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# NATURA 2000

## STANDARD DATA FORM

FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPA)  
FOR SITES ELIGIBLE FOR IDENTIFICATION AS SITES OF  
COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE (SCI)

AND

FOR SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

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### 1. SITE IDENTIFICATION

<i>1.1. TYPE</i>	<i>1.2. SITE CODE</i>	<i>1.3. COMPILATION DATE</i>	<i>1.4. UPDATE</i>
C	MT0000016	200404	200807

*1.5. RELATION WITH OTHER NATURA 2000 SITES:*  
NATURA 2000 SITE CODES  
MT0000016

*1.6. RESPONDENT(S):*  
Ecosystems Management Unit  
Environment Protection Directorate  
Malta Environment and Planning Authority

*1.7. SITE NAME:*  
Filfla

*1.8. SITE INDICATION AND DESIGNATION/CLASSIFICATION DATES:*

<i>DATE SITE PROPOSED AS ELIGIBLE AS SCI:</i>	<i>DATE CONFIRMED AS SCI:</i>
200404	200803

<i>DATE SITE CLASSIFIED AS SPA:</i>	<i>DATE SITE DESIGNATED AS SAC:</i>
200404	

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## 2. SITE LOCATION

### 2.1. SITE CENTRE LOCATION

LONGITUDE

E 14 24 33

W/E (Greenwich)

LATITUDE

35 47 18

### 2.2. AREA (HA):

6.58

### 2.3. SITE LENGTH (KM):

### 2.4. ALTITUDE (M):

MINIMUM

0

MAXIMUM

56

MEAN

28

### 2.5. ADMINISTRATIVE REGION:

NUTS CODE

MT

REGION NAME

MALTA

% COVER

100

### 2.6. BIOGEOGRAPHIC REGION:

Alpine

Atlantic

Boreal

Continental

Macaronesian

Mediterranean

### 3. ECOLOGICAL INFORMATION

#### 3.1. HABITAT types present on the site and assessment for them:

##### ANNEX I HABITAT TYPES:

CODE	%COVER	REPRESENTATIVITY	RELATIVE SURFACE	CONSERVATION STATUS	GLOBAL ASSESSMENT
8210	56.9	C	B	B	B
1420	43.1	B	C	B	B
1240		B	C	B	B

### **3.2. SPECIES**

***covered by Article 4 of Directive 79/409/EEC***

***and***

***listed in Annex II of Directive 92/43/EEC***

***and***

***site assessment for them***

**3.2.a. BIRDS listed on Annex I of Council directive 79/409/EEC**

CODE	NAME	POPULATION			SITE ASSESSMENT					
		Resident	Migratory		Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global		
			Breed	Winter	Stage					
A014	Hydrobates pelagicus		00-8000 (j)				<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>
A010	Calonectris diomedea		00-200 (p)				<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>
A464	Puffinus yelkouan		?				<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>

**3.2.b. Regularly occurring Migratory Birds not listed on Annex I of Council Directive 79/409/EEC**

CODE	NAME	POPULATION			SITE ASSESSMENT					
		Resident	Migratory		Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global		
			Breed	Winter	Stage					
A459	Larus cachinnans		00-150 (p)				<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>

**3.2.c. MAMMALS listed on Annex II of Council directive 92/43/EEC****3.2.d. AMPHIBIANS and REPTILES listed on Annex II of Council directive 92/43/EEC****3.2.e. FISHES listed on Annex II of Council directive 92/43/EEC****3.2.f. INVERTEBRATES listed on Annex II of Council directive 92/43/EEC**

CODE	NAME	POPULATION			SITE ASSESSMENT			
		Resident	Migratory		Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global

		Breed	Winter	Stage				
4060	Lampedusa imitratix	P			C	B	A	B

**3.2.g. PLANTS listed on Annex II of Council directive 92/43/EEC**

### 3.3. Other Important Species of Flora and Fauna

GROUP	SCIENTIFIC NAME	POPULATION	MOTIVATION
B M A R F I P			
	P <i>Allium</i> sp. nov. aff. <i>commutatum</i>	C	A
	P <i>Senecio leucanthemifolius</i>	R	A
	P <i>Tulostoma</i> sp.	V	D
R	<i>Podarcis filfolensis filfolensis</i>	C	B
I	<i>Trochoidea spratti despotti</i>	V	B
I	<i>Akis subterranea</i>	P	A
I	<i>Cyclodinus debilis</i>	P	D
I	<i>Mogoplistes squamiger</i>	P	A
R	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	P	C
R	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus turcicus</i>	P	C
	P <i>Senecio pygmaeus</i>	P	A
	P <i>Orobanche cernua</i>	P	A
	P <i>Urginea pancration</i>	P	A
	P <i>Senecio bicolor</i>	P	D

(B = Birds, M = Mammals, A = Amphibians, R = Reptiles, F = Fish, I = Invertebrates, P = Plants)

## 4. SITE DESCRIPTION

### 4.1. GENERAL SITE CHARACTER:

Habitat classes	% cover
Shingle, Sea cliffs, Islets	57
Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana	43
<b>Total habitat cover</b>	<b>100 %</b>

### Other site characteristics

Filfla is an offshore rocky islet consisting mainly of calcareous rock, although some clay is also present. It consists of an elevated Upper Coralline Limestone plateau, which is bounded by steep escarpments and screes. Blue Clay is then found at the base of the Upper Coralline Limestone, while freshwater springs emanate from the Perched Aquifer above the clay.

