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New records of African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* (Latham, 1790) (Pelecaniformes: Threskiornithidae) from Salerno Province (Southern Italy)

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Abstract

We report the first records of African sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* from Salerno Province (Campania, Southern Italy). The species was first reported in Italy from 1989 and in Campania in 2015 from the Province of Caserta. The African Sacred Ibis has been listed as an invasive species by the European Union.

Keywords: *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, alien species, Salerno Province, Campania.

Riassunto

Si riportano le prime segnalazioni di Ibis sacro *Threskiornis aethiopicus* per la Provincia di Salerno (Campania, Sud Italia). La specie è stata segnalata per la prima volta in Italia a partire dal 1989 e in Campania nel 2015 in Provincia di Caserta. L'Ibis sacro è stato inserito nell'elenco delle specie invasive dell'Unione Europea.

Parole chiave: *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, specie aliena, Provincia di Salerno, Campania.

The African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* (Latham, 1790) (Pelecaniformes: Threskiornithidae) is a monotypic species native to sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated population of 200,000 - 450,000 individuals, and a small, declining population located in south-eastern Iraq. In the second half of the 20th century, several non-native populations derived from introduction or escaped individuals were recorded in different European states (Yésou et al., 2017).

The African Sacred Ibis has a completely white body plumage with the exception of some black plumes on the back, while legs, neck, beak and tail are black. It inhabits cultivated areas, wetlands, dumps, flooded meadows, estuaries. It is a colonial nesting species. It is a colonial species.

In Italy, where it has recently been considered 'naturalized' (Brichetti & Fracasso, 2018), it started nesting in 1989 in the Province of Vercelli (Piedmont) (Carpegna et al., 1999). Since then, the Italian population has undergone a process of numerical growth, colonizing several regions in Central-Northern Italy, reaching a breeding population estimated at 400 - 420 pairs in 2016 (Brichetti & Fracasso, 2018).

The first report from Campania dates back to 2015 and refers to two individuals observed in

Salerno Province, the first published report concerns 1-2 individuals resting and in trophic activity in the wetlands of the Sele Plain (2 individuals - 29-30 November, 1 individual - 4 December 2023) (Usai et al., 2023).

On November 20 of 2023 a flock of 13 specimens was photographed in a fallow field of the locality Gaiarda (Fig. 1A) and on December 4 of 2023 a flock of 19 specimens was photographed in another fallow field of the locality Spinazzo both in the Municipality of Capaccio Paestum (Salerno) (Fig. 1B-D). In the 24th of February 2024 one specimen was observed in a moat in the locality Fiocche near Eboli, and a flock of 31 specimens was photographed in a fallow field in the Municipality of Serre near Borgo S. Cesareo (Municipality of Albanella, Salerno). The latest sighting dates back to the 7th of April 2024



Figure 1. Individuals of *T. aethiopicus* photographed in the 20th of November 2023 in a fallow field of locality Gaiarda (Capaccio Paestum, Salerno)(A). Individuals of *T. aethiopicus* photographed in the 4th of December 2023 feeding in the canals in another fallow field of the locality Spinazzo (Capaccio Paestum, Salerno)(B). (Photos by C. De Luca).

the wetlands of Villa Literno (Caserta) during the spring period (Finati et al., 2015). Since that date, reports have followed one another, but always localised in the Province of Caserta in the northern part of the Region (Fraissinet & Usai, 2020; Fraissinet & Usai, 2021). In the

with one specimen sighted in the Calore River banks in the locality Cerrocupo (Municipality of Altavilla Silentina, Salerno).

The report of the 20th of November 2023 is the first in Province of Salerno in temporal order, and the other reports from the Province



Figure 2. Individuals of *T. aethiopicus* photographed in a fallow field in the Municipality of Serre near Borgo S. Cesareo (Municipality of Albanella, Salerno) (Photos by F. Bolinesi).

of Salerno confirm that the number of individuals found is also interesting and really much higher than previously considered. The dispersal capacity of the African Sacred Ibis is well known, even within its home range, with movements of over 1000 kilometres, and it is therefore difficult to trace the area of origin of the flock observed in Paestum localities (Fig. 2). It will be interesting to follow the evolution of the species' presence in the Salerno area, also because, following the reports of November-December 2023, other reports have been made in locations not far from the city of Salerno (Fig. 3).

