



Photo credit: Joe Sultana

Scientific Name:

*Hydrobates pelagicus
melitensis*

English:

Mediterranean Storm
Petrel

Maltese:

il-kangū ta' Filfla

No larger than a sparrow and with a wingspan of just 36-39cm, the Mediterranean Storm Petrel is probably Malta's smallest seabird. The Mediterranean supports a separate subspecies from the rest of Europe, with its strongholds located in Sicily, the Balearic Islands and the small islet of Filfla. The latter not only supports the largest breeding colony in the Maltese Islands, estimated at 5000-8000 pairs, but comprises 50% of the entire Mediterranean population.

Being a seabird, the Mediterranean Storm Petrel has webbed feet, and is entirely black, except for its white rump and a white band on the under-wings. It has a fluttering, bat-like flight, and like other Petrels, it spends most of its life far away at sea, foraging on plants, tiny fish and other small aquatic animals. Individuals only approach land in the hours of darkness and during the breeding season in late March, where it nests in holes among boulders. Females lay a single egg in May-June, with the young fledging the colony in July-August and immediately venturing out at sea. Even though the Mediterranean Storm Petrel has a good population status, it appears to be vulnerable to light and sound pollution, and some other human-related impacts.

A recent project, the EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project, not only identified Marine Important Bird Areas for the Mediterranean Storm Petrel, amongst others, but it also shed some significant information on this seabird species. The latter is not only protected, but terrestrial and marine Special Protection Areas forming part of the Natura 2000 network have also been designated for the survival of this seabird species.