

~~Abnormal number of feathers~~

~~In the course of examining birds for moult or during the taking of biometrics one occasionally meets with birds with abnormal feathering. A first year male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* trapped for ringing at Lunnzjata on 30th October 1976 had 20 remiges on its right wing. The extra feather was between the first tertial (i.e. the outermost tertial) and the sixth secondary and was identical to the latter in size and shape. The left wing had the normal 19 remiges. On taking both wings' formulae the wing point was found to vary. That of the right wing was the fourth primary with the third being .5 mm less and the fifth 1.5 mm less. The wing point of the left was the third primary with the fourth = fifth, both being 1 mm less. (Primaries were counted from the outermost inwards i.e. ascendantly).~~

~~An adult male Sardinian Warbler trapped at Ghajni Barrani on 1st September 1977 also had 20 remiges, this time on the left wing. The extra feather was next and identical to the outermost tertial.~~

~~Another male Sardinian Warbler had 14 rectrices as against the usual 12. It was trapped at Ghajni Barrani for ringing on 17th August 1977 and retrapped on 28th. Its tail graduation, which was 10 mm., was however within the range of this species.~~

~~An adult female Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* was also found to have 14 rectrices when it was being ringed at Lunnzjata on 23rd August 1978.~~

~~Joe Sultana, Charles Gauci & John Grech.~~

~~Weasel and Nightjar run over by car~~

~~While driving along the road from Wied iz-Zurrieq to Hagar Qim on 28th September 1978 we noticed a freshly killed weasel *Mustela nivalis* on a dead Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* in the middle of the road. Both animals had no sign of having been shot but seemed to have been run over by a vehicle. The weasel which was rather greyish brown in colour was a juvenile male and was presumably carrying its prey across the road when the accident happened. This must have taken place just before our arrival (ca. 1430 hrs) as *rigor mortis* had not set in the weasel, which is usually a nocturnal hunter.~~

~~Guido Bonnet & Vincent Sammut.~~

~~An unusually large influx of Spotted Flycatchers in Spring~~

~~Although large influxes (with up to 800+) of the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* have been recorded occasionally in autumn, only up to 100+ had been previously recorded for any one locality in any single day in spring (Sultana, Gauci, Beaman — *A Guide to the Birds of Malta* — 1975).~~

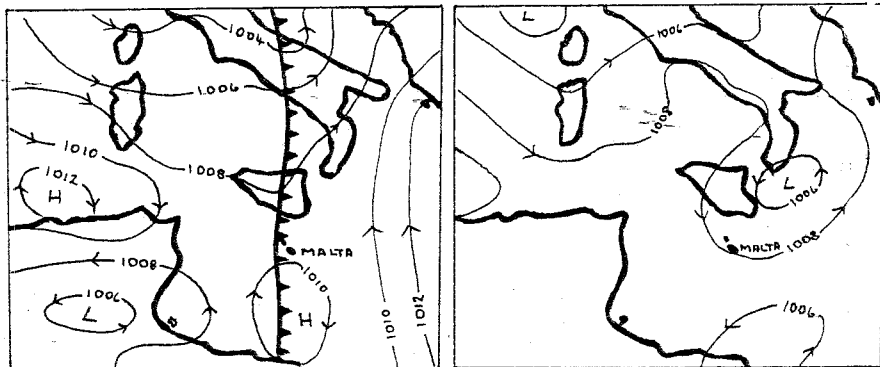
~~An unusually large influx occurred on 15th May 1977. The fall was mainly concentrated on the south south-east of Malta where 500+ were counted at Wied~~

Znuber (Hal Far) and 200+ further inland at Marsa, both in the morning. During the same period only 30+ were counted at Xemxija while in Gozo no unusually large numbers were noted.

There was already some movement of Spotted Flycatchers at 0630 hrs. at Wied Znuber and by 0930 hrs. there were 500+ along the valley feeding hungrily on flying insects. After 1100 hrs. there were fewer birds and by noon many had moved inland. In the afternoon 100+ were counted at Santa Lucia area from 1530 hrs. onwards, while 15+ were noted at Ghadira late in the afternoon.

Many had left the islands the following day but 50+ were still present in the Marsa area on the 17th, decreasing to 20+ on the 18th.

Like all other unusual falls this influx can be related to the weather conditions which for that time of the year were unusual. On 14th May there was a shallow high pressure area (1010 mbs.) to the south of Malta resulting in weak winds from a southerly direction. There was fair weather to the south, favouring



Synoptic charts at 0800 hrs on 14th May 1977 (left) on 15th May 1977 (right).

the movement of northward bound migrants. However there was a cold front extending from the north of Italy to the northern tip of Libya causing an overcast over the central Mediterranean. By the night of the 14th and 15th a low pressure area on the northern part of Italy moved south towards the central Mediterranean. This depression, while continuing to cause cloudy and unsettled weather, blocked the migrants' way. The weather on 16th May was once again settled in the central Mediterranean and to the north, allowing birds to continue their journey.

Very few other numbers of birds were involved in this fall. However 7 *Hippolais icterina*, 5 *Sylvia borin*, 5 *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, 2 *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, 2 *Sylvia communis* and 2 *Ficedula hypoleuca* were trapped for ringing at Wied Znuber in the morning of 15th May. The total number is slightly above normal for that time of the year.

Acknowledgement is due to R.M. Holman and E. Curmi for their records of Hal Far and Marsa respectively and to the staff at the Met. Office for supplying us with a copy of the synoptic charts for the period 13th to 16th May.

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci.