

# IL-MERILL

BULLETIN OF THE MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

No. 13 Jan-June 1974

10c to non-Members

## *it tajr tal priza qieghed jonqos*

Ittit pari ta' Bies.  
Spanjulett u  
Barbagann ibejjtu  
f'pajjizna: naghmlu  
minn kollox  
biex ma jinqordux



## *jehtieg inhar'suh*

ghax

- MHUX TAJR TAL-KACCA
- JAGHMEL HAFNA GID
- IMHARES BILLIGI FLEWROPA KOLLHA
- SE JINQERED GHAL KOLLOX



# MALTA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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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.

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IL-MERILL

No. 13 January-June, 1974

## EDITORIAL

Conservation being a "modern" issue is plagued by lack of understanding of the fundamental aims involved and by a proper sense of conviction and personal commitment. This explains why official "celebrations" of the environmental cause inevitably degenerate into mere empty pomposities — the heart is simply not in it. On the other hand individuals who embraced conservation because it happens to be the latest intellectual fad — consequently lacking conviction — are effusive when it comes to pay lip service but deficient in effective action and serious intent.

The editor of a Maltese daily has regaled us with a classic instance of the latter case. In a recent editorial he came out strongly in favour of environmental conservation, deploring and condemning the habitual slaughter of wildlife, pollution of the air and the sea and what-not. The sensitive observer might have flinched at the glib churning of slogans and clichés, but this editor made it easier for even a dull-wit: in the very same issue a befuddled contributor on "Shooting topics" sung lyrically about the "Glorious 23rd April" when the peak of the turtle-doves shooting is reached. In truth he complained of the ungentlemanly refusal of the turtle-doves to turn up punctually to be shot mercilessly in droves of thousands — but then this is not the only point upon which the contributor is confused. He brags erratically about natural phenomena in a painfully amateurish fashion; and, when frequently he lacks a "shooting topic", he rushes into metaphysical musings of the how-the-time-is-passing-us-by type (an apposite comment since he wastes so much of his time fooling about with a gun and lamenting about veering winds).

One might be tempted to dismiss the incident as a case of pathetic cretinism if it did not insidiously advance the cause of a fictitiously respectable type of shooting and therefore fundamentally anti-conservationist. Let us therefore spell it out for those unwilling to make the effort themselves. Environmental conservation is not a cause but the way of life of the future. It will progressively come about and its advance is irresistible because it is a positive and constructive historical factor. There will be those whose attitude is negative and reactionary but let them learn that this their pastime of hoodlums is merely tolerated in an ever fewer unenlightened communities and doomed to disappear. Miasmal floundering in mock "culture" and the collusive bigotry of the influential will not make the destruction of wildlife either dignified or respectable.

Due to the rising cost in the printing industry it was decided to issue "Il-Merill" every six months instead of every four. This issue covers January-June 1974.

## BIRD'S EYE VIEW

### 1. DEDICATION

This number of "Il-Merill" is dedicated to Mr. M. Mills of Mdina House, Naxxar who generously donated the sum of £25 towards the costs of the present issue.

### 2. FRIENDS' DONATION

The Friends of Malta GC have kindly donated £25 to the M.O.S. to enable our Ringing Group to press forward with their research work. A big thank you to the Friends of Malta G.C.

### 3. BANG-A-BANG, BANG

This spring the migratory birds were again met by formations of (literally) thousands of shot-guns and given no respite from early morning till dusk. Although appeals and protests continue to be voiced by the general public, the M.O.S. and other Natural History societies, the shooting madness goes on worsening from year to year. It has reached such appalling proportions that now it is noticeably dangerous to venture out in the countryside during the shooting seasons. The incidence of fatalities and ugly accidents is sufficient indicator to those who do not shut their eyes on this hideous social scandal.

### 4. A RARE PROSECUTION

Last January a very rare kind of prosecution took place in Malta. A Mr. J. Grech of Mtarfa was fined £2 at the Law Courts for keeping a caged robin and for trapping robins at Buskett gardens. The robin is one of the legally protected birds and Buskett is officially a protected area. It is though a sad reflection that even the present inadequate legislation on bird protection is widely unobserved and only sporadically enforced. A regular systematic enforcement of the law at least during the shooting season is of vital necessity and its implementation should be studied urgently.

