

NOTES ON RARE AND INFREQUENT ORTHOPTERA OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS  
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ABSTRACT

7 species of Orthoptera whose status in the Maltese Islands is rare or infrequent are discussed. Of these, 2 species namely, *Platycleis albopunctata* (Tettigoniidae) and *Sphingonotus savignyi* (Acrididae), are recorded for the first time.

Details of habitat in which the specimens were recorded are also taken into account.

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The list of Maltese Orthoptera has over the years been added to and updated by both local and foreign authors. (BORG, 1939; VALLETTA, 1954; 1955; LANFRANCO, 1955; 1957; BACCETTI, 1973; CILIA, 1975; SCHEMBRI and EBEJER, 1983). The present contribution, based on the accumulation of a number of records from various localities, is intended to supplement previous listings and to further the knowledge of the Orthopterous fauna which occurs in the Maltese Islands.

**TETTIGONIIDAE**

Phaneropterinae

*Odontura stenoxipha* (Fieber, 1853) TL: Sicily

Malta: Għadira, ?.07.74, 1 ♂, Leg.: A. Valletta det.: M. La Greca.

This apterous specimen was taken on *Inula crithmoides* L. and is presently deposited in the writer's collection.

Conocephalinae

*Homorocoryphus nitidulus* (Scopoli, 1786) TL: Italy

syn. *H. mandibularis* Charpentier, 1825.

Malta: Baħrija Valley, 09.10.82, 1 ♀, leg: LFC.

The single specimen was noted at rest on a leaf of *Juncus maritimus* Lam., during daytime. Possibly a remnant of a depleted population which may have existed in the area. The Genus is singly represented in the Mediterranean region, but may be considered cosmopolitan in warmer regions.

Decticinae

*Platycleis albopunctata* (Goeze, 1778) TL: France

syn. *P. denticulata* Panzer, 1796

*P. striata* Thunberg, 1815

*P. grisea* Zetterstedt, 1821 (nec F.)

The records below refer to the subspecies *maura* Zeuner, 1941.

Malta: Għadira, 03.08.76 1 ♂, leg.: LFC

Madliena, 13.06.82, 1 ♂, leg.: S. Fleri Soler det W.J. Reynolds

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The specimens were taken at dusk, while sweeping in pockets of thick vegetation in sand dune (Għadira) and garigue (Madliena) habitats. A number of *Platycleis* sp. specimens have been taken from the mentioned localities on a number of occasions and their determination has yet to be confirmed, since *P. affinis* Fieb. (VALLETTA 1954; LANFRANCO 1955) and *P. intermedia* Serv. (BACCETTI) have also been taken from the Maltese Islands. These two species were determined by the late L. Chopard, Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris and by B. Baccetti, Istituto di Zoologia dell'Università di Siena, respectively. *P. albopunctata*, *P. intermedia* and *P. affinis* may well be widespread in the Maltese Islands considering the many localities from which these species were recorded. However further field investigations would be required in various localities to assess their status more accurately. In a recent publication Schembri and Ebejer included *Platycleis grisea* (Fabricius, 1781) in addition to *P. affinis* and *P. intermedia*. (SCHEMBRI and EBEJER, 1983) In this respect it is worth mentioning that the specimens being recorded in the present work were initially determined as *P. grisea maura* by W.J. Reynolds of the British Museum (Natural History). In a later personal communication Reynolds acknowledged putting the specimens in *grisea* because of the side sclerites and the subgenital plates being fused. However he added that despite this Harz has left them in *albopunctata*. Consequently, he suggested following Harz and referring to the specimens as *albopunctata maura*.

Reynolds further commented that if *albopunctata* and *grisea* were ever to be synonymised, *maura* would definitely be in *albopunctata* since it is the older name. Evidently, these are difficult species to separate and without doubt further study is essential for a more accurate determination. The song would be a great help in such situations, as with most stridulating Orthoptera.

