

LIPU-UK WINS ANNUAL AWARD

Thanks to you - all the members and friends of LIPU-UK - we have had another really successful year and that has been recognised at the annual LIPU Congress. The UK section was voted the best of the year 2001 and presented with a certificate to commemorate the award.

The highlights of the year which have led to that award can be summarised under two headings of membership and fund raising and both show that we go from strength to strength.

Membership has now passed the four figure mark and although we lose some members for natural reasons we are now definitely growing and, as I type this Agnes MacNab of Aberdeen, our newest member, represents a total of 1002 members in nine countries!

Fund raising was even more successful than last year and thanks to the overwhelming generosity of you all, we were able to help the conservation work in Italy with financial support totalling 113 million lire, or just a little under £36,000. A splendid achievement which will be spent on:

1. The anti-poaching camp on the Straits of Messina keeping the pressure on to prevent the poaching of migrating birds.
2. Improvement of the facilities for visitors to the LIPU Volta Scirocco reserve in the Po delta.
3. Providing and stocking additional feeding stations for the reintroduced Griffon Vultures in Sicily.
4. The campaign to prevent destruction of protected habitat in the Gargano National Park.

In addition to these projects which were the basis of the annual appeal, we were able to help in two other ways:

5. Providing the infrastructure for the Sardinian reserve at Carloforte in time for this year's breeding season of the Eleonora's Falcon.

6. Providing "pump-priming" funds to help the LIPU branch at Parabiago recover from an attack on the offices by vandals.

Looking to the future there is no room for complacency, even though I've just been blowing our own trumpet. I enjoy working for an organisation which is successful but we cannot rest on our laurels, there is still so much more to be done. Thank you again for making the year so successful.



News from Italy

FROM THE PRESIDENT OF LIPU

Danilo Mainardi

THE YEAR OF VOLUNTARY WORK

Caught up, as we all are, in the manic rush of the modern world, it's a good idea every now and then to pause and reflect. That's what I have been doing recently. My thoughts have been about voluntary work in general. It is something that concerns us intimately, of course, in LIPU. Although every organisation has its own aims, we are all inspired by similar ideals.

Volunteering means making no financial gain, altruism if you like, and social species such as ours seem to be programmed to behave altruistically in order to survive. So, I for one am not surprised to feel happy about doing voluntary work, or that I have an appetite for it.

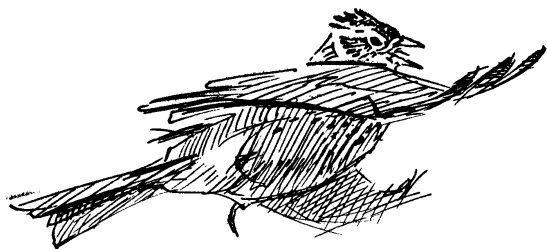
In his speech to inaugurate 2001 as the International Year of Voluntary Work, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, mentioned the importance of sharing - another feature of sociability and altruism. The problem for our species is that our behaviour does not necessarily reflect our genetic instructions! In LIPU we know a lot about this.

ENDANGERED, BUT STILL ON THE HUNTING LIST!

LIPU has launched a new campaign to help save 11 endangered bird species that can still be shot legally

by Marco Gustin

Italy is one of the last three countries in Europe (along with France and Greece) that still allows the hunting of small birds (50g and less). One of the unlucky victims is the Skylark - famed for its evocative aerial song. Here, as elsewhere, it is in serious decline, down by 40% in 30 years in some European countries, mainly as a result of today's intensive agriculture. The loss of winter crop-stubble due to modern autumn sowing practices is partly to blame, together with chemical pollution. Unfortunately the Skylark is not alone.



Other 'Red-listed' (endangered) bird species are at risk from this continuing environmental degradation. Absurdly, they are still being hunted here in Italy.

Targets include Pintail, Gadwall and Garganey ducks, the beautiful Black Grouse with its lyre-shaped tail and the Rock Partridge, of which Italy is home to 67% of the world population. We also have 80% of Europe's population of Barbary Partridge, but no matter, it is still hunted! And the list goes on ... the poor Quail also suffers heavy natural losses on its long migration from Africa, and the little Jack Snipe is practically extinct in winter on Italy's few wetland sites. 2 million Woodcock are slaughtered every year in Italy and that's over 20% of the whole European population! And finally the Turtle Dove, a popular summer "warm-up" target for the hunters before their real season kicks off once again.