### 5. SUGGESTIONS PRESENTED TO THE GOVERNMENT

The National League for the Preservation of Birds and their Environment has just published and presented to the Government proposals concerning firearms, shooters and bird-protection. A copy was sent to all the deputies in the National Assembly. The proposals include:

- a. Application for a Provisional Shooting Licence.
- b. Testing of applicants.
- c. The grant of licences.
- d. General regulation regarding shooting.
- e. The introduction of a closed season.
- f. Regulations concerning bird trapping.
- g. Taxidermy.

The League is an "ad hoc" Committee composed of representatives

from the Malta Ornithological Society, the National Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Natural History Society of Malta, the Men of the Trees — Malta, and Din l-Art He'wa. The meetings were chaired by Baron G.E. Testaferrata Abela.

### 6. M.O.S. 4th POSTER

The M.O.S. has just published its fourth poster appealing for the protection of birds of prey. It was designed by Mr. A. Baldacchino and Mr. S. Borg and publicised a couple of days before the first Spring passage of migrant birds was observed in Malta. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has kindly contributed £25 towards the printing of this poster. Copies are still available to be utilised for future publicity campaigns; those who feel that they can make good use of this poster are kindly requested to contact the P.R.O. of the Malta Ornithological Society. (See back page).

### 7. WEDDING BELLS

The M.O.S. Ringing Secretary and a regular contributor to "Il-Merill" — Mr. Charles Gauci — was married to Miss Mary Filletti on the 11th of May. Congratulations and good wishes from their many friends and well-wishers in the Malta Ornithological Society.

### 8. REFERENCES TO MALTA IN FOREIGN REPORTS

In a report on the "Hunting Seasons and Methods in Europe 1969-1970" by Mr. Teppo Lampio and H.K. Michaelis, compiled to present information on some aspects of wildfowl hunting rationalization, while affording some idea of the work of the Hunting-Rationalization Research Group (HRRG), the following extracts referring to Malta are worth quoting:

"...the situation as regards wildfowl species lacking protection in 1969-70 was favourable. The outstanding exception was Malta, where no wildfowl species was protected at any time".

"Woodcock and Snipe was protected for at least some part of the year in all countries except Malta. In Eire, no waders were legally protected but were in practise fully protected. In other countries, except Malta, they were protected for at least part of the year".

### 9. AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has recommended member Governments to reinforce their legislative and administrative measures in order to provide greater protection for the avifauna and its habitat. It calls on member Governments to afford special protection to fifty-nine species listed as examples in a study commissioned by the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Governments are asked to give special attention to migratory species and to ratify as soon as possible the Convention on Wetlands of international importance.

(Resolution (73) 31 of the Committee of Ministers, Oct. 1973).

In its Resolution (73) 30, the Committee of Ministers recommends strengthening current protection measures and setting aside certain areas in order to develop a European Network of "protected areas". For this purpose, member Governments are called upon to take into account as fully as possible the principles and criteria set out in "European Terminology for protected areas".

(Council of Europe — Newsletter 74, 1/2).

#### 10. SPAIN

The shooting and collecting of all birds of prey — as well as certain other birds — was prohibited for the duration of the 1973/74 season. Import, export and internal trade of specimens, dead or alive, of protected species were also banned. Likewise it became illegal for taxidermists to be in possession of skins of protected birds.

(ICBP — The President's letter of December 1973).

#### 11. FRANCE

The rapid decline in the nesting population of Ospreys in Corsica has caused considerable concern. During the nesting period and as a temporary measure, the nesting site with a perimeter of 500 metres was placed strictly out-of-bounds. The area was heavily guarded against shooting parties and egg collectors.

#### 12. GREECE

A new National Park has been set up in Greece; it is around Prespa Lakes in Macedonia, the region bordering Yugoslavia. Around 150 species of birds can be met with in the new National Park.

(Council of Europe — Newsletter 74-3).

Alfred Baldacchino.

## THE 12TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 12th Annual General Meeting was held on 3rd April, 1974. The meeting was opened with the showing of the R.S.P.B. film "The Kites are Flying". It was brought over from UK by the British Council for this occasion.

The proposed amendment that the term of office for the elected committee should be for a period of two years was passed unanimously.

