

~~Swifts *Apus apus* presumably mating~~

While observing a large flock of hundreds of Swifts *Apus apus* at Dingli Cliffs on 5 June 1992 at 20.30hrs., two Swifts started chasing each other, screaming and shrieking. Suddenly they clasped each other and started rolling while falling down. All this took place for about ten seconds. They were presumably mating. Cramp (1985) states that although there is no proof of insemination, successful copulation in the air is thought likely.

The Swift is a common visitor between March and October but it has never been noted mating in Malta, although it has been recorded breeding by Despott (1916) early this century.

References

- Cramp, S. (ed.) 1985. The Birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. IV. Oxford University Press : Oxford.
Despott, G. 1916. The breeding birds of Malta. Zoologist (4) 20 : 161-181.

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~~Observations of aggressive behaviour in seabirds~~

On 31 March 1994 a Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* was being observed flying on migration in a northeasterly direction off Qammieħ. On approaching the South Comino channel an adult Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* started chasing and mobbing it. After a while, two other Yellow-legged Gulls joined in. Suddenly, the heron, with an outstretched neck, chased the gulls away and kept on its course. However the Yellow-legged Gulls returned and mobbed the heron again, giving up only after the Purple Heron had passed over Cirkewwa.

On 15 December 1990 a Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* was flying low over the water. Suddenly it flew up and chased a Yellow-legged Gull which was carrying food in its mouth. After a lot of mobbing, the Great Skua gave up its chase when the two birds had almost reached the coast. It flew back offshore.

On 4 October 1994 five Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* were seen resting and feeding on the water off Qawra. The gulls flew up when a Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* chased them. The skua followed one gull which was carrying a fish in its beak. Only after the Lesser Black-backed Gull dropped the fish did the Pomarine Skua give up the chase. It picked up the fish and swallowed it a few metres away from the Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Both species of Skuas are rare visitors to Malta.

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Melanistic Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

While observing the raptor migration at Dwejra (Malta) on 25 Sept 1994 at 08.20hrs., a small dark harrier was seen flying low. At first glance it resembled a juvenile Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* as it appeared very dark but its flight was reminiscent of a ringtail harrier. When it started soaring its underparts were observed to be black with lighter primaries and secondaries. The upperparts were also very dark (black) and the bird lacked the white band on the rump.

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