

IL-MERILL

L-GHASFUR NAZZJONALI



INHALLUH JGHIX FIL-KAMPANJA
 INHARSUH BIEX MA JINQERIDY.

SKOND IN BIL-GRABVU DWOR IL-DEARSI LI JINQERIDY
 HADUVA-GRANDI...
 MEX...

LIL PUS



IL-MERILL

BULLETIN OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

No. 10 April 1973
 10c 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.

MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

PATRON

Sir Anthony J. Mamo, O.B.E., Q.C., LL.D., B.A.,
Governor General of Malta

PRESIDENT

J.M. Attard,
*44, Marsamxett Road,
Valletta. (Tel. No. 25319).*

SECRETARY

J. Sultana,
*3, Sciberras Flats,
Fleur-de-Lys Junction,
Birkirkara, (Tel. No. 40278)*

ASST. SEC./P.R.O.

A. Baldaachino,
*B1. XI, 8, Bull Street,
Cospicua, (Tel. No. 23112).*

TREASURER

B.K. German,
*126, Rudolph Street,
Sliema. (Tel. No. 31303)*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Bro. Edmund

C. Gauci

EDITOR: 'IL-MERILL'

Bro. Edmund
*St. Michael's College,
St. Julian's*

RINGING SECRETARY

C. Gauci,
*1A1, Museum Road,
Rabat*

GOZO REPRESENTATIVE

V. Vella Muskat
*38, St. Dominica Street,
Victoria, Gozo. (Tel. No. 76263).*

CONTENTS:

	Pages
Editorial	1
The 11th Annual General Meeting	2
News and Views — by J. Sultana and C. Galea	7
Aspects of the Spring Migration of Small Passengers through Malta by D.A. Rushforth	12

Cover picture: Spotted Flycatcher — a new addition to the list of breeding birds (photo: E. Hosking)

EDITORIAL

This is the 10th issue of Il-Merill and we can rightly be proud of the fact and hope that coming issues will see the magazine growing in strength of numbers and influence. It is also the last issue of the present editor, Brother Edmund of St. Michael's College, who is leaving Malta before the next issue to do missionary work in Ethiopia.

During the last five years while I have been in Malta it has been a great privilege to have been associated with the Malta Ornithological Society in trying to achieve their laudable aims of increasing the local knowledge of birds and attempting to check the senseless massacre of birds that masquerades under the ignoble title of sport.

There is little doubt that in the first of these aims much has been achieved through means of articles and letters in the Press, and we are always grateful to the newspapers who are our main supporters. MTV has also been of great help in putting our ideas across and screening some excellent bird films which we have brought over. The British Council also deserves our praise and thanks for giving us the monthly use of its rooms for lectures and showing of films. We have brought out two excellent posters, the first on the Robin and the second this month on the National Bird, Il-Merill. In these two campaigns in particular we are indebted to MBROC for their financial assistance. In addition to this we have produced a leaflet on Birds of Prey which was issued to each shooter renewing his licence appealing to him personally not to shoot the birds of prey.

St. Michael's College of Education has played no small part in educating the public in matters ornithological. It is a fact that five of the most active members of MOS are teachers closely connected with the training college and they are strongly encouraged by the staff. In addition some hundreds of teachers and trainees have had the message clearly put to them in talks and film shows. St. Michael's has also done much to further the cause of making greater use of Ghadira as a field centre and has helped in running courses there where all the facilities are brought together in an ideal site and camp. We hope that the organisers in the education department will come to realize what a glorious opportunity is within their very grasp if only they would take action.

The first aim then of educating the public through the schools and mass media is well under way and later in the year we hope to have ready a good HANDBOOK OF BIRDS for teachers' use in all the schools in Malta.

The second aim of bird preservation is closely allied to the first aim: first get to know the birds to appreciate them and then aim at their protection in an increasingly hostile world. Here we have not yet made much impact locally but hard work is going on behind the scenes to help draw up lists of protected birds, suggesting closed seasons and which areas in Malta should be very strictly reserved. In accordance with the Government's suggestion various Societies are pooling their resources to suggest to the Lawmakers the framework of legislation which we hope will help put an end to uncontrolled shooting by ignorant hunters of the bird fauna of Europe before it is too late. The migrant birds passing through Malta are also other people's natural assets.

