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1. The Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*) —

An addition to the List of European & Maltese Birds.

In George Fauré's bird collection at Luqa there is a specimen of a male Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*. It was taken at il-Miżiep on 8th March 1974. This occurrence is the first for Malta as well as for Europe. At first glance it looks like a pale Dartford Warbler with a Spectacled Warbler's wings. It has dark grey upper-parts washed with brown on the back, scapulars and rump. The wings have a strikingly rufous patch because the greater coverts, the tertials and some inner secondaries are broadly edged rufous. The lores are slightly darker and the eye ring is whitish. The under-parts, from the chin, which has some white, to the under-tail coverts are dark terracotta, except for the central lower belly which is whitish. Its graduated dark brown tail has whitish outer feathers. The measurements of the specimen in mm. are: wing — 54.5, tail — 57, bill — 10.5 and tarsus 18.5.

According to Etchécopar and Hübner (The Birds of North Africa — 1967) the nominate race breeds in Algeria and Tunisia in the Aures and Saharan Atlas and winters in the Sahara. Obviously the specimen which occurred in Malta must have overshot its breeding area on its return journey from the south. Incidentally 2 Moussier's Redstarts *Phoenicurus moussieri* also occurred on the same date in Malta. The Moussier's Redstart breeds in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia and moves altitudinally in winter and a little way into the Sahara. One may hypothetically conclude that some unusual weather condition at that time of the year made some birds of these North African species overshoot their breeding areas.

The Maltese name given to the Tristram's Warbler is *Bufula ta' Tuneżija*.

2. The Peregrines at Ta' Ċenċ.

The pair of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus brookei* at Ta' Ċenċ, in Gozo, have successfully raised 2 young this year. The adults were initially seen copulating on 9th February about 600 yards away from the eyrie which is situated some 200 feet above sea level and 200 feet below the cliff-top. The female was seen gliding towards the male which had settled on a ledge a few minutes earlier. She glided directly towards him, pushed him off the ledge and settled instead of him. After gliding in one huge circle the male approached the female and mounted her while calling repeatedly. In early May their 2 young, which by then had no trace of down left, could be seen frequently at the entrance of the eyrie where they often practised their wings, scattering about their prey's feathers. Some of their prey consisted of Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur* as could be seen from the feathers. In fact the latter half of the fledging period coincided with the peak migration of Turtle Doves. On the 12th May one of the young left the eyrie and settled a short distance away while a parent could be seen plucking the prey with which it had just arrived. At the end of May when the area was last visited the young could not be seen but they could still be somewhere near considering the alarm calls of one of the parents.

3. The Cetti's Warbler & Fan-tailed Warbler colonizing new areas.

Since our contribution on the Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* and Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* in Il-Merill No. 12:7-9 and No.13:11-13 respectively, both species have spread to new areas.

The Cetti's Warbler is now breeding at Bahrija, San Martin, Xemxija and

possibly Bingemma, where a male was heard singing this spring. The pair at Xemxija arrived in July 1974 and remained there throughout winter. This spring they bred in the thick Tamarisk grove and raised 3 young which left the nest on 15th May. Xemxija is the only area without bramble *Rubus ulmifolius* where this species is presently breeding.

The Fan-tailed Warbler is spreading quicker and has established itself firmly in various localities. At least 10 pairs have been noted breeding and the new areas include Bahrija, Buskett/Girgenti area, and Ghajn Tuffieha where there are 2 pairs. The pairs at Ghadira and Xemxija have increased to 3 and 2 respectively. Singing males have also been heard at Mtahieb, Ghajn Rihana and Siggiewi. All the nests found so far were built in grasses (also in corn fields) within 2 feet of the ground but a nest found last year in a tamarisk tree was about 6 feet above the ground.

Both the Cetti's Warbler and the Fan-tailed Warbler have also spread to Gozo where they were found breeding for the first time this year (1975). 2 pairs of Cetti's Warbler were present in Lunzjata and Xiendi Valleys where they had arrived the previous autumn. The young of the pair at Lunzjata left the nest in late May. The first nest of the Fan-tailed Warbler in Gozo was located in a cornfield at is-Sanab on 29th March. It contained 5 eggs which were different in colour from the 2 types described in our previous contribution. They were bluish but were sparsely spotted with very dark purple markings round the thicker end. Another pair was present at Sarraflu (Kerċem) while singing males were also heard at Ta' Ċenċ and at Gharb on 10th May.

