Autumn migration of buzzards across the Channel of Sicily?

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While Mediterranean populations of buzzard *Buteo buteo* are sedentary, those breeding in central, eastern and northern Europe are summer resident or partially migratory. During autumn migration, tens of thousands of birds were recorded both at Falsterbo (Sweden) and at the Bosphorus while lower numbers cross the Strait of Gibraltar (Cramp and Simmons 1980). In the central Mediterranean region observations made in southern Italy and Malta both during autumn and spring migration showed that very few buzzards move in this area (Agostini 2001, Agostini and Logozzo 1995, 1997, 1998, Agostini and Malara 1997, Agostini and Panuccio 2003, Agostini *et al.* 2000, 2004, Corso 2001, Guglielmi *et al.* 2003, Jonzén and Pettersson 1999, Panuccio *et al.* 2004, Sammut and Bonavia 2004). Since these raptors mostly use soaring flight over land during migration, thus avoiding long sea crossings (Kerlinger 1989), these results are not unexpected. However, observations on the post-reproductive migration of this species across the Channel of Sicily are lacking during the peak passage, between late September and mid October (Cramp and Simmons 1980). In this note we provide data recorded at the island of Marettimo between 15-30 September 2000 and 3-18 October 2002.

Study area and methods – This island is located about 30 km off western Sicily and 130 km NE of the Cap Bon Peninsula (Tunisia). Observations, aided with binoculars and telescopes, were made using an observation post at the altitude of c 500 m. At this site thousands of raptors, mostly black kites *Milvus migrans* and adult honey buzzards *Pernis apivorus*, concentrate during autumn migration between the end of August and mid September (Agostini *et al.* 2000, 2004).

Results and discussion - During the second half of September 2000 a total of 332 raptors was counted, mostly marsh harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, while only 4 (1,2 %) buzzards were reported. Not one buzzard was observed between 3 and 18 October 2002. In this period the short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus* was the species mostly observed (Tab. 1). Finally, 6 buzzards were reported over the island during systematic observations made between 1-31 October 2004 (Amato *et al.* pers. obs.). Although we cannot exclude that some buzzards crossed the Channel of Sicily bypassing Marettimo (Agostini *et al.* 2004), these data agree with the conclusion that a real migratory flow across the Central Mediterranean is non-existent (Agostini 2002). However, late and/or irregular movements of birds belonging to the Sicilian population (perhaps depending on ecological conditions in their breeding grounds) and/or coming from eastern Europe, could explain the existence of the small population of this species wintering in northern Tunisia such as the spring passage of some steppe buzzards *Buteo buteo vulpinus* at the Strait of Messina. In this picture, counts concerning hundreds of buzzards recorded at the Cap Bon promontory during spring 1974 and 1975 (Thiollay 1977) were probably caused by recount of birds belonging to the population wintering in Tunisia.

Species	15-30 September	3-18 October
Circaetus gallicus	18	125
Circus aeruginosus	220	27
Pernis apivorus	45	3
Milvus migrans	15	4
Buteo buteo	4	0
Hieraaetus pennatus	9	2
Neophron percnopterus	2	0
Aquila sp.	2	0
Accipiter nisus	4	0
Falco subbuteo	5	0
Falco tinnunculus	4	0
Falco naumanni	1	0
F.tinnunculus/naumanni	3	1
Falco biarmicus	0	1

Foto e grafica: Michele Panuccio

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