

# Bird's Eye View

A BirdLife Malta members' magazine

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**BirdLife**  
MALTA



# A pivotal moment for Malta's environment

In the past weeks, two significant events occurred that are likely to impact the environment, albeit in different ways. The recent MEP and Local Council elections in June have been extensively analyzed, with a common theme emerging: the public's dissatisfaction with the status quo and a desire for change.

One key issue widely criticised is the loss of open spaces, constant construction in urban and rural areas and the lack of enforcement of environment laws. Both major political parties have pledged to listen to the people which, while not a novel promise, seems to carry a greater sense of urgency this time round. This presents an opportune moment for environmentalists and nature-conscious individuals to amplify their voices and bring these issues to the forefront of the political agenda. The Mosta Local Council results, where the community collaborated with organisations like BirdLife Malta and Moviment Graffiti to save the trees, demonstrate a renewed hope for positive change among the people. Another positive result that clearly demonstrates the citizens' desire for change is what happened in Haż-Żebbuġ where following his re-election for the second time as an Independent councillor, BirdLife Malta Council Member Steve Zammit Lupi will now also be serving for the first time as mayor after obtaining the highest

number of votes in his hometown. Well done to Steve for this personal achievement!

Concurrently, the EU's Nature Restoration Directive has now cleared all hurdles. This Directive is expected to have a beneficial impact on all Member States, including Malta. The focus is shifting from mere conservation and safeguarding to actively planning the restoration of habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity. This presents an exciting opportunity for NGOs to work closely with the government to achieve the targets set by the Directive. BirdLife Malta is already prepared to propose viable solutions.

The recent elections have created a crucial window for us to push these concerns to the forefront and work with government to bring about meaningful change. Moreover, the EU's Nature Restoration Law provides a framework for Malta to prioritise habitat and biodiversity restoration, an area where environmental NGOs can play a pivotal role in partnership with the authorities. These events signal a potential shift towards greater emphasis on environmental restoration in the coming years.

**Mark Sultana**  
CEO



## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

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

**Apr 2024.** Man fined €3,000. CRIME: Possession of live Greater Flamingo at his residence (Rabat, Jun 2023). Bird will be released back into the wild in due course.

**Apr 2024.** Trapper fined €1,000 + revocation of hunting and trapping licence for life. CRIME: Trapping during closed season; trapping for protected species, including Schedule 1 species Ortolan Bunting + Greater Short-toed Lark. (Żonqor, Mar 2021).

**May 2024:** Man fined €800 + 3yr bird possession licence suspension. CRIME: Possession of European Robin and finches (Paradise Bay, Jun 2023).

**Jun 2024:** Trapper fined €1,000 + revocation of trapping licence for life. CRIME: Finch trapping without licence on unregistered site (Delimara, Oct 2023).

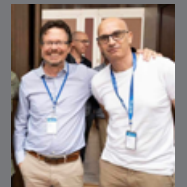
## EU Nature Restoration Law finally adopted!

Despite previous political roadblocks, the EU's Environmental Council has finally adopted the Nature Restoration Law. This crucial win for Europe's nature and climate saw 20 Member States, representing 66% of the population, endorse the law. Austria's Environment Minister, Leonore Gewessler, played a key role by shifting her country's stance. This victory, backed by over a million citizens, scientists, businesses, and civil society, strengthens the EU's position for the upcoming UN Biodiversity Conference and reinforces the importance of biodiversity in future agendas. This success demonstrates Europe's commitment to tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, ensuring a sustainable future for all.



## Fly high Martin!

In June we joined the BirdLife Partnership in mourning a good friend but also a dedicated and highly-respected environmentalist whose tragic death shocked us all. Martin Abbas Hellicar, Director of BirdLife Cyprus, was one of the Partnership's most committed conservation leaders, and his passing leaves a tremendous void, but he also leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire us all. Here he is seen with our CEO Mark Sultana who described him as "a passionate environmentalist with a leadership style that took BirdLife Cyprus to another level".



Mark Sultana and Martin Abbas Hellicar

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# ECJ AG Opinion recommends end to finch trapping



Trapper on a finch trapping site

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) Advocate General Tamara Čápetá recommended that the ECJ should find that Malta's derogation allowing the live capture of finches breaches the European Birds Directive. Čápetá suggested the Court declares that Malta's scheme for capturing seven finch species violates EU law and that Malta should bear its own and the Commission's costs. This Opinion highlights Malta's misuse of 'scientific research' provisions and sends a strong message against politically motivated derogations. In view of this BirdLife Malta has urged the government to halt the trapping season until the final judgement is delivered.

