

## Promoting biodiversity conservation in Malta



The fauna and flora on some of the 24 islets around Malta and Gozo has been surveyed in a recently-published 12-year study.

The designation of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, by the United Nations – aimed at drawing attention to the plight of biodiversity on a global scale – may now be history, but it sparked a welcome resurgence of media interest in biodiversity-related issues. One hopes that this ‘renaissance’ is not fickle or skin-deep but that it will persist in the years to come.

For this to happen, a concerted effort must be made to keep biodiversity-related issues in the limelight. An initiative in this direction is the recent launching of the latest issue of *The Central Mediterranean Naturalist*, Malta's longest running scientific publication, which traces its origins to 1970 when it was originally named *Potamon*.

Among the 13 papers and short articles in this year's issue is a description of the life to be found on local islets (such as Fessej Rock, just offshore from Mgarr ix-Xini), a report on 10 new plant and animal species discovered in Malta, articles on selected floral alien species on the islands and an intriguing report about a colony of semi-feral zebra finch (a pet bird) that has established itself in a well-known hotel complex in Tigné, Sliema.

The management of the hotel in question released several zebra finches in the hotel gardens with the aim of establishing a semi-feral colony there. After several unsuccessful attempts, a colony consisting of about 100 individuals has now established itself.

The colony has even expanded to nearby Manoel Island, where it tends to build nests on palm trees.

Another paper deals with a gruelling 12-year project to survey the faunal and floral species of 24 islets in Malta, ranging from Filfla, Cominotto and Fungus Rock to midget ones such as Ghallis Rocks at Baħar iċ-Ċagħaġ and Halfa Rock off Hondoq ir-Rummien in Gozo.

Yet another paper maps out the three locations where *Narcissus elegans* are known to be growing in Malta. These flowers' leaves are slightly different from those of the well-known French daffodil (*Narcissus tazetta* – narcis or rancis).

Prior to the publication of this paper, the *Narcissus elegans* was last reported to be growing in Malta in the late 1980s.

This year's issue of the journal is dedicated to the memory of Anthony Valletta, one of Malta's leading naturalists and a pioneer in striving to foster local awareness about the natural heritage.

His indelible legacy will also be felt in the study of Lepidoptera, a group of insects he was very interested in.

Only a limited number of hard copies of the journal are being printed in view of the fact that it is now available online at [cmnntm.org.mt](http://cmnntm.org.mt), which website is continuously being consolidated.

Scientific material to compile the journal is never in short supply but the finances to keep it going are. In this regard the journal's editorial board is indebted to the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Tourism and Culture Mario de Marco, the Malta Council for Science and Technology and Capital Pest Control for their financial support.