



# Red Tower - Foresta 2000

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## Green Walks in Mellieħa



Mellieħa  
Holiday Centre  
**FolkeFerie.dk**

Raymond Vella  
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# St Agatha's Tower | A Brief History

by Victor J Rizzo



*Red Tower and Foresta 2000 site*

A Fairy-Tale Castle on the Hill – this is how *Din l-Art Helwa* describes St. Agatha's Tower, or as it is most commonly known, the Red Tower of Mellieha.

It lies dominantly on the crest of Marfa Ridge overlooking Ghadira Bay, the Nature Reserve and the Comino Channels. The roof offers a magnificent panoramic northern view of the Maltese islands. When the afforestation of the Foresta 2000 project exactly below the tower is completed, and the trees mature, the view



*Before restoration*



*Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar*

will be even more spectacular.

It is known as the Red Tower due to the colour it was painted. It is not clear when or why the tower was first painted red. Probably this contrasting colour helped sentinels in Naxxar and Mdina to recognize it easily. Possibly, making the tower so visible also served as a deterrent to the invading marauders and corsairs of the past. This colour has been retained on restoration.

After their defeat in Rhodes in 1522 by the Ottoman Empire, the Knights of St John roamed the Mediterranean for eight years suffering further defeats in sporadic skirmishes.

In 1530, having been granted Malta in perpetual fiefdom through the direct intervention of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, King of Sicily, it was no surprise that the Turks, seeing the Order resettled, wanted to strike a final blow to the now Knights of Malta. This failed to materialize as Suleiman the Magnificent and his powerful forces were defeated by the Knights and the Maltese during the Great Siege of 1565.

*During Restoration by Din l-Art Helwa*





*A view of the Red Tower*

Fearing further invasions by the infidels, the Knights strengthened the bastions to fortify the cities of Cottonera and Valletta. From 1605 to 1720, under various Grand Masters, a chain of towers was erected as a coastal defence system making the Maltese Islands impregnable until the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798.

Work on St Agatha's tower commenced on 5 December 1647 and was completed on 20 November 1648 during the reign of Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar. In April 1649 the tower was equipped with 4 cannon and was ready for use. An inscription on a plaque at the entrance to the tower records this event.

Restoration by *Din l-Art Helwa*, Malta's National Heritage Trust, with the help of many volunteers, was generously sponsored by Toly Products, Demajo Group of Companies and Playmobil. Work commenced in 1999 and completed in 2001.

For a very nominal fee a visit to the tower is advisable. It is open from Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm and on Sundays from 10 am to 1 pm. Opening times may vary depending on volunteers. Parking space, and access to the tower, is also available to the right just as you drive past the steep staircase leading to the tower.



*Old photo of Red Tower and Foresta 2000 site*

### Getting to the Red Tower

Bus number 45 from Valletta

Bus number 645 from Sliema

Stop at far end of Ghadira Bay opposite Mellieha Bay Hotel or at the top of the hill below the Red Tower.

## Acknowledgments

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### Front Cover photo

from water colour by Jeni Caruana

### Back Cover photo

from water colour by Debbie Caruana Dingli



# A visit to St Agatha's Tower

by Victor J Rizzo



Access over wooden bridge

St Agatha's Tower or the Red Tower, as it is commonly known, is square in plan with two vaulted rooms. Four corner towers rise from the base with sloping curtain walls, giving them the false appearance of bastions. The outer walls are about four metres thick through which small windows were cut.

Access to the Tower is over a fixed wooden bridge approached by a steep flight of steps originally separated from the door by a drawbridge.

Dedicated to St Agatha, the main plaque above the door reads "To those who wage war, I the Martyr Agatha, with breasts removed stand here. A fearless Tower faithful and a threat to my enemies well known throughout the world. Under the auspices of GM Paul Lascaris Castellar, Fra Balthassar de Mandolx and the jurats of the commune, Vincentio Casteletta, Gregorio Mamo and Marco Cassar in the year 1649".

A smaller inscription above the main door tells us that this place, like many small chapels on the islands, does not offer ecclesiastical immunity to those who committed a crime and try to gain sanctuary within the tower.



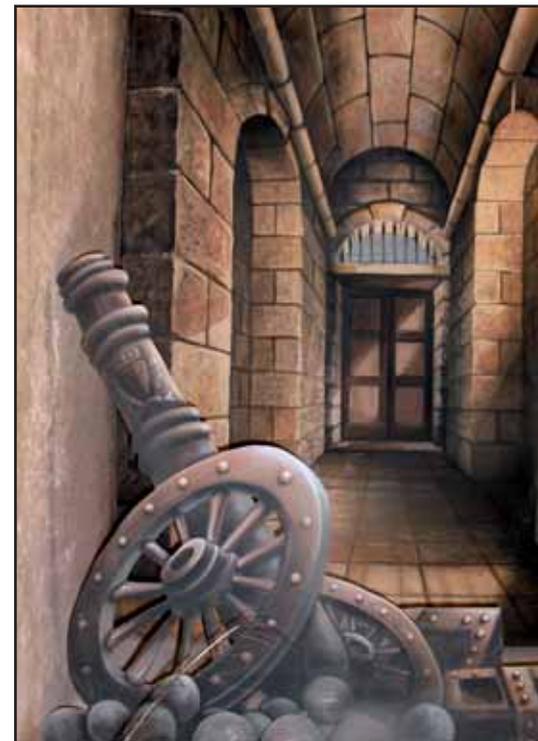
As you enter through the main door, newly made of oak by a Gozitan carpenter, notice that it has no metal hinges. It swings on a post and socket system.