Aron Tanti



Common Quail

## Another spring hunting season

Despite BirdLife Malta's opposition, a spring hunting season ran between 10 and 30 April this year, allowing hunting of Common Quail and the Vulnerable European Turtle-dove. Following an ORNIS Committee's recommendation, BirdLife Malta's call for a moratorium due to Turtle-dove decline and potential breaches of the Birds Directive was ignored. A request for a Warrant for Prohibitory Injunction by BirdLife Malta was initially accepted by the Court but later revoked, allowing the season to proceed, with 7,969 hunters permitted to hunt. BirdLife Malta gave a media briefing, monitored illegal hunting through its annual Spring Watch camp, and emphasised that hunting birds on their way to breed contravenes conservation principles.



Turtle-dove satellite tagging

## Turtle-doves tagged

During this year's spring migration, the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme fitted several European Turtle-doves with GPS trackers as part of the EU-funded HABITRACK project. Led by the National Museum of Natural History in Paris and involving European partners, the project aims to understand better the habitat needs and threats faced by 14 species of conservation concern, including the Turtle-dove. By tagging these birds, we can now monitor their journey to their breeding grounds and gain valuable insight into their migration patterns. A video showing a Turtle-dove being tagged in Malta was aired at BirdLife International's World Migratory Bird Day 2024 FB livestream, which we joined with a live broadcast from Malta.

BirdLife Malta

## Bird smuggling ring uncovered

The Malta Police Force has uncovered a significant wildlife smuggling ring involving Maltese hunters who exploited loopholes in bird conservation laws. By laundering bird collections, they affected protected species both locally and internationally. This illicit trade extends beyond Malta, as hunters capture birds in African countries with the help of tour operators and taxidermists. These findings underscore the urgent need for increased resources for the EPU, Customs, ERA and the WBRU to combat this trade effectively and strengthen conservation efforts to protect vulnerable species.

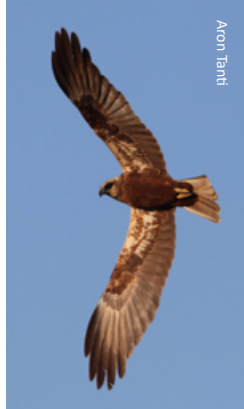


Some of the birds found by the police

Malta Police

## Harrier hunter granted bail

A hunter, apprehended by the Environmental Protection Unit of the Malta Police Force for shooting a protected Western Marsh-harrier in Delimara, was granted bail. Volunteers, guarding roosting Montagu's Harriers and Western Marsh-harriers, reported the incident, leading to the arrest. Through transfers authorised by the WBRU, the killing of Marsh-harriers is encouraging young hunters to start their own stuffed-bird collections.



Arion Janti

Marsh-harrier at Buskett

## Hunting and trapping crackdown

After a CABS operation in March led to the confiscation of 263 live birds and the dismantling of 27 illegal finch trapping sites, a hunter was caught later, in Marsaskala, shooting a protected Eurasian Collared-dove. This led to charges, licence revocation and discovery of several dead Tree Pipits and a trap with 21 European Turtle-doves and a Eurasian Collared-dove. In a separate case in Gozo, authorities identified 24 suspects and seized 33 sets of clapnets and illegal bird callers. All birds were confiscated and handed over to BirdLife Malta for rehab.



Confiscated Turtle-doves

Nik Barbara

## Advocating for nature in EP elections

In May, BirdLife Malta hosted European Parliament election candidates at Simar Nature Reserve to discuss its conservation efforts and the importance of supporting the Nature Restoration Law. This initiative came in light of the EU Parliament Scoreboard, which showed that most MEPs from 2019 to 2024 failed to protect Europe's environment. On World Environment Day, BirdLife Malta, alongside other

Nature Restoration Law. This initiative came in light of the EU Parliament Scoreboard, which showed that most MEPs from 2019 to 2024 failed to protect Europe's environment. On World Environment Day, BirdLife Malta, alongside other



Independent candidate Arnold Cassola was one of the EP election hopefuls visiting Simar

Nathaniel Attard

NGOs, urged the public to prioritise the environment in the 8 June elections, emphasizing the need for a united voice to advocate for sustainable and healthy future policies.