Brother Edmund

THE 11TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 11th Annual General Meeting of the Malta Ornithological Society was held on Wednesday, 28th February, 1973. Following is the Presidential Address and the Secretary's report.

Presidential Address

It is again my great pleasure to be addressing this annual general meeting of the Malta Ornithological Society. Looking at the year past we see that the Committee and individual members have been exceptionally active, airing their views and taking part in different types of educational activities. We have been reading for months in the local papers how certain people who even serve on councils of certain important national societies whose aims are shared with those of our Society, are often biased in their approach to bird preservation. In every aspect of life, in environmental problems and in matters related to bird preservation our little Malta and tiny Gozo cannot stay in an insular position in the middle of what is now termed a 'small lake'. We can foresee the day when countries and islands in the Mediterranean littoral form a union to fight pollution, to control overfishing and to preserve trans-Mediterranean migrants of the bird world. It is hoped that the first Mediterranean Conference on Bird Preservation will take place in Cyprus in 1974 and, this, we are sure, will be a new prelude in the international co-operation between North and South, East and West.

Bird protection legislation has been a very common topic lately. It is not easy to have adequate legislation in a country unless it is respected by the public. Here I would like to point out two aspects of bird preservation. The first is adequate legislation based on close seasons and respecting Maltese shooting customs and including a list of birds which can be either shot and/or trapped by clapnets. The second is education based on a practical approach, i.e. by having a bird reserve run as a field study-centre which anyone from every walk of life can use for pleasure or study. These two aspects go hand in hand. We cannot expect a public response to any future legislation without preparing the public through practical experience in the field.

We are lucky to have a Prime Minister who possesses a great love for the countryside especially for trees and wild birds and I would like to bring to your attention that it is not through his lack of co-operation that things have not moved in the past year. On the contrary things have been moving through the personal intervention of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice, but when matters were going well, serious unfavourable difficulties have arisen which, we are sure with the co-operation of all, will be eventually thrashed out.

I would like to express my gratitude for the sympathy I found for the M.O.S. last October during my visit to England where I met several persons who have a great say in the Conservation movement in U.K. and also in Europe.

Who said that Ghadira will not be kept up and managed properly once it is turned into a bird reserve? First we have to help ourselves and then on such an enormous venture we have to request the generous assistance

of our friends abroad who are always ready to help our cause. The shooting lease at Ghadira will end by the 1st January 1974 and it is up to the incoming committee to keep up the "Save Ghadira" campaign with the Authorities.

To help us in our struggle, a national league for the preservation of birds and their environment has been founded and its policy and activities are being studied and will be launched in the immediate future. Delegates from the M.O.S., the Natural History Society, Din l-Art Helwa, the Men of the Trees, and the Royal Society for the Protection and Care of Animals are participating in the National League.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. the Governor General for accepting our invitation to unveil the memorial marble plaque commemorating the centenary of the death of Antonio Schembri; and the Librarian Dr. Vincent Depasquale for co-operating so much with us to put on show for the public at the Royal Malta Library the works of Schembri which were unknown to almost every Maltese citizen. This was a noble contribution for a man who laid the foundation stone of the Ornithology of Malta.

I would also like to thank the Government and the Directors of the Central Bank of Malta for being conservation minded to choose the Blue Rock Thrush for the £20 gold coin. This does not mean that the Blue Rock Thrushes of Malta have turned into gold or that they are laying golden eggs for the M.O.S. On the contrary we are facing a financial problem and unless you are generous enough the publication of il-Merill will be eventually stopped. To overcome this very common problem we have set up a fund raising sub-committee which will see to this and we hope for better days though we are not expecting a golden age.

I would like to place on record the good work of the Bird Ringing Group and the contribution of Brother Edmund who as Editor of il-Merill has always been most efficient and practical.

