

## National Rarities Committee - Malta

### 1<sup>st</sup> Report

#### Preamble

The Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) - now BirdLife Malta - was founded in 1962. Until then bird-watching was virtually non-existent amongst local people, in spite of the fact that there was always great interest in birds in the Maltese Islands. However, this interest was always manifestly expressed in widespread bird shooting and trapping, and in Victorian-style mounted bird collections. Unfortunately these relatively numerous private bird collections cannot be regarded as scientific and most of the specimens are not even labeled. Apart from this several specimens of birds which had never been locally recorded, or which are rare visitors and vagrants to the Islands, have been illegally imported along the years from various countries, mainly European and North African, some of which claimed to have been taken in Malta to fetch more money from collectors (Sultana & Gauci 1982). Furthermore sea hunting has become an increasingly popular past-time (for both legal and protected species) and hunters are often equipped with powerful speedboats that can take them many miles outside of Maltese territorial waters where they kill a wide range of species, both legal and protected. This has been identified as a serious conservation problem. The same is true for some fishermen, hailing particularly from the south-east of Malta who are also keen bird hunters. It is known that some of these individuals take their guns out with them while at sea and target protected species that happen to pass by. On many occasions they would be miles and miles beyond Maltese territorial waters, with the result that several specimens of rare or vagrant sea birds to the islands have ended up in local private collections, where although they are claimed to have been taken in Malta or just offshore, there is no data to prove this.

Up to the 1960s, the compiling of records of rarities was mainly based on the birds which were shot or trapped. This continued to a large extent even up to the early 1980's, as until then very few local birds and some common migrants were legally protected. This meant that all the other species, including scarce and irregular migrants and accidentals could be shot or trapped at liberty and most of these ended up in private collections of stuffed mounted birds. Prior to the 1960s bird watching was only carried out for a period of a few years in the late 1940s and early 1950s by a few British servicemen who were stationed in the Islands (see Gibb 1951; Roberts 1954).

In the meantime MOS created a licensed bird-ringing scheme in 1965 with the help of the British Trust for Ornithology and as the Maltese member of EURING (European Union for Bird Ringing). Not only did bird ringing allow for scientific studies contributing to an international understanding of bird migration, but it also meant that licensed ringers recorded several rarities, mostly passerines, some of which are regarded as accidentals to the Islands. It was after this development that bird-watching started to be taken up by a few young people when they were attracted by bird-ringing to join the society as a means to study birds. In spite of this development the number of 'keen' bird watchers always remained very low particularly up to the late 1980s, and to this date they still do not exceed thirty in number. A Rarities Committee has always formed part of the organisation since 1966 following the strict guidelines of, and being the Maltese representative of, the Association of European Rarities Committee (AERC). In the mid 1990s the Rarities Committee went through a metamorphosis, due to an increase in bird-watching, particularly offshore bird-watching.

#### Administrative Matters

This is the first report of the National Rarities Committee covering the years 2000 to 2010. During this 11-year period, 11 Committee meetings were held: 19.01.2000; 12.02.2001; 02.03.2001; 15.01.2003; 02.02.2004; 01.07.2004; 23.01.2006; 06.03.2006; 14.12.2006; 10.12.2007 and 05.10.2010. Discussions and decisions on some of the submitted records were also carried out online, particularly during the last four years covered by this report.

The members serving on the Committee (listed in alphabetical order and with the numbers of years serving on the Committee) were: John Attard Montalto 2000-2010; Edward Bonavia 2006-2010; John J. Borg 2006-2010; Denis Cachia 2000-2010; Charles Coleiro 2000-2004; Raymond Galea 2000-2010; Charles Gauci 2000-2006; Caldon Mercieca 2000-2006; and Joe Sultana 2000-2010.

The co-ordinator of the Rarities Committee was John Attard Montalto who was also the official focal point for the AERC. Caldon Mercieca and Edward Bonavia acted as Secretaries in the years 2000-2005 and 2006-2010 respectively.

## II-Merill 32 2010

Observers, who had no vote, attended various meetings at the request of the Committee. These were John J. Borg (2001-2005) in his capacity as Secretary of BirdLife Malta Research Group; Mark Gauci (2004) in his capacity as Head of the Ringing Scheme; Joseph M. Mangion (2006) in his capacity as co-ordinator of the Research Group; and Andre Raine (2007 & 2010) in his capacity as Birdlife Malta Conservation Manager, who is also responsible for all research activities carried out by the organisation. On several occasions the Rarities Committee sought the advice of international experts before taking a decision on some records.

During the Rarities Committee Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2007 it was decided that the official name for the rarities committee should be: The National Rarities Committee Malta (NRCM) and it should include a representative of the National Museum of Natural History (JJB). The official email addresses of NRCM should be those of the Co-ordinator and the Secretary. This was done so that the committee fully works independently from its sponsoring organization (Birdlife Malta) as stipulated in the regulations, as well as to be in line with the AERC.