## Mosta Ficus poisoned

After BirdLife Malta documented and reported concerns about the Ficus trees in Mosta's main square to the EPU and ERA, it was recently confirmed that the trees were deliberately poisoned. Holes drilled into the trees and an unspecified liquid were discovered. Despite no arrests, ERA is reviewing footage to identify the culprits. BirdLife Malta continues to push for justice and remains vigilant in protecting urban trees.



Mosta Ficus trees with drilled holes visible

Nik Barbara



New kiosk at Santa Marija Bay without ERA permits

BirdLife Malta

## Call to publish Kemmuna study

In May, seven environmental NGOs, including BirdLife Malta, challenged ERA's refusal to release the Carrying Capacity Assessment for Kemmuna, attributing it to an unjustified Cabinet request. Despite a denied Freedom of Information request and subsequent complaint, the ENGOs argue that the study is mandated by the 2014 Comino Management Plan. They are now appealing to the IDPC Tribunal. Furthermore, unpermitted commercial activities, such as a new beach kiosk at Santa Marija Bay and issues at the Blue Lagoon and Comino Hotel, continue to jeopardize the island's protected status.

WORDS **Khouloud Belhadj** BirdLife Malta Communication Assistant



# Greater Short-toed Lark

Greater Short-toed Larks are markedly smaller than the familiar Eurasian Skylark (*Alwetta*), with a shorter bill, square-shaped head and characteristic long pointed wing and rather long tail. Colouration of the upperparts and breast are quite variable across the breeding range however the ones that breed in the Maltese Islands are sandy-buff above with a distinctive buff-white supercilium, emphasised by a dark eye-stripe which usually appears to surround darker cheeks, and pale lower neck-sides. Upperparts are prominently streaked dull black-brown and have a double pale wing-bar. Breast is generally plain buff white and often has brown-black upper breast side patches on the warmer sandy-buff breast.

Juvenile birds are distinctly mottled and any striking features of adult birds are usually dull or absent. This all helps to ensure that, for the first 4–6 weeks at least, young birds are well camouflaged.

Greater Short-toed Larks sing mostly in flight but also on the ground. Males, like most other larks, can hover for prolonged periods during song flights. They slowly circle, meander or undulate at 30–50m above ground and spend up to 10 minutes hovering in this way, before plummeting steeply back to the ground.

They are usually quite approachable but also wary, often stopping to straighten up and stretch their neck to scan for possible danger. As in all lark species, the diet of the Greater Short-toed lark consists almost entirely of seeds and insects.

Greater Short-toed Larks are highly gregarious outside the breeding season, typically occurring in flocks during migration and winter. At the end of the breeding season, family parties also gather into flocks.

This species is one of the most widespread and familiar small larks present around the Mediterranean. It is a summer visitor to the plains and cultivation of the Mediterranean east to the Middle East, Mongolia and Western China, and winters mostly in the Sahel and Southern Asia. There is also a mainly resident population in South Arabia.

Formerly, this species was regarded as a widespread breeding bird across the Maltese Islands, but the population has decreased drastically over the past decades especially in Malta and Kemmuna. Fortunately it is still quite frequent in Gozo and can be heard singing in various localities in late spring and summer. In Malta it can still be easily observed along the airfield at the Malta International Airport and at Majjistral Park. In the Maltese Islands, spring migration is mainly from mid-March to mid-April while autumn migration is from mid-August to mid-September. All birds breeding in Malta winter in the Sahel region in Africa.

WORDS **Edward Bonavia** Malta Rarities and Records Committee Secretary, and BirdLife Malta National Raptor Coordinator

**MALTESE NAME:** Bilbla

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

**LENGTH:** 14–15.5 cm

**WING SPAN:** 25–30 cm

**IUCN CONSERVATION STATUS:** Least Concern

**LOCAL STATUS:** Localised breeding summer resident and frequent spring and autumn migrant

**CALL:** Commonest call a short *tewp* or a dry chirruping *drit*

**BEHAVIOUR:** Hovers high for prolonged periods during song flights

**HABITAT:** Open dry areas with sparse and low vegetation cover, found in agricultural land as well as in garrigue, steppe and airfields



