

## 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 ideals 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 awakening a social conscience that will brook no further depredation of the living resources of Nature, especially birds.

### *Membership Fees:*

Life Member .....	£15
Member .....	15s per annum
Young Member (under 17) .....	2s 6d

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.

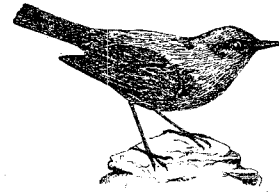
### *Malta Ornithological Society Ringing Group:*

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. Ringing Secretary: C. Gauci, 1A1 Museum Road Rabat, Malta.

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

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

Lux Printing Press

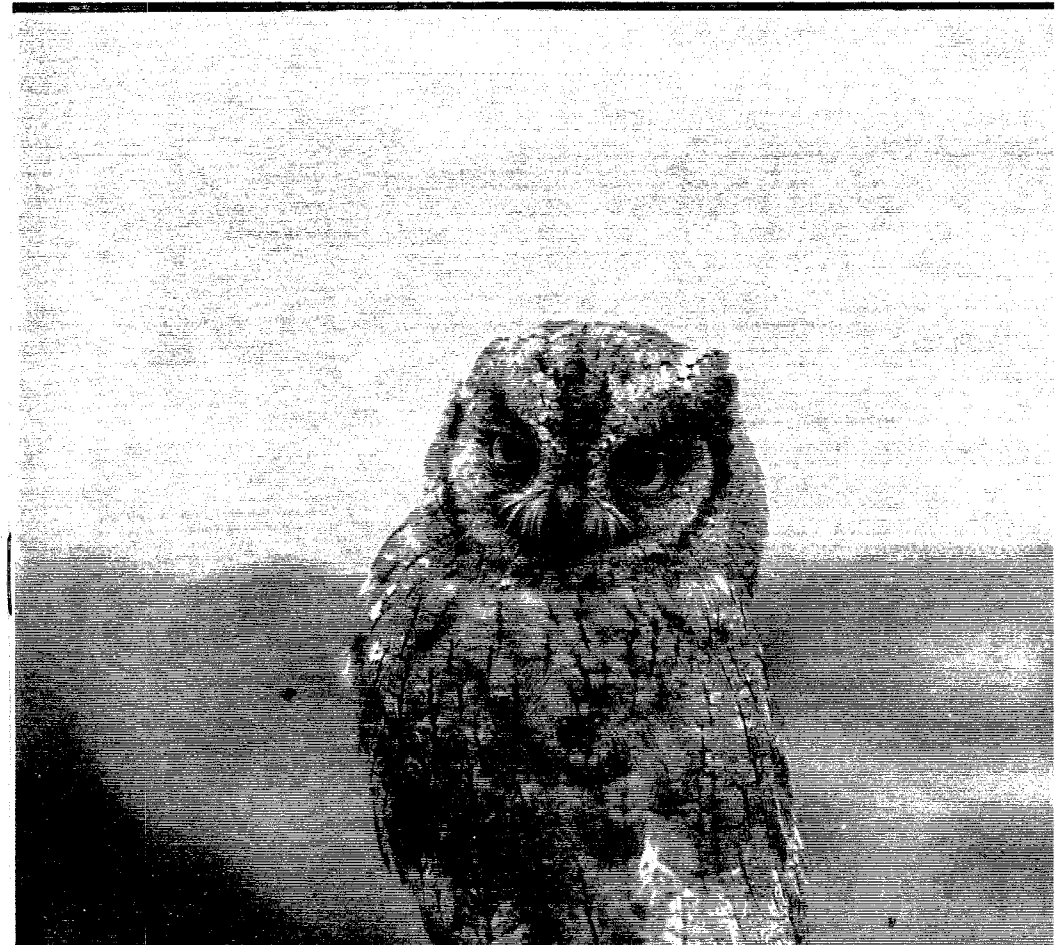


# IL-MERILL

## BULLETIN OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

No. 4 April 1971

1s.6d. to non-Members





# 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.

*Editor*

Bro. Edmund

*St. Michael's Training College, St. Julian's, Malta*

## MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### Committee for 1971

*President*

J.M. Attard

*44, Marsamxett Rd., Valletta*

*Secretary/Treasurer*

J. Sultana

*3, Sciberras Flats, Fleur-de-lys Junction,  
Birkirkara, Malta*

### Committee Members

B. German, (*Ass. Secretary*), Bro Edmund, C. Gauci (*Bird Ringing Sec.*)  
S. Borg, E. Spiteri Campbell, V. Velia Muscat (*M.O.S Gozo Representative*).

