

The late **Hubert Spiteri** was born on 16th February 1945 and married to Mary (nee Xerri). He lived in Naxxar and was a successful businessman who for over three decades, managed his family-run business based in Pietà. But his real passion had always been botanical studies. He is a well-known personality to a closed number of botanical scientists and local experts in fauna and flora. And he should be, since over the past decades his ceaseless rumblings have yielded no less than six new records of wild flowers to our official list of flora. Furthermore he developed culture techniques of growing such plants in his own garden grounds. His investigations and records have been cited both locally and internationally. And yet, he is still a stranger to the local media.

His first 'discovery' was that of the stinking sea daffodil, *Pancratium foetidum*, at Għadira in 1963. This was the first local record of this species; which is considered as of biogeographical importance, being essentially a Maghrebian species extending its range to Malta. It is now a protected flower under local regulations.

Over the period 1969-1979, we can mention at least four other discoveries or re-discoveries made by Huber, though there are others. These include the new record, the orchid *Ophrys bombyliflora* var. *parviflora*, and the butterfly orchid, *Orchis papilionacea*. The latter was reported from Malta, although prior to its discovery by Hubert, was considered doubtful. The species is considered critically endangered with a restricted distribution to the Maltese Islands and is protected.

He also rediscovered a small bluish iris belonging to the *Moraea sisyrinchium* group, which has not been recorded in our countryside for at least the previous 85 years. The likely reason for this 'hide and seek' habit for this iris may be due to the fact that its flower opens up only for about one hour during the daytime, and especially at noontime. Hubert managed to germinate its seeds in a type of compost he developed himself. Subsequently he reintroduced such species to other local places.

In 1976, he came across the elegant narcissus, *Narcissus elegans*, which has never been reported locally. The species is considered as very rare, and is listed in the Red Data Book and in local regulations as a plant species of national interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures. In 1979, Hubert rediscovered the sawfly orchid, *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, which is a critically endangered protected species, considered possibly extinct prior to this discovery. The plant observed by Hubert differs from the typical form.

Many of these species are now protected through the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations, 2006 (SL 549.44) in the Maltese Islands and included in the official 'Red Data Book for the Maltese Islands'.