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BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA MOS NEWSLETTER

Sept./Oct '95

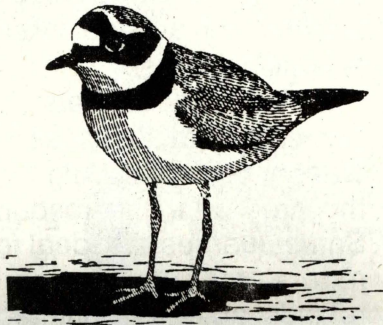
News from the nest

Summer '95 will be remembered for the exciting addition of two new birds to our breeding list, plus a number of others who haven't nested locally for a long time.

Little ringed plover

new breeder

The nest was scratched out among the sand and shingle at Ghadira nature reserve. After hatching, the two furry chicks were often observed sheltering under their parents' outstretched wings to escape the blazing sun.

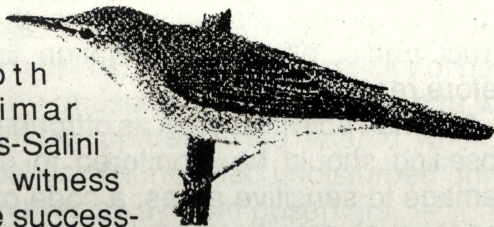


Reed warbler

a second attempt after 18 years!

Both Is-Simar and Is-Salini were witness to the successful breeding of reed warblers. The small brown bird nests among reeds, a rare habitat for our islands.

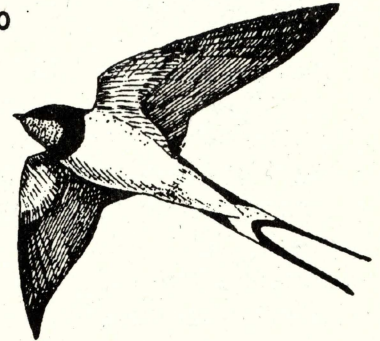
The Salini pair raised a brood of four chicks, and the pair at Is-Simar raised three chicks. This is the second record of reed warblers breeding in Malta. The first time was in 1977, also at Is-Salini.



Swallow

last bred 20 years ago

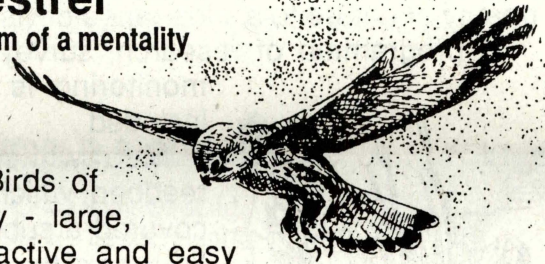
Normally the unfortunate subject of target practice, the swallow had a brighter story this summer. A pair built their characteristic mud nest in a disused farmhouse, where they successfully raised a brood of two chicks.



Kestrel

victim of a mentality

Birds of prey - large, attractive and easy target for collectors - have always found severe obstacles to their breeding attempts in our islands. This year, a pair was incubating their eggs on the ledge of a cliff face. A short while later the male went missing. The female was unable to continue the breeding cycle alone: the eggs never hatched and the nest was deserted.



Nightingale

new breeder...foiled!

A pair of nightingales twice built and laid eggs at Buskett this year. However, both attempts failed, since both clutches were raided by rats or whip snakes. The tailless female seen flying close to the nest may be evidence of an unsuccessful battle of defense.



Top tips for Is-Simar



This summer Trevor Charlton, warden of an RSPB reserve, was hosted by BirdLife Malta.

Mr Charlton gave expert advice on how best to develop and manage the new nature reserve at Is-Simar. Following his visit, the Society drew up a 5-year plan for the area. The plan outlines several aspects of habitat management, and proposes strategies and priorities. The programme aims to maintain different habitats in co-existence in order to achieve the highest biodiversity possible.

The plan also provides for educational facilities. As members know, the reserve already has three birdwatching hides. These will play a vital part in communicating the beauty of nature to a wide range of visitors.