## Regulations

The regulations of the National Rarities Committee, which have been revised in 2006, are based on the AERC guidelines. 1. The Malta's Rarities Committee works independently from its sponsoring organization (BirdLife Malta) and when possible should include a representative of the National Museum of Natural History.

2. The Committee should consist of at least five members, but not more than ten members. It may ask any other members to attend as observers when deemed necessary.

3. Members should be elected by the Committee when the need arises. Every member should have qualifications that contribute to the work of the committee, e.g. extensive field experience, knowledge of the current literature, skills in ringing or in examining museums skins and knowledge of the current birding scene.

4. Decisions should be reached unanimously or nearly so. A record should not be accepted with more than one negative vote. Reconsideration of any record can be raised at any time by any Committee Member.

5. The Committee should decide which species require submitted reports for acceptance, and should provide this information on the sponsoring organisation's website and/or publications related to rarities.

6. Submitted reports of rarities should be distributed by the Rarities Committee Co-ordinator or Secretary to the Committee Members who are requested to send their remarks. If all members are in agreement the record is accepted or rejected as the case may be. If there are conflicting opinions the record should be discussed at a full committee meeting. A Committee Member may ask for a full discussion on any submitted record.

7. Whenever possible, the first (and preferably the first three) records should be proved by photographs, video films or sound recordings. In some cases, descriptions by highly qualified observers might suffice.

8. The Committee should give reasons for non acceptance of a record on request by the submitter.

9. All Committee, consultants and specialist comments should be confidential prior to publication of any decisions. Information concerning records under consideration, or decisions prior to publication, or other Committee matters should normally not be discussed outside the committee, except through the Rarities Committee Co-ordinator to whom all outside enquiries should be directed.

10. Reports of Rarities Committees should be published in each issue of *Il-Merill* (BirdLife Malta's ornithological journal), so long as there have been new records since the previous issue. All the relevant information on a record should be given when available (species/subspecies, date, place, province, number of individuals, age, sex, names of responsible observers, documentation (photographs, video films, tape recordings), bird caught or found dead, in which case locality of the specimen and collection number).

11. The first record should always be published in detail in *Il-Merill* as a short note, including full description and photographs (even if of poor quality). The full documentation of every record should be kept in a permanent file and may be viewed on request.

12. The report should give the numbers of at least the three previous records and individuals for each species. It should be clearly stated in the report which period these figures refer to (1800-1949, since 1950 or since the committee began to work).

13. A list of species that are considered by the Committee should be published when appropriate.

14. The following categories should be used for the Malta's national list:

A. species which has been recorded in an apparently wild state at least once since 01.01.1950

B. species which has been recorded in an apparently wild state only between 1800 and 1949

C. released or escaped species which has established a self-supporting breeding population in the own country; also birds coming from a category C population of another country (with the species not breeding in the own country).

D. every species unless it is almost certainly a genuine vagrant (in which case it enters Cat. A), or almost certainly an escape from captivity (Cat. E).

E. escapes from captivity

(Category D should always be published in the annual report, even if it is not a part of the national list. Category E should be kept in file and published to help other European countries to evaluate the possibilities of escapes).

15. The Committee should check the old exceptional records when possible. In particular, reports of difficult species for which new identification criteria have been established should be reconsidered.

16. The Committee should take care that rejected records are not referred to in the official literature.

17. If the Committee has difficulties in judging a report with respect to identity or origin, it should ask specialists for help instead of reaching an unsatisfactory decision.

18. The Committee should send its reports to every other AERC Rarities Committee in Europe.

19. The Committee should provide its data to the AERC on request (in a compatible format).

**Species requiring a description by the Rarities Committee**

Ideally all records of very scarce species should be submitted to the rarities committee with a field description and if available with a photograph. Species, which have been recorded less than 20 times in the islands, require a description. However there are some species listed below that, in spite of being recorded more than 20 times, still require a description to be officially recognised as these are very difficult to identify in the field. Furthermore, the first (and preferably the first three) records should be **proved** by photographs, video films or tape recordings (but see regulation 7 above).

Previous to the re-organisation of the Rarities Committee in the 1990s, the list of vagrant species in "A new guide to the Birds of Malta" published by the Malta Ornithological Society(now BirdLife Malta) in 1982, was used as a benchmark for those species deemed to require a description to be accepted officially. Since then, due to an increase in bird-watchers, and in bird-watching proficiency, records of a number of species, which were regarded as vagrants, have greatly increased. These are now not considered as accidentals. The following list, which has been recently compiled by the Rarities Committee, includes those species, which have been recorded at least once in the Maltese islands, and which require a description. Regarding new species to the list of the Birds of Malta one should refer to regulation 7 above. The Rarities Committee may also ask for a description of other species when it deems necessary.

