

~~interpretable as follows: the Maltese countryside is very heterogeneous and disturbed, and Maltese agricultural land is a marginal habitat for all three species.~~

~~As the wintering birds arrive and settle down for the winter, they occupy territories which are unsuitable, and other species settle nearby. As competition for food sets in, one species tries to evict other species of Turdidae in order to secure a monopoly of the food resources in the area. Robins and male Stonechats often evict female Black Redstarts which have settled in agricultural land.~~

Reference

~~Cramp, S. (Ed) 1988. The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 5. (Tyrant flycatchers to Thrushes). Oxford University Press, Oxford.~~

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~~First spring records of the Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*~~

~~The Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* has always been recorded in autumn in Malta, as a scarce migrant, from early September to late November (Sultana & Gauci 1982). In 1994 three birds were recorded for the first time in spring: single birds ringed on Comino on 26th and 28th respectively and one seen at Ghadira Nature Reserve on 27th, all in April. All birds were either females or immature males.~~

Reference

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

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The call note of the Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* in Malta

The Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* is a very common autumn migrant and winter visitor from early October to early April with concentrations of about 200 birds in winter in areas where food is plentiful, such as Lunzjata in Gozo (Sultana & Gauci 1982). An average of 1000 Chiffchaffs are ringed every year by ringers. It seems that both the nominate race and the subspecies *abietinus* occur, but no attempt has ever been made to assess the percentage of *abietinus* ringed, as the separation of these two races is rather difficult according to Svensson (1984). Some birds do look greyer than others and sizes also differ. But biometrics are not always helpful to separate these two races as wing and tail lengths overlap to a great extent (Williamson 1976). The other subspecies *P.c. tristis* is not difficult to separate from its plumage (Svensson 1984, & pers. obs.), and 2-5 birds belonging to this race are ringed annually.

An attempt was made to try and note whether there was any difference in the call-note of Chiffchaffs which occur in Malta. The call-note which was very commonly noted was the well-known melancholic 'hueet', but occasionally there was also another different call which can be best described as a low shrilled distress call 'wisst'. Whether this call was of a particular subspecies or not, or whether it was a variance of the usual 'hueet' could not be ascertained.

On the other hand the call-note of the *P.c. tristis* is quite distinctively different from the other Chiffchaffs' call-note. The *tristis* call can be described as resembling a chicken call 'cheep'. This call was heard from *tristis* birds when they were feeding as well as after being released after ringing.

Williamson (1976) wrote that the call-note of *abietinus* is "said to differ from *collybita*, resembling the *cheep* of a chicken in distress". This seems to resemble more the call-note which is here described for the *tristis*.

References

- Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. 1982. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta. The Ornithological Society : Valletta.
 Svensson, L. 1984. Identification Guide to European Passerines (Third revised and enlarged edition). Stockholm.
 Williamson, K. 1967. Identification for Ringers. The Genus *Phylloscopus* (Revised). British Trust for Ornithology.

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Diurnal duck migration over the Maltese Islands

Since the postulation of the 'combination' approach to bird migration, ornithological literature has witnessed an influx of evidence for leading lines. The new approach combined the two conflicting lines of thought that upheld broad and narrow fronts. It was suggested that there was indeed a broad directional trend to migration, the birds flying in a 'standard direction' typical of their particular population while over uniform terrain or the sea; but in addition there were 'leading-lines' delineated by the boundaries between favourable and unfavourable terrain or particular topographical features. When migrants encounter such a factor they tend to fly along it, forming a narrow and concentrated stream. Once the obstacle or feature is surpassed the stream widens out into the broad front again (Matthews 1968). It is now ascertained that (especially) diurnal migrants respond to topographical features and often follow water courses, coastlines and ridges, more so when these are oriented in the direction of their movement (Gauthreaux 1980, & Gill 1990). These features provide a line that is easy both to perceive and follow, making it easier for a bird to compensate for any tendency of a crosswind to displace it sideways from its track. The disadvantage in using a leading line is that many birds following the same route increase the competition for potential staging areas (Baker 1984).

This preliminary note identifies a leading line effect in the sea channel that separates the two main islands of the Maltese archipelago, Malta and Gozo. It is evident from late February to early April and concerns *Anas* species mainly *A. querquedula*, *A. acuta* and *A. crecca*. Observations have been carried out by the present author mainly from Qammich point but also from Ċirkewwa and Ras l-Irqa on Comino and cover the period 1988-1995.

The Malta-Gozo channel is a 4.5km-wide (at its minimum) stretch of water. It is basically funnel-shaped with the mouth of the funnel facing west-southwest. Significantly, the mouth of the funnel consists of high ground; Ta'

Cenè cliffs on the Gozo side and the Marfa Ridge on the Malta side. The island of Comino lies in this channel (see Fig. 1). This is surely very striking topography that could be easily monitored by migrating flocks of Duck; especially so because of their laterally placed eyes. Indeed *A. platyrhynchos*, for instance, has been shown to achieve total panoramic vision without eye movements. Thus while a bird with laterally placed eyes flies towards a topographical feature, its position can be constantly monitored with respect to other features both to the sides and behind, and also to the complete celestial hemisphere above (Martin 1990).

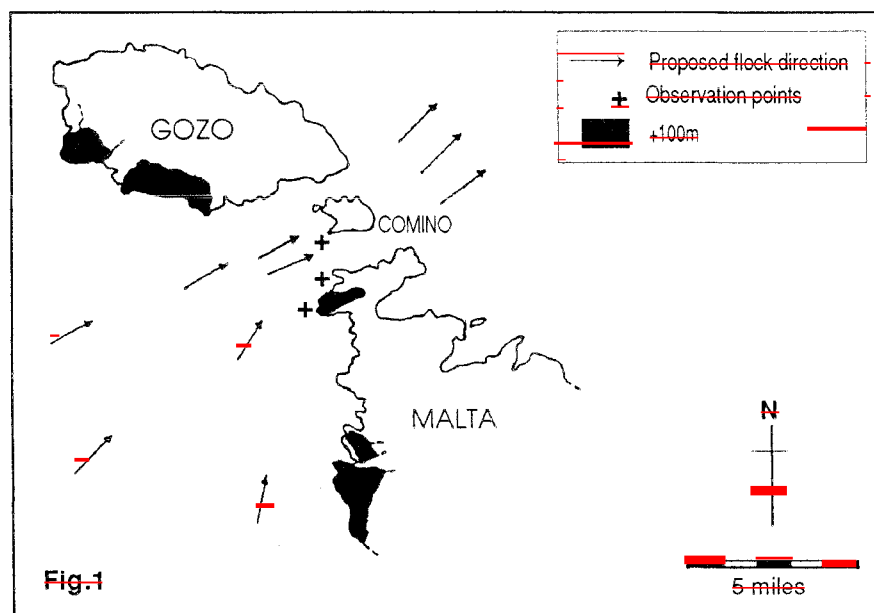


Fig.1