NATIONAL PARKS AND RHETORIC

Managing Protected Areas in the Regions is one of today's political challenges

by Nino Martino

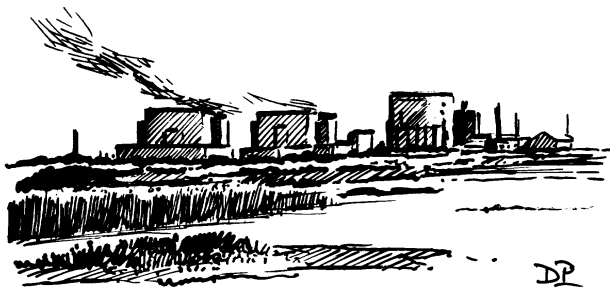
Having crossed the threshold of the new millennium, we are now wondering whether the target of protecting 10% of the area of Italy has been reached. The target was, in any case, no more than symbolic as an objective, but symbols in complex modern societies have the power to stimulate hopes and dreams, as well as alerting us to possible dangers.

The percentage of Protected Areas varies according to the methods used in its calculation. We environmentalists have managed to achieve a total of just over 7%, under a wide variety of headings, and this figure is confirmed in a number of updates to the official List of Protected Areas issued by the Ministry for the Environment. However, there is no need to give up or get discouraged: another 5% of Italy's land area, even if it affected by genuine conservation problems, is still under

some form of protection and recognised for its environmental value (Ramsar Wetlands, Important Bird Areas, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Local Community Interest).

It is the intrinsic value of the environment and its contribution to our quality of life that we must fight to defend. But only if we succeed in gaining people's attention and in persuading the media will we be able to influence MPs and Senators, in a country set on reform and tending towards federalism within the framework of the European Union; a country that must not be allowed to continue spending less in defence of its superb natural heritage than it does on building a few kilometres of road.

We take pride in seeing European leaders choosing Italy's coasts and countryside and our cities of art for their well-deserved breaks. We should be even more proud to be able to accompany Blair, Schröder and Jospin on visits to National Parks and Reserves, like LIPU Reserves, where time seems to stand still, stirred only by a darting dragonfly, the whirr of a kingfisher's wings or the majestic plunge of a whale. It is here - in a place where our children can learn that life is not all rush and frenzy, a race against time, money and competition - that lies the heart of our culture.



It is not to be found in those gigantic industrial complexes located in isolated areas and seldom operational, built with special Government funds to assist the poorest areas in the South; nor is it present in chaotic, aggressive urbanisation schemes, and is also absent from an economy based on the processing of imported raw materials.

In none of these scenarios can be found the future of an intelligent and co-operative nation, human and caring, as we would prefer it to be. It will, rather, be in a society that is run on more thoughtful and ecological lines; by extending a helping hand to its weaker members, and to the immigrant seeking warmth and humanity; by allowing our vast wealth of museums to open on Sundays; by making a serious attempt to combine species and habitat protection with the possibility of a dignified life for people living in sparsely populated areas.

These are some of the issues on which the new Parliament will be judged.

Politics today

Now that the somewhat gallant phase of creating a national system of Protected Areas is behind us, let us not forget that the Parks are anxiously waiting to see a politician capable of bringing them into being - places like the Po Delta and Gennargentu, the Cansiglio and Mont Blanc, not to mention the real and efficient protection that is required for the International Whale Sanctuary. But the principal challenge facing all politicians - whether or not they are based in Rome, or have available the ever-increasing funds required, or the decision-making capacity now devolved to the Regions - is to ensure that the Regional Parks are properly managed. After the extraordinary amount of time and effort spent on setting up Regional autonomy and local expertise to run Parks and Reserves, urgent action is needed, for example, to look after the outstanding heritage of biodiversity and culture to be found in the Alpine Wildlife Areas at Capo Passero.

Are some of these areas too extensive? Have some of them suffered as a result of human interference? Let us discuss these matters. But let us talk equally calmly about how we regard the outrageous boundaries of other Parks, like the "leopard-spot" scheme introduced on Elba and in the Tusco-Emilian Appenines. We are quite prepared to accept tough decisions, but these should be arrived at rationally, not as a result of knee-jerk reactions

to frantic demonstrations by vested private interests against the will of the general public.

