

## BirdLife Malta Bird Ringing Scheme

Report to EURING General Meeting 2007

### Background

Set up in 1965 the BirdLife Malta bird ringing scheme has been actively ringing birds in Malta for the past 42 years. The current crop of ringers stands at twenty, the highest ever number of licensed bird ringers in Malta. However, due to several other commitments not all ringers are active regularly throughout the whole year. The ringing scheme does not have any full time staff and all work is carried out by the ringers themselves during their spare time. BirdLife Malta subsidizes the cost of the rings. The ringers pay a nominal fee of about 19 EURO annually and they have unlimited access to ring stocks. But all expenses covering ringing equipment, including mist nets, are borne by the ringers.

The average number of birds ringed throughout a calendar year is around 12,000 birds. To date around 420,000 birds of 190 species have been ringed. Usually the commonest species ringed are, though not necessary in this order, the Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*.

### Data

The ringing data has not yet been computerized and this results in longer working hours to log down the ringers data, and to report and process recoveries. However this shortcoming will soon be put right thanks to a sponsorship from the Dutch Embassy, BirdLife Malta has just signed a contract for the production of computer software for the hosting of our data, which should be ready in three months time. It is hoped that within the next two years all the data, compiled since 1965, will be computerized. Furthermore as from next year (2008) the ringing scheme will be in a position to forward data to the EURING data bank.

### Projects

Since 1990, BirdLife Malta's ringing scheme participated actively in the Small Islands Project organized by our colleagues from the Italian bird ringing scheme. This entailed a whole month of bird ringing in spring from the 15th April to the 15th May. Since then the ringing scheme has been using the small island of Comino as a base for such project. Improved amenities along recent years have meant that very often the project is carried out for a longer period and as well as in the autumn. Comino is ideal as a bird ringing station. Apart from being one of the few places where hunting is prohibited, the island, wedged between

the larger islands of Malta and Gozo, is like a natural funnel, resulting in larger catches of birds during migration.

Another project which has been initiated this year, with the help of EU Life Project funds, includes a long-term study of a Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* colony at L-Ahrax tal-Madonna on the northern coast of Malta. This colony holds about 10% of the Mediterranean population of this species. An extensive bird ringing programme, including fixing of data-loggers, has already produced the first interesting results.

Monitoring of the sea-bird colonies of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* and Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* is also carried out annually on the island of Filfla. The island is visited two to three times a year to ring the petrels at night. A visit to the inaccessible plateau surface of the island is also carried out with the help of an AFM helicopter to ring the pulli of Yellow-legged Gull.

Since the setting up of the nature reserves at Ghadira and Simar by BirdLife Malta in 1980 and 1992 respectively, a form of constant effort ringing has also been carried out by the managing wardens who are both licensed ringers.