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BREVI NOTE / SHORT NOTES

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FIRST ASCERTAINED BREEDING OF RED-CRESTED POCHARD *NETTA RUFINA* (*Anseriformes Anatidae*) IN SICILY AFTER 17 YEARS

Prima nidificazione accertata di Fistione turco Netta rufina in Sicilia dopo 17 anni

INTRODUCTION

The Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* (Pallas, 1773) is in Italy a breeding, migratory and wintering species (BRICHETTI & FRACASSO, 2015), with a total of 145-160 pairs estimated for recent years (BRICHETTI & FRACASSO, 2018); it is listed as “vulnerable” (VU) in the last Red List of Italian Breeding Birds (GUSTIN *et al.*, 2019). In Sicily, it has been considered as a scarce breeder before 1900 from authors such as Doderlein, Benoit, Giglioli and Whitaker (MASSA *et al.*, 2021). The latest Sicilian breeding of the 20th century are reported for the ‘40s in the wetland of “Biviere di Lentini” (IAPICHINO & MASSA, 1989). Subsequently, the species became extinct as a breeder in the region (CORSO, 2005; MASSA *et al.*, 2021), and, to date, only a single ascertained breeding case was reported, relating to a female with its ducklings observed in May-June 2004 in “Pantano Leone” (Agrigento) (SCIABICA, 2004).

The Sicilian southeast swamp lakes area (Pantani della Sicilia sud orientale), located in the south-east coast of Sicily (Ragusa and Siracusa provinces), represents the southernmost Italian wetland-complex and one of the most important coastal wetlands of southern Europe. The wetland-complex is part of Natura 2000 as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs ITA090003) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs ITA090029) and includes the swamp lakes (Pantani) of “Pantano Cuba” and “Pantano Longarini”. These lakes and surrounding areas were bought, starting from 2013, by the German foundation “Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt ®” - Foundation Pro Biodiversity, for a total, up to date, of about 390 hectares with the sole aim of protecting and conserving biodiversity (GALASSO *et al.*, 2021).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

From January 2015 to date, weekly bird census have been carried out in the study area of Pantano Cuba and Pantano Longarini, once for week, for each season and throughout the years, using telescopes and binoculars and watching from fixed observation points, in presence of good weather conditions. Such a monitoring project has been founded and promoted by the German foundation which owns both swamp lakes.

RESULTS

After observation of a pair of Red-crested Pochard showing courtship displays in Pantano Longarini from March to April 2021 (GALASSO *et al.*, 2021), a group of 4 juvenile was observed in feeding on 16.VII.2021 in the same area where the adults were contacted for the last time; three of them were also photographed (Fig. 1). The breeding habitat is characterized by a swamp lake with shallow, standing and brackish water, with sandy shores and bottom, rich in aquatic vegetation such as *Ruppia maritima* and *Ruppia spiralis* associated to the green alga *Enteromorpha intestinalis*. The levees and the shores are covered by dense vegetation with *Phragmites australis* and *Schoenoplectus lacustris* (GUGLIELMO *et al.*, 2013).

This observation confirmed the successful of Red-crested Pochard breeding in Pantano Longarini, representing the southernmost breeding location for this species in Italy and in Europe. It is important to highlight that the habitat management and the conservation strategies applied by the German foundation “Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt” in the last years, have very likely contributed to the breeding success of the species in Sicily after almost 20 years since the last ascertained breeding case.



Fig. 1 — Three of the four juvenile Red-crested Pochard observed in Pantano Longarini on 16.VII.2021 (Photo: I. C. Romano).

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