When the Forest Team at the Bishop’s Conservatory Girls’ Secondary School decided to participate in this year’s LEAF Europe Direct Awards Scheme the met to decide on a topic related to the local flora. After some discussion it was decided that they were going to focus on “Growing and Planting More Trees”. In consultation with the National LEAF Coordinator; Mr Johann Gatt and the EkoSkola Coordinator for Gozo; Ms Marvic Refalo, it was decided to focus on one particular plant: Common Myrtle (Myrtus communis). This is known as Riħan in Maltese.

An awareness survey was conducted amongst our school community including:
- The Students,
- The School Management team,
- Teachers and
- Parents

This was done to check whether students and teachers know about this plant and its origin, questionnaires were handed out. From these questionnaires it was evident that only a couple of persons within the whole school knew about the Riħan.

During the research which the students conducted at the Gozo Public Library (Fig 2), it was confirmed that Wied ir-Riħan (Fig 3); which is situated in Nadur, Gozo, had its name derived from the Riħan plant also known as “Common Myrtle” (Fig 1). This made them embark on an awareness campaign both providing knowledge about the Riħan plant/tree and on the benefits of growing trees. During the surveys, it was also evident that most of the respondents, although they did not have any knowledge on the Riħan plant, they knew the benefits of planting trees.
Two of the benefits of planting and growing trees are in fact the release of oxygen during photosynthesis, and the absorption of carbon dioxide. To prove this, an experiment was held in the biology lab using a marine plant which is the ideal plant to be used during such experiment to prove the release and testing of oxygen using a glowing splint (Fig 4, 5 and 6). This experiment was filmed and became part of a powerpoint which was made about the project and which was featured in the school’s foyer for two whole days, exhibited for anyone entering the school. Other photos of the project were also exhibited in the same foyer to compliment the awareness activity. In additionally, during the assembly, the members of the forest team gave a summary of the project and other specific information on the Riħan Plant. The information the students gathered from research was shared with the whole school community during assembly.

During the open evening the seeds of the Riħan plant which were generously provided by the Hands on Farming Section at the Experimental Farm in Xewkija, Gozo, were prepared in small gift bags and were distributed to all year 6 Gozitan students who attended the event with their parents (Fig 7). Part of the seeds which were provided, were also planted in the school by all interested students. In the same time, the EkoSkola Committee from the St. Francis Primary School, Victoria Gozo, have visited the school and for this occasion the primary students were given Riħan seeds to be planted at their school.
During their research, the LEAF committee confirmed that Wied ir- Riħan in-Nadur Gozo had its name derived from the “Common Myrtle” plant. Upon further research and on checking with the Nadur Local Council, it resulted that the Riħan plant is no longer found growing anywhere in this area which owes its name to the tree itself! In this regard, the Forest Team collaborated with Nadur Local Council and successfully obtained permission to plant the named plant in an area in this valley.

The tree planting session, during which the students plant five (5) Myrtle trees was also attended to by the EkoSkola Coordinator for Gozo, Ms Marvic Refalo; the Executive Secretary from the Nadur Local Council, Ms Sue Ellen Bugija; an Assistant Head from the school, Ms. Dorianne Portelli, LEAF link persons at the school and gardeners from Nadur Local Council.

The Riħan trees, were donated to the school by the Government Dawwar Nursery in Victoria. Tags made by the school’s Design and Technology Department were hung on the trees to commemorate this event. The Nadur Local Council voluntarily offered to follow up the growth, watering and care of these trees.
This activity was featured on the following sources:

1) The School’s Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/bishopsconservatory/
2) The School’s Website: http://bishopsconservatory.edu.mt/leaf-programme/
4) Nadur LC Facebook Page:
   https://www.facebook.com/NadurLocalCouncil/posts/1009354002473491

To check and report the project progress some interviews with the school community members were held during the break. Such interviews were filmed for the records.

Finally, to summarise the whole project and to provide information whilst commemorating this project, a leaflet was compiled and given to the Nadur Local Council and all members involved in this project.