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BREVI NOTE / SHORT NOTES

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STATUS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN FLYCATCHER *MUSCICAPA TYRRHENICA* SCHIEBEL, 1910 (*Aves Muscicapidae*) IN SICILY

Status del Pigliamosche tirrenico Muscicapa tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910 (*Aves Muscicapidae*) *in Sicilia*

For decades, Mediterranean Flycatcher *Muscicapa tyrrhenica* Schiebel, 1910 was almost completely neglected, with little with little, if any, mention about its identification in the main bird field guides as well in the major ornithological works (Viganò, 2015; Viganò & Corso, 2015; Viganò *et al*., 2016, 2019). All the handbooks for the identification of Western Palearctic birds, contain brief, vague, and often mistaken information. After its description, this interesting *taxon* was forgotten by most ornithologists and never discussed in depth, being only briefly cited also by major taxonomic works such as Vaurie (1959). From 2004 we started to study this *taxon*, chiefly one of us devoted his University thesis to the species (Viganò, 2012, 2015). Recently splitted from the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (Pallas, 1764) by the IOC (International Ornithological Committee) and therefore reported as a separate species (with *balearica* von Jordans, 1913 as subspecies) in the IOC World Bird List, as such it is now considered by most European countries. However, in the last Italian Bird List (Baccetti *et al*. 2019), this *taxon* is still considered a subspecies of *M. striata*, following the HBW Alive/Bird Life International list. Given the strong and constant differences in vocalization, migratory pattern, plumage and morphology, as well as the wide genetic distance, we here follow IOC decision as we had already done in our previous papers (Viganò, 2015; Viganò & Corso, 2015; Pons *et al*., 2016; Viganò *et al*., 2016, 2019). In particular, the genetic distance is higher than between several sister species pairs for which the split is accepted since long time in Europe (Pons *et al*., 2016). In this short note, we report a table and some figures summarizing the main phenotypic distinguishing characters of *M. tyrrhenica* compared with *M. striata*; the key features are the wing-formula, the song (chiefly the maximum frequency kHz), primary projection, wing-formula, head and breast dark marking/pattern, rump colour (Tab. 1, Figs.1, 2, 3). The records here reported regard only those sightings for which we were able to observe very well the birds, obtaining photos of the second primary (P2) position, or as in the case of breeding birds getting sound recordings of their song (s) and call (s), in order to have sonograms for their secure identification. Where we report the word "*apparently*", it is only related to the fact that recently fledged juveniles in September may pertain to a second or third brood but still are odd, so we are not sure and where fledged.

General Data for Italy: for what concerns its *status* in Italy, *M. tyrrhenica*, apart from Sardinia and Corsica (the type localities), it is reported as breeding along a narrow coastal strip on the west-

Tab. 1
Main differentiating characters between *Muscicapa striata* (Pallas, 1764),
Muscicapa tyrrhenica tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910
and *M. tyrrhenica balearica* von Jordans, 1913.
These are divided into **Key Features**, those more relevant for a secure identification,
and all the remaining **Additional Features**.

Characters/Taxa	***M. striata***	***M. t. tyrrhenica***	***M. tyrrhenica balearica***
KEY FEATURES			
wing-formula	p2 > p5 p3 > p4 longest space p5 - p6	p2 < p5 p3 ≈ p4 short space p5 - p6	p2 < p5 p3 > / ≈ p4 shortest space p5 - p6
primary projection	longer than tertials	shorter than tertials	shorter than tertials
song	average frequency 2kHz, almost always below 10/11 kHz	electric tones in song, maximum frequency 18-20 kHz	electric tones in song, to human ear sounds very similar to *tyrrhenica*, but lower maximum frequency (13-15kHz)
head pattern	head streaking well defined, marked	poorly defined (duller/ darker ground colour of crown/whole head)	very well defined (ground colour of crown/whole head very pale, often milky white)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES			
general structure	slender and elongated	shorter wing, longer tail, large head	shorter wing, longer tail, large head
general appearance	visibly contrasted between upperparts and underparts	darker (duller) and dirtier, rather uniform	pale and clean, visible contrast between upperparts and very clean, unmarked and white underparts
rump	same colour as back and mantle	warmer than back	warmer than back
chest/breast	strongly streaked	spotted or marbled, often indistinct	Thin, well defined streaking sometimes evanescent and nearly invisible
flank and underwing	dull or dark flanks, rusty-dull underwing	dull or dirty flanks, rusty or brownish underwing	both pale and clean

