

Ix-Xaghra l-Hamra and Tal-Qortin, l/o Mellieha

PROPOSED GOLF COURSE AND SUPPORTING FACILITIES

Technical Appendix 3: Avifauna Baseline Survey

Supporting Document for
Environmental Impact Statement

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**On behalf of
Malta Tourism Authority**

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Environmental Impact Statement

Avifauna Baseline Survey

Report for:

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I. AVIFAUNA BASELINE SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of the study is to describe the current avifauna population on the site of the proposed Golf Course project, in accordance with MEPA's draft Terms of Reference. This report is in two parts: a desk study and a report of survey.

DESK STUDY

- 1.2. The ornithology of ix-Xaghra l-Hamra, unlike other areas such as the nearby Simar and Ghadira Reserves, is less well known. Compared to other locations, this area is not very frequented by local birdwatchers mainly due to the high concentrations of bird trapping sites and the considerable number of hunters present on site during the migration periods.
- 1.3. The results presented in this desk study are therefore derived from limited observations collected by BirdLife Malta birdwatchers and from personal observations in the area. Albeit sparse, these records cover a thirty-four year period (1970-2004).

Area of Study

- 1.4. The Area of Study on which this report is based is the coastal area to the west, north, and south of Manikata, known as ix-Xaghra l-Hamra and Tal-Qortin, as identified for the possible development of an 18-hole golf course.

Guidelines

- 1.5. The importance of each of the species is guided by the following criteria.

Table 1: Categories of Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC's) and Non-SPECs

Category	
Category 1	European species of global conservation concern as Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened or Data Deficient under the IUCN Red List Criteria at a global level.
Category 2	Species whose global populations are concentrated in Europe, and which have an Unfavourable Conservation Status in Europe
Category 3	Species whose global populations are not concentrated in Europe, but which have an Unfavourable Conservation Status in Europe
Non-SPEC ^E	Species whose global populations are concentrated in Europe but which have a Favourable Conservation Status in Europe
Non-SPEC	Species whose global populations are not concentrated in Europe, and which have a Favourable Conservation Status in Europe.

Source: BirdLife International, 2004

Habitat types

- 1.6. The Xaghra l-Hamra area is located on the north-west coast of Malta and forms part of a rift valley system forming a graben. The area under study is composed of agricultural land, disused fields, and wide patches of rocky outcrops and garrigue. A number of Carob trees *Ceratonia siliqua* grow in parts of the northern side of the area.

Breeding Birds

- 1.7. Approximately 20 bird species¹ are known to breed regularly in the Maltese islands: 10 species are resident and the other 10 are summer breeding visitors. Seven species have been recorded breeding in the Xaghra l-Hamra area. Agricultural land and garrigue habitats in general, support only a small number of breeding species.² The species which nest in the study area include: the Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, the Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, the Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*, the Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*, the Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, and the Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*.
- 1.8. The nearby cliffs provide a habitat for the Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*. The Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* has, on occasions, been recorded in the Carob trees during the breeding season.
- 1.9. **Appendix I** describes each of the species that have been reported in the Study Area. It is noted that where no conservation status is given, this means that the species has a favourable and secure status condition and is not threatened on a national or international level; all breeding birds are protected by Maltese legislation. **Table I** contains a summary of the birds.

Table 2: Avifauna species reported in the Study Area

Name	Species
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

¹ It is noted that, in the Maltese Islands, approximately 400 species of birds are recorded,

² This is largely because of the small field size and the intense disturbance of the fields throughout the year.