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Cover Picture: Scops Owl (photo by J. Azzopardi)

IL-MERILL

No. 4 April 1971.

## EDITORIAL

Number 4 issue of *Il-Merili* starts the second year of its existence and we have had quite a number of favourable comments offered this last year on its production and presentation. We were particularly pleased to receive the congratulations and best wishes of Bob Spencer, Ringing Officer and editor of the *Ringers' Bulletin* of the British Trust for Ornithology. The first two issues were produced at the Orphans' Press in Gozo but the third, printed on art paper, at the Lux Press was typographically a great improvement.

We are most grateful to the local press for printing letters on bird shooting and conservation and in particular to the *Times of Malta* which on ten occasions has put these letters at the head of the page and given them under bold and telling print with titles such as: *Wild Life Conservation, Protection of Birds, Organized Bird Trapping, Indiscriminate Slaughter of Birds, etc.* On three occasions the *Times of Malta* has carried leading articles entitled: *Curb on Bird-Shooting, Massacre of Birds, Check on Bird-Shooting* and in a leader on *Threats to Conservation* the final paragraph was taken up with the same theme. It is most heartening to have this support of the Press.

On our recent successful outing to Comino the Malta Ornithological Society was shocked to see and hear a hunter at work under the very eyes of the Police on this island where all bird-shooting is forbidden by law. We also came across a newly fitted-out clap-netting site and we have reported both these incidents to the Police.

Once again the lovely grove of tarmarisk at Ghadira Pool has been invaded and damaged by campers who break off branches of these trees or allow their children to do so. A pity, for in a few years' time this beautiful site which could easily be turned into a very interesting study centre for Natural History and Geography by the Education Department of Malta will become just another derelict dumping area where the camper and his junk reign supreme: is anybody really interested in this unique area in Government or Education Department? Ghadira Pool which provides an admirable resting place for migrant waders in spring and autumn could easily become an added attraction to bring bird-spotting tourists to Malta at these two times of the year. Let us hope that the incoming Government will show its interest in conserving Ghadira as a nature reserve and take up active steps to achieve this aim.

## MISCELLANY

### Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday, 27th January, 1971, at the British Council in Valletta. Following is the Presidential Address, a summary of the Secretary's Report and the Financial Report for 1970 which were read at the meeting.

### Presidential Address

1970 European Conservation Year has ended without giving us what we most expected. On our part we have made our efforts and given our share during this year to see an improvement in the protection of birds, the conservation of habitat, the education of the public and the study of our birds.

In this struggle in which we have experienced many times disappointments and frustration, we have come across inspiration and encouragement from men of good will and from local and international organisations.

It was a great honour to us when last year His Excellency the Governor-General, Sir Maurice Dorman, kindly accepted our invitation to be the Patron of Our Society. His patronage has already made a remarkable influence beyond our shores. The Friends of Malta have also shown their appreciation in our work by giving financial assistance to our Society to be able to send a representative to the XVth World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation, which took place in Holland, last year. There we were represented by our hard-working secretary, Joe Sultana, who put the case of Malta so well that his proposed resolution was unanimously passed by the delegates in this Conference. Here it was resolved that, whereas

many wild birds which are protected in most European countries, are netted and destroyed indiscriminately in Malta, the Malta Government should control these activities by adequate laws. A resolution also urged the Malta Government to turn Ghadira Pool into a Bird Sanctuary where better facilities could be provided to educate the Maltese public in terms of conservation and protection.

We must admit that it is politically difficult for any Government in power, especially when a General Election is so near, to carry out any changes in the old-accepted traditions and customs of the people, bad and rotten as they may be. But we believe that under any democracy and constitution an area universally regarded as a potential bird sanctuary, unique for our Islands and important to effect a change in the local mentality, should have never been given on lease to one person for the sake of shooting birds. If this mistake has happened it is up to the authorities to straighten things out by requisitioning the land back and use it in the best interests of the nation. As long as there is a Malta Ornithological Society, the struggle for the conservation of Ghadira will be carried on, not in the arena of politics but round the table of diplomacy and understanding.

In our address to you last year, we promised a new publication. This was done in a most interesting form under the name of "Il-Merill", ably edited by Bro. Edmund. Our publications for 1970 also included a booklet, "Bird Studies on Filfla", which is the most interesting and exhaustive study ever to be carried out on the birds of one of the islets

of the Maltese Archipelago. This is a credit to Joe Sultana and Charles Gauci who co-ordinated these studies to the best of their acquired knowledge on the birds of Filfla.

