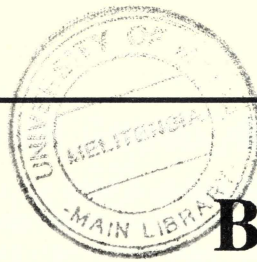


# BirdTalk



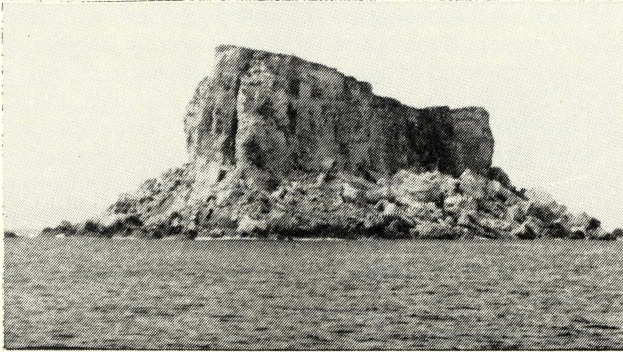
**BirdLife**  
MALTA

BIRDLIFE MALTA NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1996 • 38

editorial board: Ian Mifsud (editor), Desirée Falzon, Victor Falzon

## Six Special Sites



BirdLife Malta has shortlisted 6 sites to be included in the European database on **Important Bird Areas**. The sites are:

**Filfla:** This familiar rocky offshore islet holds one of the largest known colonies of storm petrels in the Mediterranean, and has in fact been designated a Mediterranean Special Protected Area. It is also a breeding station for Cory's shearwater and yellow-legged gull. The islet is a nature reserve.

**Ta' Ċenċ:** The impressive sheer cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ harbour the largest colony of Cory's shearwater in the Maltese islands, and the garigue surroundings hold most of the other breeding species, including blue rock thrush, corn bunting and spectacled warbler. The cliffs are threatened by major hotel expansion.

**L-Irdum tal-Madonna:** A stretch of cliffs along the L-Aħrax headland. It is a breeding station for Yelkouan shearwater. The area is threatened by the presence of hunters.

**Buskett:** the only sizeable, albeit artificial, grove of mature woodland in Malta, and therefore a magnet to incoming birds of prey, especially during the autumn migration. The wood is a bird sanctuary, but it is threatened by illegal shooting and major disturbance.

**Ghadira:** a saltmarsh saved from the onslaught of development, and now a rare resting post for migrating waders. The area is a bird sanctuary and nature reserve.

**Kemmuna:** a windswept upper coralline island, a stronghold for blue rock thrush and short-toed lark. The island is a bird sanctuary, but it is threatened by development.



## Birds and the Ballot



Politics have invariably been a major hindrance to bird protection - only too evident in the last hectic weeks before the October general elections.

Birds don't vote, but hunters do! So we have had to endure the desperate and childish attempts of the main political parties to woo the hunters over to their side. The atrocious Authority of Review and its obscene recommendations was a PN government's last-ditch effort to appease the hunters. Meanwhile the MLP promised to extend the hunting season to a record 354 days per annum! The close season? What close season?!

Just how much the hunting issue actually influenced the election results is anyone's guess. Hunters will of course have us all believe that it was *their* lobby that decided the day - they are now grabbing the opportunity to demand their pound of flesh!

What is sadly certain is that birds were (and still are) being massacred. With the election game in full swing and law enforcement at a standstill - mustn't irk the precious voter, you know - this was only to be expected.

And once more birds foot the bill for our games - with their lives.

## Day of the Watchers

On 28-29 September, 20,000 birdwatchers across Europe had their eyes set on migratory birds. BirdLife Malta members were among them, joining in the fun of the European Birdwatch 96.

Close to **1.7 million birds** were observed in 20 countries. Species included white-fronted geese in Finland, lesser spotted eagles in Bulgaria and sparrowhawks in Andorra.

