

## **Lanius hybrid ringed on Comino Island**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2007, whilst taking part in the annual BirdLife Malta spring ringing project at Wied I-Ahmar on Comino Island, the authors captured and ringed a hybrid shrike of the *Lanius* genus. This was the first time that such a hybrid was recorded in Malta.

On first impression the bird's plumage and size was of a typical male Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, complete with the pinkish flanks typical of this species at this time of year. Upon further examination however, the prominent white scapulars of this bird could not be attributed to *Lanius minor*, and furthermore the biometrics taken did not correspond within the range stipulated for *Lanius minor* in Svenson (1992). The grey head feathers of this specimen were tipped reddish, giving them a rusty tinge, especially towards the back of the head. At this stage it became apparent that the bird was not a pure *Lanius sp* but a hybrid. The white scapulars and rusty tinge on the head are typical of the Woodchat shrike *Lanius senator* and it was thus suspected that the bird was in fact a hybrid *Lanius senator*. This was further confirmed by an illustration in the book by Lefranc and Worfolk (1997) that closely resembled the bird captured on Comino and was listed as a hybrid *L. senator x L. collurio* (Red-backed Shrike).

Following this, the opinion of several experts in this field including Norbert Lefranc and Lars Svenson was sought. Both of the aforementioned ornithologists agreed that the bird was a hybrid *L. senator*, with hybridization probably having occurred with *L. collurio*. The same experts also stated that the possibility of an *L. senator x L. minor* hybrid could not be completely excluded. Further discussions on several bird-watching fora were initiated and expert opinions followed. The *L. senator x L. collurio* hybrid theory was the most commonly suggested, however always with a great deal of caution. Furthermore, the breeding biology of a brood of *L. senator x L. collurio* in Germany was recently described by Foltz *et al.* (2007) and photos of the Comino bird were included in this publication for comparison purposes, again with no definitive conclusions. It is thus apparent that although this bird was probably a hybrid *L. senator x L. collurio*, its origin could not ultimately be confirmed.

### **Acknowledgments**

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### **References**

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### **Gilbert Haber\* & Raymond Galea\*\***

\* 25 Fortunato Mizzi Street, Victoria, Gozo, Malta. ghaber85@gmail.com

\*\*79, Osprey, Ganu Street, Birkirkara BKR 1104 Malta. raygalea@onvol.net



Gilbert Haber



Gilbert Haber