

# IL-MERILL

**BULLETIN OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**No. 1 April 1970**

1s.6d to non-Members





# Malta Ornithological Society

Patron

Sir Maurice Dorman G.C.M.G. G.C.V.O.

Committee for 1970



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Cover picture: Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) by E. Hosking. This handsome dove is one of the common spring migrants and can be frequently seen in flocks. It is much sought after by the local bird-shooters.

# IL-MERILL

The title of the Society's Bulletin, IL-MERILL, is the Maltese name for the Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius*, which is one of the few resident species of the Islands. It was chosen as the National Bird of Malta by the local National Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation and has been the emblem of the Malta Ornithological Society since the latter's inception.

Bulletin of the Malta Ornithological Society No. 1 April 1970

## EDITORIAL

It is with great pleasure that we are able to announce that H.E. Sir Maurice Dorman, GCMG, GCVO has kindly consented to become the Patron of the Malta Ornithological Society. We hope that this announcement coupled with the first issue of our new publication 'Il Merill' will, in this Nature Conservation Year, help on the noble work of our organization in its effort to preserve the bird life of Malta.

It was just two years ago in March 1968 that the Malta Ornithological Society issued its first Quarterly Bulletin which ran to eight issues. It was produced on a Gestetner machine and its scope was gradually widened by producing a number of interesting and informative articles on various aspects of bird life and bird conservation on the islands of Malta and Gozo. Before March 1968 the Malta Ornithological Society which was then incorporated with the Natural History Society of Malta did indeed issue monthly newsletters which consisted largely of information about the activities of the Society and notes on observation of birds seen and these were invaluable in giving continuous and exact information of interest to the bird-lover and bird-watcher.

magazine printed and give it an entirely 'new look'. It will help to give that professional touch to our publication and possibly appeal to an even wider public so that the aims of the Society may become better known and more effectively achieved.

The aim of the Society has always been twofold: In the first place, to collect and collate precise and scientific information on local and migrant bird life which will be of interest and use to persons interested locally and to international scientific bodies concerned with the Mediterranean area and world bird migration studies. For example last year we ringed some 4,000 birds, which total we hope to surpass this year. This is quite a good effort when one considers that the British Trust for Ornithology ringed fewer than 600,000 birds in the whole of 1968. We hope that within the next few months we shall be able to complete and publish our ringed records for the past three years and this will show how the Malta Ornithological Society, though small in numbers, has achieved scientific work of no small value.

In the second place the aim of the Society in conjunction with the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee (MBROC) and the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), is to foster and promote the protection of

And now in this Nature Conservation Year we have decided to have our

bird life in particular on these islands and elsewhere as the case may arise. as we recently did by officially protesting against the revoking of bird shooting and trapping legislation in Italy, and last year by doing our share in having the island of Comino declared a bird sanctuary. This aim is indeed an ever increasingly urgent one as reports come in from all over the world of the disappearance of many species of wild life.

The shooting season is now upon us and it is to be hoped that the hunters will go out in ever-decreasing numbers and be much more discriminating in their choice of game and may the new Secondary Schools which are due to open in September for all children in Malta be schools where respect for the life of God's creatures will be taught. Here is an area also where the Church in Malta has yet to let its voice be heard. It is a frequent sight in Malta to see the sons of St. Francis walking about in his humble robe and the clergy could take a leaf from the life of St. Francis and teach that God's feathered friends have a right to life and not to end up as just another stuffed specimen beneath a glass case. one further example of man's inhumanity to God's creatures

### Miscellany

#### The infamous law No. 906 in Italy

In the fight for bird protection in Italy one of the great leaders is Professor Mario PAVAN, of the University of Pavia. The valiant efforts of the aged Professor Ghigi over many years had at last been crowned in 1969 by the passing of a law forbidding the annual massacre of birds throughout the country. Unfortunately, the present political leaders, with an eye on the next elections revoked this law by decree No. 906 and the slaughter of small birds is once again a common occurrence in Italy. The conscience of the nation has, however, been stung and

One scheme which is very dear to our heart is to have the Ghadira fresh water pond — the only such stretch of fresh water on the islands of Malta and Gozo — declared a bird sanctuary. It is indeed the main 'port of call' for many waders passing through on migration and under the present pressure of the building and developing boom could easily be encroached upon and disappear. Many an enlightened Government in other parts of the world has taken action to prevent the destruction of similar ecologically interesting areas and we hope that the Malta Government will prove itself to be just as enlightened.