In Malta 45 species were logged. Highlights included hundreds of migrating swallows and yellow wagtails. At Buskett a merlin (a rare falcon) conveniently perched on a wall metres from the birdwatchers' post. Internet subscribers can find details of the entire stunt on the homepage for NTT World Bird Count at <http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-n/w-bird>.

NTT network is giving BirdLife International US\$10 for every species seen.

This year's event was organised by the Dutch and Swiss partners of Birdlife International. Next year's event will be co-ordinated by... **BirdLife Malta!**



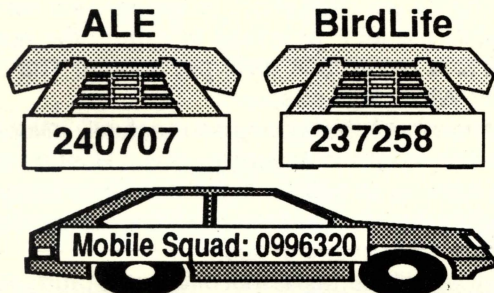
## Big job, small force

Throughout September BirdLife activists monitored the situation at Buskett, and were in continuous contact with the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) section of the Police, reporting law infringements. Such cooperation and the ALE's own surveillance of Buskett led to 13 arrests in September alone. And yet, there were several occasions on which dozens of hunters were killing raptors with impunity within the sanctuary.

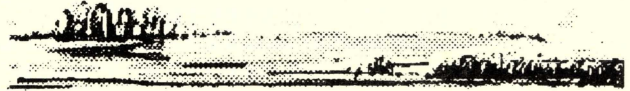
Several members of the ALE are dedicated, but the section is pathetically understaffed. Furthermore, the small unit is overburdened with other duties - from coastal patrol to shutting down illegal farms. No wonder their piecemeal action is ineffectual on a large scale.

BirdLife has long insisted for a properly equipped enforcement section to deal exclusively with bird protection. A network of regional or local wardens will also go a long way to stem the destruction.

Meanwhile, BirdLife's appeal in last issue of BirdTalk brought in a number of reports which would otherwise have gone unnoticed. We thank those members who phoned in the info, and again urge you all to join this special 'neighborhood' watch. Here's the numbers again:



## Feathered Highlights



### Osprey Delights

Feeding ospreys are more often associated with breathtaking scenes from television documentaries than with our humble reserves. Yet, last September an osprey gave a rare spectacle. Lured by mullet and eel at Ghadira, an osprey showed off its amazing hunting abilities to a group of lucky birdwatchers. The swoop, the dive, the catch, the lift, the dog-shake and the strong winging off! Heart-stopping!

Most ospreys that pass over Malta are inexperienced first year birds from Scandinavia making their maiden flight to Africa. Unfortunately many of these sturdy youngsters stop short of completing their journey. They fall victim to the macho Maltese shotgun. One danger their mother never prepared them for...

### Great Whites

Like oversize little egrets, great white herons are very rare and irregular visitors to our islands. In 50 years there have only been 40 local reports of this species. Yet in the short span of six days last September-October, no less than three specimens made separate stopovers for refuelling at Ghadira.

### King's Country

BirdLife members who last September joined the European Birdwatch logged 2 kingfishers in just one afternoon at Is-Simar. Last month alone, more than 12 kingfishers graced the water's edge at this tiny but teeming wetland reserve.

## Nomination roll call

Nominations for next year's BirdLife Council are being now accepted. Term of office is one year (March 97- March 98) and is open to any Maltese-speaking adult with a valid membership. Nominees should be seconded by 5 other adult members. Prospective candidates are to send their written nomination to the **Electoral Commissioner, BirdLife, POBox498, Valletta CMR 01** by 31 December 1996.

Council members carry a high degree of responsibility, as Council formulates the policies on which BirdLife bases all its plans, strategies and actions.



