

SOME NOTES ON THE PENDULINE TIT *REMIZ PENDULINUS* AND ITS OCCURRENCE IN MALTA

The Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* is a mainly resident species but with some dispersive, irruptive and cold weather movements. This small tit-like bird breeds in marshy habitats in the palaearctic region. Its breeding range falls mainly between 40 and 50 N. extending from western Europe to China. There has been a gradual westward spread in Europe and in recent years a marked expansion of its range occurred in northern, central and western Europe (Flade *et al.* 1968, Harrison 1982). This expansion also took place at its southwestern limits in Mediterranean France and Spain and the numbers of wintering birds recently recorded southward as far as Morocco have increased (Isenmann 1987). All this is also reflected in an increase of winter records in Malta as will be shown later. Thomsen and Jacobsen (1979) give only one record (10-11 January 1975) for Tunisia. Since then T. Gaultier (in. litt.) informed the present writers that he recorded one in January 1989 and 2 in March 1990 in two different localities in Tunisia. Iapichino & Massa (1989) estimate a breeding population of less than 100 pairs in Sicily and state that there is no regular movement although family parties wander far from breeding areas from July onwards.

The behaviour and movements of this species are quite unpredictable. A female bearing a Radolfzell ring BT30.689 is known to have bred successfully twice in the breeding season of 1986 in two places at a distance of more than 200 km in Germany, raising 5 young in one place and 6 in the second (Franz *et al.* 1987). The third Penduline Tit to be ringed in Britain (on 15 October 1988) was recovered the following May in central southern Sweden, where the species had started to breed a few years earlier (Mead 1989). One bird ringed as a pullus with a Hiddensee ring in June 1988 at Neubirchen in Germany was controlled at Xemxija, Malta in December 1990. Another first year bird ringed at Lunnzjata, Gozo in December 1989 was controlled in February 1990 at Xemxija, and then controlled again at Misano Adriatico, Italy in October 1991.

The above recoveries and several others in Italy bearing Polish and German rings indicate that the passage birds in the Mediterranean originate from the northern limits of the species' range, which are forced to travel southwards to survive the winter.

The Penduline Tit was recorded for the first time in the Maltese Islands on 4 November 1972 at Lunnzjata, Gozo (Sultana & Gauci 1973a). Since then it has occurred irregularly in winter in increasing numbers, with the largest numbers recorded in winter 1989-90. None were recorded in 1973, 1976 to 1982 and 1985.

Following is a list of annual records from 1972 to 1989 (Sultana & Gauci 1973b, 1977-78, Gauci & Sultana 1975, Gauci 1986-87, and Coleiro 1988, 1989, 1990-91).