May all the readers of our 'new look' magazine also become enthusiastic over the aim of the Malta Ornithological Society and seek out the support of similarly minded persons to promote the good work. We would particularly welcome the aid that teachers in secondary schools can give in educating the rising generation to change its attitude towards the wanton destruction of bird life on these islands and encouraging them to take up less destructive pastimes.

Professor PAVAN has himself collected more than 400,000 signatures of people protesting against law 906 and appealing to the Government to come back on its decision. We wish him and the noble Professor Ghigi success in their gallant efforts and hope the Italian Government will see reason and soon. If any reader of 'Il-Merill' wish to help on the good work, a short letter of protest sent to:

Professor Mario PAVAN,  
University of Pavia,  
Via Taramelli, 24  
Italy  
would be welcomed.

### ERIK HOSKING's gift to the M.O.S.

We are grateful to Mr. E. Hosking, Britain's international famous bird photographer, for the generous gift of 130 bird photos, to the Malta Ornithological Society, which he also kindly allowed us to publish. One of these photos, of a Turtle Dove, is reproduced on the cover of this first issue of 'Il-Merill'. We also hope to make good use of them at a Bird Week later in the year.

### Yellow Wagtails

Yellow Wagtails are protected in Malta. ARE THEY? Those who visited

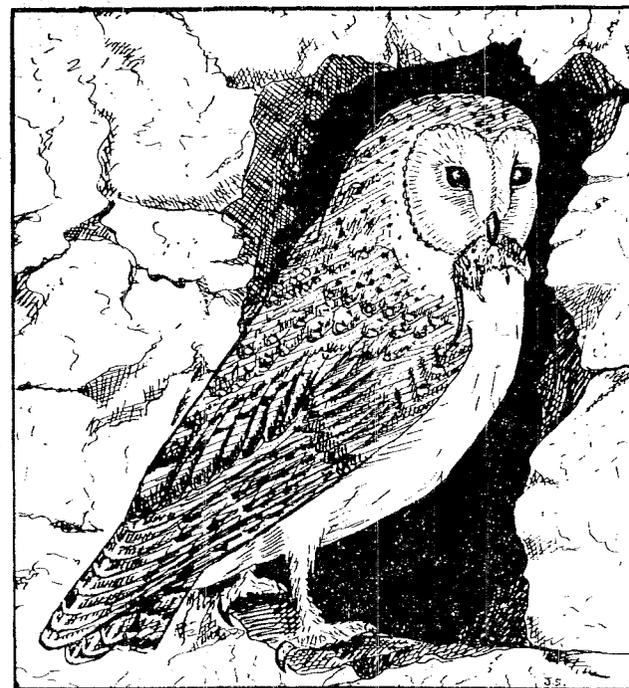
ta' Qali disused airfield during the latter half of April would have wondered. Heavy passages of these beautiful, slender and strikingly yellow birds took place. Unfortunately large numbers finished up in nets managed by a few irresponsible youths. Hundreds were trapped and most of these would, no doubt, have perished after a few days.

The same thing happened in Gozo, in the vicinity of Lunzjata Valley. It is quite discouraging to request the Government to put more species on the protected list when the law protecting the few is not respected or enforced.

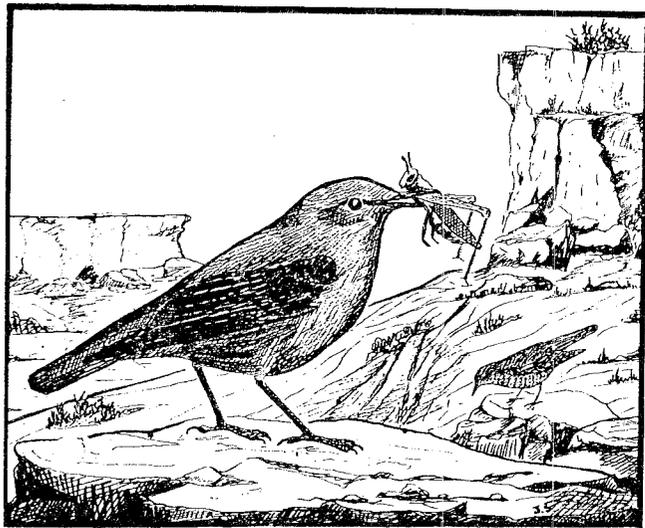
## THE BREEDING BIRDS OF MALTA

By J. Sultana & C. Gauci

(THE MALTA YEAR BOOK 1970 carries a paper on the Breeding Birds of Malta by J. Sultana & C. Gauci. The following is the Introduction of their detailed study and shows the alarming state of Malta's breeding species. Ed.)