Bean Goose <i>Anser fabalis</i>	Broad-billed Sandpiper <i>Limicola falcinellus</i>
Bar-headed Goose <i>Anser indicus</i>	Buff-breasted Sandpiper <i>Tryngites subruficollis</i>
White-fronted Goose <i>Anser albifrons</i>	Slender-billed Curlew <i>Numenius tenuirostris</i>
Red-Breasted Goose <i>Branta ruficollis</i>	Upland Sandpiper <i>Bartramia longicauda</i>
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>	Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>
Ruddy Shelduck <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Falcated Duck <i>Anas falcata</i>	Grey Phalarope <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>
Baikal Teal <i>Anas formosa</i>	Arctic Skua <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Blue-Winged Teal <i>Anas discors</i>	Long-tailed Skua <i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>
Marbled Duck <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>
Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i>	Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>
Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Greater Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	Glaucous Gull <i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Lesser Crested Tern <i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
Common Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Roseate Tern <i>Sterna dougallii</i>
Smew <i>Mergellus albellus</i>	Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>	Common Guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i>
White-headed Duck <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	Razorbill <i>Alca torda</i>
Red-throated Diver <i>Gavia stellata</i>	Little Auk <i>Alle alle</i>
Sooty Shearwater <i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Atlantic Puffin <i>Fratercula arctica</i>
Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Black-bellied Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
Balearic Shearwater <i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles alchata</i>
Leach's Storm-petrel <i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Shag <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i>
Pygmy Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	Red-necked Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>
White Pelican <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	Egyptian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>
Western Reef Heron <i>Egretta gularis</i>	White-throated Needletail Swift <i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>
Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i>	White-rumped Swift <i>Apus caffer</i>
White-tailed Eagle <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	Little Swift <i>Apus affinis</i>
Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater <i>Merops superciliosus</i>
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Green Woodpecker <i>Picus viridis</i>
Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>
American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	Southern Grey Shrike <i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Sooty Falcon <i>Falco concolor</i>	Masked Shrike <i>Lanius nubicus</i>
Lanner Falcon <i>Falco biarmicus</i>	Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Barbary Falcon <i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	Eurasian Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>
Striped Crake <i>Porzana marginalis</i>	Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Allen's Gallinule <i>Porphyryla alleni</i>	Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>
American Purple Gallinule <i>Porphyryla martinica</i>	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>
Purple Swamp-Hen <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Blue Tit <i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Red-knobbed Coot <i>Fulica cristata</i>	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>
Demoiselle Crane <i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	Bar-tailed Desert Lark <i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
Little Bustard <i>Tetrax tetrax</i>	Hoopoe Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Houbara Bustard <i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>	Dupont's Lark <i>Chersophilus duponti</i>
Great Bustard <i>Otis tarda</i>	White-winged Lark <i>Melanocorypha leucoptera</i>
Greater Sand Plover <i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	Black Lark <i>Melanocorypha yeltoniensis</i>
Caspian Plover <i>Charadrius asiaticus</i>	Lesser Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
Pacific Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Crested Lark <i>Galerida</i>
Spur-winged Lapwing <i>Hoplopterus spinosus</i>	Horned Lark <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Sociable Lapwing <i>Vanellus gregarius</i>	Temminck's Horned Lark <i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
White-tailed Lapwing <i>Vanellus</i>	Arctic Warbler <i>Phylloscopus</i>
Red Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>	Pallas's Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>
Pectoral Sandpiper <i>Tringa melanotos</i>	Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
Purple Sandpiper <i>Calidris maritime</i>	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>

## II-Merill 32 2010

Iberian Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>
Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Marmora's Warbler <i>Sylvia sarda</i>	White-crowned Black Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
Tristram's Warbler <i>Sylvia deserticola</i>	Black Wheatear <i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Barré Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	Semi-collared Flycatcher <i>Ficedula semitorquata</i> (female)
Orphean Warbler <i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	Rock Sparrow <i>Petronia petronia</i>
African Desert Warbler <i>Sylvia deserti</i>	Snowfinch <i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>
Rüppell's Warbler <i>Sylvia ruepelli</i>	Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella naevia</i>	Lesser Redpoll <i>Carduelis cabaret</i>
River Warbler <i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	Common Redpoll <i>Carduelis flammea</i>
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais pallida</i>	Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
Western Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais opaca</i>	Common Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	Snow Bunting <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>
Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>	Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>
Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	Rose-breasted Grosbeak <i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	White Throated Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>
Paddyfield Warbler <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	Pine Bunting <i>Eberiza leucocephalos</i>
Bohemian Waxwing <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Wallcreeper <i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	Cirl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Rose-coloured Starling <i>Pastor roseus</i>	Rock Bunting <i>Emberiza cia</i>
Spotless Starling <i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Cretzschmar's Bunting <i>Emberiza caesia</i>
Dipper <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>
Siberian Thrush <i>Zoothera sibirica</i>	Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>
Eyebrowed Thrush <i>Turdus obscurus</i>	Chestnut Bunting <i>Emberiza rutila</i>
Thrush Nightingale <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	Yellow-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza aureola</i>
Siberian Rubythroat <i>Luscinia calliope</i>	Black-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>
Moussier's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	

## Accepted Records

The following records have been discussed either during meetings of the Rarities Committee or by discussions online. Some of these records did not require a description and do not appear in the above list. However as these were submitted to the Committee with a description, it was felt that they should not be ignored and thus figure in the accepted list of records. All the records include, where applicable, the observers' initials. **Those records of rarities which are made public but which are not submitted to the Rarities Committee are not discussed and do not appear in the official annual systematic list of birds recorded in the Islands. However note is taken of them for any future consideration.**

Six of the accepted records relate to specimens at the National Museum of Natural History submitted by J. J. Borg, principal curator at the Museum. Three of them are first records for the Maltese Islands and were not previously reported or published:

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*: 1 on 19.03.1991 off Comino/Cirkewwa).

