

~~Three species of birds were identified:~~

~~*Sylvia melanocephala* - 5 skulls, bones and feathers in 4 pellets.
Passer hispaniolensis - 4 skulls, bones and feathers in 4 pellets.
Delichon urbica - 1 skull, bones and feathers in 1 pellet.~~

~~The Sardinian Warbler and the Spanish Sparrow are common breeding residents in the area while the House Martin is a very common spring migrant, with smaller numbers re-passing in autumn (Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta. The Ornithological Society, Valletta, Malta, 1982).~~

~~Bats are very difficult to identify. Both skulls were found to belong to Vespertilionidae bats of the genus *Myotis*. One species from this genus has been recorded from Gozo - Lesser Mouse-eared Bat *Myotis blythi* - Lomes 1857 (Borg, Cachia Zammit, Zava, di-Stefano in press). This is the first time that bat remains have been found in pellets collected from the Maltese Islands.~~

~~Other mammals identified in these pellets were: 38 *Crocidura* sp., 29 *Mus domesticus* and 7 *Rattus* sp. The material was dissected and examined by the authors.~~

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~~John Borg & Richard Cachia Zammit~~

~~J.B. - Block C 2-Flat 5, Govt. Housing Estate, ta' Xbiex, Malta~~

~~R.C.Z. - 20 Oleander Avenue, Santa Lucia, Malta.~~

LAST KNOWN PAIR OF BARN OWLS *TYTO ALBA* SHOT

Sultana et al. (1975) listed the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* as a very scarce breeding resident and estimated that at least 10 pairs were breeding. In 1976, it was only recorded at four different sites during the breeding season (Sultana & Gauci 1977-78) while it was recorded from only two sites in 1978 (Cachia Zammit & Attard Montalto 1980). Sultana and Gauci (1982) noted its presence in at least one locality in Gozo. The locality which they referred to is Mgarr ix-Xini Valley (authors pers. comm.)

On Thursday 19 May 1986, the authors went at the site beneath the nest to see if there were any pellets, which indicate the presence of the birds. A young bird which was about three weeks old was found dead on the ground below the nest. The bird could not have been dead longer than a day because it was still intact and decomposition was still at an early stage. On closer inspection, we could note another dead bird, which seemed bigger, in a bristle bush immediately below the nesting crevice. Just below the nest-site we found two fresh spent cartridges marked as containing size 9 lead shot.

On 22 May, N. Fenech went again to the nest-site. On this occasion, he was accompanied by Louis Cassar and Michael Galea, who brought their climbing equipment to try and enter into the crevice to see if there were any more young owls. On arrival, an almost fledged young bird was found on the ground below the nest. It was the same one that was seen in the bristle bush some days before. There were three more dead pulli in the nest. These were at a more advanced state of decomposition. From the nest-site we recovered a considerable number of pellets, which are being examined.

It was evident that these five young Barn Owls died of starvation after their parents had been shot. The local shooters' association claimed in a press statement that the birds may have died due to poisoning from pesticides. However, the bird recovered on the 19th showed no signs of chemical residue.

References

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Natalino Fenech & Saviour Balzan

N.F. - 35 Main Street, Attard, Malta

S.B. - 6/7 Mdina Road, Naxxar, Malta.

FIRST BREEDING RECORDS OF THE MOORHEN *GALLINULA CHLOROPUS* IN GOZO

~~The Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* was first reported breeding in Malta in 1984 (Doublet, J.A. & Portelli, P. First breeding records of the Moorhen in the Maltese Islands, *Il-Merill* 24 : 20, 1986-87).~~

~~Breeding in Gozo was suspected to have occurred for the first time in 1987, and was confirmed the following year. A few years previously, at a hillside at Ghajnsielem, Gozo above Xatt l-Ahmar, a farmer had dug a large depression in the clayey soil, using the spoil to form an embankment on the lower side. This was done to collect rain water, as well as the water originating from a little spring, to be used for irrigation purposes. The surface area of this fresh water pool is about 2,200 sq.m. Vegetation in and around the pool consists mainly of *Typha latifolia*; *Azundo donax* as well as *Rubus ulmifolius* and some specimens of *Ceratonia siliqua*. The pool is by the side of a track leading to Xatt l-Ahmar and is overlooked by buildings, including some holiday flats. The farmer keeps about 20 domestic ducks in this pool. In spite of a lot of disturbance, up to 10 adult Moorhens have been present during the past two years. No search for nests was carried out but several downy young have been noted being fed by adult birds on different days in 1988.~~

~~In 1987 up to 10 adult Moorhens were seen on four visits from January to April; 2 adults and 3 juveniles were present on 29 June, 5 adults and 3 juveniles were seen on 26 July and 6 adults and 2 juveniles on 1 August.~~

~~In 1988 the site was visited on 1 April when 9 adult birds were counted. On 7 May apart from 3 adult birds, 4 downy young were seen in the *Typha*, and 12 days later a further 3 downy young were seen being fed by an adult. On 21 May 19 birds were counted - 8 adults and 11 young of four different ages. In June, 6 adult birds and 4 juveniles (2 fully grown and 2 about two weeks old) were seen on 25th. On 6 July an adult bird was seen carrying food while 5 fully grown young were present. On 30 July 14 birds were counted - 6 adult birds, 6 full grown young and 2 about fifteen days old. Five days later (3 August) 22 birds were present - 8 adults, 12 fully grown juveniles and 2 young about 20 days old. On 28 August 6 adult birds, 6 fully grown juveniles and 3 young 4-5 weeks old were present.~~

~~It seems likely that at least three or four pairs have bred in the area in 1988. Adults were frequently seen chasing each other or other juveniles and uttering alarm calls. Both adults and fully grown juveniles were also frequently seen joining the domestic ducks feeding on food provided by the farmer.~~

~~Other species noted breeding in the area are Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncooides* and Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*.~~

Joe Sultana, Richard Cachia-Zammit & John Borg

J.S. - 3 Sciberras Flats, Fleur-de-lys Junction, B'Kara, Malta.

R.C.Z. - 20 Oleander Avenue, Santa Lucia, Malta.

J.B. - Block C 2 Flat 5, Govt. Housing Estate, Ta' Xbiex, Malta.