Squacco Heron

Regno: fauna
Birds
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Squacco Heron - *Ardeola ralloides*

The Squacco Heron is the smallest of the white herons, and is rather short and stout compared with similar species.

Its livery is very striking: taking the bird as a whole, when resting, its plumage is an elegant fawny-orange (neck, breast and back feathers) which make the bird unmistakable.

The adults also display a characteristic tuft of feathers on the head, longer and thicker than any of the other herons have, and which, in Italian, gives the bird its name (“ciuffetto” means little tuft).

Only when it opens its all white wings in flight can there be some confusion with the other white herons. Another characteristic which distinguishes this heron is its bill, which turns a dark bluish-green in the breeding season.

In spite of its bright colours, the Squacco heron is not at all easy to see: very shy and wary, it often seems to be invisible whilst its hunts immobile on the edges of a ditch or pool, hidden in the low vegetation.

This species, the least numerous among the small herons, nests in the heronry at Fucecchio Marshes (with about 50 pairs) and in the small heronry at Lake Sibolla.

During migration it can often be seen in all the wetlands. It is a long distance migratory species, with a wintering areal in tropical Africa.

During the pre-nuptial migration the first individuals can regularly be observed between the end of April and the first days of May.

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