

FIRST OCCURRENCE OF THE PADDYFIELD WARBLER *ACROCEPHALUS AGRICOLA* IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS

While ringing in a maize-field at Lunzjata, Gozo on 5 September 1986, an unfamiliar *Acrocephalus* warbler was found in one of the mist-nets. The bird's upperparts were similar to those of a Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* but with a slightly paler rufous rump. It had a conspicuous whitish supercilium which was well marked behind the eye. The underparts were whitish with a very pale tinge of buff on the throat, breast and belly. The flanks had a light olive-brown wash. The legs were pinkish with yellow soles, and the iris was olive brown. It was identified as a Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*.

Biometrics, taken in mm., were: wing 55; tail 49 (outer rectrice 42); bill (from skull) 14.5 (from feathering) 9.5; and tarsus 21.5. Wing point was 3rd=4th and it had emarginated 3rd and 4th, and slightly on 5th, primaries (counted ascendantly).

The bird was retrapped in the same area the following day. When released it was heard calling 'gish-gish'.

The Paddyfield Warbler breeds in S. Russia and Asia and is vagrant to Europe.

The Maltese name given is Bagħat tas-Saqwi.

Joe Sultana & John Grech

J.S. - 3 Sciberras Flats, Fleur-de-lys Junction, B'Kara, Malta.
J.G. - 12 Sir Paul Boffa Street, Victoria, Gozo, Malta.



The Paddy-field Warbler and the Pallas's Warbler photographed before released.

PALLAS'S WARBLER *PHYLLOSCOPUS PROREGULUS* - 1ST RECORD FOR MALTA

Putting up a mist net in your back garden can produce some surprises. I regularly put up a 6m, 3-shelf net in my back garden, which is about 50 sq. m. and is situated in the outskirts of Rabat. In it I have planted ten fruit trees and also cultivated some vegetables. I have also created a small artificial pond to attract the birds. Throughout the year a different assortment of birds are ringed. These include Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus*, Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*, White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, and Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*.

On Friday, 13 November 1987 at 0640 hours, I found what I at first thought was a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* in the net, but on closer examination the bird turned out to be a Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, a species not yet recorded in Malta. The bird was also examined by Joe Sultana and Raymond Galea who came up to see the bird after I phoned them, and a detailed description was taken. In appearance it resembled a somewhat large Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*. The beak was dark horn coloured, with the inner parts of the lower mandible orangish. It had a long yellow eyestripe which nearly met at the back of the head, and a yellow stripe along the middle of the crown. On the back parts and under the side of the supercilium it had a blackish

band, giving the impression of a black patch behind the eye. The crown was greyish green turning blackish towards the back of the head on both sides of the middle stripe. The sides of the head were faintly washed greyish green below the eye. The upperparts were greyish green with a conspicuous pale yellow rump, in a rectangular form from one side to the other.

The greater and median coverts were boldly and widely edged pale yellow forming two wing bars, with the upper smaller than the lower one. The 2nd and 3rd tertials were also edged pale yellow, while the rest of the wing flight feathers were edged greyish green, and when closed getting the same appearance as the upper parts. The tail was greyish green with the lower parts of the outer webs greenish. The underparts from chin to the under tail coverts were whitish (faintly tinged yellowish-white on the belly). The tarsus was light horn colour and the iris was black. The measurements in mm were: wing 49.5; tail 37; tarsus 15; bill to skull 10,- weight 5.1gm.

Wing formula: w.p. 4th=5th, 2nd < 7.5mm; 3rd < 2.5; 6th < 1.5; 7th < 4; 8th < 5.5; 9th < 6.5; 10th < 9. The 1st primary was 6.5 primary coverts. Primaries 3rd-6th were emarginated.

Mario V. Gauci

~~M.V.G. - 'Goldcrest', Plot 1, Ghar Barka, Rabat, Malta.~~

~~WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT *APUS CAFFER* — A NEW RECORD FOR MALTA~~

~~A specimen of a White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer* was recently noted in a local collection of stuffed birds. It was dated but had not been identified. This species has never been recorded in Malta. The specimen in question had been shot on 25 May 1974 at H-Faqanija. It was among a loose flock of about 200 Swifts *Apus apus*.~~

~~The bird's wings and deeply-forked tail are brownish black. The rest of the body is bluish black, except for a white patch on the chin and a white band on the rump, extending to the sides. The wing-length is 136mm. The longest tail feathers are 70mm while the shortest are 38mm.~~

~~Its breeding range is sub-Saharan Africa, central Morocco and, since 1964, southern Spain. It has occurred accidentally in Finland in 1968 and in North Yemen in 1982. Some populations are resident while others are migrant or partial migrant (Fry, C.H., Keith, S. & Urban, E.K. The Birds of Africa. Academic Press, 1988).~~

~~The Maltese name given to the species is Runduq tal-Hawwief.~~

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Joe Sultana & Manwel Mallia

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

~~M.M. - 20 Grace Street, Zebbug, Malta.~~

~~FIRST OCCURRENCE OF THE MASKED SHRIKE *LANIUS NUBICUS* IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS~~

~~While ringing at Lunzjata, Gozo on 20 October 1985, a Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* sized bird, later identified as a Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, was flushed from a fig tree and was seen flying into another fig tree. The first thing that was noticed was an extensive white shoulder patch which was very pronounced. The bird had another white area on its forehead. It appeared slimmer than a Woodchat Shrike and had a remarkably long tail. The underparts were washed with brown. The bird was seen in clear sunlight at 0840 hours. It stayed in the fig tree for about ten minutes and then flew across the field to a partly dead tree. It did not behave like a Woodchat Shrike and never settled on an exposed perch. It stayed reasonably well hidden in the fig tree and in the dead tree. The bird was watched for about twenty minutes.~~

~~This shrike is a summer visitor to Turkey, Greece and southern Yugoslavia and is a vagrant to the rest of Europe.~~

~~The Maltese name given is Kaccamendula tal-Maskra.~~

John Grech

~~J.G. - 12 Sir Paul Boffa Street, Victoria, Gozo, Malta.~~