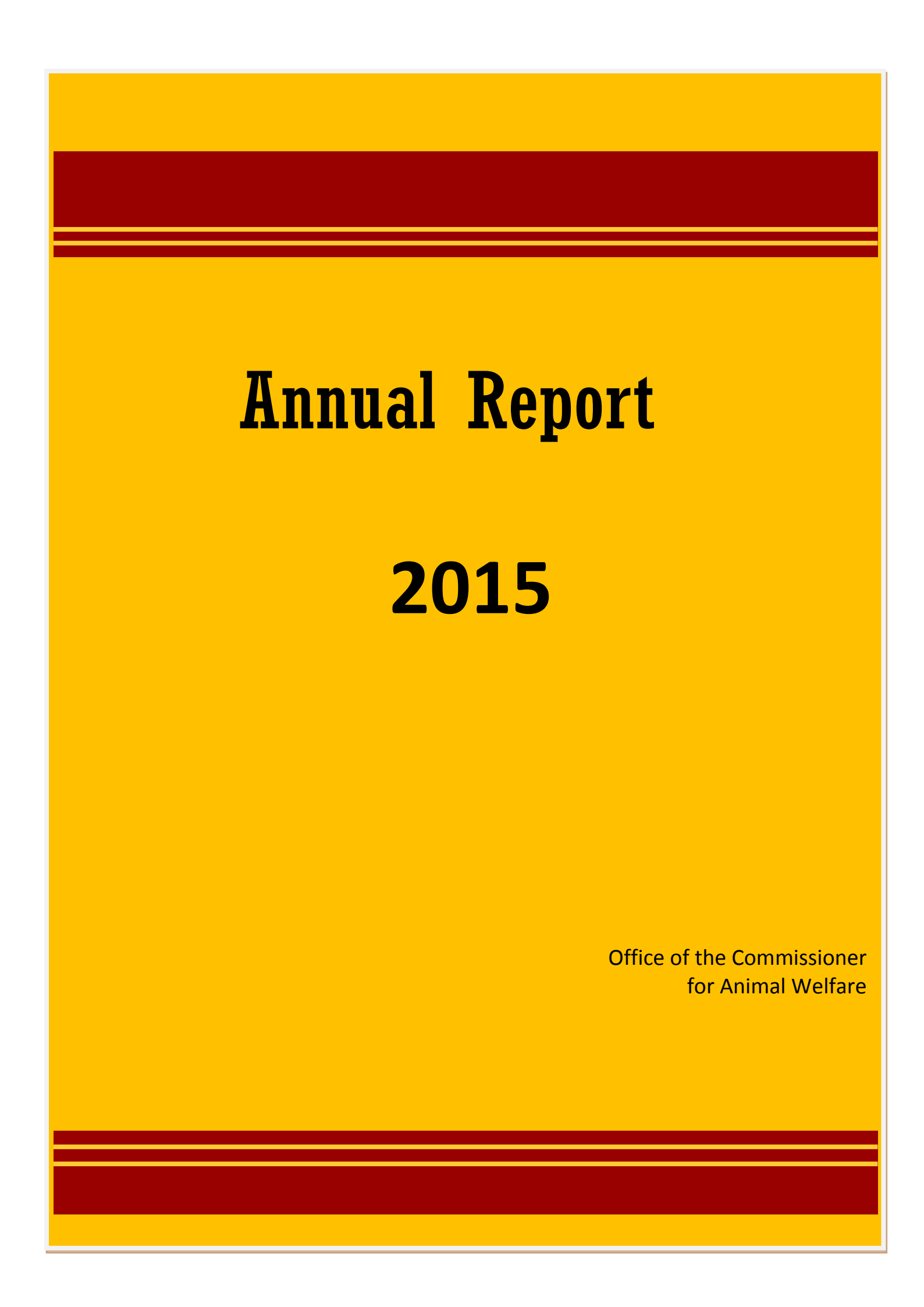




Annual Report

2015

Office of the Commissioner
for Animal Welfare

Annual Report 2015

Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare

Annual Report 2015

Page

2	Introduction
3	Responsibilities of the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare
4	Reports and Complaints
5	Combating Animal Cruelty
5	Conclusion

Annual Report 2015



Emanuel Buhagiar

Commissioner for Animal Welfare

Introduction

This is my first annual report on my appointment as the first Commissioner for Animal Welfare. The Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare was set up by Chapter 439, the Animal Welfare Act, with the task being that of projecting a higher deserved status to Animal Welfare issues and matters related thereto.

The ultimate mission of the Commissioner's Office is to promote and advocate for the animal welfare and the highest standards of health, keeping and treatment of animals. The promotion of compliance with the Animal Welfare Act, enhancement of cooperation between entities and persons advocating for animal welfare and the formulation of recommendations for the implementation of matters touching upon animal welfare, have been high on my agenda.

Annual Report 2015

Responsibilities of the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare.