Nature at our reserves

# FORESTA 2000



**Opening hours**  
Open all year round  
and accessible 24 hours a day  
Entrance free  
**More info at**  
<http://bit.ly/Foresta2000NatureReserve>



## Phoenician Juniper

Ġniepru *Juniperus phoenicea*

Most trees produce flowers and fruit but one group, known as conifers, produces cones rather than fruit, and no flowers at all. Three of these (the Aleppo Pine, the Italian Cypress and, more recently, the Araar) are common sights in our gardens, cemeteries and afforested areas. And then there's the Phoenician Juniper – a rare find in Malta, which is strange as it's a very Mediterranean species. It probably grew wild in the past but records are unclear as it was often confused with the Araar (also one of its names), whose scale-like leaves are rather similar. One obvious difference is that the Juniper's cones are fleshy rather than woody, looking very much like berries: indeed some birds eat them. The Phoenician Juniper is one hardy species that can boldly take on our arid climate, which is why the few that were planted at Foresta are thriving happily.



Victor Falzon

Phoenician Juniper

Nicholas Galea



Subalpine Warbler

## Subalpine Warbler

*Bufala Passajra* *Curruca cantillans*

Birds that spent their winter in Africa or around the mild Mediterranean shores fly back north to nest somewhere in mainland Europe. Rain and strong winds are a menace to the millions trying to cross the sea, especially those that can't swim. These include warblers, small land-loving birds that must make the crossing from North Africa to Europe in one non-stop dash... or perish. One of these is the Subalpine Warbler, a shy, active woodland species. Males have this lovely brick-red breast with a killer white 'moustache' cutting across their face. Like most other migratory birds visiting our shores, subalpines only pause for a brief but vital 'pit stop' rest and feed, before resuming their perilous trek. The insects and berries at Foresta are a welcome feast for these hungry travellers, and the thick shrubbery the ideal shelter for a one-night kip.

## Vapourer

L-Imferfxa *Orygia trigotephras*

We have hundreds of moth species but we hardly notice them because, contrary to their gaudy day-loving cousins the butterflies, moths are largely drab in colour and fly by night. One moth that breaks the night-shift rule is the Vapourer, which is sometimes encountered in the maquis area of Foresta. Males flutter about incessantly (hence the Maltese name!) in search of females, and as they don't land much, we miss the rich-brown patterned upperwings and orange underwing. The ladies' lot is very different: they are flightless, they stay in their woolly pupa, get fertilised in their pupa, die in their pupa and the caterpillars burst out of their dead mother's body – move over *Alien The Movie!* The caterpillars too are a spectacle in themselves, as the photo attests, and one may find it hard to believe Photoshop was not involved!



Victor Falzon

Vapourer

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

# Blooming Schools

## Young voices for nature: Cultivating the next generation of biodiversity advocates

Station Europe

First graduates of the *Vlogging Academy for Sustainability* - Youth exchange Romania

Blooming Schools is an inspiring Erasmus+ funded project dedicated to improving biodiversity in schools, fostering environmental activism among teenagers and strengthening BirdLife Malta's engagement in secondary schools.

### How it all started

BirdLife Malta has a long-established programme in primary schools, called Dinja Waħda. This year, Dinja Waħda is also celebrating its 30th anniversary since its first edition in 1994.

different habitats and attract native wildlife in all forms. In schools, wildlife gardens are also very good places for students to connect with nature, to engage with nature during lessons, or simply to enjoy time in a green and peaceful environment. Wildlife gardens are also beneficial for the community where these little enclaves of greenery improve urban biodiversity.

The manual provides step-by-step guidance on setting up and maintaining a school wildlife garden, including practical tips, case studies and visual information on Mediterranean pollinator plants and insects.

This will help us achieve a multiplier effect in creating these gardens in Malta and beyond, so that you the reader will also have a resource to make your garden more wildlife-friendly!

Victor Falzon



Dinja Waħda Garden at Dingli Primary, a project initiated this last scholastic year

Over the years, we have also started to collaborate with secondary schools to ensure continuity and engagement of all ages in appreciating nature. In 2021, we decided to write an Erasmus+ project to provide us and our partners with the tools and resources to engage successfully with students and create resources to support secondary teachers.

As the title suggests, Blooming Schools is aiming to ensure more schools are flourishing with nature and students have the opportunity to raise their voices for biodiversity.

