

# Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

Issue 78 • December 2023



  
**BirdLife**  
MALTA





## Jingle all the way... to conservation!

As the days grow shorter and cooler, and rain and wind become our companions, we are reminded of the cyclical rhythms crucial for nature and for ourselves. Until mid-November, however, Malta was still

alarmingly lacking in rainfall, sounding an ominous bell of looming climate change. These weather extremes underscore the urgent need to address our lifestyles and actively work to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In November, Mosta witnessed a disheartening event involving 12 trees. A dozen trees will not significantly alter global warming, but the Mosta incident is a stark reminder of our tendency to make decisions without considering the repercussions on biodiversity. Those trees were the habitat of many creatures, not least the White Wagtails that roost there every autumn and winter night.

Happily, the narrative took a positive turn when BirdLife Malta raised awareness about the issue. The Mosta community,

vocal and united, sparked an outcry that prompted a change of direction. This collective effort demonstrated the power of community action in influencing decision-makers.

The upcoming MEP elections in June 2024 provide an opportunity to voice our concerns about the protection of nature. Let us push together for nature to be made a priority on the political agenda.

Before I close, I want to congratulate Martin Harper for his recent appointment as CEO of BirdLife International. We look forward to working closely with him.

I wish all our readers a happy festive season. May it bring joy, reflection and renewed commitment to safeguarding our precious natural world.

**Mark Sultana**  
CEO



### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

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

**Sep 2023.** Trapper fined €1,000 + 2yr trapping licence suspension. CRIME: Trapping during closed season (Kalkara, Feb 2020).

**Sep 2023.** Trapper fined €600 + 2yr trapping licence suspension. CRIME: Trapping for Song Thrush on an unregistered site (Benghajsa, Nov 2022).

BirdLife Malta anticipated that there would be more court case conclusions during this time, however, since Magistrate Dr Elaine Rizzo was removed from her duties, many court cases have been left pending or unheard. A new magistrate has not been assigned to oversee the conclusion of any current cases, or hear any new cases, of environmental crimes yet.

Aron Tanti



### Rehabbed flamingo released

In September, we released a rehabilitated Greater Flamingo back into the wild at our Ghadira Nature Reserve. The juvenile flamingo had been rescued from Ramla l-Hamra (Gozo) on 1 September and had probably been part of one of several flocks observed migrating over the Islands at the start of the month. Young flamingos on their first migration journey often tire, lag behind and lose their flock, usually ending up on beaches. The young bird was found to be underweight but after a couple of weeks in rehab it regained its weight and the government vet gave the go-ahead for its release. The bird was ringed and set free, hopefully to continue its migration.

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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



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BirdLife Malta action in front of the OPM

On 16 October, BirdLife Malta staged a symbolic action in front of the Office of the Prime Minister in Castille Square in relation to the rampant killing of protected birds during this autumn hunting season. Our activists held photos of migratory birds while music played birdsong intermittently silenced by gunshot. With each gunshot the participants fell to the ground on the steps of Castille and switched to photos showing shot protected birds. Two large banners were then unfurled, one urging action against law breakers and the other stating that the shooting of protected birds in Malta is the Prime Minister's fault and responsibility.

### Endless list of casualties

During this autumn hunting season, BirdLife Malta and police continued to receive shot protected birds. The list includes many different species, including Common Hoopoe, Black-crowned Night-heron, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Common Kestrel (including a Finnish-ringed bird), Eurasian Honey-buzzard, Western Marsh-harrier, Montagu's Harrier, European Hobby, Eleonora's Falcon, Merlin, European Bee-eater, European Nightjar, Yellow-legged Gull, Eurasian Thick-knee, Eurasian Collared-dove, a European Turtle-dove shot after the season closed, a Greater Flamingo and even three Ospreys. Two of the Ospreys landed at Ghadir Nature Reserve and St Vincent de Paul residence and the third (a Latvian-ringed bird) was found at Buskett. Later in the season we had sightings of rare species, mostly at Buskett, including a young Egyptian Vulture, a Booted Eagle (shot at multiple times) and a Short-toed Snake-eagle (shot down at sea). Moreover, following the opening of a hunting season at sea on 1 October, a number of GPS-tracked highly-protected birds of prey that were being tracked to study their migration vanished as they arrived in Malta. These included a Black Kite from Czechia that stopped transmitting as soon as it arrived in Malta, a



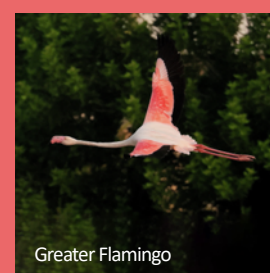
One of the illegally shot Ospreys

BirdLife Malta

rehabilitated Honey-buzzard and a colour-ringed Lesser Spotted Eagle. Other birds, all highly coveted for taxidermy, such as Black and White Storks, and other eagle species, were also targeted. Despite the shooting free-for-all, the number of police officers in the field were actually reduced this year! Whereas in past years the EPU was boosted in order to field a stronger police presence during the peak migration period, this didn't happen this year. This meant that a maximum of 1–2 police units specialised on hunting matters were operative on Malta. In Gozo the EPU is not permitted to operate, and hunting enforcement is entrusted with the Gozo Police on top of their other police duties on the island.