We prefer that people should be able to work and to live decent lives, but living well also requires clean air, green woods and uncontaminated seas, as well as peace and quiet - not just the rustle of money and the exchange of favours.

We ask of the new Parliament, of the new Government and of the Regional Assemblies: a calm and considered debate and their respectful attention to the non-voters that are, nonetheless, the pillars that support everyone's quality of life, namely, clean air and water, blue skies and blue seas, swallows that return, flowers in Spring, pure snow - and the inner calm of the man of integrity, who has done what he knows to be right. Which may not, at first sight, always appear to be most obviously beneficial.

NEWS OF A REGIONAL PARK

CESANO MADERNO

This is an example of a regional park that successfully manages its own land, while maintaining a watchful eye on the quality of life for everyone!

by Mauro Belardi and Mauro Canziani

The LIPU reserve of Cesano Maderno, near Milan, is an important example of how effective collaboration between protected areas, local organisations and residents associations enables the land to be treated as a valuable asset for all. The area had an industrial past that impacted heavily on its environmental integrity. Today the park is regarded not only as a model reserve because of the recovery and management of its natural terrain, but also as a way of increasing public awareness of environmental issues.

In 1997 LIPU, the Commune of Cesano Maderno and the Consorzio Parco Groane signed an agreement allocating 5 billion lire (£1.7 million sterling) to be invested in the regional park. The money was derived largely from public funds donated by

Cesano Maderno, with contributions from Parco Groane and, to a lesser extent, the towns of Limbiate and Bovisio Masciago.

Planning and construction

The number of projects undertaken is truly impressive. The most important to date include the acquisition of over 800,000 square metres of woods and heaths, planning and creation of a 12 hectare wetland, consolidation of riverbanks using non-invasive engineering techniques, revitalisation of torrents, implementation of schemes to improve the forest (creating meadows, planting trees, maintaining heaths and controlling non-indigenous vegetation) locating and maintaining wildlife corridors leading into neighbouring green areas, burying electricity cables and constructing a visitor centre, footpaths, cycle paths, and a rehabilitation centre for wild animals.

In addition, the LIPU reserve of Cesano Maderno is involved with a programme of activities in accordance with the local Agenda 21 initiative, promoted by four Communes. These range from research that spearheads important environmental recovery projects, to public education and awareness programmes that help to attract several thousands of visitors and students each year. Local residents have responded without hesitation; many volunteers are dedicated to the reserve and offer an invaluable contribution, giving life to one of the most well organised examples of local people voluntarily managing their own land.

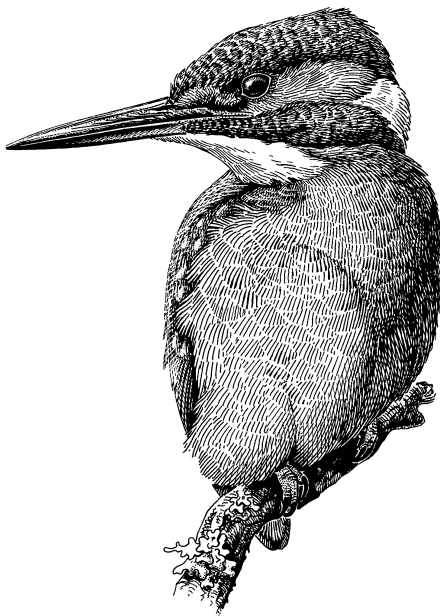
Transferable Skills

The Government bodies involved now intend to add further value to the work achieved in the reserve by training technical staff, particularly those employed in public administration, to learn skills that are transferable to other similar projects. This will be thanks to the Centre for Environmental Education, currently under construction, and to relevant educational courses and workshops which will be run there. At a time when public administrators often pose a threat to the management of land by focusing political activities on the business interests of the few, the experience of our reserve

represents a positive example of how biodiversity as well as quality of life for all can be achieved.

A Valuable Habitat

The most significant environmental improvement achieved by the LIPU reserve of Cesano Maderno is the creation of a 12-hectare wetland area inside a disused clay pit. There used to be small pockets of wetland in the region but these have now disappeared as a result of drainage and urbanisation. Here we have excavated three ponds with reedbeds, islets, a wet meadow and small wet woods and have extended a system of temporary woodland ponds suitable for birds such as Little Bittern and Kingfisher, for amphibians and for attracting migratory animals.



