

Italian Birds Rarities Committee (COI) - Report 29

Edited by Egidio Fulco¹ & Cristiano Liuzzi²

¹Via Aprilia 1, 70022 Altamura (BA), Italy. egidiofulco1@gmail.com

²Via Polignano 36, 70014 Conversano (BA), Italy. cristiano.liuzzi@gmail.com



EF 0000-0002-3323-1097, CL 0000-0003-4456-4214

Abstract - Italian Birds Rarities Committee (COI) - Report 29. This report refers to records from January 1st to December 31st 2019, with the addition of a number of records from previous years that were submitted more recently. For each species, the records are listed by date and information is given as follows: English and scientific name, number of accepted records pre- and post-1950 (the numbers in this abstract refer to the total number of records), number of individuals if more than one, age or plumage and sex if known, location, date, names of the observers, and documentation (photograph, sound recording, specimen, etc.). Taxonomy follows the new CISO-COI Italian Checklist (<https://www.ciso-coi.it/coi/checklist-ciso-coi-degli-uccelli-italiani/>), which also includes subspecies and follows the taxonomy adopted by the HBW-BirdLife Check-list, as decided by the CISO council in 2018. A total of 35 submissions involving 25 taxa were assessed. The following 30 records, involving 23 taxa, were accepted, including four first records for Italy (Cat. AERC: A – COI Category 1A, 1B): Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus* (Tuscany 1961; 2nd record post-1949); Little Swift *Apus affinis* (two records: Sardinia 2017; Sicily 2019; 3rd-4th records); Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* (2nd record); Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* (Latium 2019; Tuscany 2019; Liguria 2019; 5th-7th records); American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* (Tuscany 2019; 2nd record); Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (Latium 2016; 7th record); 'Russian Mew Gull' *Larus canus heinei* (Lombardy 2019; first record for this sub-species in Italy); Rüppel's Vulture *Gyps ruepellii* (Sicily, 2019; first record); Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* (Sicily, 2019; first record); Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* (Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2019; 2nd record); Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (Apulia, 2019; 9th record); Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor pallidirostris* (two records: Sardinia 2018; Apulia 2019; 6th-7th records); 'Desert Grey Shrike' *Lanius excubitor elegans/algeriensis* (three records: Sicily 2017; 8th-10th records); Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* (Sicily 2019; 2nd record); Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* cf. *elaeica* (Latium 2019; 8th record); Isabelline Warbler *Iduna opaca* (Latium 2016; 7th record); Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (two records: Latium 2018, 2019; 27th-28th record). Bricchetti & Fracasso (2020) list 28 records, but only 7 have been assessed by COI, in part due to the fact that the previous numerical threshold used by COI meant that some of these records would not have been submitted; Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* (Lombardy 2019; 5th record); Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (Sicily 2019; 5th record); Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisisicus* (Latium 2019; first record for this sub-species in Italy); 'Caspian Stonechat' *Saxicola torquatus hemprichii* (Sicily 2019; 4th record); Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis* (Liguria 2019; 2nd record); Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* (Latium 2019, 3rd record). The addition of Rüppel's Vulture and Red-eyed Vireo brings the Italian list to 550 accepted species. Rejected records (COI List 5A, 5B) were: Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (two records, both Latium 2016); 'Sykes's Yellow Wagtail' *Motacilla flava beema* (two records: Tuscany 1989; Calabria 2019); Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris* (Tuscany, 2019). Two records are still pending and are not included here.