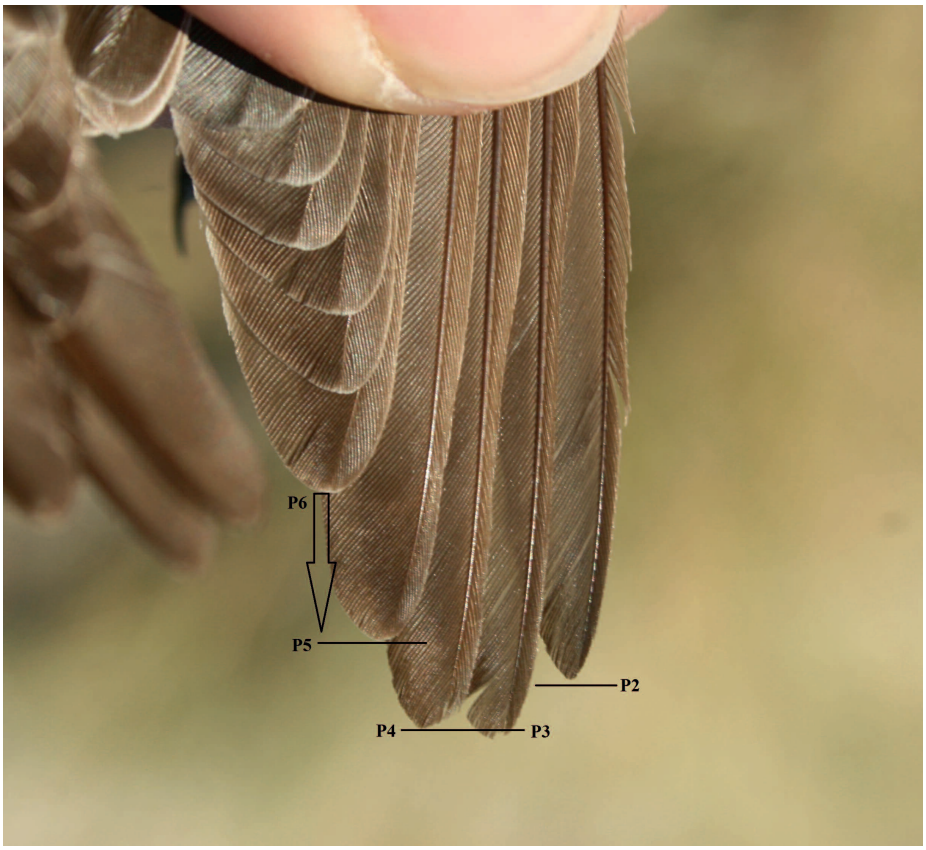

Fig. 1 — Muscicapa striata (Pallas, 1764) adult, Falsterbo, Skåne, Sweden, 22 August 2015 (Photo: Marc Illa). In the *taxa* of the group *striata* p2 is longer than p5 primaries, p3 is longer than p4, and the distance between tip of p6 and p5 is rather long.

ern – ie, Tyrrhenian – coast of Italy (TELLINI *et al.*, 1997; BRICHETTI & FRACASSO, 2008). This has recently been confirmed also during our researches: **1)** in May 2012 one breeding pair was photographed at Monti della Tolfa, Roma (Lazio) (AC, *pers. obs.*) where several were photographed in the last decade by various observers; **2**) in May 2015, we observed and sound-recorded singing individuals at Livorno (Tuscan coast) (VIGANÒ, 2015); **3)** in July 2016, several presumably breeding birds were photographed along the Entella river at Lavagna, along the Ligurian coast (Daniele Papi & Andrea Simoncini, *pers. comm.*), the most northerly population currently known. In subsequent years, the *taxon* was recorded during breeding period in several sites along the Ligurian coast (DP, AS, Rudy Valfiorito, *pers. comm.*); **4)** in June-July 2016, breeding birds were observed along the Tiber river at Rome, syntopically with several breeding pairs of Spotted Flycatcher (song recordings of both *taxa* were obtained and sonogram carried out) (AC, *pers.obs.*); **5**) in May 2018 one pair tentatively assigned to *M. tyrrhenica* was observed briefly at Oppido Mamertina, Reggio Calabria (South Italy); however, in this case, its sure identification was not fully clinched and it is here reported with the only purpose of stimulating further targeted research in the area. Its presence along the

