common Sandpipers. Don't miss the chance to spot agile Mediterranean Shore Crabs camouflaging themselves in crevices at the water's

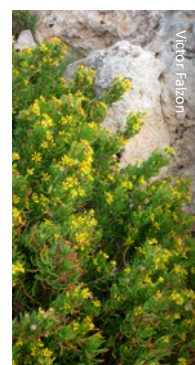
edge – sturdy hiking shoes are recommended here as rocks can be sharp. Built as a watchtower in the 17th century, It-Torri I-Abjad also offers a nice viewpoint.

A natural gem with blue hues and sea spray

Id-Dragnara, commonly known (if erroneously) as Coral Lagoon, is not reputed enough for the beautiful scenery on display. This stunning open-top grotto is filled with marine life. Being quite sheltered, yet exposed to the sun, the temperature of the water in the cavity is slightly higher, which allows more marine life to flourish. The surroundings are covered in shrubs of autumn-flowering Golden Samphire and, in early autumn, you might spot Scopoli's Shearwaters skimming the waves.



Sea Lavender



Golden Samphire



It-Torri I-Abjad surrounded by coastal garrigue habitat



Id-Dragnara, an unusual geological feature

On days when the sea is agitated you might witness the Blow Hole, a curious geological phenomenon where dramatic spurts of seawater shoot up in the air like a geyser.

Murat Gelir

Gazing from the top

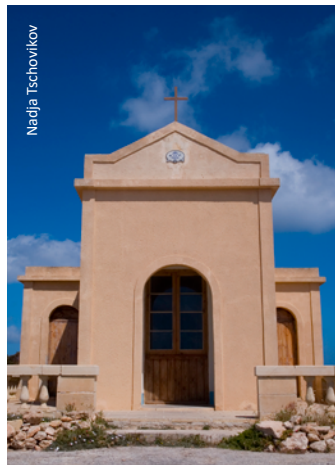
Once you leave Id-Dragnara, you can either follow the path or take the slightly rougher route along the cliffs known as L-Irdum tal-Madonna. Do keep in mind, however, that the autumn hunting season is open and this area can be quite active, so proceed with caution. You will soon reach a wooded area with Aleppo Pines and be marvelled by views from the top of the cliffs – the pale blue colour of the Mediterranean Sea near these cliffs truly took us by surprise. A little further on you reach the simple yet beautiful Madonna tal-Kuncizzjoni chapel. The chapel was built in 1961 after an earlier one was destroyed by the wind and sea spray. A statue of the Virgin Mary also stands nearby; here you may be lucky to observe Northern Wheatears, which blend in with the limestone terrain.

