

# Bird Notes . . . January - March

## JANUARY

As usual, there was little evidence of bird movements in January; with most of the wintering species well in evidence. Gannets were occasionally seen offshore, whilst a pair of Little Gulls on the 3rd and a Slender-Billed

Gull on the 28th were noted amongst the more usual wintering gulls. A Black-Necked Grebe was at Ghadira on the 14th and Great-Crested Grebes were noted on several occasions in the islands' harbours. Single Pochard and Teal were shot at Salina on the 25th and 27th respectively. Over a hundred Golden Plovers were wintering at Hal Far during the month, but Lapwings were rather scarce. Eight Qualls were at Xaghra, Gozo on the 8th and a Woodcock at Mosta on the 1st Common Sandpipers were occasionally noted around the coast, as were single Kes-

trels and a Peregrine on the 23rd. Three Moorhens and a Water Rail were seen at Ghadira on the 14th, Water Ralls were also recorded on the 4th and 10th Unusual occurrences at this time of year were three House Martins at Lunzjata, Gozo on the 3rd and a Wheatear at Hal Far on the 21st. During the first week influxes of Chiffchaffs and Greenfinches took place and at least six Moustached Warblers were wintering, but by the end of the month no movement was discernible.

## FEBRUARY

February was very similar to January as far as birds were concerned. However a number of different species was recorded. Up to three Great-Crested Grebes were present in Sliema Harbour until the 5th. A pair of Woodcock was seen at Buskett on the 6th and a wintering Wryneck was seen in Gozo the next day. A Bluethroat at Ghadira on the 8th may have been the bird noted in Dec. Also present at Ghadira on the same day was a Coot, which remained until

the end of the month. Up to 10 Lapwings and 60 Golden Plovers were present at Hal Far during the month. A Richard's Pipit at Zebbug on the 13th was followed by a Snipe and a Great-Spotted Cuckoo on the 15th. Chiffchaffs and Robins were noticeably decreasing by mid-month, whilst influxes of Blackcaps increased the numbers at Buskett to over 300. A Water Rail on the 21st was followed by an early Marsh Harrier on the 22nd. Occasional Kestrels passed through from the 21st and a Black-Tailed Godwit was shot at Salina towards the end of the month. The month closed with the first Grey Heron and last Lesser Black-Backed Gull on the 28th.

## MARCH

March was the first month of the spring migration and movement of outgoing winter visitors was considerable. However, westerly winds, which prevailed almost without exception, brought only a trickle of spring passage migrants. The month opened with a Coot at Ghadira and the last Lapwing and

Golden Plovers at Hal Far on the 1st. New arrivals on the same day were two Spoonbills, which met the inevitable fate of large birds in Malta. A Woodcock was at Mosta on the 3rd and the first Sand Martin arrived on the 4th. A Marsh Harrier the same day initiated the main raptor passage. The 5th saw an Egyptian Vulture at Hal Far, a Great Snipe and a Water Pipit at Salina and the first Tree Pipit and Little Ringed Plover. The last Fieldfare of the Winter was also noted on the 5th and the last Mistle Thrush on the following day. New on the 6th were Spotted Crakes at Buskett, Green Sandpiper, Ruff and Redshank at Ghadira and a Short Eared Owl at Hal Far. A Great spotted Cuckoo was at Marsaxiokk on the 7th and the first House Martins and Wheatears were seen in Gozo. A Baillon's Crane was also recorded during the first

week. The 8th brought the first Hoopoe, Scop's Owl and migrant Quail to Malta and a Woodlark was at Delimara. The last Moustached Warbler was also seen on the same day. A Moorhen was new on the 9th followed by a Spotted Redshank and a Jack Snipe on the 10th. Short-Toed Larks arrived on the 11th and both Swallows and a Subalpine Warbler on the 12th.

A wintering Wern and a final Redwing were last seen on the 13th, whilst the first Little Egret and an Oystercatcher were recorded at Marsaxlokk. A short period of north-easterly winds brought the first Sedge Warblers, Nightingale, Redstart and Black-Eared Wheatear to Gozo and Pallid Harrier and Yellow Wagtails to Malta. Another arrival on the 14th was a Calandra Lark at Tarxien. Further arrivals on the 15th included a Kentish Plover and a Black-winged Stilt at Ghadira with the first Willow Warblers in Gozo. North-westerly winds the following day saw the first Night Herons and Lesser Kestrel at Delimara, where Tawny Pipits, a Swift and a pair of Pallid Swifts were also newly arrived. Little Stints were new on the 17th and a Ferruginous Duck the next day. Also on the 18th were the last Dunnocks and a first Little Crake at Buskett.

The last Grey Wagtail was seen on the 19th, when 6 Purple Herons were seen at Delimara. Strong winds on the 20th brought an influx of new arrivals; these included an Osprey, a Merlin, two Stone Curlews and an Alpine Swift. Over 400 Cranes passed over the islands and a heavy passage of terns took place at Delimara; 21 Sandwich Terns, 13 Gull-billed Terns and 2 Common Terns were identified. Many more passed by farther out. Three late Gannets were also seen on the 20th as were the last Mediterranean Gulls, Starlings and Black Redstarts. A Greenshank and a Yellow-browed Warbler near Munxar in Gozo, were new on the 21st and the last Goldcrests and Stonechats the

same day. The first Wryneck and a Bluethroat arrived on the 22nd followed by a Wood Pigeon and a Ringed Plover on the 23rd. The 24th saw the first Wood Sandpiper and an Ortolan Bunting at Salina, whilst a few Black Headed Gulls were still present at Sliema. A last Skylark was seen on the 25th and a Common Sandpiper was newly arrived. Also on the 25th was an Isabelline Wheatear \*\*, in company with 10 Black Eared Wheatears, at Gnejna. Both Common and Honey Buzzards were new in Gozo the next day. An early Turtle Dove arrived in Gozo on the 27th, the day before the first Rock Thrush, Woodchat Shrike, Collared Flycatcher and Red-rumped Swallow. Pied Flycatchers were new on the 29th, when the last Firecrest was also noted. The 30th saw several Curlew and Red-throated Pipits newly arrived as well as the last Greenfinch. By the last few days of the month, almost all the winter visitors had left, but rather few passage migrants had arrived. The month closed with a Hen Harrier during the last week and a Doterel on the 31st.

\*\* The records of Isabelline Wheatear which is the first for Malta and Yellow-browed Warbler which represents the sixth occurrence, have yet to be certified by the Rarities Sub-committee.

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Taridermists C. Falzon and A. Sammut were also visited on several occasions.

M. BEAMAN

A systematic list of birds during 1970 will appear at the end of the year.

(Editor)