The screes of loose boulders and rock debris which surround the base of the cliff are mainly due to past bombing practice by the military. This practice stopped in 1971.

This island once formed part of the mainland, but a geological fault led to it becoming an islet. Being isolated, it supports a unique and very important ecosystem. Among the flora and fauna present there are endemic species.

The plateau is colonised by garrigue / steppe vegetation, including some halophylic species, particularly shrubs. The dominant permanently visible feature is the low shrub *Suaeda vera*. During spring there is also a very dense cover of very large plants akin of *Allium commutatum* (recorded as *A. ampeloprasum* in the floras). A valley-like depression is found close to the east of the plateau which is considerably covered by *Lavatera arborea*.

### 4.2. QUALITY AND IMPORTANCE:

The dominant permanently visible feature on the Filfla plateau is the low shrub *Suaeda vera*. During spring there is also a very dense cover of very large plants of *Allium commutatum* which is much larger than most mainland specimens - this flowers around the first of June when the plants are over 1.50 m high with large fist-sized flowerheads. In most publications on Maltese flora this plant appears as *A. ampeloprasum*, a species which is absent from Malta. Bulbs have been checked chromosomally and turned out to be pentaploid. The Filfla population might be a new undescribed entity. Such large leeks similar to the ones on Filfla are to be found on Hagret il-General and nearby Dwejra area (Gozo) (another Natura 2000 site).

Other plants on the plateau include *Daucus* sp., *Cynara cardunculus*, *Inula crithmoides*, and *Capparis orientalis*. A species of *Tulostoma* (a gasteromycete fungus, not determined to species level) is also found in the area.

A number of important fauna are present on the plateau, and these include:

- the snail *Lampedusa imitatrix* ("gattoi" which is special to Filfla): this is an important endemic species listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive; it is an endangered species as it is confined to Filfla and Migra Ferha (Malta); the population of Filfla is distinguished from the Maltese door snails due to its distinct conchological characters, hence *Lampedusa imitatrix gattoi*; it is also protected through national law;
- the snail *Trochoidea spratti* ("despotti" endemic to Filfla): this is an endemic snail that occurs as a distinct conchological form, despotti, which is endemic to Filfla; this snail species is protected through national law;
- the beetle *Akis subterranea*: this is an Italo-Maltese endemic and is known from the island of Filfla apart from a few other localities; it has been given a near threatened status;
- the beetle *Cyclodinus debilis*: this species is of biogeographical interest, possibly very rare and with a restricted distribution across the Maltese Islands, however data is deficient;
- the cricket *Mogoplistes squamiger*: this is very rare, limited to coastal areas (restricted distribution across Maltese Islands); it has been recorded from

Xemxija (Malta) and has been observed on Filfla.

The 'calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation' are covered with a selection of species. These include the rare annual *Senecio leucanthemifolius*, which occurs mainly in the western tip of the plateau. *Senecio leucanthemifolius* is locally rare, with a restricted distribution across the Mediterranean and within the Maltese Islands themselves. It is a very variable species with the characteristic of producing distinct localised races the systematic value of which is uncertain. The Maltese populations still need to be studied. Another species of *Senecio*, *Senecio bicolor* is also present. This is known to be sub-endemic to the Maltese Islands.

The screes ('western Mediterranean and thermophilous screes') of the islet of Filfla have proved to be ideal breeding sites for certain sea-bird species, in particular *Hydrobates pelagicus*. The seabirds *Calonectris diomedea* and *Larus cachinnas* (*michahellis*) also breed at this site. The Yelkouan shearwater, *Puffinus yelkouan*, possibly breeds on Filfla.

- *Hydrobates pelagicus*: by far the largest colony is restricted to the islet of Filfla; this species is locally vulnerable and restricted in range; it is important to note that Filfla supports one of the largest known breeding colonies of the Storm Petrel in the Mediterranean (5000-8000 pairs)

- *Calonectris diomedea*: Filfla serves as a good breeding station for this bird, however the breeding success of this species across the Maltese Islands seems to be declining

The above two species are protected through national legislation. Internationally, they are protected through the SPABIM - Annex II, Bern - Appendix II, in Resolution No. 6 of 1998 of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) - Annex I.

- *Larus cachinnas* (*michahellis*): this is locally vulnerable, particularly as it only breeds in a few colonies at the southwestern coast of Malta and Gozo, and on Filfla; this is the main predator of *Hydrobates pelagicus*; several tens of pairs breed below the cliffs of the islet.

In view of the above-mentioned bird species, Filfla has been classified as an 'Important Bird Area of EU importance' by BirdLife Malta and as an 'Important Bird Area' by BirdLife International - hence it is a Global Important Bird Area.