Barn Owl  
*Tyto alba*



Blue Rock  
Thrush  
*Monticola  
solitarius*

Cory's  
Shearwater  
*Procellaria  
diomedea*  
on nest  
on Filfla  
U. Sultana

"Besides the paucity of trees and the want of many other conveniences indispensable for breeding birds, another reason why the number of our breeding species is so very limited and nidification with the majority of these occurs rather sparingly, is assuredly want of protection".

This paragraph introduced Giuseppe Despott's paper "The Breeding Birds of Malta", in 1916, the first and only such study in Maltese ornithological literature. If this situation was quite alarming then, it is far worse now after fifty-four years. Large areas of countryside have been encroached on, by development, while the number of bird shooters and trappers has greatly increased. New roads lead to every corner of the Islands and there is not a spot of countryside which is not disturbed. The Maltese Islands are densely populated. The surface area is about 122 square miles and the population is over 320,000. Large uninhabited areas, permanent fresh water and habitats suitable for most birds are lacking, and these are all major factors resulting in a short list of breeding birds. It is well known that small islands tend to have fewer breeding species than large mainland areas



but certainly the general attitude of the Maltese worsens the situation.

Out of the 32 species that Despott listed, only 14 still breed regularly and 4 of these, namely the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), the Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and the Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*) are very scarce. The Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*) which used to breed commonly is now extinct. The last breeding pairs were exterminated in Malta in 1945 and in Gozo, where they had the last

hold on the N.E. cliffs of Xaghra, in 1956. It is a great offence indeed, still greater when one learns that this species had been on the bird protection list. Besides the Jackdaw eleven of the species listed by Despott have not been recorded as breeding since. The Rock Dove (*Columba livia*) should not figure as a breeding bird, as the few pairs that still breed on the south western cliffs of Malta and Gozo are not of a purely wild strain owing to successive interbreeding with domestic feral pigeons.

During these last few years the Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) has been added to the list. This species, which must have been overlooked, was listed only as a rare passage migrant. It is now well spread and breeding regularly. The first nests found in Gozo in 1967, were reported in the Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club. This does not mean that it was not breeding before then. Nests had been found previously, in 1959 (though not officially reported), by A. Valletta (Valletta in litt).

Other species which breed sporadically are the Quail (*C. coturnix*), the Serin (*Serinus serinus*), the Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*) and the Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). The Quail is one of the most sought after gamebirds by the local shooters. It migrates over our islands both in spring and autumn and winters in small numbers when left undisturbed. Following the spring migration a few linger behind annually but they rarely succeed in breeding. Being a ground-dwelling bird, a pair that might nest is easily detected by dogs that follow the farmers and the shooters. The Maltese bird-trappers concentrate mainly on finches and so the occasional pair of Serins, Greenfinches or Goldfinches that tries to nest is not given much chance. The chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), though never reported previously, has also bred occasionally, twice to our knowledge during the last two years. If these finches were not constantly molested especially in winter and spring, they would almost cer-

tainly figure in Malta's list of scarce but regular breeding birds. After the spring migration, a pair of Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) also occasionally attempts to breed in overgrown valleys like Girgenti and Buskett in Malta, and Lunzjata in Gozo, where freshwater springs can be found all the year round after a good rainy season. It is in such favourable places that the occasional breeders build their nests.

