

SHORT NOTES

TWO NEW SPECIES FOR MALTA - RED-EYED VIREO AND CHESTNUT BUNTING.

Autumn 1983 produced interesting vagrants including two 'firsts' for Malta - Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* and a Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila*.

While bird-ringing at Ghajn Zajtuna, Mellieha on 29th October 1983, Bro. Edmund found a curious-looking bird in his nets. The bird was later examined also by the authors and was identified as a Red-eyed Vireo. It had a rich bluish-grey crown and a white supercilium bordered with black stripes, the lower one going through its dark crimson eye. Its black beak looked relatively heavy with the tip of the upper mandible curved down. The tarsi were bluish. Its upperparts (back, neck, nape, rump and tail) were greenish, close to the colour of a dull Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. It had darker wings with the primaries and secondaries edged greyish-green. Its belly was white. The measurements in mm. were wing : 80; tail : 52; tarsus : 19.5; bill : 13.

The Red-eyed Vireo is a North American species which is accidental to Western Europe.

The male Chestnut Bunting was found on 12th November 1983 by John Grech and one of the authors while bird-ringing at Lunnjafa, Gozo. The bird was first observed in the morning when it was feeding among grass in a very wet area at the bottom of the valley, below a line of trees, mainly White Poplar and Ash. While feeding in the grass it could not be seen properly although the sharp contrast between the chestnut head and breast and the yellow belly was quite noticeable. The first species which came to mind was Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* but when it flew up into a tree its rump was very dark and not yellow. Efforts to observe the bird properly proved fruitless and after a while it disappeared. On visiting the area in the afternoon the bird was again seen feeding in the same area. A net was set up further up the valley and when trying to set up another net where it was feeding the bird flew into the first net.

The following is a description of the bird in the hand : the head, throat, breast, back and rump were all deep chestnut, the throat and breast feathers faintly tipped whitish. The chestnut on its back was admixed with greenish grey. The lesser and median coverts were chestnut while the blackish greater coverts and tertials were edged chestnut. The tail was of a greenish black colour with a tinge of white on the outer web of the outer feathers. The belly, down to the under tail coverts, was of a light lemon yellow colour with the flanks streaked greenish grey.

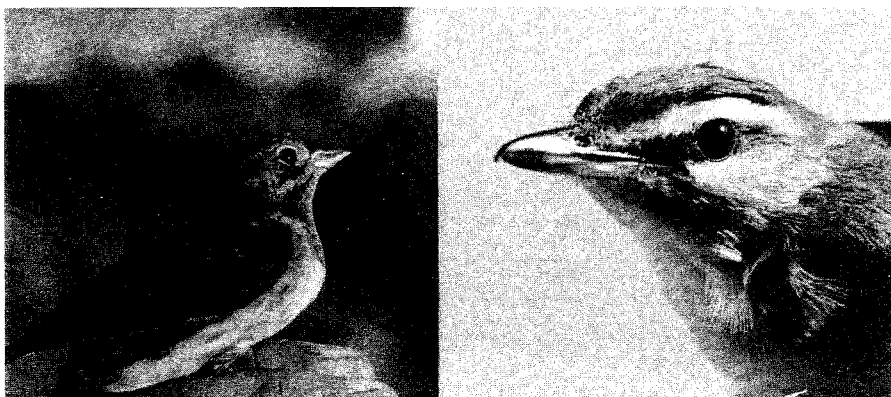
The 3rd, 4th and 5th primaries (counting from the outermost primary) formed the wing-point and were emarginated. The measurements in mm. were wing : 76; tail : 58; tarsus : 20.5 ; bill : 12.0. Weight was 18.2 gm.

The Chestnut Bunting is an Eastern Asiatic species which is accidental to Central and Western Europe.

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci

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

C.G. - 'Skylark', Targa Gap Estate, Mosta, Malta.



Chestnut Bunting and Red-eyed Vireo photographed before release. (Photos : Joe Sultana)