4. An unusual occurrence — Swallows breeding in Malta.

Last year (1974) a pair of Swallows *Hirundo rustica* bred in a house in the village of Mqabba. This was indeed an unusual occurrence. In fact the only mention of Swallows breeding in Malta was made by Antonio Schembri in 'Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta' — 1843 — wherein he stated that some pairs breed with us. None were recorded since then. The only resident in this Mqabba house was an old man, Toni Ellul, who on noticing the swallows entering the house, left one of his back windows open day and night. The pair built the saucer-shaped nest with mud and dry grass in the corner where one of the beams entered the wall. They successfully raised 4 young which left the nest on 2nd August.

5. Influxes of Sardinian Warbler.

Few people realise that our common resident the Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* established itself as such during the last century. Previously it was a winter visitor. Major Fielden was one of the first to note that Sardinian Warblers may have started to breed. He wrote to H.E. Dresser, who was working on his 'Birds of Europe', to inform him that he found Sardinian Warblers in Malta in summer 1874 and that he had little doubt that they remained to breed here. Dr. David Bruce also wrote to Dresser to inform him that during the summer the Sardinian Warbler was moderately common and that he had found 2 nests (Dresser, H.E. 1885 — Letters, Announcements, etc. Ibis (5) 3:453-454). Schembri in his Catalogo (1843) listed it as a winter visitor. So did Wright in his List of the Birds observed in the Islands of Malta and Gozo (1864); however, in his 5th appendix (1874) he remarked that the Sardinian Warbler may have started to breed.

Presently the Sardinian Warbler is very common and inhabits both rural and suburban areas. The numbers in late autumn and winter seem still to be augmented by some winter visitors. The number of fresh arrivals in 1974 was exceptionally notable and 111 new birds were ringed from 26th October to 15th

December in 4 localities — Xemxija (26), Salina (19), Haj Far (12) and Lunzjata (54). Most of these birds kept passing through and only 6 were retrapped after more than a fortnight. There were no significant retraps at Lunzjata; however, 3 at Salina remained in the area for at least 24, 56 and 62 days respectively. Two others at Xemxija stayed for 49 and 55 days. There were no other retraps after the 3rd week of January suggesting that the few which wintered in those areas had also left by then.

6. A Spotted Flycatcher's nest.

We had earlier stated that the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* can be added to the list of our rare breeding birds (News and Views — 12. Another addition to the Breeding Species of Malta — Il-Merill 10:16). We mentioned the family parties seen at Buskett and at Wied il-Kbir in 1971 and the juveniles which were recorded at Buskett in 1972.

Last year (1974) a nest with 3 almost fully fledged young was located at Buskett on 13th July. It was built on the lowest horizontal branch of a cypress tree among the twigs, sheltered by the foliage. It was about 10 feet above the ground. It was rather loosely constructed with fine grasses lined from the outside with moss and some patches of cobweb. From the inside it was scantily lined by finer grasses, a piece of cotton thread and a little vegetable down, however, the cup was almost non-existent and it looked nearly flat on top. The young left the nest on 15th July and were still seen about with their parents on 24th July when the area was last visited.

7. A Corn Bunting's nest with a difference.

The Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* usually builds its nest on the ground under some herbage or in the herbage itself. A nest containing 5 eggs found on 1st May 1975 in Xlendi Valley was about 3 feet above the ground. It was built among the dry stalks of a Fennel *Phoeniculum vulgare* and was totally covered by the growing fresh foliage. G. Despott (The Breeding Birds of Malta — The Zoologist 1916) had stated that sometimes, but very rarely, the nest is found on the lower branches of the carob tree.

8. All five Hirundine species together.

The Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* is a vagrant to our islands, appearing mostly from October to March. However, for the last 2 winters, a few Crag Martins were present in Gozo and this year 1-5 were frequently seen up to March. One was still present on 12th April at Lunzjata and on this last day it could be seen with the Swallows, House Martins, Sand Martins and 2 Red-rumped Swallows.