### Flamingo killer granted bail

On 12 November, BirdLife Malta condemned the killing of a protected Greater Flamingo at Qalet Marku and reiterated that the killing of protected birds is PM Robert Abela's and Gozo Minister Clint Camilleri's fault and responsibility. Witnesses watched the hunter shoot down and collect the flamingo from the sea, and leave the area in a car. Helped by videos taken at the site, the police tracked down and arrested the hunter, charging him in court some days later. He was granted bail against a third party guarantee for €10,000 by a relative, ordered to sign the bail book twice weekly and put under a curfew between midnight and 5am.



Greater Flamingo

Mario V Gauci





Trappers as "researchers"

## Trapping seasons open

Trappers are again this year being elevated to "researchers"! This followed the announcement of another finch trapping season under the guise of "scientific research" as recommended by the ORNIS Committee and opened on 20 October. This

despite the derogation being soon subject to a final deliberation at the ECJ – the final step in the European Commission's Infringement Proceedings initiated against Malta to stop this illegal and farcical derogation. The date also marked the start of the trapping season for Eurasian Golden Plover and Song Thrush that will run until 10 January 2024. A total of 2,616 finch trapping sites have been authorised (supposedly to catch and *release* finches!) until 20 December, and a further 1,364 sites are permitted to trap Song Thrush and Golden Plover. Trapping sites are authorised by the Wild Birds Regulation Unit (WBRU). A map of the sites we have set up can be found on Google Maps.

## Government pleas shot down

The Court dismissed the Environment and Gozo Ministers' preliminary pleas in the proceedings where BirdLife Malta is challenging the Government's decision to open the European Turtle-dove spring hunting season last year, declaring that BirdLife Malta has a legal right to challenge the Government in court, and that though the Turtle-dove 2022 spring hunting season is over, BirdLife Malta still had the right to ask the court for judgement on the season's legality. It also added that the Ministers themselves are entirely responsible and hence should face BirdLife's challenges in court. BirdLife Malta was also proven right in using the correct court procedure when filing this case, whose expenses will be borne by the defendants. The case will proceed in February after the Government's request to appeal was also turned down.



BirdLife Malta

## Need for new environmental crime magistrate

Environmental crime cases in court have been shelved indefinitely due to the removal of the presiding magistrate. Two months down the line, BirdLife Malta requested immediate by attention by the Chief Justice on the urgent need for the appointment of a new magistrate to handle such cases. In two separate letters sent in November to Chief Justice Dr Mark Chetcuti, we explained that the void left



Environmental crime cases have been shelved

by the removal of Magistrate Dr Elaine Mercieca Rizzo from the responsibility of handling environmental crime cases, and the subsequent delay in appointing a replacement, is taking its toll on the efficient handling of environmental crime in Malta. Apart from the ever-growing backlog of pending cases, the situation also affects birds that are held caged until the court determines related cases. The longer wild birds are held in captivity, the lower their chances of survival upon release.

## New BirdLife Malta Council elected

On 9 November BirdLife Malta held its Annual General Meeting for 2023 at Salina Nature Reserve. This AGM elected the new Council for the next two years. BirdLife Malta received 11 applications for Council election, and as per statute this meant there was no need for an election to be held. The candidates were approved by the members, and they are James Aquilina, Miriam Camilleri, Capt. Denise Casolani, Norman Chetcuti, Darryl Grima, Dr Eurydike Kovacs, Caldon Mercieca, Dr Paul Portelli, Kathleen Psaila Galea, Capt. Raphael Soler and Steve



President Darryl Grima addressing AGM

Zammit Lupi. All officials from the previous Council were confirmed in their roles: Darryl Grima as President, Caldon Mercieca as Vice-President, Norman Chetcuti as Treasurer and Denise Casolani as Council Secretary.

WORDS **Antoine Monnier** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant

## White Wagtail roost saved!

A national public outcry, a two-day standoff between environmentalists and contractors, the arrest of an activist, and a peaceful protest led by Moviment Graffiti and attended by Mosta residents saved the Ficus trees in Pjazza Rotunda (Mosta) from being uprooted. The decision to remove the trees had been taken by the Mosta mayor and his entire Local Council with ERA's blessing. These trees are the wintering home to many roosting White Wagtails and Common Starlings that every winter evening seek shelter in their canopies. Initially highlighted by BirdLife Malta, the issue escalated to a national level, leading the mayor to finally bow to the pressure and declare that the trees will stay. To mitigate the harm caused by the destruction of the canopies, BirdLife Malta requested that potted trees be installed on site as a temporary measure. ERA acceded to the request and placed eight Holm Oaks in the square. It is hoped these will provide shelter for some of the

1,000+ White Wagtails that used to roost in the square, until the butchered trees recover their canopies.



The protest was also addressed by BirdLife Malta CEO Mark Sultana



# Eurasian Siskin

The Eurasian Siskin is a small bird in the finch family *Fringillidae*. The male plumage is bright green and yellow with a black cap and chin, green upperparts with a yellow rump and an unstreaked yellow throat and breast. Adult females also have a green and yellow plumage tone but not as bright as in the males. Females lack the males' black cap and chin, with more greyish-green upperparts, and whitish breast and belly with dark streaks. The wings of both sexes are black with a conspicuous yellow wing bar, and the tail is black with yellow sides. The bill is short with a decurved culmen (upper ridge).