Though densely populated the Maltese Islands still offer proper habitat to the present regular breeding birds. The southern and western cliffs provide facilities and protection to the Shearwaters (*Procellaria diomedea* and *Puffinus puffinus*), the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), the Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) and the odd pair of Kestrels and Peregrines. While the inland cliffs and deep valley sides, especially of hilly Gozo, also favoured by the Blue Rock Thrush, hold a few pairs of Barn Owls. It is not difficult to meet with nests of the Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella cinerea*) and the Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) in the open spaces where the Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata*) also breeds commonly. The other Warbler, the Sardinian (*Sylvia melanocephala*), which became established as a common breeding species on Malta between the years 1874 and 1885, has been common ever since, inhabiting every niche in rural and suburban areas. Another common species which needs no introduction is the Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*). It breeds abundantly all over the islands. The Linnet (*Acanthis cannabina*), though far from being a common breeding bird, still nests around the villages of Xaghra and Nadur in Gozo, while scattered pairs, not previously reported, do so also in Malta. Contrary to what has been written since Despott's time, Filfla, the destination of recent expeditions which we organised is still a stronghold of the Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*). It is a pity that this islet is still being used as a bombing target. This has reduced

alarmingly the number of breeding Shearwaters and accounts for a large number of dead Storm Petrels and a larger number of addled eggs.

Though breeding profusely on Filfla, it has not been confirmed that the Storm Petrel breeds also on Malta and Gozo as Despott had stated, though it gets near the shores at night. And it is not surprising, considering the abundance of rats all along the coastline of both Malta and Gozo. The ground nesters, namely the Short-toed Lark and the Corn Bunting, and the two Warblers which prefer to nest just above the ground suffer immensely. Rats, snakes, herds of grazing goats, dogs and children destroy a large number of their nests. On the other hand the larger breeding birds often fall victims of the shot-gun. The Shearwaters are continuously pushed to the farthest corners through disturbances, while

large numbers are slaughtered in summer off Marsaxlokk and Wied iż-Żurriq in Malta, and off Marsalforn in Gozo, during 'pleasure' shooting boat trips. Erroneously, the Peregrine, the Kestrel, and the Barn Owl, like all other birds of prey, are looked on as man's enemies and end up in a show-case.

It is a sad fact that very few of our breeding birds are protected. Ironically, the laws that protect these few are not entirely respected. A clear example is that of the Jackdaw. It is of urgent importance to protect, not simply on paper, all our breeding birds. 1970 is European Conservation Year and it would be befitting if Malta, being a member of the Council of Europe, would conserve this neglected part of our National Heritage for future generations who would then one day call us enlightened.

## Malta . . . Birds . . . & European Conservation Year

by J.M. Attard

1970 is European Conservation Year. All the member countries of the Council of Europe are taking part, as well as Spain and Portugal which have expressed a wish to be associated with the year.

The theme of 1970 is Conservation with a stress on different influential aspects arising from urban conglomeration, industry, agriculture and forestry and leisure in the countryside.

Last February 300 participants from 27 countries met in Strasbourg for a conference to discuss on the Management of the Environment in Tomorrow's Europe. This was an inter-governmental conference and its object was action. Its process, however, was educational. The Strasbourg Conference had been well prepared and after studying and debating four thick reports — on urbanisation, industry, leisure, farming and

forestry — came out with a powerful document of 30 guidelines for Europe's decision makers. It was acclaimed unanimously.

The Council of Europe is now demanding a conference of senior government ministers as a matter of urgency which means that it should meet this year. The point will be to put European Governments on the spot as to what they are actually proposing to do about the policies and measures agreed last month.

The Strasbourg Conference meant action. The experts have even recommended that the Council of Europe should guarantee the right of every individual primarily as a voice and a voter.

If parliaments ratify this, Governments would be liable to legal action from citizens in the European Court

of Human Rights for any failure to enforce it. Besides this, the Conference unanimously declared that field sports make a considerable contribution to preserving wild life. But surely, the delegates never meant the indiscriminate shooting and trapping of birds which is carried out round the whole year and regarded as a sport in Malta.

How is Malta involved in all this?

Malta is one of the member countries of the Council of Europe. The Ministry of Agriculture is the official body responsible for European Conservation Year in Malta. Last year the Department of Agriculture formed a committee from representatives of interested bodies under the chairmanship of the Director of Agriculture to give their advice and voice their opinions on how Malta can give its contribution to this year dedicated to conservation. I represent the Malta Ornithological Society on this national Committee and together with the other representatives, our Society submitted its report to the Chairman. This included protective, administrative and educational recommendations on how to protect our few remaining breeding birds and the many thousands that migrate or winter in Malta and which come from European countries where they are usually protected.