### Concrete results and actions

Based on our experience with creating Dinja Waħda Gardens in schools, we are now writing a wildlife garden manual for Mediterranean schools. A wildlife garden's aim is to create



Stefania Papadopoul

Planter made through arts and passion





Teambuilding games

Of course, we want teachers to be comfortable in nature, therefore we are also developing an online module to provide practical tips and resources to carry out nature-based learning with the students using a STEAM approach.

STEAM is a learning approach that integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics to facilitate student inquiry, discussion and critical thinking. In a wildlife garden this kind of approach is easy to implement. For example, designing the layout of a garden involves maths to work out sizes, areas, quantities, etc.; arts to draw a physical representation of what the garden will look like; engineering to build irrigation systems; science to work out which plants and species should go where; and technology that can be used for keeping records, creating videos and many other applications that can be carried out in a wildlife garden.

Together with the online module, we are proposing a series of activities in secondary schools connected with the Sustainable Development Goals. Schools can get started by assessing their school grounds' biodiversity or just simply do a subject lesson in the garden. The activities are designed to build critical thinking in students and make them aware of little actions they can take for the environment, from hands-on activities to engaging the community.

To ensure opportunities for young people passionate about nature, we aim to engage them beyond the classroom by



Teamwork at Portela school in Portugal



Surveying the school grounds

encouraging volunteerism. At BirdLife Malta we believe in fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among students who love nature. By collaborating with schools we hope to build a network of environment-conscious youth eager to participate in conservation activities and grow together, both personally and professionally. This initiative seeks to reignite interest in nature among teens, providing them with meaningful experiences that cultivate lifelong friendships and a commitment to environmental stewardship.



Some pollination in the garden

## Are you a young person? Join Falko!

Finally, to inspire the next generation of environmental advocates, we encourage youth to create engaging social media content about sustainability and conservation. As Sir David Attenborough put it, "Saving the planet is now a communications challenge." We created the *Vlogging Academy for Sustainability* to equip young people with digital skills to become effective communicators and community leaders, making environmental topics popular and impactful.

Special thanks to the Erasmus+ funding scheme for giving us the opportunity to work on this project, and to our partners Friends of the Earth Malta, St Nicholas College Dingli Secondary, Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA, BirdLife Portugal), Agrupamento de Escolas de Portela e Moscavide in Portugal, Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS, BirdLife Greece) and Station Europe in Romania.

WORDS **Stefania Papadopol** BirdLife Malta Education Manager



# FESTA MELH SALT FEST 2024

## Salina Salt Museum Grand Opening

**Celebrate tradition at the Salina salt pans!**

**Free entry to the new Salina Salt Museum:** Discover the rich history and heritage of salt harvesting

**Food Stalls:** Enjoy a nice light snack and drink whilst taking in the view of the salt pans

**Craft Stands:** Browse and participate in unique handmade craft activities

**Family-friendly Activities:** Fun for all ages with interactive games and educational booths and a mixture of indoor (air-conditioned) and outdoor areas

*Join us for an open weekend to celebrate the inauguration of the new Salt Museum at Salina Nature Reserve. Bring your family and friends to celebrate the tradition of salt harvesting in a beautiful, historical setting. Don't miss out on this unique cultural experience!*

**Dates:** Sat 27 & Sun 28 July 2024

**Time:** 4pm–8pm

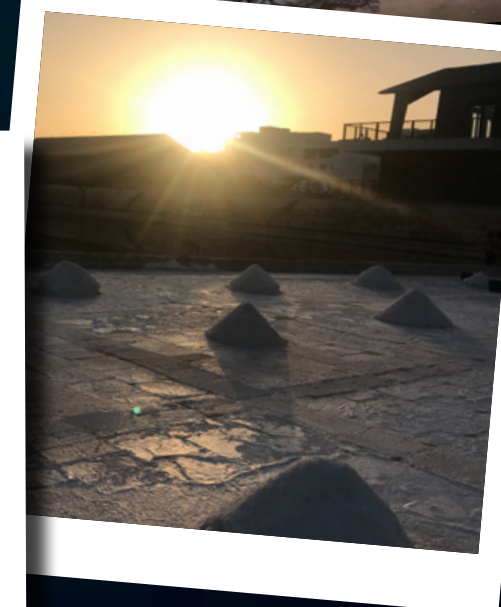
**Location:** Salina Nature Reserve

**Hosted by:** BirdLife Malta

MORE DETAILS



[bit.ly/FestaMelh2024](https://bit.ly/FestaMelh2024)