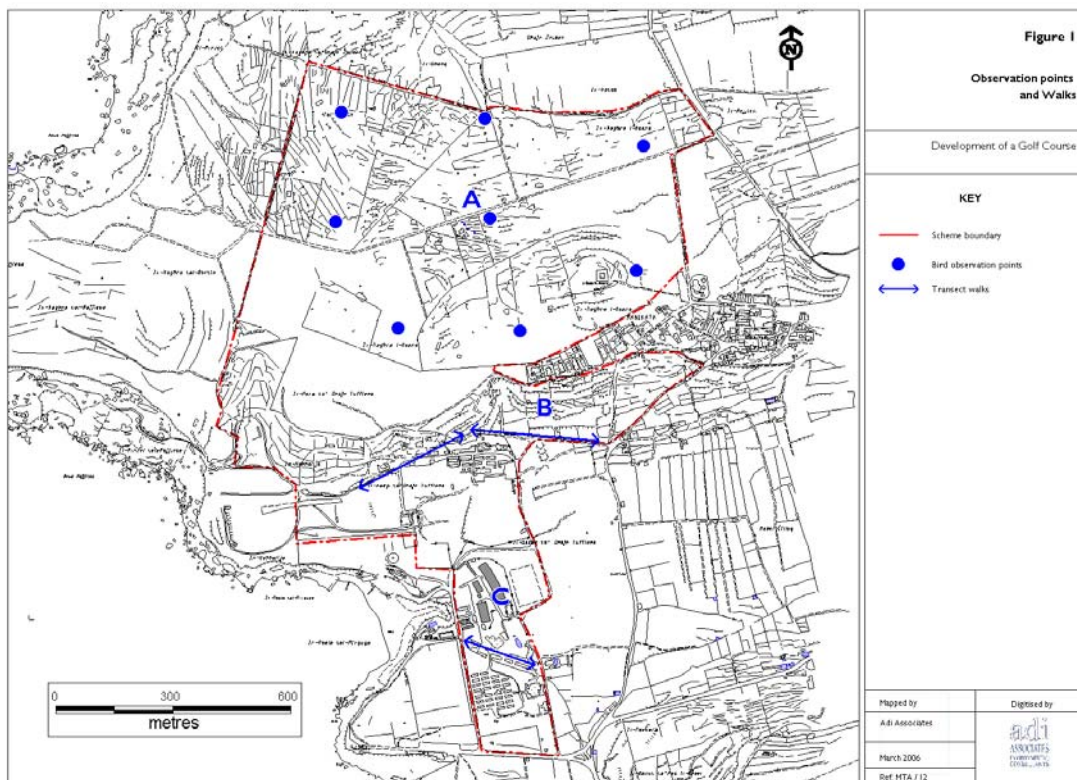
ORNITHOLOGICAL SURVEY

Introduction

- 1.10. An ornithological survey with reference to the Golf Course proposal at Xaghra I-Hamra was carried out between the second week of October and the first week of December 2005.

Area of Influence

- 1.11. The fieldwork focused on the area delineated on **Figure I**.



Methods

- 1.12. A total of five daylight visits were carried out over the whole area depicted in **Figure I** with particular attention was given to the birds present in the Study Area. Visits were carried out early in the morning and late in the afternoon. (See **Table I**.) One night visit was carried out with playback recordings for any owl species. The study area was surveyed by walking along transect lines from North to South as well as random visits. Observations were carried out along existing footpaths in areas **B+C**.

(red lines). Ten minute observations were carried out from eight pre-designated spots shown in area **A** (blue circles - see **Figure 1**).

- 1.13. The period covered (October – December) coincides with the peak autumn migration. Sightings of migrant species, wintering species as well as the resident species were logged. Zeiss 10x25 binoculars and a Kowa 20x60 telescope were used during the survey. A play-back sound system was used to entice *Sylvia* warblers and Chats to respond to these calls, as a result revealing their presence.

Table 3: Visits to Study Area

Date of visit	Period of Visit	Sunrise	Sunset	Temperature		
				Avg High	Avg Low	Mean
12 th October 2005	07.00 - 10.15	7:07 AM	6:31 PM	26°C	18°C	22°C
3 rd November 2005	07.00 – 10.00	6:27 AM	5:05 PM	22°C	16°C	19°C
11 th November 2005	15.30 – 22.00	6:35 AM	4:58 PM	21°C	14°C	18°C
5 th December 2005	14.45 – 17.00	6:58 AM	4:48 PM	17°C	12°C	15°C

- 1.14. Three other visits were carried out on the 3 July, 30 July and 5 August 2005.

Visits

- 1.15. The following describes the visits to the Study Area and the general conditions encountered.

Visit 1: Wednesday 12th October 2005 07.00 – 10.15

- 1.16. At this time of year it is difficult to associate birds with habitat type due to the continuous movements undertaken by the said migrant birds. Unlike the breeding season or winter visitors where birds are more likely to be found in a more or less specific habitat, migrant birds are more likely to be dispersed. Small flocks of birds, namely Skylarks and Common Starlings were recorded flying over the whole area.

Visit 2: Thursday 03rd November 2005 – 07.00 – 10.00

- 1.17. Migrating birds were still passing in good numbers. An increase in bird trapping activities was noted on the previous visit. This was due to the fact that a heavy passage of Siskins *Carduelis spinus* and Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* was underway. Both species are highly prized by the bird trappers. Observations along the west part of **Area B** was very much restricted because of bird trapping activities.

Visit 3: Friday 11th November 2005 – 16.50 – 22.00

- 1.18. Migrating birds were still very much evident especially along the Rdm Majjiesa coast with flocks of Finches passing almost continuously throughout the day. Robins and meadow Pipits were seen moving along the delineated area suggesting moving birds rather than winter visitors. On this occasion a night visit was carried out using a play-back recording of Scops Owl *Otus scops* and Long-eared Owls *Asio otus*. One Scops owl responded to the playback in **Area B**.

