Pandolfi, M., & Sonet, L. 2003. Migrazione di rapaci lungo la costa adriatica (Parco Naturale San Bartolo, 1998–2001). Fenologia e comportamento delle specie del genere *Circus*. *Avocetta* 27: 57–59.

Panuccio, M., Polini, N., Forconi, P., Fusari, M., Giorgetti, G., Marini, G., & Agostini, N. 2004. Mount Capodarco: a survey on the migratory behaviour of Accipitriformes along the Adriatic coast of central Italy. *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 74: 160–163.

Premuda, G., Mellone, U., & Cocchi, L. 2004. Osservazioni sulle modalità della migrazione primaverile dei rapaci a Capo d'Otranto. *Avocetta* 28: 33–36.

Shelley, E., & Benz, S. 1985. Observation of aerial hunting, food carrying and crop size of migrant raptors. In: Newton, I., & Chancellor, R. D. (eds.), *Conservation Studies on Raptors*: 299–301. ICBP Technical Publication No. 5, Cambridge.

Smith, N. G., Goldstein, D. L., & Bartholomew, G. A. 1986. Is long-distance migration possible for soaring hawks using only stored fat? *Auk* 103: 607–611.

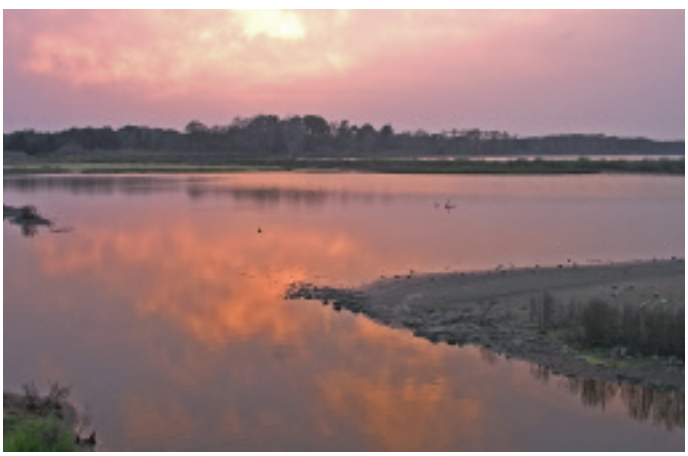
Yosef, R. 1996. Raptors feeding on migration at Eilat, Israel: opportunistic behaviour or migratory strategy? *J. Raptor Res.* 30: 242–245.

Michele Panuccio, Nicolantonio Agostini, Stephen Wilson, Giuseppe Lucia, Jack Ashton-Booth, Gianpasquale Chiatante, Ugo Mellone and Simone Todisco
MEDRAPTORS (Mediterranean Raptor Migration Network, Via Mario Fioretti, 00152 Rome, Italy; e-mail medraptors@raptormigration.org

Comments on the roosting behaviour of Marsh Harriers during migration

Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* migrate across a broad front during both spring and autumn migration, and regularly undertake long powered flights over water, sometimes using islands as stopover sites (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Agostini & Logozzo 1998; Agostini *et al.* 2001, 2003; Panuccio *et al.* 2002; Sammut 2005). Although they are capable of migrating across the sea at night, many migrating Marsh Harriers appear to suspend migration when faced with a water barrier in the afternoon, electing instead to hunt before roosting at dusk (Panuccio *et al.* 2002; Agostini & Panuccio 2003).

Migrating raptors most commonly select trees in which to roost, and in areas where woodland is scarce are often attracted to small clumps of trees (Kerlinger 1989). Marsh Harriers usually roost among rank ground vegetation during the winter and breeding season (Cramp & Simmons 1980), but we have regularly observed migrant Marsh Harriers roosting in trees in the central Mediterranean region. Since many other migrant raptors roost in trees, it is perhaps not unexpected that Marsh Harriers should also do so. On Malta, up to 200 Marsh Harriers have roosted at Buskett (a small wooded area where hunting is banned) in recent years (Sammut 2005), while on Marettimo, Agostini & Logozzo (1998) reported a flock of 100 roosting in trees on 28th March 1998. On 1st April 2002, a flock of 50 landed in the only wood on the island of Ustica, while five were seen roosting on the rocks along the shore there in March 2002. During autumn migration, observations at Circeo Promontory, central Italy, revealed at least 150 Marsh Harriers roosting in trees on 13th September 2002, despite the close proximity of a large wetland area in a protected National Park with ample ground-roosting sites (plate 178). We have also observed tree-roosting Marsh Harriers at the Strait of Messina (max. nine in spring 2004); Aspromonte Mountain, southern continental Italy (max. 14 in autumn 2004); Pantelleria, western Sicily (max. 11 in autumn 2002); and Mount Capodarco, central Italy (max. three in spring 2003). Tree species does not appear



Michele Panuccio

178. Circeo National Park, Italy.

to influence the choice of roost site. We have observed Marsh Harriers roosting in Holm Oak *Quercus ilex*, Stone Pine *Pinus pinea*, Austrian Pine *Pinus nigra*, Common Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Black Poplar *Populus nigra* and Common Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*.