The region, which is quickly returning to its natural state, is now the largest wetland area between Milan and the pre-alpine lakes and has quickly been colonised by amphibians and aquatic insects and utilised by Little Grebes, Ducks, Mallards, Coots, Moorhens and Reed Buntings for nesting purposes. Several shorebirds visited the area this spring, including Common, White-rumped and Wood Sandpipers, Greenshanks, Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers, as well as Storks and ducks such as Garganeys. Wading birds have also arrived, among which are Great White Herons,

Night Herons and Little Egrets, also birds of prey such as Hen Harriers and Marsh Harriers and others including Kingfishers, Sand Martins, and Alpine Swifts: very satisfying results in view of the fact that the site is within a highly urbanised area!

LIPU PROJECTS

A FLIGHT TRAINING CENTRE

Thanks to the LIPU rehabilitation centres each year hundreds of juvenile birds of prey can now be reintroduced into the wild.

by Andrea Ferri

It's now spring and the colour of young leaves fluttering in the breeze contrasts sharply against the intense blue sky. A rather unusual guest has arrived at the centre in a box. Soft brown-grey feathers appear to mask its large clawed feet and curved grey beak, which betray the creature's destiny: that of daring predator. Its big yellow eyes and alarm-bell like cry do not leave one in any doubt. It's a baby Long-Eared Owl. Every year hundreds of mostly nocturnal young birds of prey abandon their nests, are found in apparently critical condition and are brought to a LIPU Rescue Centre.

A thorough medical examination assesses the physical condition of the owl after which any necessary treatment is given. It will then remain at the LIPU centre, being fed using a type of toy owl that mimics the features of its parents.

A school for birds of prey...

Once it is able to feed itself, the baby owl is transferred to the LIPU rehabilitation centre; this is a 'school' which allows the young nocturnal hunter to fine tune flight and predatory techniques necessary for life in the wild. Here the young birds of prey are kept for 30 days, the necessary period required to learn and memorise the characteristics of their surrounding habitat. As soon as they are able to fly, the large windows of the flying barn will be opened and their knowledge of the area

will allow them to go out and return to the centre to feed.



Over a period of about 60 days the apprentice hunter, with its comical appearance characterised by ear tufts typical of the species, will complete his adult plumage, strengthen muscle tone and improve hunting techniques. Obviously its first attempts at hunting will not be successful, so we will provide sufficient food at the LIPU centre which will continue to be a reference point of fundamental importance for survival until the bird has learnt to catch its own prey.

...and also for people

Thanks to this project each year hundreds of young birds of prey are successfully introduced back to the wild to the enthusiasm and excitement of thousands of visitors. These LIPU rehabilitation centres are situated along nature trails in the protected areas so have the added function of increasing public awareness. The LIPU centre is therefore an open habitat where man and birds of prey can meet and learn to live together.

AN INVITATION TO VISIT

In the Cesano Maderno reserve situated within the Groane National Park north of Milan, one of the

LIPU rehabilitation centres dominates the view from the summit of a steep dry valley (fosso di groana). Here it is possible to view the juvenile birds of prey during their recuperation from within an observation walkway panelled in wood and mirrored glass. This is a very special experience for visitors who are able to see these extraordinary animals at close range without disturbing them or interfering with their natural activity in any way.

Guided tours of the rehabilitation centre may be booked in advance at the reserve's Visitor Centre. For further information please call the Cesano Macerno LIPU Reserve Tel 0362 54 68 27.

BIRDWATCHING - THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Don't forget your "bins" - even at this time of year!

by Franco Roscelli and Luciano Ruggieri

Summer is a notoriously bad birdwatching season in Italy - particularly for those who live in the cities of the Po Plain. Spring migrations have passed and the breeding season is more or less over. On top of this, the sheer heat of the day flattens bird activity, apart from flurries at dawn and dusk. Never mind folks! There's still life out there somewhere! You just need to head for the right places - in particular the mountains and the coast.

