

~~UNPUBLISHED RECORDS OF RARITIES FROM THE LATE T. CONTI'S COLLECTION.~~

~~Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* : female on 18th January 1941, Marsascala Bay.~~

~~Red Kite *Milvus milvus* : one on 7th April 1943, Marsaxlokk.~~

~~Puffin *Fratercula arctica* : one on 6th January 1924, Delimara.~~

~~Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* : one on 16th April 1956, Limits of Zurrieq.~~

~~Moussier's Redstart *Phoenicurus moussieri* : male on 3rd December 1933, Limits of Kalafrana.~~

~~Great Tit *Parus major* : one in April 1919 (locality not recorded).~~

~~Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci~~

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WARDLAW RAMSAY'S RECORDS OF S. CANTILLANS FROM MALTA.

Wardlaw Ramsay (1923) stated that both the nominate *cantillans* as well as the race *albistriata* of the Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* occur in Malta and mentioned that two specimens of *albistriata* were obtained "4/9/14" and two others belonging to the nominate race were obtained on "9/9/14". In all past literature previous to 1975 there has been no mention of other records of *albistriata* except those of Ramsay. Sultana et al. (1975) included Ramsay's records and added that "a few others" trapped for ringing in both spring and autumn since 1965 belonged to the race *albistriata*. Bannerman and Vella-Gaffiero (1976) who listed most species trinomially stated that the Subalpine Warbler was purposely named binomially in their work, obviously doubting Ramsay's records and the above statement. They wrote that both the eastern and the western subspecies "were said by Col. Wardlaw Ramsay in his Birds of Europe and North Africa, p.111 to be represented in the British Museum Collection, each by two specimens collected in the Maltese Islands". In view of this statement D.A. Bannerman asked Mr. Derek Goodwin of the British Museum staff "to examine the four specimens in the British national collection and report whether he agreed with Wardlaw Ramsay's determination". After receiving a reply from Mr. Goodwin, Bannerman and Vella-Gaffiero (1976) concluded that "it appears that of the Maltese specimens in the British Museum to which Col. Wardlaw draws our attention in his book, three were presented to the Museum by a Miss Wright (no indication of original collector and probably purchased from a trapper in the island)". Four dates of specimens are then given, different from those given by Ramsay (1923) and mentioning no races.

This confusion resulted from the erroneous assumption that the four specimens of *S. cantillans* mentioned by Ramsay (1923) were at the British Museum. Contrary to what Bannerman & Vella-Gaffiero (1976) stated, nowhere did Ramsay state this. It is a fact, however, that after inheriting the vast collection of birds formed by his uncle Arthur, Marquess of Tweedale, Col. R.G. Wardlaw Ramsay generously presented it to the British Museum. But he did this on condition that a set of duplicate specimens was to be sent to the Edinburgh Museum (see in Memoriam by W.E.C. in Ramsay 1923).

Ramsay's book, which was not ready when he died, was published posthumously and in the preface by WM. Eagle Clark we find that Surgeon-Rear-Admiral Stenhouse

helped in completing the work and that he worked on specimens in the Royal Scottish Museum. Dr. Stenhouse, who after his retirement, worked voluntarily for ten years at the Royal Scottish Museum, had a fine eye for the discrimination of racial forms (Ritchie 1931).

In view of the above the present writers wrote to Mr. I.H.J Lyster, Curator of Birds at the Royal Scottish Museum, who kindly informed us that the four specimens of Subalpine Warbler mentioned in Ramsay's book are held at the Museum and they form part of 'H.W.Fielden & Harvey Brown Collection'. The labels bear the initials HWF and thus the specimens were probably taken by Fielden in Malta. Mr. Lyster also informed us that there is an error in the dates (4/9/14 and 9/9/14) in Ramsay's book as the year of the Subalpine Warbler's records should be 1874 and not 1814 or 1914. This corresponds to the fact that H.W.Fielden was in Malta in 1874 and collected birds (Wright 1874).

We are indebted to Mr. I.H.J. Lyster and to Surgeon-Rear-Admiral Stenhouse's son, Mr. Bruce Stenhouse, who have forwarded to us the relevant information.

References

- BANNERMAN, D.A. & VELLA-GAFFIERO, J.A. 1976. Birds of the Maltese Archipelago. Museums Dept. Valletta.
- RITCHIE, J. 1931. Obituary. John Hutton Stenhouse. *Brit. Birds* (2)25:52-53.
- SULTANA, J., GAUCI, C., BEAMAN, M. 1975. A Guide to the Birds of Malta. Malta Ornithological Society, Valletta.
- WARDLAW RAMSAY, R.G. 1923. Guide to the Birds of Europe and North Africa. Gurney & Jackson, Edinburgh.
- WRIGHT, C.A. 1874. Fifth appendix to the List of Birds observed in the Islands of Malta and Gozo. *Ibis* (3)4:223-241.

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ERRATA : 11-Merill No. 18 (1977) p.26 : Unusual Nests of the Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*. "an introduced tree *Agave americana*" should read " a tree *Rhamnus alaternus*".

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