



Photo credit: Joe Sultana

Scientific Name:

Calonectris diomedea

English:

Scopoli's Shearwater

Maltese:

iċ-ċiefa

Commonly seen in large feeding flocks out at sea, the Scopoli's Shearwater only comes ashore at night during the breeding season. It is a large brown seabird with a wingspan of 100-125 cm, a white underside and a dark trailing edge, and a yellowish bill which is visible from far. While out at sea, the Shearwater feeds on fish, squid and other marine animals, and more often than not, flocks of Scopoli's Shearwater, along with other seabirds, are regularly observed scavenging behind fishing boats, especially trawlers.

This species occurs between March-October and breeds in colonies on the island of Filfla and in various other cliffs on the western coasts of Malta and Gozo. Females nest in burrows and cavities, where they each lay a single egg in May. Eggs hatch after 53 days, with the chicks leaving the colony in October. During the night at the breeding colonies, the Scopoli's Shearwater gives off a very particular call which resembles a baby's wailing cry; in the past these sounds led to ghostly myths and superstitions about Shearwaters, as they were considered to be unlucky. Following breeding season, this species flies out into the Atlantic along West Africa.

Even though the Scopoli's Shearwater is common, it is vulnerable to light and sound pollution, and some other human-related impacts. This species is listed under Annex I of the Birds Directive, and the terrestrial habitats where this bird's breeding colonies occur are protected as Natura 2000 sites.