I would like to mention the assistance, understanding and co-operation that we received from other associations especially Din l-Art Helwa, the teenage branch of this group, The Teens and Twenties Talent Trust, The Plant a Tree in Malta Committee, the National Committee of the European Conservation Year, the Malta Bird Reserve Overseas Committee and the Natural History Society of Malta. The latter Society invited us, at the end of last year, to take part in an Exhibition on Natural History. This was a tremendous success and the most popular exhibition that has ever been held at the National Museum. This is a bright and clear sign for us that the Maltese public is again realising the great need of a Natural History Museum. There are already plans for such a museum and we earnestly hope that its message will be purely educational and scientific and not something of a Victorian bird collection. The ultimate aim of such a Museum should be the conservation of our natural heritage and a source of knowledge on local Ecology and species. Here I would like to remember the late Prof. Harry Micallef of the Royal University of Malta who did so much in the planning of this Museum, but who was unfortunate not to see it bearing fruit.

I would like to end this address by thanking all those who have helped the Society in any way or other in our activities and attainments of last year.

**J. M. Attard, President, M.O.S.**

### Secretary's Report for 1970 (Summary)

The Committee for 1970 was elected as follows: President — *J. M. Attard*; Secretary/Treasurer — *J. Sultana*; Ass. Secretary — *C. Gauci*; Committee Members — *Bro. Edmund, C. Galea & E. Spiteri Campbell*. The Ringing Group Secretary was *C. Gauci* while the Gozo representative was *V. Vella Muskat*. *B. K. German*, helped by *M. Thake* and *M. Grima*, was in charge of the Young Members' Section. The Rarities committee was composed of *M. Beaman, C. Gauci & J. Sultana*. *J. M. Attard* was the Society's representative on the Plant a Tree in Malta and the Malta Committee for ECY, while *E. Spiteri Campbell* was the Society's representative at 'Din l-Art Helwa' Association.

The Ringing Group has been very active in field-work and achieved results. *Il-Merill* appeared in its new printed form and four leaflets were published for young members. 'Bird Studies on Filfla' was published to coincide with *E.C.Y.* while a series of twelve articles by *J. Sultana & C. Gauci* (10) and *B. K. German* (2) appeared in the local press including a number of letters by various members. No fewer than 19 talks were given by *C. Gauci* (8), *J. Sultana* (5), *J. M. Attard* (2), *B. K. German* (1), *M. Grima* (1), *J. A. Hardman* (1) and *V. Vella Muskat* (1) at various institutions, namely the British Council, St. Michael's Training College, St. Edward's College, Maria Regina Grammar School, Capuchins' Youth Centre, 4Ts Club, Boy Scouts Headquarters, Gozo and the Lyceum Secondary School, Gozo. Two film shows were also shown to members, while eight outings were held. Three reports — 'Wild Birds Traffic in

Malta' by Bro. Edmund, 'The Bird Situation in Malta' by J. Sultana and 'The slaughter of Birds of Prey' by C. Galea — were prepared and made use of by the Society's representative at the XV World Conference of the ICBP. MOS officials also took part in various programmes on the Malta Television and Radio-diffusion.

J. Sultana, Secretary.

**Financial Report for 1970  
Brought forward £350 4s. 8d.**

Credit	
Fees & Donations	£203 17 4
Sale of Publications	49 15 8
Interest	14 1 11
	<hr/>
	£267 14 11
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Debit	
MOS representation at the ICBP Conference	£30 0 0
Filfla Booklet	67 0 0
Il-Merill Nos 1-3	71 15 0
Postage	12 4 3
Young Members, Ringing Group, Circulars and other expenses	29 18 8
	<hr/>
	£210 17 11

Balance as on 27th January, 1971 = £407 1s. 8d.

J. Sultana, Treasurer,

**Obituary**

We were sorry to hear of the death of Dr. C. DeLucca, B.Sc., M.D., a member of the Society and a pre-

vious Hon. President. He was lately one of the Curators of the Natural History Section of the Museum Department. He has written several papers on local ornithology and natural history, including a checklist of the birds of Malta. We offer our sincere condolences to his wife and son.

