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## An important 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian paper on Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

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**Abstract.** In 1773 Caetano Monti's paper "Sur l'oiseau qui porte à Bologne le nom de Pendulino, et en Pologne celui de remiz" was reprinted in Paris. It played a decisive role in the scientific description of Penduline Tit and its nest, and provided the first significant information relating to the biology of this species. Monti was also the first to correct number of inaccuracies in earlier zoological treatises considered as "classics". His own work was recognized throughout Europe, and quoted by German and French naturalists as Buffon. Linnaeus referred to it in his own description. Monti's analysis also enables us to gain precious information concerning the way in which ornithologists worked at the time, and the methods they used: analysing classical writings, "interviewing" bird catchers and peasants, information from missionaries, field work, analysis of specimens from zoological collections, and preparing descriptions and iconographies.

**Key words:** Penduline Tit, *Remiz pendulinus*, history of ornithology, zoology in Poland, zoology in Italy

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### INTRODUCTION

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris reprinted papers published by foreign academies of science and scientific societies that French scientists considered as particularly important. In 1773 a paper by Bologna naturalist Caetano Monti "Sur l'oiseau qui porte à Bologne le nom de Pendulino, et en Pologne celui de remiz" was published in Paris, along with illustrations of the female of the Penduline Tit and a nest with young (Monti 1773). Monti stated repeatedly that he had often spotted the hanging nests in the Bologna region and that he wished to know more about a bird that built such unusual nests. He had been watching birds from the Bologna region for a number of years, but had never seen a Penduline — or maybe he was unable to determine which of the birds he watched built this type of nest. He thought this was because the species was likely to be very rare and difficult to watch since it "can easily hide among the reeds and willows in the

marshes, it usually escapes the traps set by bird catchers, their birdlimes and nets are of no use in its habitat, and most do not bother to shoot at such a little bird. I have also encountered people who due to I know not what superstition, dare not touch the Penduline Tit, which they consider a sacred bird".

Alongside direct observation, eighteenth century naturalists frequently talked to "popular" experts on birds to obtain information. Thus it comes as no surprise that Monti went to the local bird catchers for information about the Penduline Tit, whose statements were contradictory. The analysis of information published by other authors was also a source of information. In eighteenth century Europe, the writings of P. Belon, C. Gesner, U. Aldrovandi and J. Johnson were still considered classical works of zoology, though the period saw a number of new publications on ornithology (Farber 1999). Due to their exceptional shape, the nest of the Penduline Tit had long intrigued European naturalists. The

writings of the Italian naturalist Ph. Buonanni were widely recognised and much cited throughout Europe at the time. Monti quotes Buonanni's information (1709) concerning the Penduline nest brought from Lithuania stored in the collection of the Collegio Romano. The fact that it held such an important position in a natural collection of some prestige proves the interest in both the species and its nest.

Monti mentions that the nest had been described by several authors, among them U. Aldrovandi and G. Rzączyński (Rzączyński 1721). Although Aldrovandi had included an illustration of the nest and of the bird, Monti says that their writings were very brief. Not only did they include little information, but such information as there was, was unreliable, and their description "do not entirely concord". Aldrovandi thought that the bird in question was a *Parus caudatus sive montana* as he designated Long-Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, and that "pendulino" was only a local name from the Bologna marshlands, which did not designate a different species. Buonanni and Rzączyński, on the other hand, considered it as a different species, little known but rather common in Lithuania, where it is called "remiz". Both described the nest and considered the "pendulino" and "remiz" as one and the same species. Their descriptions of the bird are not very explicit as to its colour, shape, etc.

This prompted Monti to attempt to observe the species itself, not just the nest, and if possible to get hold of a specimen, in order to determine once and for all the species which builds nests that so intrigue naturalists. He asked B. Tozzi of Florence, abbey of Valombrosa, for help in this undertaking. This naturalist, member of the Royal Society in London, had for several years been making illustration of Italian bird species for his work, later known as "Ornithologiae vivis expressae coloribus" (Tongiorgi Tomasi 2001).

Since they intended to start the search on his grounds, the two naturalists asked the Prince L. F. Marsigli for assistance. Marsigli, renowned for his interest in and patronage of the natural sciences, agreed immediately, and gave Monti a letter instructing the peasants on his lands to help in any way they could. A three-day search in the bog led to nothing. They then used the Prince's letters to ask the local bird catchers for assistance, but again received information that was contradictory. Monti proceeded to offer a cash reward for adult bird and its young. Most of the bird catchers hesitated, probably considering the

task too difficult, but finally one of them agreed. After a four-day wait, and with no result forthcoming, Monti and Tozzi returned to town. A few days later the bird catcher arrived with a female of the species and a nest with her young in his bag. This fragment of Monti's paper highlights another aspect that is relevant for the history of ornithology, i.e. it shows how widespread an occupation bird catching was in 18th century Italy, and consequently how popular raising birds in captivity must have been.

Monti thus had a female but no male although knowing that among birds males and females differ considerably in their appearance. In the case of the Penduline Tit this concern was highly justified in view of the ornithological knowledge of the period. Although Buffon (Buffon et al. 1770–1786) quotes Monti (1773) and Rzączyński (1737) in his "Histoire naturelle des oiseaux" he nevertheless designates the female of Penduline Tit as a separate species *Parus narbonensis*.

A few months after returning to Florence, Tozzi came upon a Penduline Tit, painted it and sent Monti the illustration, who stated: "I was finally satisfied that the Pendulino is an unknown bird, and that neither Belon nor Gesner nor Aldrovandi nor Willoughby, nor any other author known to me had previously mentioned it".

Monti went on to describe the male and the female of the Penduline Tit. He was also the first naturalist in Europe who included extensive information about this species. For the first time in the history of ornithology we received a description of feed (insects), nesting behaviour — materials used for building nests, and the information that Penduline Tit does not migrate seasonally.

Monti explains and corrects Aldrovandi's error of confusing the nest of Long-tailed Tit and Penduline Tit. This part of Monti's paper is of undisputed interest for the history of zoology; At the time, Aldrovandi's work (Aldrovandi 1599–1603) was, along side the writings of Gesner (1617), among the major encyclopaedic writings relative to the natural sciences. This is a further reason why Monti's paper should be considered a pioneering work. The statement that the "remiz" from Poland and Lithuania, and the Italian "pendulino" are in fact one and the same bird, was also very significant for ornithological studies. Monti furthermore insisted that this species was distinct from other species (such as neotropical's weavers), which build "similar nests"

Monti considers how this species should be named and writes "I name this bird, which has hitherto no Latin or Greek name, pendulino. I could also have called it remiz, but I see no reason to prefer a foreign name to ours, which is akin to Latin and aptly expresses this bird's instinct to suspend its nest". We have here an interesting example of pre-Linnaean zoological nomenclature.

Like other authors, Monti in his paper cites Rzączyński (1721) as his most important source of information on this species. Two things are worthy of note. First, the position of this Polish naturalist in 18th century Europe, who was not only quoted alongside others long considered as absolute authorities, such as Aldrovandi. Second, as of this period the Penduline Tit was associated in European zoology with Poland. In fact, Poland was the source of most information concerning this bird. We do not know whether, or the extent to which, this connection resulted from the success of the widely quoted writings of Rzączyński, from the fact that apart from him German-speaking naturalists from Gdańsk also took an interest in this species, or lastly, that many of the nests of the Penduline Tit featured in European collections and museums came from Poland. Natural sciences dictionaries continued to name Poland as the "terra typica" for this species for a long time. Throughout the 19th century French dictionaries specified that "the remiz is native to Poland, Italy, Siberia and southern France". Obviously this statement is due to the work of Gmelin (1751–1752), Rzączyński, Monti and French naturalists more than to studies of the biogeography of this species. Linnaeus (1758) also shared this view when he described the species and wrote "Habitat in Polonia, Lithuania, Hungria, Italia missa a D. D. Montio". We come upon this species in the catalogue of the Temminck collection of 1807 under the designation "Parus pendulinus, the remiz or Tit of Poland".

Monti's paper was widely quoted in the 18th century. The will to polemize with him was doubtless the reason for the publication of a further description of the species in 1755, "Parus minimus Polonorum remiz Bononiensium pendulinus descriptus", by J. D. Titius in Leipzig. It is interesting to see the rapidity with which ornithological information spread at the time, and how lively the debate and the exchange of information between naturalists from different countries was. Titius (1775) mentions that the species called "the remiz bird" in Polish also has a German name "die Volhinie Beutelmeise". He refers above all German writings on the species,

which were overlooked by Monti. These include mentions in the works of Gdańsk naturalists M. K. Hanovius (Hanovius 1753) and J. Klein (Klein 1759). Titius also insists that, Monti's opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, the Penduline Tit was known by naturalists of Antiquity, who called him "siuit".

