

A PRELIMINARY REPORT

It was suggested as early as June 1971 that our Foundation commenced a programme of marine research in the Mediterranean Sea. The form of such research to be left undecided until further facts were established. (HG)

After consultation with various officials in London, it was agreed that such a project be investigated further, with especial regard to the establishment of a working base on the Maltese Islands. The Malta High Commission in London was duly contacted and supplied the necessary information. The Department of Information of the Maltese Government was also asked to supply information on local facilities and conditions. All this material is on file.

INTRODUCTION.

The Maltese Islands, Malta, Gozo, Comino, Cominotto and Filfla, are situated in the Central Mediterranean approximately 60 miles from Sicily and 180 miles from Africa. The latter two are uninhabited, the third on private lease. They occupy an area of approximately 27 sq. miles, Malta being 17.5 miles by 4.5 Gozo 9 miles by 5 miles. The mean temperature is 66 deg. (Jan 55. deg. July 78.) Relative humidity fluctuates between 75% in summer to 80% in winter. Annual rainfall is variable, but the months June-August are usually extremely dry. Winds are inconsistent, being predominantly Scirocco or Northerly. Geologically, the Islands consist of Upper and Lower coralline limestones, Globigerina limestone, Greensands and Blue clays of Tertiary period. Considerable coastal erosion is therefore caused where the sea has access to these softer rocks. (1)

Hydrographically the Islands are situated on the southern edge of a bank between Sicily and North Africa, that has an average depth of 50 fathoms and a maximum depth of 200 fathoms. A deep water trench is situated on the western side of Malta in a line extending westwards from the Malta-Gozo (Comino) channel (2)

Report

During the period July-September 1972 the initial investigation as to the feasibility of our projected project was carried out. Discussions were held with representatives of both national and international Organisations, local fishermen and others. The following areas were viewed and investigated as thoroughly as time allowed. N.E. Coastline: Mellieha bay to Valletta. S.E. Coastline. Marsaxlokk bay. South. Wied iz-Zurrieq, Dingli area. It was decided to establish a working base in Sliema, being in close proximity to Valletta and a 'clean' coastal area. Investigations were made as to the materials which might be needed and their availability, all proved satisfactory although certain materials have to be ordered well in advance. Although the basic language used is Maltese, the vast majority of the population are able to speak English fluently. We did experience considerable difficulty however in conversing with the older generation of the poorer fishing villages and hamlets. A Maltese speaking assistant will be required.

CONCLUSIONS:

Malta is an ideal base upon which to base any programme of research into marine life in the Mediterranean. An International Ocean Institute has been formed in association with the Royal University of Malta here and the Senior Scientific Advisor has conditionally offered us some help in this respect. I would suggest that a complete survey of Maltese fishes, their diets, habitat, distribution and economic significance be undertaken. There is a lack of accurate local records in this respect. Furthermore this survey should encompass an underwater photographic section, and a photographic record of species. Eventual publication of selected results should also be investigated. Cooperation with all local organisations is essential for maximal coverage.

G. Jennings. RESEARCH DIRECTOR

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(ERRATA. Line 15 should read...by 8.5 miles)

(Copies to all concerned)