**Blue-Winged Teal** *Anas discors*: 1 on 19.11.1980 at Qawra. (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Striped Crake** *Porzana marginalis*: 1 on 29.03.1981 at Bahar lċ-Ġaġħaq. (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: 1 in Oct.1983 at Ġnejna. (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*: 1 on 01.08.1990 off I-Aħrax Point.

**Eye-Browed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus*: 1 on 31st October 1990 at Mellieħa.

Most of the accepted records which have occurred during the years 1996-1999 have appeared in the Systematic List 1996-1999 (*Il-Merill* (2005) No. 31 pp.1-34). Following is the list of accepted records.

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*: 1 on 17.12.2002 Qawra (EB) and Aħrax (CC).

**White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*: 1 wounded juv at Ġhadira from 17-19.11.1999 (died on 20.11.1999) (CG *et al.*).

**Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis*: 1 on 20.01.2001 at Marsalforn Valley, Gozo (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**). Photograph of specimen examined by RC

**Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*: 3 at Ġhadira on 17.12.2004 (CG *et al.*). 3 at Salina on 09.05.2009 (EB/RG/AR).

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*: 2 on 18.11.2001 at Qawra (CC/MS).

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*: 2 on 18-11-05 at St.Thomas Bay (photograph of 1 specimen examined by RC).

**Smew** *Mergellus albellus*: 1 on 20.12.2001 at Ġhadira (CG).

**Balearic Shearwater** *Puffinus mauretanicus*: 3 on 24-10-02 at Qawra (CC/RG); 1 on 29-11-03 at Ġhallis (EB/DA) (**1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> records for Malta**).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* **race lucidus/moroccanus**: 1 on 19.11.2004 at Qawra (RG/CC).

**Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*: 3 on 19.11.2004 at Qawra (RG/CC).

**Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*: 1 on 07.09.1996 at Tas-Safra (MS/MS)

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*: 1 on 27-11-04 at Qawra (RG/NG); 1 on 03-11-07 at Ramla Bay (GH/JS).

**Great White Heron** *Egretta alba*: 1 on 21.08.1996 at St.Elmo Pt.(CM); 1 on 08.09.1996 at St.Elmo Pt. (CM).

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*: 1 on 20.03.1999 at Luqa Airfield (MS/MS/DA).

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*: 1 on 13.09.1998 at Marsascula (JS); 1(juv.) on 26.09.1998 at Qawra (CC/MS).

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*: Immature male on 01.09.96 at Ġhallis (MS/MS); female on 20.10.1996 at Ġhallis (MS/MS);

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*: 1 on 14.09.1997 at Mdina (MS); 1 on 28.09.1997 at Buskett (MS); 1 on 28.09.1998 at Dwejra (Malta), (CC); 1 at Ta' Pinu on 01/04/05 (IB/DA).

**Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*: 1 dark phase on 13.09.1998 at Baħar iċ-Ċaghak (MS); 1 on 30.09.2001 at St. Elmo (MS).

**Saker** *Falco cherrug*: 1 on 27.10.2002 at Qawra (MS); 1 on 25.03.2005 at Mizieb (RV).

**Striped Crake** *Porzana marginalis*: 1 shot in Apr 2004 at Siggiewi – photograph of specimen examined by RC. (**2<sup>nd</sup> record for Malta**).

**Allen's Gallinule** *Porphyrio alleni*: 1 found freshly dead on 08.01.2010 at Santa Venera (specimen and photograph examined). **2<sup>nd</sup> record for Malta**.

**Purple Swamp-hen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*: 1 from 01-07.04.2010 (AC/RV et al.) (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor*: 1 on 21.05.2008 at Luqa Airfield (EB et al.). 2 on 04-05.02.2009 at Luqa Airfield (EB et al.); 1 on 17.02.09 at Luqa Airfield (RC).

**Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola*: 1 on 05.11.1999 at B'Kara (MS).

**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus*: 1 at Għadira on 13.05.2002 (CG); 19 on 16.09.2002 at M'Scala (EB/DA); 2 (ad & juv) at Salina on 18.09.2004 (RG/CC/NG); 2 on 12.05.2005 at Xrobb il-Għagin (JPF).

**Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*: 1 on 30.09.1998 at Żejtun - specimen and photograph examined by RC; 1 on 13.06.2009 at Għadira (RG et al.)

