

NOTEWORTHY OCCURRENCES.

1. Rose-breasted Grosbeak Pheucticus ludovicianus.

An immature Pheucticus ludovicianus was trapped by a finch trapper on 31st October 1979 at the limits of Delimara. At first glance the bird looks like a large olive-coloured female sparrow with Hawfinch-like beak. The specimen has a white supercilium which almost goes to the back of the head and a wide moustachial stripe which merges into a faint buffish collar. Lighter colour on the centre of the crown gives the impression of a brown streak above the supercilium. The brownish, olive-tinged back is heavily streaked. Dark brownish streaks are also present on its breast and flanks. The tail is also olive, tinged brown. The whitish tips of the median coverts and the greater coverts form two wing bars on the closed wing. It has bright yellow underwing and its wing length is 103 mm.

When the bird was trapped its plumage was perfect and showed no sign of captivity. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds in North America and is a vagrant to Europe in autumn. This is the first published occurrence of this species in Malta

2. Falcated Duck Anas falcata.

A medium sized duck, approaching Anas penelope, with a very dark general appearance, was shot at Birzebbuga on 10th October 1979. On close examination, it turned out to be an immature male Falcated Duck Anas falcata. The specimen has a dark blackish-brown crown with pale sides to its head, copiously flecked with dark brown. Upperparts are blackish brown with mantle feathers edged yellowish buff. The underparts are buffish closely flecked with dark brown. A few moulted breast feathers are buffish white with two black crescents, one in the middle of the feather and the other at the tip. The under-tail coverts are lighter. The speculum is black with a green sheen and is bordered by greyish white. Its measurements in mm are wing - 252; tail - 60; and bill - 47.

The Falcated Duck is a rare straggler to Eastern Europe from its Asiatic breeding grounds. It is also known as an escape in Europe. To date this duck species had never been recorded in Malta.

The above two specimens are found in my collection.

Alfred Vassallo

~~AN UNUSUAL NUMBER OF EGGS IN A SPECTACLED WARBLER'S NEST.~~

~~An abandoned nest of the Spectacled Warbler Sylvia conspicillata containing eight eggs was found at Bubaqra, Zurrieq, at the beginning of August 1979. The Spectacled Warbler usually lays from three to five eggs, normally four or five.~~

~~The nest looked normal in all other respects. The colour of the eggs was off-white speckled with greenish brown and varied in width from 11.7 to 13.2 mm and in length from 16.0 to 16.7 mm. The nest seemed to have been abandoned for about two months prior to its discovery.~~

~~There is the possibility of the female laying a second clutch after the first proved infertile. If this was the case it would also be most unusual as this species, like many other passerines, uses the nest once.~~

~~John Attard Montalto~~