The Siskin is very common throughout Europe and Asia. Often found in forested areas – both coniferous and mixed woodland – it feeds acrobatically on seeds of all kinds, especially conifers. Its breeding range is spread over two zones, one on each side of the Palearctic region: the central and northern part of Europe, and the eastern coast of Asia. Birds from the northern region migrate further south in winter. BirdLife Malta bird ringers have recovered Siskins carrying rings from Russia, Croatia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Czechia, Latvia, Italy and Germany.

In Malta the Siskin is an irregular autumn migrant and is mostly seen from mid-October to December. Some birds overwinter here and can be seen as late as March or April. The Siskin's migration in Malta is very erratic and numbers may vary from year to year. In some years there are large influxes, and in other years it can be scarce. Very large numbers were recorded in the autumns of 1990 and 2005. There is only one record of Siskins possibly breeding in Malta, when a pair of adults were seen with a juvenile at Buskett on 3 July 1976 (Sultana & Gauci, 1982).

Due to its melodious song, the Siskin is unfortunately prized with finch trappers.

**References:** Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. (1982) *A New Guide to the Birds of Malta*, The Ornithological Society.

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

**MALTESE NAME:** Ekru

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Spinus spinus*

**LENGTH:** 11–12.5 cm

**WING SPAN:** 18–22 cm

**CONSERVATION STATUS:** Least concern

**LOCAL STATUS:** Irregular autumn migrant, abundant in some years and scarce in others

**CALL:** Two similar whistled calls – *tluee* and *tzsy-ee*

**BEHAVIOUR:** Very tame, and considerably active especially when feeding on conifer cones

**HABITAT:** Forested areas such as Buskett, with conifers and mixed woodland





Nature at our reserves

# GHADIRA



**Opening hours**  
September to May  
Monday, Wednesday & Friday 2pm-7pm  
Saturday & Sunday 10am-4pm  
Entrance free (donations welcome!)

**More info at**  
<http://bit.ly/GhadiraNatureReserve>





## Red Admiral

Farfett tal-*Hurrieq* *Vanessa atalanta*

Malta is not blessed with many species of butterfly. Maybe two dozen or so species have been recorded, but even an experienced naturalist will be lucky to rack up 20. Some are rare, others less so. Some are migratory, others resident, some are small, others big and showy. The Red Admiral is “medium-large showy”, easy to identify from its bold colours. Many Red Admirals migrate, and some years we get thousands fluttering across our countryside and gardens (and nature reserves), descending on flowering shrubs to gorge on nectar. As its Maltese name shows, the foodplant of this butterfly’s larvae is the humble Nettle, which many consider a pesky weed. We don’t, of course! Nettles, like many other plants, are the precious basis of entire foodchains.



Mark Anthony Falzon

Red Admiral

## African Tamarisk

Bruka *Tamarix africana*

Most plants hate salt, so places like saltmarshes and seashores are areas they avoid. Some plants, however, have colonised these saline habitats, and the large shrub most evidently adapted to these conditions is the African Tamarisk. It can survive in salty places because it has evolved a way of ridding its system of excess salinity by expelling salt from its leaves. Not only, but the drying salt crystals encrusting the leaves have the added bonus of rendering them unpalatable to most insects. Tamarisks are by far the most common large shrub at Għadira, and at this time of year they’re all getting ready for their winter sleep, so their leaves are turning a nice orange-brown. Despite the name, by the way, the African Tamarisk is quite native – and protected.



Desirée Falzon

African Tamarisk

## Northern Lapwing

Venewwa *Vanellus vanellus*

In the UK the Northern Lapwing is also called ‘peewit’ and it’s a name you only appreciate if you hear the bird calling. Last I heard one at Għadira I thought it was kids playing a toy trumpet – over my head! But it was only a Lapwing sounding its fluty squeak. Lapwings often visit wetlands to poke about for worms at the water’s edge. But they’re equally at home in grassy meadows, where insects and worms are also to be had; in fact the few Lapwings that turn up in Malta in late autumn often head for grassy places like the airport. With their head crest, patterns and metallic plumage, Lapwings are beautiful specimens of the bird world. Sadly their name is on that shameful list of birds that hunters can kill for fun. Thank goodness for protected areas like our nature reserves!