**A Set of Stamps**

In 1963 the Natural History of Malta and the Malta Ornithological Society suggested to the Chairman of the Stamp Advisory Board to consider the issue of a Natural History set of stamps. Since then the M.O.S. have reminded him annually about the matter. Our insistence and that of the N.H.S.M. have been rewarded at last. Next September the Post Office will issue a set of four stamps depicting the Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, the National Bird, and the *Centaurea spathulata*, the National Plant.

**A Day Seminar**

On the initiative of the M.O.S., a day Seminar — The Future of the Malta Environment — will be held on 4th July jointly with Din l-Art Helwa, The Natural History Society of Malta and the Malta Geographical Society. Illustrated talks and discussions will be the main items. A circular will be sent to all local members with all the details.

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**RAPTORS IN MALTESE SKIES**

C. Galea

*(This is the second of a series of articles on diurnal birds of prey. The author has been working on this family of birds for the last six years at the request of the M.O.S. Ed.)*

**Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)  
Kuccarda**

The Honey Buzzard is frequent in spring (late March to early June) and common in autumn (mid-August to mid-October). The words 'frequent' and 'common' when describing migratory birds are somewhat vague. Thus, the two periods mentioned simply indicate the period of passage of the bird; the status given applies for only a part of this period. Honey Buzzards arrive initially in ones or twos, the number increasing as the season gets under way. This of course applies to all migratory birds.

The Honey Buzzard is very variable in its plumage but it is always dark brownish on its back and on its upper wing surface. Its head may be white grey or brown, while the streaked or barred under parts may be white or some shade of brown. Its brownish tail has a dark subterminal band and two or three variable bars. Occasionally a bird with a white rump can be noted.

This raptor is a most useful bird, subsisting mostly on insects, especially those of the bee family, with an occasional small vertebrate. The scale-like feathers on its cheek serve to protect its face from being stung by wasps and bees as it ransacks their nest. Naturally, considering its mode of feeding, it is quite

at home on the ground.

In the air this buzzard is quite an accomplished flier, soaring and gliding on down-curved wings with grace and ease. Honey buzzards, considering their size, can be surprisingly fast on the wing — especially when shooting down with nearly closed wings towards a tree chosen as a roost.

In Malta this bird is usually seen in flocks of up to a dozen at a time, at a height varying from a few hundred to a few thousand feet. These parties are mostly seen travelling steadily on their journey, though they can be observed also wheeling high in the sky. Other hawks (Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Kestrel and Hobby) are observed in their company. Roberts (Birds of Malta — 1954 — Progress Press) noted also the Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* soaring with this buzzard.

**Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)  
Arpa**

The Osprey is a scarce though regular passage migrant, occurring in spring (late March to mid-May) and in autumn from mid-September to late October. About a dozen birds are recorded yearly. One was recorded at Wardija on 4th November 1968 (M.O.S. Quarterly Bulletin Voi. 1. No. 4). Despott, curiously enough, recorded the Osprey only between 8th June and the 25th of September (Notes on the Ornithology of Malta — Ibis — July 1917, pp. 281-349).

Ospreys have dark brown upper parts with the white under parts having a faint brown band across the breast. A broad black band runs

from the beak through the eye to the sides of the neck. Its bluish feet have padded toes with strong claws to enable it to clutch securely the fish on which it feeds.

In its habitat this raptor occurs naturally enough near water. This holds true also for Malta; however, especially in autumn, they can also be observed at the hill ridges.

Its buoyant flight consists of a few slow wing beats followed by long glides on level deeply-arched wings.

**Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)  
Astun Iswed**

This Kite is a scarce spring and autumn passage migrant occurring from April to mid-May and in slightly greater numbers from August to late September. It has been also recorded in late March and in July. About ten occurrences are noted yearly.

Black Kites are a dingy dark brown with darker streaks on breast and belly. The upper surfaces of the wing have a pale patch which is also found on their under surface in juveniles. Its dark tail is slightly forked.

These birds can be seen singly or in small parties (the largest recorded being of sixteen birds in spring 1970). On migration they fly at a medium height, in autumn often with the Honey Buzzards.

In flight this bird soars and glides leisurely but gracefully on level wings, though it can hold them momentarily in a shallow V.

**Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*)  
Sparvier**

Sparrow Hawks are uncommonly seen from late September to mid-October; they are very rare at other times. So far in the last five years it has only occurred twice later than mid-October, and just once in Spring. It is interesting to note that Schembri (Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta — 1843) described it as common in both spring and autumn.

