

Ghadira and Filfla. The posters also called on the local shooters to be more discriminate in their quarry and to spare beneficial and rare breeders such as the barn owl, as well as those birds which do not constitute game. Leaflets about the MOS were also distributed.

The views of the general public watching the protest were varied. Many agreed with our cause, others dismissed it with sarcasm. Others still did not bother. However, it is certain that the effort was never lost — some good will always result.

3. Habitat Management at Ghadira

A lot of voluntary work is carried out during the year by the YMS in the management of the habitat at Ghadira. This is a long-term policy which the YMS has adopted in trying to save Ghadira from disappearing for ever under steel and concrete, as well as improving the habitat which had started to degenerate through the random parking of cars and pitching of camps. The work which is being carried out in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture under the guidance of Mr. Joe Borg, Afforestation Officer, involves the planting of several hundred trees (mostly tamarisk and pine) as well as the erection and maintenance of a reed fence to protect the saplings from the wind. Recently a stretch of land along the outer border of Ghadira has been planted with prickly pears to form a natural barrier thus impeding cars from entering and causing the erosion of the soil.

Several tree-planting activities have been held at Ghadira and others are projected for the near future. Tree-planting sessions have also been held on other occasions at Xemxija and Ta' Qali.

TAXONOMICAL POSITION OF THE TREE SPARROW OF MALTA

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The occurrence of the Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* in Malta has been known since 1843, but even Despott (1917), Roberts (1954), De Lucca & De Lucca (1959) and De Lucca (1967) have taken it for a sporadic straggler. Its breeding in 1967 was published for the first time by Sultana (1969). Since that time larger flocks have been observed, smaller ones more frequently, although the Tree Sparrow is not a regular visitor to Malta (Gauci & Sultana 1971).

Some specimens were collected, but it seemed not valid enough for a taxonomical determination, as the populations of South-Italy and Sicily had been determined for *P.m. montanus*.

The IBP meeting in Leningrad in 1973 decided to prepare a monograph on the Tree Sparrow, and it was an honour for me, that Dr. Pinowski invited me to write the taxonomical chapter.

Till now 33 subspecies of the *Passer montanus* have been described, but many of them synonymized, so Moreau and Greenway (1962) accepted only seven

subspecies. Studying the literature, one can see that in the synonymization the opinions of the different authors are not uniform.

This was the reason for preparing a new revision, which I could undertake with the kind help of 32 museums and institutions on 1411 skins.

According to this revision the Spanish *P.m. hispaniae* (v. Jordans 1932) has proved to be a valid subspecies.

With the kind aid of Prof. Dott. E. Moltoni (Milano), of Dr. I.H.F. Lyster (Edinburgh), of Dr. H. Schifter (Vienna), of Dr. J. Reichholf (Munich) and of Dr. G. Mauersberger (Berlin) I could compare a bigger series of Italian Tree Sparrows, on which results I have written in another paper. The Terra Typica of *P. m. montanus*, Linne 1758, was fixed by Clancey (1948) in the region of Ravenna, North Italy, and my results have shown that the South Italians are not identical with them. The southern limit of the area of *P. m. montanus* reaches down to Rome. In Calabria, Sicily and Sardegna lives the Spanish *Passer montanus hispaniae*.

So it seems expedient also to ascertain to which subspecies belongs the population of the Island of Malta. Mr. J. Sultana was so kind to send me a skin which I have compared with Spanish ones. As it was to be expected it proved to belong to the brighter *P. m. hispaniae* with small wing-sizes (65 mm). Because of the scarcity of Tree Sparrow in Malta one cannot expect bigger series of skins and the proof from this single specimen can be regarded as the logical conclusion.

Perhaps the Tree Sparrow is in Malta as part of its area-expansion towards the South, to the southern part of Asia Minor, Iraq and Israel where it was found recently; 20 years ago the Tree Sparrow was unknown in such countries.

I'm very obliged to acknowledge the help of my Colleagues, who made possible my successful revision.

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Note: The wing-length of 44 Tree-Sparrows measured (maximum chord) by the MOS ringers range from 62.5 to 72 mm. (mostly 65-69) with a mean of 66.9 mm.