



BirdTalk



BirdLife Malta Newsletter

Issue 53

May - June 1999

Editorial Board: Ian Mifsud, Antoine Vella

Prime Minister visits Ghadira

On Saturday, 8th May, the Prime Minister paid a visit to the Ghadira Nature Reserve together with several family members, including his young grandchildren. This was the first time that the Prime Minister visited the reserve which had been used for hunting before BirdLife turned it into a wildlife sanctuary in 1978.

Dr Fenech Adami was taken round the reserve by Joe Sultana and Charles Gauci who is the managing warden of Ghadira. Mr Sultana, an official of the Environmental Protection Department, explained the role of the reserve in providing a refuge for birds while Mr Gauci described its educational function. The Prime Minister showed keen interest in the wildlife which could be observed, including waders such as the black-winged stilt and little-ringed plovers. Wild rabbits scampered and peered from behind the vegetation as the visitors strolled along the paths of the reserve on their way to the hides.



The Ghadira Nature Reserve covers about six hectares and was set up with the financial and technical assistance of several local and international organizations and NGOs. It was

declared officially open in 1988 and, a year later, BirdLife won the Europa Nostra merit diploma for the way the reserve had been converted and was being managed.

The visit of the Prime Minister was covered by practically all the major newspapers and television stations of Malta and provided very good publicity for the work that BirdLife is doing to preserve the Maltese environment.

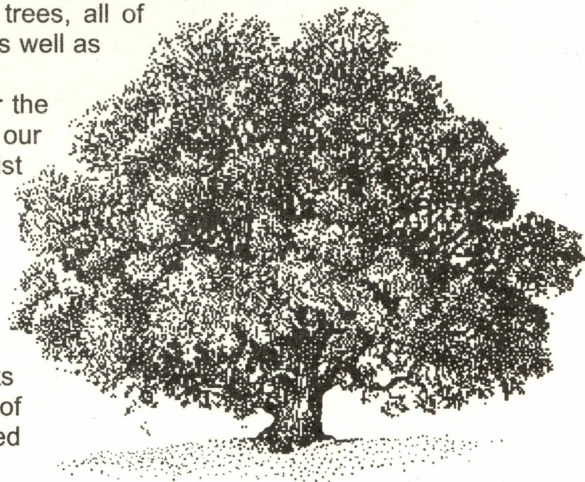
Update on Foresta 2000



Foresta 2000 is BirdLife's afforestation project for the new millennium; preparatory work commenced a couple of years ago and we are now reaching the point where the project will be launched officially. In 1997 a working committee was set up to look for a suitable site and carry out all the necessary bureaucratic and planning processes. Foresta 2000 will involve the planting out of more than 2000 oak and other Maltese trees, all of them grown from seed by BirdLife members and schoolchildren as well as at the BirdLife nursery within the Ghadira nature reserve.

After short-listing a number of sites, a neglected area near the Red Tower in Mellieha was chosen as the most suited for our purposes. With the help of Mr Edwin Lanfranco, an eminent botanist and expert on local flora, and Manlio Bozzo an Italian student from Bari University, a preliminary management plan has been drawn up.

Meetings have been held with the Mellieha Local Council, which is enthusiastically supporting the idea, and the Ministry of Environment which has also approved the project. The Planning Authority has likewise expressed itself favourably: Foresta 2000 fits well into its North West Local Plan which includes the designation of woodland conservation areas and the re-afforestation of abandoned agricultural land.



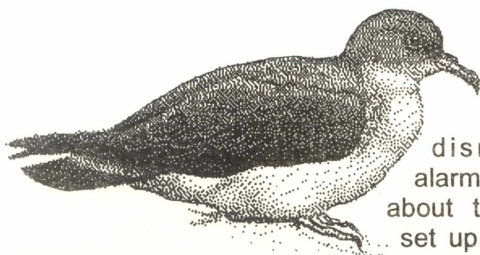
From the office



Our BirdLife Office in Ta' Xbiex, where Vicky and Katherine ensure the smooth running of the Society's administration, was a very busy place over the past couple of months. Shane Cormie from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) of the UK has been working with us since March on membership recruitment campaigns. He will be going back at the end of May and we would like to thank him for his work and hope to see him around at the British Birdfair next August.