Following is the President's address, the Secretary's report and the Income and Expenditure Account for 1973 which were read at the meeting.

\* \* \*

### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have met again to hear what the M.O.S. has done in the past year, to study the Society's financial situation and to elect a new committee.

Various indoor and outdoor activities were organised. In spite of the rising cost of printing we continued to issue the Society's publication "Il-Merill" regularly. This has appeared under the new Editor Mr. Dominic Cutajar, a staunch conservationist and a co-founder of the M.O.S. We were sorry at the same time to lose Brother Edmund, the former Editor, who moved to Eritrea where birds are plentiful and bird shooters are few. I wish to take this opportunity to thank him for the sterling services he rendered to the Society during the happy years he spent with us.

The M.O.S. has taken an active part in drawing up a report with recommendations for new legislation on bird protection. Various meetings were held with Ministers and Government Departments about the preservation of Ghadira. This year should be one of great expectations. The question of Ghadira has to be settled once and for all. The shooting lease expire this year and we hope that the Government will give the area on trust to be used for educational purposes.

The XVI World Conference of the ICBP will be held this year in Canberra. Malta will be represented by a great friend and a well-known conservationist, Mr. Anthony D'Andria, a former Secretary of the M.O.S. and a member of its founding Committee who has settled happily with his family in Australia.

A poster appealing for the protection of Birds of Prey has just been published for local distribution. The R.S.P.B. has kindly helped financially in this publication. An information leaflet on the M.O.S. has also been published and locally distributed hoping to advertise our aims and enroll new members. A fortnight's course sponsored by M.O.S. and the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee was taken by Alfred Baldacchino in UK where he was able to see how Field Centres are run.

I am glad to announce that our two dynamic members, Joe Sultana and Charles Gauci, are working hard on the new Check-list of the Birds

of Malta. I have already seen parts of the manuscript and I am sure that once it is published it will be the Check-list for the years to come.

The Young Members' Section also deserve a word of praise for organising several activities, including a protest march at Buskett which was held jointly with the 4Ts.

Before I end this address I must acknowledge the full co-operation we are finding from the Representative of the British Council for the use of the premises and the loan of films. I must also put on record the continual support which we receive from Mrs. E. Coxon on behalf of the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee. My personal thanks go to the members of the outgoing committee.

J.M. Attard — President.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT: MARCH 1973 — FEBRUARY 1974

The Committee for 1973 was elected as follows:

President: J.M. Attard; Secretary: J. Sultana; Asst. Sec./P.R.O. A. Baldacchino; Treasurer: B.K. German; Committee Members: Bro. Edmund and C. Gauci.

In mid-year Bro Edmund had to leave the islands and so the nominated member at the Annual General Meeting with the next larger number of votes — J. Azzopardi, was asked to sit on the Committee for the remaining part of the year. Bro. Edmund had to resign also from the editorship of "Il-Merill". D. Cutajar accepted the Committee's invitation to be the Editor.

The Committee held ten committee meetings during the past year. There were also two sub-committees — The Bird Ringing Group and the Young Members Section. The Young Members Section was composed of a Chairman (M. Grima), a Secretary (J. Azzopardi), and two members (C. Galea and V. Cilla). Various activities were held by the Section including the publication of leaflets for young members. The Bird Ringing Group was composed of the following licensed ringers: S. Borg, Bro. Edmund, A. Gauci, C. Gauci, B.K. German, J. Grech, J. Sultana and V. Vella Muskat. The Ringing Officer and Secretary of the Group were J. Sultana and C. Gauci respectively. The Group carried out bird studies in the Maltese Islands mainly by recording and ringing. Over 6,200 birds were ringed, amassing a grand total of over 36,600 ringed birds since 1965. A percentage of these birds are regularly retrapped and recovered thus helping us to better our knowledge of bird movements and behaviour. Further more a daily log of birds seen was kept by the Group. This gives a clear picture of the present status of our birds. A new breeding species for Malta has also been discovered during the year

## MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE M.O.S.

(March 1973 — February 1974)

### MARCH

Bird-watching excursion to Ghadira for young members and for the Salesian Boys Brigade. An illustrated talk was also held afterwards at the Youth Service Organisation Barracks of Ghadira.