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*: 1 on 15 to 16 Jul 2002 Għadira (CG et al.); 1 from 10.05 to 14.05.2006 Għadira (CG/RG et al.)

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subbrifcollis*: 1 in September 1998 at Wied Ghar dalam l/o Għaxaq (SS/JS/JJB) (specimen at NMNH).

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*: 1 at Marsa on 16-17.03.1996 (CM).

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*: 1 on 11-08-06 at Qawra (JEP); 49 on 31.03.2010 off Cirkewwa (RG et al.).

**Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*: 1 found dead on 04.01.1997 at St. Elmo Pt. (MS).

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*: 1 on 31.03.1996 at North Comino Channel (MAF/MC/PA); 1 on 25.04.1996 at Qrejten Pt. (MS); 1 on 19.03.1999 at Qammieħ (MS et al.); 1 on 11.04.1999 at Qawra (MS/MS); 1 at Qawra on 14.11.1999 (CC et al.).

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*: 1 on 03.02.2002 off Qawra (MS, RG)

**Long-Tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*: 1 on 16.08.2005 at M'Scala (EB/RG)

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua*: Qammieħ; 1 on 31.03.1999 (CC/MS/RG); 1 on 18.03.2000 at Qammieħ (EB, CC, MS);

**Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii*: 1 on 21.01.1996 at Għadira (DC); 1 sub-adult on 24-25 ta' April 1997 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 31.01.2005 at Għadira (CG).

**Common Gull** *Larus canus*: 1 from 20.01 to 19.02.1996 at Għadira (CG et al.); 1 (1<sup>st</sup> year) on 05.11.1997 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 23.12.2002 at Qawra (EB/RG/CC); 1 on 28.12.2002 at Pt. St. Elmo (MS); 1 on 04.02.2003 Għadira (CG); 2 on 15.11.2004 M'Scala (EB/RG); 1 on 19.11.2004 at Marsascala (EB); 1 on 20.11.2004 at San Luċjan (EB/DA); 1 on 07-04.2006 M'Scala (EB); 1 on 26-01.2007 Għadira (VF/RV et al.).

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*: 1 on 02.01.2000 at Għallis (MS); 1 on 09.11.2002 at Pt. St. Elmo (MS); 1 on 25.01.2003 off Pt. St. Elmo (MS et al.); 1 on 04.02.2003 at Sliema (JAM); 1 from 22.12 to 26.12.05 Qawra (EB/RG/CC).

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons*: 1 on 23.04.1997 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 02.05.1998 at Għadira (CG); 1 adult on 03.05.1998 at Għadira (DC); 1 on 04.05.1998 at Għadira Bay (CG).

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida*: 1 on 30.05.1997 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 01.06.1997 at Għadira (CG); 3 on 02.04.1998 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 29.05.1998 at Għadira (CG); 1 on 09.06.1999 at Manoel Island (JAM).

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*: 1 on 07.10.1996 at St. Elmo Pt. (CM/JV).

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*: 1 on 25/07/85 at M'Xlokk (specimen and photograph examined). (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis*: 1 in September 1989 at Munxar Pt. (specimen and photograph examined). (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*: 1 found dead in February 1980 at Għadira (specimen and photograph examined).

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*: 1 found dead on 21.02.1999 at Salina (MS); 1 mist-netted (had lead shot, died later) on 23.04.1999 at Comino (JMM/MG/VC); 1 on 02.07.2000 at Għadira (DC); 1 on 13.10.2000 at Simar (DA).

**Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis*: 1 on 05.05.1997 at Comino (JJB/CM); 1 on 15.07.2001 at Għadira (DC); 1 on 04.07.2002 at Għadira (CG) (records accepted but origin uncertain).

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis*: 1 at Buskett on 13.09.2003 (RG et al.); 1 on 05.06.2009 at Dwejra, Gozo (JS/JJB).

**Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor*: 1 on 13.02.1997 at San Gwann (MS); 1 on 18.02.1997 at San Gwann (MS); 1 from 03.07 to 06.07.2006 at Ta' Lambert Gozo (ringed & photographed - JS/GH); 1 on 06 July 2008 at Buskett (RG).

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*: 1 on 09.04.2004 at Salina (EB et al.)

**Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura*: 1 from 31.03.2010 to 05.04.2010 at Delimara (JB/EB/RG et al.).

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*: 1 on 27.10.1996 at St. Elmo Pt. (IB/MS/MS);

**Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens*: 1 from 02-03.04.2010 at Ta' Ċenċ (JS et al.)

**Shore Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*: 1 on 02-03.06.2007 at Xaġħra L-Ħamra (RG et al.)

**Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: 2 on 29.11.2004 at Buskett (RG).

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*: 1 ringed on 09-12-02 at Għadira (CG) (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).

**Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis*: 1 ringed on 12.10.1997 at Lunzjata (JG).

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*: 1 ringed on 03.04.1997 on Lunzjata (JG); 1 on 02.11.1996 at Addolorata Cemetery (MS); 1 on 17.10.2000 at Għadira (CG); 1 ringed on 19.10.2000 at Simar (CC); 1 on 19.11.2004 at Targa Gap (MS).

**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi*: 1 ringed at Lunzjata on 23.10.1999 (JG/JM); 1 ringed on 02.11.2007 at Comino (AR) (**2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> records for Malta**).

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*: 1 ringed on 02.11.1997 at Simar (RG); 1 from 29.01 to 05.05.2000 at Għadira - ringed (CG); 1 from 06.01 to 06.04.2004 Simar – ringed (CC); 1 from 31.10.2008 to 19.11.2008 at Għadira (CG et al.); 1 ringed on 01.11.2009 at Rabat (Saqqajja) (MVG/RG/IB).

- Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus*: 1 at Buskett on 20.05.2005 to 20.07.2005 (RG/NG/MG/MVG/OC/MS *et al.*); 1 at Simar from 27.02.2010 to 18.03.2010 (EB/CC/RG); 1 at Ghadira on 27.02.2010 to 06.03.2010 (DC/RG). (**1<sup>st</sup> records for Malta**).
- Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*: 1 ringed on 12.05.2003 at Comino (JS/JG); 1 1<sup>st</sup> year bird ringed on 14.09.2007 at Ghadira (CG) (**3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> records for Malta**).
- Rüppell's Warbler** *Sylvia rueppelli*: 1 on 15.03.1996 at Clapham Junction (CM); 1 on 23.03.1999 at Żabbar (Mas.S); 1 from 27.03 to 01.04.2006 at Dwejra (Malta) (RG/EB/CC).
- Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*: 1 ringed on 02.05.1997 at Comino (CC); 1 ringed on 11.05.2000 (KC/CM at Comino); 1 ringed on 19.08.2000 at Ghadira (CG).
- River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*: 1 ringed on 21.09.2004 at Rabat (MM).
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida*: 1 ringed on 20-21st May 2001 at Ghadira (DC); 1 ringed on 30.04.07 at Sarraflu (EB/RG *et al.*)
- Western Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais opaca*: 1 ringed on 05.05.1998 at Comino (JMM/JV); 1 ringed on 08.05.1998 at Comino (JMM); 1 ringed on 04.05.1999 at Comino (JMM/JS/JJB); 1 on 08.05.2002 at Comino (JJB); 1 ringed on 05.05.2004 at Lunzjata (JS/JG).
- Eastern/Western Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida/opaca*: 1 ringed at Ghadira on 13-14.05.1998 (CG).
- Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta*: 1 on 26.04.1997 at Ghadira (CG); 1 on 04.05.1998 at Comino (JMM); 1 on 01.05.2001 at Comino (JJB/MM/RG/EB/DA); 1 on 08.05.2002 at Comino (JJB/JPF); all records of birds ringed.
- Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*: 1 on 28.09.1997, 1 on 04.09.1998, 1 on 09.09.1998, & 3 on 16.09.1998, all at Lunzjata (JG) 1 on 15.09.2000, & 1 on 26.09.2000 both at Lunzjata (JG/JS/GH); 1 on 26.08.2001 at Wied il-Luq (JMM/MM/IB/AC); 1 on 09.09.2004 at Mellieħa (DC); 1 on 31.08.2005 at Buskett (JAM); 1 on 08.09.2005 at Rabat (MVG); all records of birds ringed.
- Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*: 1 ringed on 13.10.1998 at Lunzjata (JG). (**3<sup>rd</sup> record for Malta**).
- Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus Agricola*: 1 ringed on 11.09.2000 at Ghadira (CG). (**3<sup>rd</sup> record for Malta**).
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*: 1 at Sliema on 28.09.1998 (FB).
- Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope*: 1 ringed on 25.01.2004 at Rabat (MG/MM) (**1<sup>st</sup> record for Malta**).
- Moussier's Redstart** *Phoenicurus moussieri*: 4+ on 09.04.2000 at Dwejra, Gozo (JG/GH); 1 on 15.03.2005 at Żebbug (Gozo) (EH/EAH *et al.*); 1 from 30.11.2008 to 01.03.2009 at Xagħra I-Ħamra (AR *et al.*).
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*: 1 on 31.08.1996 at Marsa (CM/SS); 1 on 26.03.2000 at Qawra (MS).
- Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*: 1 on 13.12.2001 at St. Lucian (EB); 1 from 11.12 to 25.12.2005 Migra Ferha (MM *et al.*); 1 from 05.12 to 09.12.2007 at Qammieħ (RG/EB *et al.*).
- Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*: 2 on 23 Nov 2002 at Qammieħ (MS/JPF).
- Eye-browed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus*: 1 in January 1999 at Mtaħleb (live specimen photographed); 1 in Oct 1999 or 2000 Wardija (specimen and photograph examined).
- Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata*: 1 ringed on 12.04.1997 at Lunzjata (JG); 1 (female) ringed on 13.04.1997 at Simar(RG); 1 ringed on 29.04.1998 at Ghadira (CG); 1 on 13 Apr 2002 at Kennedy Grove (MS/MP); 1 on 24.04.2002 at Wied il-Mielħa (Gozo) (RI); 1 ringed on 25.04.2002 at Lunzjata (JG/JM); 1 ringed on 15.04.2003 at Ghadira (CG); 1 ringed on 16.04.2003 at Ghadira (CG); 1 ringed on 14.04.2004 at Comino (MG); 1 ringed on 07.10.2004 at Buskett (MM); 1 ringed on 23.03.2005 Ghadira (CG); 1 photographed on 30.03.06 at Mosta (SF); 1 female on 07.04.10 at Comino (NG).
- Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris*: 1 on 10.11.2004 at Għar Ħasan (specimen examined).
- Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodsgoni*: 1 ringed on 30.11.2003 at Buskett (MG/MM); 1 ringed on 12.12.2005 at Buskett (JAM/MVG); 1 from 17.02 to 25.02.2007 at Saqqajja, Rabat (ringed) (MVG/CGB); 1 ringed on 08.11.2008 at Rabat (MVG/CGB).
- Water Pipit** (*Anthus spinoletta*): 1 on 18.02.1996 at Ta' Qali (MS/MS); 1 ringed on 27.10.1997 at Rabat (MVG); 1 on 08.02.1998 at Anchor Bay (MS); 31.10.1999 at Ta' Qali (MS/MS).
- Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*: 6 (flock) on 06.10.1996 at Kennedy Grove, Salina (MS/MS).
- Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus*: 1 on 12.03.2010 at Mnajdra (NH).
- Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*: 1 immature male on 04.09.1998 at Mdina (MS); 1 juv ringed on 14.09.1998 at Ghadira (CG); 1 (imm.) ringed on 27.09.1998 at Rabat (MVG); 1 ringed on 18.10.1998 at Lunzjata (JG/JM).
- Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: 1 on 24.01.1993 at Manikata (specimen examined); 1 on 07.10.1999 at Dwejra (Malta) (RG); 1 on 23.09.2000 at Qawra (MS/ CC).
- Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis*: 1 on 18-19.11.2001 at Il-Mielħa (Xagħra) (specimen and photograph examined).
- Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*: 1 trapped in early October 2008 at l/o Qrendi (seized by Police on 11.10.2008 – ringed and released at Ghadira on 13.10.2008 - specimen and photograph examined).
- Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*: 1 male trapped on 09.11.1998 at ix-Xatt l-Aħmar (Gozo) (specimen examined). 1 on 22.10.07 at Ta' L-Għejjun, Gozo (JT/JS).
- Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*: 1 on 23.10.2003 at Comino (JS/MG).
- Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia*: 1 on 06.11.2003 at Nadur, Gozo (specimen and photograph examined).
- Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*: 1 on 04.05.2000 at Fomm ir-Riħ (JV).
- Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica*: 1 ringed on 04.11.1997 at Lunzjata (JG/JS); 1 ringed on 03.11.1998 at Lunzjata (JG).
- Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*: 1 ringed on 02.11.1998 at Lunzjata (JG); 1 ringed at Salina on 19/11/08 (MVG); 1 ringed at Ghadira on 29/10/09 (CG).
- Black-Headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala*: 1 male at Cirkewwa on 03.04.2004(RG/CC).