While saying goodbye and thanks to Shane we welcome Liz Curmi who has just joined the staff at BirdLife as a full-time marketing officer. While acquainting herself with the work of BirdLife Malta, she has already started marketing the society's image. We wish her luck and hope she enjoy herself working with us.

Ta' Ċenċ under threat again



BirdLife was dismayed and alarmed to learn about the proposal to set up a tuna-penning project just metres away from the cliffs of Ta' Ċenċ, an ecologically important site. These cliffs not only provide one of the most breath-taking landscapes of Gozo, but are also home for five of our breeding sea-birds. Shearwaters, gulls and petrels - as well as barn owls and peregrines before they became extinct - all nest in the sheer cliff-faces. The siting of a fish farm close to these cliffs would cause irreparable harm and spell the end for a major breeding site. Ironically, the Council of Europe is presently formulating a convention to safeguard such special landscapes

Today the largest colony of Cory's shearwater in the Maltese islands is that of Ta' Ċenċ while storm petrels, which were formerly known only from Filfla, have been also been found here. The ecological importance of this site is recognised on a European scale and has been officially documented both locally and internationally. The Environment Protection Department, in fact, designates Ta' Ċenċ as an important bird area and we expect it to support BirdLife in opposing the tuna-penning project.

At a public hearing organised by the Environmental Protection Department at the end of



Victor Falzon

April, BirdLife voiced its apprehensions regarding the project and later submitted its objections in writing as stipulated by law. At the time of writing we are still waiting for the Planning Authority's decision to accept or reject the proposed fish-farm.

In any case, in order to avoid any further perils for Ta' Ċenċ, it is important that the site be declared a nature reserve like Filfla. Meanwhile we invite our members to make themselves heard through the media in favour of our natural heritage.

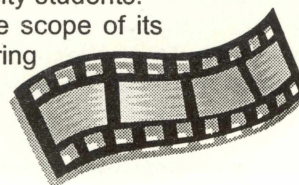


Media Campaign

The media campaign, for which funds have been collected in the past months, is continuing and starting to bear fruit. The principal aim is to raise public awareness about the need to preserve Malta's wildlife, with particular regard to resident and migratory birds.

Articles and adverts are regularly appearing in various publications, such as The Voice, a paper produced by the Students University Council (KSU) and widely read by all 8000 university and Junior College students. BirdLife was also featured on the University website and students could enrol by downloading a membership form from the site. A recruitment stand was set up at the university to coincide with the adverts in The Voice and we managed to increase our membership among university students.

Advertising in cinemas has been another initiative taken by BirdLife within the scope of its campaign to use mass media to convey its message. BirdLife adverts will be appearing regularly at a the Eden Century Cinema Complex throughout the next months.



The Greenweek and the Spring Show

Victor Falzon



A busy scene at the BirdLife stand during the Greenweek fair. About 120 persons enrolled in the adult or youth sections of the Society.

Birdlife participated in agricultural/nature fairs such as the Greenweek held at the Trade Fair Grounds in April and the Horticultural Spring Show held in May at San Anton Gardens. Good promotion to our Society was given especially during the Greenweek, where over 20 adult members were enrolled while Kiabb Huttat (the young members' section) acquired 100 new recruits.

During this fair BirdLife also sold saplings of native trees such as the Carob, Judas tree and our national tree, the Sandarac which incidentally appears to be gaining in popularity with home-owners. Bird tables and boxes were also displayed and sold during the Greenweek. These were assembled on site by an enthusiastic group of schoolchildren and distributed free of charge to those who enrolled in the Society. In this way, BirdLife hopes to persuade people to make their gardens more attractive to birds. There was also a computer presentation about the work of BirdLife. Like

the bird tables, this was also the work of schoolchildren. We would like to thank the following persons for making our stand at the Greenweek a great success:

- ◆ Mr Ivan Coleiro for donating of a set of display boards.
- ◆ the boys of St. Albert the Great, Valletta and their teacher Ms Anna Marie Gatt for assembling the bird tables and producing the computer presentation,
- ◆ Mr Mallia for helping the students assemble the tables and boxes
- ◆ Mr Lino Attard of Clock Studio, Gzira for providing the wood for these tables.
- ◆ Mr Patrick McCarthy of Global Computer Shop who provided a computer for the presentation and donated prizes
- ◆ Mr Michael Faizon who cut out the large jigsaw puzzles used in children's corner.
- ◆ Mr Joseph Falzon for making the furniture used in the stand.