Male Sparrow Hawks are slate grey on back, wings and tail; the breast and belly are white-barred with rusty brown. Females have brownish upper-parts, while their underparts are white-barred with greyish brown. In young birds the upper-parts are brownish with rufous tipped feathers; the underparts range from orange to white with irregular markings. Both its feet and iris are yellow.

These hawks are found in well wooded areas which are suitable for the way they hunt. Their prey consists chiefly of small birds, although a few small mammals are also taken.

It has a rapid flight, a few supple wing beats being followed by a long light glide. It has not been observed soaring much in these islands.

These predators are usually met with flying over the hill ridges (especially over Buskett) on their migratory flight which takes place at very variable altitudes. Birds mostly travel singly but on two occasions were noted with hobbies. Occasionally it can be observed hunting, skimming low over the stone walls.

SOME NOTES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN GULL *LARUS*  
*MELANOCEPHALUS* AND THE BLACK-HEADED GULL *LARUS*  
*RIDIBUNDUS*

When one examines critically the various studies published on Maltese Ornithology one is likely to meet with confused statements regarding the status of quite a number of species. Two of these are the Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* and the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

Before trying to give the proper status of these gulls I list hereunder previous statements.

	Mediterranean Gull	Black-headed Gull
Schembri (1843)	Common in the winter months.	Common in the winter months.
Wright (1864)	This is the common gull of Malta. During winter congregates in large flocks in the harbours.	Associates with <i>L. Melanocephalus</i> but is by no means so common.
Despott (1917)	This is the common gull of Malta. It is to be seen in pretty large numbers in our harbours.	I must confess that though I have looked for it most carefully I have not yet succeeded in detecting it.
Gibb (1951)	Many.	(surprisingly not mentioned)
Roberts (1954)	A very common winter visitor.	A common winter visitor to Malta's harbours associating freely with <i>L. Melanocephalus</i> , though usually in rather smaller numbers.
De Lucca (1969)	A very common winter visitor.	A common winter visitor.

Considering the fact that it is the Black-headed Gull which is the commoner of the two with us in winter (and not the Mediterranean Gull as generally stated in the above table), one assumes that some of the afore mentioned authorities totally confused the two species in the winter and immature plumages. (Others, it seems, were content to rely on previous works.) I cannot imagine that a change in the numbers of wintering gulls has taken place. The only published statement with which I fully agree is that of A. D'Andria who wrote "*The Black-headed Gull is, in my experience rather more common here than the above (Mediterranean Gull), con-*

trary to earlier records (*Times of Malta*, 18. 2. 1962 *Sea Gulls over Malta*).

These two gulls frequently congregate in the Grand and Marsamxett Harbours during winter, their numbers increasing during strong North-westerly wind. Frequent counts were made during the last three winters and only once (in December 1968) did the numbers of the Mediterranean Gull reach 35% of the number of the two gulls present. Otherwise it was always less than 15%.

The Black-headed Gull appears earlier than the Mediterranean Gull but the bulk of both are with us by mid-December. They both leave by the end of March but singles or small parties of the Mediterranean Gull may still be noted by mid-April.

All the ringed recoveries (19) in Malta of the Mediterranean Gull were of birds ringed as juveniles on the breeding island of Orlov in the Black Sea. Those of the Black-headed Gull (13) hail from Finland, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany, Yugoslavia and France.

#### References for the compilation of the table:

- 1843 Schembri, A.: *Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta*, Tip. Anglo-Maltese, Malta.  
1864 Wright, C. A.: *List of the Birds observed in the islands of Malta and Gozo*. *Ibis* 6:42-73, 137-157.  
1917 Despott, G.: *Notes on the Ornithology of Malta*. *Ibis* (10) 5:281-349, 466-526.  
1951 Gibb, J.: *The Birds of the Maltese Islands*. *Ibis* 93: 109-127.  
1954 Roberts, E. L.: *The Birds of Malta*. Progress Press, Malta.  
1969 DeLucca, C.: *A Revised Check-List of the Birds of the Maltese Islands*. E. W. Classey Ltd., England.

