A newly discovered colony of European Storm-petrels in Italy

On 31st May 2008, on the north coast of Lampedusa Island (a small island in the Mediterranean, about 20 km² in extent, c. 120 km from Tunisia and c. 195 km from Sicily, Italy), I noticed the characteristic musty odour associated with a storm-petrel breeding colony. The avifauna of Lampedusa is well known, and Moltoni (1970) found just one nest of European Storm-petrel Hydrobates pelagicus on the neighbouring islet of Lampione, 18 km ENE of Lampedusa.

On 6th June 2008, I returned to the site, a large cave, at night and discovered a large colony of European Storm-petrels breeding in small cavities in the cave walls. Although I could not estimate the total number of birds present, many tens of individuals were entering the cave and milling around at the cave entrance. Subsequent daytime visits in August 2008 failed to provide any further information on numbers present.

Two subspecies of European Storm-petrel occur in Europe, distinguishable in terms of both biometrics and genetics: nominate pelagicus breeds in the eastern North Atlantic, while H. p. melitensis (see editorial comment, below) is restricted to a small number of islands in the Mediterranean. The latter is characterised by its larger size and the fact that it breeds at a younger age, including some at one year old (Hemery & D’Elbée 1985; Catalisano et al. 1988; Bretagnolle 1992; Lo Valvo & Massa 2000; Lalanne et al. 2001; Cagnon et al. 2004). The population is much smaller than that of the North Atlantic, believed to be in the range of 8,500–15,200 pairs, compared with 430,000–510,000 pairs in the North Atlantic (BirdLife International 2004). The breeding range of H. p. melitensis includes the Balearic Islands (1,800–4,000 pairs), Corsica (c. 100 pairs), Sardinia (c. 500 pairs, including c. 300 pairs on a single islet off the northwest coast; Paddau et al. 1997), Sicily (1,700–2,500 pairs, mostly on the island of Marettimo; Lo Valvo & Massa 2000, Albores-Barajas et al. 2008), and Filfla, Malta (5,000–8,000 pairs), together with...
One afternoon in July 2008, I saw a Common Buzzard playing with a plastic bag. The bag was filled with air and thus acted like a small sail. The buzzard let it fall for some 20 seconds or so, followed it down, then caught it and regained height before repeating the procedure. This routine was repeated about ten times.

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