# Bird studies on a small island

## A look at the spring 2024 ringing campaign on Kemmuna

European Turtle-dove fitted with GPS transmitter before release

In April and May the BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme conducted its annual spring migration ringing campaign on Kemmuna. Over 27 days, a total of 2,019 birds were ringed by our licensed ringers, an average year and a good result considering the frequent strong winds. The highest day tally was 268 birds on 21 April.

Days with sudden peaks of birds followed by dips are common on Mediterranean islands which are widely used by birds as resting sites while on migration. Birds aim to cross the Mediterranean in one night (most migrate at night to avoid heat and predators) but unexpected weather conditions often make them pause on their journey, and this is what causes 'falls' on islands like Kemmuna. Biometrics (measurements such as mass) show the birds' body condition and give us a good indication of how strenuous the birds' journey was from their point of departure in Africa.

A total of 42 species were ringed, the most common being Common Whitethroat (351 ringed), Wood Warbler (287), Garden Warbler (241), Pied Flycatcher (173) and Spotted Flycatcher (161). All these have a large population and breeding distribution across central and eastern Europe.

Rarities ringed this year included three Ruppell's Warblers, a rare eastern species seldom ringed in Malta. Other highlights included Eurasian Scops-owl, European Nightjar, Common Hoopoe, Common Cuckoo, European Bee-eater and the third ever European Roller ringed. Three birds with foreign rings were controlled, all ringed on other Mediterranean Islands: a Garden Warbler ringed on Ponza (Italy) in May 2021, an Icterine Warbler ringed on Ventotene (Italy) in May 2022 and a Common Redstart ringed on Gavdos (Crete) in April 2023.



European Roller (ringed on 3 May) – the third of this species ever ringed in Malta (previous two also ringed on Kemmuna)

The European Turtle-dove, an iconic and controversial species across our flyways, was specially studied on Kemmuna this year with some individuals fitted with GPS trackers. These will allow us to follow the birds' movements remotely and understand better the threats they face along their migration routes and breeding grounds.



Male Ruppell's Warbler ringed on 16 April – closely related to locally common Sardinian Warbler, but with black throat and bold white 'moustache'

Kemmuna is an excellent location to study migrating birds, especially passerines, as these funnel through in large numbers through the vegetated valleys of an otherwise arid island, allowing us to sample good numbers. BirdLife Malta has been running ringing programmes at our Kemmuna Bird Observatory since the early 1990s. Collecting standardised data annually enables us to study trends in population, the effects of weather and climate change on migration strategies, etc. This data is regularly sent to the EURING databank, which holds millions of ringing records from across EURING member schemes and is available for scientific studies.



Male Common Redstart with ring from the Greek ringing scheme, controlled on 8 May



Members visiting the ringing station admiring a European Nightjar being ringed

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **Nicholas Galea** Head, BirdLife Malta Ringing Scheme

# What lies below!

A snorkel along the rocky coast of Il-Prajjet

Il-Prajjet (also known as Anchor Bay)

Il-Prajjet<sup>1</sup> is an inlet on the rugged northwest coast of Malta. Also known as Anchor Bay, it is apparently where the heavy anchors and moorings once used in the *tunnara* tuna-trapping industry were stored. Today, it is best known for its Popeye Village, the set built for the 1980 Hollywood musical and never dismantled. The ironically named *Sweethaven* has since had rather a lot of spinach and encroached on what would otherwise be an idyllic place. Still, if you can look the other way, the place somehow retains considerable charm for its geological formations and terrestrial and marine wildlife.

The easiest access point to the sea is the long jetty in the centre of the bay. The concrete walls of the jetty have over the years become abundantly colonized by marine life and are well worth a close inspection. Invertebrates such as sponges, limpets and barnacles can all be found here, and they in turn create the perfect habitat for small territorial fishes like blennies and triplefins. The Molly Miller blenny, for example, thrives on the partially submerged concrete platforms.

