

## Italy's journey towards accession to AEWA

### **Progress towards ratification of the AEWA Agreement**

Italy occupies a central position relative to the main migratory routes between Europe and Africa; in addition, the country plays an important role for the over-wintering of several species that breed in northern Europe.

In view of the numerous laws, conventions, regulations and European directives already in place to protect the aquatic migratory birds covered by the AEWA agreement, Italy did not regard accession to AEWA as a priority until recently.

However, as the causes of the decline of many of these species are often also of interest to non-European countries covered neither by the Bern Convention nor by Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds, and considering its crucial geographical position, Italy now considers it important to accede to an international agreement such as AEWA that provides a basis for international cooperation both inside and outside Europe, on activities devoted to the conservation and management of such species.

For this reason, in October 2004 Italy began the process of accession to AEWA with the tabling of a bill that is currently being considered by the Italian Parliament. It is expected that final ratification of the agreement will take place before the current parliamentary term ends, in June 2006.

### **The Marbled Teal**

#### STATUS OF THE SPECIES

The Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) is one of the species for which Italy considers it is important to establish international agreements within AEWA as soon as possible.

No historical data is available concerning the breeding distribution of this species. Since the autumn of 1999, following the establishment of the Integral Natural Reserve 'Lago di

Preola e Gorghi Tondi', some specimens have been observed in the area of Mazara del Vallo (Trapani Province, Sicily). Then, in 2000, a breeding pair was reported near Pantano Leone (Campobello di Mazara), and two pairs were sighted in 2004.

Large fluctuations in numbers are typical for this species, so its regular appearance in south-western Sicily in recent years would suggest that breeding there is not merely episodic, but may be the start of colonization.

Since the environmental and climatic conditions on the southern Sicilian coast are similar to those in the nesting sites of Spain and North Africa, the species could in fact become permanently established in the middle to long term.

#### THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

In order to support this process of re-colonization, the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territorial Protection (Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio, MATT) commissioned a National Action Plan for the Marbled Teal from the National Wildlife Institute (Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica, INFS). Given the special status of this species in Italy, it was considered that the following steps were required in order to prepare the plan:

Acquisition of basic information about the species, by collation of available bibliographical data regarding recent re-colonization and any other records relating to Italy. In addition, potential breeding sites in Sicily were to be identified based on the environmental preferences gleaned from the bibliography.

Identification of limiting factors and threats, and definition of conservation actions.

#### IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

This INFS study suggested that, despite the activities being carried out at a national level and even if the numbers of Marbled Teal in Sicily were to increase remarkably in a just few years, it was unlikely that a sufficiently large and sustainable breeding nucleus could be established without regular genetic exchange with other populations. Thus, in order to guarantee the future of the species in Italy, cooperation with the international community and the other countries of the western Mediterranean, supporting the adoption of focused and coordinated conservation measures is considered to be essential.

It seems particularly important to cooperate closely with the other western Mediterranean countries that have Marbled Teal breeding sites, thus ensuring the continuity of the current

colonization process. These include Tunisia and Algeria (not yet Parties to AEWA), Morocco (which signed in 1997 but has not yet ratified) and Spain (an AEWA Party).

In addition it is considered important to give technical and possibly also financial support to the North African countries involved, especially to Tunisia from where the Sicilian specimens probably come, in order to promote internal monitoring and protection activities.

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