This is an extract from the Report of Malta submitted to the European Conservation Conference last February:

"It is a great pity that Malta has been blacklisted as another country where undesirable bird trapping and killing still persist. It is high time that the question of destruction of wild fowl be seriously studied. It is indeed impossible to prohibit totally the hunting of birds. What is needed is the establishment of a closed season for game hunting. The bi-annual hunting season is almost a national passion. The following places might be declared bird sanctuaries (a) Għadira (b) Salina (c) Ta' Qali (d) Ta' Cenc (e) Xlendi Bay (f) Comino and

(g) Filfla. Protective measures, such as prohibitions of fire-arms and clap-nets in bird sanctuaries might also be adopted. Legislation for the protection of birds might also be carried out in the near future".

The greatest contribution that Malta can give to European Conservation Year is to stop the indiscriminate slaughter and control the trapping of those birds coming from other member countries of the Council of Europe. On no other aspect of conservation can Malta meet so close with her member states.

Wild birds are our national heritage and that of Europe. They know no boundaries and they belong to no particular country. They belong to all Europe. Wild birds are a social resource because of their value in recreation, an educational resource because of the importance of biology and ecology in an agricultural country, a cultural resource because of their significance in Maltese and European literature, art and folklore, and an economic resource because of the value to farmers of many species which provide biological control of pests instead of necessitating the use of the deadly and toxic agricultural pesticides.

Our avifauna is paelarctic. Our geographical position in the middle sea between the two continents makes our Islands of great importance in the study of the movements of European birds. This has been realised by other countries since the last century when ornithology was yet in its infancy. In 1884, the first International Ornithological Congress was convened in Vienna and here it was resolved that Malta was an important observatory station for migratory birds. This congress, therefore, requested the Governor of Malta to permit ornithological observations from the lighthouses in Malta and Gozo by day and night. These observations covering the years 1886 to 1894 were compiled and published by the German Professor Blasius.

In no other field of study can Malta help directly other European countries as Ornithology. Most of the birds that ornithologists study in other European countries are the same birds that are shot or trapped here or, if they are so fortunate, trapped, ringed and released by members of the Malta Ornithological Society Ringing Group.

During the last four years of ringing our Society has put Malta on the Ornithological map. Our Bulletin is finding itself in the libraries of Europe's best field study centres and ornithological institutions. The recoveries of ringed birds in Malta and of other birds ringed by us here and recovered on the continent show the mutual contribution in this field of study. We had recoveries from nearly all European countries where bird ringing is carried out. On the other hand, England, Finland, Sweden, Poland and Italy had recoveries of birds ringed in Malta.

The Malta Ornithological Society has been trying for some years to create a public conscience and to work in the direction for better protective measures to be taken by the authorities. Whilst the size of the countryside is increasingly shrinking, the number of licensed shooters has reached the figure of 8000. The number of motor vehicles on the road is 62,000 and the mileage of roads is 750 miles. Though the birth rate has fallen down in the past years, the population is still increasing substantially for the size of Malta. Agricultural pesticides are being used indiscriminately. Many old trees especially the Carob are being felled and precious soil waisted. This is the result of the building boom. Sea is being polluted with oil and sewage. Litter and building material is thrown and dumped in the valleys. Uglier buildings are appearing like monsters in every part of the Islands. Both breeding and migratory birds are decreasing, while conservation problems are increasing. This is

Malta in 1970. What will Malta look like in the year 2000.

With every passing year sitting and doing nothing, we shall need five years of reparation to bring nature and environment back to normal if we ever are successful. Our few breeding species are today regarded as Cindirellas. Responsible Maltese opinion should become aware of the political and prestige value of our natural heritage during this year of European Conservation. In this modern world, a country without a nature reserve or a national park can hardly be regarded as civilised. And for Malta to pursue a negative and 'laissez faire' policy on the few bird sanctuaries in existence and those proposed by the Malta Ornithological Society, and to permit the indiscriminate shooting and netting of birds in this European Campaign of conservation, would shock Europe and put Malta as a black spot on the Map.

In the past, in the present and in the near future, the cause of wild birds protection has been fighting and usually losing a series of rear-guard actions against economic, political and social pressures, and the general human thoughtlessness and blindness. I am afraid that it is already late now to realise what we had lost.

We should therefore rouse a public opinion during this year with the ultimate aim of seeing wild life conservation and bird protection stepping into the centre of the political stage and demanding action. Unless we are ready to learn the harsh lesson we must start now. The interest is there, only waiting to be aroused. The Council of Europe and a number of the member countries have already showed their backing in the struggle to save Ghadira for birds. Now is the time to give our share to the cause of European Conservation.