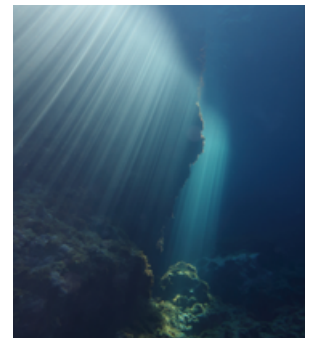
The sea in the inlet is a few metres deep and characterized by sand, stones and clumps of *Posidonia* seagrass. Benthic (bottom-dwelling) fishes include the cryptic weevers and flounders that tend to lie half-buried in the sand. Open-water swimmers include breams, notably the Annular Seabream which prefers the cover of *Posidonia* meadows. Also easily observable are the various species of wrasses that swim among the stones and algae and feed on tiny invertebrates. In June and early July, male Ocellated Wrasses collect algae to build small nests that look quite like warblers' nests. They then proceed to attract females and to defend them vigorously. In spring, Cuttlefish enter the shallow water of the bay to lay their eggs.



Common Octopus *Octopus vulgaris*



Red Hermit Crab *Dardanus calidus* (Il-Prajjet, July 2023)



Submerged boulders in early-morning light at Il-Prajjet

The submerged boulder fields along the northern shore are where Il-Prajjet gets special. In the early morning and late afternoon, shafts of light sword their way through the rock formations and create a chiaroscuro world of gloom and intensity which doubles as a collage of microhabitats for numerous species of algae, invertebrates and fishes. Madeira Scorpionfish rely on their perfect camouflage and hide in plain sight to ambush small fish. Equally accomplished ambush-feeders, Painted Combers associate with octopus and other large invertebrates, and sometimes with predators like Moray Eels, to pick off any prey disturbed by the bigger animal. The boulder fields are also an excellent habitat for foraging Parrot Fish and large shoals of Saupe and Grey Mulletts.

At Il-Prajjet, the boulders give way to medium-shallow rocky platforms and deeper pockets of sand and *Posidonia*. The craggy slopes, which in recent years have seen a great abundance of the invasive (if quite beautiful) red alga *Asparagopsis*, are a good place for spotting conspicuous invertebrates such as starfish (typically the Mediterranean Red Sea Star *Echinaster sepositus*), Common Octopus, and the Red Hermit Crab *Dardanus calidus*.



Male Ocellated Wrasse *Symphodus ocellatus*



Molly Miller *Scartella cristata*



Shoal of Grey Mulletts of the family *Mugilidae* (Il-Prajjet, July 2023)



Madeira Scorpionfish *Scorpaena maderensis* (Il-Prajjet, July 2019)

The towering cliffs of Ras in-Niexfa are probably a good place to turn around and head back to the inlet. Beyond that and closer to the sewage treatment plant at Iċ-Ċumnija, the water is often polluted.

<sup>1</sup>Prajjet is a diminutive of the word *port* and means a small harbour.

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



Murat Geir



**24 Mar 2024** We celebrated Easter together while engaging in many educational and fun games at Foresta 2000 and Ghadira Nature Reserves. Young participants discovered the beauty of nature and the wonders of Easter, with quizzes, puzzles, crafts, charades and other activities designed for kids of all ages. Every participant was a winner and took home sweet prizes and happy memories.

Theresa M Cremona



**1 Apr 2024** Our Events & Activities Group organised a trip to Sicily for HSBC staff. Participants joined an 8km circular trek at Cava Grande del Cassibile followed by a late lunch at Agriturismo Leone (Noto Province).

**3 & 4 Apr 2024** BirdLife Malta had a stand at the Esplora Interactive Science Centre where our participants learned about rabbits, birds and eggs and used their imagination and creativity to learn through activities and games.



Sara Melifi



**6 Apr 2024** Nature enthusiasts and bird lovers alike gathered at Ghadira Nature Reserve for an unforgettable celebration of spring bird migration at our *Wings Over Malta* event. Visitors enjoyed birdwatching and a lovely walk along the nature trail accompanied by birdsong, and learned about birds' extraordinary journeys.

**12 Apr 2024** The fifth in the *Sip, Savour and Soak in Nature* series was held at Salina Nature Reserve. Expert Alfred E. Baldacchino shared with us his extensive knowledge of Maltese native trees. Following the presentation, the participants socialised on the Salina terrace together.



