

## THE OCCURENCE OF *ALCA TORDA TORDA* (Lin) IN MALTA

Dr. C.B. Ticehurst classified separately the British razorbills from Swedish and Greenland birds under the name *britannica* on account of their smaller size. This name was accepted by the British List Commitee in 1937. It was later discovered that Iceland rozarbills were small in size like the British population and therefore Brehm's type of *islandica*, which had been obtained in southern Iceland in 1931, took precedence over *britannica*.

In 1941 Whiterby gave the following measurements for both types and these show a significant difference in bill and wing measurements:

*Alca torda torda* : Wing 201-218, Bill 30-35, Bill depth 22-26 (mm)  
*Alca torda islandica*: " 185-203, " 30-35 " " 21-23

In 1959 C. & V. De Lucca noted that the few examples they have examined all belonged to the type *islandica* ("Note Sull'Ornitologia delle Isole Maltesi" — Riv. It. Orn. (29) 2:62). But Dr C. DeLucca added the type *Alca torda torda* in his "Revised Check List of the Birds of the Maltese Islands" (No. 168) giving its status as "straggler in winter"

At the Museum of Natural History in Mdina there are to be found five specimens of Razorbills. On examination it was found that one of these five specimens belong to the Northern type *Alca torda torda*, whilst the other four (although these are birds of the year) are *Alca torda islandica*.

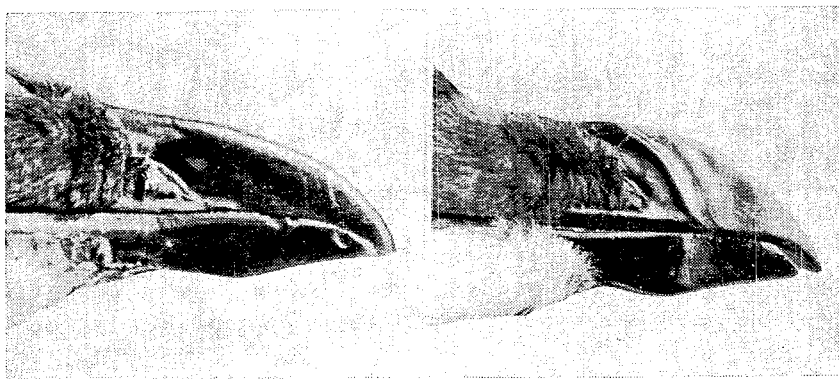


photo by courtesy of the Director of Museums

### Bills of 1st year *A.t. islandica* (left) and *A.t.torda*

The following are the measurements of these birds in mm:

Date & Locality	Wing	Bill	Bill depth
(a) No date or locality	190	33	16(*)
(b) Malta — Feb. 1891	185	34	16(*)
(c) Salina 30.9.1924	188	29(*)	14(*)
(d) Salina 10.11.1925	185	28(*)	17(*)
(e) M'Skala 6.11.1933	211	34	24

In Italy the Rozarbill is rare and irregular like it is in Malta. The type commonly taken there is that of *Alca torda islandica*, although even more rarely the *Alca torda torda* may occur (Avifauna Italica — Augusto Toschi). In the Birds of North Africa, Etchecopar and Hue state that the wintering birds off the coasts of the Canaries, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are of the type *islandica*.

This record of the Northern Razorbill is very interesting as it is the only documented occurrence so far south recorded and may give future evidence to the winter migration of the Northern race.

J. Vella Gaffiero

(\*) Bill measurements do not agree with lengths given by Witherby; but this is because Razorbills take a year before they grow their bills to the proper length.

### ~~RAPTORS IN MALTESE SKIES~~

~~(This is the last article on diurnal birds of prey which appear in Malta. The accidentals and rare visitors have not been included. The first three appeared in "Il-Merill" Nos. 3, 4 and 7 respectively.)~~

~~Merlin *Falco columbarius* Seger ta' Denbu~~

~~Merlins are nowadays scarce and irregular in our islands. They occur during March and early April and from mid-October to mid-November. They have also been recorded in January, September and December.~~

~~Both females and immatures have much the same plumage: the upper parts are brownish and the underparts are creamy buff with dark brown markings; the tail is brown with a white tip and bands. Adult males are slate grey above and heavily striped with rufous below; the slate blue tail has a black terminal band.~~

~~In the air Merlins fly low and erratically over the ground as they chase the small birds on which they feed. Their flight on migration is not different and they have been observed to migrate only singly.~~

~~Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* Zumbrell~~

~~In spring Red-footed Falcons are normally seen frequently from mid-April to mid-May; in autumn they are scarce though fairly regular, occurring from late September to mid-October. Birds have also turned up in late March, June, July and early September.~~

~~With its dark blue grey plumage, except for chestnut on its thighs and under the tail, the adult is a very handsome falcon. Adult females have a rufous head, with short chestnut moustachial stripes, barred greyish upper parts and sandy underparts. Immatures resemble the female, but do not have the rufous head and are browner. Both sexes have reddish beak and feet, which in juveniles are yellower.~~

~~This falcon in the air looks and flies much like a Hobby, but its wing-base is broader and it is less agile. When perched, its wings reach almost to~~