

# INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS (PART OF THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK)

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**Report for the period January to December 2009, on activities carried out by The Gaia  
Foundation as Project Manager for Ramla, Gozo**

**THE GAIA FOUNDATION**

## 1 Introduction

Project Gaia is the name given to The Gaia Foundation's work on the integrated management of specially protected areas in the Maltese Islands. The project covered a number of initiatives in the management of 2 sites between 2000 and 2003, namely Ghajn Tuffieha and Ramla, Gozo. The management agreements for the sites expired in July and December 2003 respectively. A renewed contract for Ghajn Tuffieha was signed in June 2004. A renewal of the Ramla contract was signed in December 2005.

## 2 Background

The management of Ghajn Tuffieha and Ramla formed part of a LIFE project that included the management of Ramla Bay, Gozo, namely TCY99/M/95, which fell under the direction of IcoD and the management of The Gaia Foundation. This project commenced in 2000 and was brought to a successful conclusion in July 2003. The management of both sites has continued at a steady pace by the Gaia Foundation.

## 3 Project Overview

Although the project is of an integrated coastal management nature, the various important integrated arms have been given different project names, in order to better focus and understand the complexity and uniqueness of each arm. The main arms of this project which relate to the management of Ghajn Tuffieha are as follows:

Project Elysium	Biodiversity and ecological restoration of habitats
Project Olympus	Coastal conservation, enforcement, monitoring
Project Poseidon	Marine conservation and safety
Project Phoenix	Waste management
Project Hermes	Dissemination of information
Project Apollo	Operation of a Visitor Centre
Project Persephone	Promotion of Organic Farming
Project Athene	Agro-Environment. Forestation of Olive, Almond and Pomegranate Trees

These projects, except for Galatea and Poseidon, were all active in this project report period. On the advice of the NPU, the work on the organic farming project "Persephone" is not included in this report.

The Management agreement for Ramla signed with the MRAE in 2005 is valid until December 2009. Under the agreement the parties may extend by mutual agreement in writing.

## 4 Project Activities

Activities projected for January – December 2009 <sup>1</sup>	Main Activities carried out January – December 2009	Activities projected for January – December 2010
<b>4.1 Biodiversity and ecological restoration of habitats</b>		
<p><b>Ramla Management Contract:</b>                      “2.3 ... the management of (Ghajn Tuffieha/Ramla) is taken to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the conservation, management and monitoring of the biological diversity of the area in line with the provisions of relevant policies and legislation;</li> <li>(ii) the rehabilitation of degraded areas within the area;</li> <li>(iii) the establishment of a series of measures required to maintain or restore the natural habitats and the population of species of wild fauna and flora at a favourable conservation status”</li> </ul>		
1. Inventory of species present, listing of threatened species		
	A plant species list was drawn in 2007 up by T. Tabone covering both wet and dry seasons. One list was drawn up for the entire site. These have numbered 165. Some of this information was used to produce a number of information panels (see 4.5 below)	1. Commission update of flora list starting Autumn 2010
2. Assessment of habitat degradation/restoration		
<p>1. <i>Monitor progress of vegetation recovery in rehabilitated areas.</i></p>	<p>The overall assessment of the sand dune habitat at Ramla is that following the removal of the arundo donax in 2007 and 2008, a number of species, most notably the Sea daffodil, is very much on the increase. This trend continued in earnest in 2009. The sand dune signs asking people to refrain from walking or sunbathing in the dunes, together with regular ranger patrols, was seriously upgraded in 2009 with increased patrols, thanks to the combination of paid as well as EVS volunteer rangers. The system was further enhanced with the laying of a rope from one sign to the next, physically creating a border between the beach and the dunes. This also had a major positive impact in the reduction of bathers and ramblers wandering onto the dunes, especially in the summer season. Despite this patrols were still deemed necessary to remove the occasional transgressors, especially on the busy weekends.</p>	<p>1. Take photographic records of sand dunes to assist in dune assessment.                      2. Carry out site inspections to monitor sand dune development.</p>