Marion L'Huillier-Hunsinger



The cliffs at L-Irdum Tal-Madonna

Nadja Tschovikoff



Madonna tal-Kuncizzjoni Chapel, also known as Il-Madonna tal-Ahrax



Northern Wheatear



Blue Rock-thrushes nest in these parts

Arion Tanti

Windy path and hidden bays

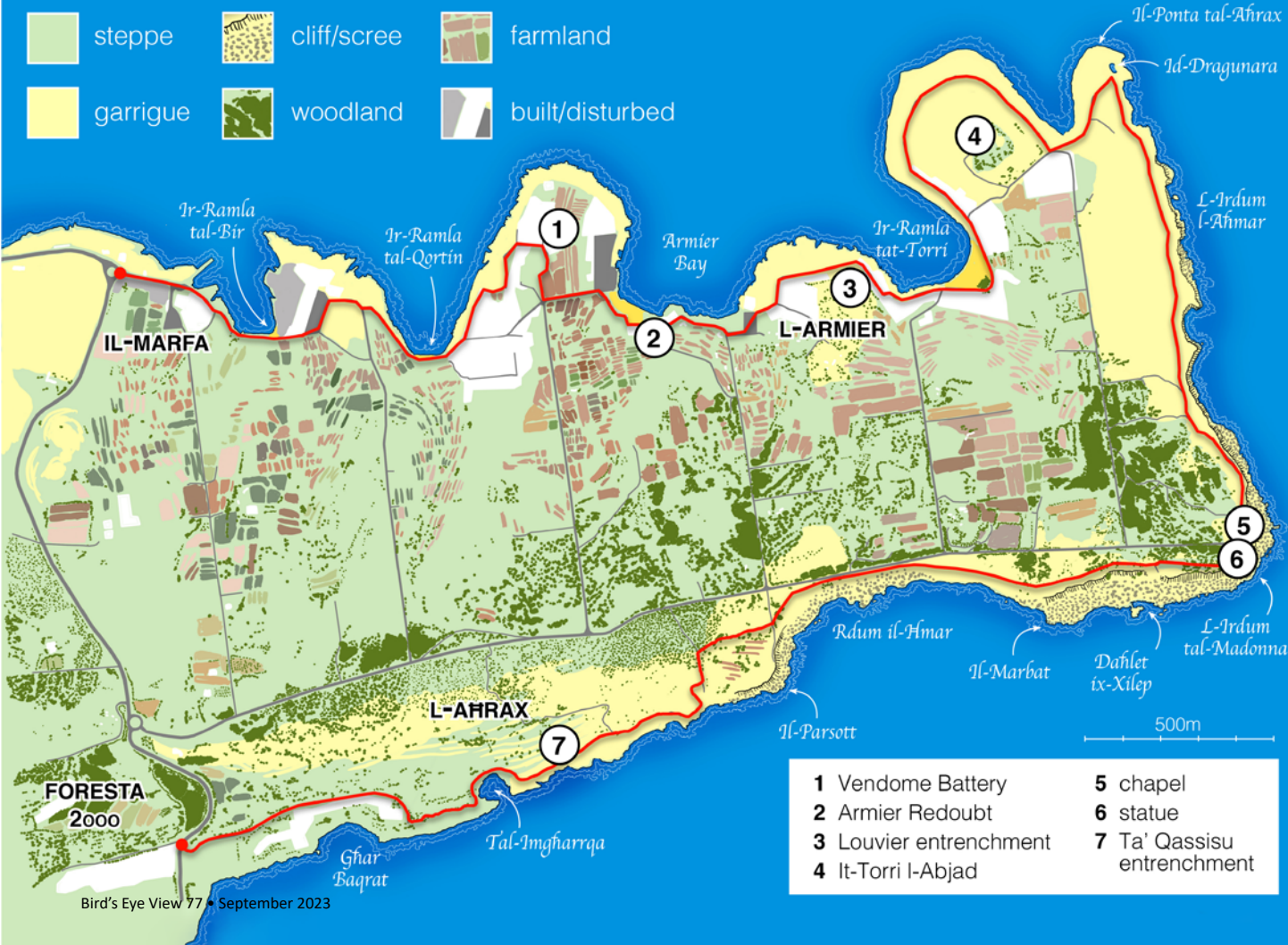
Continue your walk along a winding path, with opportunities to explore secluded bays, like tiny Daħlet ix-Xilep. At sunset, the panoramic view of Mellieħa and Mellieħa Bay take on tints of pink and purple. Blue Rock-thrushes regularly sing along these cliffs to enhance your experience. Eventually, you will reach the main road and end your journey at Foresta 2000, our woodland nature reserve.



Mediterranean Shore Crab

Victor Falzon

WORDS Marion L'Huillier-Hunsinger BirdLife Malta Nature Reserves Visitor Assistant



Victor Falzon

Alessandra Loria



5–8 Jun 2023 BirdLife Malta's education team met with the *It's Time* project international partners in Warsaw (Poland) and discussed the next steps for the project. Led by BirdLife Malta since 2021, the project aims to establish the BirdLife International Youth Leaders Council for global nature conservation. The team also found time to enjoy some Polish wildlife.

BirdLife Malta



17 Jun 2023 At Salina we hosted *Above & Below Salina: A natural and cultural experience* organised by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage in collaboration with Heritage Malta to

celebrate Malta's natural and cultural heritage. The event formed part of the European Archaeology Days and included a lecture for participants and activities for children.

Antoine Monnier



22-23 Jun & 6 Jul 2023 The long-awaited summer adventure from the LIFE PanPuffinus! project team was back! We sailed to Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs in Gozo, witnessing a sunset that painted the sky in vibrant hues, while Scopoli's Shearwaters skimmed the sea or bobbed on the surface. Thanks to all who attended. We look forward to seeing you next year.



Alessandra Loria

10 Jun 2023 Our LIFE PanPuffinus! team joined the Malta National Aquarium with other eNGOs to celebrate World Ocean Day. At our stall, families learned about our seabirds and the challenges they face. Kids enjoyed seabird-themed games and listened to shearwater calls.



Nastasya Koroleva

17–18 Jun 2023 BirdLife Malta joined the *Eco Festival* at Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta. The festival aimed to promote eco-friendly products and to educate people about

sustainable living. Visitors at our stand learned about Malta's birds and our conservation work. Kids took part in fun and educational activities and learned how to support conservation.



Nastasya Koroleva

10–15 Jul 2023 Teachers and BirdLife representatives from Spain, Slovakia, UK and Malta gathered in Girona (Spain) for a five-day training on integrating nature into education. We learned best practices for nature-based activities with pre-schoolers, explored children's perceptions of nature, and witnessed successful urban nature integration projects. We also explored stunning national parks and enjoyed birdwatching.

14–16 Jul 2023 BirdLife Malta had a busy and rewarding time at the *Global BirdFair*. On Day 1 we engaged with visitors at our stand and took part in three events, including a wildlife crime debate and a seabird conservation presentation. Day 2 was rainy but despite the weather we bravely manned our stand! BirdLife Malta CEO Mark Sultana met outgoing BirdLife International CEO Patricia Zurita. On Day 3 we met Birdfair organiser Tim Appleton. We thank visitors and UK volunteers for their support and look forward to next year's fair.