As you walk in on your right do not fail to miss the painting behind a gate. It is a *Trompe l'oeil*, an illusion of depth that tricks the eye.

The original flagstones discovered during restoration have been recently covered by a wooden surface for protection. Glass panels have been strategically positioned through which one can view the original slabs.



Top post and socket of oak door



Optical Illusion of depth

The water cistern, used by the soldiers stationed in the tower, is accessed via a removable slab to the right as you enter the first barrel vaulted room. It contains up to 42 cu. metres of water collected via channels from the roof.

The central window at the far end of the castle has a metal bar visible. This was used to mount a machine gun during the Second World War as the area within sight was quite substantial. Notice the thick walls which are nearly five metres thick at the base of the tower.



A shallow alcove, to the right of the central window, housed a chapel dedicated to St Agatha from where the name of the tower derived.

An inscription of a cross on the middle wall is dated 1814. Perhaps this was carved during the plague in Malta in 1813-1814. Several other small niches in the walls must have served other purposes.

Access to the four turret rooms on the roof is via a spiral staircase to the right of the entrance. The original stone staircase was vandalized and removed. Soldiers stationed at the tower during the last century had to use metal rungs to gain access to the roof. These rungs still exist and are visible as you gain access to the roof.



*Chapel dedicated to St Agatha*

As you go up the stairs you will come across two openings on your right which provided the necessary light. There was no electricity at that time. About halfway up the staircase access is possible to the gallery and two small windows. At the opposite end of the vaulted rooms, two further small windows can be seen but not accessible.



*View of opposite window from gallery*



*View of Sta Marija Tower and Gozo*



*Turret with adjacent toilet*

It is believed that, originally, the tower included two additional rooms below the vaulted ceilings. These would have provided sleeping quarters for the garrison and would have been approached through the gallery off the staircase

The flat roof also acted as a gun platform and a signal station to other towers. During restoration one turret was found partially dilapidated and another turret severely damaged. The walls and roof had to be rebuilt and all eroded stone blocks were replaced. The alcove adjacent to turret door at the rear end was the toilet of the soldiers.

From the rear end of the roof you have a good view of Santa Marija Tower in Comino with a Gun Battery to the right. The White Tower of Armier is also visible further right. From the front end, to your right, the ruins of Ghajn Żnuber Tower near Manikata are visible and, further left in the distance, Lippija Tower above Ġnejna Bay. All these watch towers used to keep guard of the numerous sandy beaches around this end of the island.

Unlike many other towers, the Red Tower is surrounded by a low eight-pointed star-shaped entrenchment for defensive purposes. The gun platform





*Aerial view of eight-pointed entrenchment*

built in the rear flanks of the Tower is an eighteenth century addition. These are clearly visible from the roof. The circular hole in the ground on the North side of the tower is an old cesspit system from the days of the British occupation. During the British period the tower was used for defense purposes and was manned during both World Wars. In recent times it was equipped as a radar station by the Armed Forces of Malta.

From the front end of the tower enjoy a magnificent view of Ghadira Bay with the Parish Church of Mellieħa village high up in the distance. You also have a good view of the Nature Reserve and bird sanctuary.

Directly below the tower from Ghadira Bay on your left, to the sea at the extreme right you are viewing an ambitious afforestation project known as Foresta 2000. This is a joint venture undertaken by *Din l-Art Helwa*, BirdLife Malta, and the Park Division within the Ministry for Rural Affairs.

*The next two walks in this booklet are meant to take you through this afforestation project.*



*Panoramic view of Red Tower and Foresta 2000*



*View of Nature Reserve and the Mellieħa Holiday Centre*



## To the Cliffs and the Red Tower via Foresta 2000

By Raymond Vella

*This walk starts at the far end of Għadira Bay, near Mellieħa Bay Hotel, uphill towards the lower track of Foresta 2000, to the gorge, and up to the ridge road. Then either left towards the cliffs or right to the Red Tower.*

Malta over the centuries has been heavily altered by man. Years of deforestation and alterations have changed the face of the countryside to what it is today. The area around the Red Tower is still largely unspoilt and the area is diverse and differs as it covers many different types of habitats. This area has now been chosen also as part of the Foresta 2000 site, an area which covers 104



*Older aerial View of Foresta 2000 site*



*Gate near Hotel*

hectares of land, which is being planted with native trees and shrubs and with time will grow into typical Mediterranean woodland. This will be dominated by Aleppo Pines and Holm Oaks with a maquis undergrowth of shrubs.

