

Vertebrate inclusions in the diet of the Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

The diet of the Spanish Sparrow *P. hispaniolensis* consists of plant material and invertebrates; that of the House Sparrow, which converges ecologically with the Spanish Sparrow in the Mediterranean region (the species is absent from the Maltese Islands though), is similar (Snow & Perrins 1998). In the Maltese Islands, Roberts (1954) reports that Spanish Sparrows regularly feed on crops and adds that insects are eaten during spring and summer. Sultana and Gauci (1982) also report the species feeding on crops.

At mid-day on 2 July 1999, in an urban area, a Spanish Sparrow was observed repeatedly attacking a Maltese Wall Lizard *Podarcis filfolensis*. For some reason the lizard did not attempt to escape. The bird was then disturbed and flew off. Upon close inspection the lizard, an adult female, was found to be in good condition if somewhat sluggish.

References

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Editorial Note: A Spanish Sparrow was reported eating a lizard on 14th May 1987 in the Funchal Botanic Gardens, Madeira (see Zonfrillo, B. 1992. Spanish Sparrow eating Lizard. *British Birds* 85: 499).

The Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* nesting on Comino

The Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* is a common migrant in the Maltese Islands, both in spring and in autumn; a few birds overwinter in suitable localities. Occasional pairs breed and probably the species would be a regular breeding bird were it not for human persecution (Sultana & Gauci 1982). The species bred on Comino in 1994, when a pair with two fledged young was observed in the last week of June. The last nest on record was noted at Ta' Cenc cliffs in Gozo, on 2 June 1945; the nest contained young about a fortnight old (Gibb 1951).

On 8 April 1990 a pair of Common Kestrels were observed performing a flight display on the north-eastern side of the island of Comino. On April 14 they were observed copulating on a rubble wall (A. Casha, pers. comm.), suggesting breeding in the area. On April 27 a nest was located in a hole 3.6 metres below the edge of the nearby sea cliffs; although there was no sign of the adult birds, the nest site was characterised by droppings and dry grass. On April 27 and 31 the female was noted to be incubating. The site was last visited on June 7, when closer inspection with the help of a mirror lowered from the cliff edge revealed a nest with three eggs; the nesting hole was considerably deep but the nest itself was very close to the entrance. On this occasion there was no sign of the adults.

It should be noted that after April 14 only the female was observed - the male must have been shot soon after this date. The female must have deserted the nest after the eggs failed to hatch, possibly due to the female spending a lot of time away hunting. Village (1990) suggests that female Common Kestrels desert their clutches if they are not fed sufficiently by their mate and must hunt for themselves, and that the ability of males to supply food to their mates may be the main factor affecting the timing and success of breeding.

References

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