Introduction

This report details the records of rare species and subspecies in Italy received and assessed by the Italian Records Committee (Commissione Ornitologica Italiana - COI) as of 31st December 2019. The members who voted on the records in this report are Emiliano Arcamone, Nicola Baccetti, Pierandrea Brichetti, Adriano De Faveri, Giancarlo Fracasso, Egidio Fulco (Secretary), Andrea Galimberti, Ottavio Janni, Cristiano Liuzzi (Secretary), Sergio Nissardi, Menotti Passarella, Lorenzo Vanni and Michele Viganò. For more information on the Committee, including current members, please refer to the COI page on the CISO website (<https://ciso-coi.it/coi/>). Further details on the procedures with which the Commission operates and on the categorisations attributed to the individual reports examined can be found in Report 24 (Janni & Fracasso 2012), available online at the address mentioned above. All previous COI reports are listed below:

Riv. ital. Orn.: (1) 1982, 52: 205-206; (2) 1983, 53: 194-195; (3) 1985, 55: 186-187; (4) 1986, 56: 245-246; (5) 1987, 57: 243-246; (6) 1989, 59: 269-272; (7) 1992, 62: 41-43; (8) 1993, 63: 193-198; (9) 1995, 65: 63-68; (10) 1995, 65: 147-149; (11) 1996, 66: 171-174; (12) 1997, 67: 189-192; (13) 1998, 68: 205-208; (14) 1999, 69: 211-214.

Avocetta: (15) 2002, 26: 117-121; (16) 2003, 27: 207-210; (17) 2004, 28: 41-44; (18) 2004, 28: 97-102; (19) 2005, 29: 93-97; (20) 2007, 31: 75-79; (21) 2008, 32: 82-86; (22) 2009, 33: 117-146; (23) 2010, 34: 71-106; (24) 2012, 36: 81-88; (25) 2013, 37: 67-70; (26) 2015, 39: 37-40; (27) 2018, 45-54; (28) 2019, 43:177-188.

The names used are those in the latest CISO-COI List of Italian Birds (Baccetti et al., in press). In accordance with the resolution adopted by the Committee in January 2018, this checklist includes all subspecies reported in Italy and follows the taxonomy of the HBW-BirdLife Checklist (del Hoyo & Collar 2014, 2016, HBW & BirdLife International 2018). For each taxon, reports are listed by date and accompanied by the following information: number of individuals (if more than one); age / sex if known (in non-adults the age is expressed in "calendar years" abbreviated to "cy"); updated number of accepted records since 1st January 1950 and prior to this date; locality including municipality (where applicable) and the province (abbreviated); name of the observers; and the nature of the documentation provided (photos, sound recordings, specimens, etc.).

ACCEPTED RECORDS (Category 1A, 1B)

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus*

(post-1949 = 2, pre-1950 = c. 170)

- Castiglione della Pescaia (GR), XII.1961. Finder: Lorenzo Vanni (category 1A); specimen found in a museum collection

The specimen is part of the private collection that belonged to Angiolo Meluzzi, which was recently donated by family members to the Natural History Museum of the University of Pisa where it has been catalogued and is now housed. The record had already been mentioned by Mocci Demartis (1975). The collection is made up almost entirely of birds captured in coastal Tuscany, with the exception of a few specimens from Sardinia. As for most of the specimens in the collection, information on the species, place and date of capture is shown under the pedestal. The collection as a whole was examined carefully, and there are no reasons to doubt the reliability of the information reported. This is the second accepted record post-1949. In the 19th century, over 160 individuals were recorded between 1871 and 1889. Additionally, another 8 individuals were recorded in 1908.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

(post-1949 = 4, pre-1950 = 2)

- Sella del Diavolo, Cagliari (CA), 26.VII.2017. Finder: Leonardo Siddi (category 1B).
- Linosa Island, Linosa e Lampedusa (AG), 24.IV.2019. Finder: Ottavio Janni (category 1B); documented by photos.

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*

(post-1949 = 1, pre-1950 = 1)

- Mouth of the Metauro river, Fano (PU), 20.X.2019. Finder: Marco Pantalone (category 1A); documented by photos.

This species breeds on a few islands in the South Atlantic (Gough Island, Nightingale and Inaccessible islands in the Tristan da Cunha archipelago, Kidney Island, and the Falklands). It is a trans-Equatorial

migrant that spends April/May to October/November in the North Atlantic, migrating along a roughly circular route that first takes it northwards along the western Atlantic to the waters off the north-eastern United States, Canada and southern Greenland, then southwards at the beginning of the Boreal summer. Between August and October part of the population migrates along the Atlantic coast of Europe, during which time a few birds may enter the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar.