Other important fauna on Filfla include:

- *Podarcis filfolensis filfolensis*: only known locality, endemic to Filfla; protected nationally and internationally (Bern Appendix II); the populations of *Podarcis filfolensis* on the various Maltese Islands show differences between each other: *Podarcis filfolensis filfolensis* is the largest of the *Podarcis filfolensis* lizards;

- the two gecko species found across the Maltese Islands, and which are both locally vulnerable, have both been reported from Filfla; these are *Tarentola mauritanica* and *Hemidactylus turcicus turcicus*, both of which are listed in Appendix III (protected fauna) of the Bern Convention (1979).

Note on section: Ecological Information - Habitats

Part of this islet supports a combination of two habitats: 1240 & 1420, and thus, the % cover was only entered once (next to 1420).

### 4.3. VULNERABILITY

The military used to practice at this site up to 1971. This led to the formation of screes made up of loose boulders and rock debris surrounding the base of the rocky escarpments of Filfla.

A predominant feature of this site is shore erosion, which is due to wave action and wind. The numbers of *Hydrobates pelagicus* are probably decreasing after storms washed away some of the scree and hence there was a loss in the number of breeding sites. In fact, the main threats are caused by natural events. Storms may cause the sweeping off of biota and may cause shifting and collapse of screes.

Another threat is the taking of incubating birds, and the extension of the increasing colony of *Larus cachinnans* below the cliffs, which prey on *Hydrobates pelagicus*.

Introduced predators, eg. rats & cats, can also be considered as a further threat.

It is important to note that ringers visit Filfla 2 - 3 times a year in order to ring / census birds during the breeding season. This is particularly important in order to be able to collect valuable data in relation to birds found on this islet.

#### 4.4. SITE DESIGNATION:

The site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation - Candidate Site of International Importance and as a Special Protection Area via Government Notice 112 of 2007, as declared through the provisions of the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Regulations of 2006 (Legal Notice 311 of 2006).

Filfla has been declared as a Bird Sanctuary via Legal Notice 79 of 2006 - Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations. Filfla is in fact one of the Important Bird Areas in Malta, as designated by BirdLife International, and thus it is a Global Important Bird Area, apart from being classified as an Important Bird Area of EU importance by BirdLife Malta.

Filfla and Filflett Islands is scheduled as an Area of Ecological Importance / Site of Scientific Importance through Government Notice 827 of 2002.

The Filfla Nature Reserve Act, 1988 (Act XV of 1988) establishes the island of Filfla as a Strict Nature Reserve and prohibits killing, capture, collecting, trapping, keeping in captivity, taxidermy, commercial exploitation, picking and hunting any species of flora and fauna in or from Filfla. Access to the island is also prohibited. Permission has to be granted prior to visiting this islet, and this is only allowed for scientific and educational purposes.

Local Notice to Mariners 16 of 1987 prohibits the berthing or navigation of any craft within an area of one nautical mile radius off Filfla. It also prohibits swimming, underwater activities and any other activity that is connected with fishing/trawling, with the exception of fishing from surface vessels within one nautical mile off the islet (which is governed by GN 173 of 1990). Through these notices Filfla has the designation of a No Berthing Zone / No Entry Zone except for Fisheries (from moving vessels).

Filfla and the surrounding islets have been internationally designated as a Specially Protected Area through the SPA Protocol (Barcelona Convention) since 1986.

#### 4.5. OWNERSHIP

#### 4.6. DOCUMENTATION

## 4. SITE DESCRIPTION

### 4.7. HISTORY

## 5. SITE PROTECTION STATUS AND RELATION WITH CORINE BIOTOPES

### 5.1. DESIGNATION TYPES at National and Regional level:

CODE	% COVER
MT99	100

### 5.2. RELATION OF THE DESCRIBED SITE WITH OTHER SITES:

**designated at National or Regional level:**

**designated at International level:**

### 5.3. RELATION OF THE DESCRIBED SITE WITH CORINE BIOTOPE SITES:

## 6. IMPACTS AND ACTIVITIES IN AND AROUND THE SITE

### 6.1. GENERAL IMPACTS AND ACTIVITIES AND PROPORTION OF THE SURFACE OF THE SITE AFFECTED

#### IMPACTS AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN the site

CODE	INTENSITY	% OF SITE	INFLUENCE
290	A B C		+ 0 -
990	A B C		+ 0 -
900	A B C		+ 0 -
971	A B C		+ 0 -

#### IMPACTS AND ACTIVITIES AROUND the site

CODE	INTENSITY	INFLUENCE
290	A B C	+ 0 -
690	A B C	+ 0 -

### 6.2. SITE MANAGEMENT AND PLANS

#### BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SITE MANAGEMENT

Malta Environment and Planning Authority - MEPA

#### SITE MANAGEMENT AND PLANS

## 7. MAPS OF THE SITE

### *Physical map*

<i>NATIONAL MAP NUMBER</i>	<i>SCALE</i>	<i>PROJECTION</i>	<i>DIGITISED FORM AVAILABLE (*)</i>
No Map Number	45000	(MT)	Digitised using MapInfo

*(\*) Reference to availability of boundaries in digitised form*

*Aerial photograph(s) included:*

## 8. SLIDES