

and on the North African coast during the typical autumn migration.

The situation during the 23rd-26th September was however anything but typical. The favourable weather conditions over the mainland of Europe encouraged migrants to commence their long journey southwards only to be met in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean region with totally unfavourable conditions, which brought their migratory journey to an abrupt halt. There can be little doubt that the majority of birds present in Malta at this time were birds brought down by the depressed weather conditions. Whilst the grounding conditions continued in Malta until the 27th September there are indications that breaks in the cloud began to develop during the night of the 24th/25th September sufficient to allow a proportion of the grounded migrants to leave. This is borne out by the reduced numbers of most species on the 25th and reducing even further on the 26th and 27th as conditions continued to improve.

Major falls of migrants on the

requent in September since the weather in Northern Europe tends to be more susceptible to change at this time of year. In Malta however the weather in September and early October is usually settled with light winds creating generally favourable migratory conditions. The only comparable fall of Autumn migrants in recent years occurred late in October 1966 following a period of severe thunderstorms, when many thousands of Songs Thrushes, Blackbirds and Robins were grounded on the islands.

These conditions will occur periodically and in varying degrees of intensity to give the ornithologist in Malta an unexpected boost at a time of year when things are normally unexciting. It must be recognized however that those conditions are abnormal and that in most years the trans Sahara migrants will pass by Malta on their long flight Southward.

I am indebted to Nick Diamond of the British Trust for Ornithology for his assistance in interpreting the weather reports and to the Meteorological Office at Bawtrey for the loan of the weather reports.



BIRD-WATCHING IN MALTA

M. Beman.

Where do you see all these birds? I've only seen a few sparrows in Malta'. This is a question which I am frequently asked. Many people, including, I suspect some of our members, are under the impression that these islands are almost devoid of bird-life. Although this is almost true during the summer months, at other times of the year the islands hold considerable numbers of many species of birds.

The secret of seeing birds lies in being in the right place at the right time. The time of day is of great importance, for birds tend to be most active in the early morning and late afternoon, thus it follows that watching is best done at these times.

Factors such as wind direction also influence the numbers and types of birds which may be seen. It should be remembered that

migrating birds tend to fly into the wind and thus arrive in Malta on the side towards which the wind is blowing. Even then, certain localities will be more favoured than others; for this reason a list of the best areas in Malta, including some information about likely birds etc., follows:

Buskett

The only area in Malta which can be described as woodland and one of the best places to watch birds in attractive surroundings. The access is too well known to need mention, although it should be noted that the best part is at the lowest part of the valley.

Winter:

Thrushes, finches, wagtails, Goldcrest, & Firecrest, Robin, Blackcap, Chiffchaff.

Spring & Autumn:

Night Heron, raptors (Birds of

Prey), crakes, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Golden Oriole, Wryneck, warblers, chats, flycatchers, hirundines (swallows etc.), Woodchat Shrike, Roller.

Delimara

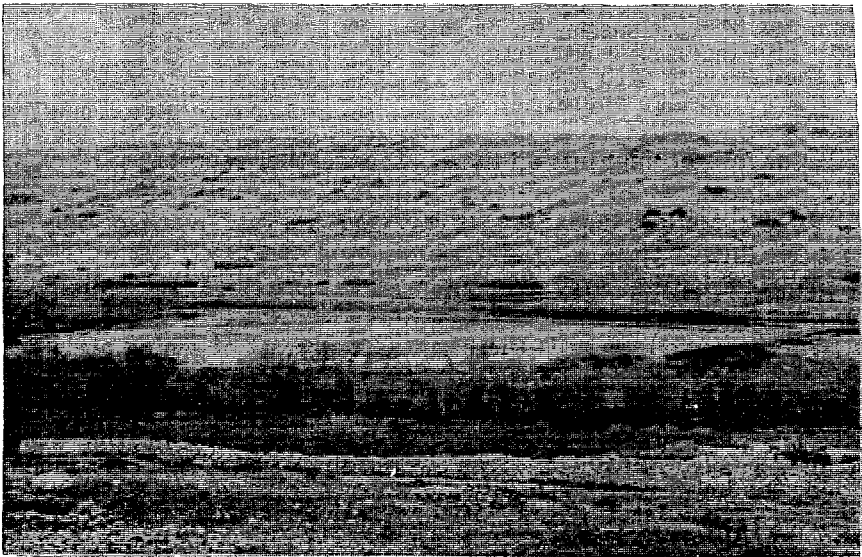
The southernmost point of Malta, forming one of the arms of Marsaxlokk. During strong north-west or north east winds in spring and autumn, large numbers of herons can be seen from the point as they seek shelter from the wind on Malta's southern coast.

Winter:

Gulls, terns, ducks, Gannet, Cormorant.

Spring & Autumn

Hérons, terns, Cory's Shearwater (Mediterranean form), raptors.



Għadira, the only fresh-water pool in Malta, where many waders and wild fowl rest and feed during migration. The M.O.S. hopes to turn it into a bird-sanctuary and field centre. (*J. Attard*).

Ghadira

Malta's only freshwater pool and the target of a bird-reserve campaign by the M.O.S. Preserved as a duck shoot (during winter) by its present tenant, it is virtually the only sanctuary for exhausted migrants. In addition to the water birds attracted by the pool, the surrounding tamarisks hold large numbers of small passerines. Easterly winds produce the largest falls in this area, but some birds are always present.

Winter:

Ducks, Black-necked Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Water Rail.

