

**UNUSUAL MOULT IN A WOOD WARBLER *PHYLLOSCOPUS SIBILATRIX***

An adult Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* caught for ringing at Xemxija on 14 September 1988 was found to have undergone a partial post-nuptial moult in its European breeding ground. The bird had moulted the following remiges: pp 3-4 and ss 6-8 as well as some greater coverts. All other tracts showed no sign of moult and as such showed a contrast between old feathers and the brighter green of the new feathers.

The bird also had an unusually short second primary which fell between pp 5-6. This could have been due to the fact that pp 3-4 were new while 2, 5 and 6 were not, and as such would have undergone some wear since their last moult.

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**FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF THE BLUE ROCK THRUSH *MONTICOLA SOLITARIUS***

A male Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* was noted wintering for 2 consecutive years in a disused quarry at Is-Sghajtar, l/o Naxxar. The following method of feeding was observed.

The bird perched on an exposed rock 3 to 10m above the ground, watching for suitable food items. When it spotted its prey, which in many cases consisted of insects of the order Coleoptera, it flew to the ground, grabbed the prey and carried it on a flat stone or slab of rock. There it battered the prey against the ground, then it stood back and waited, presumably to check whether the prey was dead before eating it. Sometimes it hovered momentarily before grabbing the prey.

The average size of the insects eaten was 2 to 3cm. On one occasion the bird took a large insect about 5cm long of the order Orthoptera in flight. On another occasion, the same bird was observed feeding on winged ants (probably *Messor sp.*) in a flycatcher like manner.

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**RECORDS OF SKYLARK *ALAUDA ARVENSIS* SINGING IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS**

The Skylark *Alauda arvensis* is a very common autumn migrant but only a few manage to winter, probably due to shooting. A small return passage is often observed in spring. It had never been recorded singing in the Maltese Islands (Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta. The Ornithological Society, Valletta: Malta, 1982).

On 10 February 1987, at Mgarr ix-Xini in Gozo, a Skylark was noted giving its aerial song. The bird continued singing throughout the 5 minutes that we stayed in the area. Skylarks have been recorded singing at Ghadira in February - March on a few occasions in recent years (J. Sultana & C. Gauci, pers. comm.).

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**A PAIR OF SWALLOWS *HIRUNDO RUSTICA* SUSPECTED BREEDING IN JUNE 1988**

At about 0800 hrs on 5 June 1988, on a country road leading from Girgenti to Zebbug (Malta), a couple of Swallows *Hirundo rustica* were noted perching on an electricity wire about 15m away from the road. As these birds were rather late in their migration journey, the possibility of breeding was raised.

After a few minutes observation, the two Swallows took off and came searching for insects, flying very low, just on the road from where the authors were observing; sometimes

1-2m away. From the length of the outer tail feathers it was assumed that the two birds were a pair. The male had two long streamers, while those of the female were almost non discernible. The birds then perched again at the same place on the wire. After a few minutes they came down again to prey on flying insects. This happened several times, and it seemed that a bond existed between them. They never flew alone, and a contact call was repeated several times while flying and even while perching on the wire. This behaviour gave us the suspicion that these birds were doing some sort of display to each other.

It is to be noted that this area still holds a number of farmhouses, most of which are uninhabited, thus offering good nesting places for this species, especially those with open windows and doors.

On re-visiting the area on 8 June, only one bird was seen. It is to be noted that it was early in the morning (between 0630-0730 hrs) and that it was very windy. The presence of this bird made the authors believe that the two Swallows were probably nesting somewhere in that area. Unfortunately, no visits were made after this date.

In the Maltese Islands, Swallows are very common passage migrants, in spring from March to May, with some till mid-June; and in autumn from early September to the end of October. A few birds sometimes occur during the rest of the year (Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta. The Ornithological Society, Valletta: Malta).

In 1974 a pair of Swallows bred in a house in the village of Mqabba, raising 4 young which left the nest on 2 August (Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. Eight Ornithological Notes - 1974-1975 : An unusual occurrence - Swallows breeding in Malta. *IL-Merill* 15 : 2-4, 1975).

The only previous reference to breeding of Swallows in these Islands was made way back in 1843 by Antonio Schembri, who stated that a few breed (Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta. Anglo-Maltese : Malta, 1834).

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### ~~LONG LEGGED BUZZARD BUTEO RUFINUS FEEDING ON FLEDGLINGS OF THE LOGGERHEAD TURTLE CARETTA CARETTA~~

~~On 16 August 1987 I was accompanying some Turkish biologists who were studying the breeding biology of the Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* at Dabayan, a sandy beach on the S.W. coast of Turkey.~~

~~During the visit, which started at day break, we walked along the 7km beach, making notes on the tracks left by the young turtles which had fledged during the night and early morning. At one time a raptor was observed flying towards the beach from the direction of a wood on the other side of the bay. This raptor, which was eventually identified as a Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, alighted on a log on the beach about 150m ahead of us. After some minutes it flew about 1m above the ground and landed on the ground where it was observed to run and hop about.~~

~~It then flew across the bay in the direction of the wood carrying an unidentified object in its talons. We then walked towards the spot where the bird was observed and found a set of turtle tracks surrounded by the tracks of the bird. The turtle tracks ended at the spot where the bird was seen to take off. It was assumed that the turtle fledgling was taken by the Long-legged Buzzard. I was later informed that the bird was observed again in the area on subsequent days.~~

~~According to 'The Birds of the Western Palearctic', Vol. II (Cramp, S & Simmons, K.E.L. (eds.) Oxford University Press, 1980), the Long-legged Buzzard feeds chiefly on small mammals, reptiles and large insects. Sometimes it searches for prey from a perch on a rock, mound or tree and often on the ground. Reptiles taken include lizards *Lacerta* and *Zemias* sp. and snakes *Natrix* and *Viper*a sp.~~

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