

First Record of the Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* in the Maltese Islands

During a bird ringing session at Rabat on 25th January 2004 a Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* was caught in a single shelf net placed amongst low grass in a semi flooded field. The site habitat consisted of a small valley characterized mainly with giant reeds surrounded by a number of semi-flooded and uncultivated fields. The bird was immediately suspected to be a Siberian Rubythroat with the conspicuous eye stripe and pinkish tinge to the throat being the main indicators. This was soon confirmed when the bird was compared with an identification guide (Collins Field Guide 1st edition). The bird in question was in fact a second calendar year female. Full measurements and a set of photos were taken and the record was submitted to the Rarities Committee who accepted the record.

The weight and measurements were: Weight 21.2g; Wing 76mm; Tail 61mm; Tarsus 31mm; and Bill skull to tip 17mm, and feathering to tip 12.5mm. It had a fat score of 2 and its breast muscle was 3.

The species has an extremely large range but breeds mainly in mixed coniferous forests with undergrowth in Siberia and is a rare vagrant to Western Europe. The above was the first record of the species for the Maltese Islands. From 1826-1995 there were only 18 European records noted outside Russia, with two in spring (1st March and 1st May) and the remainder in autumn and winter). The geographical distribution reveals no pattern with birds recorded in the United Kingdom, Italy, Estonia, Finland, Germany and France.

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First record of the Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* in the Maltese Islands

Whilst sea-watching on 24 October 2002 at 1630hrs at Qawra Point, three shearwater species were seen in the distance, moving North-West. We could not identify them at first as they were not typical Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* or Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, the two shearwater species that we normally and commonly see around Malta's shores.

The flight, shape and jizz were almost like that of a Yelkouan (a few of which we had seen some minutes before and a species of which we were very familiar with), but the colour was very different. They were brownish, almost like Cory's, but even browner than that species. Cory's Shearwater was however excluded, based on its much larger size than the birds in question and flight. Also the other shearwater species recorded in the Mediterranean, the Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, was also excluded as this is totally black and white in colour, contrary to our brownish birds. They were a bit bigger and more robust than Yelkouan but smaller than Cory's. No shearwater except Balearic shows such characters in the Mediterranean. The birds were seen well by means of telescope (specifications: Nikon 15-45x) for about 1.5 minutes. The wind was strong North-West and it was clear and sunny which gave us good views of the birds.

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