

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS

BLUE ROCK THRUSH

The Blue Rock Thrush (Maltese: Merill) is Malta's national bird. The Blue Rock Thrush, along with the Maltese Centaury (Widnet il-Baħar), were chosen as our national bird and flower in 1971.

Scientific Name: Monticola solitarius describes the Blue Rock Thrush perfectly; the solitary rock lover.

Description: Adult males have a dark glossy blue plumage, while females and young birds are brown in colour.

Distribution: It occurs as a resident bird from Portugal, across the Mediterranean and all the way to Japan. Locally, we find the Blue Rock Thrush breeding on the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino.

In Malta: Common resident.

Habitat: Sea-cliffs are the dominant habitat for the Blue Rock Thrush. It builds its nest and raises its chicks in narrow crevices and inside caves. In recent years, some individuals colonized inland areas with pairs now breeding in abandoned buildings, farmhouses, as well as occupied palaces. A pair started breeding at the National Museum of Natural History in Mdina, raising two broods each year. During the late autumn and winter months, young birds venture inland and can be seen in urban areas.

Breeding: Singing males can be heard from late February but actual breeding starts in March. Two broods are laid each year. Four to six bluish eggs are laid in a shallow neat cup constructed on a narrow ledge. The first brood fledges around the end of April, while the second brood leaves the nest towards the end of June.

Conservation: In the past, many nests were taken to raise the young birds in cages. Luckily, this habit of stealing nests has declined in recent years, resulting in an increase in the local bird population. The Blue Rock Thrush is a protected species by Maltese Law.



Maltese Lira coin (1986-2008) portraying the Blue Rock Thrush