Blue Rock Thrush posters were published and distributed in schools and exhibited in the Notice Boards of the Information Dept.

### APRIL

Filmshow: Highland Heronry — Birds of Strathspey — Wildlife for the Future.

Talk by G. Davies — The Running of Reserves and Field Centres. Publication of "Il-Merill" No. 10.

M.O.S. Delegation (A. Baldacchino, M. Grima and J. Sultana) meeting the Minister of Education and Culture to discuss Ghadira as a Field Centre and other matters on bird conservation.

### MAY

Three outings for young members — two to Ghadira and one to Buskett/Girgenti area.

Three programmes on Rediffusion regarding bird conservation, Ghadira as a field centre and the need to protect Birds of Prey. Members taking part respectively — B.K. German, C. Galea and J. Sultana.

Ringling Group and RAF Luqa Ornithological Society joint expedition to Filfla.

Illustrated talk — Birds and their Songs — by C. Gauci and A. Baldacchino.

Illustrated talk at St. Patrick's School — Breeding Birds and their Protection by J. Sultana.

A documentary film on bird-watching and bird ringing was shot at Ghadira and later shown to school. (A repetition of the film was shown again on TV to school children the following October).

### JUNE

Farewell dinner to Bro. Edmund.

Ringling Group's expedition to Filfla.

M.O.S. delegation (J.M. Attard, A. Baldacchino and J. Sultana) meeting the Parliamentary Secretary Dr. P. Holland, to discuss Ghadira's project.

### JULY

A Day Seminar held jointly with the Natural History Society and other interested bodies. Resolutions were sent to various Ministers and Government Departments.

## AUGUST

A. Baldacchino's brief course in UK on Youth Leadership in Environmental Conservation.

Rediffusion programme on Bird Ringing in Gozo.

Publication of "Il-Merill" No. 11 (special issue Ringing Group report for 1972).

Ringing Group and RAF Luqa Ornithological Society 2nd joint expedition to Filfla.

## SEPTEMBER

Bird-watching outing for young members at Buskett.

M.O.S. Delegation (A. Baldacchino and J. Sultana) meeting with the Minister of Trade Industry and Agriculture to discuss matters re Ghadira, Xemxija area and bird conservation.

## OCTOBER

Filmshow: Wild Highlands — Birds are Interesting — Journey into Spring.

Robin Posters distributed in schools and exhibited outside Police Stations.

Protest march with placards by Young members at Buskett against indiscriminate shooting. (Held jointly with the Teens and Twenties Talents Trust).

## NOVEMBER

Two outings for young members to Buskett and Ghadira.

M.O.S. joining Natural History Society for Nature Week with an illustrated talk on Rare Birds and Bird Songs by J. Sultana and A. Baldacchino.

## DECEMBER

Filmshow — The Call of the Running Tide — Wilderness is not a Place.

Illustrated talk — Activities of the Ringing Group — by C. Gauci.

Publication of "Il-Merill" No. 12.

M.O.S. support to a petition against shooting presented to the Prime Minister organised by the Teens and Twenties Talents Trust.

## JANUARY — (1974)

Publication of M.O.S. Information leaflet.

M.O.S. proposals and plan for a Field Centre at Ghadira forwarded to Prime Minister.

M.O.S. delegation (J.M. Attard, A. Baldacchino and J. Sultana) two meetings with the Director of Agriculture regarding Xemxija.

## FEBRUARY

Filmshow — Between the Tides — Ripple in the Reeds.

Two programmes on Radio Malta — Birds and the Environment and Bird Watching by J. Sultana.

Illustrated Talk — Wintering Birds in the Ghadira area — by J. Sultana to students attending a Field Course at Ghadira.

M.O.S. delegation (A. Baldacchino and J. Sultana) meeting with the Secretary at the Ministry of Trade Industry and Agriculture, regarding M.O.S. plans for Ghadira.

\* \* \*

Apart from the above mentioned activities Committee members frequently contributed articles and letters to the local press. Contacts with International and European Ornithological Societies and institutions were maintained. Exchange of literature have been taking place with various societies. A number of the M.O.S. activities were held jointly with other societies mainly with the Natural History Society.

