



A Glimpse of Maltese Fauna

Calendar 2006





Name - *Oryctolagus cuniculus*
Wild rabbit
Fenek selvaġġ

Status - common

Size - 340-450 mm

Notes - Largest wild land mammal of the Maltese Islands. Present on the main islands Malta, Gozo and Comino. Found in two forms light form (as photo) and dark form. In all islands both forms exist but on Comino which has the largest population to land scale, the light form is much commoner. White tail very visible when animal runs. Eyes more prominent than those of domestic stock. Lives in colonies, and stamps hind legs when alarmed. Mating is in spring, each male mating up to 5 females. Gestation is 28-33 days. Females can bear more than three litters (with up to 5 in each) in a year. Very fast runner.
Photo by Arnold Sciberras.



Name - *Platalea leucorodia*
Spoonbill
Paletta

Status - Very Scarce

Size - 800-930 mm

Notes - Easily recognized by its long spatula-like beak. Feeds by swinging the beak in the water to catch small animals. Usually solitary but can also be seen in small flocks. Seen almost every year in nature reserves such as Ghadira. Protected.

Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.



Name - *Otus scops*
Scops Owl
Kokka

Status - Frequent
Size - 190 -210 mm

Notes - Smallest owl in the Maltese Islands. Colour is greyish-brown with bright yellow eyes and has small "ear" tufts. Nocturnal and predatory, feeding mainly on insects and other small night-foraging dwelling arthropods. Prefers woodland areas such as Buskett. Protected.

Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona



Name - *Passer hispaniolensis*
Spanish Sparrow
Ghasfur tal-Bejt

Status - Very common
Size - 150 mm

Notes - The most common bird found in the Maltese Islands. Sexes can be distinguished easily since the male is coloured and the female pale brown. Males are more brightly coloured in spring than in winter (right photo). Resident and widespread. Builds nest in trees, walls, cliffs, etc. Can have up to 3 broods a year with 4 to 6 eggs per brood. Often gather to roost (sleep) in great numbers after the breeding season. Protected.

Photo by Arnold Sciberras.



Name – *Chamaeleo chamaeleon*
Mediterranean Chameleon,
Kamaleont

Status – Frequent

Size – up to 300 mm

Notes – Males tend to be larger than females and skull is more robust. Eyes can be pointed in different directions independently. Catches insects using camouflage and at close range shoots out tongue which has a sticky tip. The tongue can be twice the size of its body length. Changes colour according to physiological or emotional state, and also on the surrounding environment. Mating occurs from May onwards. Female lays up to 15 eggs and these are generally covered with soil. Introduced from species from North Africa around 1846 – 1865. Has spread to all parts of Malta, more commonly in the North especially at Ghadira nature reserve and coastal areas. Also found in Gozo, Comino and Cominotto . Protected.

Photo by Arnold Sciberras.



Name – *Discoglossus pictus*
Painted Frog
Żring

Status – Common

Size – 70 mm



Notes – The only indigenous amphibian. Subspecies *pictus* is endemic to Sicily and the Maltese Islands. Although common it is decreasing rapidly. Colour varies from light green to dark brown. Found in localities where fresh water is present. In summer it lies concealed in humid areas. Lays around 500 eggs in water in a layer held by a gelatinous covering often attached to pool vegetation. Eggs grow rapidly and hatch after reaching 45 mm. Hatchlings are about 9 mm long and as grow up to 45 mm. Tadpoles spend 5 to 8 weeks in water. At first they breathe through gills and later they develop lungs and go up to the surface to breathe air. Hind legs develop before forelegs. The body starts changing to frog-like shape and tail shortens and eventually disappears. Diet also changes gradually from vegetable matter to small animals.

Protected.

Photos by Arnold Sciberras



Name - *Hemidactylus turcicus*
Turkish Gecko
Wiżgħa tad-Djar

Status - Common

Size - up to 100 mm

Notes - More widespread than the Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica* but less common. Present on all islands, islets and rocks where the Maltese Wall Lizard *Podarcis filfolensis* is present. Smaller than the Moorish Gecko and can be distinguished by its pale translucent skin, and bears claws on all toes. Feeds on small arthropods that are usually hidden under stones. Mostly nocturnal. Has a gestation period of 5 weeks and lays 2 to 3 eggs which hatch in 2 to 3 months. Protected.

Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.



Name - *Mantis religiosa*
Praying Mantis
Debba tax-Xitan

Status - frequent

Size - 70mm

Notes - Excellent vision. Carnivorous and highly cannibalistic. Hunts by staying still until prey comes, which it then snatches with its toothed front legs and eats alive. Diet consists of anything smaller than the mantis itself. Eggs are laid in a papery structure case. Found mostly in warm weather and overwinter as eggs. Found in two forms.

Photo of green form by Arnold Sciberras.

Photo of brown form by Matthew Borg Cardona.