## Rejected Records

The following records have been discussed during meetings of the Rarities Committee and rejected as they were not felt to have had sufficient evidence to be accepted under the criteria of the AERC. In some cases, submissions with the descriptions were sent to experts abroad for their comment before a final decision was taken. The submitters and the reasons for refusals are not included in this report.

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*: 2 on 22.09.1999 over Mdina.  
**Lanner** *Falco biarmicus*: 1 found shot (injured) on 15.11.2004 at Ghajn Żejtuna.  
**Barbary Falcon** *Falco pelegrinoides*: 1 on 15.10.2002 Buskett; 1 on 02.10.2004 at Buskett.  
**Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax*: 1 on 15.10.2002 at San Ġwann.  
**Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus*: 1 on 25.06.2000 at Salina.  
**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*: 1 on 11.11.2001 off Qawra.  
**Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*: 1 on 17 Jan 1999 off Pt.St.Elmo; 1 on 29.12.2001 at Qawra; 1 on 26.01.2002 off Pt.St.Elmo.  
**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*: 1 on 26.12.1999 at Qawra. 1 (1<sup>st</sup> winter) on 18.01.2003 at Pt. St. Elmo.  
**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus*: 1 on 31 Dec 2002 off Pt St. Elmo.  
**Razorbill** *Alca torda*: 1 on 16.12.2002 off NE Coast.  
**Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*: 1 on 09.12.2001 off Qawra.  
**Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis*: 1 on 12 Sep 2002 San Ġwann  
**Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius*: 1 on 07.04.2000 at B'kara  
**Black-browed Warbler** *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*: 1 at San Anton Gardens on 02.05.1993.  
**Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus*: 1 on 26.10.2000 at B'kara.  
**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*: 1 female on 02.04.2000 at Ġerma.  
**Fulvous Babbler** *Turdoides fulvus*: 1 on 19.04.2005 at Ghadira.

