

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. // *Merill* 24 : 21-38.

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~~C C "Belvedere" St. Silvester Str., Mosta, MST 06, Malta.~~

~~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

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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

or less reddish near the eyes, and with webbed feet (National Library of Malta - MS 145a - translated into Maltese by Farrugia (1936)).

The Storm Petrel was first described from Filfla by Antonio Schembri (1843). He was informed by Maltese hunters that this petrel does not breed on the south side of Malta, Gozo and Comino, but only on Filfla. Schembri thought he had discovered a new species and named it *Thalassidroma melitensis*. However, a year later, Strickland (1844) compared specimens from Filfla and the British Isles and found them identical. Although Wright (1846) and Despott (1916) wrote that the Storm Petrel was very common on the south side of the island they never mentioned the location of any colonies breeding on the mainland.

In summer 1973 a long dead corpse of a Storm Petrel was found on a ledge in a cave at the base of Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs in Gozo (Sultana et. al. 1975). Since then the cave was visited only once in 1993 but only the Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* was found breeding.

In summer 1994, a survey of the coastline of Gozo was initiated to estimate the breeding population and range of the Cory's Shearwater and the Mediterranean Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*. Particular attention was given to any signs of Storm Petrels. The first visit was organised on 18 June. Although a moderate southwesterly swell made it difficult to get close to the cliffs, JB managed to land in a cave. One young Mediterranean Shearwater was found in a shallow crevice on a shelf situated some 10m above sea-level. After noticing small droppings similar to those of Storm Petrels, an adult Storm Petrel was found incubating in a shallow crevice about 30cm deep. Unfortunately, an increasing sea-swell made it impossible to continue the search.

The cave was visited again on 25 June. This time the nest was found empty. Both incubating adult and the egg had disappeared. Inexplicably, two dead adult Storm Petrels, which could not be retrieved, were seen floating in a wide and deep shaft further in the cave. But the characteristic musky-oily smell of Storm Petrels was still strong, and faint "pipping" sounds were heard from within a deep crevice. Crawling with difficulty on sharp rocks inside the crevice, 8 sitting birds were located in an area of about 9m². Two of the three birds which were accessible were each brooding 1-2 day old chicks, while the third was incubating its egg. Other birds were heard calling deeper in the crevice. It has still to be ascertained whether this cave is the same one referred to by Agius De Soldanis.

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Reference:

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~~Diet of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in a rural area in Gozo~~

~~The Barn Owl *Tyto alba* is a rural as well as a sub-urban species in the Maltese Islands, recorded breeding in crags on sea and inland cliffs, valleys, fortifications, bastions, and quarries (Despott 1916, Sultana & Gauci 1982). Its breeding biology has never been studied in the Maltese Islands due to several disadvantages, including the scarcity of the bird, the inaccessibility of the nest sites and the constant human persecution. The last known breeding pair was shot in 1988 (Fenech & Balzan 1988). Data on the Barn Owl's diet in Malta have been published previously by Sultana (1971), Schembri & Cachia-Zammit (1979), and Borg & Cachia-Zammit (1988). These data, together with the data collected since 1986, are presented in Table 1.~~

~~Since 1986, fifty seven pellets were collected from below a nest site at Mgarr ix Xini Valley, Gozo, where it was last known to breed. Some material was also collected from three other sites, also in Gozo. Five species of~~