

~~jata Valley) has a reed bed along the middle with a wooded area (relative ly to Gozo) on one side and irrigated fields on the other. The lower part (Xlendi Valley) is deeper with rocky heights on both sides. It is best visited during N.W. & N.E. winds. It takes only 15 minutes on foot from the centre of Victoria, on the road to Xlendi, to reach the point between the two valleys.~~

~~Birds that can be seen during spring and autumn in the above localities: Crakes, Scops Owl, Cuckoo, Nightjar, Bee-eater & Roller (spring only), Hoopoe, Wryneck, pipits, wagtails, Woodchat Shrike, warblers, flycatchers, thrushes and chats, and Golden Oriole (mostly in spring).~~

~~*Ta' Cene Cliffs:* This is a rocky area with a 400 foot drop to the south. The cliffs provide a magnificent view. It can be reached from the village of Sannat. Larks, pipits, wheatears, and Rock Thrush (not to be confused with the Blue Rock Thrush which is always present) are birds which frequent this area.~~

~~Other places worth a visit are Pergla Valley in Xaghra (half way between Marsalforn and Ramla Bays), San Blass and Wied ir Rihan in Nadur, the valleys round the village of Zebbug and the area round the village of Gharb.~~

~~The wintering birds, Water Rail (at Lunzjata), Meadow Pipit, Wagtails (White and Grey), Dunnoek, Chiffchaff, Fire/Golderest, Stonechat, Black Redstart, Robin, thrushes, finches and Starling can be watched in various localities. Sea cliffs round the island provide vantage points to do sea-bird watching.~~

~~While in cultivated areas, bird watchers are advised to keep strictly to the paths. Farmers are generally hospitable and helpful, but they do not like to see people trekking across their cultivated fields. Unfortunately, as in Malta, the best areas are frequented by shooters and trappers to the bird watchers' annoyance.~~

RAPTORS IN MALTESE SKIES

A REVIEW

C. GALEA

One of the many projects that the M.O.S. has taken in hand is the appraisal of the situation of birds of prey in the Maltese Islands. It is very urgently needed and will provide, it is hoped, a basis for future efforts aimed at both the further study of these birds and at the education of the public in its appreciation of raptors — not as plucked carcasses for the pot, not as stuffed caricatures in glass-cases, but as the magnificent monarchs of the sky as they truly are.

This appraisal will take the form of a review which will consist of several parts, each dealing with a different aspect e.g. migration.

All the birds seen in Malta are of course European ones. So it is quite pertinent to take a brief look at the whole i.e. European picture.

38 species of raptors are found breeding in Europe; 28 *Accipitridae* (broad-wingeds) and 10 *Falconidae* (Falcons). They occupy every conceivable habitat, from the bleak Arctic tundra of the Gyr Falcon



A pair of Kestrels on the nest. (E. Hosking)

Falco rusticolus to the forests of the Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, from the swamps of the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* to the mountain ranges of the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*.

Only 9 species are resident, the rest being either partial migrants or else summer visitors. On their twice yearly journey to and from their breeding quarters large concentrations of migrating broad-wingeds are seen at Falsterbö (Sweden), at Gibraltar and at the most famous of all, the Bosphorus.

Naturally only migratory species can be observed in these Islands, and this cuts down the number of species that one can expect to meet with here. The tally is further limited by:

(a) the geographical position of the Islands, right in the centre of the Mediterranean, 60 miles S.E. of Sicily and 180 miles away from the nearest point on the African coast. This appears to be a 'long' sea-crossing to broad-winged raptors;

and (b) the known propensity of most *Accipitridae* to avoid long sea-crossings. However, Harriers do not seem to mind crossing large stretches of open water.

Thus *Accipitridae* would not be expected to be seen in any large variety or numbers; this, however, would not necessarily apply to Harriers and Falcons. Still in spite of these adverse factors, 31 species have been recorded; 11 *Falconidae* and 20 *Accipitridae*. Of this total, 12 which will be treated in a separate article are of very rare occurrence (2 are accidental for Europe),

the rest ranging from very common to rather rare.

Annually some 18 species are met with, of which 15 are regular visitors. These are the Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, all 4 European harriers *Circus macrourus*, *C. pygargus*, *C. cyaneus* and *C. aeruginosus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter nisus*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Red-footed Falcon *Falco tinnunculus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, and Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*. A Short-toed Eagle *Circus gallicus*, a few Buzzards *Buteo buteo* and the odd Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* or two turn up in most years.

Only two species nest here, the Peregrine and the Kestrel. Peregrines formerly used to breed all around the coast as several place names indicate, e.g. Rdum il-Bies (the Peregrine's Hill) at M'Xlokk. Nowadays only two pairs breed. Kestrels used to breed commonly, even on the Valletta bastions. Now only the odd pair manages to breed. A. Schembri (Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta — 1843) stated, on second hand information, that the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* bred on the southern sea-cliffs of Gozo. The Red Kite is an accidental species to our Islands.

These then are the raptors that one may see in Malta. Their list is not impressive, but all things considered it is quite an imposing and interesting one.

~~SOME NOTES ON THE WHITE WAGTAIL~~

~~J. SULTANA & C. GAUCI~~

~~The White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (Maltese name: Zakak) generally arrives in October though stragglers may be seen as early as mid-September~~