



*Ghar Hasan Cliffs*

Ranging anywhere between 0m-250m in altitude, cliffs form a significant component of the Maltese Islands' natural heritage. These have a south-southwest-west inclination due to Malta's geomorphology, and span along the entire south to west side of Malta, Gozo and Comino, and also on the north-east side of mainland Malta.

The rugged and relatively inaccessible cliffs display a great variety of form and profile; being exposed to dry and harsh conditions, the vegetation and animal communities of this habitat are highly adapted to live in such extreme conditions. Such communities are known as *rdum* communities. Whilst sheer cliffs tend to be composed of Coralline Limestones, many *rdum* in Malta show all the local geological strata, from the Lower Coralline Limestone to the Upper Coralline Limestone. This includes the Globigerina Limestone, Blue Clay and Green Sand layers. Besides features of geographical interest and spectacular views, the cliffs and screes harbour rare and often threatened species; including a significant number of endemics.

A good number of endemic species are found along the coastal cliffs since these habitats have provided suitable shelter from biotic, abiotic and anthropogenic impacts. Some species have been present from even before the Ice-Ages; consequently, these are very old. Examples of such paleoendemic plants include the Maltese Cliff-orache (*il-bjanka tal-irdum*), the Maltese Hyoseris (*iż-żigland ta' Ghawdex*) and the National Plant, Maltese Rock-centaury (*widnet il-baħar*). Other endemic species found in *rdum* communities include the Maltese Everlasting (*is-sempreviva ta' Ghawdex*), the Maltese Door Snails (*id-dussies*) and the Cliff Top-snail (*iż-żugraga tal-irdum*). Moreover, the cliffs also serve as important breeding sites for a number of seabirds, such as the Scopoli's (*iċ-ċiefa*) and Yelkouan (*il-garnija*) Shearwaters, which breed within cracks and crevices.

The Maltese cliffs and screes form a unique natural habitat, recognised as important at various levels, and are therefore protected at national, regional, and European level.

**English:**  
Cliffs & Screes

**Maltese:**  
*I-irdumijiet u s-sisien*



*Different varieties of Maltese Door Snails*



*Maltese Rock-centaury*