In contrast to Sammut (2005), who concluded that migrant Marsh Harriers roost in trees only as a last resort, when it is the only available safe roost site, we consider that some Marsh Harriers on migration actively select to roost in trees, regardless of whether suitable ground cover is available.

Finally, it is interesting that observations during the winters from 1999/2000 to 2004/05 showed that small numbers of Marsh Harriers regularly roost in trees at the Circeo National Park, central Italy, where large flocks of waterfowl and many Marsh Harriers winter. Within this period, numbers of tree-roosting birds peaked at nine, along with three Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus*, in December 1999.

References

Agostini, N., & Logozzo, D. 1998. Primi dati sulla migrazione primaverile dei rapaci Accipitriformi sull'isola di Marettimo (Egadi). *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 68: 153–157.

— & Coleiro, C. 2003. How do Accipitriformes behave during autumn migration at the Circeo Promontory (Central Italy)? *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 73(2): 165–167.

—, — & Panuccio, M. 2003. Autumn migration of Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) across the central Mediterranean in 2002. *Ring* 25: 47–52.

—, —, Corbi, F., Di Lieto, G., Pinos, F., & Panuccio, M. 2001. Comparative study of the autumn migration of Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) at three sites of the central Mediterranean. *Vogelwarte* 41: 154–158.

Cramp, S., & Simmons, K. E. L. (eds.). 1980. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol. 2. OUP, Oxford.

Kerlinger, P. 1989. *Flight Strategies of Migrating Hawks*. Univ. Chicago Press, Chicago.

Panuccio, M., Agostini, N., & Massa, B. 2002. Crossing the Tyrrhenian Sea: spring migration of Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*), sex classes and relation to wind conditions. *Vogelwarte* 41: 271–275.

Sammut, M. 2005. Marsh Harriers roosting in trees. *Brit. Birds* 98: 314–316.

Michele Panuccio and Nicolantonio Agostini
MEDRAPTORS (Mediterranean Raptor Migration Network), Via Mario Fioretti, 00152 Rome, Italy; e-mail medraptors@raptormigration.org

Hunting technique used by Eurasian Sparrowhawk attempting to catch a Common Swift

On 27th July 2005, I was operating a tractor-driven mower at Holkham NNR, Norfolk, to top thistles (Cardueae) among grassland of the grazing marshes. The mower was often surrounded by about 40 low-flying Common Swifts *Apus apus* – a regular occurrence as the birds eagerly snap up flies and other winged insects that are disturbed from the grass during the mowing operation. About 150 m away, I noticed a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* fly in from the south, low to the ground, before landing abruptly in a low spot within the marsh. I stopped the tractor to look at the hawk with binoculars and, as it remained in the same area, eventually nestling down into the vegetation with its head held down almost flat with its back, I continued slowly towards it. Coming to within 15 m of the hawk, with a congregation of swifts wheeling around me in all directions, the hawk suddenly shot up at the nearest bird, which had unknowingly passed directly above the hidden predator. In a twisting, turning chase over a distance of about 50 m, covered in a few seconds, the Sparrowhawk matched the swift's every move, almost grabbing its faster victim. Ultimately, it was simply not agile enough and the swift banked up at a crucial moment and ascended high in the opposite direction to avoid capture.

Newton (*The Sparrowhawk*, Poyser, 1986) noted that Sparrowhawks will hunt small birds by deploying such a technique, particularly in open ground (he terms it 'still-hunting') but does not mention swifts as victims in his account. The same author did, however, record Common Swift as a rare prey item of the Sparrowhawk; for a bird renowned for its exceptional speed and agility, the Common Swift might initially seem an unlikely prey species. I wondered whether, in the case described above, the Sparrowhawk had foreseen the situation of the swifts hawking around the tractor and used the low-growing flora as a potential ambush location? Or was it just coincidence that the swifts drew close, and the Sparrowhawk exploited an opportunistic situation?

Andrew Bloomfield
20 Lancaster Road, Blenheim Park, Sculthorpe, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 7PX