## Holiday Apartments in Gozo

*Seafront Flats at Marsalforn*

*Seafront Flats at Xlendi Bay*

*Newly-built flats at Victoria*

*Farmhouse in the countryside*

For more details write to:

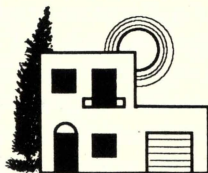
**Catherine Vella**

Casalgo House, The Gardens,

Kerċem Rd Victoria Gozo

Tel (356)553723

Fax (356)554199



"Unsere Familie fängt und schießt keine Vögel!"

## Wanted

BirdLife needs a person to secure adverts for the Society's publications. Working hours are flexible and payment will be on a commission basis. The ideal candidate should have an outgoing personality, be mature and have his/her own transport.

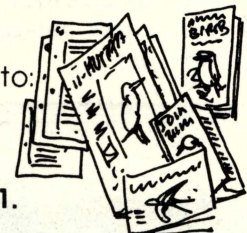
Applicants please write to:

**The President**

**BirdLife**

**PO Box 498**

**Valletta CMR 01.**





# B R I E F S

## Award

Joe Sultana, a veteran member and former BirdLife President, has been awarded the prestigious RSPB Medal for Conservation for his outstanding commitment in the environmental field. Joe is presently chairperson of the BirdLife Research Committee. Well done, Joe!

## School drip

BirdLife installed a drip-irrigation nursery for use by green-minded girls at Mrieħel Junior Lyceum. The nursery handles about 200 saplings. Thank you John Grech (BirdLife President) for its construction, and Ms M Mifsud Matrenza (head of school) for hands down support and enthusiasm.

## Nursery

A new nursery is being set up at Is-Simar. The capacity of this new nursery is estimated at around 2000 saplings. Pine, cypress, myrtle and chaste trees will be among the first saplings to be tended at this nursery, many of which will be planted within or around the reserves. Others will be used for various BirdLife projects. Again, well done John Grech, our master nursery builder!

## Hot Debate

On 12 November BirdLife took part in a television debate about the hunting issue. BirdLife was represented by Antoine Vella, the Society vice-President. In between repeated interruptions by the hunters' reps, Antoine gave a very clear picture of what hunting in Malta is really about: a chronic case of rampant killing. Good show, Antoine!

## Wanted

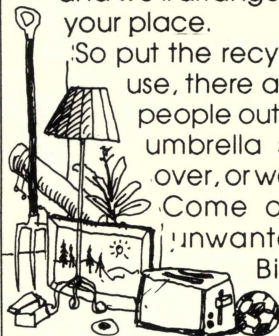
We need volunteers to help guide visitors at Ghadira nature reserve at the weekends, especially Sunday afternoons. Members with an hour or two to spare please call. BirdLife strongly believes that bringing people in contact with nature in a positive atmosphere is the ideal way to get people to love and respect nature.



## Wanted

We're trying to get a car-booth sale going. If you have any items that you can give away, please do let us know. Call **230684** or **250229**, and we'll arrange to collect the items from your place.

So put the recycle gospel to very good use, there are probably hundreds of people out there who want that old umbrella stand you keep falling over, or was it a duplicate toaster... Come on! Get rid of all your unwanted items as you help BirdLife raise precious conservation money.



## Make it a special one!

As a member of BirdLife you sponsor:

- the lobby against bird killing
- the recreation of rare and valuable habitat
- the environmental education of the younger generation
- the fight against environmental destruction
- the propagation of native woodland

BirdLife needs more members. It needs a louder voice to reach a wider audience. A massive membership is a formidable weapon when lobbying government and other authorities to take nature protection seriously. Members are indeed our best and farthest reaching advertisement.

So make this a special Christmas for BirdLife - enrol a new member!

As a small token of our appreciation, we're offering a Lm1 voucher in house plants from Zammit Nurseries for every new member you rope in!



Use form below for the details of the newcomer.

## Here's one for the ranks!

### New Member's details

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

### My own details

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find cheque/PO for Lm4 as 1 year's subscription for the new member detailed above. Please rush me now my plant voucher. Thanks!



