



20 years of ESSL – monthly jubilee topic

As part of the celebrations of **20 years of ESSL**, we are publishing a series of monthly jubilee topics highlighting different aspects of our work and community. Each month, we also briefly revisit a historical high-impact event featured as the “topic of the month” in the ESSL calendar. This time, we focus on the **large hail event in Grottaferrata and Marino on 26 August 1876**.

Large hail in Grottaferrata and Marino (Lazio, Italy) on 26 August 1876

As this month marks **150 years since the event**, we revisit the large hailstorm that struck **Grottaferrata and Marino on 26 August 1876**. The Jesuit astronomer **Angelo Secchi (1818–1878)**, who witnessed the storm at Grottaferrata, described it as without equal “in living memory” in those parts.

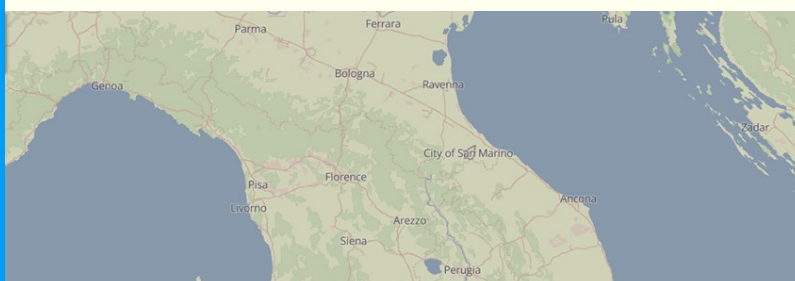
The event is presented in detail by Secchi in an article published in October 1876 in the journal *Rivista Scientifico-Industriale*. According to Secchi’s account, at around 16:00 a black cloud rose to the south-east from Monte Cavo, and by about 17:30 the sky appeared divided into two:

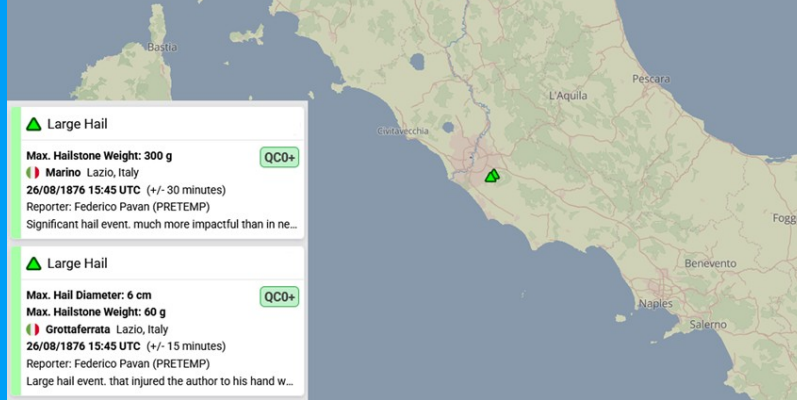
one half with no clouds, the other with dark clouds and almost continuous thunder. The two zones were separated, along a SW–NE line, by a whitish “cloud cord” that rolled forward “like a bale of cotton”, animated by a strong motion about a horizontal axis.



Original report by Angelo Secchi on the 26 August 1876 hailstorm, published in *Rivista Scientifico-Industriale* in October 1876.

When the storm reached Grottaferrata, large raindrops fell at first, followed by **hail the size of hazelnuts, quickly reaching 5–6 cm in diameter**. Secchi gives a very detailed description of the shape of the stones: not spherical but angular, made up of clusters of clear crystals in the form of hexagonal prisms terminating in six-faced pyramids, some more than a centimetre long, attached to irregular transparent masses with an opaque core. One such cluster, resembling a collection of quartz crystals, weighed 60 grams, while others had shapes recalling the heads of medieval maces.





Location of the Marino and Grottaferrata large hail events in Italy (green triangles; source: ESWD).

At Grottaferrata, the hail lasted only 3–4 minutes and there was almost no damage. At Marino (to the south-west of Grottaferrata), however, it went on for nearly a quarter of an hour and caused significant destruction, with **some stones weighing 300 grams**. Secchi concludes that this storm is further proof of the role of the whirling motion of the air and of the descent of cold air from the upper regions, which rapidly freezes the masses of water held in suspension at lower levels.