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3. Plant Nursery & Habitat Restoration of degraded areas		
<p>2. <i>Propagation of indigenous and endemic plants to assist in habitat restoration.</i></p> <p>3. <i>Removal and control of Arundo donax (giant reed) and Vitis vinifera (vines) impinging on the sand dunes at ir-Ramla, so as to assist sand dune species to recover and flourish.</i></p>	<p>1. Work at the nursery focused on the sowing, sticking and repotting of various indigenous and endemic species, detailed in <b>Annex 1</b>. The continued propagation of new species was tried successfully (e.g. Judas Tree, Maltese Salt Tree, Mediterranean Buckthorn and Lentisk) with a substantially improved yield in 2008, especially with regard to the Med. Buckthorn.</p> <p>2. The propagation of a number of rare the rare Narrow Leaved Rock Rose (<i>Cistus monspeliensis</i>) by cuttings and seeds last year was successful and a similar experiment is currently being tested with Myrtle (<i>Myrtus Communis</i>) and Maltese Stalk (<i>Matthial Incana</i> SSP <i>Melitensis</i>).</p> <p>3. Other work in the indigenous tree nursery included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. repotting,</li> <li>ii. weeding,</li> <li>iii. cleaning</li> <li>iv. watering.</li> </ol> <p>4. <i>Arundo donax</i> (giant reed) impinging on the sand dunes at ir-Ramla were removed throughout the year, so as to assist sand dune species to recover and flourish. During this period the <i>Vitis vinifera</i> (vines) were not removed as in previous years. This was because their spread was very limited and caused no real threat to the dunes, while the local farmer working the land next to the dunes, Carmel Azzopardi expressed his disapproval in their removal. In previous years the manager had compensated him for their removal, and offered to do the same in 2009, but Mr Azzopardi insisted it was not for the money, and that he wanted to harvest some grapes for wine. It was decided to postpone further removal of the vitis assess its growth in 2010.</p> <p>in 2009 once again a substantial growth and recovery of the sand dune species has been observed since the commencement of the control programme of the <i>Arundo donax</i>. Unfortunately eradication does not seem possible, so constant work is carried out to keep the arundo donax under control by constantly cutting them back, allowing the dune species space and light to continue their colonisation of the dunes. An experiment was carried out covering the stubs of the arundo donax with black plastic, to prevent regrowth. This appears to have at success in at least reducing such regrowth.</p>	<p>1. Continue work in Tree Nursery and extend assortment with more native plants difficult to propagate. Focus on the <i>Rhamnus alaternus</i>, <i>Lonicera implexa</i>, <i>Erica multiflora</i>, <i>pistacio lentiscus</i>, <i>vitex agnus castus</i>.</p> <p>2. Removal and control of <i>Arundo donax</i> (giant reed), <i>Vitis vinifera</i> (vines) and <i>Opuntia ficus indicus</i> (Prickly Pear) impinging on the sand dunes at ir-Ramla, so as to assist sand dune species to recover and flourish.</p> <p>4. Spreading of <i>Pancratium maritimum</i> (sea daffodil) seeds along degraded parts of the sand dunes.</p> <p>5. remove tamarisk plants in isolated places to allow existing dune species to establish themselves.</p>

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<b>4.2 – Coastal Conservation &amp; Beach Management</b>		
<p><b>Ramla Management Contract:</b>                      the management of Ramla is taken to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(iv) the control of activities that may be harmful to the ecology of the area;</li> <li>(v) the application of coastal conservation measures, patrolling of site and assistance in enforcement of site regulations;</li> <li>(vi) the management of beaches in the area”</li> </ul>		
1. Beach and site management and enforcement of site regulations for coastal conservation		
<p><i>“1. Carry out regular ranger patrols throughout the protected site to monitor and enforce site regulations.</i></p> <p><i>2. Monitoring and control of BBQ’s during the summer</i></p> <p><i>3. Design, Production installation and/or maintenance/replacement of signs warning the public of site regulations, guidelines and protection status of the site.</i></p> <p><i>4. Liaise with MMA to seal off swimmers’ zones with markers across the bay.</i></p> <p><i>5. Ensure regular testing of bathing water quality, post</i></p>	<p>Ongoing patrols were carried out on land, with higher frequency in the summer months. The Gaia rangers controlled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access by motorised and non motorised boats to Ramla Bay,</li> <li>- Access of vehicles (cars and motorcycles) into the area</li> <li>- Regulations pertaining to camping, littering, noise, removal or disturbance of flora and habitats.</li> </ul> <p>Gaia rangers retained the same uniform designed in 2007, with a maroon polo shirt, navy blue shorts and cap, with embroidered logos on the shirts and caps.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Throughout the summer at Ramla the criteria for applying for the blue flag award were met. As a result the Manager submitted an application for the blue flag award for this beach.</li> <li>2. The old Police Station was once again given maintenance work and repainted during the Spring by the Manger’s rangers. The Manager then upgraded the ranger station/information centre by producing more information boards on the flora and fauna of Ramla. These provided a good addition to the framed Mepa posters produced by Mepa that were placed at the centre the previous year.</li> <li>3. The Rangers carried out daily patrols on both sites. New wooden signs informing persons</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Liaise with OPM and Mepa regarding the issue of site specific regulations.</li> <li>2. Continue maintenance of Ramla Ranger Station.</li> <li>3. Maintain surveillance through the replacement of damaged CCTV equipment installed on site.</li> <li>4. Maintain small wooden signs for sand dune protection.</li> <li>5. Maintain and service all signage on site.</li> <li>6. Lay out safety lines in swimmers’ zone.</li> </ol>

