

Reserves handed over to BirdLife



The Government has formally entrusted BirdLife Malta with the management of the only two nature reserves in the country Ghadira and Simar - both of which, incidentally were set up through the efforts of BirdLife itself. On the 28th of July, BirdLife Malta and the Environment Protection Department signed the contracts by which the Department handed over the reserves to BirdLife for the next five years.

Our Society has been actively involved in the running of the reserves since the very first days of their establishment, although on an informal basis. BirdLife volunteers have been opening the Ghadira reserve on weekends and providing guides for the many tourists and locals who visit and many improvements, including the building of hides and other structures were made possible though funds collected by BirdLife for the purpose.

The fact that BirdLife is now officially responsible for the management of the sites will allow us to develop them according to our own strategy. The educational aspect will be emphasised and additional personnel are being employed to cater for school visits. It is also expected that the development application for the Simar reception centre will be followed more closely.



Bird of Prey Camp

BirdLife will this year be again organising a bird-watching camp, mainly for foreign birdwatchers, between the 7th and 24th of September, to coincide with the autumn migration of raptors.

Every day at 2.00 pm there will also be a birdwatching session at Buskett to which everyone is welcome. For more information phone the BirdLife office or check the Camp website at <http://www.geocities.com/bopcamp>.



Hunting Control

For the past four decades, BirdLife Malta has been the foremost environmental society in Malta and as such, any initiative it takes is bound to create a stir. People may agree or disagree with whatever action is taken but it cannot be ignored because BirdLife is pivotal to conservation in Malta.

Last June BirdLife Malta once again made news by its agreement with the hunters' Federation. The main aim of this pact is the enforcement of the hunting regulations and the effective protection of wild birds.

Now that the first emotive outbursts - in favour or against such a step - have largely died down it is perhaps possible to assess the potential effects of this initiative. The breeding of barn-owls will start in the next few months while the quail-breeding programme of the hunters' Federation is even more in its initial stages and much time has to pass before the first birds are released.

Meanwhile the Monitoring Board is being set up immediately: all its members have already been selected and it is expected to be launched in the third week of August, just in time to start functioning before the start of the hunting season in September.

It is still too early to say what will be the effect of the Board. For the first time BirdLife will be in a position to exert a direct influence on Government policies and the action of the police in combating illegal hunting. We believe this is the first time that a volunteer environmental organisation has been given an official role - albeit a limited one - to affect law-enforcement in Malta and we are determined to make sure that our presence in the Monitoring Board will make a difference and save birds.

Environment day



As in previous BirdLife set up a stand at the Environment Day activity organised by the Ministry for the Environment on the 5th of June at the Sliema sea-front. A large number of visitors were attracted to our stand and received information about the activities that BirdLife Malta carries out. Several new members were enrolled and, as usual, the Adopt a Shearwater scheme proved a real success with many chicks being adopted.

Advocacy

In the past weeks BirdLife has been meeting various ministers and other authorities to keep up the pressure for changes to the hunting regulations and for their proper and effective enforcement.

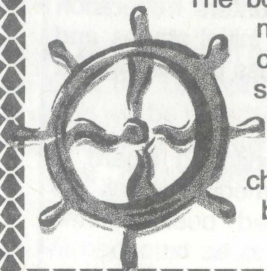
The Conservation Committee of BirdLife has met the Minister for Internal Affairs and the Minister for the Environment several times. Other meetings were held with the Police Assistant Commissioner and the Environment Protection Department. This is an on-going process that can never be considered ended: lobbying for such a difficult and controversial subject as the curbing of hunting abuses is a full-time job that requires all the skill, perseverance and determination that the Conservation Committee can muster.

On all occasions, BirdLife has stressed that more resources are necessary to combat illegal hunting efficiently. Ideally we would like to see a special section of the police tackle this aspect of law and order since the Administrative Law Enforcement (ALE) Section has too much on its plate and is too dispersed to cope with these added duties. If such an "environmental" section is not set up, the ALE should at least be reinforced with additional officers, vehicles and other resources.

SATURDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER A SIX-HOUR BOAT TRIP ROUND GOZO

Meeting Place at Ċirkewwa at 9.30 am. From Gozo we will board another boat to take us round Gozo stopping at various sites, including Dwejra and below Ta' Cenc Cliffs. We will be back at Ċirkewwa at 4.30pm. The price is £M6.30 all inclusive (including a snack on the boat). Those who would like to have a dip in Gozitan waters should bring their bathing costumes. Members residing in Gozo are advised to be at Mgarr near the berthing place not later than 10.15 am to meet those crossing over from Malta.

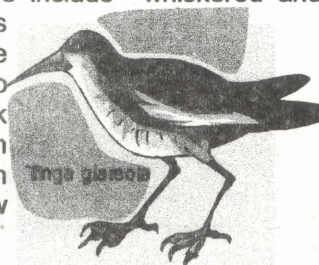
The boat can take only 30 persons and members will be booked on a first come first served basis. Members should inform the BirdLife Malta's office (by phone mornings only) of their participation and send a cheque or a postal order for £M6.50 before the end of August.



Summer records



This summer is proving to be very rewarding for birdwatchers. Although it is not the peak migrating time, a wide variety of birds are being recorded, some of them quite rare such as the ferruginous duck, a threatened species all over Europe. Other uncommon species which have been observed by our members include whiskered and gull-billed terns, Temminck's stint and oystercatchers. A large group of about 200 wood sandpipers was also observed during July - this is the second largest flock of waders ever seen locally. Spoonbills have also been seen - and duly killed by poachers, another reason why BirdLife places attaches such importance to law enforcement.



