





IL-MERILL

BULLETIN OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

No. 1 April 1970

1s.6d to non-Members



Malta Ornithological Society

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Cover picture: Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) by E. Hosking. This handsome dove is one of the common spring migrants and can be frequently seen in flocks. It is much sought after by the local birdshooters.

IL-MERILL

The title of the Society's Bulletin, IL-MERILL, is the Maltese name for the Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius*, which is one of the few resident species of the Islands. It was chosen as the National Bird of Malta by the local National Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation and has been the emblem of the Malta Ornithological Society since the latter's inception.

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EDITORIAL

It is with great pleasure that we are able to announce that H.E. Sir Maurice Dorman, GCMG, GCVO has kindly consented to become the Patron of the Malta Ornithological Society. We hope that this announcement coupled with the first issue of our new publication 'Il Merill' will, in this Nature Conservation Year, help on the noble work of our organization in its effort to preserve the bird life of Malta.

It was just two years ago in March 1968 that the Malta Ornithological Society issued its first Quarterly Bulletin which ran to eight issues. It was produced on a Gestetner machine and its scope was gradually widened by producing a number of interesting and informative articles on various aspects of bird life and bird conservation on the islands of Malta and Gozo. Before March 1968 the Malta Ornithological Society which was then incorporated with the Natural History Society of Malta did indeed issue monthly newsletters which consisted largely of information about the activities of the Society and notes on observation of birds seen and these were invaluable in giving continuous and exact information of interest to the bird-lover and bird-watcher.

And now in this Nature Conservation Year we have decided to have our

magazine printed and give it an entirely 'new look'. It will help to give that professional touch to our publication and possibly appeal to an even wider public so that the aims of the Society may become better known and more effectively achieved.

The aim of the Society has always been twofold: In the first place to collect and collate precise and scientific information on local and migrant bird life which will be of interest and use to persons interested locally and to international scientific bodies concerned with the Mediterranean area and world bird migration studies. For example last year we ringed some 4,000 birds, which total we hope to surpass this year. This is quite a good effort when one considers that the British Trust for Ornithology ringed fewer than 600,000 birds in the whole of 1968. We hope that within the next few months we shall be able to complete and publish our ringed records for the past three years and this will show how the Malta Ornithological Society, though small in numbers, has achieved scientific work of no small value.

In the second place the aim of the Society in conjunction with the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee (MBROC) and the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), is to foster and promote the protection of

bird life in particular on these islands and elsewhere as the case may arise. as we recently did by officially protesting against the revoking of bird shooting and trapping legislation in Italy, and last year by doing our share in having the island of Comino declared a bird sanctuary. This aim is indeed an ever increasingly urgent one as reports come in from all over the world of the disappearance of many species of wild life.

The shooting season is now upon us and it is to be hoped that the hunters will go out in ever-decreasing numbers and be much more discriminating in their choice of game and may the new Secondary Schools which are due to open in September for all children in Malta be schools where respect for the life of God's creatures will be taught. Here is an area also where the Church in Malta has yet to let its voice be heard. It is a frequent sight in Malta to see the sons of St. Francis walking about in his humble robe and the clergy could take a leaf from the life of St Francis and teach that God's feathered friends have a right to life and not to end up as just another stuffed specimen beneath a glass case. one further example of man's inhumanity to God's creatures

One scheme which is very dear to our heart is to have the Ghadira fresh water pond — the only such stretch of fresh water on the islands of Malta and Gozo — declared a bird sanctuary. It is indeed the main 'port of call' for many waders passing through on migration and under the present pressure of the building and developing boom could easily be encroached upon and disappear. Many an enlightened Government in other parts of the world has taken action to prevent the destruction of similar ecologically interesting areas and we hope that the Malta Government will prove itself to be just as enlightened.

May all the readers of our 'new look' magazine also become enthusiastic over the aim of the Malta Ornithological Society and seek out the support of similarly minded persons to promote the good work. We would particularly welcome the aid that teachers in secondary schools can give in educating the rising generation to change its attitude towards the wanton destruction of bird life on these islands and encouraging them to take up less destructive pastimes.

Miscellany

The infamous law No. 906 in Italy

~~In the fight for bird protection in Italy one of the great leaders is Professor Mario PAVAN, of the University of Pavia. The valiant efforts of the aged Professor Ghigi over many years had at last been crowned in 1969 by the passing of a law forbidding the annual massacre of birds throughout the country. Unfortunately, the present political leaders, with an eye on the next elections revoked this law by decree No. 906 and the slaughter of small birds is once again a common occurrence in Italy. The conscience of the nation has, however, been stung and~~

~~Professor PAVAN has himself collected more than 400,000 signatures of people protesting against law 906 and appealing to the Government to come back on its decision. We wish him and the noble Professor Ghigi success in their gallant efforts and hope the Italian Government will see reason and soon. If any reader of 'Il Merill' wish to help on the good work, a short letter of protest sent to:~~

~~Professor Mario PAVAN,
University of Pavia,
Via Taramelli, 24
Italy~~

~~would be welcomed.~~