I would like to end this address by thanking all members of the outgoing committee and hope the incoming committee will be as inspiring and hardworking.

J.M. Attard
M.O.S. President

The Secretary's Report for March 1972 — February 1973

The Committee for 1972 was as follows:
President — Mr. Joe M. Attard
Secretary/Treasurer — Mr. Joe Sultana
Assistant Secretary — Mr. B.K. German till July, from then Mr. John Azzopardi.

Committee Members — Rev. Bro Edmund, Mr. Sammy Borg, Mr. Charles Galea & Mr. Charles Gauci

Sub-Committees

Bird Ringing Group— Ringing Officer: Mr. Joe Sultana
Ringing Secretary: Mr. Charles Gauci
Recorder: Mr. Sammy Borg
Sub-committee Member: Bro Edmund

Young Members Section— Messrs. Brian K. German, Michael Grima, John Azzopardi, Charles Galea & Martin Thake.

Fund-raising Committee— Mrs K.N.S. McKay, & Messrs A. Baldacchino, Brian K. German and Michael Chircop.

The Gozo Branch Sub-committee composed of Messrs John Grech, Victor Vella Muskat and Joe Sultana did not function except in helping the Ringing Group.

Main activities of the Committee:

March

Publication of Il-Merill No. 6

Young Members Outing.

List of areas that should be declared reserves forwarded to the Director of Agriculture.

A Visit to Ghadira by the Minister of Justice in the company of the President and Secretary of the Society.

Illustrated talk at the Teens and Twenties Talents Trust on the Wildlife of Filfla by J. Sultana.

April

President Joe M. Attard meeting The Minister of Justice on various occasions regarding Bird Protection. Other similar meetings took place in other months.

Young Members' Outing

Day Outing to Ghadira and Marfa Ridge jointly with the 4Ts.

Filmshow — 'Wildlife for the Future'.

Discussion on the problem of Conservation in Malta chaired by Mr Joe Attard. Guest speaker Mr. Glynn Davies

May

Il-Merill Issue No. 7

2nd Issue of the Young Members Leaflet l-Ghasfur

Expedition to Filfla by the Bird Ringing Group.

Young Members Outing

Corresponding with the Prime Minister regarding Ghadira.

Report on the need of better bird protection with a draft legislation sent to the Department of Agriculture.

June

Corresponding with the Prime Minister re Filfla

2nd expedition of the year to Filfla

July

Stand at the Malta Trade Fair

September

Il-Merill Issue No. 8

Two Young Members' outings to Buskett to watch migrating Birds of Prey

October

Filmshow — 'Winged Aristocrats'

President's visit to UK meeting officials of the International Council for Bird Preservation, World Wildlife Fund and Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee.

November

Filmshow — Wild Wings

Showing of 'Winged Aristocrats' in various schools.

" " " " with a Maltese commentary on MTV

Young Members Outing.

December

Illustrated talk by Mr. Charles Gauci on Bird Ringing in 1972.

Winged Aristocrats shown to students of St. Michael's College of Education during their Field Course at Ghadira. Shown also in other schools.

Winged Aristocrats and Wild Wing shown to R.A.F. Luqa O.S.

Exhibition of Antonio Schembri's works at the Royal Malta Library.

January (1973)

Erection of a marble plaque at Buskett to commemorate Antonio Schembri's death.

Helping in setting up a National League for Bird Preservation with other interested bodies.

MOS Represented on the Men of Trees Working Group Committee for the Seminar which was held in the following month.

February (1973)

Illustrated talk by Mr. Joe Attard on Antonio Schembri's life and works.

Illustrated talk by Mr. Joe Sultana on 'Conserving the Wildlife of Filfla' at Zurrieq.

Apart from the above activities the President and Committee Members frequently contributed articles and letters to the local press and opportunity was also taken to convey the Society's ideals on various occasions on the local Rediffusion. Contacts with local and foreign bodies were continued and il-Merill was sent to most of the European Bird Societies which commented favourably about it. The Bird Ringing Group continued its study of our birds. No fewer than 6,528 of 81 species were ringed during 1972. The

Group's report on Ringing and Bird notes will be published in a future issue of *Il-Merill*.

