

First breeding record of Rufous Nightingale ***Luscinia megarhynchos***

The Rufous Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* is a common passage migrant in Malta from mid-March to mid-May, with a few birds until late May and from mid-August to mid-October. Occasional single birds have also been recorded in June at Buskett (Sultana & Gauci 1982). There are no documented breeding records of the Rufous Nightingale in Malta. Ardoino (1928) and Despott (1932) stated that it bred but did not mention any breeding records.

On the morning of 28 May 1995 a male bird was in full song at Wied il-Luq, Buskett – a valley with a narrow strip of deciduous woodland with a thick undergrowth. The song was repeated several times and on one occasion the bird was seen chasing away a Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. The area was visited again in the morning of 4 June. The singing male was still present, while another bird, presumably a female, was observed carrying dry nest material towards the nearby undergrowth. After searching the area a nearly completed nest was discovered. Two days later the nest was still empty and the male was again heard singing in the vicinity. On visiting the site again on the morning of 11 June, the female was noted incubating 4 eggs. Unfortunately the next day the nest was empty. The eggs must have been predated upon by Brown Rats *Rattus norvegicus*, which infest the area.

On 25 June a second nest was found some 17m away from the first one. It contained broken egg shells of at least three eggs. Loose tail feathers of the female were also noted in and around the nest, suggesting that a predator, most likely a Brown Rat, must have attacked the female while incubating. The male was still present and singing on 3 July but there was no sign of the female.

The area where the nests were found is dominated by large trees, mainly White Poplar *Populus alba*, Elm *Elmus* sp. and Italian Cypress *Cupressus sempervirens*, with thick undergrowth of Bramble *Rubus ulmifolius*, Common Goosegrass *Galium aparine* and Ivy *Hedera helix*.

The first nest was built in the Bramble and the Common Goosegrass, 0.5m above the ground, the second nest in the Bramble and in the Ivy a little less than 0.5m above the ground. Both nests were rather loosely built of dead leaves and dry grasses with the inside lined with finer dried grasses, forming a neat cup. The eggs were subelliptical, smooth and slightly glossy and of grey-green colour. Both nests were close to a public footpath but very well concealed.

References

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Despott, G. 1932. Ornitologia delle Isole Maltese. *Riv. Ital. Orn.* (2) 2:119-136.
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Raymond Galea

First breeding record of Little Ringed Plover ***Charadrius dubius***

The Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* is a common passage migrant from early March to late May and from late July to early November. It has never been recorded breeding in the Maltese Islands (Sultana & Gauci 1982). It has always been frequently recorded at Ghadira, a small wetland area in the north of the island of Malta, but the maximum stay of individual ringed birds which were retrapped never exceeded 5 days (Gauci 1990). Engineering works with heavy machinery in the area, which started in 1980, and continued for 3 consecutive summers, created a number of small islands in a relatively low extensive pool.

In 1995 a pair bred for the first time on one of the low islands in the area and 3 eggs were laid. Two of these hatched on 29-30 June and one of the young was still present on 7 August. Both adult birds and the newly-fledged young were ringed. A ringed male, presumably one of the birds that bred in 1995, and an unringed female bred successfully in the following 3 years. Two young hatched in 1996 and 3 on 1 August 1997. In 1998 the female was already noted incubating its eggs on 29 April and 4 young hatched on 23 May. Only one fledged. On 3 June

the female had already laid a second clutch of 4 eggs which hatched on 4 July. Unfortunately none of these succeeded to fledge as they were taken either by stray cats or other predators.

References

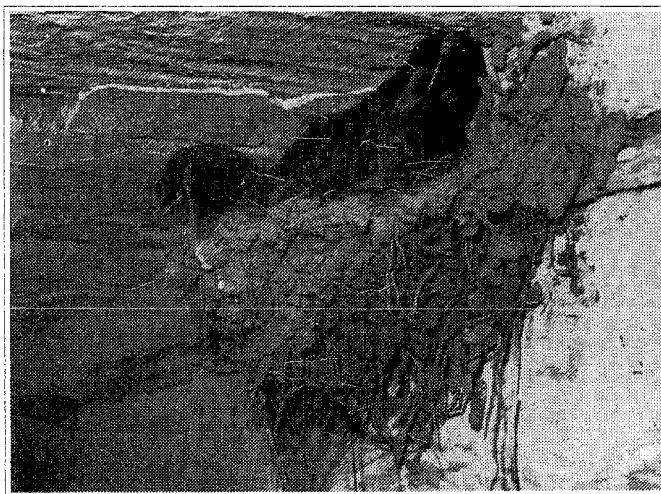
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Charles Gauci & Joe Sultana

~~Second breeding record of Barn Swallow~~ ~~*Hirundo rustica*~~

The Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* is a very common passage migrant in spring and autumn. There has been only one documented breeding record in the Maltese Islands; a pair bred at Mqabba in July 1974 and raised a brood of 4 which fledged on 2 August (Sultana & Gauci 1975).

In July 1995 a pair nested in an old, derelict farmhouse limits of Bidnija. Most of the doors and windows were either broken or missing. The nest was built of mud and dry grass, and located near the middle of a wooden beam very close to the ceiling, in a small room at ground floor level. It was about 3m above the ground. A farmer informed the writer that the birds had collected the mud from the edge of a small water hole in nearby fields. On 28 July the nest contained 4 young which were ready to fledge. They must have fledged the following day as the nest was empty on 30 July.



Raymond Galea

Fig 1. The nest of *H. rustica* at Bidnija.

Reference

- Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. 1975. Eight Ornithological Notes 1974-1975. *II-Merill* 15: 2-4.

Raymond Galea

~~Breeding records of Reed Warbler~~ ~~*Acrocephalus scirpaceus* 1995-1998~~

The Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* is a fairly common migrant in autumn from late July to October. In spring it is generally very scarce from late March to early June (Sultana & Gauci 1982). It was first recorded breeding in Malta in July 1977 when 4 newly fledged young accompanied by an adult were observed at Salina (Cachia-Zammit & Testa 1977-78). From 1995 to 1998 the species has been recorded breeding a number of times at Salina and Is Simar. Following is a compilation of these records.

Breeding records at Salina

Salina consists of a network of salt pans fringed by ditches overgrown with the Common Reed *Phragmites australis*.

1995

Two adult birds were observed singing on 12 June. A nest with 4 eggs was located in the Common Reed on 21 June. The nest was 1.5m above dry ground and 2m away from the water's edge. On 30 June both adults were feeding four pulli of c. 7 days. On 8 July the nest was empty and the fledged young and the adults were heard calling in the vicinity.