The hypothesis of De Juana & Garcia (2015) that at least a fraction of these individuals "get lost" within the Mediterranean would seem to be at least partially confirmed by a temporal analysis of records, which peak in the middle of the northern winter (Fig. 1). There is a relatively high number of reports from the eastern Mediterranean (Greece, Lebanon and Israel), mostly from January-March, which corresponds to the middle of the breeding season for this species in the southern hemisphere (Fig. 2).

This is the first documented record for the Adriatic Sea. The only previous Italian record is of a male captured in Porto Conte, Alghero (SS) on 20.V.1895, which specimen is now held in the "La Specola" Museum of Natural History in Florence (Martorelli, 1906).

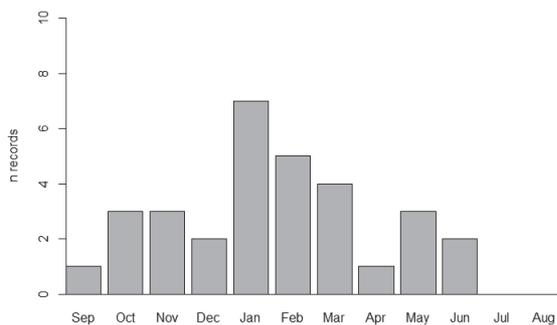


Figure 1. *Ardenna gravis* - Frequency of records in the Mediterranean by month. The barplot starts in September because of the biological cycle of the species, which forms its breeding colonies at the beginning of the boreal autumn

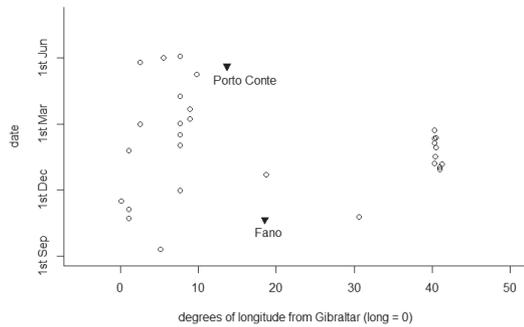


Figure 2. *Ardenna gravis* - Distribution in time of Mediterranean records in relation to the distance in degrees of longitude from Gibraltar. As you proceed eastwards, the sightings are increasingly concentrated in the winter period.

Brown Bobby *Sula leucogaster*

(post-1949 = 7, pre-1950 = 0)

- Civitavecchia harbor (RM), 20.VI.2019. Finder: Davide Valenti (category 1A); documented by photos.
- Mouth of the Serchio river, Vecchiano (PI), 28.X.2019. Finder: Alessio Quagliarini (category 1A); documented by photos.
- Genova Voltri harbor (GE), 7-28.XII.2019. Finder: Marco Sozzi (category 1A); documented by photos.

The available documentation suggests that the above records refer to at least two different individuals. As such, each report was considered separately, especially considering the amount of time that lapsed between them.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

(post-1949 = 2, pre-1950 = 0)

- Massarella, Fucecchio (FI), 23.IV.2019. Finder: Daniele Occhiato (category 1A); documented by photos.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

(post-1949 = 7, pre-1950 = 0)

- Furbara, Cerveteri (RM), 26.IV.2016. Finder: Massimo Biondi (category 1A); documented by photos.

'Russian Mew Gull' *Larus canus heinei*

(post-1949 = 1*, pre-1950 = 0)

- Garlate lake, Pescate (LC), 5.XII.2019. Finder: Enrico Viganò (category 1A); documented by photos.

