

**THE CONDITION OF THE ITALIAN WETLANDS
AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THEIR CONSERVATION**

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The situation of the wetlands and of the waterfowl in Italy is not much changed from our Report presented in 1968.

However the land reclamation of some wetlands such as the Valli Isola, Donzella e Falce in the Po Delta of about 2200 hectares has been effected. These transformations have been carried out by the Ente di Sviluppo Delta Padano, in agreement with the General Direction for Land Reclamation, in spite of the remonstrance of the Commission for the Protection of Nature of the Italian National Researches Council, the Italia Nostra Association, the Italian Section of W.W.F., and the Laboratorio di Zoologia applicata alla Caccia of Bologna.

On the other hand there has been an intensification of propaganda for the conservation of wetland, supported by the above-mentioned Institutions and by some Hunters' Association. This propaganda culminated in 1970, in European Conservation Year. On this occasion the Agricultural Bureau installed a special Commission to undertake conservative activities, including the conservation of wetlands of natural interest. There has been a considerable revival of public interest in these matters.

A census of these biotopes has therefore been started. Similar censuses have been worked up by the Commission for the Protection of Nature abovementioned, which has published the first list; by the Italia Nostra Association and lastly by the same General Direction of Land Reclamation.

In the meantime some meetings have been organized in order to discuss the problems of land reclamation. We can mention that of October 1969 in Comacchio for the conservation of the "Valli"; that of September 1970 in Pomposa for the conservation of the Emilia littorals, both organized by Italia Nostra; that on land reclamation and wetlands held in Rome in October 1970 and the XXIV the National Congress of the Land Reclamation Associations held in October 1970 in Florence.

From these meetings emerged the opportunity to delay the draining of biotopes of notable natural interest and to intensify their study and classification.

Moreover we can mention some enterprises adopted in our country to realize the conservation of wetlands and of their waterfowl. Among these

we quote first the organization of the “Punte Alberete” biotope. In This wetland was applied a landscape bond, in other words its transformation is prohibited. In this biotope some hydraulic works have been performed in order not only to avoid draining but to maintain the water conditions most suitable for attracting migrant waterfowl. In such a zone hunting is forbidden so that it is a veritable bird sanctuary.

Other bird sanctuaries have been organized at the Burano Lake (Grosseto) and marsh of Bolgheri (Livorno). Both are enterprises of the Italian section of W.W.F.

The choice of the wetland to be preserved for their international interest is not easy. We have in our previous report indicated them approximately, We propose to exclude in general inland fresh water, because of their secondary importance and the unlikelihood of their being menaced. We think that the basic principles for selecting such wetlands in our country can be met in the bigger wetland systems giving refuge to migrant and wintering waterfowl. These consist of some lagoon marshes and lakes along the coast of Veneto, Emilia, Puglie, Tuscany, Latium and Sardinia. We think we can exclude wetlands of small area except those in contiguous series representing breeding grounds of uncommon species. These cases seem to be rather scarce in our country.

The necessity for the conservation of at least some of these zones seem to be taken in consideration also by some responsible sections of our Government and especially by the General Direction of the Land Reclamation that sent me the following message:

«Some problems still remain open such as that of landscape planning, especially from the point of view of the agriculture, industry, canal-harbours, recreation and tourism. Another important problem interferes with the conservation of wetlands, as local powers in our country have acquired recently a large say in public administration»

These promising symptoms nourish the hope for an accession to the Convention in a near future.

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