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<p><i>results on site and report any signs of contamination.</i></p> <p><i>6. Liaise with authorities to prevent beach operators from operating without all necessary permits.</i></p> <p><i>7. Lay out safety lines in swimmers' zone.</i></p> <p><i>8. Upgrade beach management to reach Int Blue Flag standards in order to apply for Blue Flag/Beach of quality award for 2010.</i></p> <p><i>9. Carry out maintenance of plastering and painting of Ramla ranger station.</i></p>	<p>not to sun bathe or walk on the dunes at Ramla were put in place and enforced, replacing the old damaged signs. The Manager was assisted by a number of foreign volunteers from the EVS programme during the day, who supplemented the Gozitan rangers who patrolled in the late afternoon and evening.</p> <p>4. Safety lines similar to the ones at Ghajn Tuffieha, were put in place at Ramla by the Manager and maintained. These were successful, with no major incidents recorded. The safety flags were operated on a daily basis by the Rangers.</p> <p>6. 4 public awareness activities were carried out at Ramla, namely, the regular setting of mountable information boards on the local flora, fauna and other environment issues. Once again 2 clean ups were organised in collaboration with the Gozo Scouts. The Ranger station was officially re opened in June 2009.</p> <p>7. A report was made to Mepa, the ALE and the MMA about the setting up of a beach post station on the sand by Alfred Cini, the water sports operator, who was misleading the public with a large sign advertising Baywatch and first aid. The structure is not covered by any permit. This was a repetition of the previous year, when enforcement was unfortunately not effected. However the matter was raised in the early Spring in a meeting between the Manager and Mepa where it was agreed that action would be taken in the event that such works were carried out again. Following the Manager's report that works commenced in May 2009, and that A. Cini continued operating water sports and keeping canoes and peddloes on the sand when not in use, without the required permit from Mepa, action was taken by Mepa enforcement and the ALE and works were removed and water sport operations were terminated in July. This was deemed to be a great success for the management of the beach, without the disturbance, deceit, and illegal development and activities that had been one of the beach's main problems.</p> <p>8. The wooden walkway along the sand, which was financed by the MTA was serviced and once again installed in June.</p>	<p>7. Liaise with Transport Malta to secure swimmers' zone.</p> <p>8. Organise beach and environment awareness activity in the summer season.</p> <p>9. Assess the feasibility of introducing a restricted area for BBQ's.</p> <p>10. Liaise with authorities to prevent beach operators from operating without necessary permits.</p> <p>11. Assist and monitor any filming carried out on site, and ensure compliance of MEPA conditions.</p> <p>12. Collaborate with third parties re introduction of lifeguard services for beach in summer season.</p> <p>13. Ensure regular testing of bathing water quality, post results on site and report any signs of contamination.</p> <p>14. Liaise with Mepa and Xaghra Council re possible dredging of Ramla watercourse.</p> <p>15. Liaise MTA for the reinstallation of wooden</p>