Vera Tokmakova



Marcel Tellus

**13 Apr 2024** Our Events & Activities Group organised another Sicily Day Trip. The trek was led by local guide Salvatore Barone and covered a circular 13km route. It was a challenging route with three steep inclines, but the paths were partially paved, and the views were splendid! The trek was followed by lunch at the Agriturismo Al Focolare and later we had time to stop at Pozzallo for an ice-cream and a stroll along the promenade.

**1 May 2024** The Young Birders Club organised a day trip to Kemmuna where the young members enjoyed stunning birds such as Eurasian Scops-owl, European Nightjar, European Bee-eaters and more! The club is a special group within Klabb Ħuttaf for children aged 8–13 who show a special interest in birds and birdwatching. To find out more, email [nicholas.galea@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:nicholas.galea@birdlifemalta.org).



Nua Donaj



**12 May 2024** At this year's Science in the Citadel festival in Gozo, we shared our knowledge about seabirds and presented our efforts to protect them through the current EU-funded LIFE PanPuffinus! project. Board games, shearwater colony games and puzzles were among the activities we organised for participants, with prizes for the most active and interested children.



**14 May 2024** BirdLife Malta joined Eco Market Malta's stand at this year's Valletta Green Festival. We used the event to spread awareness about sustainability and a chance for the public to learn the importance of doing one's part.



**18 May 2024** Nature lovers had a great time at our Foresta 2000 Sunset Walk. It rained earlier in the day, but the weather turned out warm and breezy in time for our walk. We began by learning about the history of Foresta 2000 and during the walk enjoyed discovering plants and birds, helped along by identification guides.



**25 May 2024** BirdLife Malta participated in Science Fest 2024 at St Monica School in Gżira. Members of the recently revamped Falko youth group engaged with a diverse audience, promoting awareness about Maltese biodiversity. The event's highlight was teaching young participants to differentiate between male and female birds. We are grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness about nature conservation and look forward to participating next year.



**9 Jun 2024** BirdLife Malta marked World Oceans Day with a stand at the Malta National Aquarium. Activities and games of an educational and ecological nature were waiting for visitors, who learned about our efforts to protect seabirds through the current EU-funded LIFE PanPuffinus! project.

**15 Jun 2024** We met for this month's Walk and Talk at Għadira & Foresta 2000 Nature Reserves. This event was a unique opportunity to connect with others and appreciate nature's beauty. We explored the reserves and walked along the nature trail, and engaged in a mindfulness exercise to enhance our connection with ourselves and the environment.



**21 Jun 2024** BirdLife Malta held an event for Klabb Huttat members and families. Pokémon fans gathered at Simar to enjoy themselves while engaging in educational and fun activities and crafts. These included matching Pokémon to wildlife found at the reserve, a self-led scavenger hunt and participants creating their very own Pokémons!



**26 Jun 2024** An unforgettable evening with Din l-Art Ħelwa at Gozo's 17th-century Dwejra Tower, a Dark Sky Heritage Site. The event included a brief tour of the recently restored Knights-era tower, a presentation on Gozo's seabirds and a cliff walk to listen for shearwaters. Focus of the event was the new LIFE Tetide project which has key actions in the Dwejra area.

## Upcoming events

**27 & 28 Jul 2024** Join us for an open weekend to celebrate the inauguration of the new Salt Museum at Salina Nature Reserve. Bring your family and friends to celebrate the tradition of salt harvesting in a beautiful, historical setting. Don't miss this unique cultural experience while enjoying food stalls, craft stands and family activities.

**27 & 28 Sep 2024** BirdLife Malta will again join Science in the City with a stand and different fun educational games and activities. Save these dates!

**5 & 6 Oct 2024** Get ready for EuroBirdwatch24! Led by experts and nature-lovers, watch birds of prey in flight and witness the peak of autumn bird migration in Malta. More details over summer.

### 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



# Unwinding at Majjistral!



BirdLife Malta recently organised a Staff Day for all its staff and volunteers. Held two or three times a year, these are occasions for the team to unwind and enjoy some quality time away from the workplace. This particular day was organised by the conservation team and we spent a beautiful day together at Majjistral Nature & History Park, during which we got to know each other better, especially those who joined the team recently. The programme included lunch and a number of presentations about each team's work; later we engaged in teambuilding events, including tree-planting and a clean-up at the cliffs. It was a day enjoyed by all, and we all look forward to the next one.