On behalf of the President and Committee I thank the Representative of the British Council for the use of the hall;

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the British Transport Films for the loan of two films;

The Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee for their continual help; and last but not least all our members, donors and supporters without whose help financially and morally the M.O.S. would not be able to function.

J. Sultana
Hon. Secretary M.O.S.

NEWS AND VIEWS

1. Bro. Edmund



We regret that Bro. Edmund, who has given invaluable service to the MOS as Committee Member, Editor of *'IL-MERILL'* and as an active member of the Ringing Group, is due to leave the islands in summer. We'll be missing a great friend and a staunch supporter of the Conservation movement in Malta. Bro. Edmund was also the chairman of the National Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation.

We wish him luck with the birds of Eritrea where he hopes he will be working in the future. Malta's loss is Eritrea's gain.

2. Mr. Dominic Cutajar

We are glad to announce that Mr. Dominic Cutajar, a life member of the MOS, has accepted to be the new Editor of *'IL-MERILL'* after Bro. Edmund's departure. Mr. D. Cutajar was one of the co-founders of MOS and has served on the Committee as Secretary/Treasurer for four years.

3 In the Press

The local papers have never carried so many articles and letters protesting against the indiscriminate shooting of birds. For the last few months few were the days when protest letters or articles did not appear in the papers. Leaders of the newspapers also pointed out the need to control the shooting and trapping. The P.R.O. of the MOS took the opportunity to hammer the society's ideals. It was encouraging to note that some correspondents were persons who are not in any way interested in birds. At last we seem to be arousing the public's interest.

4 Field course for young students at Ghadira

An experimental field course in nature study was held for about forty students from the Secondary School for Boys, Paola. The students carried out studies on various plant environment and its effect on plant structure in the Ghadira area. It is being realised that Ghadira is ideal for such courses. The latter are still a novelty in Malta and should be very frequently held. But leaders of such courses should make it a point to hammer in conservation ideals. Conservation of our countryside and all its wildlife should be included with the theme of each field course. The MOS has been stressing the need to educate the younger generation in the appreciation of wildlife in its natural state and it is for this reason that we have requested the Government to utilise the area at Ghadira which offers unique potentialities for a field study centre.

5. MOS Young Members Section

The Young Members Section should be congratulated for the number of activities which they have organised. They have had quite a number of successful bird-watching outings this spring. One hopes that the number of members of this Section will increase as the MOS depends on them in the future. The enthusiasm that prevails amongst this small band of youngsters should be partly attributed to the Section's dedicated Secretary, Mr. John Azzopardi.

6. The Blue Rock Thrush

Some people make it their business to steal the young of the Blue Rock Thrush to be reared by hand. The females are generally released whilst the males are caged for their song. This illegal practice still goes on and a male may fetch up to £M5.

Several hundred posters have been printed lately by MOS appealing for its protection by the general public and pointing out that it is prohibited to kill, trap, or keep by any means at any time of the year this bird. These posters were exhibited in all schools and in Notice Boards at Police Stations. (See back cover).

It is worth quoting here what Charles Wright had written on the Blue Rock Thrush, more than a hundred years ago, in his "List of birds observed in the Islands of Malta and Gozo" published in the B.O.U. Journal "The Ibis" in 1864.

"A lover of rocky and solitary places, it not unfrequently approaches the dwellings of man; and it is no uncommon occurrence to see it perched on the corner of some house, giving vent to its me-