Our first walk starts at the bottom of the hill, just opposite the Mellieħa Bay Hotel. As one climbs the hill from Mellieħa Bay on foot via the gate one can see a grove of Aleppo Pines and Sandarac trees on the right hand side. These were mostly planted in 2007 and will take a few years to mature.

On the left side just past the entrance there is a majestic Fig tree. In summer the dark green leaves cover the plant, while in winter it is bare and the light grey bark is evident.

Under the tree grow a small population of *Mobresia*, an introduced species, whose orange flowers are evident in late winter and spring. As you turn left to the bend towards the hill one may see a few specimens of Narrow leaved

*Fig Tree fruit*



*Young Aleppo Pines*





*Narrow leaved Ash*

Ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*) which were planted in the water catchment area and where the trees are sometimes submersed in water for weeks on end in the wetter years.

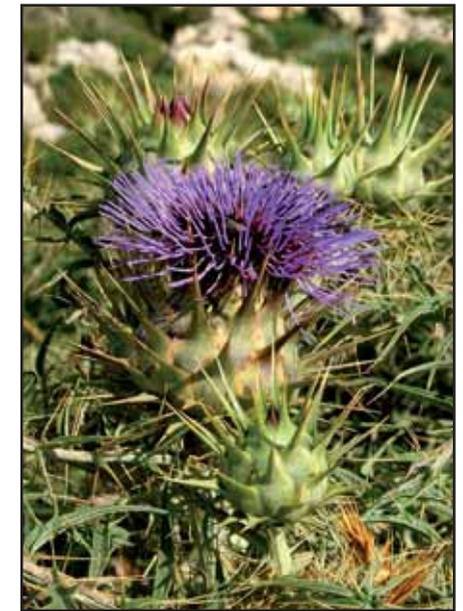
Here one finds a pathway on the left side heading west. Following this pathway one can proceed towards the Foresta 2000 site. On the steep hill the French Daffodils with their dainty white flowers are very common in January to February, while in March the red flowers of Sulla clover literally form a carpet and blanket the hillside. Here one

can also see the Wild Artichoke which flowers in May and June. The hillside can be slippery in the wet season (October through March) so proceed with caution.

On the hill just under the two old palm trees you can see the shrub variety which has been planted. This is dominated by Lentisk (*Pistaccia lentiscus*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*), Myrtle (*Myrtus communis*), Strawberry Trees *Narcissus – French daffodil*



*Strawberry Tree*



*Wild Artichokes*



*Sulla Clover*



*Date Palm*



*Wolfbane*



*Lentisk*



*Myrtle*



*Mediterranean Buckthorn*



*Holm Oak*

(*Arbutus unedo*), Wolfbane (*Periploca angustifolia*) while the trees are mostly Aleppo Pines (*Pinus halapensis*) and Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*).

At the end of this pathway just at the edge of the vineyard one can see a ramp, taking this further along for approximately 150 meters one can see more of the planted areas and rubble walls which have been built to maintain the soil from erosion. This is found throughout the Maltese islands where precious soil is maintained through terracing. Centuries of heavy deforestation and agriculture have almost completely washed away the topsoil so farmers had to adapt to keeping the soil from further eroding away. Just below the ramp one may see a beautiful specimen of Lentisk, this particular shrub is probably many years old and has now grown to its extreme height. This shrub is a male plant as it

only produces flowers but no berries.

After walking for approximately 150 meters of rough paths, one finds a steep pathway heading downhill. Taking this for 25 meters you will come to a dirt road on the right. This dirt track will take you for about a kilometre of woodland

*Woodland Maquis*





*Carob Trees*

and maquis (scrubland), some of which was planted around 25 years ago and some which was planted in October 2007. The first tree on the right side is a Carob tree, this female specimen is covered in brown pods from August onwards. The pod was used as fodder for feeding farm animals and during the war years many persons used it to feed on as protein during the siege years

(1941-1943). Today it is still used to produce a honey for use as a cough syrup. The seeds of the tree were also used a weight, apparently the carat in use for gold weighing was the equivalent of one carob seed.

The two stone structures at the start of the track are stone corbelled huts or “Girna”, a stone structure built by shepherds or farmers to keep out from the midday sun. These used to be found in many areas of the island especially in the north where the farmers would take their siesta and perhaps store their tools or fodder for their donkey or mule. The stones were built ending with a dome. No wooden beams or material was used to support the dome. Simple but effective engineering.

