

## First winter observation of the Pallid harrier *Circus macrourus* in the Marche region, central Italy

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**Abstract** – Vengono riportate due osservazioni invernali di albanello pallido nelle Marche (31 gennaio e 25 febbraio 2009), riguardanti entrambe maschi adulti, osservati in ambienti agricoli. Si tratta delle prime osservazioni invernali della specie per questa regione, e tra quelle a più elevata latitudine note per l'Italia. Gli autori inquadrano le osservazioni nel contesto orologico dello svernamento della specie, a scala nazionale e globale.

This report provides the first record of presence of the Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* during the winter in the northern part of the Marche region, central Italy. The Pallid Harrier is a long distance migrant and the majority of birds winter in the Indian subcontinent and Myanmar, and Africa (Newton 1979; Cramp 1980; Verma 2005). The breeding range of the species is concentrated in eastern Europe and western and central Asia (Cramp 1980; Panucci *et al.* 2004; Terraube *et al.* 2009). In Italy the Pallid Harrier is considered regular migrant ('M reg') and irregular as a wintering species ('W irr'; Brichetti and Fracasso 2003). The species status is near-threatened on the IUCN Red List with a decreasing population trend (Birdlife International 2003; IUCN 2008).

During the winter 2008/2009, in different days, two observations of the above mentioned species were made by three different observers (using 10 x 40 binoculars). The first observation was done on 31<sup>st</sup> of January at 9:30 a.m. (43°52'38.19"N ; 12°44'39.76"E) and the second one on 25<sup>th</sup> of February at 12:52 p.m. The second record was made quite close to the first observation site (43°50'17.37"N; 12°43'2.58"E; < 5 km distance). During the first observation we identified an adult male of Pallid harrier, flying across a road, less than 10 meters above the ground, coming from an agricultural zone with an artificial sportfishing lake. The whole observation lasted less than 1 minute

while the second one was longer, more or less 8 minutes. In this latter, an adult male was seen flying above agricultural and abandoned fields, presumably searching for food. During the last four years, in the same area, we have done a lot of observations of wintering *Circus cyaneus*, and this guarantees that there were no homology problems.

The wintering regions of *Circus macrourus* are mainly located in the Indian Subcontinent (plus Burma) and Ethiopia. Wintering occurs also in North Africa, Balkans, Turkey and throughout the Middle East, even though irregular wintering have been recorded in southern parts of USSR (i.e. north Crimea, lower Volga, Caucasus and Aral-Caspian steppes) (Cramp 1980; Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994; Forsman 1999).

In Italy, in the last decades, only seven observations were recorded during the winter period, five in Sicily (1985, 1992 and 1994; Iapichino and Massa 1989; Corso and Iapichino 1998), one in Tuscany in December 1999 (Corso *et al.* 2001) and one in Latium in 2005 (Savo *et al.* 2006).

In the Marche region this species is considered M reg (Giacchini 2003) and few data about its presence have been collected; these data are only focused on spring migration periods along the Adriatic coast, particularly on the sites of Po Delta, Mount Conero, Mount S. Bartolo (Gustin 1995; Agostini 2002; Agostini 2003; Gustin *et al.* 2003; Pandolfi and Sonet 2003; Corso and Cardelli 2004; Gustin and Sorace 2004; Panuccio *et al.* 2004; Premuda 2004; Panuccio and Agostini 2006; Premuda 2007; Premuda *et al.* 2008). On the contrary, our observation was made during the winter season. The last documented records of this species during the winter in south-central Italy are constituted by some observations and photos made in Latium region in 2005 (Savo *et al.* 2006) which, geographically, is much closer to the regular wintering areas of the Pallid Harrier. Our observations constitute one of the first records of a so northern winter observation of the species and we believe

Ricevuto 27 febbraio 2009, accettato dopo revisione  
22 maggio 2009

that it could represent the first indication of the presence of Pallid harriers during the winter in Marche region.

**Acknowledgements** – We thank Genny Del Zotto and Mario D’Atri for comments on the manuscript.

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