Visit: Monday 05th December 2005 – 14.45 – 17.00

- 1.19. Very little migration movement was noted and the wintering species such as Robins, Stonechats, Meadow Pipits, Grey and White Wagtails appeared to have settled in their respective types of preferred habitats.

Table 4: Bird Sightings

<u>Species</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Area Recorded</u>
Visit 1: Wednesday 12th October 2005 – 07.00-10.15		
Common Kestrel 1	M	A
Turtle Dove 2	M	A
Wryneck 1	MWV	B
Skylark 40+	M	A
Short-toed Lark 2	SBV	A
Dunnock 4	MWV	B+C
Barn Swallow 51	M	A+B+C
House Martin 15	M	B+C
Common Wheatear 2	M	A
Common Redstart 4	M	B+C
Meadow Pipit 34	WV	A+B
White Wagtail 2	WV	B
Grey Wagtail 1	WV	A
Songthrush 45+	M	A+B
Blue Rock Thrush 1m	R	A
Stonechat 15	WV	A+B+C
Robin 65+	MWV	A+B+C
Sardinian Warbler 5	R	A+C
Spectacled Warbler 1	R	A
Willow Warbler 2	M	C
Common Starling 400	WV	B
Common Chaffinch 2	M	B
Tree Sparrow 5	R	A
Spanish Sparrow 350+	R	A+B+C
Zitting Cisticola 2males	R	C
Corn Bunting 1	R	A
Visit 2; Thursday 03rd November 2005 – 07.00 – 10.00		
Wryneck 1	MWV	B
Skylark 80+	M	A
Meadow Pipit 12	WV	A+B

Species	Status	Area Recorded
Tawny Pipit 1	SPM	B
Grey Wagtail 1	WV	A
White Wagtail 7	WV	B
Dunnock 5	MWV	A+B+C
Songthrush 15+	M	A+B
Black Redstart 2	WV	B
Stonechat 13	WV	A+B+C
Robin 35+	MWV	A+B+C
Zitting Cisticola 2males	R	C
Sardinian Warbler 7	R	A+B+C
Spectacled Warbler 1	R	A
Common Chiffchaff 5	WV	C
Common Starling 56	WV	A+B+C
Spanish Sparrow 350+	R	A+B+C
Tree Sparrow 2	R	A
Siskin 5	M	B
Corn Bunting 1	R	A
Visit 3; Friday 11th November 2005 – 15.30 – 22.00		
Scops Owl 1	M	B
Wryneck 1	MWV	B
Skylark 5	M	A
Meadow Pipit 32	WV	A+B
Red-throated Pipit 1	SPM	A
Grey Wagtail 1	WV	A
White Wagtail 7	WV	B
Dunnock 5	MWV	B+C
Song thrush 3	M	A+B
Blackbird 1m	MWV	C
Stonechat 11	WV	A+B+C
Robin 56	MWV	A+B+C
Common Redstart 2	M	B+C
Black Redstart 4	WV	A+B+C
Zitting Cisticola 2males	R	C
Sardinian Warbler 5	R	A+B+C
Spectacled Warbler 2	R	A
Common Chiffchaff 1	WV	C
Common Starling 15	WV	A
Spanish Sparrow 350+	R	A+B+C
Tree Sparrow 1	R	A
Siskin 2	M	B
Corn Bunting 1	R	A
Visit 4; Monday 05th December 2005 – 14.45 – 17.00		
Woodcock 1	M	C
Wryneck 1	MWV	B
Meadow Pipit 15	WV	A+B
Grey Wagtail 1	WV	A
White Wagtail 9	WV	B
Dunnock 4	WV	B+C
Song thrush 1	M	A+B

<u>Species</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Area Recorded</u>
Stonechat 11	WV	A+B+C
Robin 25	MWV	A+B+C
Black Redstart 6	WV	A+B+C
Zitting Cisticola 2males	R	C
Sardinian Warbler 8	R	A+B+C
Spectacled Warbler 2	R	A
Common Chiffchaff 3	WV	C
Common Starling 22	WV	A
Spanish Sparrow 350+	R	A+B+C
Tree Sparrow 2	R	A
Corn Bunting 1	R	A

Legend: M = Migrant, WV = Winter Visitor, R = Resident, SPM = Scarce Passage Migrant, SBV = Summer Breeding Visitor.