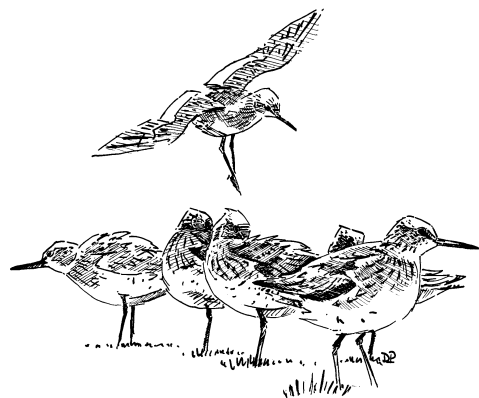
The mountains

Melting snows mean that it is relatively easy to reach a good altitude and to reap the benefits of a close encounter with the wildlife that lives above the tree line. Choughs, Alpine Choughs, Snow Finches and Alpine Accentors are just some of the typical birds whose young are just about to fledge in July. Adults are busy feeding and it's a great time to observe their antics. But please - don't hang around too long in one spot and keep your distance, especially if an adult bird is alarm calling. Too much disturbance may cause nests to be abandoned and you may be helping opportunistic predators, like foxes and weasels, to home in on sites more easily.

The Gran Paradiso and Stelvio National Parks (NW and NE Italy respectively) are rich in bird life. Typical passerines include Lesser Whitethroat, Water Pipit, Citril Finch, Wallcreeper and Dun-nock. What's more, if you are lucky, you may catch a glimpse of the rare and magnificent Lammergeier. Thanks to an international reintroduction scheme, the Lammergeier is once again gliding around the Italian Alps - after being hunted to extinction in this region 70 years ago.

The coast

Even in high summer the coast can have its rewards. If your holidays happen to be in Sardinia, Sicily or some of the smaller islands there is plenty of scope for birdwatching. The first passerines are returning to Africa and waders too. The Sardinian and Sicilian lagoon reserves (Cabras, Santa Gilla, Molentargius in Sardinia; Vendicari, Pantani di Longarini and Cuba reserves in Sicily) are fabulous feeding stations for waders.



Typical species include Avocets, Greater Flamingos, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints. And then there is the rich habitat of the wetlands, inland of the coastal dunes, where even small pools can be teeming with life.

The island of San Pietro, off the SW coast of Sardinia, remains famous for its large colony of Eleonora's Falcon, thanks largely to LIPU's anti-hunting camp on the island. The colony has assembled by August, but breeding begins in September, uniquely among birds of prey. This timing

coincides with the passage of their migrating passerine prey.

OPERATION FREE FLIGHT

by Rino Esposito

LIPU, the Environmental Operations arm of the state police (NOE), and game wardens have concluded an enormous operation against poaching on the Domitian shoreline, between Naples and Caserta. Operation "Free Flight" was planned by the Rome police following a detailed submission by LIPU. After months of inquiries and surveillance, an attack was launched. Four poachers were unmasked, their rifles, cartridges, acoustic decoys and other equipment confiscated, as well as 7 dead Garganey, 1 Teal and 2 Black-winged Stilt, and 1 wounded Garganey. Hunting occurs on this shoreline especially in the spring migration, during the closed season. Waders, ducks and shorebirds are killed systematically from the artificial hides put up by poachers. Attracted by the deceptive decoys, some acoustic, some live, the birds land on the water where they are caught in a blaze of gunfire.

The hides are fitted with benches, and even beds and stoves. From the use of these structures there has developed a really profitable business. A single hide, built somewhere on a migration route and, for the time, being difficult to control, can earn 20 million lire a year (£7000 sterling).

Operation "Free Flight" has put an end to the impunity that this activity has enjoyed for years. Moreover, a very serious fact has emerged: some of the illegal emplacements were established on land that was leased from the commune of Carinola (CE). To increase the effect of its surveillance, the LIPU task will be to put pressure on this commune and other local bodies to adopt concrete measures to confirm the legality of what happens on their land. LIPU's proposal is to create a protected reserve: where today criminal associations do business at the expense of the national environment, tomorrow a legally conducted business will be able to operate fully respecting the area's biodiversity.

AND THE STORY GOES ON

There was once a reserve where many animals used to live, called Massaciuccoli

by Ugo Faralli and Andrea Fontanelli

There are stories and stories. This is the story of one of the "historic" LIPU reserves, the one at Lake Massaciuccoli. The story, shared by almost all the LIPU reserves, made up of nature and birds, of volunteers and people, but also of battles and setbacks, of successes and failures, of meetings with local realities and with the Migliarino-San Rossore-Massaciuccoli Park. It's a story that goes round again and again. The story of a reserve born in far-off 1985 thanks to a formal agreement between the Park and LIPU.

