

IL-BALLUT TAL-WARDIJA

PROTECTED SITE

Did you know?

The Holm Oaks in the area are estimated to be 500 - 1000 years old, possibly older, and are amongst the oldest and largest trees in the Maltese Islands.

Description

- Il-Ballut tal-Wardiya lies in the limits of San Pawl il-Baħar and overlooks St Paul's Bay. This area benefits from a continual supply of freshwater from permanent springs in the area, especially the Ġhajj Ballut spring.
- It is characterised by an oak forest remnant, that is, the remains of an old naturally growing forest of Holm Oaks (*Quercus ilex*).
- It is also characterised by a small coniferous woodland, based on Aleppo Pine trees (*Pinus halepensis*).
- Both woodlands are surrounded by agricultural land and garrigue.



Holm Oak - *Quercus ilex*



Aleppo Pine - *Pinus halepensis*

Ecology and importance

- The holm oak forest remnant, which is in itself very rare and valuable, also houses a number of rare and threatened tree species, such as Mediterranean Buckthorns (*Rhamnus alaternus*) and the Myrtles (*Myrtus communis*), as well as Olive trees (*Olea europaea*), Lentisks (*Pistacia lentiscus*) and Carobs (*Ceratonia siliqua*), some of which are particularly old.
- The site is particularly rich in mushrooms, other fungi and lichens, most of which grow only in this or other forest remnants, making them very rare and vulnerable, with a restricted distribution in the Maltese Islands.
- The fauna in the area is also peculiar and extremely vulnerable since it depends on the constant forest cover.

- It also consists of very rare and vulnerable invertebrates, including various endemic species, that is, species that can be found only in the Maltese Islands. Many species live embedded in the soil, leaf litter, in dead branches of trees or under the bark of trees and damp stones.
- The garrigue in the area is very important for a number of rare, threatened and/or endemic flora, including plants with a limited distribution in the Mediterranean such as the endemic Maltese Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis urvilleana*).

Threats

- The site is threatened by uncontrolled fires on agricultural land which could destroy the old trees.
- It is also threatened by dumping of material and other illegal activities.



Mediterranean Buckthorn - *Rhamnus alaternus*