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FIRST BREEDING OF EURASIAN COOT *FULICA ATRA* RECORDED ON MADEIRA ISLAND (MADEIRA ARCHIPELAGO)

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With 2 figures

ABSTRACT. This contribution reports the discovery of the first breeding record of the Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* on the Island of Madeira (Madeira Archipelago). The breeding site (32° 40' 44. 75" N, 17° 5' 19. 70" W) is situated on a fresh water pond by the sea, Lugar de Baixo, Ponta do Sol, Madeira Island.

RESUMO. Neste trabalho é assinalada pela primeira vez a nidificação do galeirão-comum, *Fulica atra*, na Ilha da Madeira. O local de nidificação (32° 40' 44. 75" N, 17° 5' 19. 70" W) situa-se numa lagoa de água doce na zona costeira do Lugar de Baixo, Ponta de Sol, Ilha da Madeira.

KEY WORDS: Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*, breeding, Madeira.

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INTRODUCTION

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a widespread species, which was recorded from Madeira as a seasonal (winter) visitor (HARCOURT, 1851; ZINO *et al.*, 1995). Since 2004 the authors have recorded year-round visits of this species with greater numbers in winter (up to 50 individuals at one time in Lugar de Baixo pond) and very few in summer, sometimes a single bird. Breeding of this species in Madeira is confirmed and reported herein.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

As part of their professional work for Madeira Wind Birds, the authors have visited Lugar de Baixo pond on a biweekly basis for at least 4 years. The presence of Eurasian Coots was recorded in each visit in order to assess the abundance and behavior of this species on that pond. The presence of other resident and vagrant birds was recorded as well.

RESULTS

On the 17th of May 2009 at 5:10 pm the authors observed and photographed (Fig. 1) a pair of *Fulica atra* feeding 4 recently hatched young, bright red, bold crown, encircled with orange downy feathers and red bill, which proves to be the first breeding record for this species for the Madeira Archipelago. The birds were observed again on the 18th of May 2009 at 10:05 am for one hour, whilst the parents were feeding the chicks (Fig. 2). This family of 6 were the only Eurasian Coots on the pond. The chicks were swimming on the waterside of the reeds (*Saccharum* sp.) and did not follow their parents further into the centre of the pond to avoid predators. When gulls (*Larus* sp.) flew by, they hid in the reeds. On the pond there were also some Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* also with chicks, Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* and one drake Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*, though none of these birds disturbed either the parents or chicks of *Fulica atra*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Considering that *Fulica atra* eggs are incubated by both parents for up to 24 days and that the chicks leave the nest a few days after hatching (COLLIN, 2009), it is presumed that this brood was laid in mid-April 2009. Between 2006 and 2008 Eurasian Coots have been seen gathering nesting material in Lugar de Baixo, though neither eggs nor chicks have ever been previously observed.

In Madeira there are several records of vagrant Eurasian Coots in different places around the island, such as:



Fig. 1 - Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, adult feeding 2 chicks in Lugar de Baixo, Madeira, 17th of May 2009 (Photograph H. Romano).



Fig. 2 - Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, adult feeding 4 chicks in Lugar de Baixo, Madeira, 18th of May 2009 (Photograph C. Fagundes).

Lugar de Baixo, Ponta do Sol (32°40'44.75"N, 17°5'19.70"W) - common place to observe Coots in Madeira, with greater concentrations (maximum 54 registered) observed during winter and where they can be observed almost all year round;

Vila da Ribeira Brava, Ribeira Brava (32°40'16.34"N, 17° 3'55.12"W) - 2 birds observed during winter 2008/09;

Lagoa Santo António da Serra, Santa Cruz (32°43'7.27"N, 16°48'29.74"W) - 1 bird observed during winter 2007/08;

Ribeira de São Jorge, Santana (32°49'41.48"N, 16°53'52.88"W) - 1 bird observed in Spring 2007 and in February 2009 (BIRDS & BIRDWATCHING, 2009).

For Porto Santo, the neighbouring island, some 20 nautical miles NE of Madeira, there have been observations in Ribeiro Salgado, (33°03'06.73"N, 16°21'40.72"W) - where records date from the 5th of October 2005 with a maximum of 20 birds observed on the 10th of February 2008.

Lugar de Baixo is the warmest place in Madeira and it's pond is mainly fresh water though sometimes it gets brackish as it is situated near the sea and at high tides some sea water gets into the pond. This spot attracts many vagrant birds to Madeira, mainly Ardeidae, Anatidae, Charadriidae, Scolopacidae and Rallidae. Other species that breed on this pond area are Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata*, Feral Dove *Columba livia*, Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* and Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (first breeding record in 2003) (FAGUNDES & NUNES, 2003) and every evening there is a lady who feed them with bread and raw vegetables.

On the neighbouring archipelagos of the Canaries and the Azores, Eurasian Coots are recorded as breeding bird species though not always successfully, with records on Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma, Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria for the Canary Islands, where they nest on man-made water reservoirs (CLARKE, 2004).

During the last few years some water reservoirs have been constructed in Madeira and Porto Santo, creating alternative resting, and now new potential breeding areas for this species.

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