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OBSERVATIONS ON THE BREEDING OF THE GREENFINCH AND THE HOOPOE IN THE ARCHIPELAGO OF MADEIRA

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With 3 figures

SYNOPSIS

Regarding the Greenfinch, the author mentions numerous instances during which he could hear the call of several of these birds, and he records for the first time the finding of a nest, thus producing conclusive evidence that *Chloris chloris* must be included henceforth among the breeding birds of Madeira.

Many cases of observing hoopoes in the island of Porto Santo are recorded and several nests, where these birds bred successfully, have been found. The now commonly heard call of the hoopoe gives proof of its return to that island as a breeder, after an almost total absence for many years.

THE GREENFINCH

Vernon Harcourt, in his «Sketch of Madeira», 1851, lists the Greenfinch among the many stragglers.

Padre Schmitz, who lived in Madeira and made a close study of its birds from 1888 to 1898 (Schmitz, 1899, p. 66) and again from 1902 to 1908 (Silva & Menezes 1966, Vol. III, p. 277), obtained only one specimen and that from Porto Santo on the 24th. October 1896.

Eric Schindler who was in Madeira from 23rd February to the 14th May 1960 and again from the 9th-20th July 1960 did not see a sin-

1) Quinta da Vista Alegre, Rua do Dr. Pita, 5, Funchal, Madeira

gle Greenfinch during his visits. Schindler spent most of his stay walking and camping in various parts of the island and had Greenfinches been present in any numbers he would surely have recorded their presence.

Bannerman, in «Birds of the Atlantic Islands» Volume 2, states that he distinctly heard the characteristic call of the Greenfinch in Madeira in April 1960. In May 1963 and again in November 1964 he actually saw them in two different parts of the island. There are several specimens in the Municipal Museum in Funchal, the last having been obtained in July 1955. Bannerman concluded that the Greenfinch was resident but undoubtedly scarce and this seems to have been the case until 1968 when the Greenfinch was seen and heard on many occasions in different parts of the island.

The day following my return from a trip abroad on the 1st March 1968, I distinctly heard the characteristic «TZEEE...» call of the Greenfinch in the gardens of Quinta da Vista Alegre in Funchal, and continued to hear it every day until the 17th March when for the first time 2 Greenfinches were seen feeding on the ground beneath cypress trees. Thereafter they were seen constantly in the same locality.

On the 28th April many Greenfinches were heard calling from the uppermost branches of tall trees at Santo da Serra, 680 metres.

On the 30th April several were seen and heard at Quinta do Palheiro.

On the 5th May I observed 2 Greenfinches on pine trees at a distance of about 10 metres at Cabo Girão. Their characteristic mating call was loud, clear and constant.

On the 26th May several Greenfinches were again heard at Santo da Serra.

During the month of June I was absent from Madeira but on my return the first sound which greeted me in my garden was the unmistakable call of the Greenfinch. During the whole month of July they were constantly seen and heard in the garden. Similarly every time I visited Santo da Serra they were heard and seen there.

In view of the possibility that some of these birds might be breeding, I asked my friends to keep an eye open for evidence of nesting. On the 27th July Dr. Alberto Araujo informed me that he had three young Greenfinches in a cage at his country house above Estreito de Câmara de Lobos. I immediately drove up to his house and there in a pine tree (*Pinus*

pinaster) about 12 feet about the ground, was the empty nest of a Greenfinch.

Alongside this nest, among the branches, a cage had been placed in which there were three young male Greenfinches.

Dr. Araujo had given instructions to his gardner to trap some wild canaries. The gardener had found this nest with young and believing them to be canaries placed them in a cage alongside the nest where the parent birds came to feed them through the wires of the cage. While we were there the female came many times and sat on the cage feeding her young.

The following morning I returned to the nest to attempt to photograph the young being fed but due to bad light and lack of time was unsuccessful. I took the cage and birds with me to Funchal but later on thinking the matter over decided to make another attempt the following morning. So on the 29th July, 24 hours after having brought them to Funchal, I returned to the site and placed the cage with the young on the lawn about 15 metres distant from the nest. After a short while the female appeared and inspected the cage and young from a distance. After a wait of approximately one hour she approached the cage and started to feed her young. (Plate I, fig. 1)

While this is the first recorded nest of a Greenfinch in Madeira, judging from the number of birds seen in various parts of the island and from their characteristic breeding call, it is likely that this nest was one of many and that in the future we shall have reports of breeding Greenfinches in various parts of the island.

