

Editorial

All that begins must come to an end

Italy is renowned for its cultivated tradition of ornithology. Why? I feel that the reasons for this are two-fold and interlinked. First, Italy lies at the centre of the Mediterranean Basin and its palaeo-geographical origins are owed to complex natural and cultural phenomena, as well as to the close proximity to a multitude of centres-of-origin, where colonization of fauna and flora concerned. Notwithstanding, the presence of the sea to the east and west of the Italian Peninsula acts as a natural barrier for sedentary species. Second, the considerable number of birds present, of which some are also endemic taxa, have always attracted ornithologists and birdwatchers. No other European or Mediterranean country may claim a bird species devoted to it; Italy has *Passer italiae*. In sum Italy has an inherent natural appeal for ornithology!

These are the likely reasons why ornithology became a popular and favoured science in Italy, together with the other branches of zoology. The last Italian Congress of Ornithology (Naples 26th-29th September 2019) afforded an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that ornithology in Italy is now held in high regard and receives meaningful attention across both scientific circles and a wider audience, as it branches into several subdivisions, including ecology, ethology, conservation and taxonomy. This is quite evident when reading some of the ca. 140 papers published in the journal *Avocetta* between 2011 and 2019, that is, the eight-year period during which I was editor-in-chief of the Editorial Board. Mainly thanks to the collaboration of the co-editors and the numerous referees, this ornithological journal has grown from strength to strength; it is now listed in the *Scopus* index, as well as other international bibliographic databases, and each published paper is provided with a custom "DOI".

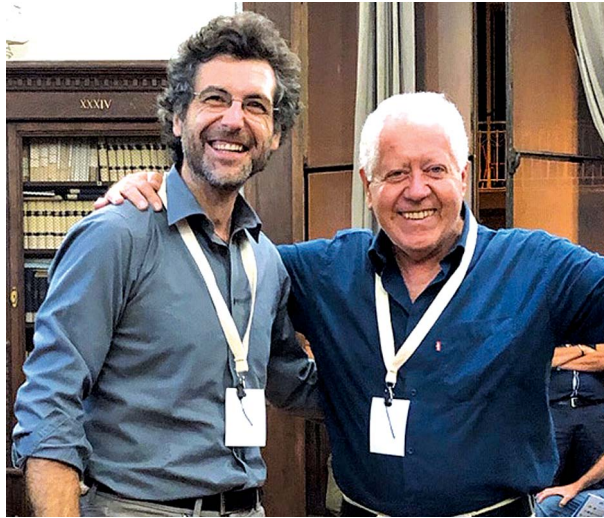
Avocetta is at present available on the website <http://www.avocetta.org>, where all issues (from n° 1 to the latest published, n° 43) can be viewed. It has published two issues per year on a regular basis and has also entirely devoted some issues to particular subjects, for example, to *Perdix* and *Alectoris* species in 2013, to the status of the Golden Eagle in Italy in 2017, and to the ecology, behaviour and conservation of raptors in 2019. This latter was also the last issue edited by Michele Panuccio, who most regrettably passed away on 18th June 2019, immediately after he had completed his hard work but, unfortunately, without the gratification of seeing the completed issue.

Some months ago, I decided that it was time to vacate the position of editor-in-chief of *Avocetta*; all that begins, at some time or other, must come to an end - it is a natural changeover. The present issue will be the last number edited by me and the first for the new editor-in-chief, my young colleague Roberto Ambrosini, to whom I wish every success and the attainment of even better outcomes, for example, *ISI* acknowledgement for *Avocetta*.

I would conclude citing a sentence of Darwin's autobiography (1887): "*In my simplicity, I remember wondering why every gentleman did not become an ornithologist*". Finally, following the principle "*primum non nocere*", I would very much like to thank the Centro Italiano Studi Ornitologici and the Editorial Board of *Avocetta* (years: 2011-2019) for their valued assistance as well as their trust during these eight years, which I shall cherish and remember as "*happy years*".

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Roberto Ambrosini (present editor-in-chief of *Avocetta*) and Bruno Massa (past editor) at the Italian Ornithological Congress in Naples (27th September 2019) (Photo by A. Montemaggiore).

Looking ahead without forgetting the past

Ornithology, as many other branches of science, has expanded immensely in recent years thanks to new technologies that have opened up entire fields that were previously simply impossible to explore. Miniaturized tagging devices have allowed us to gather in a few years more data and more detailed information on the movements of individuals of some species than many years of ringing activity. Automated sound recorders promise to replace long hours of work of expert ornithologists, who may no longer have to get up before dawn, but just wait for a powerful server to analyse gigabytes of sonogram data, perhaps using sophisticated machine-learning techniques. Genomic analyses will soon become routine, even during field works, thanks to miniaturized DNA sequencing devices that can be connected directly to a laptop's USB port like a memory stick. Have we come to the end of "traditional" ornithology? Maybe not. In a recent editorial published in this Journal, Michele Panuccio explained why ornithologists still need to put their boots in the field and have a "sense of nature". That editorial, published on the number 42(2) of *Avocetta*, is one of the last papers written by Michele before he passed away prematurely, and it is a laude of field work, but also a clear explanation of why ornithological research must go on and embrace the new technologies, without losing contact with nature.

Looking ahead without forgetting where you came from is a lesson I learned from my mentor Nicola Saino, who also passed away this year. The Obituary in the last pages of this issue explains how Nicola was a real innovator for Italian ornithology much better than what I could say in these pages.

Avocetta has started as the Journal of the community of Italian ornithologists, a community with a renowned tradition, but also with a considerable boost to innovation, thanks to many young and very active researchers, as Bruno Massa has explained in his Editorial. This community has now widely extended beyond national boundaries, as many young ornithologists are working abroad. *Avocetta* has grown together, becoming an international journal, which now publishes papers exclusively in English. In addition, *Avocetta* is an open access journal, which means everyone can read its articles for free. This is not big news nowadays, but what makes *Avocetta* different is that it is also free of charge, which means that authors do not face a trade-off between using their (often scarce) funds to do research or to publish. How many other journals offer both these benefits?

Bruno decided to vacate the position of Editor-in-chief of *Avocetta* some months ago, after eight years

in which he did an immense work that has resulted in the Journal being indexed in Scopus, with good possibility of obtaining an Impact Factor soon.

Now I have the honour of directing Avocetta, and I want to thank the Centro Italiano Studi Ornitologici for this great professional opportunity. Luckily, I am not alone in this work because I have the precious help of an editorial board of young and enthusiast colleagues. They are Giacomo Assandri, Gaia Bazzi, Letizia Campioni, Daniela Campobello, Davide Dominoni, Giulia Masoero and Michelangelo Morganti, who is also Vice-Editor-in-chief. Many of them work or have worked abroad (see <http://www.avocetta.org/editorial-board/> for more information). All of them are happy when they can go to the field and collect data, but are also able to use and manage new technologies. We have already started to manage papers and promote the journal in the social networks – an activity that is fundamental nowadays – and they are a great group and an invaluable support. Our aim is to make the Journal grow further, and be the voice of the international scientific community of ornithologists. I firmly believe that Avocetta has the potential to achieve this goal.

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