

Peregrine Falcon at Rocca Pendice: a difficult but possible relationship

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Abstract — Among the family of Falconidae, Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is considered to be the most beautiful and fascinating member of its family. The history and fame of this family dates back to ancient times and the frequent crisis that this species underwent in the years triggered preservation actions that often dealt with climbing and nesting of this bird. The discover in 2001 of a couple of Peregrine falcon that nested on the Eastern cliff of Rocca Pendice brought up the problem of overlapping between the two species (falcon and man) forcing the management of the Colli Euganei Park to assess the situation with LIPU and CAI in order to find a common strategy to solve the problem. From 2001 to nowadays several limitation strategies have been applied with different results depending upon the protected area along with the protection period. The action plans that are hereafter described have proved a positive effect on nesting of the bird. Although climbers have undergone disadvantages because of these decisions we have recorded an increased sensibility in the problem by them that led to a respectful use of the cliff. The encouraging results show how a good collaboration is possible to establish a peaceful cohabitation between sport tourism and endangered species in protected areas.

Index Terms — Protection, Peregrine falcon, alpine climbers.

1 INTRODUCTION

When thinking about falcons the peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) is for sure estimated as the most famous of its family. The fame of this beautiful and fascinating bird commences already in ancient times when it was worshipped as a god as drawn on Egyptian tombs and monuments. Its celebrity was also achieved thanks to the great bibliography that can be found on it worldwide since it's a cosmopolitan species.

Falcon is a species of raptor that stands at the top of the trofic chain therefore resulting highly vulnerable to pollutants such as DDT and chlorine compound used in

agriculture that between the 50s and 70s contributed to reduce Falcon's population in Europe and America of about 80-90%. It took more than 20 years to the falcon to bounce back to its original population magnitudes thanks to the protection programs established both in USA and Europe.

The Colli Euganei are of volcanic genesis therefore numerous rocky structures, mainly trachyte, of great size that every year are climbed by a large number of climbers.

In particular, Rocca Pendice cliff, with its 300m a.s.l. was well known among climbers already at the beginning of 20th century. It was considered to be a perfect training facility by mountaineers that were getting ready to Dolomitic deeds.

Famous alpine climbers as R. Messner and E. Comici have come to train on these walls making Rocca Pendice one of the best known climbing facility of Veneto, where climbers from different countries can come and climb all the year around

The establishment in 1989 of the Region-

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al Park of Colli Euganei and the discover, in 2001, of the presence of a couple of falcons nesting on the eastern cliff of Rocca Pendice triggered a wide range of cohabitation problems between the two species (man and falcon) forcing the board of the park to start an action table with LIPU and CAI.

2 COHABITATION IS POSSIBLE

2.1 Setting up of a working group

The records of a couple of falcons from LIPU in Rocca Pendice was transmitted to the park board and a working group was set up. This comprised the park, LIPU of Padova, CAI-TAM Veneto, CAI Padova, Field monitoring volunteers, County police, National Forestry service.

The aim of the working group was to allow the falcons to reproduce without disturbances and to the climbers to practice sport activity. To find a common strategy that delights both the actors wasn't an easy task, especially taking count of the targets of the park but the positive collaboration of LIPU and the two CAIs made it possible.

2.2 Limitation measures.

The strenuous participation of all the members and in particular LIPU, CAI and the park ended up with a no climbing zone and with a period in which climbing was forbidden.

Along the years, from 2001 to nowadays, various experimentations for limiting climbers were assessed and the results were different.

CAI and LIPU proposed to build and place a nesting house on a nearby cliff that was less attractive to climbers so more suitable to be protected and managed. This proposal didn't bring any good results however it allowed to study and better understand falcon behavior.

When limitation procedures were finally chosen an "information sign" was

made and placed at the main access points to the walls of Rocca Pendice. Later on the same sign was introduced in the web site of the park.

2.3 Effects of the protection actions and offspring.

Nesting became a certainty when during February 2001 Aldo Tonelli (LIPU Padova), spotted a couple of falcons doing the pre-nuptial court that was promptly followed three days later by the first reproduction. No special protection action was taken on the first year since nobody knew about the presence of these individuals.

Luckily for falcons a rainy spring limited significantly climbers' activities and the first egg hatched successfully on April 22nd just after a heavy rainstorm that saw some snowflakes and a sudden drop in temperature.

Even though the lack of information on the presence of the nest led to anthropic disturbance, the two juveniles were able to regularly fly by the end of May.

During 2002 the access to the wall where the nest stood was forbidden and next spring 3 young falcons were born. The following two years was characterized by a beautiful springs and the protection area around the nesting zone did little to avoid damage. A large number of climbers, probably ignoring the consequences, passed next to the nest. Female was forced to leave the nesting both in 2003 and 2004 resulting in the loss of the offspring.

This led the board of the park along with CAI and LIPU to close the East cliff completely from March to May in order to protect the falcons which were the only couple in the Province of Padova.

In 2005 just one juvenile was able to fly but this event has to be estimated as positive since the bad results of the previous years.

During spring of 2006 the protection area size was somewhere between the extreme 2005 decision and the mild 2002.

This action along with the information policies performed by CAI made possible for three juveniles to hatch in 2006.

In 2007 the location of the nest was really close to the one of 2006, therefore the same limitations were kept and this allowed four young falcons to fly out. In 2008 the protection area was considered to be solid and this permitted three juveniles to be born.



Fig. 1. Hunting activity of peregrine falcon.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The experience that was gained in these years and the positive collaboration with LIPU and CAI-TAM Veneto and CAI Padova allowed to find a strategy that met the requirements of both the falcon and the climbers.

The solution that is actually under use provokes a slight damage to the climbers that on the other hand have proved to acknowledge the delicate scenario accepting the limitations.

CAI-TAM played a major role in educating and making aware climbers on this problem. The knowledge that built up and the comparison with other realities brought to a result that we hope will lead to a code for the users of Rocca Pendice, a code that will assure protection to the falcons along with the use of the cliffs from CAI members and occasional climbers.

It can be said that the board of the park was able to find the right solution to the problem granting at the same time safety for an endangered species and the valorization of the territory for tourism.