A Difficult Beginning.

They were passionate times. The Park had been founded six years earlier and there were still serious tensions between it and the local people, especially with the hunters, which often led to personal threats and acts of vandalism. There were confrontations between LIPU's representatives and reserve officers on one side and intruders from the poaching gangs, setting fire to the canebrakes, walkways and hides: in 1989 the reserve's visitors' centre was completely burnt to the ground. Then the story took its first turn. We decided, with a grand campaign in the magazine (then called "Uccelli") to purchase an old farmhouse on the lakeside in the little village of Massaciuccoli, right opposite where we reorganised the visitors' centre that had been destroyed. After this enormous effort, it needed four more years, however, of the Association investing more energy, human and economic, in the Reserve.

The First Fruits

In 1994 the story took another turn and thanks to a group of volunteers from the Pisa branch, LIPU resumed management of the farmhouse and of the reserve. Before us we had a situation that was certainly not rosy: the walkway to the marshland was almost totally destroyed, the farmhouse needed

rebuilding and relations between the Park and local people needed much improvement. From that moment the story turned anew, and for the better. LIPU volunteers had faith in it, started to establish projects, one suddenly became a bricklayer, another an electrician or house painter or even a plumber, and investing their limited funds in it began to work at top speed.

By the end of the year they had managed to open a little visitors' centre in one of the houses in the hamlet, and then a small but functional hostel. And the hostel worked, for that summer we managed to organise the first stay by children and the first camp of volunteer workers, which enabled us to reinstate the walkways and the hides. From that moment the story has rolled on, always upwards, right up till now. A warden was appointed, activities with schools resumed, summer camps, events and punting excursions, contact with public bodies started again and with the University of Pisa and, most importantly of all, with the National Park. Signing the agreement with the Park guarantees financial support and transforms the centre into the Chiarone Nature Reserve, covering about fifty hectares.



There are some 6,000 visitors each year, more than fifty school visits and almost 200 children take part in summer camps, environmental education activities and Nature Events, as well as conservation projects like the tending of the canebrakes and the habitat to make it suitable for Bitterns and Drosera, a little carnivorous plant.

To do and to see

If you wish to see more make contact with the LIPU personnel on the Reserve (tel. 05 84 97 55 67). We can organise a visit on foot for birdwatchers. There are Moustached Warblers, Marsh Harriers and, on the lake, ducks and cormorants will kindle curiosity in any season. Alternatively you can choose a visit by punt, a real total immersion in the marshes, with close encounters with Purple Herons, Marsh Harriers, Black-winged Stilts, brightly coloured Bearded Tits and the elusive Little Bittern; the more fortunate might see the ultra-rare Bittern, (of which Lake Massaciucoli has the most important population in Italy).

For the more audacious it is also possible to hire a kayak or canoe to lose themselves in the crowded network of channels that criss-cross the marsh, and anyone who wishes to stay for a few days might avail himself of the hospitality of our guest-house at a very reasonable price.

ALBATROSS - A FIRST SUCCESS

The campaign launched by BirdLife International against the slaughter of albatrosses and of other seabirds caused by "longlining" (the fishing technique which uses extremely long lines to which are attached millions of hooks), has had its first successful outcome. An international agreement (The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels) has been promulgated which establishes the conservation measures that will have to be taken by the signatory countries, which include research and monitoring, the reduction of mortality due to fishing practices and the elimination from the breeding sites of non-natural predators (artificially introduced rats and cats), site protection and the reduction of pollution. Agreement was reached at a meeting, which took place in Cape Town, South Africa, among representatives of those countries whose fleets fish the seas populated by these enormous birds. BirdLife International is now pressing all those countries to ratify and immediately to put into action the measures foreseen by the agreement.