Results

- 1.20. A total of 13.5 hours of observation was carried out during four. A total of thirty-two (32) different species were recorded inside the Study Aarea. A total of 16 species (*) were recorded on the ground outside it. A further 5 species were recorded flying at high altitude overhead, these latter birds, namely Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Little Egret and Honey Buzzard are not included in the Check List. The status of each species (for the whole Maltese archipelago) follows that of Sultana & Gauci 1982. Further details are included in **Appendix 2**.

Breeding

- 1.21. The following breeding pairs were noted.

Table 5: Breeding species, nesting areas and number of pairs (2005)

<u>Breeding species</u>	<u>Nesting area</u>	<u>No of pairs</u>
<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	A	8
	B	x
	C	2
<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	C	2
<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	A	6
	B	3
	C	2
<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	A	2
<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	A+B+C	?
<i>Passer montanus</i>	A	2
<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	A	1

Conclusion

- 1.22. The general area is under intense human pressure and this is visible by the large amount of rubbish dumped especially in area A.
- 1.23. Area A, which covers the largest expanse of land is primarily frequented by birds of open spaces but the large number of trapping sites in the area and a high presence of

bird shooters in the area keep the number of birds (species and numerically) very low. The furrowed fields are frequented by wintering birds such as Meadow Pipits and the odd White Wagtail, but during migration several passerines were noted feeding in freshly plowed fields.

- I.24. Area B is the one most close to human habitations and the constant presence of people there as well as the number of trapping sites close to the large reservoir kept most birds away but evening visits, when trappers had left, this resulted in a larger number of birds present.
- I.25. The two areas with large trees in area C were frequented by “woodland” migratory species. The thick clumps of vegetation provide cover for a number of species.

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Appendix I:

Avifauna that have been reported in the Study Area

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – **Annex I species**

SPEC* **Category 3****

RDB Maltese Islands – **Vulnerable*****

***SPEC - Species of European Conservation Concern**

****Category 3 - Species whose global populations are not concentrated in Europe, but which have an Unfavourable Conservation Status in Europe**

*****Vulnerable – Taxon is likely to become endangered in the near future if the factors threatening it continue to operate.**



The Short-toed Lark is a bird of open grounds, frequenting agricultural land and areas of garrigue. The sand coloured plumage of the bird helps it to blend into its surroundings. Till the early years of the 1980s the Short-toed Lark was reported as being a very common migrant and breeding summer resident (Sultana & Gauci 1982). The increase of human activities in the countryside in the last ten years has greatly affected the breeding population.

The first birds start arriving in March. Nest building starts in the third week of April. The nest is built on the ground in the shade of a bush or a large rock. The young hatch after 13 days of incubation and fledge the nest after another 10 days. The Short-toed Lark is double brooded, that is, it breeds twice each year. In the month of August the young birds flock together and roost communally on the ground. By early October all the Short-toed Larks would have left the islands.

The study area is known to hold a total of 10-15 pairs of Short-toed Larks. These are mainly located in the Xaghra I-Hamra – Qortin area.

Size: **14cm**

Nest type: **ground nesting**

Number of eggs per brood: **3-5**

Colour of eggs: **creamy white**

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: **300-450 breeding pairs (Bp)**

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

RDB Maltese Islands – **Vulnerable**



The Blue Rock Thrush is a resident species. It usually frequents the rocky coast, especially the cliff sides. During the breeding season the adult birds frequently forage for small reptiles, snails, grasshoppers, and other insects in the hinterland, often frequenting the rubble walls and rocky outcrops there.

Nest building starts in March and four to five eggs are laid. Incubation lasts 13 days and the chicks fledge the nest when 14 days old. The Blue Rock Thrush is a double brooder; a second brood is raised in summer. In autumn the young birds have a tendency to move inland.

Although no breeding has been reported in the study area, the cliffs and slopes on the south-west and west side of the study area are known to hold some 5-8 pairs.

Size: **20.5cm**

Nests type: **crevices and fissures in cliffs and fortifications, also abandoned buildings**
in the countryside

Number of eggs per brood: **4-5**

Colour of eggs: **light blue with brown spots on the larger end**

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: **150-180 Bp**

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*



The Zitting Cisticola is the smallest resident species; it became established in Malta in the early 1970s. Its favourite habitats are agricultural land and valleys with long grasses. It feeds exclusively on insects, which is highly beneficial to agriculture.

The bottle-shaped nest, constructed out of spider webs and thin strands of grass is woven amidst strands of grasses and leaves of small shallow bushes. Notwithstanding its small size, its presence hardly ever goes unnoticed. The “zip-zip” calls of the patrolling males are very much evident during the breeding season from January to July and occasionally later, with one record in November. Males are polygamous with a single male having up to four females in his territory. The first nest in Malta was found in the nearby Pwales valley in 1973.