J. Sultana.

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## BIRD NOTES FOR JANUARY-APRIL 1971

### 1. Selected Occurrences.

Black-necked Grebe: singles on 19/1 and 10/2  
Bittern: singles on 16/3 at Wardija and on 27/3 at Ras il-Peilegrin.  
Osprey: 3 records in April.  
Buzzard: One at il-Qadi on 21/3.  
Eleonora's Falcon: Single bird (dark phase) at Wardija on 23/4.  
Merlin: One on 2/4 at St. Andrew's  
Baillon's Crake: Single bird taken on 31/3.  
Kentish Plover: 2 at Salina on 16/3.  
Turnstone: 3 single birds from 21-28/4.  
Spotted Redshank: One at Ghadira on 13/4.  
Marsh Sandpiper: One at Ghadira from 20-23/4 and at Salina on 23/4.  
Black-tailed Godwit: 5 single birds from 17/2 to 26/3.  
Great Snipe: one at Salina on 6 and 7/3.  
Black-winged Stilt: 2 near B'bugia on 18/2 and 9 records in April.  
Avocet: 2 crossing the south Comino Channel on 14/4.

Cream-coloured Courser: 7 records from 5/2 till 1/4.  
Pratincole: singles on 24/3 at Gnejna, at Ta' Qali on 9/4 and at M'Skala on 19/4. Two at Ta' Qali on 20/4.  
Great Skua: singles taken by fishermen off south coast on 7/2, 3/3 & 5/3.  
Slender-billed Gull: 2 off St. Thomas Bay on 26/3.  
Caspian Tern: 5 off Delimara on 8/4.  
Sandwich Tern: single birds on 3 dates in January, on 25/3 and on 14/4. 2 at Delimara on 4/2.  
Little Tern: single bird on 24/4 at Benghisa.  
Wood Pigeon: singles on 24/3 at Mtahleb and on 28/3 at Wardija.  
Great Spotted Cuckoo: singles on 9/1 at Siggiewi, on 3/3 at Zabbar, on 16/3 at Mgarr and 20/4 at Gudja.  
Pallid Swift: 2 on 7/4 at Rabat and 1 on 8/4 at Mtahleb.  
Kingfisher: one at San Martin on 8/2.  
Bar-tailed Desert Lark: single bird on 5/4.  
Wood Lark: One at Ggantija on 11/3.  
Red-rumped Swallow: 2 on 22/3 at Chadwick Lakes, 2 at Marsalforn on 9/4 and one at Ramla on 10/4.  
Richard's Pipit: One on 20/2 at Salina.  
Water/Rock Pipit: One at Wied il-Ghasri on 16/4.  
Great Grey Shrike: singles on 15/3 at Mellieha and on 2/4.  
Waxwing: one at Siggiewi on 9/1.  
Savi's Warbler: one at Salina on 24/3.  
Grasshopper Warbler: One on 31/3 at Ta' Zuta. (First record for Malta. It was examined in the hand by C. Gauci & S. Borg).  
Orphean Warbler: one ringed at Ghadira on 2/4.  
Fan-tailed Warbler: one in clover fields at M'Xlokk on 9-10/4.  
Rufous Bush Chat: Singles on 14, 15 and 23/4.  
Ring Ouzel: single bird at Pwales on 4/1.  
Ortolan Bunting: 3 single birds from 19-24/4 at Gharb.  
Reed Bunting: singles on 16/1 and 24/2 at Salina.

The winter-residents/visitors (from January) were about in their usual numbers, these increasing by the end of January till mid-February by those wintering south of Malta. The number started decreasing till March as these continued their northward movement. There were no records for the Great Crested Grebe while only one Coot was recorded. Apart from the Garganey, there were only two single records of ducks (Pintail on 13/2 and Mallard on 16/3). Surprisingly there was a small influx of Spoonbills in February with a max. of 20 on 27th and a larger influx of Glossy Ibis in mid-March with several flocks on the 20th. The most unusual fall was of Song Thrushes which appeared in their thousands on 16/3 during strong north-westerly winds.

### 2. Last dates of some wintering species.

*March*: 3rd Gannet; 7th Lapwing; 9th Redwing; 10th Lesser Black-backed Gull; 15th Golden Plover; 16th Fieldfare; 17th Black-headed Gull; 18th Dunnock; 19th Starling and Dartford Warbler; 21st Mediterranean Gull and Blackbird; 24th Goldcrest, Black Redstart, Stonechat and Serin; 27th Wren; 28th Grey Wagtail

*April*: 8th White Wagtail; 10th Chiffchaff and Meadow Pipit; 19th Blackcap; 20th Robin and Song Thrush; 23rd Skylark

The first trickle of spring migrants arrived just before the end of February. Though since mid-March there were frequent but irregular small influxes, no exceptional large falls took place and there were periods of several days with very few spring migrants about especially in April. Very unusual low numbers were recorded for some species, e.g. Wryneck, Woodchat Shrike, Whitethroat.

