

This is the story of a proto-diplomat, the ornithologist Margaret Nice. It is set in a time and place, where humans were no longer able to see the Others than human. They couldn't see the rivers, nor the mountains, nor the Douglas firs, nor the salmon, nor the peregrine falcons, nor the song sparrows. And they struggled to see even the crows and pigeons that were everywhere.

They couldn't see because they assumed there was nothing to see. For centuries, they had been trained to develop strategies, techniques, and tools that exempted them from having to pay attention to the Others, the ecosystems, the relationships. For Western settlers, in fact, to civilise an area meant to make it habitable in a way that they could live there completely ignoring the presence of Others than human.

Of course, there were other cultures for which dwelling essentially meant the opposite, where being at home meant immersing oneself in a network of attention and kinship with other life forms, even at the cost of arduous and not always peaceful negotiations.

But Margaret Nice's story begins in the culture of blindness, in a time when women were not welcome in the academic world. Therefore, Margaret takes her first steps in ornithology as an amateur, observing song sparrows around her home in Ohio.

She watches them, but struggles to see them.

Until towards the end of the 1920s, she comes up with an idea that breaks with the ornithology of the time. She decides to start marking the leg of each sparrow with a combination of four coloured rings plus one of aluminium. It's a way to focus attention on the lives of individual birds, in an era focused on description, geographic dislocation, and collecting.

Nice thus begins to reconstruct the individual lives of the sparrows, endowing each of them with a biography that allows her to understand what matters to them. And so she begins to see them.

In 1932, 136 song sparrows, both males and females, were ringed. And at that point, Nice knows them so well that she can distinguish many of them simply by listening to them. She knows, because she has "seen" it, that each male has a unique repertoire, composed of 6 to 9 different songs. She has also started to see that not all song sparrows migrate. Some - the "summer residents" - do, while others - the "winter residents" - stay all year round.

And she sees 4M, a rather pugnacious male in defending his territory. In the early years, 4M forces his neighbour, 1M, to constantly defend his own borders.

Nice sees 4M modify his habits. Until he allows 110M, a young summer resident, to settle in 1M's ancient territory without conflicts...

Margaret Nice sees 4M, 1M, 110M...

But how did she learn to see them?

It may seem obvious, but to see a sparrow, one must get close. The coloured rings allow her this closeness, distinguishing the individual sparrows and, through this distinction, constructing new forms of proximity, of intimacy. But the rings also function as attention devices, drawing her researcher's gaze to differences that are important.

To see a sparrow, it goes without saying that we must pay attention. This attention is not just a polite acknowledgment of presence, but it takes on a political value, because it breaks with the assumption that there is nothing to see there.

Margaret Nice, proto-diplomat of intimacy, was certainly not the only one to have paid attention: even before having interspecies diplomatic corps, humanity has dedicated entire lives to trying to see Others, to gain a better understanding of different ways of being alive. Thousands and thousands of written pages testify to this, and many of the texts by biologists and ethologists are not just scientific texts. We must recognize their full political significance.

Here, among these thousands of pages, among the intimate gestures of an ornithologist fixing coloured rings to the legs of sparrows in her garden, among the thousands of times a falcon lands on the falconer's fist rather than flying away, there is the space where the School of Interspecies Diplomacies and the MuseoMontagna come together to attempt this recognition.

It's the space where the Museum takes on the task of directing our gaze and attention differently. Where it chooses to think of itself as a device of intimacy, breaking with the centuries-old prejudice that blinds us.

What kind of attention does a mountain require to be seen? How should we look at it to understand what matters to it? To become intimate with it?

This tent, placed on a terrace that stretches between the Po River and the Alps, a terrace created by humans, but not necessarily just for humans, is then an outpost of diplomacy. The vision of a possible embassy, the starting of an archive of stories and practices that allow us to begin to see and create alliances.