lodicious but plaintive song, which it also often pours forth on the wing. It is most commonly met with in pairs on the south coast, where it breeds in the high cliffs. It also constructs a loosely formed nest in ruined buildings, in which case its progeny are sure to be taken by the country-lads, who find a ready sale for them in the town as cage-birds. The Blue Thrush becomes strongly attached to the locality in which it has been brought up, and seldom quits it. This affection is also known in a state of captivity, and it rarely long survives removal to a new and strange place. Many instances of this kind have come under my notice. One is worth mentioning. When the New Market in Valletta was opened, many of the market-people brought with them cages containing these birds from the old market, where they had been reared. One after another the birds pined away and died, and in a few weeks not one survived the change of locality, yet they were fed by the same hand, and with the same description of food. Almost fabulous prices are sometimes given for a good songster. An instance is fresh in my memory of a noble lady who considered herself fortunate in securing one for £7 10s, as the owner was very loath to part with it; and two or three pounds is not an unusual price. The male nestlings may easily be distinguished from the females at a very early age by their blue wing-coverts. In confinement they are much subject to a disease of the feet, which generally proves fatal. The Maltese suspend a piece of red cloth and a cowry-shell in its cage, which they consider a certain specific against the 'evil eye'".

7. MOS Logogram



This is the Society's logogram as designed by Mr. A. Baidacchino. The letters MOS have been arranged in a way that resembles a flying bird.

8. Dedication

This issue of 'IL-MERILL' is dedicated to Mrs. M. Fergusson of Pitlochrie, Perthshire, who donated £22 towards its cost.

9. Obituary: Dr. David Lack

Dr. David Lack, F.R.S., who died at the age of 63 in Oxford, after a long illness, on 12 March, 1973, was one of the most outstanding among world ornithologists. His interest in birds dated from his early days at school. When he was still an undergraduate he had already written a greater part of his book 'The Birds of Cambridgeshire'.

After carrying out studies on the biology and behaviour of the Robin he wrote a number of important papers and his very popular book 'The Life of the Robin' appeared in 1943. Just before the war, David Lack made an expedition to the Galapagos Islands and in 1947 he expounded his general ideas of species-formation, competition between species and the evolution of island faunas in his book 'Darwin's Finches' which has become a classic of evolutionary literature. At the end of the war he was appointed Director of Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford. In 'The Natural Regulation of

Animal Numbers' (1954) he dealt with the reproductive rates of birds and the natural selection of family size and provided information about the survival of birds both young and adult under various conditions by analysing bird-ringing results. At this time he also started to carry out migration studies through observation, later turning to radar to study the volume and direction of migrants reaching the British Isles from the European mainland.

David Lack also produced many studies on individual species. With the help of students under his direction he produced a remarkable long-term study on the population of the Great Tit. His 'Swifts in a Tower' (1956) presents scientific work, as with 'The Life of the Robin', to the enjoyment of the intelligent laymen.

David Lack was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1951 and president of the Ornithological Congress in 1966. At the end of last year he was awarded the Darwin Medal of the Royal Society.

10. Good Friday Eve

It has been some years since we had such a poor migration in spring. A belt of low pressures and adverse weather conditions along the north coast of Africa south of Malta for the best part of spring must have been one of the main causes. However we did have a few influxes. The most spectacular occurred on Good Friday eve, April 19th. The wind was blowing moderately, at times strongly, from the NE with frequent light showers. Members of the Bird Ringing Group were operating at Hal Far and were lucky to witness a number of birds coming. Their numbers increased as the day grew

older and the wind dropped. 57 species were recorded there, including Black Kite, Osprey, Marsh Harrier, Purple and Night Heron, Glossy Ibis, Stone Curlew and an assortment of chats and warblers. Turtle Doves, too, arrived in large numbers; so did Golden Orioles. Small flocks of this brilliant species were seen coming in at regular intervals. Although protected by Maltese law, they received the same treatment as any other bird, the size of a thrush or larger, did. Ironically one male golden oriole fell dead just in front of the statue of St. Francis surrounded by birds near the Pope John Peace Laboratory at Hal Far.

11. Two additions to the List of the Birds of Malta

Penduline Tit (*Remiz pendulinus*) & Needle-tailed Swift (*Hirundapus caudacutus*).

(i) While three members of the Ringing Group, J. Grech, V. Veilla Muskat and J. Sultana were operating at Lunzjata Valley on 4th November, 1972, a curiously looking small bird was found in the net. As it was getting dark it was taken home in a ringer's bag and on examination it turned out to be a first year Penduline Tit, which had never been recorded in the Maltese Islands. It was ringed, measured, weighed and photographed. On its release early next morning at Lunzjata it started to call and immediately another was heard answering. Afterwards both birds were seen together in the reeds. The last recorded sight of this species was on 9th December when one was still present in the same area.