3 First date of appearance of selected spring migrants.

*February*: 21st Pallid Harrier; 27th Marsh Harrier; 23rd Green Sandpiper and House Martin; 28th Swallow.

*March*: 1st Purple Heron; 5th Hoopoe; 7th Tree Pipit; 8th Hen Harrier; 9th Short-toed Lark (summer resident); 10th Wheatear; 12th Lesser Kestrel; 13th Little Egret, Grey Heron, Hobby, Sedge Warbler and Bluethroat; 14th Night Heron, Little Crake, Wood Sandpiper; Tawny Pipit and Redstart; 18th Red-footed Falcon and Nightingale; 20th Swift, Yellow Wagtail and Rock Thrush; 21st Little Stint, Subalpine Warbler, Willow Warbler and Black-eared Wheatear; 22nd Squacco Heron, Ruff and Sand Martin; 24th Alpine Swift, Woodchat Shrike and Bonelli's Warbler; 27th Curlew Sandpiper; 28th Greenshank, Whitethroat and Wood Warbler; 29th Red-throated Pipit and Pied Flycatcher; 30th Little Bittern.

*April*: 1st Montagu's Harrier and Turtle Dove; 2nd Bee Eater; 4th Cuckoo and Whinchat; 5th Wryneck (but one was wintering at Buskett); 11th Roller; 12th Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher; 13th Collared Flycatcher and Golden Oriole; 16th Great Reed Warbler; 18th Nightjar; 19th Temminck's Stint; 21st Ringed Plover; 23rd Honey Buzzard; 25th Icterine Warbler.

The following members have kindly helped us by offering their records: J. Azzopardi, M. Beaman, S. Borg, G. Davies, L. Ellu, Mercer, C. Galea, T. Gauci, B. K. German, J. Grech, B. P. Grenfell, M. Pennell, D. Rushforth, D. Sherard-Smith and M. Thake.

J. SULTANA & C. GAUCI.

Errata for List Of Birds Ringed in Il-Merill Issue No. 3, December 1970, Page 12. One Swift ringed in May was accidentally omitted from the list. The Grand Total remains the same.

## NEWS FROM THE RINGING GROUP . . . JANUARY-APRIL

During the first four months of the year 2,455 birds of 63 different species were ringed. This is a record total and is a credit to the ringers, who worked so hard. Spring migration was one of the poorest for years but was nevertheless exciting. Curlew Sandpiper, Red-throated Pipit and Orphean Warbler were new species ringed. It was a good spring for Blue-throats and a total of eight was ringed.

### JANUARY

Ringling was mainly confined to Buskett and Mtahleb, with occasional visits to other localities. As expected, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Robins were the main birds caught. No exciting catches were reported and the highest catch was recorded at Mtahleb on 6th, when twenty six birds were ringed and five re-trapped.

### FEBRUARY

February followed the pattern of January. Salina, where quite a large number of Chiffchaffs wintered, was visited on a few occasions. The highest catch was obtained there on the 25th when twenty Chiffchaffs were ringed. Buskett was the main catching area for Blackcaps and Robins. Both these species showed an increase over the previous month. Interesting birds ringed were a Wren at Buskett on 6th and a Dartford Warbler at Salina on 25th.

### MARCH

Many Blackcaps were at Buskett during the first week of the month. Though they were feeding high in the ivy, we managed to ring forty-three during three visits. The first spring migrant to be ringed was the House Martin, when nine were trapped at Ramla Valley on the 6th. Otherwise, spring migrants were very late and only hirundines were caught in large numbers. Between the 24th and 31st, just under 400 hundred mostly Swallows, were ringed at Lunzjata Valley. On the 28th there was a moderate fall, mainly of Subalpine Warblers, and fourteen were ringed at Wied Znuber and Mtahleb. A new Cetti's Warbler was ringed at Wied il-Luq on 21st. Interesting birds ringed were a Water Rail and a Spotted Crake at Ghadira on the 29th and two Red-rumped Swallows at Chadwick Lakes on the 22nd.

### APRIL

With a depression stationary over North Africa for most of the first three weeks of April only a trickle of birds arrived. Swallows were again the main birds ringed. The highest catches were recorded at Ramla Valley during the first half of the month with a maximum of 164 on the 10th. The first indication of a small fall was noted on the 18th and then on the 24th, when the first Great Reed Warblers were ringed. A larger fall took place on the 26th, when 29 birds were caught at Ghadira. Interesting birds ringed were a Curlew Sandpiper at Ghadira on the 27th, a Red-throated Pipit at Marsalforn Valley on the 18th and an Orphean Warbler at Ghadira on the 2nd, all species being new to our ringing list.



