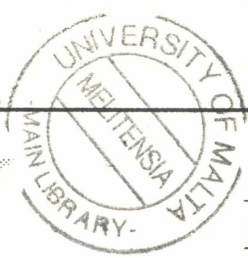


BirdTalk



BIRDLIFE MALTA NEWSLETTER

JULY/AUGUST 1998 Issue 48

Editorial Board: Ian Mifsud, Antoine Vella

Electoral Auctioneering

The environment pays the price of political jockeying as the PN and MLP try to outdo each other in collecting votes by fair means or foul.

As the general elections approach, the two main political parties are vying with each other to garner every possible vote in every possible way. Unfortunately for the country, this includes giving in to the most outrageous and selfish demands put forward by anybody who is willing to sell his or her vote to the highest bidder.

Our politicians are thus regaling us with the undignified spectacle of desperately courting the hunting community (notoriously selfish when it comes to such matters) with extravagant promises of allowing hunters and trappers even more privileges than they enjoy at present.

BirdLife Malta has raised its voice in angry protest and somehow managed to make itself heard over the media, a difficult task when one considers the brash and strident cacophony of political speeches, slogans and pseudo-news that gobble up all the available media space during the electoral campaign. It has also joined up with most of the environmental NGOs on the Island to hold a press conference condemning the betrayal of our local environment in the cynical game being played over our heads.

It is not expected that such a reaction will impress politicians sufficiently to make them reverse their decisions. At least, however, it will convey the message to the general public that, in our country, there still exists a solitary rock of reason amidst the raging seas of election fever.



The cormorant, together with the shelduck has been sacrificed by the MLP in order to curry favour with hunters. Both species will be added to the list of species that may be killed by Maltese shooters.

BirdLife Malta meets the PN Secretary

As part of its electoral strategy, the PN has met hunters several times and struck an agreement with them. The Party promised that it would not change the present regulations except to make them better for hunters. It also assured hunters, that they would be fully represented in any talks with the European Union regarding Malta's membership bid.

This U-turn dismayed environmentalists throughout Malta and BirdLife was quick to react. After sharply criticising this move in a press release, BirdLife met Dr Gonzi and discussed the issue in a cordial meeting in which we explained that the present regulations are far from satisfactory and we have in fact appealed to the Authority of Review to change them. Dr Gonzi reassured BirdLife that a Nationalist government would abide by what the Authority of Review would decide. As regards representation in EU talks, Dr Gonzi told us that we would be given the same opportunities as those given to hunters.

MEDMARAVIS

The 5th MEDMARAVIS symposium is being organised jointly by BirdLife Malta and MEDMARAVIS (Mediterranean Marine Bird Association). The latter is a non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and conservation of seabirds and their habitats in the Mediterranean.

The symposium which will be held in Gozo next September will focus on the "*Monitoring and conservation of birds, mammals and sea-turtles of the Mediterranean and Black Seas*". The four-day symposium will commence on the 29th September and will be followed by a full-day excursion on Saturday 3rd October.



Programme

Tuesday 29th September

Official opening by the chairman, Xavier Monbailliu

Key talks - Human geography, its implication for conservation

- Aims and rationale of distribution studies

Afternoon session - Distribution of lesser-known bird species

Wednesday 30th September

Morning session - Breeding distribution of seabirds and sea-turtles

Afternoon session - At sea distribution of birds and mammals

Late afternoon: Poster session

Thursday 1st October

Morning session - Biological Monitoring

Afternoon session - Networks for research in biological conservation

This session will be followed by a workshop on "Development of distribution-oriented research in the Mediterranean and Black Sea."

Friday 2nd October

Morning session - ON-going studies distribution and biology

Afternoon session - Closing of symposium followed by conference dinner

Interested members may obtain a full programme and further details by phoning BirdLife Malta during office hours

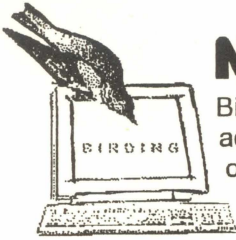
A Word of . . .

Thanks

BirdLife thanks the following persons who have generously donated items for our jumble sale to be held later this year. Mrs Hardwické Garner and Mr Zammit have sent us a number of home appliances while Mrs Galea Borg and Mr O'Hayon have given our Society two lots of fine books that are always popular in sales.

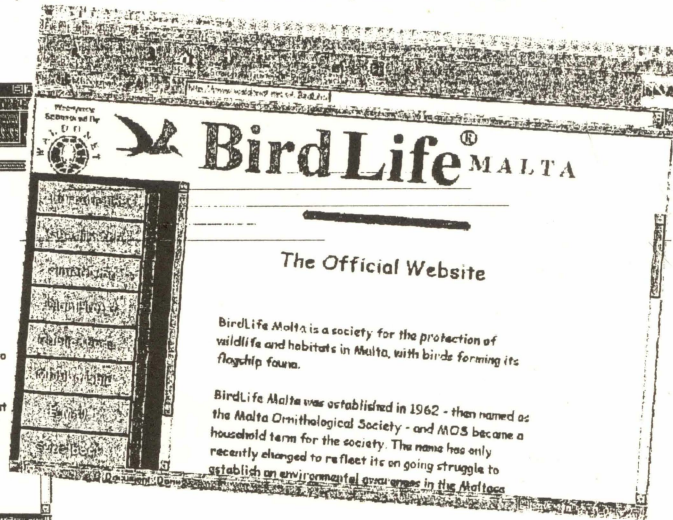
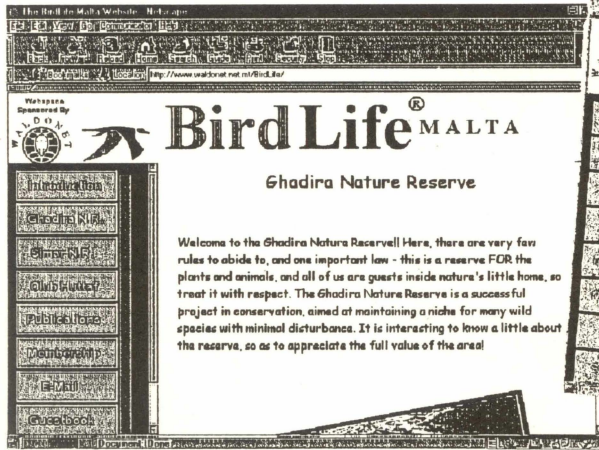
We are grateful for the support of these members. Such gestures encourage us to keep up our efforts to help save the Maltese environment and protect the hundreds of thousands of birds that fly over our islands during migrations.