Following the measures adopted by the European Union to combat the spread of alien species, the African Sacred Ibis has been included in the list of invasive species and is therefore subject to specific control and eradication programmes (DAISIE, 2009). It is in fact a species that causes considerable damage to populations of Italian and European endemic species, which

is why it is extremely important to tracing the dispersion pattern and knowing the areas of new colonization.

Author contribution

Conceptualization: NM, FB, FMG

Data curation: NM, MF, FP, CDL, FN, FMG

Writing original and final draft preparation:

NM, MF, FP, CDL, FN, FMG

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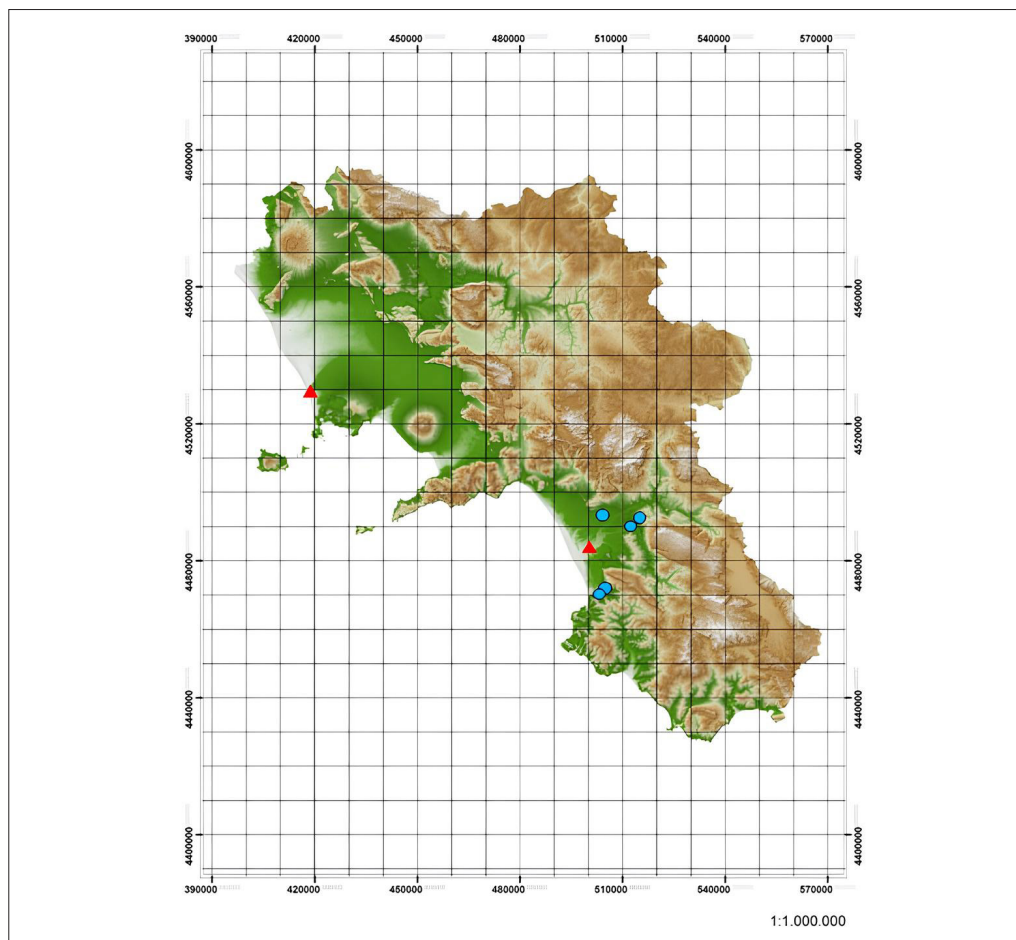


Figure 3. Records of *T. aethiopicus* from Campania. ▲ First report from Campania of 2015 in the wetlands of Villa Literno (Caserta) (Finati et al., 2015) and the Sele Plain in the 2023 (Usai et al., 2023). ● Individuals observed in the 2023 and 2024 in Province of Salerno.