LIST OF BIRDS RINGED

Species	1971				Total
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	
Manx Shearwater	—	—	—	4	4
Kestrel	—	—	—	1	1
Water Rail	—	—	1	—	1
Spotted Crake	—	—	1	—	1
Little Ringed Plover	—	—	—	2	2
Little Stint	—	—	—	1	1
Curlew Sandpiper	—	—	—	1	1
Ruff	—	—	—	1	1
Green Sandpiper	—	—	1	—	1
Wood Sandpiper	—	—	—	2	2
Common Sandpiper	—	—	—	1	1
Scops Owl	—	—	—	1	1
Wryneck	—	—	1	2	3
Short-toed Lark	—	—	1	3	4
Sand Martin	—	—	16	107	123
Swallow	—	—	373	696	1,069
Red-rumped Swallow	—	—	2	—	2
House Martin	—	—	74	57	131
Tree Pipit	—	—	1	14	15
Meadow Pipit	1	1	3	—	5
Red-throated Pipit	—	—	—	1	1
Yellow Wagtail	—	—	10	17	27
Grey Wagtail	3	2	—	—	5
White Wagtail	—	1	4	—	5
Wren	—	1	—	—	1
Dunnock	4	3	—	—	7
Cetti's Warbler	—	—	1	—	1
Sedge Warbler	—	—	8	14	22
Reed Warbler	—	—	—	1	1
Great Reed Warbler	—	—	—	8	8
Icterine Warbler	—	—	—	1	1
Orphean Warbler	—	—	—	1	1
Garden Warbler	—	—	—	22	22
Blackcap	47	71	68	3	189
Whitethroat	—	—	1	28	29
Sardinian Warbler	7	7	5	6	25
Subarpine Warbler	—	—	18	7	25
Spectacled Warbler	1	—	2	—	3
Dartford Warbler	—	1	—	—	1
Willow Warbler	—	—	18	31	49
Chiffchaff	108	130	67	8	313
Bonelli's Warbler	—	—	3	—	3
Wood Warbler	—	—	1	13	14
Goldcrest	—	—	1	—	1
Firecrest	3	3	2	—	8
Pied Flycatcher	—	—	1	20	21

Spotted Flycatcher	—	—	—	2	2
Whinchat	—	—	—	7	7
Stonechat	1	—	1	—	2
Wheatear	—	—	1	2	3
Black Redstart	1	—	—	—	1
Redstart	—	—	1	21	22
Robin	40	68	26	2	136
Nightingale	—	—	6	15	21
Bluethroat	—	—	4	4	8
Blackbird	—	1	1	—	2
Song Thrush	4	1	5	—	10
Corn Bunting	—	—	—	2	2
Chaffinch	—	2	—	—	2
Serin	1	—	—	—	1
Greenfinch	5	—	1	—	6
Linnet	—	—	16	—	16
Spanish Sparrow	7	17	21	17	62
Totals	233	308	768	1,146	2,455

RETRAPS

About four hundred birds were retrapped during the first four months. Among the most interesting were two Chiffchaffs ringed five years back. Several Chiffchaffs were ringed 1-4 years ago. A good number of Blackcaps, ringed 1-3 winters back were also retrapped. Other birds (apart from Cetti's and Sardinian Warblers and Spanish Sparrows) ringed in previous years and re-trapped during this period were Grey Wagtail, Robin and Manx Shearwater.

RECOVERIES

1. A Wood Sandpiper ringed at Ghadira in April 1970 was recovered at Mosta in March 1971.
2. A Chiffchaff ringed at Lunzjata in January 1969 was controlled in Austria in March 1971.
3. A Robin ringed in October 1970 at Buskett was shot in Greece in February 1971.
4. A Robin ringed at Mtahleb in October 1968 was caught in Algeria in March 1971.
5. A Swallow ringed at Ramia Valley in April 1971 was found in Crete a few days later.
6. A Sand Martin with an Arnhem (Dutch) ring was controlled at Ramia Valley in April.
7. A Swallow with a Paris (French) ring was controlled at Ramia Valley in April.
8. A Little Bittern with a Zagreb (Yugoslav) ring was recovered at Rabat in April.
9. A Turtle Dove with a Praha (Czechoslovak) ring was caught near Zurrieq in April.

Ringling details of 6-9 have not yet been received. These will be published in a future report.