In the older pines on the left side many nest boxes have been put up to encourage breeding birds, such as Spotted Flycatcher and Tree Sparrows. The

*Corbelled Hut (Girna)*



*Male Spanish Sparrow*



*Common Starling*



*Sardinian Warbler*



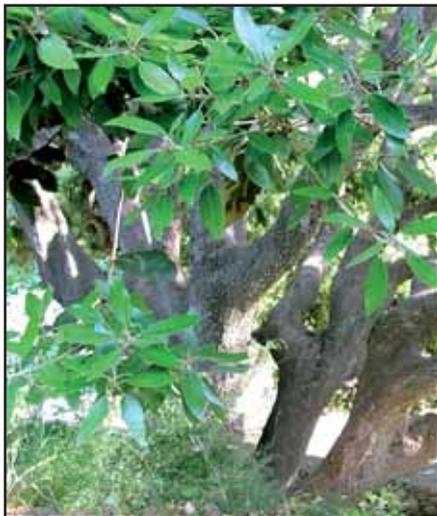
*Robin*

purpose of planting shrubs also is to encourage other species such as Sardinian Warbler and Spectacled Warbler to breed in the area. The shrubs all provide small fruits and berries throughout the year which are extremely important in the diets of these small birds. In winter they also attract Blackbirds, Song thrush, Blackcaps, Robins and Starlings. Any walk in the winter months is usually productive in seeing these species here, and in some years Goldcrest and Firecrest are also quite common in the pines.

During migration periods this area can be very productive for many species of warblers, including Subalpine and Garden Warblers, Whitethroats and many other species. Flycatchers also are quite common in March and April. One may also see Turtledove in springtime and falcons and Honey Buzzards are regular over the area in spring and autumn.

Here you can see the Aleppo Pines and Holm Oaks which are now approaching a height of 7 meters. On both sides of the track there are some large examples of Wolfbane (*Periploca angustifolia*). This once scarce plant is making a successful comeback after the end of heavy grazing by goats. The plant is covered by huge amounts of seed pods in a silk covering in June, hence the Maltese name of “Silk Tree” (*Sigra tal-Harir*). On both sides of the track you can see many species of Bind weed, Olive leaved Germander (*Teucrium fruticans*), Thyme, and recently planted Sandarac (*Tetraclinis articulata*).

*Holm Oak*



*Aleppo Pines*



*Wolfbane*



*Olive leaved Germander*



*Mallow Bindweed*



*Olive leaved Bindweed*



*Sandarac Tree*

This is Malta's national tree and it closely resembles a Cypress or a Juniper but the cones are extremely small and it is also one of the few conifers to survive fire as it comes back out again after the first rains. This tree is only found in the wild in Malta and one small area in Spain within Europe. The main area of its range is found in Northern Africa. Here we hope to have the largest population in Malta of this very rare tree. Around 500 were planted in the area and we hope that with time it will successfully be able to re-colonize the area on its own. In Malta it is usually found on rocky slopes and sometimes on

*Mediterranean Thyme*



inland cliffs. This is perhaps as it retreated to these areas as its other habitats were lost with time.

On the right side of the track you might be able to spot Narrow leaved Cistus (*Cistus monspeliensis*) also, another very rare plant which was successfully planted in the area. The small white and yellow flowers are in bloom in spring and early summer. It can grow quite fast and we hope to see it increase in numbers with time.

As you emerge from the green gate, the outer boundary of the Foresta 2000 Site, make a slight detour uphill towards the Pill Box. These pill boxes were built during the war

*Aleppo Pines*



*Narrow leaved Cistus*

These pill boxes were built during the war



*View of Gorge from Pill Box*

by the British forces and provided a coastal defence of the islands against an Axis invasion. Many were lightly armed by small machine gun or light cannons, and were more of an observation post than an actual deterrent to a heavily armed foe.

With care have a good look at the *Ic-Ċumnija* ‘gorge’ below the pill box. To your left along the south coast you can also see the rocky promontories

*View of Rocky Promontaries*



*Beehives, probably Roman*

of *Ras in-Niexfa* and *Ras il-Waħx* with *Ras il-Pellegrin* in the distance. This scene can be viewed better as you hike uphill

This area is very unspoiled with pleasant foot paths. The building at the bottom of the hill is the Waste Recycling Plant.

Past the pillbox one can then proceed up the right dirt road for 160 meters before finding a pathway on the right climbing up. This will take you towards the ridge and some ancient beehives in the cliff face. These beehives were probably from the Roman era and today this area is still famous for its honey, due to the many aromatic shrubs and flowers which make up the garigue or rocky areas found on the top of the ridge. One can take a short break before proceeding to the steep stairs up towards the ridge.

**When you arrive on the main road you either turn left along the ridge towards the cliff face at *Ras il-Qammieh* and the old radar station, and back OR turn right towards the Red Tower which is some 700 metres away.**



*Milky Orchid*



*Bumble Bee Orchid*



*Bear's Breeches*



*Greater Snapdragon*



*Brown Orchid*



*Fan Lipped Orchid*



*Mediterranean Heath*



*Honeysuckle*

The best trek to take is to turn left and follow the road towards the sea. This leads you to some extremely well vegetated garrigue, or stony scrubland. This is dominated by Mediterranean Heather (*Erica multiflora*), Olive leaved Germander (*Teucrium fruticans*), Thyme (*Thymbra capitata*), Honey Suckle, Snapdragon, many species of Orchids in late winter and spring, and many other plants associated with this type of habitat. In the summer months most of the shrubs and vegetation are dormant, and many lose their leaves. This protects them from the fierce Maltese summers which dominate throughout May to September.

