

SOME NOTES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN GULL *LARUS*
MELANOCEPHALUS AND THE BLACK-HEADED GULL *LARUS*
RIDIBUNDUS

When one examines critically the various studies published on Maltese Ornithology one is likely to meet with confused statements regarding the status of quite a number of species. Two of these are the Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* and the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

Before trying to give the proper status of these gulls I list hereunder previous statements.

| | Mediterranean Gull | Black-headed Gull |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Schembri (1843) | Common in the winter months. | Common in the winter months. |
| Wright (1864) | This is the common gull of Malta. During winter congregates in large flocks in the harbours. | Associates with <i>L. Melanocephalus</i> but is by no means so common. |
| Despott (1917) | This is the common gull of Malta. It is to be seen in pretty large numbers in our harbours. | I must confess that though I have looked for it most carefully I have not yet succeeded in detecting it. |
| Gibb (1951) | Many. | (surprisingly not mentioned) |
| Roberts (1954) | A very common winter visitor. | A common winter visitor to Malta's harbours associating freely with <i>L. Melanocephalus</i> , though usually in rather smaller numbers. |
| De Lucca (1969) | A very common winter visitor. | A common winter visitor. |

Considering the fact that it is the Black-headed Gull which is the commoner of the two with us in winter (and not the Mediterranean Gull as generally stated in the above table), one assumes that some of the afore mentioned authorities totally confused the two species in the winter and immature plumages. (Others, it seems, were content to rely on previous works.) I cannot imagine that a change in the numbers of wintering gulls has taken place. The only published statement with which I fully agree is that of A. D'Andria who wrote "*The Black-headed Gull is, in my experience rather more common here than the above (Mediterranean Gull), con-*

trary to earlier records (*Times of Malta*, 18. 2. 1962 *Sea Gulls over Malta*).

These two gulls frequently congregate in the Grand and Marsamxett Harbours during winter, their numbers increasing during strong North-westerly wind. Frequent counts were made during the last three winters and only once (in December 1968) did the numbers of the Mediterranean Gull reach 35% of the number of the two gulls present. Otherwise it was always less than 15%.

The Black-headed Gull appears earlier than the Mediterranean Gull but the bulk of both are with us by mid-December. They both leave by the end of March but singles or small parties of the Mediterranean Gull may still be noted by mid-April.

All the ringed recoveries (19) in Malta of the Mediterranean Gull were of birds ringed as juveniles on the breeding island of Orlov in the Black Sea. Those of the Black-headed Gull (13) hail from Finland, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany, Yugoslavia and France.

References for the compilation of the table:

- 1843 Schembri, A.: *Catalogo Ornitoiologico del Gruppo di Malta*, Tip. Anglo-Maltese, Malta.
1864 Wright, C. A.: *List of the Birds observed in the islands of Malta and Gozo*. *Ibis* 6:42-73, 137-157.
1917 Despott, G.: *Notes on the Ornithology of Malta*. *Ibis* (10) 5:281-349, 466-526.
1951 Gibb, J.: *The Birds of the Maltese Islands*, *Ibis* 93: 109-127.
1954 Roberts, E. L.: *The Birds of Malta*. Progress Press, Malta.
1969 DeLucca, C.: *A Revised Check-List of the Birds of the Maltese Islands*. E. W. Classey Ltd., England.

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BIRD NOTES FOR JANUARY-APRIL 1971

1. Selected Occurrences.

- Black-necked Grebe: singles on 19/1 and 10/2
Bittern: singles on 16/3 at Wardija and on 27/3 at Ras il-Pelegrin.
Osprey: 3 records in April.
Buzzard: One at il-Qadi on 21/3.
Eleonora's Falcon: Single bird (dark phase) at Wardija on 23/4.
Merlin: One on 2/4 at St. Andrew's
Baillon's Crake: Single bird taken on 31/3.
Kentish Plover: 2 at Salina on 16/3.
Turnstone: 3 single birds from 21-28/4.
Spotted Redshank: One at Ghadira on 13/4.
Marsh Sandpiper: One at Ghadira from 20-23/4 and at Salina on 23/4.
Black-tailed Godwit: 5 single birds from 17/2 to 26/3.
Great Snipe: one at Salina on 6 and 7/3.
Black-winged Stilt: 2 near B'bugia on 18/2 and 9 records in April.
Avocet: 2 crossing the south Comino Channel on 14/4.