

## FACIAL STAINS IN THE SARDINIAN AND OTHER WARBLERS IN GIBRALTAR.

During January 1981, whilst out birdwatching in Gibraltar, the author caught a glimpse of what looked like a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, except that this one showed a flash of orange on the chin. As there was no time for focusing binoculars and as this bird was not seen again, it was given up as a one-time occurrence.

Later on during the same month, a Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* was seen in the same situation with a bright-orange chin, but this time the colouring extended to the facial area around the bill.

When queried about the staining Mr. C. Finlayson, Chairman of the Gibraltar Ornithological Society, provided the answer. Some of the Sardinian Warblers and Chiffchaffs, as well as Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*, which had been netted for ringing had shown signs of orange around the same facial areas. This orange dye effect had been caused by the pollen from a flower of a plant that is abundant in Gibraltar and is in full bloom during January and February. The plant is *Aloe arborescens*, which is spiny and succulent. It has been noted in Malta and Gozo in the past but perhaps not in such abundance as in Gibraltar. This plant was introduced to Europe from South Africa and normally the birds that feed from its bright-orange flowers are long-billed. The Warblers are obviously attracted to this flowering plant but have relatively short bills so that their chins and facial parts become dyed orange by the pollen when they insert their bills into these flowers.

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Ed. note : These yellow facial stains have also been noted by ringers in Malta on some Sardinian Warblers and Blackcaps in Winter. *Aloe arborescens* is still frequently cultivated in Malta. A short paper 'Nectar : a supplementary food source for wintering Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita*' by M.A. Thake has appeared in the *Riv.Ital.Orn.* 50(2-3) : 167-168.

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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON WRENS NEAR DUBROVNIK.

~~The Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* is a very numerous and common migratory and wintering bird in all the regions of the southern Adriatic, where it stays from the autumn till the spring. It arrives in the area regularly during October (4th-20th). Sometimes (but very seldom) the first individuals appear as early as September (the earliest bird was recorded on the 5th September). The autumn migration ceases at the end of October or sometimes in the first ten days of November. After that there remains the wintering population. During the winter a great part of the population lives in dense underbushes of evergreen maquis, in hedges along paths or in bushes near houses. At these sites they live isolated or in small groups of 3-6. The author observed that isolated specimens sleep in hollows of olive trees or in holes of old walls or similar places. Numerous males start singing from mid-January, continuing till the end of February; they very seldom sing in the first days of March. Sometimes a few males start to sing at the end of November or in December but they don't sing so intensely as in the following months. The food of wintering birds consists of small insects, spiders or similar small creatures. The greater part of the wintering Wrens has disappeared from the East Adriatic coastal regions by the end of March. Very seldom and only occasionally a few isolated specimens can be seen in the first days of April (the author saw the last specimen on the 23rd April). During the summer months the Wren is completely absent from the coastal regions of the eastern Adriatic. At that time it is a very numerous breeding bird in the continental regions of Yugoslavia where it lives in densely wooded and covered areas especially on mountain slopes or similar places.~~

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## HERRING GULLS CHASING GREY HERONS.

~~While on a fishing boat close to Filfla in the afternoon of 19th March 1980, a flock of 13 Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* were noted heading for Filfla trying to alight on the rocks. As soon as they got near the islet the entire colony of Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* flew out towards the herons calling repeatedly and chased them away. The herons tried more than once to alight on Filfla but each time they were chased away by the Herring Gulls which breed there.~~

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