Garigue has occurred when man has cut down the trees causing the loss of soil and protection from the elements and plants, usually aromatic have taken over, making use of what little soil has been left and competing by their flowers to attract insects and bees. Some species of orchids also are quite common but one has to be extremely attentive to see them as they are quite tiny, except for the showy Pyramidal Orchid found in April.

Thyme is in flower in June and the purplish blue flowers are visited by scores of bees, producing what is definitely the best natural honey on the island. Many bee keepers have their hives in this area.

Along the ridge towards the cliff face there are some excellent views and the sound of the Blue Rock Thrush in winter and spring is quite evident. The male

#### *Circular Hides*



#### *Maltese Pyramidal Orchid*

in its bright blue colours is a close relative of the Blackbird and has the same fluty song, which it often sings in flight or on the stone walls. In the summer Short-toed Larks may also be heard singing high in the air over the garigue.

On the road one might also see stone circular hides which were used to trap Turtle Doves and Finches, a not so pleasant part of Maltese traditions, but with Malta's entry into the European Union this will be phased out in 2009.

At the end of the road you will come across Radar Station in use by the Malta Maritime Authority for monitoring the seaways. Previously the area was a Radio Relay station in use by the U.S. Air Force for radio traffic between the base they once had in Libya and their Sicilian bases. This was dismantled around 1970.

**Turn back on the main road and proceed to the Red Tower.**



*Radar Station*



*Striped Shield Bug*



On the way back one can see round stone hides used to hunt and trap birds. These are to be outlawed by the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 as part of Malta's entry into the European Union. The birds that used to be taken were mostly Turtle Doves and finches for the cage bird trade. On the left side there is also another example of a World War 2 pill box which many times were camouflaged as farm houses or blending into the stone.

The trees under the Red Tower itself are from the 1970's when many Australian trees such as Blue Acacia and Eucalyptus were planted. Unfortunately although they were quick growing and quite aggressive they

*Carob Tree*

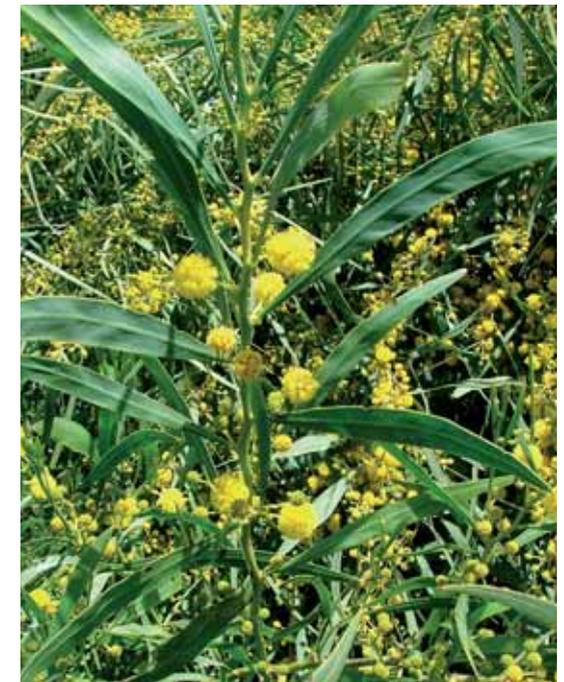


*World War II Pill Box*

were soon poisoning the ground and not giving a chance for the native shrubs and plants to grow. Plans are to eliminate these introduced plants in the future as our own plants start to grow.

In front of the Red Tower itself is a beautiful example of Carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*). Although these trees were probably introduced to Malta thousands of years ago they are now part of the Maltese countryside and a naturalized tree.

*Blue Acacia*



For a very small fee a visit to the Red Tower is advisable. Take the side entrance through the parking area on the left to avoid the steep flight of steps below the main door.

Follow details of the tour in page 6

Otherwise proceed further down the road towards Ghadira Bay through the footpath starting at the narrow opening on the right. This will take you back to the gate and the end of the walk. Always proceed with extreme caution downhill as it is very slippery in wet weather and the clay can be a nuisance in wet conditions.

If the pathway is too steep or slippery one may proceed down the tarmac road towards the bay and take the steps through the opening under the overhead traffic sign.

*Path to Mellieħa Bay Hotel*



Walk 2 (Approx. 1 hour – 2km)

## Through the Afforestation project of Foresta 2000

*By Raymond Vella*

*This walk starts at the Red Tower with a round trip through the upper and lower tracks of Foresta 2000, then either back to the Red Tower or down to the sandy beach.*

After visiting the Red Tower one can take a short walk through an area called Foresta 2000, a site which has been chosen to eventually become a typical Mediterranean forest, composed of typical shrubs and trees.