Aron Tanti

Northern Lapwing

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



# Restoring the Salina wetland

## Another success story

### Part 2

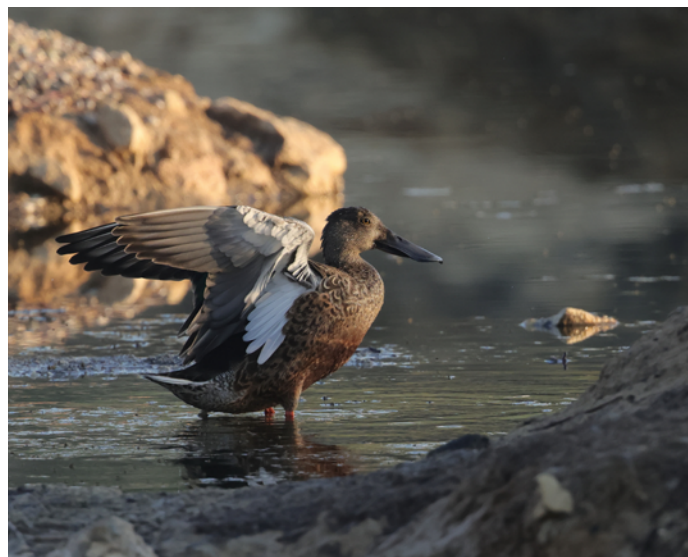
*Part 1 was featured in the previous issue of Bird's Eye View*

Completion of first pool

### The restoration continues

With the fencing set up and the site secured, next in was the heavy machinery work. In November 2022 excavators were brought in to remove the tons of earth dumped over the years. Under constant supervision by reserve staff, the machines created a network of canals and shallow pools that will form excellent wetland habitat for aquatic organisms and for birds. Meanwhile, some of the existing tamarisk shrubs were carefully pruned to ensure they suffer no damage during works.

Much of the excavated material was piled up into earth embankments which, once planted with native vegetation, will serve several purposes. The embankments will provide food and shelter to a variety of animals, and they will also form a barrier against noise pollution, light pollution and screen off visual disturbance from human activity in the vicinity; along with the fence, the embankments will also further discourage human intrusion.



Northern Shoveler on the muddy shores of the main pool



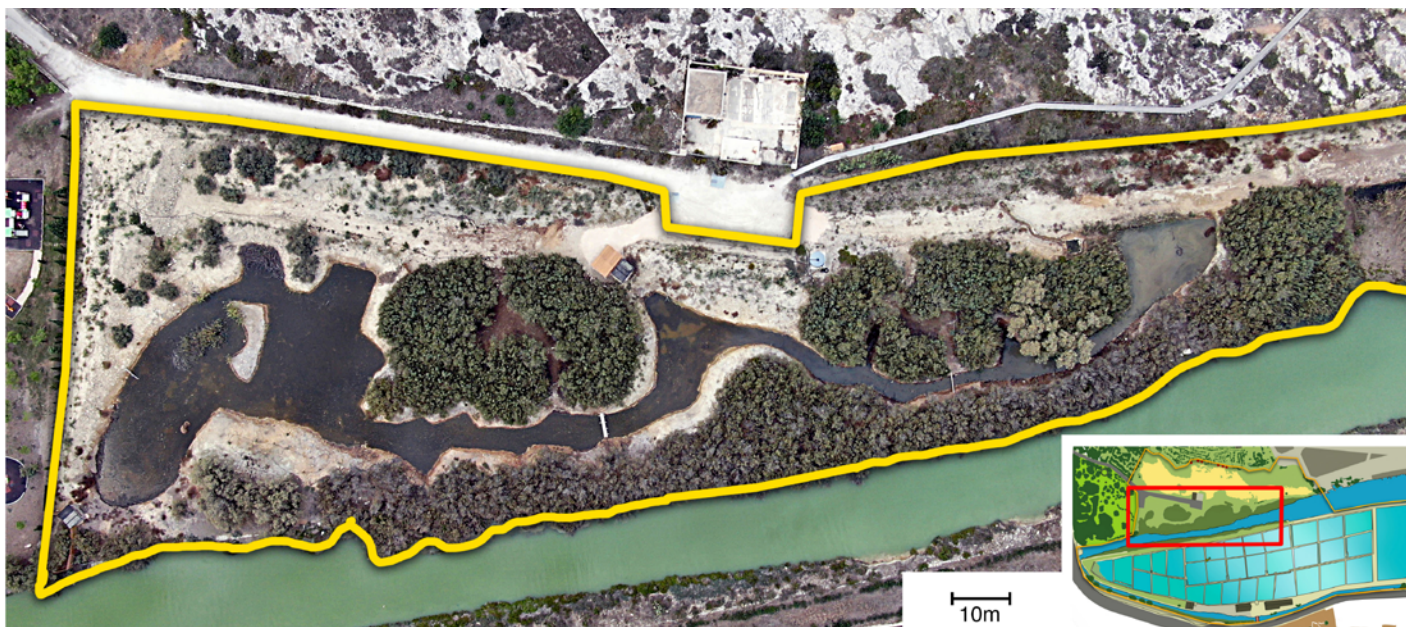
Extension of main pool in progress

### Return to nature

With the major earthworks complete by April 2023, an intensive tree-planting programme followed. Around 700 trees and shrubs were planted, mostly African Tamarisk and Chaste Tree, both native and well-suited to brackish conditions. In other parts of the embankment, a hedgerow was planted with native species including Mediterranean Buckthorn, Lentisk and Judas Tree. For the first years, these trees will be supported with a drip-irrigation system. This hedgerow will also grow into the fence, thereby obscuring an unattractive, if necessary, human structure.

