

Geography Matters



Students create a message on bird conservation by using spent cartridges collected during fieldwork.

The Geography teachers at St. Margaret College Boys Secondary Verdala, namely Edmond Lufi and Rita DeBattista, collaborated with the Form V Geography Option students during scholastic year 2011/2012 to make a positive impact on the environment both at school and national level. We managed to do so through the annual investigations that were carried out. These were then eventually presented by the students for their SEC Geography exam.

We carried out a water audit at school as one of our investigations. The students examined the new system of water supply set up during the restructuring of the school. They also examined plans of the premises and realised that there were three reservoirs built for the military retrenchment

built by the English. The main reservoir could flood the ammunition stores which used to supply the Mediterranean fleet if there was any danger of an explosion. This danger no longer exists for the gunpowder and ammunition has long been removed. The students concluded that even though the reservoirs already existed before the restructuring took place water used at school was only coming from one source that is from the mains. The former GeoClub student members of Verdala 2005 – 2006 had suggested the idea of using the reservoir water for secondary uses but the system was never connected. The Principal of the College Mr Stephen Cachia took prompt action after we contacted him. Eventually during the last week of March we had the opportunity to see two tanks of the pump room being filled up with water from the reservoir. The work was done thanks to the DES plumbers, the college Precincts' Officer Nicholas Balzan and our school handyman Laurence Scicluna in collaboration with the FTS engineer. The DES electricians will in the near future be devising a system so that the pump can operate automatically.

We carried another fieldwork exercise at the Park tal-Majjistral to study the differences between the garrigue vegetation and steppe vegetation as well as the natural adaptations of the plants to the Mediterranean Climate. The official guide was Ms Analise Falzon of Nature Trust. However, we did not want to just visit the site but to make a positive change. We brought with us some bags that are biodegradable. In these biodegradable bags we put in the litter that we saw in this area. After some time, the students concluded that we were mostly finding cartridges 'skratac' left by the hunters.

Hunting at the park is legal. However, I think that few people know that all the lead and plastic from these cartridges is causing harm to the soil and to the water aquifer. The students filled nine bags, of medium size, with litter consisting mostly of these different coloured cartridges. We then decided to

use these cartridges to encourage more responsible behaviour from all those who visit this park - even the hunters. Responsible hunters can, before they leave, pick up the cartridges that they have shot and maybe others left by the irresponsible hunters.

Eventually, when we found the time at school, we used the cartridges to create a mosaic of a large bird of prey. This was drawn by our colleague Mr Keith Balzan. We then set up a display on parents' day to encourage hunters to pick up their cartridges so that they do not poison the soil and water with lead and plastic.

We hope that our suggestion to pick the cartridges is taken up by all the hunters, not only those who frequent the Park tal-Majjistral, so that the soils and water aquifer in Malta will become more sustainable.

Geography will matter more if students think of ways by which they can do a positive impact when they go out on fieldwork. Imagine the example that the geography students would be giving to the people living in Malta. The environment will be greatly improved if everyone then follows our example.

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Geography

