

EURING GENERAL ASSEMBLY CHEMNITZ, GERMANY, 20-22 AUGUST 2003 ITALIAN REPORT

1. Staff

The staff at the Ringing Centre is still made of 5 full-time positions: 2 Academic (Fernando Spina 40%, Davide Licheri 100%), 4 clerical (Stefano Macchio 50% & Ezio Orfelini 50% - licensing & data analysis, Rosita Mantovani 50% & Alessandra Stagni - ringing data & rings, Dario Piacentini 100% - recoveries). Project-related external funds allow also 3 more positions: Stefano Volponi 30% - migration atlas, CES project, Sara Tomasini 30% - migration atlas, Lara Marangoni 70% GIS analyses.

2. Ringers

In the last two years the positive trend in the number of ringers and trainees has continued. Exams to release new licenses and test already licensed ringers have been organised twice a year. The exams are based on multiple replies tests and wing and bird slides. All participants have to answer 30 general questions on field protocols, coding, moult strategies, followed by blocks of 20 slides for each of the different levels (i.e., C level participants will have 20 slides, A level participants will have 60). Also A ringers who were not active for at least 3 years are asked to reply to the whole set of 90 questions. The training system requires the trainee to follow two different A level ringers for at least 2 years before reaching the first level exam. The number of active ringers is presently 371, while the total of local permits is 468 (same ringers can ring in different administrative areas). The total of trainees is 111, while helpers (people who can be at the ringing site and help the ringer, but not ring) are 120.

3. National Ringers' meeting

Thanks to funds we obtained by the Bergamo Province, the VII ringers' meeting was held in San Pellegrino Terme in 9-10 february 2002, in the historical liberty-style building of the Casinò delle Terme. The meeting was a success, with over 300 people attending; Franz Bairlein and Ake Lindstroem kindly accepted our invitation, and offered keynote addresses which greatly contributed to the program.

4. New software at the Ringing Centre

Based on funds issued by the Ministry of the Environment in 2002, a full re-organisation of the informatic system at the Ringing Centre has been started; the system formerly based on an external software house has been abandoned, and the new system will be fully based on the new EURING code and on internet connection between the ringers and the Scheme. Retraps will be automatically processed, as many recoveries. The new system is planned to be fully active in early 2003. Presently we are in the critical stage of transition to the new system, which might easily cause delays in processing recoveries, for which we apologise. The new system will allow ringers to use our software Nisoria, although a much improved software will be freely offered to all ringers.

5. Ringings

Annual numbers stay around 200-230,000. We are trying to compensate for the bad delay in annual reports; the last one to be circulated is 1999.

6. Recoveries

The passage to the new informatic system has implied a substantial period of planning and re-organisation, which has badly affected our efficiency in processing recoveries; presently we are slow in processing data till the new system will be operating. We expect an average delay of 10 months in

processing recoveries, which we'll try to compensate for during 2004. We were recently able to "refresh" our data at the EDB, with slightly over 100,000 recoveries and retraps of Italian ringed birds.

7. Retraps

Retraps are regularly being obtained directly coded by the ringers, and this will be maintained and enhanced with the new system.

8. Projects

- Progetto Piccole Isole: also in 2002-2003 the project has benefitted by the direct involvement of Italian, Spanish, French, Maltese and Greek stations; in Italy new sites have been activated, and the interest and involvement of ringers and trainees is still very high. Satellite projects have been carried on at some of the Italian sites. The co-ordination of the project has been made possible through funds by the Italian Ministry of the Environment.
- EURING Swallow Project: the project is still quite popular in Italy, both for the breeding and migration sections. In 2002-2003 the total numbers will be lower than in the peak years of 1999-2000, as some of the ringers have decreased their involvement in the breeding section. Analyses are being completed on movements between colonies and roosts, and directionality of movements during the pre-migratory period.
- Progetto Alpi: also this project continues with a strong interest and support by the ringers. Secretarial help is still positively provided by the Museo Tridentino di Storia Naturale of Trento. A total of 30 stations have been involved since the start in 1997; 14 sites are on passes, 5 on slopes and 11 on valley bottoms. Ringing activities, based on selected pentades, are distributed between August 19 and November 1. An overall total of 113,132 birds have been ringed belonging to 137 species. The intended period of 5 years has been completed, and a general report with results from the project has been planned for production in 2004. Meanwhile field activities will continue, based on the strong interest confirmed by ringers.
- CES: constant effort sites have been activated following the positive examples of other Schemes. A total of 13 sites have joined the Italian CES project (PRISCO) in 2002, in 8 different Regions. Just over 3,500 birds have been ringed (1864 adults, 1680 first-year birds), belonging to 71 species, by 30 licensed ringers. The first year of the project also produced 524 retraps. The five most frequent species were: Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*. For 2003 we expect a slight increase in the number of PRISCO sites.
- Monitoring projects based on ringing: since 2001 the Ringing Centre put forward a series of project proposals aimed to get Local Administrations (Regions, Provinces, Parks, Reserves) involved in supporting monitoring activities based on ringing. Three meetings have been organised at our Institute, where local administrators have been shown the potential ringing has in providing data of direct use in the enforcement of national/international legislation at the local level. Projects proposed are: evaluating the conservation value of different habitat typologies through standardised, year-round mist-netting of Passerines; CES project; specific projects aimed to species or groups of species of key relevance for hunting policies (ducks, quail). In order to activate the projects, we ask local Authorities to support ringers with equipment and financial help; we also ask them to contribute to the central co-ordination of the projects, through an annual total of 3,000 Euros for the Ringing Centre. These funds allow us to have extra staff devoted to coordinate the projects and analyse the data, as well as to offer a part-time support also to the Scheme itself.