## 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 Quails 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 Kestrels and a Peregrine on the 23rd. Three Moorhens and a Water Rail were seen at Ghadira on the 14th. Water Rails 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 Black-caps 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 Wheat-ears were seen in Gozo. A Baillon's Crake 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 Flicreest was also noted. The 30th saw several Curlew and Red-throated Pipts 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.

The contributors to the above Bird Notes were P. Caruana, M. Beaman, B. German, S. Borg, C. Galea, C. Gauci, (Mr. & Mrs.) J. A. Hardman, N. Sammut, J. Sultana, F. Vassallo, J. Vella Gaffiero, & (Mr. & Mrs.) T. M. Watson.

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)

## News from the Ringing Group January to March

By C. Gauci

The first three months were dominated by strong winds which hampered ringing activities no end. Despite this, however, the group managed to ring over 650 birds belonging to thirty four different species. This figure exceeds that of the corresponding period for the past two years.

In January five ringing stations were manned: Buskett for seven hours on three days, Mtable for five hours, on two days Wied Zhuber and Ghadira for two hours on a single day each, and Lunzjata Valley, in Gozo, for six hours on two days. The Chiffchaff, one of our commonest winter residents, was the main bird trapped during this month. Two Moustached Warblers ringed at Ghadira were the first ever to be trapped in January. The best catch of the month was recorded at Lunzjata Valley on the 10th, when thirty five birds were ringed and nine retrapped.

February proved to be the poorest month, with only sixty one birds ringed. Buskett was the most frequented site with twelve hours on seven days. Ghadira, Lunzjata Valley and Ramla Bay were each visited once. The rather poor results obtained during the month were compensated by the addition of a new ringer to the group — Bro Edmund. Bro. Edmund who was trained by J. Sultana, received the necessary permit from the British Trust for Ornithology late in the month.

With the onset of Spring migration ringing was intensified in March and no fewer than nine localities were used. These were Buskett (including Wied il-Luq) — 21 hours on 9 days, Ghadira — 18 hours on 8 days, Ramla Valley — 15 hours on 6 days, Xlendi Valley — 6 hours on two days, Lunzjata Valley — 6 hours on 2 days, Ta' Glorni — 8 hours on 3 days, and Wied Ir-Raghab, Ghajn Barrani and Wied Zhuber on one occasion each. Ramla Valley proved to be the

best area with three very good catches to its credit. The first was on the 15th when eighty five birds of eight species were trapped and ringed in just over two hours. These were mostly Chiffchaffs, but also included a brilliant male Bluethroat. On the 28th and 29th, fifty two and seventy eight birds (Mainly hirundines) respectively were ringed. These included a Red-rumped Swallow. J. Sultana and C. Gauci visited a Manx Shearwater colony three times at night. This colony was discovered by them last year. Nine birds could be recovered from their burrows to be ringed. An all out effort to ring Blackcaps during the last week of March (usually their peak period at Buskett) was foiled when these birds left much earlier than usual.

Mr. & Mrs. Hardman and Mr. & Mrs. T.M. Watson, all B.T.O. ringers, arrived on the 27th March for a holiday in the Maltese Islands and helped the group with the ringing. J.A. Hardman was one of the British Trust for Ornithology ringers who came over in 1965/6 to start the present Ringing Group and helped J. Attard, C. Gauci, J. Sultana and V. Vella Muskat to obtain the necessary permits from the B.T.O.

### List of Birds Ringed

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Manx Shearwater	—	—	9	9
Little Ringed Plover	—	—	5	5
Hoopoe	—	—	1	1
Wryneck	—	—	3	3
Sand Martin	—	—	3	3
Swallow	—	—	129	129
Red-rumped Swallow	—	—	1	1
House Martin	—	—	7	7
Tree Pipit	—	—	1	1
Meadow Pipit	—	1	2	3
Yellow Wagtail	—	—	1	1
Grey Wagtail	1	—	—	1
Dunnock	1	1	—	2
Moustached Warbler	2	1	—	3
Sedge Warbler	—	—	7	7
Blackcap	5	16	60	81
Whitethroat	—	—	1	1
Sardinian Warbler	4	2	13	19