Fortunately, the rains persisted well into spring 2023, which helped to begin washing away the scars left by the heavy machinery and begin the process of nature's regeneration. And it did so in a very short time! The rare Beaked Tasselweed spread quickly in the water and large shoals of Mediterranean





Recent drone view of the new wetland area showing clearly the extended water body

Mario V Gauci



Common Sandpipers in the newly-formed canals



The main pool with the birdwatching hide in the background

Arion Tanti

Killifish fry were sighted. Common Sandpipers, Little Egrets and Common Kingfisher were all spotted feeding in the newly-formed shallows.

Thanks to its new protection from trampling and burning, the reedbed at the east end of the wetland flourished. A small canal with predominantly freshwater conditions – probably due to an underground spring in the area – attracted dragonflies and damselflies to breed. The calls and song of Common Reed-warblers soon resonated from among the lush stand of Common Reed, and a pair recorded breeding there for the first time in many years. Incidentally Salina is also the site of the first known breeding record of the Common Reed-warbler in Malta. This was way back in 1977.

## The human element

In all its restoration projects, BirdLife Malta has never left out the human element. While committed to protecting nature from human destruction, we strongly believe in the importance of making nature accessible to people. For this reason, two small birdwatching hides were erected on site: such viewing places play an important role in letting the public enjoy nature at this restored wetland without disturbing the fragile ecosystem.

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



BirdLife Malta staff fixing new signage on the birdwatching hide

Arion Tanti



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.





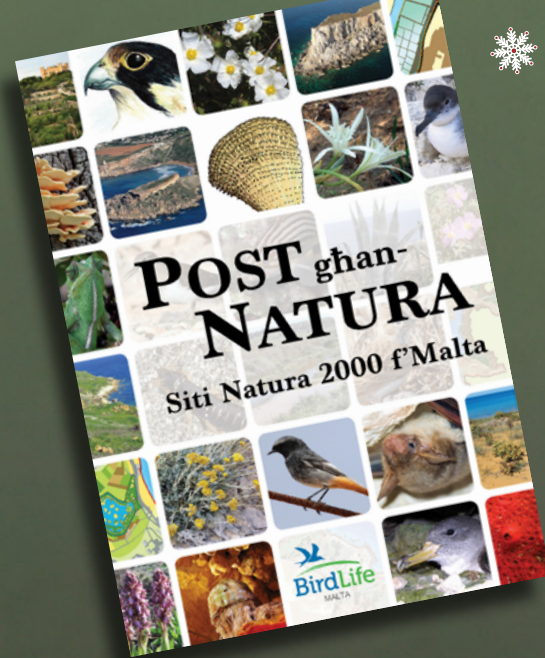


# Christmas membership Special offer!

*A gift to anyone  
who becomes a member this December!*

- \* A book that celebrates Natura 2000 sites in Malta
- \* Subscription to our monthly newsletter
- \* Subscription to our members' magazine *Bird's Eye View* and our junior magazine *Il-Ħuttafa*
- \* Invitation to exclusive member events
- \* Access to tranquil natural spaces at our nature reserves

Join BirdLife Malta and  
lend birds and nature  
your voice



*Become  
a member  
now*



*Happy  
Christmas  
and  
Happy  
New Year  
to all our members!*

**A yearly subscription of just €20 covers all  
adults and children living at one household**

The special Christmas membership gift book *Post għan-Natura* can be collected from our nature reserves or from our office in Ta' Xbiex (until stocks last)

Photo Credit: Ian Balzan



<http://bit.ly/joinBLM>



# First annual Malta Bird Report published

The Malta Bird Report 2021 was launched this summer

Aron Tanti



Spring 2022 was an exceptional year for Rüppell's Warblers

Steve Zammit Lupi



This Temminck's Lark at Hal Far was the 5th record for Malta

Ray Galea



This White-crowned Wheatear at Dwejra (Gozo) was the 3rd record for Malta

Kevin Gambin



This Razorbill at Valletta gave excellent views in late 2022

Malta's first annual bird report was launched in July 2023 and covered the year 2021. The need for a stand-alone annual *Malta Bird Report* (MBR) was felt in order to have information on bird observations in Malta readily available. In parallel, efforts are underway by the Malta Rarities and Records Committee (MRRC) to publish the systematic lists for missing years in upcoming issues of BirdLife Malta's ornithological journal *//Merill*, to eventually close gaps of unreported years.

The main intent of the MBR is to act as a point of reference for interested birders to learn what species are recorded in Malta, in which seasons and in what numbers. It is useful for both experienced local birders as well as foreign birders seeking to learn more about birds and birding in Malta. While not intended to be a scientific publication, it is nevertheless useful from an environmental and conservation perspective, so as to provide indicative trends of bird populations migrating through Malta.

The cornerstone of the MBR is the systematic list of all the species recorded during the year under review. For each species, a brief overview of observations is given, based on data from birdwatching and bird ringing. Where possible, an indication of the phenology of each species is given, such as first and last occurrences, seasonal abundance, etc.; a brief overview of the breeding distribution of nesting species is also given.

Photographs of interesting species or sightings taken during that particular year illustrate the report, making it a more enjoyable read.

