

An unusually large influx of Ruff

The Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* is a common spring migrant to the Maltese Islands from late February and early March to mid-June with normally up to 20 - 50 birds in a day, sometimes up to 130, but c.300 were at Hal Far and Luqa airfields in spring 1973 (Sultana & Gauci 1982), and 200+ were recorded at Luqa on 2nd April 1979 (Cachia Zammit 1983). It is less common in autumn from mid-July to mid-October with daily maximum recorded being of 30 birds. A large flock of c.300 birds occurred at Salina in mid-July 1973.

10th March 2001 was thus exceptional as 1060+ birds were recorded from Cirkewwa during a three-hour period between 11:20hrs and 14:35hrs (Table 1). 5 Flocks were observed all coming from a South Westerly direction and all heading to the North-North-East direction, mostly crossing the channel between Malta and Gozo, as most of the other migrating ducks and other species do at this time of the year.

Time	Number	Notes
11.25	60	
11.39	C.500	10 Duck species with the flock
13.00	200+	1 Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> with the flock
13.10	150+	
14.35	150+	

Table 1. Counts of Ruff flocks recorded at Cirkewwa on 10th March 2001

Observations on that day started at 0700 hrs and ended at 14:45 hrs, although Ruff were not recorded until 11:25. Other migrating birds and numbers observed on that day included:

35 Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	95+ Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i> (3 flocks)
2 Great Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	18 Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
1345+ Garganey <i>Anas querquedula</i> (in 14 different flocks)	170+ Unidentified duck Sp (<i>Anas sp</i>) (3 flocks)
100+ Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i> (3 flocks)	80+ Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> (2 flocks)

The weather for the day was mainly overcast with showers and drizzling rain at times, with the visibility poor during the rain and due to the low clouds. Wind was light to moderate east-southeast.

Thanks to C.Coleiro who accompanied the author during the observations.

References

- Sultana, J. & Gauci, C. 1982. *A New Guide to the Birds of Malta*. Malta Ornithological Society, Malta.
 Cachia Zammit, R. 1983. Systematic List for 1979 & 1980. *II Merrill* 22: 22-42

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~~New breeding site for Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*~~

~~The Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* is a fairly common passage migrant from March to May and from late August to November (Sultana & Gauci 1982). It is considered as a rare breeder mainly confined to wetlands and areas with water that remains present even during the summer period (Raine *et al.* 2009). The first confirmed breeding record of this species in the Maltese Islands was in 1984, when a nest was found in a flooded quarry in the south-eastern part of Malta. Since then it has established itself as a regular breeder at Ghadira (approximately 10 pairs) and Simar Nature Reserves (between 10 and 12 pairs) with a small but healthy population. Also in recent years, it has bred in abandoned quarries holding water, as well as in a few new other restricted and undisturbed areas (Raine 2009; Raine & Webb 2010).~~

~~In late October 2008, one adult bird was noted at Wied Qirda. Wied Qirda is located in mainland Malta, in the limits of Haz-Zebbug and Siggiewi. Until 23rd December no less than two birds were overwintering in the area along with two Water Rails *Rallus aquaticus*. Again on 12th March 2009 another bird was sighted and on 18th March three were seen. During visits made to the site in the following two months, up to two birds were again recorded. On 19th June breeding~~