

Editorial

COVID-19 and ornithology: will 2020 be a sad gap in our data?

There is no doubt that the last six months have been exceptional. The lockdowns imposed in most countries due to COVID-19 pandemic have heavily affected our lives and changed our way of working. Moreover, in the periods when countries were moving back to "normal" activities after the lockdowns, limits to movements and to in-person meetings have been imposed and the so-called 'smart working' has become common and widespread. Many people share the opinion that COVID-19 is a 'game changer': our future lives will be different from our past ones (Goodell 2020). This will occur mostly for the enormous economic and social costs of this pandemic, which has been estimated to exceed 8 trillion dollar (Park et al. 2020). How our lives will differ, however, is still unclear, first because we are still at the beginning of the crisis and second because COVID-19 is an unprecedented phenomenon in a modern globalized world. The 1918 influenza pandemic is maybe the sole precedent (Goodell 2020), but the world was very different at that time.

The world was clearly unprepared to tackle a global pandemic like COVID-19, yet such an event was largely anticipated. Clearly, no one could predict what happened exactly, but it was rather clear to experts that a global pandemic was very likely. For instance, during 2011–2018, the World Health Organization tracked 1,483 epidemic events in 172 countries (Global Preparedness Monitoring Board 2019). It was therefore quite likely that one of these events could escape our control and spread worldwide.

Researchers have been severely affected by the changes imposed by this pandemic. Lockdown has been an opportunity for many of us to complete research in a quieter environment, but for others, particularly those who have the responsibility of caring for children, elderly relatives or are in other difficult circumstances, working has been challenging in these difficult months. A shift in submitted papers has already been noticed by the editors of some journals, particularly a decrease in the number of papers submitted by women, who usually have the larger responsibilities on domestic affairs (<https://www.thelilly.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fwomen-academics-seem-to-be-submitting-fewer-papers-during-coronavirus-never-seen-anything-like-it-says-one-editor%2f%3f>). A reduction in scientific production, particularly by young colleagues in the early stages of their careers, can have long-lasting effects on their future career prospects. Avocetta has supported a global initiative called 'Publication partners' (see <https://www.avocetta.org/publication-partners/> and reference therein) to help those colleagues that are experiencing challenging circumstances under lockdown. This initiative aims at creating a global network of volunteers that provide simple help in those scientifically marginal but time-consuming tasks that an author must attend to, like formatting a manuscript or a figure.

Not only researchers have been affected personally, scientific research has suffered the impact of COVID-19 too. Some studies have already addressed the impacts on clinical studies. For instance, patient enrolment in active clinical trials for cancer therapies decreased due to pandemic (Upadhaya et al. 2020). Fewer studies, if any, have been conducted on the impact of pandemic on other research areas, and, to the best of my knowledge, no one on ornithological research. However, there is no doubt that impacts have been heavy. For instance, in Italy, ringing activities were stopped on March 10th with an official note of the Italian ringing authority with few exceptions (ringing stations that can comply with a stringent set of safety norms) and restarted only on May 19th. In the 22 years of my long-term study on the barn swallows in

the Adda Sud Regional Park in Northern Italy, this is the first year in which monitoring did not start in early April and visits to the colonies for counting breeding pairs had decreased from the usual 5 – 10 per breeding season to one only. By the way, part of the Park, including some of the study colonies, is in the first “red area” of northern Italy, close to Codogno, which has suddenly become world-famous for the COVID-19 outbreak. For sure, the data I collected with this non-standard and not optimal protocol are not comparable to those collected in the past years. This is therefore the first gap in a 22 year-long time series of data.

Will 2020 be a gap in several other long term time series of ecological data? Which will be the consequences of these gaps on ornithological studies? It will be interesting to see some papers on the effects of COVID-19 on ornithological researches published on *Avocetta* in the next months. What has happened to your activities? Did COVID-19 and the associated lockdown affect more field work or lab work or both? We will welcome manuscripts on this topic, to be published in the Forums section of the Journal's next number(s), provided they are not mere anecdotic reports of what happened to one or few ornithologists but they are extensive, organic investigations to what happened to ornithological research at least at the regional scale.

At the same time, anecdotal information suggests that wildlife has largely benefitted from COVID-19 lockdowns. A Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* was documented over Milan on April 5th, 2020 during an EBN Italy event (<https://rivistanatura.com/birdwatching-a-km-zero-unaquila-reale-a-milano/>). The unprecedented pause in global human activities due to lockdowns has already been named 'anthropause' and it has been argued that it will allow researchers to quantify the effects of human activities on wildlife (Rutz et al. 2020). The idea is intriguing and Rutz and co-authors show in their paper that there is a large potential for research in different fields. Some interesting and potentially important data may be available to the readers of *Avocetta*. Why not sharing them with a broader community? We look forward to your manuscripts.

COVID-19 has monopolized attention and suspended our lives in the last months, but other initiatives were already ongoing before the pandemic. *Avocetta* supports a Conservation Evidence initiative for rising authors' attention on a thorough search and citing of previous scientific evidence on conservation practice. A forthcoming editorial on Conservation Biology by William Sutherland (Sutherland et al. in press) highlights how selective citing is still unfortunately common in conservation science and how it can distort knowledge. Together with thirty conservation-focused journals, *Avocetta* now requests that authors perform an extensive search in the literature before submitting their papers when they include conservation or management recommendations also by consulting websites like Conservation Evidence (<https://www.conservationevidence.com/>), which summarizes results of conservation actions worldwide. By joining this initiative, we aim at raising consciousness on avoiding the perils of 'cherry picking' scientific literature and base conservation action on evidence, so that we can stand on the shoulders of giants rather than on their toes.

Roberto Ambrosini

Department of Environmental Science and Policy, University of Milan
Via Celoria 26 - 20131 Milano, Italy
e-mail: roberto.ambrosini@unimi.it
ORCID 0000-0002-7148-1468

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