Finally, we have to mention the volunteers - twenty-three of them - who manned the stand throughout the Greenweek.

The Spring Show stand was valiantly manned by Shane Cormie who was constantly present throughout the two-day event. He had a few helpers especially André and Roderick who managed to collect over Lm 50 from donations.

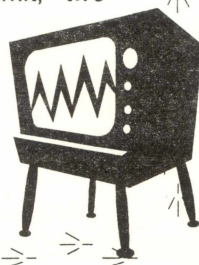
A big thank you to you all.



Television Programmes

A seven-episode series on the natural history of Malta is currently being shown on Super 1 TV. These documentaries, which have been ably produced by John Borg and Richard Cachia Zammit, two veteran BirdLife members, are being transmitted every Monday at 8.30 pm and repeated on Thursday at 5.00 pm.

It is not often that one finds nature programmes dealing with our own wildlife and our congratulations go to John and Richard for producing the series.



Wanted

We are looking for a small, second-hand fridge for our premises.

Any offers ?



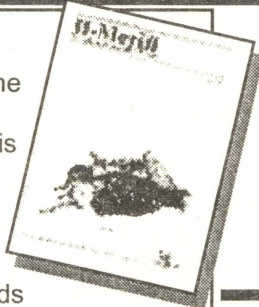
John Borg, the new warden of the Simar nature reserve talks to a group of young nature-lovers. Visits to the reserve by groups of schoolchildren have started to be organized on a trial basis. Regular visits are scheduled to begin as soon as proper reception facilities are available.



Victor Falzon

II-Merill

The 29th issue of II-Merill, the scientific journal of BirdLife has just been published. This 67-page issue contains various papers and short notes on different aspects of ornithology as well as systematic lists of all the birds ringed or recorded in the Maltese Islands from 1993 to 1996, a massive and painstaking task carried out by not less than 46 ornithologists and birdwatchers!



The publication costs Lm 3 but is available at request for BirdLife members **at no charge**. Interested persons may contact the BirdLife office. Although II-Merill is free of charge donations will be very welcome. Thank you.



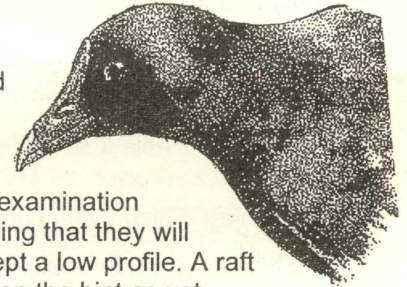
New BirdLife Council

BirdLife Malta held its Annual General meeting on the 8th of April. This was well-attended by members and various amendments to the statute of the Society were approved. The new Council for the next two years was also chosen. This is now made up of:

Antoine Vella (President), Dennis Cachia (Secretary), Anita Aloisio (Treasurer), Desiree Falzon (Chairperson), Alex Casha, Norman Chetcuti, Vistor Falzon, Ray Galea, Ian Mifsud (members). At the first Council meeting, John Borg was also co-opted to the Council.

News from the Nature Reserves

This spring was an unusually quite season on both our reserves at Ghadira and Simar. Certain events may however be highlighted: little ringed plovers are once again incubating a clutch of eggs at Ghadira while the moorhens of Simar are at the peak of their breeding season, prowling around in search of food. The reed warblers born last year at Simar have come back as adults. An examination of their rings confirmed that these were the very same birds and we're now hoping that they will build their nests within the reserve. The coots, also at Simar, have up to now kept a low profile. A raft has been placed in the water to encourage them to breed but they have not taken the hint as yet.



A big thank you to Audrey Chetcuti and all the volunteers who have, over the past months, helped in the running of the Ghadira Nature Reserve during the weekends.

The reserve will be closed from the beginning of June until next October



A2235
Ms. Ninette Zammit
Assistant Librarian
Melitensia Special Collection
University of Malta Library
Msida



Printed on recycled paper

BirdTalk is published by
BirdLife Malta
57, Marina Court, Abate Rigord St.,
Ta' Xbiex, MSD 12, Malta
Tel: 347646 Fax: 343239
e-mail: blm@orbit.net.mt
<http://www.waldonet.net.mt/birdlife/>

**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**