The number of calling males in the Xaghra l-Hamra area, especially close to agricultural land and the fringes of the garrigue varied from 5 to 10 from 1985-2000.

Size: 10cm

Nests type: built in long grasses

Number of eggs per brood: 3-6

Colour of eggs: white or light blue, occasionally with some violet spots

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: 1,000-2,000 Bp

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*



This is a common resident species frequenting all types of habitats, including urban environments, where it is frequently seen moving among low bushes close to human habitations. It feeds on insects and small wild fruits. It is a very active and noisy species.

Weather permitting, breeding starts in February with the male birds singing while in flight. Incubation lasts 13 days and the young fledge after 12 days. The Sardinian Warbler breeds at least twice a year; sometimes three times. Males are highly territorial and do not tolerate other males of the same species. Its scolding alarm call is audible especially when someone or something ventures close to the nest.

The annual average number of breeding birds in the proposed golf course area is eight pairs.

Size: 13cm

Nests type: in low bushes and trees

Number of eggs per brood: 3-4

Colour of eggs: greenish-white to brown, variable amount of spots

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: 3,000 – 5,000 Bp

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*

RDB Maltese Islands – **Endangered***

*** Endangered - Taxon is in danger of extinction due to populations having become severely depleted or due to a drastic reduction in habitat**



Formerly a common resident species, it suffered a drastic decline in the 1980s. It is now considered a scarce resident breeder. This species forages amongst low lying vegetation and feeds on insects and small invertebrates.

Breeding may start in late February. Males are highly territorial and may be frequently seen and heard chasing other males away from their territory. The nest consists of a neat cup constructed of vegetation and animal hair in a shallow bush. The eggs hatch after 12 days of incubation and the young leave the nest after another 12 days.

In the recent past the proposed golf course area used to hold up to 10 pairs of this species, but in the last five years (1999-2004) only two have been recorded.

Size: 12cm

Nests type: low bushes

Number of eggs per brood: 3-5

Colour of eggs: greenish-white with light brown spots

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: 200-250 Bp

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*



The Spanish Sparrow is an abundant resident species that frequents all sorts of habitats. It frequently occurs close to human habitations that it exploits for food. In urban areas it mainly feeds on scraps, but it also feeds on seeds, insects, and other invertebrates.

The breeding season starts in February and can continue till early autumn. Four broods may be raised each year. Soon after the main breeding season (late summer) the Spanish Sparrow congregates in large flocks, sometimes reaching several thousands, to roost communally in large trees.

The study area holds a large population of the Spanish Sparrow. They roost in trees close to human habitations at Ghajn Tuffieha and Manikata but forage throughout.

Size: 15cm

Nests type: untidy nest in trees, buildings, electricity pylons, broken water pipes etc.

Number of eggs per brood: 4-6

Colour of eggs: white or light blue with many brown spots

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: 60,000 – 100,000 Bp

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

RDB Maltese Islands – **Vulnerable**



The shrill call of the male Corn Bunting has almost disappeared from the Maltese countryside. This species suffered a dramatic decline in the last 15 years mainly because of intense use of pesticides and increasing leisure activities in the countryside. The increase in the rodent population is also believed to have contributed to this decline

During mild winters, males start courting by late February and the females lay the eggs in early March. When the winters are severe, breeding may be delayed by as much as one month. Incubation lasts 12 days and the young leave the nest after 10 days, when still unable to fly. During the summer months small flocks of Corn Buntings congregate near water holes.

In past years the proposed golf course area used to hold six to eight pairs of Corn Bunting but in the last five years only one pair has been recorded.

Size: **18cm**

Nests type: **ground nester or in low bushes**

Number of eggs per brood: **4-6**

Colour of eggs: **white with a violet tinge and heavily marked**

Total breeding population in the Maltese Islands: **50-100 Bp**

Wintering Birds

The open spaces and sparse vegetation of the study area offer an ideal habitat for a number of wintering species such as larks, pipits, chats and warblers. Single Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* over-winter. The number of larks present in the Xaghra I-Hamra – Il-Qortin area is negatively affected by the strong concentration of hunting activity. Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* are present throughout the winter months, as are Robins *Erithacus rubecula*, Stonechats *Saxicola torquata*, Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochrurus*, Songthrush *Turdus philomelos*, and other thrushes and several warbler species such as the Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*.

