

IN MEMORIAM OF FABIO PERCO (1946–2019)

In the middle of February 2019, more than 300 people paid their last respects to Dr Fabio Perco at the cemetery of Santa Anna in Trieste. Fabio was an esteemed biologist, an outstanding ornithologist and a very warm person, who left a profound mark on the creation, protection, management and popularisation of many Italian natural sites of immense importance, such as the northern Adriatic lagoons, the coastal limestone cliffs and Trieste's karstic environment. He was actively involved in the creation of the Škocjan Inlet Nature Reserve on the Slovenian coast. In short, I can surely say he dedicated his entire life to nature conservation.



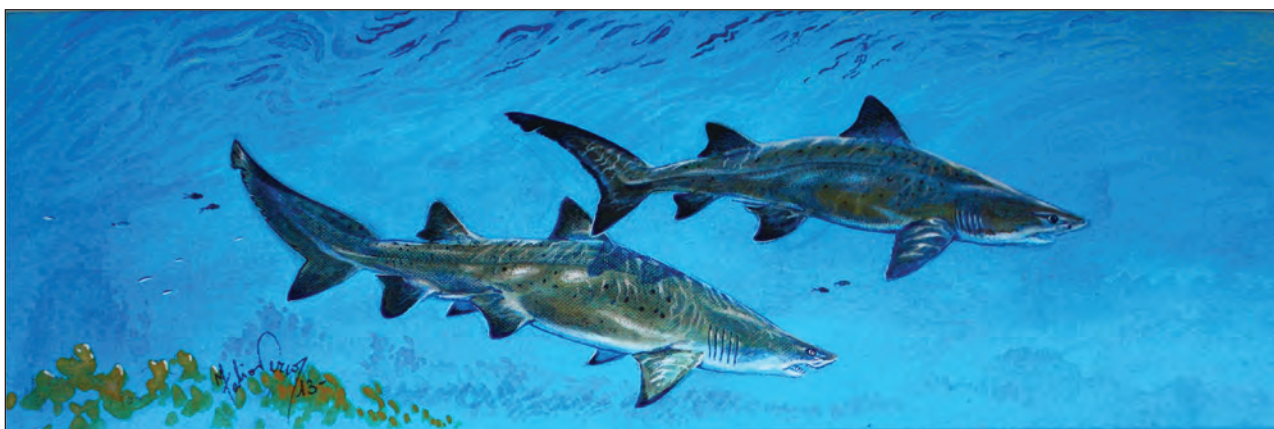
Carcharhinus limbatus (drawing Fabio Perco).

Fabio was a truly gifted artist, who was certainly bestowed his artistic talent at birth, for his father Dino was an excellent illustrator, as were Fabio's brothers and daughters. Fabio was a master wildlife painter, able to produce exquisite illustrations of birds and other animals. The birds in his paintings are realistic and authen-

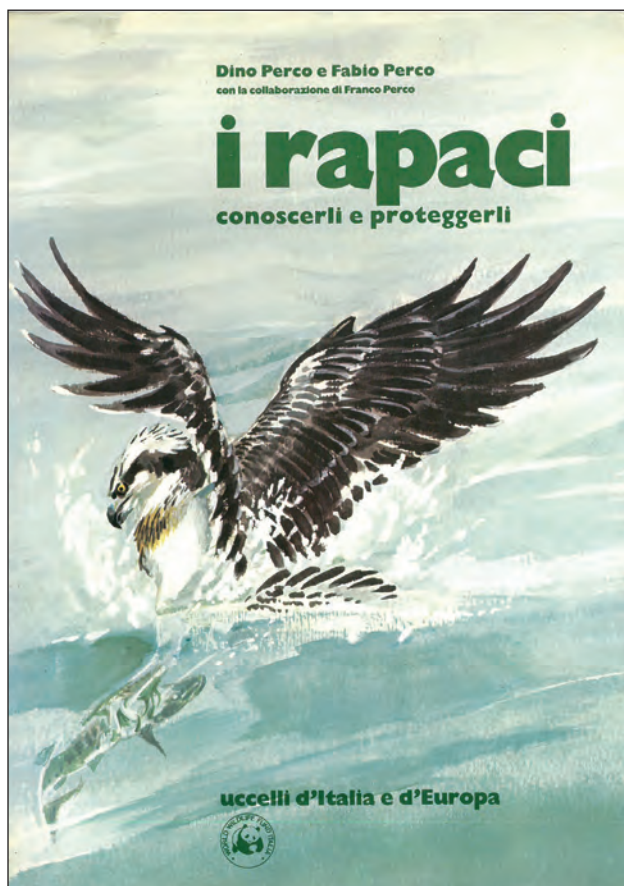
tic, always depicted in their natural habitats, but with a fairy tale touch. Some of his masterpieces of lagoon avifauna are on display at the centre of the Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve in Koper. His magnificent art was undoubtedly inspired by his love for nature, especially the animal kingdom.