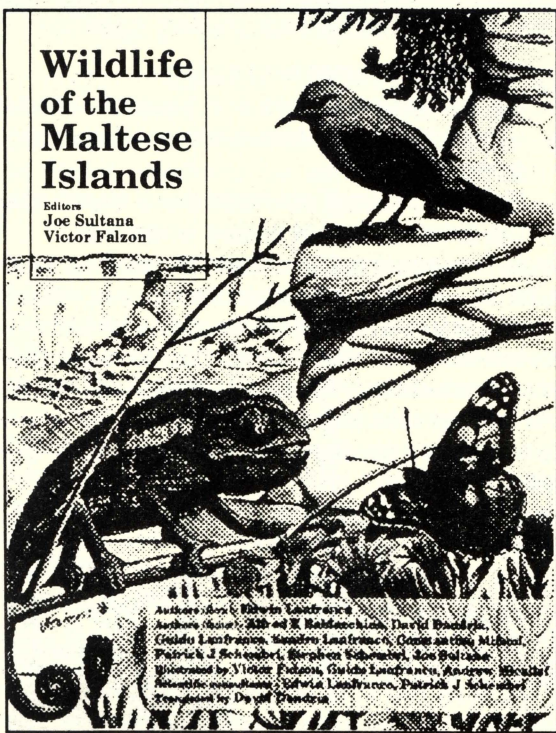
Cheques to be made payable to BirdLife Malta and sent to the address below



# It's Out!

## Wildlife of the Maltese Islands

Editors  
Joe Sultana  
Victor Falzon



In 1995 the landmark book *Flora u Fawna ta' Malta* sold out in a matter of months. Now, hot from the printers, comes the English version of a book that became a collector's item overnight...

Sporting a new cover, several updates and twice the number of ink illustrations, **Wildlife of the Maltese Islands** covers almost **1000 species** of Maltese plants and animals, each with clear description, habits and habitat, status and full colour illustration.

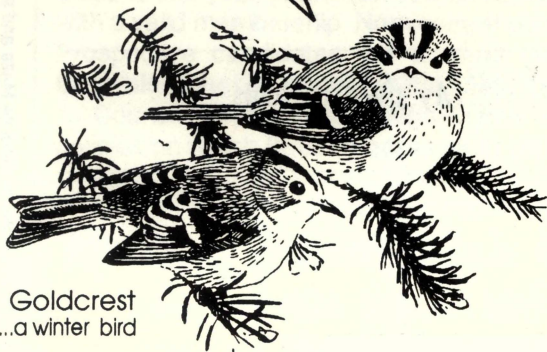
**Wildlife of the Maltese Islands** is for sale at:

- **BirdLife Nature Shop** at 65 Sta Lucija Str. Valletta  
Monday-Friday 9am-12noon
- **Ghadira Nature Reserve**  
Saturday-Sunday 9am-12.30pm, 2pm-4pm

**Copies bought from above outlets are signed by the editors.**

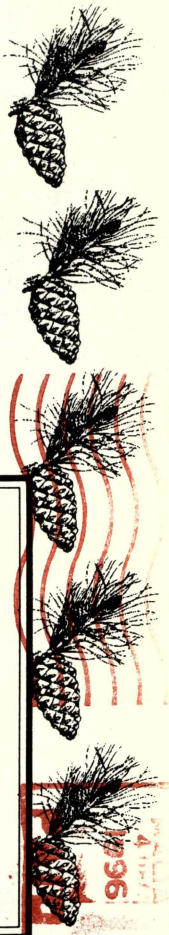
The price is Lm6.90. Prospective buyers are advised to hurry, as history has a habit of repeating itself...!

**Happy Christmas  
all of you!**



Goldcrest  
...a winter bird

A2235  
Mr. Eric German,  
Assistant Librarian,  
Melitensia Special Collection  
University of Malta Library,  
Msida.



**BirdLife Malta is the Society for the protection and study of birds and the natural environment.**  
**BirdLife Malta is the Partner of BirdLife International in the Maltese Islands.**