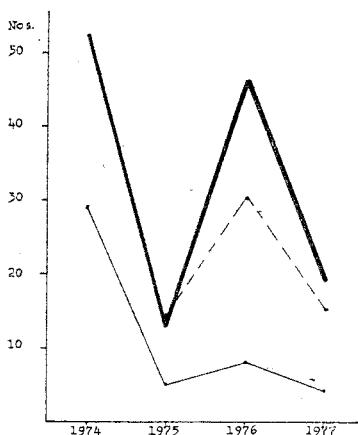


## Evidence of Spring passage of Sardinian Warblers through Malta

The presence of Sardinian Warblers *Sylvia melanocephala* as autumn migrants/winter visitors in Malta has already been documented (Sultana & Gauci : Influxes of Sardinian Warbler. *Il-Merill*, 15 : 3-4). A similar autumn influx again took place in 1976, but the numbers involved were slightly smaller (see figure and explanation).

Very few of the birds ringed during the autumn 1974 influx were retrapped, and most seemed to have moved on (Sultana & Gauci, *loc. cit.*). An examination of the retrap cards of the Ringing Scheme reveals that the number of Sardinian Warblers retrapped following the 1976 influx was also insignificant. After the 1974 influx, no return movement was discernible the following spring. However, in late February and early March, 1977, three separate incidents pointed directly to a return passage.



Numbers of Sardinian Warblers ringed at Lunzjata (thick lines), Xemxija (thin lines) and Rabat (broken lines) during the periods 15 Oct — 31 Dec, 1974-77. Lunzjata and Xemxija are the only two sites which have received regular coverage throughout the above periods. Rabat was not worked in 1974, but coverage was even during the other three years. A look at the numbers of juvenile Sardinian Warblers ringed in June-September, 1974-77, at Wied il-Luq, Buskett, the only systematically worked area during these four months, shows very little variation, suggesting that breeding success was fairly uniform throughout the four years.

Between 0645 and 0830 hours on 20th February, R.M. Holman trapped six new Sardinian Warblers at Wied Znuber, Hal Far. Three of these were of average weight (12 g). The other three weighed 14 g, 15 g, and 18 g respectively. Weights as high as 14 g are very rarely recorded, and the bird weighing 18 g was exceptionally heavy. One of the birds weighing 12 g was retrapped in February and April, 1978. On 6th March, no fewer than seventeen were trapped at L-Ahrax Pt. by V. Sammut. Their weight ranged from 11.2 g to 14.5 g, mean 12.4 g. Only one was subsequently retrapped — the following February. On the same day, a first year male weighing 18.2 g was trapped at Sta. Lucia by R. Cachia Zammit. Even in the net, the bird struck the ringer as being conspicuously fat. On examination in the hand it was found to be carrying heavy fat deposits.

The two birds weighing 18 g suggest that Sardinian Warblers arriving in Malta in autumn (and subsequently re-passing in spring) originate from the northernmost parts of their breeding range.

Charles Gauci & Joe Sultana.

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### ~~Eleonora's Falcon attacking an Avocet~~

~~While sitting below the Tunny Net at Ghadira Bay on 9th July 1978 a large black and white wader was seen flying low towards the Mellicha Bay Hotel about 3 metres above the sea. On viewing it with binoculars it was identified as an Avocet *Recurvirostra avoetia*. While it was being watched it suddenly 'fell' on to the water where surprisingly it seemed to start swimming. This strange behaviour was soon explained. Flying swiftly towards it was a dark phase Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*, which though diving towards it, swept over it as if it were afraid of the water. After a second similar attempt the Eleonora's Falcon flew off towards L-Ahrax. The Avocet remained on the sea for about 5 minutes before also taking off. All this happened while speedboats and other small sea-craft were passing not far away from the two birds.~~

Raymond Vella.

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### ~~Aggressive behaviour of the Fan-tailed Warbler~~

~~The continuous territorial flights of the male Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* during the breeding season are one of this species' characteristics. This strange behaviour is only matched by its aggressiveness to intruders which the authors often had the chance to witness during their investigations into the breeding biology of this species. The male can be frequently seen not only chasing away other males or first year birds which enter its territory but also other larger species such as *Passer hispaniolensis* and *Miliaria calandra* which venture near one of its nests, as was frequently noted at Ghadira. It also indulges in diving attacks on the intruders while calling incessantly. Its sharp scolding notes 'pitz, pitz, pitz', unlike the rasping 'dzeep, dzeep, dzeep,' or 'zip, zip, zip' which it utters during its song flight, are uttered without any pause between each call.~~

~~While going round checking nests at Wied Ghajn Rihana on 25 June 1977 a male Fan-tailed Warbler attracted attention by its scolding notes and behaviour while flying low over a rubble wall on one side of the valley. Below the wall the female too was uttering scolding notes while settling on a heap of dead vine twigs. It seemed as if it was attacking something. To our amazement a snake *Coluber viridiflavus*, which was about 75 cm in length, was seen attempting to strike at the bird. In turn the female was quickly retreating at each of the snake's attempts, however boldly persisting in mobbing and chasing the snake.~~

~~On another occasion at Xemxija a male Fan-tailed Warbler was furious at the presence of a mist net to the extent that it even dive bombed into it from high above.~~

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci.