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The Black Stork, *Ciconia nigra* (Aves: Ciconiidae) in central-eastern Calabria (Italy)

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The black stork (*Ciconia nigra* Linnaeus, 1758) is an extraordinary bird not only for its elegance but also for its unique habitat. It prefers isolated places that are often inaccessible to humans and always in direct contact with water, a vital element for its biological cycle. Calabria is a region rich in natural beauty, with large coniferous forests, canyons, rivers, mountain streams and crystal clear lakes, an extensive area of which is legally protected since the 1970's. All this has encouraged breeding of the black stork in Calabria, which, in the past was considered as rare and/or occasional. In 1994, in Fiumara Vittravo, ‘Commune di Pallagorio’, a small mountain village of Albanian origin, the first nesting site of the black stork was identified. For several years the black stork nested and reproduced regularly in this region but for about 15 years, only sporadic sightings were reported. In 2014, an adult was located in the area of the first nest and a research campaign was initiated. In the following year, the black stork come back and nested along the walls of a deep canyon, whose emerald green waters are rich in fish. In these last three years (2015-2017) the black stork was observed to favour a wider territorial sector stretching from the hills of the Marchesato Crotonese to the Silano Plateau in central-eastern Calabria. This barely urbanised area offers ecological characteristics which favour the conservation of this bird. The topography of such places, having extended hydrographic latitudes and large plains occupied by mountain lakes favour the conservation of the black stork.

The present work outlines the results obtained in the above mentioned territory regarding breeding and flight activities of the three-year period with direct observations or reports from ornithologists. The results of this work indicate that reproductive success was high with eight chicks taking regular flights from the same nest over a period of three years. In Winter time, the presence of individual storks was also noted in the wetlands of Silan Lakes (Congi, *G. pers. comm.*). The research also confirmed the migratory route of small groups, with less than ten individuals, along the course of the Sila Grande (Congi, *G. pers. comm.*) and the dispersion of young immature individuals moving along the river routes of Vittravo, Lese, Neto, and Tacina, either

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towards the Silan Plateau (from where they originate), or towards the Ionian sea. The protection of river habitats, inland waters and high altitude wetlands is important for the future conservation of the black stork in Calabria and across the Mediterranean Region.