A programme of research, survey and monitoring is also included.



Meanwhile the reedbed, which has covered a substantial area of the water body, is being manually cut back to allow foraging space for various birds. Work on the birdwatching hides has also progressed considerably.

This year two unusual breeding species were recorded inside the reserve. **Moorhens** raised two to three broods - 14 chicks in all! This bird has only been recorded to breed in one freshwater pond in Gozo.

A pair of **reed warblers** (see pg1) obligingly built their nest and reared their young only metres from one of the hides!

Voluntary work is always welcome at Is-Simar or Ghadira, especially during the coming months. If you can spare a few hours at weekends get in touch with the BirdLife Malta office (tel 230684/250229)

Master Plan for the Northwest

BirdLife Malta has been approached by the Planning Authority to give its advice on the formulation of a Country Plan for the Northwest of Malta.



The Society immediately set up a Working Group to study this matter, and drew up a report which was subsequently submitted to the Planning Authority. The report highlighted various areas in need of protection, and among other things proposed that:

- a number of habitats are of extreme ecological value and should be protected wherever they occur: such areas should be marked out and declared sites of special scientific interest.

- man-made habitats should be managed to create attractive sites for wildlife:

Quarry owners should be bound to restore the area after the resource is exhausted. Some quarries are ideal for conversion into nature reserves: such sites could be relandscaped and planted with indigenous trees and shrubs, pools created etc.

Abandoned fields should be requisitioned and planted with indigenous trees to create woodland and reduce soil erosion.

Road verges should be managed to become havens for wildlife, e.g. seeding some areas with appropriate indigenous plants; trimming perennials only where they obstruct traffic; allowing vegetation to seed before removal.

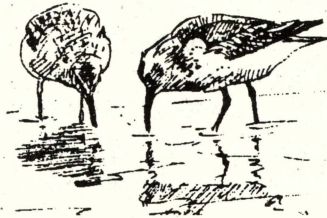
- human activities such as offroading and abseiling should be monitored to prevent damage to sensitive areas; a code of practice for such activities should be drawn up.



Salt pans in the limelight

Developers have proposed to convert Is-Salini area into a fun park.

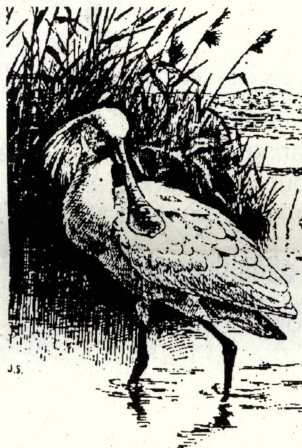
BirdLife Malta at once objected to these proposals, and drew up its own report, proposing a more environment friendly approach to upgrading the area for public use while still improving the wildlife potential of the area.



Salina is the largest of the remaining coastal marshlands. The salt pans are a major resting place in Malta for migrating waders and duck.

Rare Spoon

The **spoonbill** (Maltese: paletta) is an irregular visitor to our islands. This peculiar bird has a broad, flat bill rather like a spoon. This feature helps the bird feed on microscopic organisms and small fish from the water surface.



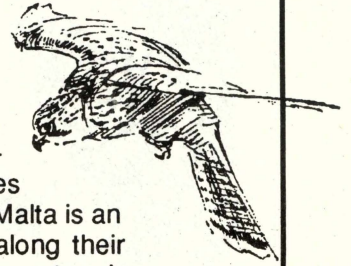
One such bird landed at Għadira nature reserve in late July and stayed more than two weeks! It often flew out towards the popular beach in front of the reserve, much to the surprise of bathers. The unusual tameness of the bird was even more apparent in the reserve, when on several occasions it fed undisturbed only a few metres away from observers.

The spoonbill left Għadira during the first week of August. Fortunately the BirdLife grapevine received no reports of a shot spoonbill. Presumably it safely reached the shores of Africa.