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- 1972: 1-2 at Lunnzjata, Gozo from 4 Nov. to 9 Dec.  
 1974: 1-2 at Lunnzjata, Gozo on 30 Nov. - 1 Dec.  
 1975: 1 at Delimara on 11 Apr.  
 1983: 2 at Lunnzjata, Gozo on 2 Nov. then same 2 birds at Ramla Bay on 16-18 Nov.  
 1984: 3 at Ghadira on 11 Mar.  
 1985: 1-6 frequently from 24 Oct to 16 Nov. 1 on 22 Nov. 1-3 almost daily from 1-9 Dec. (5 on 8th), and 1 on 27th and 2 on 29-30 Dec. All at Ghadira.  
 1987: 1-4 on 6 dates in Jan and 1-5 on 3 dates in Feb. 1-3 almost daily in Mar. (5+ on 17-18th at Xemxija). 2 on 3 Nov. Mostly recorded at Ghadira.  
 1988: 2-6 on 4 dates in Nov. and 1-3 on 8 dates in Dec. Mostly recorded at Ghadira.  
 1989: 16 single sightings in Jan. and Feb. and 1-3 on 3 dates until 8 Mar. all at Ghadira. 1-6 (mostly recorded from Ghadira and Lunnzjata, Gozo) almost daily from 28 Oct to end of year but 15+ at Xemxija on 15 Nov. and 8-10 on 7-8 Dec. at Ramla Bay, Gozo.
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Local recoveries and retraps indicate that wintering Penduline Tits have a tendency to roam frequently from one site to another. 5 birds ringed in Gozo were controlled in Malta while 1 ringed at Ghadira on 1 November 1989 was controlled at Lunzjata, Gozo on 9 December 1989 and then back in Malta at Xemxija on 8 December 1990. Some remain up to 3 months in the islands. 3 out of 44 birds ringed in winter 1989-90 returned to the islands the following winter. Following is a list of interesting recoveries and retraps.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
JX 59.829	30.11.74.	Lunzjata	00.03.75	Burmarrad	90+	25	SE
75.340	01.11.89	Ghadira	09.12.89 08.02.90	Lunzjata Xemxija	38 99	15.5 20	NW SE
75.777	08.11.89	Ramla	15.11.89	Xemxija	7	17.5	SE
74.109	15.11.89	Xemxija	25.01.90	Ghadira	71	5	NW
A8.964	20.11.89	Lunzjata	11.02.90	Xemxija	83	20	SE
A8.976	21.11.89	Lunzjata	08.12.89	Ramla	17	6.5	NE
68.312	08.12.89	Ramla	07.03.90	Xemxija	9	17.5	SE
74.172	08.12.89	Xemxija	04.02.90	Xemxija	58	-	-
68.319	09.12.89	Lunzjata	08.02.90	Xemxija	61	20	SE
74.181	10.12.89	Xemxija	27.02.90	Xemxija	79	-	-
74.194	19.12.89	Xemxija 07.11.90	28.01.90 Xemxija	Xemxija 323	40 -	- -	- -
75.855	14.01.90	Lunzjata	11.02.90	Xemxija	28	20	SE
77.732	30.01.90	Xemxija 11.02.90	08.02.90 Xemxija	Xemxija 12	9 -	- -	- -
59.619	04.02.90	Xemxija 22.11.90	27.02.90 Xemxija	Xemxija 291	23 -	- -	- -
77.740	08.02.90	Xemxija	21.02.90	Ghadira	13	5	NW
77.140	21.02.90	Ghadira	07.11.90	Lunzjata	159	15.5	NW

1 = Ring No.; 2 = Ringing Date; 3 = Ringing Locality; 4 = Recovery / Retrap Date; 5 = Recovery / Retrap Locality; 6 = Number of days between Ringing and Recovery / Retrap Dates; 7 = Distance in km between Ringing and Recovery / Retrap Localities; 8 = Direction.

Most of the 44 birds which were ringed in winter 1989-90 were moulting the head feathers. Two birds were in body moult; two were moulting the tertials; one was moulting the median and underwing coverts; and another was moulting all wing coverts. The first year birds which occurred in November had a predominantly brown head with an ill-defined mask which gradually changed slowly to a silvery grey head and a jet black mask as in adults in January or February. After this time ageing is only possible if

the bird still retains some juvenile greater coverts or tertials which indicate a 2nd year bird. Svensson (1984) states that Swedish 1st year birds do not undergo a complete moult while the South European ones may undertake a complete moult. This also supports the view mentioned earlier that the birds of passage in the Mediterranean originate from the species' extended northern range.

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## ~~BREEDING OF SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS AT BUSKETT IN 1991~~

~~The last breeding records of Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata* in the Maltese Islands were in 1986 and documented by the author (il-Merill 24:18).~~

~~Buskett woods were visited every summer from 1987 to 1990, mainly in June and July, but no birds were found breeding during this period, although single birds were present on 22 June 1987 and 12 June 1988. During June and July of 1991 two pairs of Spotted Flycatchers successfully raised a brood each at Buskett. The first pair was located inside the boundary wall of the Verdala Castle Gardens and built the nest on a lower lateral branch of mature Aleppo Pine *P. halepensis*, about 8 m. above the ground. Three eggs were laid in the last days of June. All three eggs hatched and the young fledged successfully in the third week of July.~~

~~The second pair also nested on the lower lateral branch of an Aleppo Pine about 3 m. above the ground. On 6 July the female was brooding two eggs, which hatched on 16th July. Two fledged young were observed in the vicinity of the nest on 29 July. Both nests were built well away from the main trunk and were very well concealed. They were both constructed of thin twigs, grass, lichens and plant down and lined with small feathers and hair.~~

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