On behalf of the outgoing Committee I would like to thank the Representative and Staff of the British Council for the use of the premises and for the loan of films; the Malta Bird Reserves Overseas Committee for supporting financially the M.O.S. in a number of projects; and all the members and donors who continue to support the M.O.S.

My personal thanks go to A. Baldacchino the Asst./Secretary and P.R.O. and to C. Gauci, the Ringing Group's Secretary, for their unfailing help.

J. Sultana — Hon. Secretary.

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FINANCIAL REPORT --

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT AS AT  
31 DECEMBER 1973

Il-Merill Bulletin (cost)	£M140-90,0	Subscriptions and	
Sundry Expenses		Donations 1973	£M193-59,3
(Note 1)	142-19,3	Il-Merill Sales and	
Postages	39-55,2	Donations	51-16,0
Loss on Exchange		Sundry Expenses	
(Note 2)	29-32,4	Donations	41-97,6
Stationery	19-56,6	Interest Received	16-03,3
Ringling Group		Seminars and other	
Expenses	14-92,6	Entertainment	4-23,0
Young Members'		EXCESS OF	
Section Expenses	4-25,0	EXPENDITURE	83-71,9
	£M390-71,1		£M390-71,1

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 1973

<b>Capital Account</b>		<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>	
Balance b/f	£M385-61,8	7% Savings Bonds	
Inc. & Exp. B/c.	83-71,9	(Cost £100) (Note 3)	£M 88-00,0
	£M301-89,9	Ringling Equipment	72-00,0
<b>Reserves (Note 4)</b>	55-00,0		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			£M160-00,0
Subscriptions in		<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>	
advance	22-87,5	Bank B/c.	£M217-75,7
		Debtors	2-01,7
	£M379-77,4		£M219-77,4
			£M379-77,4

**NOTE 1** Sundry Expenses: Include the cost of a marble plaque (£M33) which should have been incurred in 1972 — No provision was made in this respect.

Included under this heading are: Half air fare to U.K., cost of posters, blocks, projectionist fees, outing expenses, invitation cards and telephone expenses.

**NOTE 2** Loss On Exchange: This item represents the loss incurred in converting Sterling amounts to Malta Pounds.

**NOTE 3** A sum of twelve pounds has been written off in order to convert Stg. £100 to Malta Pounds. This difference (£12) is included in "2" above.

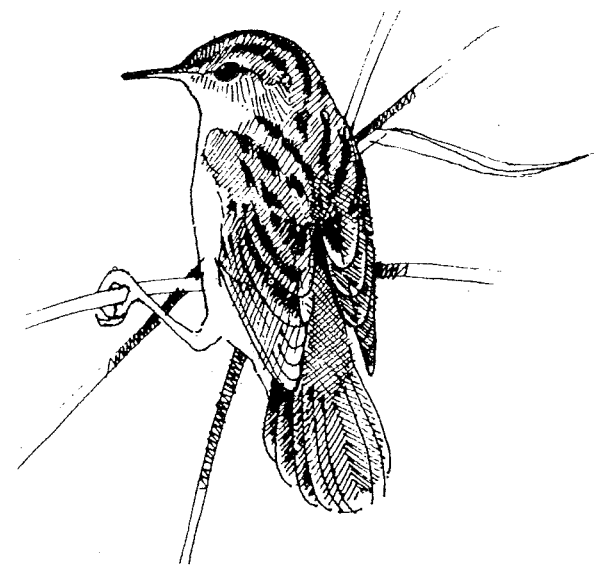
**NOTE 4** This is a reserve for the publication of a leaflet which is still in progress.

There are no bills due and owing as at 31 December 1973.

B.K. German — Hon. Treasurer.

THE FAN-TAILED WARBLER *CISTICOLA JUNCIDIS*  
A NEW BREEDING SPECIES FOR MALTA

The Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*, only four inches in length, is one of the smallest European birds. It is brownish, being paler below. The upper parts, except for its rump which is yellowish rufous, are heavily streaked. It has a short, rounded, dark tail which, when fanned, shows black and white tips to all but the two central feathers. Both sexes look alike though the male is slightly brighter in spring. During the breeding season the male patrols the area, flying 'feebly' high above during most of the day with an undulating flight, while it utters a series of 'zip' calls which seem to be synchronized with each wave of its flight. As such it is very conspicuous and attracts attention, otherwise it is very secretive and rarely flies any distance before hopping into cover.



