

AN UNSUCCESSFUL BREEDING ATTEMPT BY THE HOUSE MARTIN

There are three previously documented records of House Martins *Delichon urbica* breeding in the Maltese Islands. The first dates back to June 1981 when two nests were built under the balcony of a building facing Mosta Church (Sultana J. & Gauci C. 1982. A New Guide to the Birds of Malta). The second record was of a pair which built a nest beneath the clock on the right side of the Cathedral at Mdina in June 1982. That same year, in August, a pair of House Martins was found breeding on the islet of Filfla (Sultana J. & Gauci C. 1981-83. House Martin - New Breeding Species for Malta. *Il-Merill* 22: 17-18).

On 17 June 1985 at 1508 hours C.E.T. one House Martin was noticed flying over the bus terminus at Valletta. It approached City Gate and entered into the left arch from the terminus's side. A closer look revealed that the bird had alighted in the saucer-shaped top-most part of a lantern hanging from the ceiling. A little while later the bird left the site, flying away over the ditch on the left side. The next day the bird was also seen. On 19 June one bird was seen entering the lantern. Before alighting it twittered and its partner was heard answering from inside. The House Martins were also present on 20th and 21 June, and on the morning of the 22nd both partners could be seen circling and feeding in the ditch on the right side. At frequent times the birds were observed landing on the ditch sides probably collecting material for the nest, consisting of dust from the eroded ditch sides. Single birds were then recorded on 25th and 28 June. On 4 July twittering was heard in the nest and one of the House Martins was seen on the lantern. The last time that the House Martins were recorded was on 8 July when one was seen entering the nest. Subsequent observations proved fruitless.

It is not known whether any eggs were laid and neither why the House Martins abandoned the area. The House Martins may have easily fallen victims to illegal shooting practices on the island. It is also possible that the House Martins found a more suitable place where to breed. In this respect successful breeding in 1985 by the House Martin rests to be confirmed.

The author would like to thank the following persons for submitting their observations for the compilation of this note : S. Balzan, P. Barbara, J. Borg, D. Cachia, R. Cachia Zammit, D. Coleiro, J. Doublet, V. Falzon, M. Grima, P. Portelli and J. Vella.

J.M.M. - 10 Constitution Street, Zejtun, Malta.

Joseph M. Mangion

~~TWO INTERESTING BREEDING RECORDS DURING 1984~~

~~On 8 July 1984 an adult Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* was seen carrying food at Lal-Balal, Limits of B'Kara. On visiting the same area on 10th both the mate and the female were seen. On the following day an adult and two fully fledged young were seen perching on top of a Carob tree *Ceratonia siliqua* in the same area.~~

~~Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* are recorded every year in summer, mostly at Buskett. Females, caught for ringing in July and August, are often found with brood patches. On 22 July a family party was observed at Wied il-Luq. At least one adult and 3 fully fledged young were observed.~~

~~Raymond Galea~~

~~SARDINIAN WARBLER TRAPPED IN SPIDER'S WEB~~

~~On 24 August 1986 at Wied il-Luq, Buskett, a female Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* was found trapped in an Orb Spider's *Agiope lobata* web. The bird was hanging from its feet. As it was approached it fluttered its wings and escaped. This relatively large web was 80cm above the ground and the Sardinian Warbler was trapped at the lower part of it.~~

~~Raymond Galea~~

~~R.G. - 'Sunview', Potters Street, B'Kara, Malta.~~