Conclusion: Since all ornithologists who have written about Madeira birds, especially Padre Schmitz, who lived here many years, have either not mentioned the Greenfinch at all or then referred to it only as a straggler or rare bird, there is no doubt that until recently the Greenfinch was a very rare bird in Madeira and most unlikely to have ever bred here. However, in view of the numbers recorded during 1968 and the nest which was found in that year, it can be concluded that its numbers are increasing and it can now be included among the breeding birds of Madeira.

THE HOOPOE

The Hoopoe is reported to have nested both in Madeira and in Porto Santo in years gone by but no definite proof was ever obtained

until July 1965 when the dried remains of a young Hoopoe, which had died in captivity, were found and sent by the Curator of the Funchal museum to Dr. David Bannerman who mentions this occurrence in his «Birds of the Atlantic Islands», Volume 2.

This was to be the first of many definite proofs of nesting in Porto Santo for on the 7th April 1966 I found and photographed 5 young Hoopoes in their nest situated inside a stone wall at Zambujeiros, Campo de Baixo. (One of those birds is shown on the hand on plate I, fig. 2) In the evening of the 25th February 1967 Hoopoes were seen coming in to roost at Campo de Baixo. The following day a nest was found in a 6ft high supporting wall of large loose stones. A Hoopoe was sitting at the end of a 3ft deep hole in this wall and did not appear perturbed when made to move, revealing 7 pale blue eggs. Two days later on further examination there were 8 eggs in this nest.

On the 24th March 1967 a further nest was found in the same locality with a clutch of seven eggs. An adult bird was sitting at the end of a deep hole in a similar wall and although it raised its crest when disturbed, it did not seem unduly nervous when it was repeatedly photographed with an electronic flash lamp. (Plate II).

On the 20th August 1967 four chicks almost ready to fly were found and photographed near to the previous find. Further occupied nests were found in deep holes on the 20th May 1968 (one visible chick and one addled egg) at Jardim, Campo de Baixo about one hundred yards distant from the beach, and on the 13th July 1968 below Zambujeiro (5 chicks), both inside supporting walls. When some stones were removed from the wall containing the first of these nests the adult bird, which had just entered to feed its young, was heard to make several grunting sounds.

In all cases the eggs and chicks were found on dried earth, there being no nesting material other than a few blades of dried grass.

On the 18th May 1968 the characteristic HOO-HOO-HOO call of the Hoopoe was heard for the first time. No local inhabitants had ever heard this sound before. During the summer months of 1968 it became a fairly common sound and many more hoopoes than was usual were seen in several parts of the island. The most recent observation was a nest containing at least two nearly fully-grown chicks found in a supporting wall at Jardim on the 20th April 1969.

All these records of nesting Hoopoes were made during brief visits to Porto Santo and if a constant look out were kept during the breeding season it is highly probable that many more nests would be found.

Although it is almost certain that Hoopoes used to nest in Porto Santo at least several decades have passed without any nest being reported. Within the last three years clutches of 4 to 8 eggs or chicks have become quite common and the number of the birds seen has been increasing.

The Hoopoe at Porto Santo seems to prefer supporting walls of large loose stones to make its nest. The nests are situated in deep holes and the eggs are laid on dry earth with practically no building material.

Nesting occurs at least from February to August.