Spring & Autumn:

Hérons and waders (in autumn, only if pool full), Turtle Dove, Wryneck, Woodchat Shrike, Hoopoe, warblers, chats, flycatchers, pipits, Scops Owl.

Mtahleb

An area of great scenic beauty, Mtahleb is the only break in the high cliffs that run from Gebel Ciantar to Fomm ir-Rih. Access to the lowest part of the valley, which is the best for watching, can be obtained by taking a left

turn from the cliff-top road near the primary school and by taking the right fork halfway down the hill. The rocky cliff-top should be searched for such species as the Rock Thrush (not to be confused with the Blue Rock Thrush, which is to be found along the sea-cliffs), Wheatear and Black-eared Wheatear. Due to its position on the coast, Mtahleb is best visited during easterly winds in spring and autumn.

Spring & Autumn:

Raptors, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Woodchat Shrike warblers, chats, flycatchers, pipits.

Salina

The salt-pans at Salina form an ideal resting place for migrating waders and other water birds.

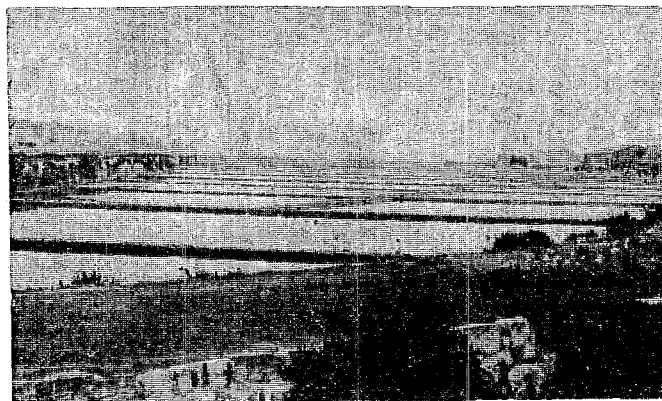
Unfortunately the place is heavily shot and those birds that escape the guns are discouraged from remaining there long.

Winter:

Ducks, Black-necked Grebe.

Spring & Autumn:

Hérons, Waders, terns, Kingfisher (autumn), hirundines, wagtails, small passerines (in the Kennedy Grove).



The salt-pans at Salina are also much frequented by waders, but these are not given any chance by the numerous shooters that visit the place.

(J. Sultana)

The disused airdrome at Ta' Qali forms an ideal habitat for birds of heathland and other flat areas. Unfortunately it is also heavily shot over and few large birds remain for long.

Golden Plover, Lapwing.

Spring & Autumn:

Raptors (especially harriers in spring), waders, Hoopoe, pipits, wagtails and chats.

In the next issue J.Sultana writes on bird-watching in Gozo.

BIRD NOTES**APRIL to JULY.**

~~Spring migration was rather lean with very few notable falls or passages recorded. As usual, however, it was nonetheless exciting with a good number of rare or unusual birds turning up regularly.~~

APRIL

~~April opened with a movement of Ruffs, with 15 counted on the 1st. On the same day a Dotterel was found freshly dead. The 2nd saw more Ruffs with 52 counted and a fall of Bonelli's Warblers, with 6 at Ghadira and 2 at Mosta. 3 Kentish Plovers, a Great Spotted Cuckoo, a Stone Curlew and an Osprey were also logged. 2 Whinchat at Ghadira were the first for the spring. On the 3rd two late Ring Ouzels were at Delimara, where Purple and Grey Heron and Little Egret were also seen; a Pallid Swift was seen at Gebel Ciantar. Great Reed Warbler was new on the next day, when a Pratincole was also newly arrived. The first Montagu's Harrier arrived on the 5th; on the same day a party of 16 Black Kites flew over Ta' Qali and 17 Honey Buzzards were seen at Mtahleb. A late Blackbird was also logged. The first of a number of Reed Warblers was seen on the 6th and the last White Wagtail the following day. Another Great Spotted Cuckoo was recorded on the 8th. The 9th saw a Savi's Warbler at Wied il-Luq and Marsh, Pallid, Hen and Montagu's Harrier at~~

~~Ta' Qali, where about 20 Red-throated Pipits were present. A Pratincole and a late Starling were seen on the same day. A Kentish Plover arrived at Ghadira on the 10th and stayed till the 24th. The first Garden Warblers arrived on the 11th when a final Serin was seen. A passage of herons, including the first Squaccoos, was recorded at Delimara the next day. A Glossy Ibis, an Osprey, a Pratincole, a Snipe and several Greenshanks were also observed. A Savi's warbler on the 13th could have been the same bird logged on the 9th. A Black Kite, a Dotterel and a late Song Thrush were seen. An influx of Red-throated Pipits was noted on the 14th, with 30 counted at Ta' Qali. A Cornsnake and an Alpine Swift arrived on the same day. A Blackcap and a Cormorant on 15th were late birds; Golden Oriole and Little Bittern were new on the same day. 2 Pratincoles and 2 late Robins were seen on the 16th when the first Nightjar was logged. The 17th saw a final Goldfinch, a very late Blackbird, 2 Reed Warblers, a Black Kite and 6 Montagu's Harriers. Small influxes of Quail, Turtle Dove and Hoopoe were noted on the 19th. New on the same day were Curlew Sandpiper, Roller, Bee Eater and a Great Snipe; a final Chiffchaff was also seen. A Great Snipe was again recorded on the following two days. The first Red-footed Falcons arrived on the 23rd when an Ortolan Bunt-~~