## GRYLLIDAE

### Gryllinae

*Brachytrupes megacephalus* (Lefevre, 1827) TL: Sicily

Malta: Għadira, 08.04 to 20.05.83, 19 ♂♂ (not collected).

This population was kept under observation between 08.04 and 20.05.83. All specimens were recorded stridulating at the mouth of their burrows. *B. megacephalus* is an indigenous species and occurs within the Għadira sand dune area in a relatively well-established population. It is however precariously localised and its breeding success depends on the complex and unstable environment of the dune ecosystem.

Marsa, 11.10.83, 1 ♀, leg.: P.M. Sammut.

This female was found aboard a vessel berthed at Grand Harbour, an industrial Port area. The cargo ship, (M/T Mulberry Queen), had sailed to Malta from Augusta (Sicily) via Libya. This species occurs quite commonly in both Sicily and Libya and was probably transported here accidentally.

Gozo: Ramla l-Hamra, 09.04.90, 1 ♂, Obs.: LFC. (not collected)

This is the second known record from the island of Gozo, after a lapse of almost 35 years. The first record was of another male which was discovered at Ramla l-Hamra while workmen were shifting sand. (LANFRANCO, 1957) The recent specimen was observed stridulating outside a north-facing burrow excavated in a cultivated area in the hind portion of the dunes.

*Gryllus campestris* Linnaeus, 1758 TL: Europe

Malta: Msida, 14.08.75, 1 ♂, leg.: LFC

The specimen was first noted stridulating in a shallow crevice along the sidewalk of an urban area and was eventually attracted from its refuge with over-ripe tomato fruit placed approximately 0.5 metre from the opening. This species, whose distribution comprises Europe, Eastern Asia and North Africa, has previously been reported from at least two other localities in Malta. (Sliema — LANFRANCO, 1955; and Cospicua — CILIA, 1975). These sparse occurrences may be attributed to accidental importation.

## ACRIDIDAE

Acridinae

*Oedaleus decorus* (Germar, 1826) TL: Podolsk (SW Russia)

syn. *O. nigrofasciatus* Bonnet & Finot, 1885

*O. flavus* Werner, 1914 (nec. L.)

Malta: Salina, 27.08.83, 1 ♂, leg.: LFC

This adult specimen was taken from the garigue which outlines the NW bank of the Salina salt-marsh, an area negatively affected by human encroachment. It is situated some 1.5 km from Għallis where two nymphs were recorded in June 1954. (LANFRANCO, 1955). Both localities are on the Island's Northern coastline, receding from inland masses of Upper Coralline limestone which form Ġebel San Pietru (126 m) and Ġebel Għawżara (118 m) assuming the shape of an extended horseshoe surrounding the agricultural Magħtab/Burmarrad plain. This environment is similar in habitat and conditions to that of Djebel Dyr (1080 m), El Kef in Tunisia (approx. 36°10' N: 8°40' E) where the author has recorded several examples of this species over a span of three years. It is relevant to note that the application of various pesticides does not seem to be in common use in the El Kef area as has been in the Magħtab/Burmarrad area in recent years. Assuming that *O. decorus* is indigenous and restricted to this particular area of the Maltese Islands, the use of such chemicals may have contributed to a decline in population numbers. Furthermore, the occurrence of vagrants to supplement the local population, as happens with *Locusta migratoria*, would be insignificant.

*Oedaleus decorus* is widespread in Africa and the Mediterranean Basin, with a sparse distribution throughout Southwest Asia.

*Sphingonotus savignyi* Saussure, 1884

Malta: Buskett (limits of Rabat), ? .08.79, 1 ♀, leg.: P.M. Sammut det.: W.J. Reynolds.

This rather worn specimen was taken in arid conditions over a stretch of land surrounded by profuse vegetation. As far as can be ascertained, this is the first known record for the Maltese Islands, although the Genus is already represented by the commonly occurring *S. caerulans* L.

The distribution of *Sphingonotus savignyi* ranges throughout the North African desert region as far south to Niger; Cape Verde Islands; SW Asia from Saudi Arabia to India.

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