This habitat once covered the entire Maltese islands but with the onslaught of time very little is now left of what once was Oak, Pine and Sandarac forest. With years and time this 104 hectare area will once again become a small forest rich in flora and local fauna as this walk will demonstrate.

*Habitat - open woodland*





*Sandarac Tree with Cones*

From the Red Tower go left down the main road, turn right at the derelict building and proceed through the green gate. On the left side, just before the gate, one can see a small grove of Sandarac (*Tetraclinis articulata*), or Gum Tree. This is Malta's national tree found only in Malta and one other small area of Spain in all of Europe. This tree is found in North Africa in the mountains where it is still common, but these two relict populations in Europe suggest that at some time these areas were part of North Africa.

The small cones are apparent on the trees and come out every year, contrary to the other common Aleppo Pines in this area, which take up to three years to ripen. It is also resistant to fire and drought.

As you enter the gate, on the right side one can see an enclosed area where bee hives are kept. Do not approach the bee hives from late spring to summer as the bees may be aggressive in these seasons. Due to the abundance of wild thyme, flowers and pollen many bee-keepers keep their hives in this area, and the area is well known for its well flavoured honey.



*Beehives below  
Red Tower*



*Paper Wasps*

As one walks on the dirt road, heading west, there are excellent views of Ghadira Nature reserve. This artificial lake attracts plenty of migrating birds in autumn and spring and small amounts of ducks and waders in winter. It is open to the public between November and May on weekends.

On the left side one can see the different types of shrubs and trees which have been planted recently, which in time will be the future forested area. Amongst the shrubs, one may find Lentisk, Buckthorn, Myrtle, Rosemary and Olive leaved Germander, while here and there Holm Oaks, Aleppo Pine and Sandarac dot the area.

A few African Tamarisk on both sides of the road may be encountered with. This tree is highly adaptable to salt laden environments and in summer they sweat out the excess salt through their leaves in the early morning.



*View of Nature  
Reserve*

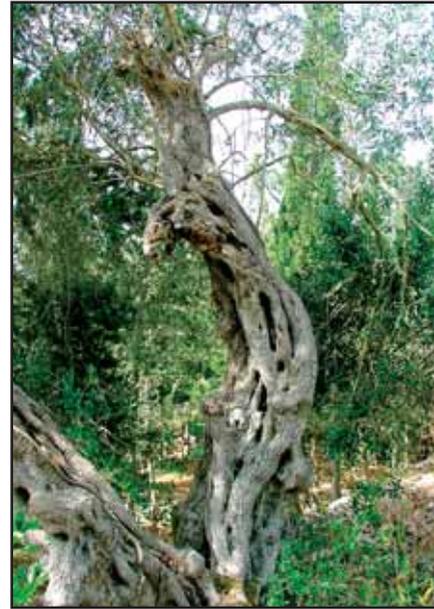




*Lentisk*



*Rosemary*



*Olive Tree*



*African Tamarisk*



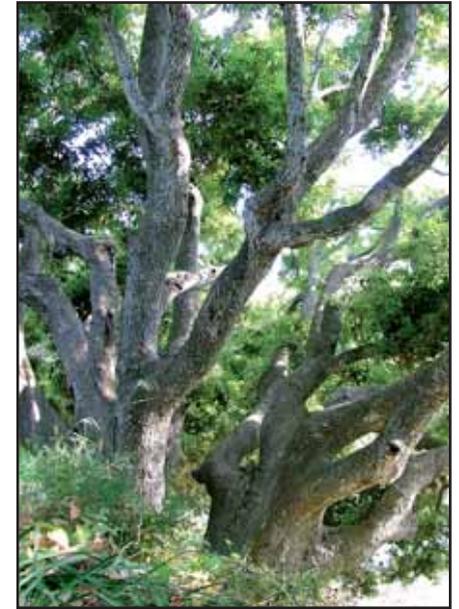
*Myrtle*



*Olive-leaved Germander*



*Aleppo Pines*



*Holm Oak*





*Yellow - Striped Grasshopper*



*Lobed Argiope*

Along the pathway one may see grasshoppers, spiders, butterflies and the occasional Chameleon. This introduced reptile has now become quite common and although it is an arboreal reptile it is easily encountered on the track or sunning itself in the shrubs.