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		walkway on the beach. 16. Liaise with Mepa and Public cleansing to remove or more excess pebbles on the beach when deemed necessary. 17. Carry out patrols to monitor & enforce site regulations.
2. Restriction of access to legitimate vehicles		
“1. Regular ongoing patrols at Ramla 2. The entry of unauthorized vehicles to be reported to NPU, MEPA and action taken.” 3. Third party access allowed only on formal approval.	Regular patrols were carried out to control vehicular access to the beach. This was limited mostly to beach cleaners when necessary. Irregular vehicular access did not pose a problem to the site management during this period	1. The entry of unauthorized vehicles to be reported to NPU, MEPA and action taken. 2. Third party access to be allowed only on formal approval.
<b>4.4 – Waste Management</b>		
<b>Conservation Order:</b> “Removal of litter shall be carried out regularly, through an approved methodology. To this effect, the site managers shall submit a method statement and cleaning programme”		
1. Beach-cleaning and implementation of waste management system		
1. Appointment of contact persons who would follow up	1. Ing Bajada was the person appointed as contact in charge of public cleansing	1. Liaise with OPM and Tourism to study need for

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<p><i>any reports by the manager, council or public.</i></p> <p><i>2. Liaise with Gozo Ministry for the beach cleaning and waste management, and removal of excessive Posidonia.</i></p> <p><i>3. Organise Gaia volunteers to carry out cleanups of the dune area in the summer period.</i></p> <p><i>4. Introduce waste fraction bins at Ranger station.</i></p> <p><i>5. Liaise with authorities to ensure proper maintenance of the public conveniences.</i></p> <p><i>6. Study need for sand sifting and liaise with Mepa and Public cleansing accordingly.</i></p>	<p>activities at Ramla.</p> <p>2. The beach was cleaned on a daily basis by personnel from the Gozo public cleansing department. 10 of the dept's bins were originally left along the road at the entrance to the beach, and were being used by the kiosks and ice cream vendor. The Manager requested that these be reduced to 4, with the rest being taken to the beach itself, which had an insufficient number of bins. This was done.</p> <p>3. The Manager introduced 4 bins for waste fractions just by the Ranger station, and serviced these by taking the fractions to the bring in site at Xaghra. The bins were however not used much by the public, who seemed to be inclined to keep using the all purpose metal bins.</p> <p>4. Posidonia was removed on 2 occasions when amounts that washed ashore had become an inconvenience to bathers.</p> <p>5. There were no reports through the summer of any overflows from the cesspit that services the public toilets. The Rangers ensured that this was serviced regularly.</p> <p>6. Once again, as in previous years, the Manager noticed that the public toilet attendants were not always present during opening hours. Sometimes an attendant would come and open in the morning and just return to close in the evening. This effectively meant that the toilets were sometimes in a dirty state throughout the day.</p> <p>7. Some Remains from BBQ ashes were sometimes found deposited in the sand in the morning patrols, despite daily ranger patrols up to 10pm.</p> <p>8. Mechanical sand sifting took place once, on 11<sup>th</sup> July at Ramla Bay. Stones and pebbles were collected in small piles along the beach. These were manually selected from the rubbish collected from the machine and put back in situ. Gaia rangers were supervising the sifting throughout the whole night.</p>	<p>sand sifting in Spring to remove accumulated litter</p> <p>2. Liaise with Gozo Ministry Public Cleansing section to ensure adequate beach cleaning and number of beach bins.</p> <p>3. Maintain separated waste bins at Ramla Ranger Station and Information Centre.</p> <p>4. Liaise with Tourism to remove Posidonia banquettes on main beach only in summer and when they pose an inconvenience to bathers.</p> <p>5. Ensure regular servicing of septic tank at public conveniences.</p>
<p><b>4.5 Visitor Centre and Visitor Information</b></p>		
<p>1. Visitor interpretation boards at vantage points</p>		
<p>1. Produce panels on flora and fauna of Ramla.</p> <p>2. Display Mepa posters in picture frames at Ramla</p>	<p>1. 6 new information panels focussing on Ramla's land marine flora, and land, marine and avifauna, were designed and produced. These were posted on mobile wooden frames at the entrance to the beach on an average of 4 times per week in the mornings, and removed at sunset by the rangers, offering visitors a wealth of</p>	<p>1. replace any boards that have been damaged.</p>

