

FURTHER BREEDING RECORDS OF THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER.

The known breeding records of the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* from 1971 to 1976 have already been documented by the present writers (Il-Merill 10:10, 15:4, & 17:29-30).

Following are further breeding attempts, this time unsuccessful, by a female in 1977 and 1978 at Buskett using the same nest-site which was described in Il-Merill (17:29-30).

On 22nd May 1977 a bird was seen twice carrying nesting material to the nest site adding it to the same nest used in the previous year and on 26th May it was noted sitting on the nest. On 29th May this female was again noted sitting and when the nest was examined it was found to contain 4 eggs. The colour of the eggs was bluish green speckled and blotched with brick-red. On 5th June the female was still incubating. However, on the 11th June there was no sign of the bird and the 4 eggs were still unhatched. On visiting the nesting site on 25th June, the female was again noticed incubating, this time sitting on 6 eggs. These must have included some, if not all, eggs of the previous infertile clutch. On 2nd July the female was still incubating but the number of eggs had decreased to four, and, though egg-shells were found under the nest-site, the nest contained no young. On 3rd and 9th July the female was still incubating the unhatched eggs. There was no sign of any male at any time in the area when visited during the whole period.

In 1978 a bird, presumably the same female, was noted on 28th May sitting again on 4 eggs in a nest which was built over last year's nest in the same nest-site. On 2nd June the female was still incubating but there was no sign of a male in the area. On 7th June the female was seen again sitting on the eggs. However, this time, another Spotted Flycatcher was heard calling nearby. When the area was visited again on 9th and 10th June the female was seen sitting on the nest but on both occasions there was no sign of any other adult bird. On 14th June the female was still sitting on the unhatched eggs which once again were infertile. During this visit the other bird, presumably a male, was seen in the area. This time the female must have laid the clutch before the arrival of a male. However a family party of 4 birds was noted at Buskett on 23rd July and another party of at least 3 birds, one of which seemed to have just fledged, was seen close to the nesting area on 15th August.

In 'A Guide to the Birds of Malta' (1975) Sultana, Gauci, Beaman stated that a clutch of Spotted Flycatcher's eggs taken from Buskett previous to 1971 was found in a local collection. The exact year of this breeding record could not be obtained then. The date of this record, which under the circumstances it has to be stated that it was also an unsuccessful breeding attempt, was acquired before the auction sale of the late T. Conti's collection, when one of the authors, accompanied by V. Cilia, noted and examined the clutch of 4 eggs labelled Buskett 19th July 1963. Another nest with 4 eggs dated 27th April 1961 from Buskett was acquired by the Natural History Museum from T. Conti's collection (J. Vella Gaffiero pers.comm.).

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci

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~~MOBBING BEHAVIOUR BY A FERAL ROCK PIGEON.~~

~~While going through Pieta on 8th December at ca. 08.00 hours, I saw two Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* flying close together in Pieta Creek. Suddenly a feral rock pigeon flew nearby and started to mob the two gulls. It dived repeatedly at the two Black-headed Gulls until these separated and flew in different directions. The pigeon then lost interest and flew away.~~

~~John Azzopardi~~