An adult wintered on Garlate lake between Pescate and Abbadia Lariana (LC), where it was observed until 5.III.2020. Reliable criteria for field identification were only recently developed (Adriaens & Gibbins 2016), and have resulted in a number of other reports, some of which were published in online or print media but have not been submitted to the Committee yet. While preliminary evidence suggests this taxon may be regular in Italy, the Committee will continue to evaluate reports in order to improve knowledge on its status. In the new national checklist, the taxon was conservatively assigned A30 status, meaning a taxon that has been recorded less than 10 times post-1949 (Baccetti et al., in press).

Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii*

(post-1949 = 1, pre-1950 = 0)

- Militello Rosmarino (ME), 2.X.2019. Finder: Michele Ungaro (category 1A); documented by photos. (Fig. 3). Present until at least 22.VII.2020. First report for Italy.

A widespread sub-Saharan African species ranging from Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia in the west, to Sudan and Ethiopia in the east and southward to Tanzania. The nominal subspecies is present in most of the range, while *G. r. erlangerii* occurs in the Horn of Africa.

The first records outside its main range date back to the late 1970s (Thévenot et al. 2003). The first Spanish record dates back to 1992 (Hernández & Otano, 1994), while the first Portuguese sighting was in 1993 (de Juana, 2006). Since the early 2000s, the species has become regular in Spain (Gutiérrez, 2003), with observations concentrated mainly in the Gibraltar area (Ramírez Román, 2012). This first observation for Italy fits in with this range expansion, and follows records from a number of inland areas in Spain and France.



Figure 3: Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii* spotted on 02.X.2019 in Militello Rosmarino (ME). First Italian record. Ph. Michele Ungaro.

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

(post-1949 = 1, pre-1950 = 0)

- Linosa island (AG), 21.X.2019. Finder: Matteo Toller (lista 1A); documented by photos (Fig. 4). Present until 23.X.2019. First record for Italy.

Widely distributed in North America, this is the most frequent Nearctic passerine in Europe, with most records from the Atlantic coast of Great Britain and France, the Azores and Iceland. This is a remarkable record as there are only three previous records from the Mediterranean, three in Spain and one in Malta, all in October (De Juana & Garcia, 2015; Sultana & Gauci, 1985). This is the first accepted record for Italy. There is one previous record of an individual caught in the province of Venice on 10.X.1975 (Fantin, 1976), but the author questioned its origin on the basis of "documented", but unspecified information on an alleged extensive trading network run by operators abroad (Fantin, 1976).



Figure 4: Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, sighted on 21.X.2019 in Linosa Island (AG). First Italian record. Ph. Matteo Toller.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

(post-1949 = 2, pre-1950 = 0)

- Rivoli di Osoppo (UD), 23.XII.2019. Finder: Marta Trombetta (category 1A); documented by photos. Wintering individual, observed until 9.II.2020.

Second Italian record; as with the previous record – from Mirandola (MO) in the winter of 2002-2003 – this individual also overwintered.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

(post-1949 = 9, pre-1950 = 0)

Siponto, Manfredonia (FG), 17.V.2019. Finder: Massimo Notarangelo (lista 1A); documented by photos (Fig. 5).

An individual in breeding plumage; the photographic documentation rules out *L. phoenicuroides*. For a discussion on the occurrence of these taxa, see Fulco & Liuzzi 2019.



Figure 5: Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, sighted on 17.V.2019 in Manfredonia (FG). Ph. Massimo Notarangelo.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor pallidirostris*

(post-1949 = 7, pre-1950 = 0)

- Agumu, Pula (CA), 15.XII.2018. Finder: Mauro Fois (category 1A); documented by photos.
- Torre a Mare, Bari (BA), 02.XII.2019. Finders: Anthony Green, Simone Todisco (category 1A); documented by photos.

'Desert Grey Shrike' *Lanius excubitor elegans/algeriensis*

(post-1949 = 10, pre-1950 = 1)

- Lampedusa Island (Agrigento), 30.IX.2019. Finder: Aldo Lauricella (category 1A); documented by photos (Fig. 6).
- Lampedusa Island (Agrigento), 23.X.2019. Finder: Aldo Lauricella (category 1A); documented by photos.
- Lampedusa Island (Agrigento), 27-29. XI.2019. Finder: Aldo Lauricella (category 1A); documented by photos.