The following describes the conservation status of these species:

Skylarks <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	SPEC 3; Status (Depleted) large historical decline
Meadow Pipits <i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Non-SPEC _E Status (Secure)
Robins <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Non-SPEC _E Status Secure
Stonechats <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Non-SPEC Status (Secure)
Black Redstarts <i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>	Non-SPEC Status Secure
Songthrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Non-SPEC _E Status Secure
Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Non-SPEC Status Secure
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> .	Non-SPEC _E Status Secure

Category	European Species of Global conservation Concern	Conservation Status in Europe	Global population or range concentrated in Europe
SPEC 3	NO	Unfavorable	No
Non-SPEC _E	NO	Favourable	Yes
Non-SPEC	NO	Favourable	No

From: BirdLife International 2004. Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status. Cambridge, UK.

Migrants

Migration is a period when birds are encountered outside their normal preferred habitats. That is, species preferring woodland may be encountered in open areas and *vice versa*. The Ghajn Tuffieha area is renowned among hunters as the place for migrating Herons and Egrets. Raptors such as Harriers are also frequently seen in the area. The open grounds are ideal for Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus*, Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* and Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Since the area is close to the coast, adverse weather conditions may bring in all types of bird species.

On the basis of the information available, although the Xaghra I-Hamra – Il-Qortin area is not a priority site for breeding species, it is still considered to be an important site for wintering and migrating species. In conclusion, if bird catching practices (hunting and trapping) in the Xaghra I-Hamra – Il-Qortin area are curtailed, the number of birds present (visitors as well as residents) is likely to increase, especially if this is coupled with a reduction in uncontrolled leisure activities that can themselves negatively affect the avifauna present there, especially during the breeding season.

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Appendix 2:

Annotated checklist of the birds observed during fieldwork

Order **Accipitriformes**
Family **Accipitridae**

***Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Non-SPEC; Status Secure

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Scarce autumn migrant and very scarce spring migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One male seen flying along the cliffs heading inland towards the Mizieb area.

Order **Falconiformes**
Family **Falconidae**

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 3; Status Declining

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Common passage migrant. Formerly a regular breeder. Some birds attempt to overwinter in the Maltese islands (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A juvenile bird was observed hunting on 12 October in **area A**. It was seen catching a wall lizard *Podarcis filfolensis* from the garrigue area. Soon after it was shot at and flew away towards Mellieha ridge.

Order **Galliformes**
Family **Phasianidae**

* **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (Linnaeus, 1758)

SPEC Category 3; Status (Depleted)

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Common passage migrant, formerly a common breeding bird (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A male bird was flushed by a shooter's dog and was shot just outside **area B** on the 12 October.

Order **Charadriiformes**
Family **Burhinidae**

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus (Linnaeus, 1758)
SPEC 3; Status (Vulnerable)
European IUCN Red List Criteria A2b
EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Generally a scarce migrant; formerly a rare breeding bird (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A single bird seen running on the rocks above Rdum Majjesa on the 3 November. Shot at but managed to fly away apparently unharmed.

Family **Scolopacidae**

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* Linnaeus, 1758
SPEC 3; Status (Declining)
EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/1; III/2 species
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common autumn migrant with single birds overwintering (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One bird was shot in the evening of the 11 November in **area C**.

Order **Columbiformes**
Family **Columbidae**

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (Linnaeus, 1758)
SPEC 3; Status Declining
EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Sultana & Gauci (1982) listed the Turtle Dove as a very common spring migrant and re-passes in smaller numbers in autumn. Data collected between 1983 – 2004 shows a large decline in numbers.

Two birds flushed from low trees in the north side of **area A**. Flew away in the direction of Mizieb.

Order **Strigiformes**
Family **Strigidae**

* **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* (Pontoppidan, 1763)

SPEC 3; Status (Depleted)

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Scarce passage migrant, single birds bred in the early years of the 19th Century (Sultana & Gauci 1982). One pair laid a clutch of 12 eggs on Comino in March 1983 (BLM records).

A single bird was shot in **area B** as soon as it came in from the sea on 3 November.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC 2; Status (Depleted)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Generally a fairly common migrant with single birds over-wintering in the Maltese Islands (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A single male bird responded to play-back calls in the evening of the 11 November in **area B**

Order **Caprimulgiformes**
Family **Caprimulgidae**

***Eurasian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC 2; Status (Depleted)

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Two birds were seen flying at dawn in the south side of area A and north side of area B on the 12 October.

Order **Coraciiformes**
Family **Alcedinidae**

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis (Linnaeus, 1758)

SPEC 3; Status Depleted

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common autumn migrant and scarce winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One bird present on all days on the rocks below Rdum Majjesa. Two birds present on the 3rd November.

Family **Upupidae**

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC 3; Status (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common spring migrant, but scarce during the autumn passage (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One bird feeding on the garrigue close to the cliffs, west of area **B**.