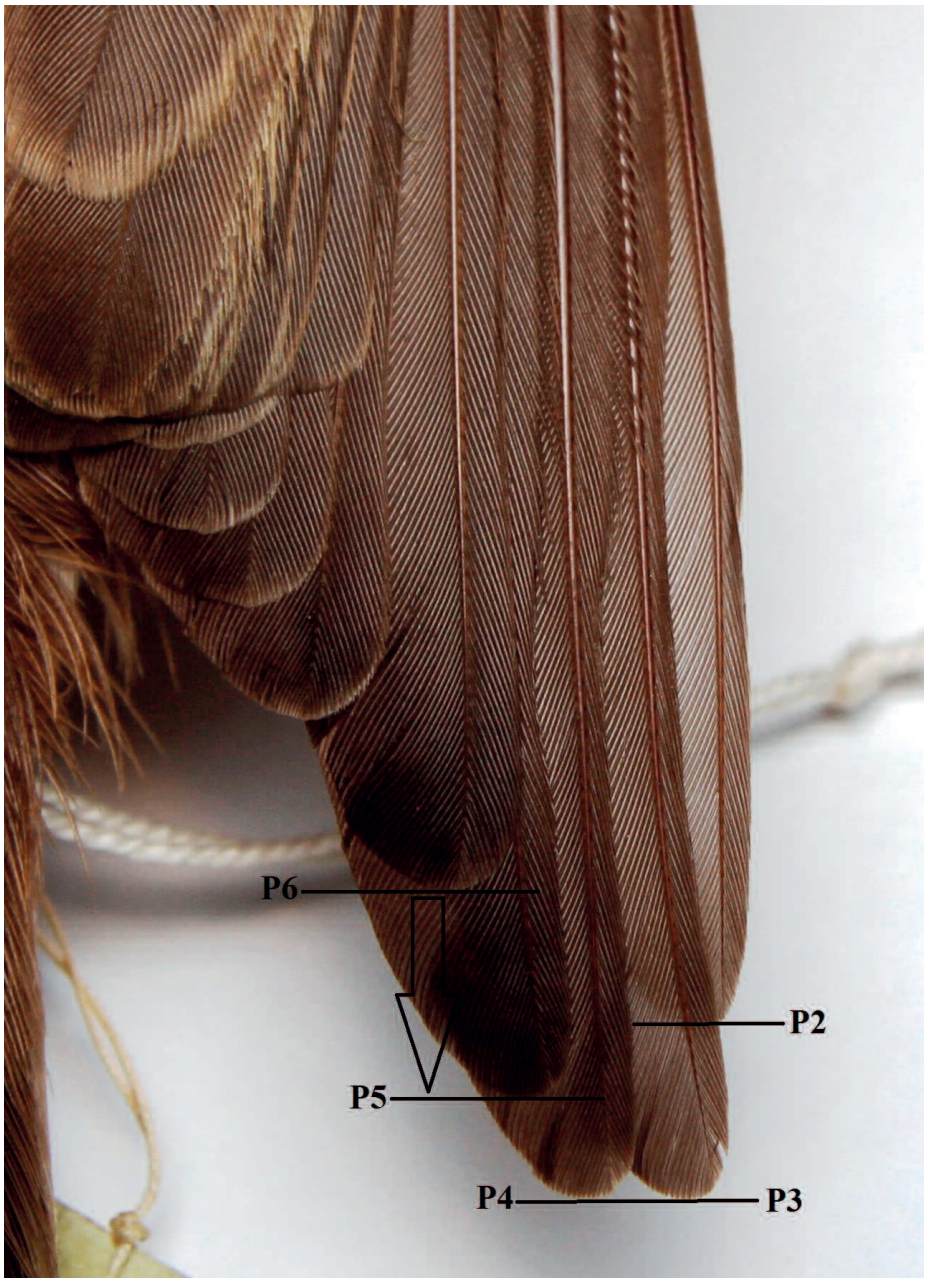

Fig. 2 — Muscicapa t. tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910 adult (collected on Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy, 14 May 1966), Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Milano, Italy, 20 November 2012 (Photo M. Viganò). In the *taxa* of the group *tyrrhenica* p2 is always shorter than p5 primaries, p3 is equal to p4, and the distance between tip of p6 and p5 is shorter than in *striata*.