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Ranger & information Centre. 3. Add more dune formation signs.	information on Ramla and other environmental issues.	
<b>2. Visitor Centre &amp; Ranger Station</b>		
<i>1. Replaster, paint and refurnish Ramla police station for use as a ranger station and information centre.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The day to day running of the interpretation centre and ranger station which was set up at Ramla in 2008. This is located at the old police station. The first room accommodates information panels and info for visitors.</li> <li>2. The second room accommodates the ranger station, which as detailed above now houses surveillance (CCTV) equipment to cover the whole site.</li> <li>3. The centre is equipped with telephone and internet access.</li> <li>4. The yard is used for storage of beach equipment, waste fraction bins and garden tools.</li> <li>5. Some indigenous and endemic plants of the area were planted outside the ranger station.</li> <li>6. a water tap was installed outside the station for people can rinse their feet from the sand. This water tap is only functional when the ranger station is open.</li> <li>7. Painting and plastering at the ranger station was also done this year.</li> <li>8. A new door was installed leading to the yard.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued maintenance of Ramla interpretation and ranger station.</li> <li>2. Purchase of any extra equipment where required.</li> </ol>
<b>4.6 – Dissemination of information</b>		
<p>"The warden's role shall mainly consist of guiding the flow of human activity along footpaths, away from sensitive areas, act as a medium of education, control access to various parts of the conservation area, support actual conservation measures..."</p>		

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1. Holding of educational and public awareness activities.		
<p>1. organise awareness activities for youth.</p> <p>2. distribute questionnaire to beach users.</p> <p>3. promote environmental awareness amongst beach users through the local ranger and display of info boards at the entrance to the beach.</p>	<p>1. An activity for school children was prepared in collaboration with the Xaghra primary school but nobody turned up for this activity. However we did this activity with the WWF team. The event was related to blue flag. Children had a number of small activities from doing their own flag, doing a blue flag beach, jigsaw puzzle, and a clean up event. An explanation on Ramla, blue flag, and the ecological importance of the sand dunes was given to the students.</p> <p>2. Same event as above was also done with a scouts group.</p> <p>3. A questionnaire specifically asking questions related to blue flag and sand dunes was distributed to passers by or to people at the beach. More than 50 people answered the questionnaire.</p> <p>4. An explanation of the work done at the areas we managed was explained on a 40 minutes interview on a local radio station (RTK) with Ms. Sonia Young. Emphasis was made on the safety of the beaches, mentioning of the safety lines, site regulations, and other projects we undertake.</p>	<p><b>Ramla</b></p> <p>1. Exhibit info panels on wooden frames during the day at the entrance to the beach during summer.</p> <p>2. Maintain and service flag system.</p>
2. Website		
<p>1. Continuation of the upgrade of the main website, <a href="http://www.projectgaia.org">www.projectgaia.org</a> to include updated material.</p>	<p>1. updating of the Gaia Website <a href="http://www.projectgaia.org">www.projectgaia.org</a> was carried out by the Manager's own personnel.</p>	<p>1. upgrade and maintain websites</p>

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3. Media		
1. Issue media release re management of Ramla	Media coverage was obtained at the start of the summer season highlighting the management of Ramla as a unique Natura 2000 site. This was made to time with the high season when public presence is most likely to have an impact on the eco system	1. Promote the unique features and management of Ramla in the Media during high season.
4. Dissemination of project results and experience.		
<p>1. Participation in working groups with MEPA in order to further develop the management plan.</p> <p>2. Presentation of report January-December to MEPA and MRAE and OPM.</p> <p>3. Publish updated activities and financial reports on <a href="http://www.projectgaia.org">www.projectgaia.org</a></p>	<p>1. This Report for period January - December 2009 is being submitted to MEPA, OPM, and the Continuendo MusartE Foundation, and posted online at <a href="http://www.projectgaia.org">www.projectgaia.org</a>.</p> <p>2. Financial reports for Jan Dec 09 were submitted to OPM and The MusartE Foundation.</p> <p>3. 2008 Audited management accounts were posted on the website in 2009. These have been made available to the public, in line with the Foundation's policy since 2000.</p> <p>4. An updated species list for Ramla has been posted on the Manager's website <a href="http://www.projectgaia.org">www.projectgaia.org</a></p> <p>5. Meetings were held between the Manager, NPU and OPM on the upgrading of the management plan and the renewal of the management agreement which comes up for review in 2010. Work on the new plan was started in 2009 by the Manager. Renewal of the agreement had not been effected up to the end of this reporting period.</p>	<p>1. This report on the management of the sites &amp; related activities is to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Published on the website</li> <li>- sent to OPM &amp; MRA</li> <li>- sent to MEPA</li> <li>- sent to Funders</li> </ul> <p>2. Liaise with OPM and Mepa for the renewal of the management agreement for Ramla in 2010.</p>