



Wied tal-Fżejjen

Valley watercourses represent the main type of freshwater habitat in the Maltese Islands, and include many rare habitats and species which are very often endangered on a national scale. The watercourse community is by nature dynamic, and its integrity depends mainly on the amount and frequency of rainfall, as well as other natural elements. For instance, in most valley systems (*il-widien*), water only flows during the wet season, drying up in the hot summer months. Nevertheless, in some areas, springs originating from the perched aquifers drain into the surrounding areas, sometimes retaining some surface water even during the dry season.

The greater part of local plant and animal species reliant on water during some part of their life cycle are generally found in valley watercourses. Various plants, some of which are rare on a national scale because of the restricted distribution of their habitat, colonise watercourses; these require a good underground system of roots or rhizomes for anchorage to the unstable waterlogged substrate of watercourses. One can mention the Willow-leaved Knotgrass (*il-persikarja tal-Bahrija*), a very rare perennial; the Thread-leaved Water Crowfoot (*ic-ċfolloq tal-widien*), an annual aquatic herb with floating leaves, and the common reed (*l-ghaljun*), frequently found at the mouth of valley watercourses and salt marshes. Remnants of woodlands located on the bank of watercourses, known as riparian woodlands, still exist where water flow is abundant. Riparian woodlands are commonly typified by deciduous trees such as the rare White Poplar (*is-siġra tal-luq*) and the African Tamarisk (*il-bruka*).

Watercourses provide a habitat and an important food source to various animals, amongst which, Malta's only native amphibian, the Painted Frog (*iż-żring*), and the endemic Maltese Freshwater Crab (*il-qabru*), only found in Malta in the world. A large variety of insect and other invertebrate fauna also thrive in local valleys, such as dragonflies and damselflies, semi-aquatic grasshoppers, mayflies, aquatic and semi-aquatic beetles, small crustaceans, freshwater snails, pea mussels (*l-arzell tal-ilma helu*), and many others.

The Environment and Resources Authority manages and protects watercourses through relevant policies and public education. One of the instruments used to protect and manage water bodies, including selected watercourses, is the second Water Catchment Management Plan which addresses anthropogenic pressures on these water-related ecosystems and identifies actions for protection of such rare sites in our islands.

English:
Wetlands

Maltese:
art mistgħadra



Thread-leaved Water Crowfoot



Painted Frog



Maltese Freshwater Crab