

First breeding record of the Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

On the morning of 17 July 1993, whilst bird ringing at Rabat, a Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* was flushed from the ground and it alighted on some bushes a few metres away fully exposed to us. It acted in the same way on the two occasions that it was flushed, giving the impression that it was either a very tame or an injured bird. Nearby a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* was heard uttering an alarm call continuously and on one occasion it was seen very close to the Cuckoo.

When subsequently the bird was mist-netted it turned out to be an immature Cuckoo. In the hand it was much smaller than an adult bird. It also showed signs of wax (ca.20mm) on the shafts of the primaries and the tail feathers. Down was also visible near the undertail coverts. It was obvious that the bird was very recently fledged and could not have moved far from its nest site.

Its measurements were: wing 179mm; tail 142mm; and its weight was 56g. Fat score was zero. The upper parts were black with fine white bars on the neck, giving an impression of a white patch. The primaries were very dark grey with white bars, whilst the secondaries were dark grey with chestnut bars. The tail was black with white bars, with the underside greyish white with dark bars. The beak was horn-black with a very conspicuous orange gape. The legs were of a straw to orange colour and the iris mellow brown.

The behaviour of the Cetti's Warbler indicates that it had fostered the Cuckoo. In the area the Cetti's Warbler is a common breeder with 3-4 males present all year round. The bird was not seen on subsequent visits to the site, but in a conversation with a farmer it was established that the bird was sporadically seen feeding in vineyards in the same area.

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First breeding records of Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

The Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* is a common spring and autumn passage migrant. There is only one 'summer' record, on 9 June 1983 (Gauci 1986-87).

1st breeding record: A Tawny Pipit was observed singing from an exposed perch in a garigue area alongside the road above Dingli Cliffs on 1 July 1993 at 06.30hrs. The bird was singing on a small territory, flying from one perch to another and also perching on rocks on the ground. It was also observed in an undulating song flight. This behaviour suggested breeding and the ground was searched for a possible nest. At this time the bird circled just above our heads, singing from time to time, and landing very close to us. At one time another bird, this time a fully fledged young (tail not fully grown) approached the site, and the singing adult flew near him, after which both left in different directions. Next day, an adult and a juvenile were seen together, with the adult bird carrying a food item in its bill. On the morning of 4 July two adults, possibly male and female, and a juvenile were seen together, when one of the adults was observed feeding a worm to the young bird. The three birds were seen again on 8 July. The area was subsequently visited several times and one last bird was seen on 14 July. In most cases only one or both adults were seen, singing in the same area.

2nd breeding record: In the afternoon of 1 July 1993, a garigue area near Rdum Majesa was visited to check for possible breeding by another pair of Tawny Pipits after an adult bird had been observed singing there on 7 June. Two adult birds were located and observed together, mainly running on the rocky ground and feeding on insects. They only flew short distances and remained in the same area. At least one bird was observed in song flight. On 3 July the two birds were observed again feeding together in the same area. When one bird flew the other followed, suggesting pair bonding. One bird was again observed in song flight. The area was visited again on 5 and 8 July, two adults being seen on both occasions. Breeding was confirmed on 10 July when two adults and a fledged juvenile were seen together. One adult was seen bringing food several times and feeding it to the young bird. The young bird, although flying very well, had a shorter tail than the adults and begged for food as the adult approached with food. The juvenile bird stayed in the same area when the adult bird left to bring food. As in the previous case only one juvenile bird was seen. The birds were last seen on 16 July.

Juveniles are easily identified from adults in having more streaks on the mantle and more spots on the breast. It is also to be noted that on two occasions one of the adult birds was seen chasing Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* entering its territory at Rdum Majesa.

Reference

Gauci, C. 1986-87. Systematic List for 1983-84. II-Merill 24 : 21-38.

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~~Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* found breeding on the east coast of Malta~~

~~The Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* is a common breeding visitor, and its breeding grounds are situated along the southern cliffs of Malta and Gozo and on Filfla. (Sultana & Gauci 1982, Cachia-Zammit & Borg 1986-87).~~

~~In 1969, a colony of Mediterranean Shearwaters *Puffinus yelkouan* was discovered along the northeastern coast of Malta (Sultana et al. 1975). An accessible site was monitored regularly in the following years. During these visits, single Cory's have been heard calling along the cliffs and six adults have been caught and ringed up to 1992, but actual breeding had never been confirmed (MOS records).~~

~~The area was visited on 26 May 1993 to ring the young of Mediterranean Shearwaters. One nest, which was occupied by a pair of Mediterranean Shearwaters in March, was taken over by a pair of Cory's Shearwaters, and an adult male (sexed from cloacal inspection as well as by call) was found incubating. During subsequent visits, the female, as well as the young, which eventually fledged successfully, were also ringed. At least three other pairs were heard calling throughout the breeding season, from inaccessible crevices.~~

~~Unfortunately, after heavy storms in February 1994, part of the cliff gave way and tumbled down below, destroying the nesting site. In 1994, the other three pairs were present in inaccessible crevices.~~

References

~~Cachia-Zammit, R. & Borg, J. 1986-87. Notes on the Breeding Biology of the Cory's Shearwater in the Maltese Islands. II-Merill 24: 1-9.~~

~~Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. 1982. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta. The Ornithological Society : Valletta.~~

~~Sultana, J., Gauci, C. & Beaman, M. 1975. A Guide to the Birds of Malta. Malta Ornithological Society : Valletta.~~

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~~Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* found breeding at Ta' Ċenċ, Gozo~~

~~The Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* breeds in large numbers in the boulder and rubble slopes of Filfla (Sultana & Gauci 1982). It has never been recorded breeding elsewhere in the Maltese Islands, although in the 18th century, the historian Canon Agius de Soldanis recounted that he found a 'strange bird' (probably the Storm Petrel) breeding in a cave between Xlendi and Ta' Ċenċ cliffs in Gozo. De Soldanis wrote that small seabirds can be found in a cave called Għar Ilma, where they spend the day in crags, waiting for nightfall to fly out to sea in search of food. He mentions that a foul smell lingers where the birds are found. Fishermen assured him that these birds are not found in any other cave in Gozo or Malta. He wrote that he saw these birds both on the nest and in the hand. In size they were similar to a Song Thrush, with a black bill resembling that of a young pigeon, more~~