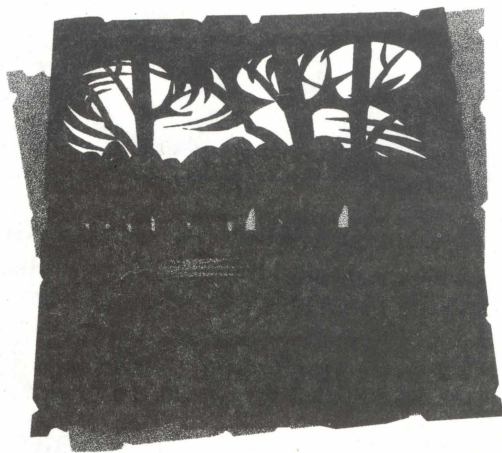
Please Note

The BirdLife offices will remain closed from the 21st to the 25th of August

MLP delegation visits reserves

On the 22nd of July BirdLife was pleased to host a delegation from the Malta Labour Party visiting the nature reserves of Ghadira and Simar. The delegation was led by Mr Joe Mizzi, spokesman for the environment and Mr Jimmy Magro, General Secretary of the MLP. Other distinguished guests included Mr Noel Farrugia, spokesman for agriculture and various officials of the Party.

Our guests toured the reserves and saw for themselves the potential that such sites hold for conservation and education. BirdLife explained the main difficulties facing the environment in general and the reserves in particular. As always, the necessity for proper law-enforcement was stressed and the MLP delegation expressed its agreement on this point. Further meetings between BirdLife Malta and the MLP - as well as with the other parties - are planned for the future,



Police visit to Italy

BirdLife Malta has recently made arrangements for a number of police officers to go to Italy on a four-day training course. During their stay the officers met various sections of the Italian police who showed them the way they work in enforcing the law and preventing abuses.

Just ten years ago Calabria was notorious for the annual massacre of thousands of birds, especially honey buzzards which are common migrating raptors. Serious and sustained efforts by the Italian police have virtually wiped out illegal practice in the mountainous region. The Maltese officers were instructed in methods that the Calabrian police use to handle cases of illegal hunting.

BirdLife Malta looks forward to the forthcoming autumn migrations in the certainty that the experience gained in the rugged, difficult terrain of Calabria will be put to good use by our police. It seems that this year everyone, from the Minister for the Environment to the hunters themselves, is in favour of proper law enforcement so there is no reason to doubt that it will finally come about.



"Adoptive parents" visit Ghar Hasan



BirdLife Malta recently organised a outing for those who are participating in one of its most successful schemes. Hundreds of Cory's shearwater chicks have now been adopted and a group of thirty-five "adoptive parents" gathered at Ghar Hasan to spend an evening with the seabirds.

The sea was dead calm and visibility good; several hundred shearwaters could be seen flying in a northerly direction, eventually joining up with a group of rafting birds some 3 kilometres offshore. At one point there were well over one thousand birds in one raft while two other rafts had meanwhile formed farther away. As if to increase the spectacle, a pod of dolphins also showed up to delight the observers with their playful behaviour, frequently jumping out of the water. Before darkness, those present assisted to a presentation by John J. Borg on the breeding biology and ecology of the Cory's Shearwater. John has been studying these birds for over 17 years and is the foremost Maltese expert on the subject. Liz Curmi, the Marketing Officer of BirdLife Malta, later briefed those present on the role and aims of the Society. Soon after darkness, the unmistakable cries of the shearwaters could be heard faintly as the birds approached land. The noise steadily increased until it engulfed the whole cliff.

BirdLife Malta's Seabird Research Group works for the better understanding and protection of our breeding seabirds, as well as monitoring the Internationally Important Bird Areas of Ta' Ċenc, Filfla and L-Irdum tal-Madonna, as well as other coastal sites.

Information about the Adopt a Shearwater scheme can be obtained from our office.

Ta' Ċenċ

The spectacular cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ in Gozo are among the most exciting natural habitats in the Maltese islands. BirdLife is going to organise a visit to the site on

Saturday 26th August

to hear the Cory's shearwaters after sunset

Members who intend coming to this activity are kindly asked to inform our office (mornings only) by the 20th of August.

Meeting place - Ċirkewwa at 7.00 pm. From Mġarr, Gozo, transport to the cliffs will be provided. Members residing in Gozo have to be at Mġarr, by 7.45 pm

John Borg, a BirdLife member who has been studying Cory's shearwaters for 17 years, will speak briefly on the breeding biology of this species. Other birds that may be seen are Short-toed Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Sardinian Warbler and Spectacled warbler. The Shearwaters are expected to start coming in at about 9.00 pm.

We shall catch the 11.00 pm ferry back to Malta. Members will be asked to pay for the fare of the ferry boat and for the transport in Gozo.



Xlendi – Top quality, furnished apartment (like a maisonette) comprising 3 large bedrooms, a large kitchen/living room and a large bathroom. The property also has 2 balconies with sea-views and a small internal yard. Freehold.

Contact Mr Anthony Sultana on 564126

British BirdFair

BirdLife Malta is again going to take part in this year's BirdFair in the UK being held at the end of August. The stand will be manned by Liz Curmi, our Marketing Officer, together with some helpers from Malta and a number of UK members who have kindly volunteered for this work.

As many of our readers doubtlessly know, this fair is one of the most important and well-attended events in

the international birding calendar and our participation has always yielded excellent results. The members manning our stand will be promoting the work carried out by BirdLife Malta and will certainly boost our UK membership as well as (we hope) manage to collect some funds for our activities.

As usual, our participation at the Fair has been made possible thanks to the never-ending generosity of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds which provides us with space for our stand.



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