(ii) We were informed by Mr. P. Micallef that Mr. George Mangion of Qormi, had in his possession a

mounted bird whose description matched that of the Needle-tailed Swift, an east Asian bird which winters in New Guinea and Australia. Members of the Ringing Group examined the skin which was found to be the Needle-tailed Swift. The tail feathers of this species end in needle-like spikes. It is a large swift with a short unforked tail, white forehead and throat and a conspicuous white horseshoe-shaped area under the tail. It is one of the fastest birds and reaches speeds of over 100 mph. It is a rare straggler to Europe and has been recorded in Great Britain, Finland and Italy. The locally stuffed bird was taken in mid-November, 1971, at Faqqanija.

12. Another addition to the Breeding Species of Malta

The Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) can be added to our list of rare breeding species. It has always been recorded by previous authorities as a common spring and autumn passage migrant. However during the last few years it was noted that one or two pairs have started to breed with us. The following records are proof enough.

In 1971, a pair with three fledged young was present from the 6th to the 10th June at Buskett. After this up to 5 birds were noted on various dates in the same locality till 18th August. In the same year another family party was noted at Wied il-Kbir on 30th June and 11th July.

Last year (1973) 2 juveniles were present at Buskett on 9th July. We were also informed that a few years ago a nest with eggs of this species was most unfortunately collected from the same locality.

13. Unusual Winter Visitors

Every winter one or two spring and/or autumn migrants make an unusual appearance. This year we had 3 House Martins at Lunzjata during the first week of January while a Wheatear appeared at Hal Far on 4th January. But the most unusual winter visitor was a Great Reed Warbler which was trapped and ringed at Xemxija on 12th January. It was undergoing heavy body moult while its old wing and tail feathers were much worn out. Another surprise visit was made by a Red-backed Shrike which seemed to have wintered at Lunzjata. It was last seen in mid-March. Both the Great Reed Warbler and the Red-backed Shrike winter south of the Sahara.

14. Two overloaded birds.

While bird-ringing at Xemxija an exhausted Wood Warbler was found in the nets with its feet each covered with relatively large clods of hard clay. One would not have been surprised had these been found on a ground dwelling species. It was patiently relieved of its load. Another warbler, this time a White-throat, was relieved of four large ticks which seemed to have been working quite a lot on its blood for the last few days. Their size altogether was almost as large as its head.

15. A silly pair of Sardinian Warblers

Two members were surprised to

notice that a pair of Sardinian Warblers had built a nest which was still empty, in a small dead branch lying alongside a public path. The nest couldn't have been more exposed. They concealed it as best they could with some vegetation and on subsequent visits was found that the pair managed to raise a brood of four.

16. Ringing Recoveries

The Bird Ringing Group has already had seven birds recovered abroad this year. Five of these (a Starling ringed at Hal Far in October, 1972; a Chaffinch ringed at Buskett in January, 1970; two Robins, one ringed at Lunzjata in November and the other at Hal Far in October, both last year; and a Blackcap ringed at Buskett in February, 1970;) have been recovered in Tunisia. A Grey Wagtail ringed in November, 1971, at Lunzjata was recovered in nearby Sicily while a Song Thrush ringed in November, 1970, also at Lunzjata was recovered in Reggio Calabria, Italy.

Foreign ringed birds recovered in Malta this year include a Gannet from Scotland, a Purple Heron from Holland, and a Kestrel from Tunisia. A Golden Oriole and a Serin with Czechoslovak rings, a Linnets with Lithuanian ring, a Kestrel and Purple Heron with French rings have also come to our notice.

Details of all recoveries will be published in the Ringing Group Reports.