These three reports were submitted as *Lanius excubitor elegans*, but in light of taxonomic uncertainty and the existence of areas of intergradation with *L. e. algeriensis* with many intermediate forms, the Committee took a conservative approach and accepted these records as *L. e. elegans / algeriensis*. The total number of Italian records referred to above includes *elegans*, *algeriensis* and the intermediate forms sometimes known as "*dodsoni*". Although this taxon appears to be regular in the Pelagie Islands, from whence several documented records remain to be submitted, the Committee considers it useful to continue examining all future reports of this subspecies group, in order to achieve a picture as complete as possible on their status.



Figure 6: Desert Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor elegans/algeriensis*, sighted on 30.IX.2019 in Lampedusa Island (AG). Ph. Aldo Lauricella.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*

(post-1949 = 2, pre-1950 = 0)

- Lampedusa Island (AG), 28.III.2019. Finder: Aldo Lauricella (category 1A); documented by photos. Present until 26.X.2019 and reported by numerous observers.

Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

(post-1949 = 8, pre-1950 = 5)

- Ventotene Island (LT), 2.V.2019. Finder: Sara Riello (lista 1A); ringed individual showing the features of ssp. *elaeica*; record documented by photos.

The number of post-1949 records (8) refers to those accepted by COI; we are aware of at least 7 other reports between 1990 and 2018 that were never submitted (Brichetti & Fracasso, 2020). Given the difficulties of separation from other similar species (especially *I. opaca*), the Commission will continue to examine sightings of this species. Observers are therefore encouraged to collect as much material as possible in order to provide comprehensive documentation. In particular, field observers are urged to obtain sound recordings of songs and/or calls, as well as photos that show the lores, the secondaries, and the primary extension. In addition to the standard biometric data, ringers are also asked to record the complete wing formula and take close-up, high quality photos of the tarsi, bill, wing tip, secondaries (open and closed wing), lores and rectrices.

Isabelline Warbler *Iduna opaca*

(post-1949 = 7, pre-1950 = 0)

- Ventotene Island (LT), 12.V.2016. Finder: Vincenzo Alfano (category 1A); documented by photos.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*

(post-1949 = 28, pre-1950 = 0)

- Torre di S. Michele (RM), 12.X.2018. Finder Luca Demartini (category 1A); ringed bird.
- Torre di S. Michele (RM), 7.XI.2019. Finder Carlo

Catoni (category 1A); ringed.

Brichetti & Fracasso (2020) list 28 records, but only 7 have been assessed by COI, in part due to the fact that the previous numerical threshold used by COI meant that some of these records would not have been submitted. Although it is likely that this species is a rare migrant rather than a vagrant, the Committee still welcomes submissions, in order to shed light on its phenology and distribution. Almost all Italian records come from ringing stations.

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*

(post-1949 = 5, pre-1950 = 0)

- Dosolo (MN), 24.III.2019. Finder Alessandro Pavesi (category 1A); documented by audio recordings of the song and calls (Fig. 7).

Field identification of silent individuals is very challenging. This is the first documented record from northern Italy. Based on limited data, this species is likely to be a rare but regular migrant, at least in southern Italy.

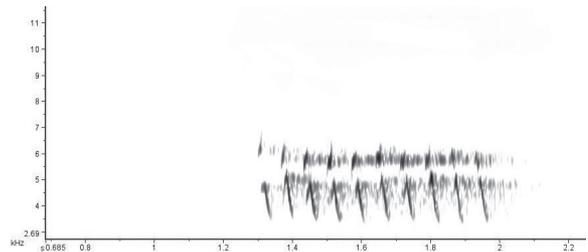


Figure 7: Song spectrogram of Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*, recorded on 24.III.2019 in Dosolo (MN) by Alessandro Pavesi. The sonogram shows how the descending segment of each sub-element is much longer than the ascending one. In *P. bonelli* exactly the opposite occurs. Sonogram analysis by COI.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*

(post-1949 = 5, pre-1950 = 0)

- 2 individuals. Siracusa, 24.III.2019 Finder Andrea Corso (category 1A); documented by audio recording of the song. Observed until 5.IV.2019.

