

~~Anthropomorphic interpretations of animal behaviour are risky, but the behaviour reported here was strongly suggestive of little children playing tag ! This seems to be an instance of social play in the Spectacled Warbler.~~

~~Martin A. Thake~~

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~~SARDINIAN WARBLER : UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOUR.~~

~~On 10th January 1978, a single male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* was seen pecking at a piece of bread. The bird flew away when approached without attempting to lift the bread. The item lay in the middle of Old Railway Road, in front of St. Aloysius College, B'Kara and had probably been dropped by one of the college students. Scraps dropped by students form an important part of the diet of Spanish Sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis* during the academic year. Similar behaviour was observed during winter 1982-83, but the date was not recorded.~~

~~In late January 1983, while on a country walk at Buskett, a single male Sardinian Warbler was seen foraging within one of the large barrels which serve as dust bins. It was not possible to determine whether the bird was feeding on flies or on food scraps among the rubbish.~~

~~Martin A. Thake~~

~~M.A.T. - 169 Fleur-de-Lys Road, B'Kara, Malta.~~

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~~PURPLE HERON EATING A SKINK.~~

~~While bird-watching with some friends at Ghadira Nature Reserve on 9th April 1984, we noticed that a Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* had caught a prey. The bird then flew a short distance to one of the islands in the reserve with its prey dangling in its beak.~~

~~The heron took several minutes to swallow its prey, during which time we could identify its food. The prey was a reptile and we all were in agreement that it was a skink. Only one species of skink is found in Malta, the Ocellated Skink *Chalcides ocellatus*, which is fairly common in the reserve. The skink was a fully grown specimen and seemed to be about 25 cm in length.~~

~~The heron held the skink by its neck, suffocating it to death and then succeeded to swallow it after several attempts, head first.~~

~~Purple Herons are rarely seen feeding in the Maltese Islands. They are very vulnerable to the local bird-shooters, when they are flying low or when they alight. Appropriate feeding areas are very scarce and these, with the exception of Ghadira, are regularly visited by bird-shooters.~~

~~During spring 1984 up to three Purple Herons were present at Ghadira for several days. Their main diet during their stay at the reserve consisted of killifish *Aphanius fasciatus* and Grey Mullet *Mugil sp.*~~

~~Denis-Cachia~~

~~D.C. - 17 Gardenia Street, Santa Lucia, Malta.~~

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~~AN UNSUCCESSFUL BREEDING ATTEMPT BY THE SHORT-EARED OWL.~~

~~During the nineteenth century odd pairs of Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus* used to breed in the Maltese Islands (Schembri, A. 1843. *Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta*, & Wright, C. 1864. *List of the Birds observed in the Islands of Malta and Gozo*). In the present century only two nests were found - one with 5 young in the vicinity of Siggiewi on 4th May 1906 and another with a clutch of 3 eggs at Wied Zhuber on 18th May 1909 (Despott, G. 1917. *Notes on the Ornithology of Malta*).~~

~~Since then there have been no other breeding records of this species; not surprising when considering the prevailing intense human interference and the ever-shrinking adequate habitat. On 17th March 1983 an employee of the Department of Agriculture reported to us that he had flushed a large owl from a nest containing 5 eggs while on duty on the island of Comino which is a bird sanctuary. On visiting the locality on 24th March a Short-eared Owl was found incubating 5 eggs in a nest which was situated on the remnants of a base of a rubble wall which divided two uncultivated terraced fields. The nest had little material and was a shallow hollow, sheltered by vegetation. Unfortunately the nest was found destroyed a few days later. Only two cold eggs remained and the site appeared much disturbed. During the period in which the nest was under observation only one owl was seen and it is worth noting that a Short-eared Owl had been shot from a dinghy just off Comino in mid-March.~~

~~Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci~~

~~J.S. - 3 Seiberras Flats, Fleur-de-Lys Junction, B'Kara, Malta.~~

~~C.G. - 'Skyline', Targa Gap Estate, Mosta, Malta.~~