

Obituary

Marco Borioni (28th June 1946 / 16th August 2022)



On August 16th, at age of 76, after a short but painful illness, Marco Borioni passed away in Ancona, his hometown. He approaches environmentalism at the beginning of the 1970s, becoming member of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and immediately engaging in associative life. Over the years, he became more and more passionate about ornithology, becoming a member of Italian League for the Protection of Birds (LIPU, BirdLife Italy) in 1982 and dividing his free time between the two associations. In these years he began to observe the birdlife of Conero promontory (Central Italy) constantly: he was one of the first to do so, immediately understanding the great potential of that territory. As an intelligent person with no academic background, he began to study ornithology and bird identification by himself with rigour and constancy, continuing to do so throughout his life. He did not neglect the advice of scholars and experts, to which he added an extensive amount of time dedicated to field observations: the latter became his main study room. His love for the Conero was absolute and was sublimated in 1983 when he observed for the first time the peregrine falcons nesting on sea cliffs. For decades, he devoted himself to the study of this species, iconic for the Ancona scholars and his studies about the Peregrine Falcon, now the symbol of that territory, contributed decisively to the establishment of the Conero Regional Park (AN) in 1987. Starting this year, Marco began to devote himself with commitment to the observation of the spring migration of birds of prey, having realized the enormous potential of the site. The success of this project was mainly due to the great talents of Borioni. To his boundless passion and perseverance, Marco combined an extraordinary ability in recognition which, refined by practice and constant study of manuals, led him to grasp every minimum detail useful for the identification of raptors. So much so that in the following decades he became one of the leading experts in this field at the national level. Thus began the first raptor migration camp on the Adriatic coast (one of the first in Italy, not long after the Messina strait camp, which started in 1983) and Borioni published the results in the book *“Rapaci sul Conero”* (1993), based on his observations in the years 1987-1990. This study highlights the importance of the Conero as a crucial

point for the migratory routes of birds of prey, which here cross the Adriatic in one of its narrowest points or use it as a reference to proceed towards north-eastern Europe. In 1994 Borioni was one of the promoters of the creation of the monitoring camp to protect the Peregrine Falcon and above all for the “Permanent Camp for the study of the spring migration of raptors through the Conero territory”. From this moment, Gradina del Poggio (Conero, AN) becomes a very important national point for ornithological observations (included in 2010 by LIPU in the list of ten Italian locations of extraordinary importance for birdwatching), starting to attract numerous researchers and birdwatchers. In 1997 Borioni presented the book *“Ali nel parco” (“Wings in the park”)*, in which the first check list of the Conero birds was published. This study was accompanied by new research always related to the same area, published in the main Italian ornithological reviews, some also presented in national and international conferences about birds of prey. In addition to the observations at the Conero, since 2008 Borioni also actively participated in the migration camp “Campo Versilia - Alpi Apuane”, both in the spring and in the autumn section. In 2012, the Conero park stopped supporting the local field study of raptor migration, but Borioni continued to keep it active as a volunteer, dedicating all his free time to it and carrying out studies on migration with the help of many friends. During 35 years of uninterrupted monitoring activity at the Conero, Borioni observed numerous species of rare nationwide raptors, counted over 160,000 birds of prey (up to 2000 in a single day) and about 180,000 total migrants. To facilitate the observation by the increasing number of birdwatchers in the Conero, he also created illustrative panels on the various bird species in the habitats of the protected area. Despite the small number of scientific publications, Borioni has contributed in an important way to the study of migration along the Adriatic coast: however, the greatest contribution he has given to Italian ornithology has been the training of many young people (many of which later became scholars and researchers), teaching at two generations of ornithologists and for decades in the field, not only the rules and secrets of identifying birds of prey, but transmitting his great passion to everyone. For this reason, many researchers returned for years to the Gradina, where Marco remained for his observation until May 2022, a few months before his departure. He had created, as a truly great master of field observation as he unquestionably was, a place where everyone could meet, observing raptors and confronting each other. Gruff and severe, especially with young people if they mistake identification, he was at the same time likeable and engaging. He loved telling about birds of prey (even by photographing, sculpting and painting them), covering everything with his personal style, concrete but also romantically poetic. The death of Marco Borioni leaves a great void in all his friends and in everyone that discovered the Conero thanks to him: his experience, his great skills in identification, his constancy in observation and above all his example, will be severely missed. We wish to express our deep sympathy to his family, first of all to his wife Mariarosa Baldoni, beloved and faithful partner of life and observations, always at his side on the field.

Marco Pantalone