Order **Piciformes**

Family **Picidae**

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC 3; Status (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One wintering bird present in **area B** in trees close to fields.

Order **Passeriformes**
Family **Alaudidae**

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Leisler, 1814)

SPEC Category 3; **Status** Declining

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex I species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Vulnerable

Sultana & Gauci (1982) listed the Short-toed Lark as a very common migrant and breeding visitor. A large decline has been recorded in the last 15 years with the population plummeting down by 80% (BLM data).

All breeding birds have migrated; the last two remaining birds were seen on the 12 October in **area A**.

Breeding: During the breeding season of 2005 eight pairs have nested in **area A**. Five singing males were noted west of **area B**.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Depleted)

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common autumn migrant according to Sultana & Gauci (1982). Recent observations show a drastic decline in numbers (BLM Data).

40+ (in small flocks of up to 12) on the 12 October in **area A**, 80+ (most in small flocks of 10) in **area A** on 3 November, 5 birds feeding on the ground in **area A** on 11 November.

Family **Hirundinidae**

***Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* (Linnaeus, 1758)

SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Depleted)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common spring and autumn migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Single birds were seen mixed with other hirundines (Barn Swallows and House Martins) flying close to the cliffs and over fields south of **area C**. on the first two visits.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus, 1758
SPEC Category 3; **Status** Depleted
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982), a few odd pairs have nested in the Maltese islands in the last 10 years. Passes in large numbers especially in September and early October. Likes to feed over open water or cultivated fields.

Recorded flying in the three areas; **A+B+C**.

House Martin *Delichon urbica* (Linnaeus, 1758)
SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Declining)
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982). Has the same habits as the Barn Swallow with which it frequently mixes.

Recorded flying in all the three areas; **A+B+C**.

Family **Motacillidae**

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* Linnaeus, 1758
SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Declining)
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A single bird was flushed from the ground on 3 November in **area B**.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis Linnaeus, 1758
Non-SPEC; **Status** Secure
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common spring migrant and common autumn migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A flock of 5 and another single bird were seen on 12 October passing over **area B**.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common autumn migrant and winter visitor according to Sultana and Gauci (1982) but in the last 10 years a decline in the number of passing and wintering birds has been noted (BLM data).

Single birds have been recorded on all days with the largest number being 24 (flock) flushed from the ground close to Rdum Majjesa on 11 November. A total of 34 birds were seen in **areas A and B** on the 12 October. The wintering population was of fifteen birds in areas **A+B** with an additional 12 birds outside the surveyed area.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Pallas, 1811

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common migrant (Sultana & Gauci (1982))

A single bird on 11th November in **Area C** and a flock of 6 outside area **A** on 12 October.

***Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Linnaeus, 1758**

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A flock of 22 passed overhead while walking in **area A** on 12 October.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Tunstall, 1771

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common autumn migrant and fairly common winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A single overwintering bird was recorded on all visits in the same location in the southern edge of **area A**.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Up to twelve birds recorded on all visits in areas **A+B+C**. Most of these birds were observed singly or in pairs along footpaths and uncultivated land. By the end of November six to eight birds had set up territory in all the surveyed area for the winter.

Family **Prunellidae**

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Four on 12 October (2 in **B** and 2 in **C**), five birds in **A+B+C** on 3rd and 11 November and 4 on 12 December. These last birds were present in the vegetated parts of **areas B+C**.

Family **Turdidae**

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common autumn migrant and common winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Very large numbers passed in autumn 2005, with up to 150 birds counted in the first two visits. In the last visit a total of 25 wintering birds were counted. These were evenly distributed in all the three areas.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Gmelin, 1789

Non-SPEC; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A total of six wintering birds present in all the areas. During the daylight hours, birds were feeding on rocky ground while in the late evening these birds roosted singly in derelict or unused buildings in the area.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 2; **Status** (Depleted)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Four on the 12 October in **areas B+C**, and 2 on 11 November also in **areas B+C**. Other single birds were seen outside the study area.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Areas A and B offer ideal habitat for this open ground species. The highest number recorded in the study area was of 15 birds on 12 October, but a further 21 other birds were present just outside the delineated area. The wintering population in the study area was of 11 birds. The majority in **areas A+B** and three birds in **area C**.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Two birds present in **area A** on 12 October. A further six birds were seen on the rocks west of **area A**.

***Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* Linnaeus, 1758**
SPEC Category 2; **Status** (Depleted)
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Scarce passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

A male and a juvenile bird were seen on the rocks on 12 October just outside the west side of **area A**.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* Linnaeus, 1758
SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Depleted)
Berne Convention – Annex III species
RDB Maltese Islands – Vulnerable

A fairly common breeding resident (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

One juvenile male perched on rocks in **area A** on 12 October.

