

Alessandro Ghigi

Obituary

Ibis, 1971

Professor Alessandro Ghigi, who died in Bologna on 20 November 1970 at the age of 95, was loosely connected with that city all his life. He was born there in February 1875, lecturer in zoology and agricultural entomology in the School of Agriculture of the University from 1902 to 1915, became Professor of Zoology in 1922, and was Rector of the University from 1930 to 1943, an unprecedented long term for this office. He founded the Institute of Zoology of the University which he directed for 30 years, and also established a laboratory of applied zoology for the study of game animals, including birds.

Professor Ghigi was a member of the two highest scientific institutions in Italy – *Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze* and *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* – in addition to being a member of the Academies of Science of Bologna, Torino and Modena.

During his long and distinguished zoological career he worked in many branches, but perhaps paid more attention to birds than any other group. In this his interest was not only wide but active, and ranged from such different aspects as systematics, morphology and genetics to migration, birds and sport, conservation, aviculture and even to domestic poultry, on which he was a great authority.

Between 1920 and 1932 Professor Ghigi made a number of collecting expeditions to Cyrenaica, the Dodecanese Islands, Mexico and Morocco. He travelled widely all his life and was as well known in many other countries as he was in his native Italy. He held Honorary Doctorates of the Universities of Boston and Coimbra and was a member of the American Ornithologists' Union, *Société Mammalogique et Ornithologique de France*, and the Zoological Society of London, his ties with Great Britain being particularly close. He was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Avicultural Society in 1911, an Honorary Member of the B.O.U. in 1940, and was a Vice-President of the Pheasant Trust since its foundation in 1960. He was President of the 9th International Ornithological Congress in Rouen in 1938, and it was typical of his desire for close co-operation between ornithologists of different countries that he

attended the Conference organized by the B.O.U. in Edinburgh in 1947, which was the first international gathering of ornithologists after the war.

Professor Ghigi spent a great part of his life in efforts to stop the mass destruction of birds in Italy against hard opposition. When in 1967 he succeeded in obtaining an Act to prohibit all shooting and bird catching in spring (which was to come into force in 1969) he wrote "*Après presque un siècle de batailles, nous avons enfin vaincu*". It must have been a bitter blow when the Italian Government rescinded this law, an action which brought a storm of protest from all over the world. But Professor Ghigi did far more in a less spectacular way by his continued and unceasing insistence on the teaching of natural history in all grades of education in Italy, which in the long term is the only answer for a better attitude towards bird life.

He was a great internationalist and played a leading role in the affairs of the International Council for Bird Preservation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and the *Conseil International de la Chasse*, and was Honorary President of the World Poultry Science Association.

Professor Ghigi was an outstanding character, with his handsome features, commanding presence, sense of fun and indomitable courage with which he refused to allow advancing years and ill-health to interfere in any way with his activities. Those who attended the 8th International Ornithological Congress in 1934 will have an unforgettable memory of him in the full regalia of the Rector of the University of Bologna at the Reception given by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford at the Ashmolean Museum. The passing of this grand old man leaves a gap which can never be filled.

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