A long-distance migrant that may be more regular in Italy than previously thought. Identification based on plumage and/or biometrics is extremely challenging,

and vocalizations or genetic data are much more reliable. In keeping with the approach adopted by other European records committee, we request that ringers collect as much information as possible on any individuals they capture showing characteristics of *P. ibericus*. Specifically, we recommend that they record the complete wing formula, in addition to the standard biometrics, in order to calculate the MCV index proposed by Shiriahi & Svensson (2018) as a supporting criterion for identification.

Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*

(post-1949 = 1, pre-1950 = 0)

- Ventotene Island (LT), 2.V.2019. Finder Sara Riello (lista 1A); ringed bird, documented by photos. (Fig. 8); adult male. First record for Italy.

This subspecies breeds from Turkey, Georgia and Crimea to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Iran. Field identification is very difficult, especially in autumn, when first winter birds can be indistinguishable from hybrids with *P. ochruros* or from extreme individuals of the nominal subspecies.



Figure 8: Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus*, ringed on 02.V.2019 in Ventotene Island (LT). Ph. Sara Riello.

'Caspian Stonechat' *Saxicola torquatus hemprichii*

(post-1949 = 4, pre-1950 = 0)

- Linosa Island (AG), 19.IV.2019. Finder Ottavio Janni (category 1A); documented by photos.

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*

(post-1949 = 2, pre-1950 = 0)

- Entella River, Lavagna (GE), 30.XI.2019 - 05.XII.2019. Finder Antonio Solinas (category 1A); documented by photos.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

(post-1949 = 3, pre-1950 = 0)

- Furbara, Santa Marinella (RM), 19.I.2019. Finders Fulvio Fraticelli, Ernesto Monaco, Sergio Muratore (category 1B); documented by photos.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED (LIST COI 5)

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*

- Ventotene Island (Latina), 16.V.2016. (category 5A). Ringed bird with biometrics and plumage compatible with *P. collybita*.
- Ventotene Island (Latina), 5.X.2016. (category 5A). Ringed bird with biometric characters and plumage compatible to *P. collybita*.

'Sykes's Yellow Wagtail' *Motacilla flava beema*

- Montecristo Island, Portoferraio (LI), 15.IV.1989. (list 5A). Ringed bird with biometrics and plumage compatible with *M. f. flava*.
- Cecita Lake, Celico (CS). 29.III.2019. (list 5A). Documented by photo. Plumage characters do not rule out the nominal subspecies, or an integrade involving *flava*, *lutea*, *flavissima* and/or *beema* (Shiriahi & Svensson, 2018).

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*

- Stagnone, Orbetello (GR). 13.IV.2019. (category 5A). Observation documented by sound recordings, which were not considered sufficient, in this case, to identify the species with certainty.

ITALIAN BIRD CHECK-LIST UPDATE (CISO-COI Lists A, B and C)

With the addition of *Gyps rueppelli* and *Vireo olivaceus*, the total number of species on the Italian bird list (A, B and C) increases to 550 (Baccetti et al., in press).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the observers who submitted their records for their support to the Committee's work; without their input, this report

would not be possible. Special thanks go to Lorenzo Vanni providing valuable information on the Pallas's Sandgrouse record and to Flavio Ferlini for input in assessing reports of *M. flava bema*. Thanks to Giancarlo Fracasso for his detailed comments on Great Shearwater and for his constant support in the drafting of this report. Finally, we thank Nicola Baccetti, Pierandrea Brichetti and Ottavio Janni for critically reviewing the draft manuscript.

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