Monti's work thus played a decisive role in the description of Penduline. Today, in spite of its tremendous value in the history of European ornithology, it is almost forgotten, and Monti's name is almost never mentioned in recent historical survey such as a book of Farber (1997). Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Monti's paper is an important and interesting document relative to this period of European ornithology.

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## STRESZCZENIE

### [Osiemnastowieczna włoska rozprawa o remizie *Remiz pendulinus* z Bolonii i z Polski]

W XVIII w. Królewska Akademia Nauk w Paryżu przedrukowywała rozprawy ogłaszane w publikacjach cudzoziemskich akademii nauk i towarzystw naukowych, a uznawane przez francuskich uczonych za szczególnie ważne. W 1773 roku przetłumaczono z łaciny i opublikowano w Paryżu rozprawę o remizie bolońskiego przyrodnika Caetana Monti (Monti 1773). Wraz z rozprawą przedrukowano także ilustracje samicy remiza i gniazda z młodymi. W osiemnastym wieku gniazda remiza, ze względu na ich formę, wzbudzały wśród europejskich przyrodników duże zainteresowanie. Nie potrafiono jednak ustalić gatunku ptaka budującego te gniazda.

W osiemnastowiecznej Europie nadal za zoologiczną klasykę uchodziły prace Gesnera, Aldrovandiego i Johnstona. Był to jednak okres stosunkowo licznych nowych publikacji dotyczących ornitologii. Powszechnie znana była praca włoskiego przyrodnika i jezuitę, Filipa Buonnaniego, który opisał gniazda remiza pochodzące z Polski znajdujące się w kolekcji Coleggio Romano.

Monti zanalizował informacje podawane na temat remiza przez europejskich przyrodników

m. in. Ulyssesa Aldrovandiego i Gabriela Rzeczyńskiego (Rzeczyński 1737). Boloński przyrodnik poszukiwał informacji na temat remiza także wśród miejscowych ptaszników, którzy podawali jednak sprzeczne informacje. Aby ostatecznie zidentyfikować gatunek, Monti udał się wraz z florenckim przyrodnikiem Bruno Tozzi na podbolońskie mokradła. Kilkuniedniowe poszukiwania nie dały jednak rezultatu. Dopiero po wyznaczeniu nagrody otrzymał od miejscowych ptaszników gniazdo i samicę remiza. Okaz posłużył mu do opisu, a Tozziemu do sporządzenia ilustracji. Caetano Monti jako pierwszy podał także szereg informacji na temat pokarmu remiza, materiału z którego budowane są gniazda oraz sezonu lęgowego.

Począwszy od osiemnastego wieku remiz był w europejskiej zoologii kojarzony z Polską, skąd pochodziła znaczna część informacji na jego temat. Nie wiadomo czy i w jakim stopniu związek remiza z Polską wynikał z sukcesu, jaki odniosła powszechnie cytowana praca Rzeczyńskiego, czy z faktu, iż gatunkiem tym interesowali się także przyrodnicy gdańscy czy też dlatego, że z Polski pochodziła znaczna część gniazd remiza przechowywanych w europejskich kolekcjach i muzeach. Jeszcze przez długi czas słowniki przyrodnicze wymieniały Polskę jako "terra typica" dla tego gatunku.

Rozprawa Montiego była bardzo szeroko cytowana w osiemnastowiecznej Europie. Chęć polemiki z włoskim przyrodnikiem była bez wątpienia przyczyną wydania przez Johanna Daniela Titiusa (1755) kolejnego opisu tego gatunku.

Praca Caetano Montiego odegrała więc decydującą rolę dla opisu gatunku. Boloński ornitolog jako pierwszy dostarczył wielu informacji na temat biologii remiza. Rozprawa została doceniona i zauważona w całej osiemnastowiecznej Europie, cytowali ją Niemcy i Francuzi przyrodnicy m. in. G. L. Buffon (Buffon et al. 1770–1786). Uwzględnił ją w swoim opisie także Karol Linneusz. Dzisiaj jednak została ona praktycznie zapomniana. Nazwisko Montiego nie pojawia się we współczesnych przeglądowych historiach ornitologii (Faber 1997). Warto przypomnieć pracę włoskiego przyrodnika również dlatego, iż jej analiza jest ważnym świadectwem warsztatu pracy ornitologów w osiemnastowiecznej Europie. Pozwala ona poznać metody ich pracy: analizę dzieł klasycznych, wywiad prowadzony wśród ptaszników i chłopów, informacje uzyskiwane za pośrednictwem misjonarzy, obserwacje w terenie, analizę okazów z kolekcji zoologicznych, wreszcie przygotowywanie ikonografii i publikację opisu.