Breeding: Three pairs have been noted along the cliffs outside the delineated area. Both males and females were frequently seen flying inland in all the three areas in search of food which usually consisted of small lizards.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Linnaeus, 1758
Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure
EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Two males in different parts of **area C**, close to thickets of undergrowth.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* Brehm, 1831

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Generally a very common autumn migrant and common winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Several birds seen while on migration on the 12 October especially in areas **A+B** but single birds were seen flying over area **C** as well. Most birds were flushed from mostly vegetated areas in **A + B**.

Family **Sylviidae**

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (Rafinesque, 1810)

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

A common breeding resident (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Two males heard calling on all visits in **area C**

Breeding: Two singing males present in **area C**, while another male was noted in the southern side of **area A**. Two empty nests of the year were located one in **area C** and one in the north side of **area B**. Two other males were calling continuously close to the Manikata Church during the breeding season.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* Temminck, 1820

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Reported as a fairly common breeding resident by Sultana & Gauci (1982) but numbers have declined since 1990.

Two male birds heard and seen on all visits in **area A**.

Breeding: One pair was seen in area A during the breeding season with the male still holding territory in early August.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* Gmelin, 1789
Non-SPEC^E; Status (Secure)
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common breeding resident (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Single birds present in all areas on all dates mainly close to thick vegetation.

Breeding – A total of 14 pairs were counted in **Area A**. 8 to 10 pairs present in **area B** and 6-8 pairs present in **area C**. Fledged young were encountered throughout the entire area.

* **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* Latham, 1787
Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common spring and scarce autumn migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Two birds seen close to east side of **area A** on the other side of the road moving along low bushes close to the aqueduct on 12 October.

* **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* Linnaeus, 1758
Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common winter visitor and passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

A male was seen close **area C** while another was heard just to the west of **area B** on 11 November.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Vieillot, 1817
Non-SPEC; Status Secure
Berne Convention – Annex III species

Very common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Single figures observed almost on all days in **area C** close to thick vegetation.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Two birds on 12 October feeding in agricultural land in **area C**.

Family **Laniidae**

***Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 2; **Status** (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Fairly common passage migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

A single bird was seen perched on low trees on the north side of **area A** just outside delineated area on 12 October.

Family **Sturnidae**

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Linnaeus, 1758

SPEC Category 3; **Status** Declining

EU Birds' Directive 79/409/EEC – Annex II/2 species

Very common autumn migrant and winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Recorded in small flocks in all areas but in the early winter one small flock was feeding in the east side of **area A**.

Family **Passeridae**

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (Temminck, 1820)

Non-SPEC; Status (Secure)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Abundant breeding resident (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Recorded in double figures in all the three areas, especially common in the southern side of **area C**.

Breeding – Several tens of pairs breeding in man-made holes and cavities as well as in trees. Nests were found in all the three areas.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

SPEC Category 3; **Status** (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Vulnerable

Rare breeding resident and autumn migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Single birds seen in **area A** along the north east side.

Breeding – At least two pairs nested in a hole in an abandoned farm-house along the north-east side of **area A**.

Family **Fringillidae**

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Linnaeus, 1758

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Common autumn migrant and fairly common winter visitor (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Two were seen on low bushes on 12 October in **area B**

*** European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (Linnaeus, 1758)**

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Endangered

Common autumn migrant and winter visitor in small numbers (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

A flock of 12 birds was seen passing close to the cliffs outside the delineated area on 11 November.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Non-SPEC^E; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Generally a scarce autumn migrant (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

This autumn Siskins passes in good numbers and many were trapped by bird-trappers. A flock of five birds was seen on low bushes in area B on the 3 November, and two in the same place on the 11 October. Trappers in **areas A** and **B** informed that many were caught there in November.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes

Non-SPEC; Status Secure

Berne Convention – Annex III species

Generally a frequent autumn migrant and winter visitor in smaller numbers (Sultana & Gauci 1982)

Like the Siskin, this year Hawfinches passed in good numbers. Bird trappers in areas A and B reported several birds present / trapped on most days in November.

Family **Emberizidae**

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* (Linnaeus, 1758)

SPEC Category 2; **Status** (Declining)

Berne Convention – Annex III species

RDB Maltese Islands – Vulnerable

A common breeding resident according to Sultana & Gauci (1982). Numbers have suffered a sharp decline since the early 1990s (BLM data).

A single male bird heard calling in **area A** throughout the whole survey.

Breeding – A single pair nested in the north-west side of **area A** but eggs were taken by rats.