Finding a new premises for an office has not been easy; after a year we are still at Casa Leoni in St. Venera. My responsibilities included finding the appropriate persons from the Civil Service to form a new team for the set up of this office. After nearly six months in office an Inspector for Animal Welfare and two Promotional Officers were interviewed and recruited. Although my staff is so limited in number, teamwork and cooperation have given us great results.

Months before my official appointment, I had started to compile a book regarding animal welfare, namely **L-Imħabba Tagħna Lejn l-Animali Obbligati - Ligijiet - Regolamenti**. In May 2015 this book was set for printing at the Government Printing Press. This illustrated book was vital for the guidelines to animal welfare in Malta and therefore ten thousand copies were ordered to serve as promotional material mainly for children from Year 6 upwards. On the 6th October 2015 this book was officially launched at the Luqa Primary School in the presence of the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary Roderick Galdes. For this successful event a total of 380 books were distributed to all students.

One of the duties of the two Promotional Officers at my office is to visit schools around Malta and Gozo, to deliver a brief lecture with a powerpoint on the subject, and distribute a copy of this book together with a book mark to every student. We embarked on this initiative after my meeting with the Director General of Education, Dr. Frank Fabri, who forwarded a circular in this regard to all Heads of school. These talks are to be held during the PSCD lessons throughout the scholastic year. With regards to our visits to schools during *Skola Sajf* for the promotion of Animal Welfare, we were invited to visit the San Gwann Primary School of St. Clare's College of Pembroke, to give a talk to one hundred and seventy three Year 6 students. This event was a success judging from the participation of the students who were given a book each. Another promotion activity was held at San Bastjan Primary School in Qormi where a powerpoint was delivered to year 6 students. Books were

Annual Report 2015

distributed to all. Invitations to *Skola Sajf* were made by several other schools. My Office collaborated with the Animal Welfare Directorate, thus ensuring a memorable experience for the youngsters. Furthermore, I was frequently invited to take part in discussions on various T.V. and radio stations; public awareness has increased although we still have some way to go.

Reports and Complaints on animal welfare issues were made to the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare nearly on a daily basis by email or by phone. In the current year a total of four hundred and sixty seven cases were reported. These cases were all handled accordingly, and in some instances the Animal Welfare Director and the Director of Veterinarians were guided to provide assistance for more efficiency. On other occasions an investigation was needed to compile a specific report. A case in point was an investigation made on the 14th November 2014 with regards to nearly five hundred wild finches that were kept in the Veterinary Quarantine at Luqa. They died while being held as court evidence. These birds were smuggled from Calabria in October 2014. The said report was made public and is to be found on the webpage of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare.

On the 11th August 2015 a report regarding cruelty to animals on a farm at Imsida was made to my Office and an investigation was made accordingly. Animals on the said farm was kept for many years in poor animal welfare conditions. Action was taken by my Office by reporting such cruelty to animals, to the Director of Veterinaries and Services and the Director of Animal Welfare to address such a situation.

Some reports on animal cruelty are not straight forward to investigate. Such cases should be handled diligently while at times an expert advice is necessary to compile a final and precise report. Animal cruelty makes headlines around the world everyday, whether it's the person who kills the neighbour's cat, the hoarder of sick and dying animals or the family who is keeping the dog tied up outside without proper shelter. Animal Cruelty is defined by a simple Neglect, Gross neglect, Intentional abuse, Animal hoarding, Organised abuse, or Ritualistic abuse. These cases of animal cruelty cannot be overlooked as such practices inflict great pain on these animals which are helpless, unless we speak for them. Moreover it has been proven that at times they are linked to other crimes.

Annual Report 2015

Combating Animal Cruelty is a journey that must be undertaken by all. It is a major role within the Government Departments, that is, the Police, the Local Wardens, The Veterinary Services Department and The Animal Welfare Directorate, while it has been strengthened by the role of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare. It is also an issue wherein members of the society at large have a most important role to play.

Therefore we appreciate the effort of many individuals who report to my office several forms of cruelty to animals. However we note that the majority of them are not ready to testify in court, as they prefer to be kept anonymous. We adhere to their demand but in certain cases this hinders our work. With regards to the Directorate for Veterinary Services and the Directorate for Animal Welfare personnel there were instances where my office had to investigate. This regarded complaints filed by individuals for lack of action taken in cases of animal cruelty. It transpired that although they are aware of the Animal Welfare Act Chapter 439 and its Regulations, some of them just do the bare minimum possible to take action. Several citizens and myself are concerned about this fact, which needs to be addressed. All Officers in question have to take initiative and be highly motivated to combat animal cruelty.

Conclusion

When considering the complaints raised by the citizens of the Maltese Islands about the handling of reports on animal welfare issues, it is clear enough that further training to Animal Welfare Officers is necessary to do their mission properly with regards to enforcement. The State recognises that it has the duty to promote the welfare of animals, through its intervention by the Legislative, Judicial and Administrative organs while in exercising such a sensitive mission, collaboration with the general public is needed to move forward in animal welfare.

Emanuel Buhagiar
Commissioner for Animal Welfare