J. Sultana & C. Gauci

ASPECTS OF THE SPRING MIGRATION OF SMALL PASSENGERS

THROUGH MALTA

by D.A. Rushforth

Most of my visits to Malta have been at the time of the Spring Migration through the islands, since this time of year holds a special excitement for me, that is never matched by the flow of migrants at other times. This was no doubt generated by the migrants I witnessed on the occasion of my first visit in April 1965 when Chats, Flycatchers and Warblers were everywhere. Whilst falls of birds comparable to that of 1965 have not been repeated in later years, there is never-the-less the anticipation that this could occur at any time.

Recently members of the Ornithological Society have been systematically recording the numbers of birds passing through Malta, and since 1966 ringing and associated studies of birds has taken place. It is still too soon to draw any conclusions from their records, but one cannot help but notice the great variation in the number of birds recorded year by year.

It is well known that changeable winds have a significant effect on the migratory pattern of small birds, and it is reasonable to assume that drifting occurs in the Mediterranean as much as it does in other parts of the world. Several observers have indicated that in spring there is a steady flow of small migrants through Malta if the wind is light westerly or if it is calm. The occurrence of larger falls of small migrants usually occurs with a sudden deterioration in weather conditions in the area. Thus my own observations of abnormally high numbers of small passerines in April 1965, can probably be attributed to the occurrence of frequent sand-storms on the North Africa coast at that time.

Whilst weather conditions can materially affect the numbers of migrants visually observed each Spring, there is never-the-less a consistent migration of birds through the islands. Whatever the weather may be one can expect to record good numbers of Yellow Wagtails, Wood Warblers, Wheatears, Whinchats, and so on. What force controls the repeated occurrence of these birds in Malta? A number of possibilities suggest themselves, each of which has to be considered.

- a) They are birds following a predetermined migratory route.
- b) They are birds filtering through after landing and feeding in North Africa.
- c) They are birds that have overshot the North Africa coastal feeding strip or failed to find a supply of food in that region.
- d) They are birds that had intended to make the journey from South of the Sahara to mainland Europe in one long flight, but found themselves too weak to complete the journey.

Of the thirty-six species of small passerines which occur commonly in Malta each spring, thirty-four have known wintering grounds to the West or South-West of Lake Chad. The exceptions Icterine Warbler and Collared Flycatcher are probably the least common of the regular migrants and have their main wintering grounds in the Congo. The generally accepted theory that small passerines cross the Sahara on a S.W.-N.E. course suggests that

Malta receives its birds via Tunisia and Libya.

The vegetation of Northern and Central Tunisia at the time of the spring migration is at its best, and offers a plentiful supply of food to a bird which has just crossed 1800 miles of desert. On the other hand Southern Tunisia and Libya offer little or no vegetation, and desert and sea are often joined. A bird reaching the Mediterranean along this stretch of coast-line, is therefore faced with the necessity of going on to find a supply of food.

If we examine the records of the Malta Ornithological Society in more detail we find that.

- 1) No bird ringed at any of the Tunisian ringing stations has been recovered in Malta in the year it was first ringed.
- 2) All birds trapped in Malta are light in weight having consumed all their fat reserves accumulated South of the Sahara.
- 3) Birds landing in Malta tend to spend up to some 4/6 days here, and subsequent re-traps indicate a material increase in body weight during this time.
- 4) No small passerines have been recovered in Malta on a succeeding Spring Migration.

It is therefore tentatively suggested that birds appearing in Malta are either:—

- a) Passerines that have failed to find a food supply on the Northern edge of the Sahara.
- b) Passerines that had intended to make the flight from South of the Sahara to mainland Europe, in one long journey but found themselves too weak to accomplish their desired aim.
- c) Passerines that have overshot the vegetation areas of North Africa probably through favourable weather conditions.

The present available information is meagre and only many years of detailed observations will determine how right or wrong these suggestions are.

If they provoke discussion and further assessment then their object will have been achieved.

References:— R.E. Moreau— Problem of Mediterranean — Saharan Migration. *Ibis* 1961
R.E. Moreau— The Palaearctic — African Migration Systems.
E.L. Roberts— The Birds of Malta.
Bulletins of the Malta Ornithological Society.