

THE 1974 OCCURRENCE OF THE TRISTRAM'S WARBLER

In IL-MERILL (no. 15 for Jan.-June 1975) we reported the occurrence of the Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*) in Malta on 8th March 1974. However in an attached slip to the same issue, we pointed out "that the date of occurrence of the Tristram's Warbler has proved uncertain beyond the fact that it was in 1974". We promised a fuller presentation of available facts in a future issue of IL-MERILL.

The facts, as far as we could ascertain, are as follows:

During a visit to Mr. George Faure's residence at Luqa, Malta in May 1975 we came across the specimen in question, stuffed and mounted. We duly informed the owner that it was the first record of that species for Malta and Europe. Mr. Faure told us that it was taken on the 8th March 1974 and showed us a Moussier's Redstart, one of two which were also taken on the same date.

We visited Mr. Faure a second time in order to photograph the specimens and to take measurements of the Tristram's Warbler, all of which appeared in IL-MERILL No. 15.

Some days later Mr. Faure sold some mounted birds to the Museum of Natural History including the Tristram's Warbler in question. On 21st June 1975, a short article, signed by Mr. J. Vella Gaffiero, appeared in the daily newspapers "Malta News" and "L-Orizzont" stating that "a small collection of mounted birds recently acquired by the National Museum of Natural History at Mdina from Mr. George Faure included a specimen of the Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*) taken by Mr. Faure himself on 8th July 1974".

On noting the different date, we contacted Mr. Faure again on 23rd June 1975; he stressed the fact that the Tristram's Warbler was taken on the same day as the Moussier's Redstarts — that is on 8th March 1974 and not in the following July. So duly a letter was sent to the Editor of "L-Orizzont" in July 1975 to correct the date given apparently in error by Mr. J. Vella Gaffiero.

We were subsequently informed by Mr. Faure that he had wrongly communicated the 8th March 1974 date to us. Since we had taken scrupulous precautions in ascertaining this particular information, the change of dates appeared altogether baffling. Consequently, in an attempt to clear the issue, we contacted Mr. Vella Gaffiero, and we agreed that it would be better to simply consider the Tristram's Warbler as having been taken in 1974.

The fact that Mr. Faure had informed us that the Tristram's Warbler and the Moussier's Redstarts were taken on the same day, coupled with the additional information that at least 6 Moussier's Redstarts occurred in March 1974 as well, tend to strengthen the argument for the March date when due to unusual meteorological conditions very plausibly a movement of North African species overshot their breeding areas.

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