

~~An addition to the list of the breeding birds of Malta — the Reed Warbler~~

~~**Aerocephalus scirpaceus**~~

~~While bird-watching at Salina on 26th July 1977, we heard frequent calls of young birds coming from a cluster of reeds *Phragmites communis* growing at the fringes of the water. These calls resembled those of young birds begging for food. On further investigation we saw a Reed Warbler *Aerocephalus scirpaceus* carrying food and observed it feeding a fully fledged young. This was later confirmed by J. Sultana who visited the area at our request. He also heard and observed the same calls and behaviour.~~

~~Next morning we accompanied J. Sultana and C. Gauci to the area and after setting up a mist-net trapped (for ringing) the adult male (still holding a small white spider in its beak) and four fully fledged young. The adult had a small brood patch and its wing and tail were 65 mm and 53 mm long respectively. The wing-length of the four young birds ranged from 57-60.5 mm and their short tails ranged from 35-43 mm. These measurements suggested that they couldn't have moved far from their nesting area.~~

~~The young were again seen being fed by the adult male (carrying a ring) on the 28th and 29th July in the same area. On four other dates from 8th to 17th August only the adult male was observed and heard. It was not seen or heard when the area was visited again on the 19th and 23rd August. It is worth mentioning that at no time was the adult female observed.~~

~~This is the first known breeding record of this species in Malta, where it is a fairly common autumn migrant, though generally very scarce in spring.~~

~~Richard Cachia-Zammit & Raymond Testa.~~

The Barbary Falcon in Malta

In 'A Guide to the Birds of Malta' (1975) the authors (Sultana, Gauci & Beaman) put the Barbary Falcon *Falco peregrinoides*, which following Vaurie, was treated as a species, in Appendix I — Rejected Species — as it was felt that its inclusion in the list of the birds of Malta required proper confirmation (see page 153). Due to the confused nomenclature at that time of the *Falco peregrinus brookei* the authors stated that the 2 examples of *Falco barbarus* (= *Falco peregrinoides*) listed as occurring in Malta in 1850 and 1885 by E.H. Giglioli (Avifauna Italica — 1907) could have been the *brookei* subspecies of the Peregrine.

Writing on the 'Ornithology of Northern Africa' in Ibis (1859) Vol. 1 Tristram stated that the "*Falco punicus* is said to have gained a claim to the European list, having been shot in Malta by Col. H.M. Drummond". Wright (List of the birds observed in the Islands of Malta and Gozo — Ibis (1) 6 — 1864) included *Falco barbarus* (Syn. *F. punicus*) with a query mentioning Tristram's statement. Wright wrote that Mr. Tristram had informed him "that Colonel Drummond-Hay fancied the bird shot by him was a small Peregrine" but Mr. Tristram

thought that he was mistaken. In the second appendix Wright (Ibis (2) 1 — 1865) mentions an immature *Falco peregrinus* obtained on 4th May 1864 which seemed to approach *Falco barbarus* in the ruddy colouring of the under surface.

The only two documented records were listed by Giglioli in his 'Avifauna Italica' (1907) as *Falco barbarus* (= *Falco pelegrioides*). The first was an adult male obtained by Gulia in 1850 and was at the Natural History Museum of Florence and the second was picked up at the Valletta Market on 22nd March 1885 and was in Dresser's Collection.

Knowing that the Manchester Museum houses Dresser's Collection, one of us wrote to Dr. M.V. Hounscome, Keeper of Zoology, of this Museum enquiring about the birds collected in Malta which were in Dresser's Collection. Dr. Hounscome was kind enough to send us a comprehensive detailed list which included a specimen of *Falco pelegrioides*. The specimen was found by Dr. D. Bruce at the Valletta Market on 22nd April 1885. In his correspondence Dr. Hounscome confirmed that the specimen was an immature Barbary Falcon, probably a male, with the following measurements: Wing — 262 mm; Bill with a worn tip) 15 mm; Tarsus — 44 mm; and Tail very worn) — 140 mm. Dr. Hounscome added that the plumage of the specimen is very worn, possibly suggesting it was a captive bird, but that this could equally well be due to abrasion in its north African habitat.

This specimen is undoubtedly the same one mentioned by Giglioli, though this author gave the month as March and not April as labelled at the Manchester Museum.

In view of the above information we think that this species should be reinstated in the list of the birds of Malta.

We owe much to Dr. M.V. Hounscome for the information which he unhesitatingly communicated to us.

Joe Sultana, Charles Gauci & Mark Beaman.

~~The occurrence of an American Purple Gallinule in Malta — *Porphyryla martinica* a possibly escaped bird~~

~~Vagrants from North America are recorded annually in Europe mainly on the Atlantic coast and for obvious reasons few are recorded further inland or in the Mediterranean.~~

~~On 2nd February 1978 the author was informed by Mr. C. Galea of Msida that he had mounted a bird which he believed was an Allen's Gallinule *Porphyryla alleni*. However on examining the specimen I found that it was an American Purple Gallinule *Porphyryla martinica*. It had been shot at Safina in the autumn of 1977.~~

~~The breeding range of this species is from the Southern United States of America southward to Northern Argentina. It has however been recorded in Europe as a vagrant to Britain and Norway (J. Gooders — Edit. Birds of the World — 1969). The European records have been of immature birds. The Malta specimen is that of an adult.~~