The annual systematic lists are now much faster to compile thanks to the setting up of the Malta Bird Sightings (MBS) online platform, which was launched by BirdLife Malta in January 2021. The possibility to extract observations data from this platform in a standard tabulated format greatly facilitated the subsequent analysis for each species to enable a short summary for each species to be written. The data is also subjected to quality control by the MRRC to ensure accuracy. Each entry is

also supplemented by bird ringing data; including such data is especially useful for certain species since this may be more representative of the occurrence than sightings data. Ringing data from the long-established Upupa online platform is also used to compile the report in this regard.

## MBR 2022 out soon

Meanwhile the report for 2022 has also been compiled and will be available by end 2023. The structure and content of these reports is envisaged to continue evolving. In the forthcoming MBR 2022, besides an introduction and systematic list, a summary of the year is also being included, highlighting among other things the occurrence of rare birds, significant

influxes of migrants, and any exceptional breeding records. Future editions will include further interesting supplementary information.

Both issues of the *Malta Bird Report* will soon be available from BirdLife Malta's nature reserves in print, and online on our website. If interested in obtaining a copy you can also email [info@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:info@birdlifemalta.org).

WORDS **Stefano Miceli** Editor, Malta Bird Report





# Exploring the north-east

A wintry walk in nature and history at L-Imġiebaħ Natura 2000 site

Panorama of Wied L-Imġiebaħ

This walk starts and ends at Selmun Palace where there is ample space for parking. The walk is about 4.7 km long and includes a detour to Il-Qortin and down to the sandy beach of Mġiebaħ. Much of the route is on a Natura 2000 site known as *L-Inħawi tal-Imġiebaħ u Tal-Mignuna*.

Aron Tanti



Selmun Palace

## Selmun Palace – our departure point

Selmun Palace was built in the 18th century. It is also known as Selmun Tower, as it also included a watchtower due to its prominent location on high ground overlooking the northern part of the island. This palace was leased to the Knights of the Order of St John as a hunting lodge for rabbits and a place for relaxation. Despite its fort-like appearance it was never used for military purposes.

## Across the garrigue

Take the country lane across the road from the palace and start walking towards Mellieħa. Soon an asphalted road crosses your path. Cross the road and continue along a country lane still in the general direction of Mellieħa. The habitat here turns to rocky garrigue, where you will encounter various species of our garrigue and steppe flora. To mention a few, you will find Sea Squill (Għansar), Spiny Asparagus (Spraġ Xewwieki) and Branched Asphodel (Berwieq). Various trees too dot the landscape along the way, including Carob (Ħarruba), Aleppo Pine (Żnuber) and Olive (Żebbuġ).

Since we're in the winter season, the fauna here is dominated by the presence of birds. Apart from European Robin (Pitirross), whose calls you will surely hear, you will likely encounter Black Redstarts (Fjamma Sewda), Meadow Pipits (Pespis) and Common Stonechats (Buċaq tax-Xitwa) on the garrigue, among other species.

Along your walk, take a moment, stay silent for a minute and feel the nature that surrounds you. Listen to the birds, watch out maybe for late-season butterflies and smell the different wild plants in the area. If a north-easterly *Grigal* wind is blowing, you should also smell the sea breeze!

## On to the apiaries

At the end of the pathway, walk a few metres along a tarmac road and swing back onto the rough trail as indicated on the map. The path takes a circular route across the flat garrigue plateau known as Il-Qortin, which here is rich in shrubs of Hoary Rock-rose (Ċistu Roża), which however are not at their best in winter. Along the path back you will come across the remains of old apiaries hewn out of the rock and which date back to Punic times.



Aron Tanti

Black Redstart



Aron Tanti

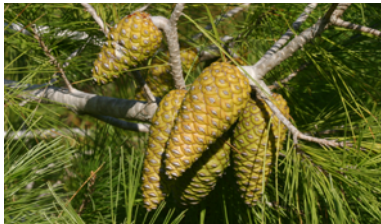
Common Stonechat



## Down to Mġiebaħ beach

Back on the asphalted road, take a left and follow the road down to Mġiebaħ beach. This is a narrow two-way road which is relatively popular in summer, but drivers are usually courteous to walkers along the way. Along the way you will pass on your left a dark grove of trees nestled against the cliff – these are the Ballut tal-Imġiebaħ, one of the handful of wild Holm Oak woodland remnants in Malta. Eventually you will walk past a farmhouse on a curve and soon you will reach the end at a small opening often used as a parking area. Take a left turn here and walk down an even narrower road – with lush reedbed on your right – that will take you to the pristine sandy Mġiebaħ beach. Take a break and stop for a picnic (or a swim if it's summer) and breathe in the silence and salty sea air.

Victor Falzon

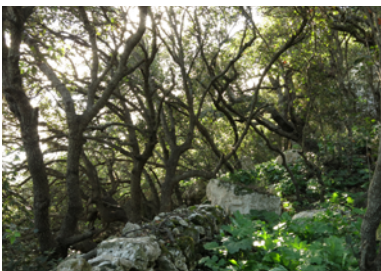


Aleppo Pine

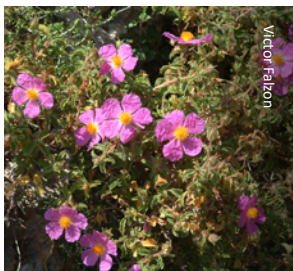


Branched Asphodel

Desirée Falzon



Il-Ballut tal-Imġiebaħ



Hoary Rock-rose



Victor Falzon

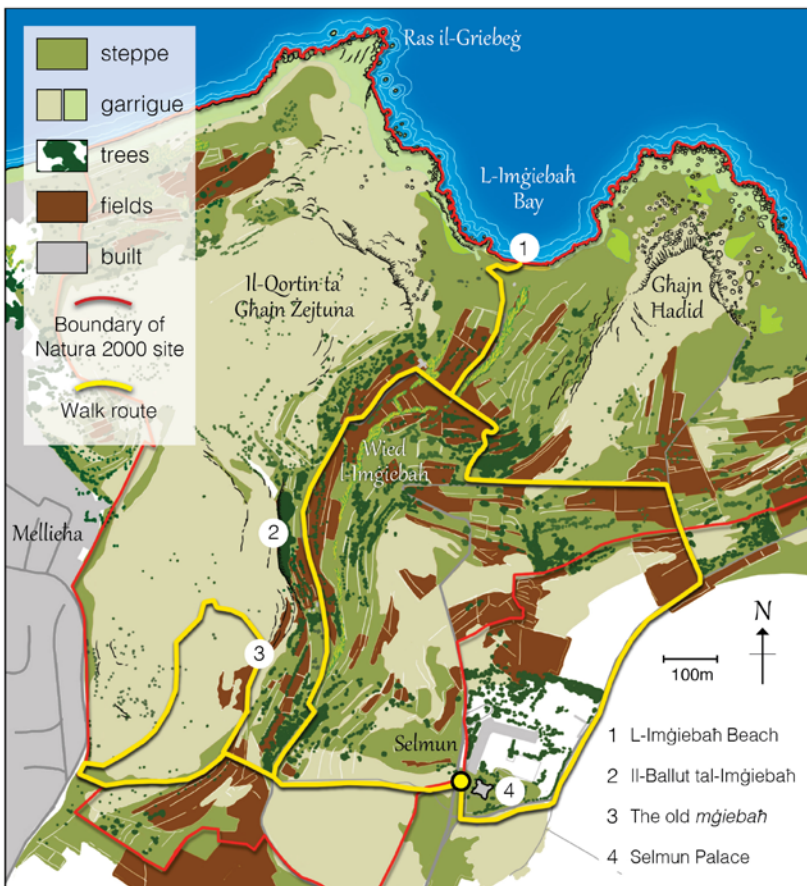
L-Imġiebaħ sandy beach

## Heading back

Let's resume the walk and start heading back. Back track to the parking area after the walk along the reeds and turn left and walk along the road, which very soon ends at a small house. There's a pathway that leads you behind the house and back up the hill. It is slightly steep but manageable. Once at the top and back on an asphalted road, take left and follow the road, which will take you along the edge of the hill overlooking Mistra Valley and eventually back to Selmun Palace. We hope you enjoy the walk!

WORDS **Theresa M Cremona** BirdLife Malta Events & Activities Group

Victor Falzon



Beekeeping in Malta has a long history. The Greeks called the island *Melite* which derives from the word *meli* that means honey. This name was also used under the Romans and only changed to *Malta* during the Arab rule. The old Maltese word for beehive is *mġbħa* – the plural *mġiebaħ* gives the name to the region! Visualise the bees entering these tiny man-made caves to produce honey in the special jars left for them by the farmers. Honey was a commodity in old times before the invention of sugar refining.



Victor Falzon

The old hives that gave the name *L-Imġiebaħ* to the area



Aron Tanti



**23 Sep 2023** In anticipation of this year's EuroBirdwatch weekend of events, we organised a Facebook livestream of a bird ringing session hosted by BirdLife Malta ringer Nicholas Galea assisted by Nimrod Mifsud at Ghadira Nature Reserve. We also

had a surprise for those who joined us online when at the end of the livestream we released back into the wild a Greater Flamingo that had been nursed back to health by our rehab team.

Antoine Monnier



**29 Sep 2023** BirdLife Malta hosted an educational event at Salina as part of the Natural Helpers and LIFE PanPuffinus! projects to celebrate World Maritime Day. Our guides for the evening were Many Russo, who leads BirdLife Malta's LIFE PanPuffinus! project, and Martina Cutajar, who is the manager of the Ċirkewwa Marine Park led by Nature Trust-FEE Malta.

**29—30 Sep 2023** The BirdLife Malta education team participated in the *Science in the City Street Festival* by showing through fun, games and conversation how simple steps can improve the environment around us.

This event was ideal to showcase what we do to help birds and bring people closer to nature, especially by creating new wildlife gardens.

**29—30 Sep 2023** During *Science in the City 2023*, we organised an exciting comic art workshop where participants of all ages had an amazing time learning to combine science with art as our resident cartoonist Daniel Collin talked them through the intricacies of studying wild animals to create characters for a visual medium, be it cartoons, comics or animation. The workshop

Alessandra Loria



was offered as part of LIFE PanPuffinus! which aims to improve the conservation status of Yelkouan Shearwaters and Balearic Shearwaters by tackling threats to these vulnerable seabirds.