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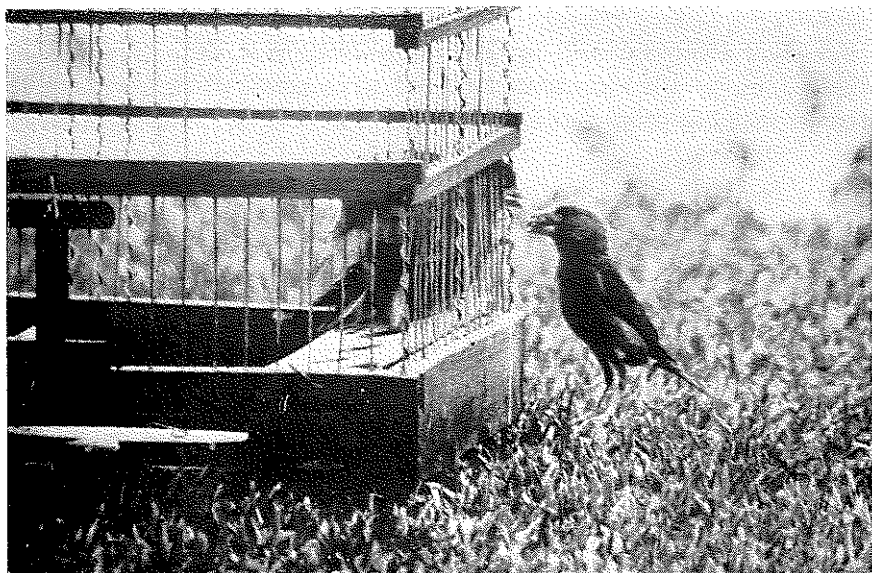
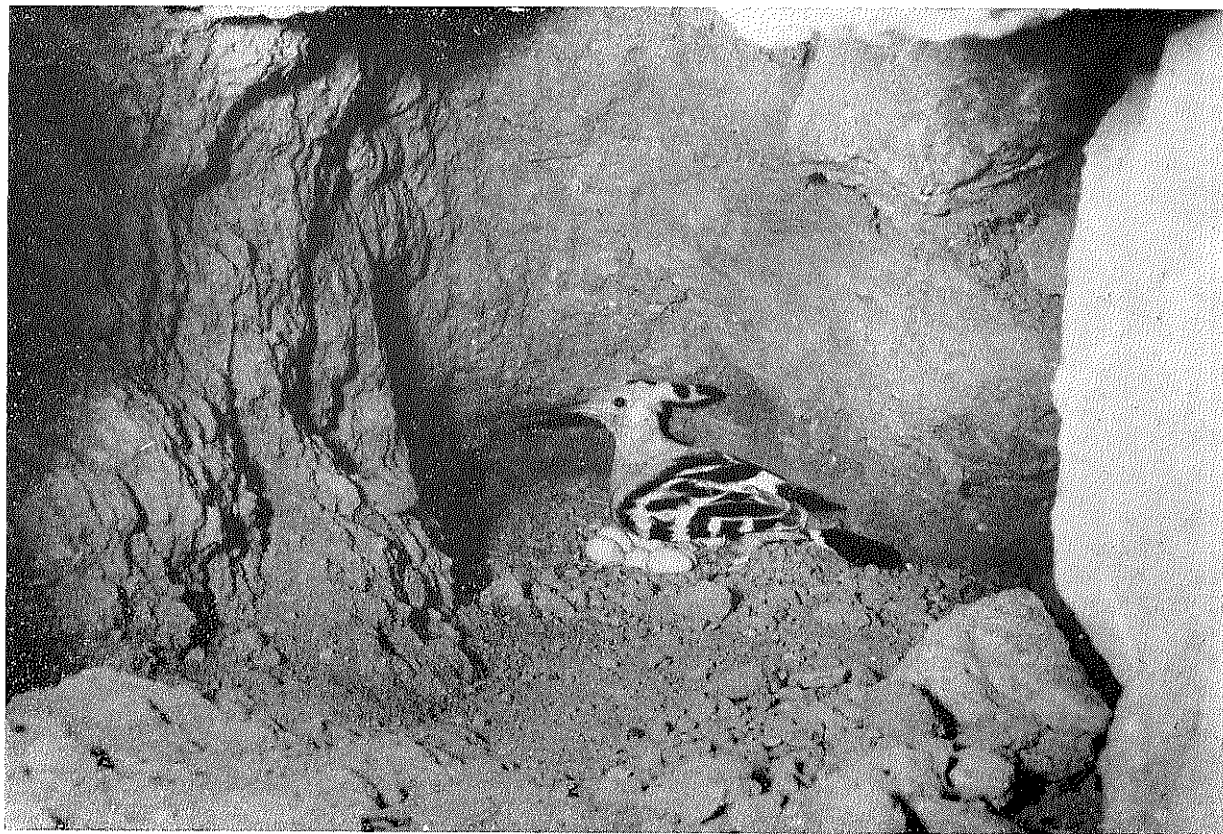


Fig. 1. — Parent bird of greenfinches feeding young in cage (see page 3)



Fig. 2. — Young hoopoe from nest found on the 7th April 1966 (see page 4)



Hoopoe on eggs in nest found on the 24th March 1967 (see page 4)