New Webpage for BirdLife

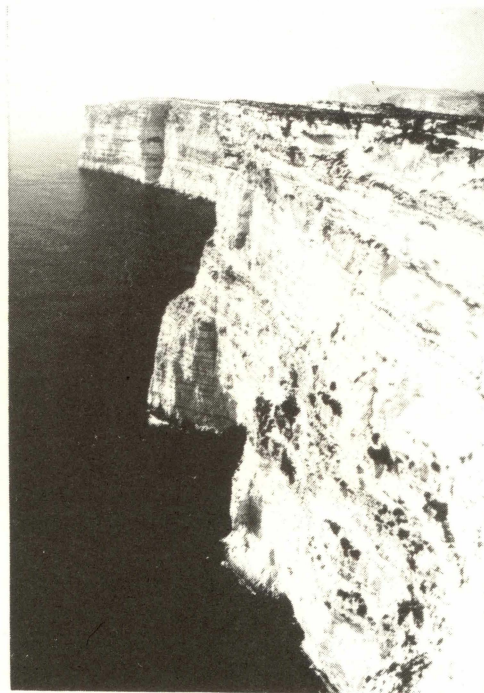
BirdLife Malta is happy to announce its new Internet homepage which can be accessed at <http://www.waldonet.net.mt/BirdLife>. This site - which replaces the older geocities one - will be an important tool to help us convey our message to the millions of Internet users throughout the world.



Important Bird Areas in Malta and Gozo

Five areas in Malta have been accepted by BirdLife International for inclusion into a World database of Important Bird Area (IBA). About 3500 such sites have been identified and designated throughout Europe and they comply with the stringent criteria laid down by BirdLife. This database will be a useful tool for effective conservation of birds and sites through regular monitoring of birds and habitat threats to such sites. Four of the five sites are coastal habitats, located along sea-cliffs (Ta' Ċenċ, Rdum tal-Madonna), islets (Filfla) and the entire island of Comino. Buskett is the only site that is non-marine, with its coniferous woodland, garigue and agricultural land. In total, these sites cover just less than 1 % of the total land areas of Malta and Gozo.

All the local IBAs (apart from Buskett) are important for their breeding sea-birds - Cory's and Manx shearwaters and Storm Petrels. Filfla has been designated also as a Mediterranean Specially Protected Site due to the high number of breeding petrels, which is estimated at between 8000 and 10,000 pairs. On the other hand, Buskett is an important roosting site for migratory raptors particularly Honey Buzzards, Marsh Harriers and falcons.



Buskett (top) and Ta' Ċenċ (right) are two of the Important Bird Areas identified by BirdLife International



International Summer Camp

Raptor-watching will be the main event of an international camp being organised for youth members of BirdLife Malta.

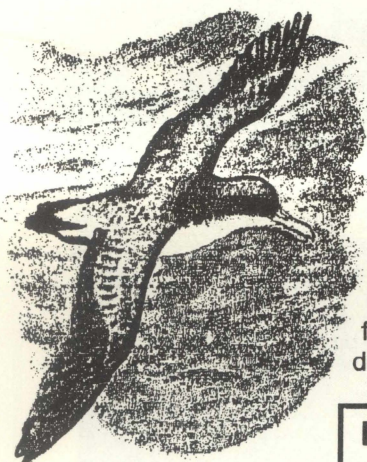
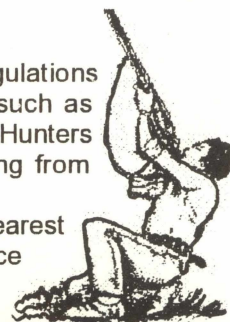
Please note that there has been a change in the dates. The camp will now be held between the 18th and 24th of September and not as previously announced.



TIME FOR KILLING - AGAIN

The hunting season will open again on the 1st of September. Under the present regulations hunting is forbidden in the afternoon on public holidays and Sundays while places such as Buskett, Kennedy Grove and Salina are supposedly a permanently hunting-free zone. Hunters should also keep at least 50 metres distance from roads and built-up areas. Shooting from seacraft is allowed from October to February

For what it's worth, infringements of bird protection laws may be reported to the nearest police station or directly to the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) Section of the police on 240707.



SHEARWATER WATCHING

Over 30 members attended the shearwater-watching activity held at Ghar Hasan in July. Those present were treated to a spectacle of several Cory's shearwaters flying into their nests along the sheer cliff-face.

The shearwater is not a prolific breeder, usually laying just one egg a year. The young birds have just started to hatch by now and will be fed all through summer by their parents. The food given to the chicks includes mainly small fish and squid - they do not drink, the only fluid they take being that found in the food itself. Round about October, the parents stop feeding their young who, driven by hunger, have to take their first and hardest flight to independence.

Please note that the BirdLife office telephone number has changed. It is now 347646.

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