Manya Russo



5 Aug 2023 At Simar Nature Reserve we delved into the world of dinosaurs with our Klabb Huttat members. After an engaging story about how birds descended from dinosaurs, our young explorers turned

paleontologists and hunted fossils in the nature reserve's olive grove. They followed a skeleton trail, trying to tell dinosaur from bird remains. Measuring ancient dinosaurs and visualising their massive size took us on a time-travel journey. Join Klabb Huttat for more adventures at our upcoming events.

Murat Gelir



11 Aug 2023 Eleven youths aged 16 to 27 gathered for our *Save Our Seabirds: Shearwater colony* clean-up. They engaged in birdwatching and hands-on activities at Salina Nature Reserve, and a clean-up at Migra l-Ferha; an event supported by the Erasmus+ funded *It's Time* project and LIFE PanPuffinus! while also participating in the Clean Up Med campaign.

Mark Sultana



18 Aug 2023 The second edition of *Sip, Savour and Soak in Nature* at Salina Nature Reserve featured nature presentations by ERA officer Stanley Gatt and photographer Guido Bonetti, exploring environmental legislation and local wildlife. The full-house event followed the first get-together in this new series held in July, during which ringer Ray Galea shared insights on bird diversity of the Maltese Islands, followed by Prof. Mark Anthony Falzon who showcased marine life around our shores.

Alessandra Loria



19 Aug 2023 Our Blooming Minds team joined August's Walk & Talk in Bidnija, which included a scenic circular route and a mindfulness exercise by Awake2Life - Mindful Living by Bubbly Me, at sunset. Participants enjoyed a mindfulness session, staying in the present moment through surrounding sounds.

Upcoming events

29 Sep 2023 Join us at Salina Nature Reserve for World Maritime Day, with talks on marine ecosystem protection by experts Manya Russo and Martina Cutajar. The evening will be followed by networking space, drinks and snacks. This free event is open to all.

29-30 Sep 2023 Unleash your inner comic book creator at our *Zoology of Cartoons* workshops during Science in the City 2023. Craft stunning characters and bring wildlife to life. Join us, whether you're an artist or a beginner, to bridge science and creativity with seasoned professionals. Workshops will take place at Floriana's Catholic Institute, San Gorg Preca Hall.

29-30 Sep 2023 BirdLife Malta will join the Science in the City 2023 Street Festival at Biskuttin Gardens in Valletta's Pjazza Tritoni. Come to our stand both days of the festival evenings and embark on a journey of knowledge, inspiration, and action on biodiversity protection. Learn simple steps to improve life for migratory birds.

30 Sep 2023 Join us for Day 1 of EuroBirdwatch23 at Ghadira Nature Reserve. Start the morning with a bird-ringing session (booking required), followed by birdwatching tours from 10am to 4pm (no reservations needed). Connect with nature and support our cause.

1 Oct 2023 Join us for Day 2 of EuroBirdwatch23 in Buskett. Led by experts and nature lovers, watch birds of prey in flight and witness autumn bird migration. Sturdy footwear needed for some rough terrain in the observation area.

9 Nov 2023 BirdLife Malta's 2023 AGM at 6.30pm at Salina Nature Reserve, open only for fully paid-up adult members. The event will include the President's speech, financial reports for 2022, an operational report and a tribute to late founding member Dominic Cutajar. This AGM will also elect the new BirdLife Malta Council for the next two years.

12 Nov 2023 Our regular winter nature walks are back, opening the season with a walk at Ghar Lapsi. Wear suitable footwear and clothes for a walk with great views of the cliffs and the sea.

18-19 Nov 2023 Join our education and reserves teams at Esplora for World Children's Day! This year's theme is climate change. Visit our stand to learn about bird ringing and how it helps study the effects of climate change on bird migration. We'll also showcase the equipment used in our research.

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>

Want to join an event?

Get more details at <http://bit.ly/joinanevent>
or email events@birdlifemalta.org
or call +356 2134 7645



Kirsten Shante Vella

2 Sep 2023 BirdLife Malta's education team participated in the *Culture Garden: Let's Green Gżira!* event at The Council of Europe Gardens, leading activities on Maltese biodiversity and nature reserves. Children enjoyed interactive games about Malta's birds. This event was part of the Varcities project, supported by Gżira Local Council and the University of Malta, and funded by the European Commission, aiming to enhance citizens' well-being through sustainable initiatives.

Summer with a difference!



Murat Gellir

Our summer *Nature Guardians* course came to an end some weeks ago. It was an unforgettable journey for a group of young naturalists who in July embarked on an adventure to explore the wonders of the natural world. Throughout summer, the young explorers became soil scientists, learned about birdwatching, explored Maltese history and had a go at collecting salt from the Salina salt pans. They built homes for insects and bats, they met the BirdLife seabird team and played games that gave them a feel of what it's like to be a seabird. In the last session they were also lucky to watch Nature Trust-FEE Malta release a rehabbed Loggerhead Turtle back into the wild. But the adventure doesn't end here, as we will soon be launching the autumn edition of *Nature Guardians* (details on p10).