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, 15:6, & 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 nest-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 26th May sitting 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. On the 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, Gaucl, & Beaman stated that a clutch of Spotted Flycatcher's eggs taken from Buskett previous to 1972 was acquired by the present collection and 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 Gaucl

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 dive-bombed 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

NOTEWORTHY OCCURRENCES.

1. Rose-breasted Grosbeak Pheucticus ludovicianus.

An immature Pheucticus ludovicianus was trapped by a finch trapper on 31st October 1976 (Fred Vassallo pers. comm.). The specimen had never been recorded in Malta.

2. Falcated Duck Anas falcata.

A medium-sized duck, approaching Anas penelope, with a very dark general appearance, was shot at Bubaqra on 10th October 1972. On close examination, it turned out to be an immature male Falcated Duck Anas falcata. The specimen has a dark bluish brown crown with pale sides to its head, sparsely flecked with dark brown. Upperparts are blackish brown with mantle feathers edged yellowish buff. The undertail is buffish closely flecked with dark brown. A few moulted primary feathers are present with a white base. Underparts are a greyish white, the breast is black with a grey sheen and is bordered by greyish white. The measurements are as follows: 250 mm, head and body; 170 mm, wing; 130 mm, tail. The Falcated Duck is a rare straggler to Eastern Europe from its Asiatic breeding grounds. It is also known as an escape in Europe. To date this duck species had never been recorded in Malta.

The above two specimens are found in my collection.

Alfred Vassallo

AN UNUSUAL NUMBER OF EGGS IN A SPECTACLED WARBLER'S NEST.

An abandoned nest of the Spectacled Warbler Sylvia conspicillicata containing eight eggs was found at Bubaqra, Zurrieq, at the beginning of August 1979. The Spectacled Warbler usually lays from three to five eggs, normally four or five.

The nest looked normal in all other respects. The colour of the eggs was off-white speckled with greenish brown and varied in width from 11.7 to 13.2 mm and in length from 16.0 to 16.7 mm. The nest seemed to have been abandoned for about two months prior to its discovery. There is the possibility of the female laying a second clutch after the first proved infertile. If this was the case it would also be most unusual as this species, like many other passerines, uses the nest once.

John Attard Montalto