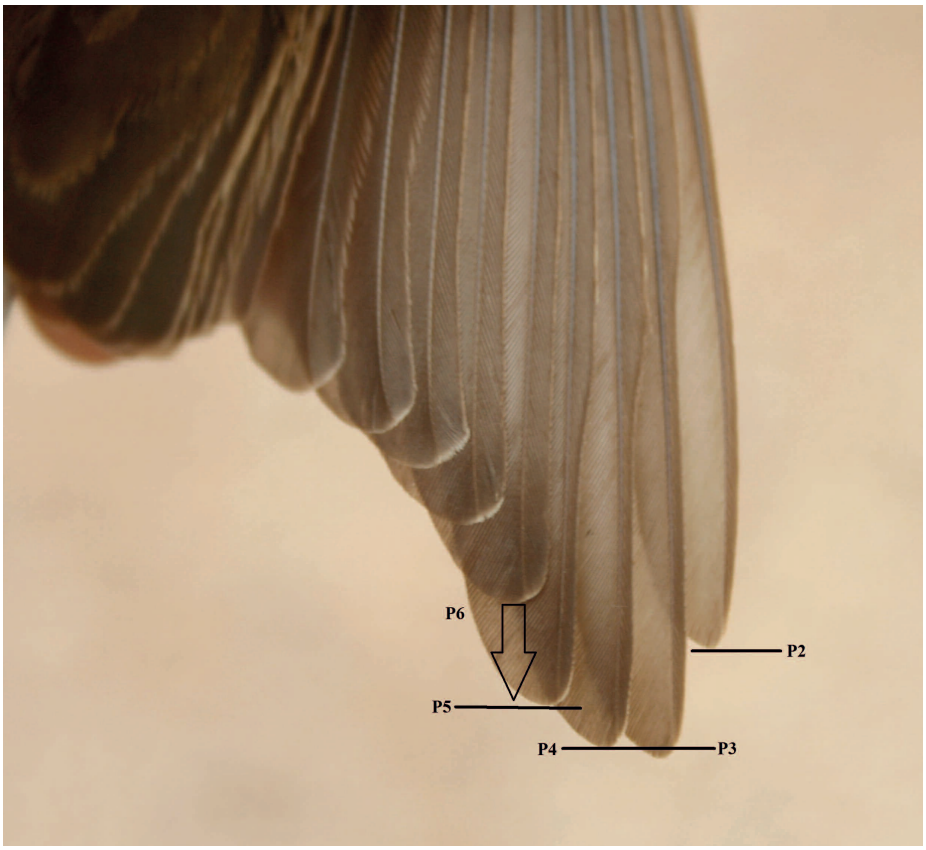

Fig. 3 — Muscicapa tyrrhenica balearica von Jordans, 1913 adult, Illa de l'Aire, Menorca, Balearic Islands, Spain, 5 May 2015 (Photo Marc Illa). In the ssp. *balearica*, p2 is visibly shorter than p5 primaries, p3 is equal to p4 or slightly longer, and the distance between tip of p6 and p5 is the shortest of all the taxa here discussed.

Tyrrhenian coast of Tuscany is confirmed by some individuals identified genetically as *M. tyrrhenica* from the city of Livorno (Pons *et al*., 2016). The presence of *M. tyrrhenica* as far inland as Firenze, the locality of the wrongly identified photograph in Shirihai & Svensson (2018), was never confirmed so far; the bird photographed at Firenze and purported as *M. tyrrhenica* shows in fact plumage characters not associated with *M. tyrrhenica*: heavy dark streaking over the head, rather well defined dark streaking over the breast, very long wing and so on.

