

#### BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR - NEW BREEDING RECORD FOR MALTA.

~~On 4th July 1982 we visited Ta' Zuta to check a report by Joe Grima, who had seen a pair of *Oenanthe* sp. there on 26th June.~~

~~On arriving on the edge of the cliff overlooking Fawwara, above a large sloping area covered with boulders of mixed sizes, a white-throated male of the eastern race of the Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* started calling alarmingly, flying about excitedly, while carrying food in its beak. The alarm calls increased as we climbed down towards the rubble slope. We went further down below the slope from where we could see the male bringing food from the rocky area above the cliffs. It was carrying food to at least two spots amongst the boulders which made us realise that it had fledged young. At one time one was heard calling from beneath a boulder at the approach of the male with food.~~

~~Next day (5th July) we visited the area again. We soon discovered why we had only seen the male the previous day. We found the corpse of the female which had been dead for at least five days. The bird had been shot, one lead pellet having penetrated the skull. The male and young had moved to about 300 m away. The male was seen carrying food to three different spots suggesting that it was accompanied by three fledged young.~~

~~Joe Grima reported again to us that on 22nd July he saw a male and two full grown young at il-Qaws, 5 km to the NW of Fawwara.~~

~~The Black-eared Wheatear is generally a scarce spring migrant, seen up to mid-May with occasional records in June. It is scarcer in autumn. Both the nominate race and *melanoleuca* occur.~~

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci

J.S. = Sciberras Flats / 3, Fleur-de-Lys Junction, B'Kara, Malta.

C.G. = Skyark, Targa Gap Estate, Mosta, Malta.

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#### HOUSE MARTIN - NEW BREEDING SPECIES FOR MALTA.

The House Martin *Delichon urbica* is a common migrant in spring and autumn with a few birds sometimes occurring during the rest of the year, particularly in winter.

Throughout the day, on 7th June 1981, 3 House Martins were noted prospecting for a nesting site under the balcony of a villa at Attard. Although they were not seen there the following day, 6 birds were found prospecting for nesting sites at buildings in the main square of Mosta. The prospecting continued until the 13th June when the birds disappeared. However, 4 birds returned a week later and 2 nests were built under one of the balconies of the building facing Mosta Church. In early August each nest contained 3 young. Adults and young deserted the area by the 3rd week of August. On 15th August, the day when the village feast is celebrated, the birds suffered from great disturbance when fireworks were let off even from the balcony where they were resting.

The following year the birds did not return at Mosta but on 7th June 1982 3 House Martins were seen chasing each other in the square in front of the Cathedral at Mdina. One of the birds was also seen frequently settling beneath the clock on the right side of the Cathedral's facade. Later in the day 2 birds started building a nest at the same spot. Two days later the nest was nearly complete. The mud was being collected from a reservoir which was dug amongst fields ca. 300 m to the east of the Mdina Bastions. On 15th June another pair, one of which had 1 to 2 primaries missing on the right wing, was noted prospecting under the other clock, but both birds deserted the area two days later. However, the third unmated House Martin was still frequently seen about. By the end of the following month at least two young had left the nest which was used again to raise a second brood. On 19th September both adults, as well as two other juveniles from the second brood were seen on the wing together and in the evening all four were noted going in the nest to roost. At least two birds were still using the nest to roost on 3rd October.

Meanwhile on a visit to the islet of Filfla on 7th August 1982 a pair of House Martins were seen flying about. Surprisingly they were found breeding. The nest was in a small round hole, possibly made by a rocket when Filfla was used for bombing practices, in a

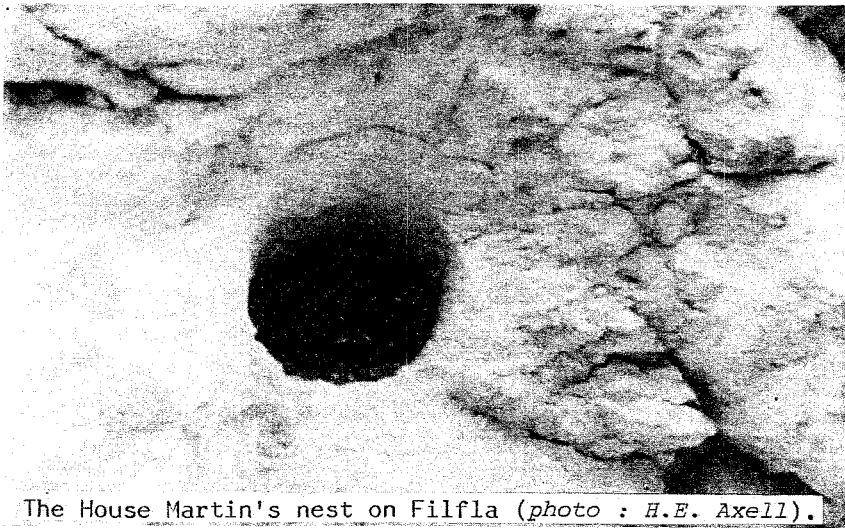
huge boulder. The birds partly blocked the hole by clay as in a form of balcony (see photo below). It was 3 metres above the ground and ca. 10 metres away from the seawater's edge. It contained a young bird and an added egg. Incidentally one of the adult birds had two of its primaries on its right wing damaged, similar to the one noted at Mdina on 15th June.

Our thanks are due to Mario V. Gauci who found the House Martins at Mdina in 1982 and who kept regular observations on the pair breeding there. A report on the first two pairs breeding at Mosta in 1981 has already appeared in 'A New Guide to the Birds of Malta' (1982) by the same writers.

Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci

J.S. - Sciberras Flats / 3, Fleur-de-Lys Junction, B'Kara, Malta.

C.G. - Skylark, Targa Cap Estate, Mosta, Malta.



The House Martin's nest on Filfla (photo : H.E. Axell).

#### FAN-TAILED WARBLER ATTACKING A WEASEL.

A note on the aggressive behaviour of the Fan-Tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* has appeared in *II-Merill* No. 19 p.19 (1977-78). It included an incident when a female was seen attacking a snake *Coluber viridiflavus*.

At 0800 hrs on 5th July 1981, at Wied il-Lun, a female Fan-tailed Warbler was seen carrying a small dragonfly in its beak and from its antics it indicated that it had a nest with young or fledged young in the vicinity. After perching on a fennel stalk about 1.5 m above the ground, it suddenly took off uttering scolding notes, and repeatedly dived amongst the low vegetation on the ground as if attacking something. Three fledged young were noted scattering in all directions and a weasel *Mustela nivalis* was seen running about trying to catch them.

Raymond Galea

R.G. - Sunview, Potters St., B'Kara, Malta.