Line drawing by R. Ingram

The Fan-tailed Warbler was first included with the Birds of Malta by N. Ardoino in a list which he compiled in 1893 and which was posthumously published by the Societa' Storico-Scientifica Maltese in 1928 with a biography by G. Despott. Ardoino's 'Gli Uccelli Di Malta — elenco sinottico' listed the Fan-tailed Warbler as scarce in early September. From 1967 (the year of its first documented records) till 1972 the Fan-tailed Warbler was recorded annually on a total of eighteen dates, sometimes up to four together, mostly at Salina (Il-Merill Nos. 5, 8 & 11). The first four birds which appeared at Salina in 1967 were also reported by C. De Lucca in a brief notice in the 'Ibis', the journal of the British Ornithologists Union.

wherein the author stated that three of the specimens 'were shot and preserved' (1967, 'Ibis' 109:623). As a result of the latter statement a strongly-worded protest signed by twenty-five prominent ornithologists appeared in the same journal. In their communication they condemned the needless killing of such birds for identification purposes in a place like Malta when these can be identified adequately by other means ('The Collecting of Rare Birds' 1968, 'Ibis' 110: 211-212).

In 1973 the Fan-tailed Warbler was found breeding for the first time at Xemxija and Ghadira. Xemxija was first visited by members of the M.O.S. Bird Ringing Group in January, 1973. It was subsequently visited regularly and a male was noted present. In March breeding was suspected as the male was intensively working up the area with his peculiar noisy flight. At times it was also suspected that two birds were present. On 27th April a female carrying food led us to a curiously built nest in a small patch of a type of wild oat *Avena sterilis* surrounded by a larger patch of Bear-thistles *Galactites tomentosa*. The nest contained young but, owing to its structure and as we did not wish to disturb a nest of a newly found breeding species, the young were not counted. Unfortunately the young were taken very probably by a snake as the nest was found empty and holed at the bottom on 2nd May.

The pair built a second nest which was discovered on 2nd June in an uncultivated field overgrown with *Phragmites communis* and the wild species of Lesser Canary-grass *Phalaris minor*. The nest which was built in the latter plant contained five young. The vegetation was being cut down by a farmer to use it as fodder, but on explaining to him the importance of the nest he agreed to leave the field undisturbed till the young leave the nest. So this time, the young, which were ringed, left the nest successfully in spite of the fact that the farmer's cat had a litter of kittens within six feet of the nest. When the empty nest was examined an addled egg was found. This was of a bluish colour with very faint pinkish and light brownish blotches. The pair must have had another brood in the area, which was not visited before September, as five other birds were noted without rings.

In the same year (1973) Ghadira was frequently visited till early May and no Fan-tailed Warblers were noted. However, on visiting the area on 11th and 12th July a pair was noted feeding at least two newly fledged young. This pair is still present this year and by the end of March (1974) its first brood had already left the nest. In another area not far from Ghadira proper another pair was noted and a nest containing six eggs was discovered on 6th April 1974. It was built in Sea Rush *Juncus maritimus* and the eggs this time were white with pink and light brown freckles. This new area had not been visited the year before (1973) and the species must have bred there too as a very old nest was found in Sharp Rush *Juncus acutus*.

The nest of the Fan-tailed Warbler is peculiar both in its shape and structure. In shape it is like a wide-necked bottle or an open deep round purse. All the nests found so far were built within two feet above the ground. The blades of grass in which it is built are also incorporated into

the structure which is neatly woven with vegetable down, cobwebs and fine blades of dry grass.

The Fan-tailed Warbler is the fourth species which has been added to the list of Malta's breeding birds since 1966. The other three are the Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (Bull. B.O.C. (1)89:29-31); the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (Il-Merill 10:10); and the Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* (Il-Merill 12:7-9).

We are grateful to S. Borg and L. Attard for helping us to locate the nest at Ghadira and to Edwin Lanfranco for identifying the plants which are mentioned in the text.