Subalpine Warbler	—	—	7	7	Bluethroat	—	—	1	1
Willow Warbler	—	—	6	6	Blackbird	1	1	—	2
Chiffchaff	80	15	107	202	Chaffinch	2	—	—	2
Firecrest	—	—	3	3	Serin	—	—	1	1
Stonechat	1	—	—	1	Greenfinch	—	—	—	1
Black Redstart	—	—	1	1	Linnet	—	—	62	62
Redstart	—	—	5	5	Spanish Sparrow	6	—	11	17
Robin	26	24	15	65					
Nightingale	—	—	7	7	TOTALS	129	61	469	659

The birds in the above list were ringed by M. Beaman, Bro. Edmund, C. Gaudi, J.A. Hardman (Mr. & Mrs.), J. Sultana, V. Vella Muskat and T.M. Watson (Mr. & Mrs.).

#### RETRAPS:

As usual, a good number of ringed birds was retrapped. The majority were Chiffchaffs retrapped after one to three weeks. Following is a list of more interesting ones.

Species	Locality	Date	Wt.	Date	Wt.
		Ringed	(gms)	Retrapped	(gms)
1. Cetti's Warbler	Wied il-Luq	15 - 9 - 69		11 - 2 - 70	
2. Cetti's Warbler	Wied il-Luq	29 - 8 - 68		11 - 2 - 70	
3. Moustached Warbler	Wied il-Luq	11 - 2 - 70		6 - 8 - 70	11.9
				8 - 8 - 70	11.8
4. Sedge Warbler	Ramla Valley	15 - 8 - 70	11.7	29 - 8 - 70	16.5
5. Blackcap	Buskett	29 - 8 - 69		17 - 9 - 70	
6. Sardinian Warbler	Lunzjata	9 - 10 - 67		10 - 1 - 70	
7. Chiffchaff	Lunzjata	30 - 1 - 68		8 - 1 - 70	
8. Robin	Lunzjata	10 - 1 - 70	17.2	19 - 8 - 70	21.5
9. Robin	Buskett	21 - 12 - 68		18 - 8 - 70	
10. Spanish Sparrow	Ghadira	27 - 4 - 69		30 - 8 - 70	

- Remarks:**
- (1) Still present in same locality after five months.
  - (2) Still present in same locality after eighteen months.
  - (3) Still present in same locality after three weeks.
  - (4) Increased in weight by 4.8 gms in 14 days.
  - (5) Same place the year after.
  - (6) Over two years old.
  - (7) Returned to winter in same place after two years.
  - (8) Note increase in weight before departure.
  - (9) Wintering in same place the year after.
  - (10) Still present after one year.

# Malta Ornithological Society

#### Principles and Aims:

(a) The Society's main purpose is to initiate, foster and aid the study of avian fauna in accordance with strictly scientific methods, thereby helping to increase the sum of human knowledge on the subject.

(b) The Society solemnly affirms its belief in the Conservation of Nature and will pursue whatever actions it deems necessary to ensure adequate protection of wild - life, and to propagate these ideas in the Maltese Islands.

#### Membership:

Members can join the Society and participate in all its activities, provided they subscribe to the aims of the Society and further, undertake to propagate its views, each in his own sphere of life, thus spreading the Society's enlightened ideal and awaking a social conscience that will brook no further deprecation of the living resources of Nature, especially birds.

#### Membership Fees:

Life Member	£15
Member	15s. per annum
Junior Member (under 17)	2s6d (voluntary).

Anyone wishing to join the Society is welcome to write to the Secretary. The Society's Bulletin is sent free to members and illustrated talks, meetings and outings are held monthly except during the summer months.

#### Malta Ornithological Society Ringing Group:

The Society also has its Bird Ringing Group. This Group is engaged in studying the various aspects of Maltese Ornithology, and is staffed by qualified bird ringers holding a ringing permit from the British Trust for Ornithology.

*The Editor welcomes articles, letters and other features bearing on any aspect of the Ornithology of the Maltese Islands and the Mediterranean for publication in this Bulletin.*

*The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the M.O.S.*

We have many copies of I.L.MERILL available. Members can help by selling a few copies to their friends. Write to the Secretary and ask for a number of copies which you think you can manage to sell. The result ..... spreading the gospel for bird preservation and cutting down the Society's expenses.