## Revisited Records

A record of a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* (April 1999) which was accepted at the meeting of the National Rarities Committee held on 02.03.01 (and which has appeared in print elsewhere) was recently revisited after new photos of the specimen were presented to the Committee. The Committee were also given the opportunity to examine the specimen itself, which now forms part of the collections at the National Museum of Natural History, and compared it with skins and photos of confirmed Buff-breasted Sandpipers. On the basis of these comparisons the record was rejected.

## Pending Records

The following is a list of records which have been submitted to the Rarities Committee but have not yet been discussed. These will be dealt with at the next Rarities Committee meeting.

**Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus*: 1 on 18.07.2009 at Ġhallis.  
**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus*: 1 on 15.02.2005 at Qawra.  
**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus*: 1 (injured) on 02.09.2010 at Ghadira.  
**Sabine's Gull** *Xema sabini*: 2 specimens in private collections (December 2005 – off Wied il-Ghajn, and late September 2007 off M'Xlokk) – specimens in private collections – photographed.  
**Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis*: 1 on 11.01.2009 at B'buġa.  
**Egyptian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus aegyptius*: 1 on 19.10.2009 at Rabat.  
**Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cinctura*: 1 on 11.11.2010 l.o. Xlendi.  
**Western Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia hortensis*: 1 from 27.05.2010 to 06.06.2010 at Buskett.  
**African Desert** *Sylvia deserti*: 1 on 22-23.04.2010 at Miġra l-Ferħa.  
**Marmora's Warbler** *Sylvia sarda*: 1 on 27-30.10.2010 at Comino.  
**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*: 1 trapped in Nov 2010 at Għarb (confiscated by police) released on 20.11.2001.  
**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* on 01&03.11.2010 at Ghadira.

## Discussions & other Decisions

It was decided that

- (a) the **Bar-headed Goose** *Anser indicus*, a specimen of which was shot in December 1993 at St. Thomas Bay when it was seen coming from offshore, should be kept in Category D.
- (b) the **Chukar** *Alectoris chukar* is kept in Category C as this species seems to have established itself on Comino after its introduction and numbers have increased. (See regulation 14 above).
- (c) the **Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* accepted records above should be kept in category D.

## Conclusion

One of the main problems of Rarities Committees in Europe is that some bird watchers do not submit descriptions for official recognition and that a number of records will in due course probably be lost owing to lack of any supporting documentation. This problem also preoccupies the Rarities Committee in Malta. Apart from this some bird-watchers do not consider that a notebook and a pencil are essential tools as much as a pair of binoculars is and more often than not descriptions are jotted down later from memory. Very often records are too poorly documented for a good decision to be

## **Il-Merill 32 2010**

reached. The use of digital photography has helped immensely in the last years, but this should mainly support and not replace totally reliable conventional methods as the origin of photographs can also be questioned. Fortunately in Malta there is only one established ornithological association (BirdLife Malta – formerly Malta Ornithological Society) and only one ornithological journal (*Il-Merill*). As the Rarities Committee is administered by this association only officially accepted records by this Committee are published in this journal, although local newspapers and foreign journals do occasionally carry unverified reports of rare birds.

One of the main tasks of the Rarities Committee should be to update and maintain the national list of the birds of Malta, allocating species to various categories, and detailing accepted records of rare and vagrant species. The Committee will not abstain from reviewing accepted or rejected records during its period of existence if new evidence is presented. It should also embark on a re-assessment of old records published in earlier literature, and if there is clear evidence that a mistake was made or that records were published without proper documentation, will, without being outright ruthless, grade such records as doubtful and/or rejected.

Some European Rarities Committees are very stringent for firsts or whole scale species reviews. This Committee is now following this line and where possible requires photographic evidence. So far the Committee has not taken on board observer reviews, such as have been carried out by some European Committees where an observer is considered unreliable when evidence has built up to that stage. So far the Rarities Committee have not commented on records which have not been submitted but which have appeared in the public domain. It may have to do so in future to clear any doubts and to put the record straight as it is done by some European Rarities Committees.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all I would like to thank all those bird watchers who co-operated with the Rarities Committee by regularly submitting their records with descriptions and/or photographs. Without their co-operation the Rarities Committee would be superfluous. I would also like to thank Joe Sultana who prepared the first draft of this report, Edward Bonavia who thoroughly checked all the records, and all the members of the Rarities Committee for being patient in examining all the submissions and for their valid comments to this report. Any member who would like any further information on all the above mentioned records should contact the undersigned

**John Attard Montalto**  
**(Rarities Committee Co-ordinator)**  
**o.b.o the Members of the Rarities Committee**

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