Murat Gellir

**30 Sep 2023** BirdLife Malta hosted two bird ringing sessions and an open day at Ghadira Nature Reserve. Participants learned about bird ringing techniques and the importance of this research tool. This event was part of EuroBirdwatch23, Europe's biggest annual birdwatching event.

**1 Oct 2023** On Day 2 of EuroBirdwatch23 we marvelled at birds of prey migrating over Buskett. Families joined us for the bird count in Malta's oldest woodland, after which we reported our findings to the EuroBirdwatch organisers. This year 777 events were held across Europe and Central Asia. Thanks everyone for making this event a success. See you again next year!

Antoine Monnier



Mark Gauci



**6 Oct 2023** Our popular *Sip, Savour and Soak* in Nature series returned at Salina Nature Reserve. The theme for this third edition was conservation. Attendees first enjoyed a presentation by Debra Jane Camilleri, Executive Officer at the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, who focused on the need to safeguard our cultural heritage. Following this we screened the short film documentary *Birds without Borders*, produced by Mark Trapani, about a major conservation issue in Malta – spring hunting of birds.



Abigail Farrugia

**10—12 Oct 2023** BirdLife Malta's education team participated at the MCAST Fresher's Week, bringing excitement and awareness about

our organisation. We introduced students to our mission and our youth Erasmus+ *It's Time* project, which focuses on engaging young individuals in the global effort to protect vulnerable birds while also establishing a youth council.





**14 Oct 2023** BirdLife Malta's Blooming Minds team participated in the monthly Walk and Talk at Vincent's Eco Estate. It was one of founder Rachael Hollwey's last

events after setting up Walk and Talk four years ago before she sadly left Malta for medical reasons. Following the walk, we enjoyed refreshments together while listening to an acoustic version of the theme from *Friends*.



**28 Oct 2023** BirdLife Malta staff and volunteers celebrated Halloween with an exclusive event for our young Klabb Huttat members at Salina Nature Reserve. The event was full of fun educational games aimed to expand children's knowledge about bats, insects and other animals.



**5 Nov 2023** Our Blooming Minds team's monthly appointment with Walk and Talk was held at our Foresta 2000 Nature Reserve, a re-created swathe of Mediterranean woodland stretching almost from coast to coast in Mellieħa, offering diverse wildlife and great views across the valley.



**9 Nov 2023** BirdLife Malta's Annual General Meeting was held at Salina Nature Reserve's Visitor Centre. The event was open to BirdLife Malta members residing in Malta and Gozo. The AGM included the presentation of the Financial Statements and Operational Report for 2022. A moment was dedicated to the memory of the late Dominic Cutajar, one of the founders of BirdLife Malta. A new BirdLife Malta Council was also elected (more about this on page 4).



**12 Nov 2023** Our Events & Activities Group organised a four-hour walk in our beautiful countryside. Starting at Mgarr Parish Church, we made our way past Castello Zammitello onwards to Fomm ir-Riħ where we admired the sea below us as well as distant views of Gozo. Later we walked along the Victoria Lines, then continued downhill towards the Chapel of Our Lady of Hodegetria for our final stop before finishing again at Mgarr.

**18–19 Nov 2023**

Our team was a guest at a special event to celebrate the seventh anniversary of Esplora. The event was filled with interactive activities and workshops, all aimed at spreading awareness about environmental conservation and climate change. Visitors learned more about Maltese nature reserves, bird ringing, the effects of climate change on bird migration, and trees on the islands.



## Upcoming events

**17 Dec 2023** Join us at Simar Nature Reserve's visitor centre for a Christmas family event from 11am to 3pm. The event will also bring children closer to nature through several activities such as crafting origami, learning about birdwatching, the European Robin and more.

**11 Feb 2024** Our Events and Activities Group is planning the first nature walk for the new year. Mark this date on your calendar and follow our Fb page for more information. Date and route will be confirmed at the start of the new year. We look forward to having you with us.

**25 Feb 2024** We're excited to announce Walk for Nature 2024! This annual fundraising event is organised by our Education and Events teams, and is led by our Events & Activities Group. The walk signals the arrival of spring and brings together schoolchildren, parents and nature enthusiasts to raise awareness and money for nature protection. This year's route will be a circular one from and back to Simar Nature Reserve.

**6–7 Mar 2024** Visit our festAmbjent stand at the Junior College on 6 and 7 March. We look forward to interacting with students and sharing knowledge about bird conservation.

### 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](mailto:events@birdlifemalta.org)  
or call +356 2134 7645





# Another year of achievements

Victor Falzon



Well done to all the schools awarded for connecting children with nature over the past scholastic year! Trophies were handed out to 77 schools at this year's Dinja Wahda Awards event, held on 16 November at Xara Lodge. The occasion also marked the launch of a new scholastic year 2023–2024 that will see our flagship environmental education programme fully transitioning to the new Dinja Wahda Action Guide. Dinja Wahda is part of BirdLife Malta's commitment to protecting wildlife and habitats through nature-based learning, with Bank of Valletta as project partners.



Andine Monnier