Mediterranean Flycatcher was previously not reported for the Sicilian fauna, with no mention found in Iapichino & Massa (1989) as well as in Corso (2005). During our studies on the morphology of the "spotted flycatchers" and their identification, we obtained several records of *M. tyrrhenica* for Sicily. **MIGRATION**: **1**) at least three birds were observed in migration on 12th September 2015 at Salina, Aeolian islands (Messina) (Davide De Marchi, *pers. comm*.); **2**) two birds on 11th October 2015 at Lampedusa, Pelagie islands (Agrigento) (MISC, *pers. obs*.); **3**) numerous individuals (both adults and juveniles) at Favignana, Egadi islands (Trapani), in mid - to late September

2013-2016 (AC, Brian J. Small, Peter Kennerly, Colin Bushell, *pers. comm.*); **4**) at Monte Erice, 2 birds observed in May 2017 (AC, *pers.obs*.). **BREEDING**: **1**) some breeding pairs in June 2012 at Marettimo, Egadi islands (Trapani); recently fledged juv., still fed by the parents were observed (GS, *pers. obs*.); **2**) some breeding pairs in June 2017 at Ustica (Palermo); some nests were found and recently fledged juv., still fed by the parents were observed (GS, *pers. obs*.); **3**) a pair with two juveniles, apparently (due to the late date) recently fledged, at Erice (Trapani), on early September 2018 and, in the same place, on early September 2019 (AC, *pers. obs*.). From the data here reported, we may conclude that *M. tyrrhenica* is a regular passage migrant in Western Sicily, chiefly along the Egadi-Ustica islands flyway, where it also breeds with some pairs. Most likely, it breeds as well in the Valderice area (Trapani, western-most Sicily) and possibly also at Aeolian islands (Messina, north-east Sicily). At the current state of knowledge, we are not aware of any observation in southern to eastern Sicily as well as at Pantelleria island, where instead it should be observed. Further south in the Sicilian Channel, this *taxon* is a rare vagrant at Pelagie islands. Up to date, no records of the subsp. *balearica* were obtained in Sicily, while there is at least one record from the near Maltese Archipelago (Galea & Viganò, 2011) as well as from Sardinia (Fozzi *et al*., 2019). In conclusion, *M. tyrrhenica* could be included in the Sicilian avifauna, its distribution as a breeding species deserve further researches. Ringing sessions and sound-recordings of the song should be organized to confirm its presence also on the other Egadi islands (outside Marettimo) and in the Trapani province, as well as at Aeolian islands.

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Fig. 4 — Muscicapa tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910, Ustica Island, Palermo (Sicily), June 2017 (Photo: G. Speranza). Note p2 falls visibly shorter than p3 primary (more than in *M. striata*), so that the distance between their tips is rather long, while the distance between tip of p5 and p6 is shorter than in *M. striata*. Plumage-wise: rather rusty-brownish plumage, with warm uppertail and rump, no dark streaking over mantle, barely visible dark streaking on crown, flanks and breast, that appear almost uniform or "flecked". Birds in Figs. 4-6 were feeding juveniles or visiting nest-sites.

Fig. 5 — Muscicapa tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910, Ustica Island, Palermo (Sicily), June 2017 (Photo: G. Speranza). Note the short primary-projection (below line), visibly shorter than tertials' length (above line); note that the "gap" between tips of p5 and p6 is very short, much shorter than in *M. striata.* Note also the rather dull or dark uniform plumage, almost "non-descript", typical of this *taxon*.

Fig. 6 — *Muscicapa tyrrhenica* Schiebel, 1910, Ustica Island, Palermo (Sicily), June 2017 (Photo: G. Speranza). Note the rather dull, uniform and rusty plumage and general looking, with almost unstreaked flanks and belly (appearing at most flecked or spotted as a Thrush Nightingale), and barely streaked frons/crown. The throat is often typically rusty, contrasting with a paler moustache-mark in this *taxon*.

Fig. 7 — Muscicapa tyrrhenica Schiebel, 1910, Marettimo Island, Palermo (Sicily), June 2012 (Photo: G. Speranza). Note the rather uniform, rusty-brown looking, with weak, delicate rusty streaking over the breast (this pattern could be pencil-like streaming or "clouded", mottled looking). Note also the position of P2, which falls rather shortly before P3. This bird was actively feeding recently fledged juveniles.