Other species, which are common, are Wild Rabbit, Hedgehog and the occasional Weasel, the island's only carnivore. The size of this small predator is only about the size

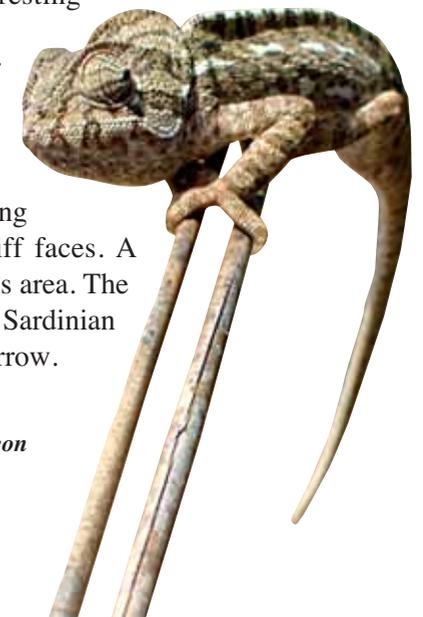


*Common Blue Butterfly*

of a large rat, so no need to worry about being eaten! It feeds on rodents, shrews, and the occasional bird. Some Moorish Geckos and Skinks can be usually seen sunning themselves amongst the rubble walls.

Amongst the bird species easily seen in winter are the Robins, Stone Chat, Song Thrush, Finches, Wagtails and Redstarts. Other birds are Firecrest and Goldcrest, Europe's smallest birds. During migration anything from warblers to Honey Buzzard may be seen migrating through and walking slowly and attentively will produce some interesting species.

At the end of the track there is another gate. Go to the pillbox and marvel at the scenery of the gorge below. Blue Rock Thrushes are very common here and the blue thrush size bird is easily heard giving out its melodious fluty song on the cliff faces. A few Spectacled Warblers also breed in this area. The commonest species are Zitting Cisticolas, Sardinian Warblers and the ubiquitous Spanish Sparrow.



*Mediterranean Chameleon*



*Algerian Hedgehog*



*Moorish Gecko*



*Weasel*



*Common Redstart*



*Ocellated Skink*



*Goldfinch*



*Stonechat*



*Yellow Wagtail*



*White Wagtail*



*World War II Pill Box*

The World War II pillbox found here, formed part of the coastal defence during the war years. It must have been hurriedly built as no camouflage rocks were added unlike other pre-war bunkers.

*View of gorge from Pillbox*



*Sardinian Warbler*





*Leopard Snake*

After taking in the spectacular views, a short walk left down the paved road to the next gate will take you back into the Foresta 2000 site. Keep to the path on the left side.

As you walk in on both sides of the road the Wolfbane plants are conspicuous especially in early summer covered in their silk like seeds, which cover the plant. A few Holm Oaks on the left side of the track are easily distinguished by their year round dark green leaves and acorns which adorn the tree in early winter.

On both sides of the track Aleppo Pines grow and these trees were planted in the late 70's but have reached very good heights already. Many small pines have already begun to grow on their own, a good sign that reclamation of the area is being done naturally also.

Down the pathway one may notice the rubble walls which are part of the Maltese countryside. These provide shelter and terracing. The winter rains, which may be heavy at times are prevented from carrying the soil runoff due to these walls. They also provide shelter for geckos, hedgehogs and wild rabbits.

At least 3 species of snake make their home here, the largest being the

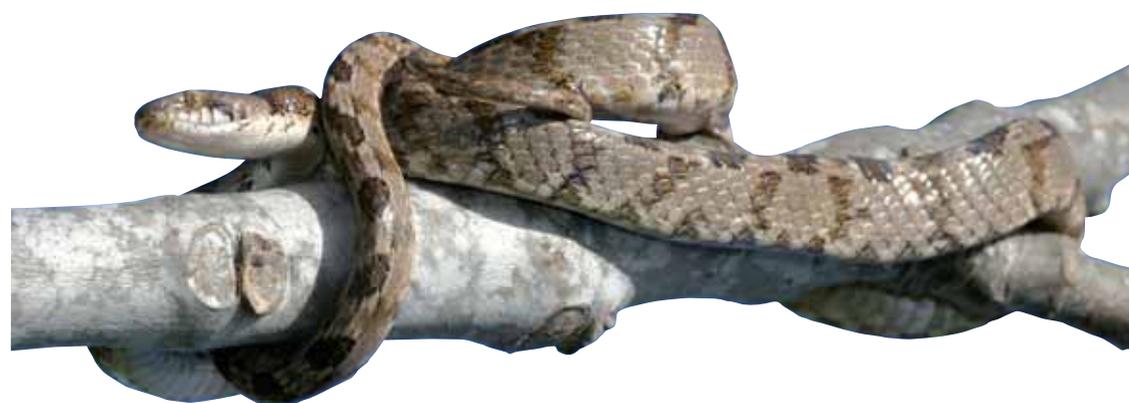
Western Whip Snake, which grows to 150 centimetres. It is a dark black in colour and, as in all Maltese snakes, non-venomous. The other two species are the nocturnal Cat Snake and the Leopard snake. All reptiles are protected by law.

On both sides of the pathways there is a myriad mix of wild flowers in the spring. Hoary Rock roses, Narrow-leaved Cistus, Large Star of Bethlehem, Bindweed, French Daffodils, various orchids, and many more adorn the area including the Caper plant. A small population of the endemic Maltese Pyramidal Orchid is found here. Also endemic to Malta is the Maltese Euphorbia which is very common here. In summer the plant retreats to its dry and shrivelled appearance but in winter it is covered in small green leaves.