J. Sultana and C. Gauci.

\* \* \*

#### A PLEA FOR SAVING AUDOUIN'S GULL

For several decades we have known about the endangered existence of *Larus audouinii*. The World Wildlife Fund names this rare species on its Red List. Audouin's Gull nests only in the Mediterranean and is reduced to an estimated number of 1,000 to 1,800 birds.

While numbers of European gulls increase as a result of anthropogenic influences the population of Audouin's Gull decreases; how fast is not known.

The breeding-success is diminished by various factors: fishermen, tourists and photographers disturb adults during the breeding season. Eggs and fledglings are frequently and lastingly exposed to solar radiation and often die. Oologists collect eggs indiscriminately.

In cooperation with the World Wildlife Fund I have started a programme of collecting every information about colonies, pairs and breeding-success to form a broad and reliable basis for a study of the population dynamics and the general state of the species. I request that ornithologists and bird-watchers from Malta make available their data on *Larus audouinii* that the combined knowledge can be used to reach this goal and hopefully save the species.

Only full cooperation will make it possible to institute an efficient conservation programme.

Hans Witt.

Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum A. Koenig,  
D-53 Bonn 1, Adenauerallee 150, W. Germany.

Editor's note: *Larus audouinee* does not breed in Malta. Any sight records, of this species will be reported by the M O S to the author.

(See drawing on Cover 3)



UNPUBLISHED RARE OCCURRENCES BEFORE 31st DECEMBER, 1971

An examination of the specimens kept at the Natural History Museum at Mdina reveals that a number of rare occurrences have so far remained unpublished. Excepting the Egyptian Vulture and the Crossbill, all the occurrences have been recorded less than twenty times in the Maltese Islands. Apart from a list compiled from the Natural History Museum, with the kind permission of the Director of Museums, known and reliably dated specimens in private collections have been included. Unless otherwise indicated, the specimens are all found at the Natural History Museum. The records of specimens in private collections are indicated by the initials of the owners. These are S.B. (S. Borg), L.G. (L. Gera), J.P. (J. Pullis), and J.V.G. (J. Vella Gaffiero).

Shag:	Singles at Salina in November, 1944, and on 21st October, 1948.
Great White Heron:	One at Salina on 2nd September, 1948.
White Stork:	One in Gozo on 15th April, 1922.
Black Stork:	One at Zabbar on 12th September, 1939, and one at Msida in October, 1961.
Greater Flamingo:	One in Gozo on 28th September, 1917; one at Salina on 30th September, 1922; one shot from a party of ten at Marsaxlokk on 20th September, 1955.
White-fronted Goose:	One at Salina on 15th November, 1949; one in Gozo on 8th November, 1950.
Bean Goose:	2 in Gozo on 3rd November, 1954.
Ruddy Shelduck:	One at Marsaxlokk on 10th May, 1952 (L.G.).
Gadwall:	One at Marsaxlokk in November, 1942, another on 20th October, 1952, and one at Salina on 11th October, 1965 (J.V.G.).
Red-crested Pochard:	One at Salina on 10th November, 1950.
Tufted Duck:	One at Salina on 3rd November, 1949.
Common Scoter:	One at Salina on 2nd November, 1948.

Egyptian Vulture:	One in Gozo on 4th September, 1944; one at Ghal-lis on 18th October, 1948; one at Maghtab on 20th October, 1948; and one at Bingemma on 30th October, 1952.
Little Bustard:	One in Gozo on 4th October, 1938, one at l-Ahrax on 12th September, 1948, and one at Mellieha on 28th September, 1952.
Oystercatcher:	One at Marsaxlokk on 2nd August, 1930, and one at Salina on 13th September, 1946.
Spur-winged Plover:	One at Girgenti on 20th August, 1950.
Common Gull:	One at M'scala in November, 1937.
Audouin's Gull:	One at Marsascala on 5th October, 1967, and another at Qawra on 27th February, 1971 (J.P.).
Kittiwake:	One in Gozo on 25th February, 1950.
Caspian Tern:	One at Marsaxlokk on 8th October, 1961 (J.V.G.).
Common Tern:	2 on 7th July, 1967 and another 2 on 14th September, 1967, all four at Marsaxlokk, and one on 22nd June, 1971, at Marsascala (J.P.).
Little Tern:	One at Salina on 25th September, 1964 (J.V.G.).
Puffin:	One at Salina on 2nd November, 1938.
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:	One in Gozo on 15th May, 1931, and one at Siggiewi on 16th March, 1951.
Red-necked Nightjar:	One at Siggiewi on 1st April, 1934.
Egyptian Nightjar:	2 at Wied id-Dis on 1st April, 1935.
Shore Lark:	One at Qrendi on 5th September, 1960.
Crested Lark:	One at Salina on 15th October, 1957.
Hoopoe Lark:	One at Hal Far on 25th October, 1964 (S.B.).
Richard's Pipit:	One at Marsascala on 7th November, 1970 (J.P.).
Ruppell's Warbler:	Singles at Marsaxlokk on 22nd March, 1953 (L.G.) and one in May 1966.