He planned and brought to realisation many nature conservation projects. His efforts were crucial in the creation of several coastal protected areas, such as the Regional Nature Reserve "Isola della Cona". This popular ornithological and naturalist site has won numerous awards at national and international levels. Fabio was also a promotor for the establishment of a centre for white storks at the Oasis of Quadris near Fagagna del Friuli and in charge of the establishment of a lakeside feeding station for vultures at Cornino near Udine. Unfortunately, he did not manage to bring to life another brilliant project of his, whose goal was to reintroduce the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) into the province of Friuli Venezia Giulia.

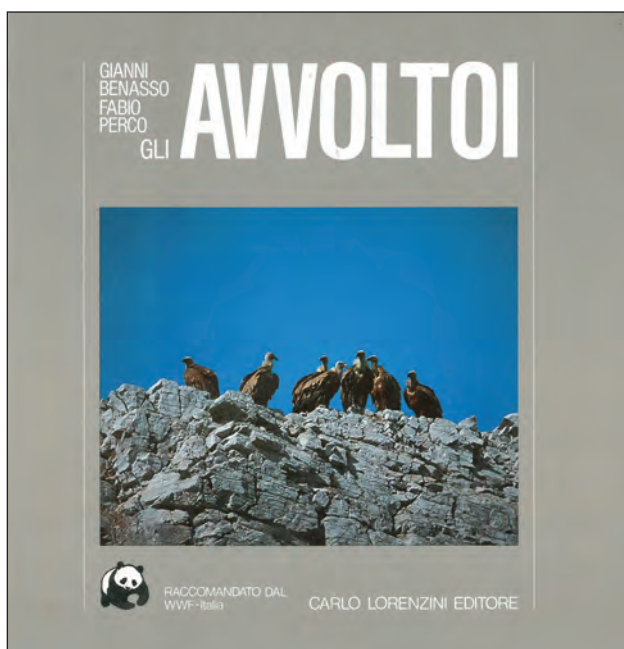
Fabio was also a gifted writer, publishing articles on a variety of topics dealing with ornithology, nature conservation and protected areas, especially the wetlands. He was a dedicated man who gathered his inspiration from his family, so it is not surprising that he published many books in co-authorship with his close relatives. He dedicated a lot of his time to researching birds of prey and owls. In fact, Fabio studied natural sciences at the University of Trieste, obtaining his Master of Science title with a thesis on the goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) in the Trieste Karst. My favourite book by Fabio is a monograph about owls and birds of prey entitled *I rapaci, conoscerli e proteggerli* (WWF Italia, 1976), which he co-wrote with his father Dino and his brother Franco, also a skilled illustrator and writer. He also produced a book on the fauna of the impressive limestone cliffs of Duino together with his daughter Nicoletta (*Fauna della Riserva naturale Falesie di Duino*, 2011), with illustrations created by his daughter Elena. Among the many



Carcharias taurus and *Odontaspis ferox* (drawing Fabio Perco).



other monographs that Fabio penned, the amazing study dealing with vultures, which he published with Gianni Benassi (*Gli avvoltoi*, 1985), and the one on the griffon



vulture (*Il grifone in Italia e nel mondo*, 1996) co-authored with Fulvio Genero and Bruno Dentessani (1996), deserve special mention.

I regret to have known Fabio for only a few years; still, I can say that our meetings were very fruitful for me. I learned so much from him, heard so many stories and enjoyed every single moment that I spent with him in his karstic realm of Sgonico. The possibility and privilege to exchange opinions with such an erudite and discussing topics of terrestrial and marine biology, nature conservation, history and etymology, is something I will never forget. He was a skilled narrator who could present a topic in a very interesting and detailed manner.

But above all, I will remember Fabio as a genuinely warm person, a good friend with a great sense of humour, and an eternal discoverer of the secrets of nature. We will remain surrounded by his legacy in the wetlands of either side of the Gulf of Trieste...

Lovrenc Lipej



Fabio Perco (photo: Nataša Šalaja).