Secchi, A., 1876: *Di una grandine accaduta il 26 agosto 1876 a Grottaferrata e Marino* (On a hailstorm that occurred on 26 August 1876 at Grottaferrata and Marino). *Rivista Scientifico-Industriale*, VIII, 285–288. ([link](#))

The ESSL Team: What We Are Proud Of

Over the past 20 years, ESSL has been shaped by many people, from colleagues who were there in its early years and helped build the organisation and remain part of ESSL today, to those who have only recently joined the team. We come from different countries and backgrounds, and our paths to ESSL have been very different. Some became involved through research projects or university work, others through forecasting, severe weather event reporting, training activities or collaborations with ESSL.

Today, ESSL is still a relatively small organisation, with a team of 16 employees, but it has grown steadily over the years. What connects us is a shared interest in meteorology and severe weather and, perhaps most importantly, a genuine passion for severe storms.

For our 20th anniversary, we asked colleagues what makes ESSL special and what they are most proud of. Their answers reflect many different parts of ESSL's work, including the European Severe Weather Database, research and scientific collaboration, Testbeds, training activities and ESSL's role within the European severe storm community.

One of ESSL's strengths is the variety of specialised expertise within the team. Different skills and perspectives complement each other, while a shared interest in severe storms, openness to collaboration and a strong European perspective bring the team together. This combination was also highlighted by our colleagues as one of the things that makes ESSL special.

Over the past two decades, ESSL itself has changed considerably. What started as an informal network of researchers has grown into a well-established institution and a point of reference for the European severe storm community. Along the way, ESSL has become a place where research, observations, forecasting, training and severe weather data come together across Europe. This is one of the achievements that our team is particularly proud of.

Looking ahead, there is a clear wish for ESSL to continue growing while keeping the qualities that have shaped it so far: scientific expertise, collaboration, innovation and curiosity. After 20 years, the organisation is much larger and more established than it was in its early years, but its work continues to be driven by something very familiar: a fascination with severe weather and the motivation to better understand it.

The word cloud below reflects some of the qualities and ideas that appeared most often in the responses, including passion for storms, collaboration, expertise, openness and impact.



[Meet the ESSL team](#) and learn more about our work.

ESSL event and training calendar 2026 and 2027

Our event calendar has been updated with upcoming courses, Testbeds, workshops and conferences through 2027.

Date	Activity
6 – 11 September 2026	EMS Annual Meeting (co-sponsored by ESSL) Utrecht, Netherlands
14 – 18 September 2026	ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus)
28 September 2026	20th Anniversary of the ESSL – jubilee event
29 September – 1 October 2026	IF Scale and wind damage assessment workshop
5 – 9 October 2026	ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus)
15 – 19 February 2027	HIGHLIGHT - 2nd edition of new radar course : Optimal use of radar data in severe storm nowcasting
1 – 5 March 2027	The legendary STANDARD every forecaster should attend at least once: Course on Forecasting Severe Convection
15 – 19 March 2027	Course – spring edition: Aviation Forecasting of Severe Convection
10 – 14 May 2027	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 1
31 May – 4 June 2027	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 2
7 – 11 June 2027	ESSL Testbed with focus on radar, nowcasting products and NWP – week 1
21 – 25 June 2027	ESSL Testbed with focus on radar, nowcasting products and NWP – week 2
28 June – 2 July 2027	ESSL Testbed – expert week This event is by invitation only.

5 – 10 September 2027	EMS Annual Meeting (co-sponsored by ESSL) Kraków, Poland
13 – 17 September 2027	EUMETSAT-ESSL Forecaster Training Testbed with focus on MTG – week 3
18 – 22 October 2027	European Conference on Severe Storms – ECSS2027 in Genova, Italy
22 – 26 November 2027	Course – autumn edition: Aviation Forecasting of Severe Convection

You can find details about all events and registration at

<https://www.events.essl.org/>.

Unsure which course to attend? [Try our online quiz!](#)

For further information about registration, please contact us via email at events@essl.org.

Or contact us for [tailored training or forecaster training on the job](#).



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