Towards the end of the track one may see a couple of stone corbelled huts (*Girna* in Maltese). These were rudimentary shelter for the shepherds and farmers who once eked out a living from this harsh land.

A beautiful example of Carob tree is found at the end of the track. This female tree is covered in pods in the summer, and it once provided food for farm animals. Nowadays few people bother to pick the fruits. It is said that the seed of the tree was once used to weigh gold as the seed weighed in as one carat.

Here you will find a pathway on the left leading up to the old hotel and eventually to the Red Tower or down hill to the sandy beach. This steep pathway can be slippery in winter so please take care.



*European Cat Snake*



*Caper Plant*



*Hoary Rock Roses*



*Larg Star of Bethlehem*



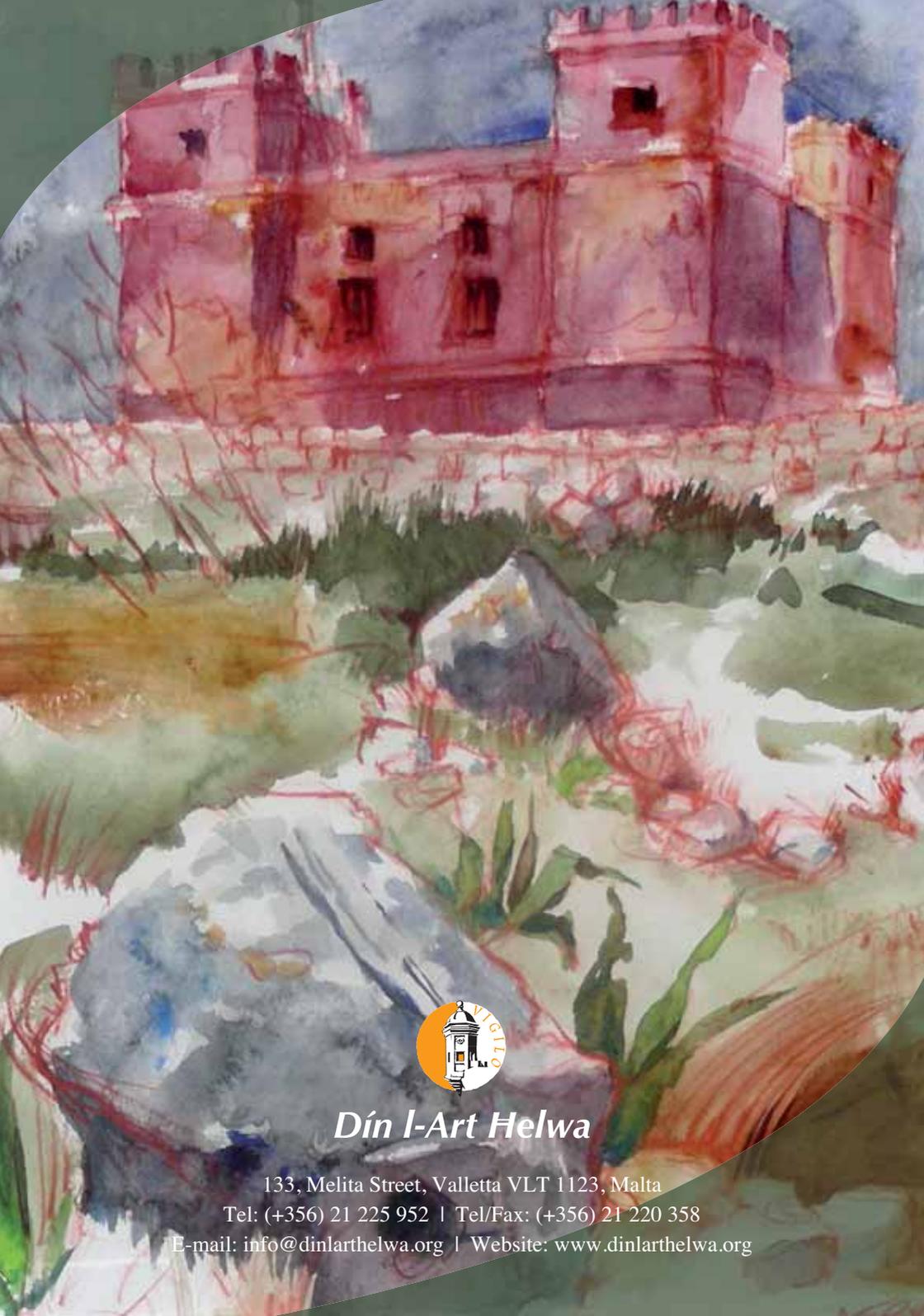
*Maltese Spurge - Euphorbia*



*Maltese Pyramidal Orchid*



*Milky Orchid*



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