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SHORT NOTES

ARRIVAL DATES OF MANX SHEARWATERS AT COLONIES IN MALTA

The Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* is the commonest shearwater in the western palearctic, with two sub-species being found in the Mediterranean. The *Puffinus p. mauretanicus* of the Balearics, and the *Puffinus p. yelkouan* of the eastern Mediterranean, including the Maltese Islands. The Manx Shearwater is a common breeding visitor to the Maltese Islands.

Sultana & Gauci (1982) record that birds start arriving at their colonies from February. Manx Shearwaters had never been recorded locally in the months of November and December, until five were seen off the east coast on 31 December 1974 (Gauci & Sultana, 1975). Prior to this date there had been only one sighting between August and February. This dearth of records was probably due to the lack of sea watching. Forty-three birds were counted in one afternoon off the northern tip of Malta on the 24 November 1976 (Sultana & Gauci 1982). Single birds were noted flying off the south coast of Malta, near Filfla, during December and January in recent years (pers.obs.). As sightings of this shearwater increased during the early winter months, various visits were conducted to the largest breeding colony, situated in the northern part of Malta, to determine whether adult birds started visiting the colonies before January.

The first visit was made on 25 November 1983, when no signs of birds visiting colonies were found. On the second visit on 12 December, birds had already been ashore, as footprints were seen in front of many burrows. Waiting until after dark, we managed to catch one bird which had been ringed in previous years, another was seen, while one was heard calling out at sea. In the following year we again went to the colony on 12 December when two were trapped. In 1985 we visited the colony on an earlier date, on 8 December. Footprints were seen in front of several nest holes. Remaining until after dark we managed to catch one, while another was seen flying close to the cliff. During these visits the weather was calm with clear skies and no moon, except for the night of 12 December 1983 which was calm but with an overcast sky and a light drizzle. A morning visit on 3 December 1986 revealed that birds had already been ashore as fresh footprints were found in front of some burrows.

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