Name – *Anacridium aegyptium*
Egyptian Grasshopper
Gurat tar-Raba'

Status – Common

Size – Male – 50mm
Female – 70mm

Notes – The most common of the large grasshoppers. Found in every type of habitat, especially on the Caster Oil Trees *Ricinus communis*. Despite its size and status it causes little damage to crops. Sighting almost all year round and increase in number in warm weather. Nymphs (young) can be found in a green or brown form and adults can vary in color but have the same pattern.

Photo by Arnold Sciberras.



Name – *Agapanthia asphodeli*
Asphodel long-horned beetle
Susa tal-Berwieq

Status – common

Size – 30mm

Notes – A member of the long-horned beetle with narrow body and very long antennae. When threatened they produce a squeaking sound to confuse predators. Their larvae feed inside the stalk of the plants, mostly the Branched Asphodel *Asphodelus aestivus*. Sighting of adult is generally from March to May.

Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona



Name – *Gastropacha quercifolia*
Lappet Moth
Werqa Niexfa

Status – Common
Wingspan – 48-86mm

Notes – Females are generally much larger than males. Produces two broods, and the eggs are blue striped with white. The larva is covered with a thin layer of grey hair which it entwines with leaves to pupate in them. Larvae feed on leaves of fruit trees such as apple and pears. Sightings as a moth are mostly May to June and August to October.

Photo by Arnold Sciberras



Name – *Maniola jurtina*
Meadow Brown
Kannella Kbir

Status – Scarce and localised

Wingspan – 52-58mm

Notes – The subspecies *hyperhispulla* is endemic. One of the larva's food plants is *Bromus diandrus* (Great Brome). Sighting from April to September. Protected.
Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.



Name – *Podarcis filfolensis*
Maltese Wall Lizard
Gremxula ta' Malta

Status – Depending on locality.

Size – from 150 to 300 mm depending the population.

Notes – Highly variable in colour and each population of the different island have distinctive colour pattern and size. These may be due to the different environmental factors. Present on Malta, Gozo and Comino, Cominotto, Selmunett Island, (male specimen in photo), Fungus Rock, Filfla, Blue Lagoon Rocks, Halfa Rock and Ċawla Rock. Also present on Linosa and Lampione. Some of these populations have been given formal scientific names as subspecies. Active all year round, especially in warm weather. Highly territorial. Males are larger and brighter in colour and the head is more robust. Mating occurs in March – April followed by a gestation period of 40 to 58 days. Each brood may contain 1 to 3 eggs. Juveniles often seen in mid-July. Diet ranges from various fruits to several arthropods. Protected.

Photo by Arnold Sciberras.



Name – *Coluber viridiflavus*
Western Whip Snake
Serp Iswed

Status – Common

Size – 1500 mm or more.

Notes – Largest of four snakes found on the island. Also present in Gozo and Comino. The colours are generally black with a greenish tinge, belly light grey to yellow and the young have a much lighter colour than adults and resembles the Algerian whip snake *Coluber Alvirius*. Adult colours attained in fourth year although sexually mature much earlier. Found in all habitats especially in dry vegetation. Feeds on small animals such as lizards, young birds, mice and other small snakes. Mating occurs in early March and female lays up to 15 eggs in June – July. Hatching occurs 6 to 8 weeks later. Protected.

Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.

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Front photos

Up right **Name** *Meloe tucceus*, Oil Beetle, Dliela żejtņija

Status Common **size** females can grow up to 30mm

Notes found in vegetation on which it feeds on and in humid places. It is distinctive because it lacks the hind wings. When threatened it releases a liquid, which could be unpleasant or causing blistering on human skin. The larvae are parasitic on some species of bees. Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.

Bottom right **Name** *Potamon fluviatile*, Maltese fresh water crab, Qabru

Status Rare **Size** 8cm (excluding legs)

Notes The subspecies *lanfrancoi* is endemic to the Maltese islands. Restricted to a few local areas where running fresh water is present all year round. Females carry young till they are large enough to fend for themselves. When threatened it retreats in burrows in which it excavates in mud or clay. These generally have two openings with a 10cm diameter and exceed 50cm in depth. The inner part is generally flooded with water. Protected. Photo by Arnold Sciberras.

Up left **Name** *Fulicra atra*, Coot, Tigięga tal-baħar.

Status Frequent **Size** up to 40cm

Notes Occurs in Malta in autumn and winter. A small numbers overwinter annually at Għadira and Simar nature reserves. Feet lobed and flattened. Can dive and remain under water for several minutes. Protected. Photo by Arnold Sciberras.

Bottom left **Name** *Colias croceas*, Clouded yellow, Farfett tas-silla

Status Common **Wingspan** 50-58mm

Notes One of the larva's food plant is *Hedysarum coronarium* (clover). Sighting is between February and March and between October and November. Photo by Matthew Borg Cardona.

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