

Cliff Communities or Ecosystems

Two types of cliffs can be found along the Maltese archipelago. Vertical plunging cliffs are formed from Lower Coralline limestone and Upper Coralline Limestone. These lack shore platforms at their feet due to the absence of mass movement processes and are probably tectonic. The *rdum* or coastal scree cliffs occur when marls of Blue Clay formations are overlaid by upper coralline limestone. The unconsolidated Blue Clay is easily eroded by wave action and after torrential rains water percolates through the overlying limestone fissures resulting in the saturation of the clay. This causes the clay to become plastic and mudslides may occur. When the Upper Coralline Limestone on top is undercut, rock falls occur, and as a result there is a gradual cliff retreat. The geological formations called rupestral communities are situated at the western, south western and southern coasts of Malta due to the extensive Upper Coralline Limestone plateau found.

The cliffs, harbor many species of flora and fauna. These Cliff communities are dominated by **shrubs** and **halophytic** (that is adapted to living in a saline environment) plants as well as the endemic **Maltese Rock Centaury** (*Palaeocyanus crassifolius*), the Maltese National plant. Other endemic species found in this community include the Maltese Salt Tree (*Darniella melitensis*), Maltese Sea-Lavender (*Limonium melitense*), Maltese Fleabane (*Chiladenus bocconeii*) and the Maltese Everlasting (*Helichrysum melitense*). The **Blue Rock thrush** (Maltese National bird: *Merill*) as well as the Cory Shearwater also inhabit these communities. **These habitats are in a relatively good conservation status, mostly because of their relative inaccessibility or resilience.**

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