Black-headed Bunting: One in Gozo on 10th April, 1949.

Great Tit: One at Ta' Eraxia in October, 1960.

Snow Bunting: One in Malta in December, 1955.

Crossbill: One at Portes de Bombes on 3rd October, 1933,  
and one at Wied-id-Dis on 20th August, 1941.

Rose-coloured Starling: 2 at Burmarrad on 13th October, 1949.

Spotless Starling: One at St. Julian's on 16th October, 1947.

Rook: One at M-Qadi on 25th April, 1942.

Compiled by J. Vella Gaffiero and S. Borg.

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#### A WEEKEND IN CYPRUS

At the end of January I was lucky enough to have two whole days free whilst serving at RAF Akrotiri, in Cyprus. To many people, knowing of its association with the British Forces, Cyprus is thought of as a sister island to Malta. This, of course, is not true, for the island is very much larger than Malta — about the size of Crete — and boasts a large and varied resident bird population. Whilst shooting and trapping is still carried out on a large scale, conservation measures are gradually being introduced by the Government; Nature Reserves have been established and abuses of the conservation laws are usually 'pounced upon' by the Police Force.

Going to the island in January, I was too early to see the Spring passage migrants; too late to see those that pass through in the Autumn. However, my efforts were not in vain. On the afternoon of the 26th I was greeted with my first sighting of a Finsch's Wheatear, but a trip to a valley near to Episkopi failed to bring into the binoculars the anticipated Wallcreeper. However, as compensation, I was lucky enough to see a pair of Griffon Vultures on a rocky crag, and a single, soaring Crag Martin.

Early on the morning of the 27th I set out to join Wilf Corris, since, unfortunately, re-posted to the UK, at his ringing site at a spot known as Bishop's Pool — the local sewage farm. None of the many birds that must now (30th March) be passing the area were to be seen on that day, although in the distance on the Salt Lake could be seen a large flock of Greater Flamingo. The first birds to enter the nets were Chiffchaffs, White Wag-

tails, a Red-throated Pipit, and several Blackcaps. During the days these were joined at the ringing table by Meadow Pipits, Sardinian Warblers, Stonechats, Redstarts, Robins, Serins, and Goldfinches — to mention but a few.

Amongst the birds on the adjacent pool were Ferruginous Ducks, Little Grebes, Pochard, and many Coots, whilst over-flyers were Magpies, Hooded Crows, Jackdaws, and various Gulls.

As dusk fell, my thoughts returned to Malta as the last sighting of the day was added to a healthy list — a single Blue Rock Thrush!

#### List of Sightings:

Little Grebe	Herring Gull	Redstart
Shag	Rock Dove	Robin
Greater Flamingo	Lesser Short-toed Lark	Chaffinch
Mallard	Short-toed Lark	Serin
Gadwall	Crested Lark	Greenfinch
Pintail	Woodlark	Goldfinch
Pochard	Crag Martin	Finsch's Wheatear
Ferruginous Duck	Meadow Pipit	Song Thrush
Tufted Duck	Red-throated Pipit	House Sparrow
Griffon Vulture	Water Pipit	Spanish Sparrow
Chucka	Grey Wagtail	Blackbird
Water Rail	White Wagtail	Magpie
Coot	Blackcap	Jackdaw
Lapwing	Sardinian Warbler	Hooded Crow.
Snipe	Chiffchaff	
Black-headed Gull	Stonechat	
	Blue Rock Thrush	

C.A. Pomeroy.



Audouin's Gull: Immature and (right) Adult

(see page 13)