9. Use of data by the Ringing Scheme

We are still actively involved in trying to make use of ringing data for monitoring purposes. A total of 58 sites selected both on the basis of seasonal coverage and trapping effort have been taken into account to describe variations in the avian community based on ringing data corrected by effort. Six "ornithological seasons" have been identified based on cluster analysis out of the overall totals of 15 years of ringing data. For each of these seasons, a description of the community is offered, with the list of dominant species and comments on the changes in the role of the different species across the

seasons. A volume has been published with the results of these analyses (**Macchio S., Messineo A., Spina F., 2002 – Attività di alcune stazioni di inanellamento italiane: aspetti metodologici finalizzati al monitoraggio ambientale. Biol. Cons. Fauna, 110: 1-596**). Following a pilot analysis of morphometrics and physical conditions of birds ringed in Italy carried on in 2001, a full analysis of all data referred to Passerines has been performed. The aim is to provide data on phenology and variations in morphometrics and physical conditions of birds in Italy, as a reference material to stimulate further analyses and indicate the periods when different geographical populations are present in our country. Two volumes have been produced, the first of which already printed (**Licheri D., Spina F., 2002 – Biodiversità dell'avifauna italiana: variabilità morfologica nei Passeriformi (parte II: *Alaudidae* – *Sylviidae*). Biol. Cons. Fauna, 112: 1-208**); the second one is due early in the autumn (**Spina F., Licheri D., 2002 – Biodiversità dell'avifauna italiana: variabilità morfologica nei Passeriformi (parte III: *Muscicapidae* - *Emberizidae*). Biol. Cons. Fauna, 113: 1-177**). Seasonal maps of distribution of ringings corrected by ringing effort have also been produced for a total of 362 bird species, out of a set of 3,070,179 data collected in 3,116 sites. In this case the aim is to offer indications on changes in the distribution of the different species across Italy during each of the six ornithological seasons. The results of this analysis have been produced as a CD Rom for the Ministry of the Environment (**Facoetti R., Spina F., 2002 - Atlante della distribuzione stagionale dell'avifauna italiana sulla base di dati di inanellamento**), but we're seeking funds to publish also a volume. Analyses are being performed on habitat use of species along the year, based on a GIS approach and taking into account ringing data computerised since 1982.

10. Italian Migration Atlas

Funds have been obtained in 2002 by the Ministry of the Environment to produce an Italian migration atlas. We're presently working to check our data bank and try and find missing data which were only published in the ornithological literature (both in Italy and abroad), but were not sent to the Scheme for different reasons. All data referred to Italy will be used, namely birds with Italian rings and foreign-ringed birds reported in Italy. We will start analysing data early in the autumn, and the analysis is due to be completed by the end of 2004.

11. Problems at the Italian Ringing Centre

Recently a request for support has been circulated to all Schemes to help the Bologna Centre in a particularly critical phase. Shortage of funds, together with a situation with no president, director and administrative board of our Institute are badly affecting the efficiency of the Scheme. Meanwhile, strong pressures in favour of a regional co-ordination of ringing are putting at risk the existence of the National Scheme. The situation is very serious already since several months now, and we still are waiting for decisions which are due early in the autumn. Letters have been sent by several Ringing Centres, and we wish to warmly thank our colleagues of the following Schemes: Praha, Kaunas, BTO, Heteren, Radolfzell, Helgoland, Valletta, Hiddensee, Helsinki, EURING Data Bank, Gdansk. With their letters they have stressed the need for an efficient national ringing scheme in Italy also for the benefit of the European network represented by EURING, and we still hope we will eventually come to a positive solution of this most negative period for our Institute.

Compiled by: Fernando Spina