Nature Visits

RAPTORWATCH

When birds of prey migrate they normally use warm air currents that form over landmasses. Therefore they choose the routes with minimum open sea. Malta is an important stepping stone along their journey south to warmer quarters in Africa.



And September is the best month to watch out for them in Malta! Among the more common raptors one may see **marsh harrier, honey buzzard, hobby and kestrel**. However sightings of rarer migrants such as the endangered **osprey** and **Eleonora's falcon** are also possible.

Members will be able to enjoy an afternoon observing these splendid birds soar over Buskett. BirdLife Malta volunteers will be present to help spot and identify the birds, so you needn't worry if you don't feel expert enough!

Date: **Sunday 24 September 1995**

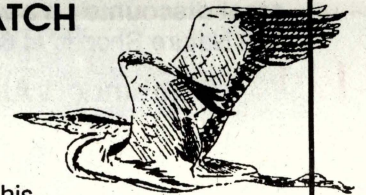
Time: **2pm**

Meeting Point: **Sheltered carpark, Buskett.**

Bookings aren't necessary, but be on time!

WORLD BIRDWATCH

Once again BirdLife Malta will be participating in the global birdwatch organised by BirdLife International. This year's event will be spread over two days in October.



For this year's event we shall make use of the nature reserves at **Is-Simar** and **Għadira**, which will be open to members and general public.

Come along, bring your family, and see how many species you can spot!

Date: **Saturday 7 October 1995**

Time: **9 am - 12 noon**

Place: **Is-Simar nature reserve**

Date: **Sunday 8 October 1995**

Time: **9 am - 12 noon**

Place: **Għadira nature reserve**

PRICES OFF at the NATURE SHOP
BUY books, copybooks and other stationery NOW
and SAVE money



Lonely heart gets a chance!

The Spix's macaw once occurred in large numbers in the Brazilian riverine forests. Today habitat destruction and trapping for illegal bird trade has reduced the species to a single wild individual!

This single male Spix's macaw was pursuing a sad and inevitably fruitless relationship with a female green-winged macaw, a closely related but completely separate species.

Conservationists around the world set out on a 'match-making' mission, trying to find a suitable companion for the lone male Spix's. Around 30 Spix's macaws exist in captivity.

Last March, after extensive research using high-tech systems such as DNA sequencing, a female was released to join the male.

The two birds are now being monitored round-the-clock by biologists and guarded from poachers.

Although it has taken a while, the two now seem to have fallen for each other, and are almost inseparable. The rejected green-winged macaw generally joins the couple during the day, but leaves them alone for the night. Hopes are high for success in the next breeding season.

STOCK UP AT OUR NATURE SHOP!

As September looms up, many of us get down to preparing for school. This year stock up your children's schoolbag with a visit to our Nature Shop, and help conservation at the same time. Besides school sundries there are also **great discounts on a wide selection of books.**

The Nature Shop is at 65 Sta. Lucia Str, Valletta (Tel 230684/250229)

Opening hours

Monday to Friday

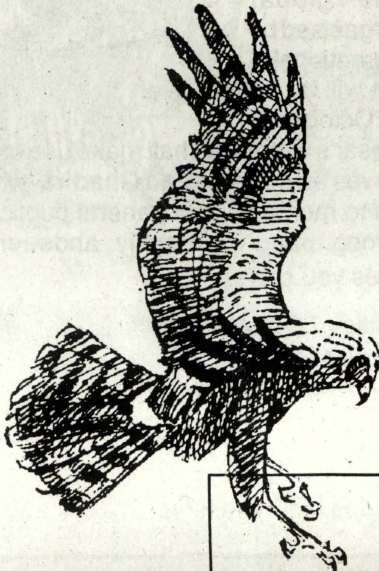
9 am - 12 noon

5 pm - 7 pm

Saturday

9 am - 12 noon

Remember! All profits go to nature conservation!



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Mr. Eric German,
Assistant Librarian,
Melitensia Special Collection,
University of Malta Library,
Msida.

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