LAMMERGEIER PROJECT

An extraordinary reintroduction project organised by the Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture, is restoring to the mountains of the Alps one of their most fascinating avian inhabitants, the Lammergeier or Bearded Vulture. Believed, largely on account of its curious feeding habits (it feeds on bones), to be a harmful bird of ill omen it was persecuted to the edge of extinction throughout the alpine chain. Now, after almost a century, it is beginning once more to repopulate these peaks through a project, which also involves Italy. In fact the re-introductions, apart from those in Austria, France and Switzerland, are taking place in the Maritime Alps Natural Park and the Stelvio National Park. After the first case of breeding in Upper Savoy in 1997, a pair bred successfully in the Stelvio Park in 1998 and in 2000, the number of pairs has risen to two. These instances of breeding underline not only the benefits of a strategy of international collaboration but, and there was never a greater need for it, the importance of the role that the parks can play in the conservation of the environment and wildlife.

THANKS TO YOU

WORK IN PROGRESS

Positive results in the past few months include: -

- Extra protection for the Carloforte reserve on the island of San Pietro, off SW Sardinia.
- A blitz on illegal hunting in the Campania region.
- Continued support for our swallow-friendly farms project.

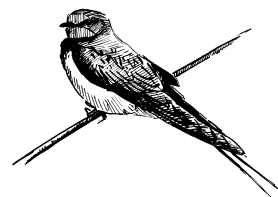
CARLOFORTE: A haven for falcons

Finally, after 3 years, an environmental management agreement has been reached between the Commune of Carloforte, the Province of Cagliari and LIPU. Carloforte Reserve is located on a pristine coastline on the island of San Pietro. It is one of the world's main sites for breeding populations

of Eleonora's Falcon. Thanks to a generous gift, the reserve is now 48 hectares bigger, 300 hectares in total. A 5-year habitat management plan is now under way, being carried out by the two reserve wardens and a team of volunteers from the local LIPU group in Cagliari. A visitor centre opens there this summer, part-funded by the Sardinian Regional Council and part by LIPU-UK and AISPA.



The passing through Parliament of Article 8/122 means more money and more resources for the Forest Ranger Service. This will help them in their fight against the poachers and LIPU has been pushing for this for over a year. The battle began in 1999 when a chronic lack of funds became obvious. Together with Stefano Allavena of the Forest Rangers, Alfonso Scanio and the Greens in the Senate, LIPU lobbied for amendments to the law. Now the Rangers have over 1/2 million pounds sterling per annum for the current year and also for 2002, to target the poachers and purchase equipment. The next objective will be to secure this level of funding for the future.



PURPLE GALLINULE

These are the largest members of the Rail family in Europe and our reintroduction programme is going well. The first calling males have been heard on the Biviere di Gela nature reserve in southern Sicily. On June 11, 30 more birds were transported from a reserve near Valencia, Spain, one group was released at Biviere di Gela (again) and another at Foce del Simeto reserve, south of Catania in eastern Sicily. A public seminar was held a couple of days later at Catania University to explain this LIPU project and to discuss future conservation at Sicily's remaining wetlands.

HUNTING - KEEP OUT EKOCLUB!

Lazio Regional Court has barred Ekoclub from membership of the Joint Environmental Protection Group, which also includes WWF and LIPU. Ekoclub can no longer attend meetings nor participate in park and reserve management policy. This was mainly due to Ekoclub's procedural failures, but LIPU's main criticism of Ekoclub is its unswerving alliance with the pro-hunting organisation Federcaccia.

ANTI-POACHING VICTORY

SWALLOWS PROJECT: ESSELUNGA IS ON OUR SIDE.

Another step forward in the protection of swallows and towards more natural agriculture is marked by the happy collaboration between LIPU and ESSELUNGA, a major distribution company. Thanks largely to the contribution of Esselunga, who have donated to LIPU a percentage of their income from sales of BIO Esselunga in April and May this year, it will be possible to build a second Swallow centre, following that already in operation in LIPU's Castel di Guido reserve. This new site will be close to Milan, within a state nature reserve.

The "Swallow Centres" are models of farming in accord with the environment, more sympathetic to the needs of both wildlife and man, centres of education about the environment, open to the public and schools, with discovery trails, a visitor centre and displays. They serve also as places where farmers can meet for discussion, research, shaping and spreading ideas.

A Return to News from LIPU-UK

At last year's British Birdwatching Fair LIPU member James Parry bought a draw ticket and

thought no more of it until he discovered he had won the first prize of a free stay in the Po delta for some really tremendous bird watching.

He gave in to my coercion and has written a super account of his trip...

IN SEARCH OF THE FERRUGINOUS DUCK

A trip to the Po Delta

by James Parry & Sue Whittle

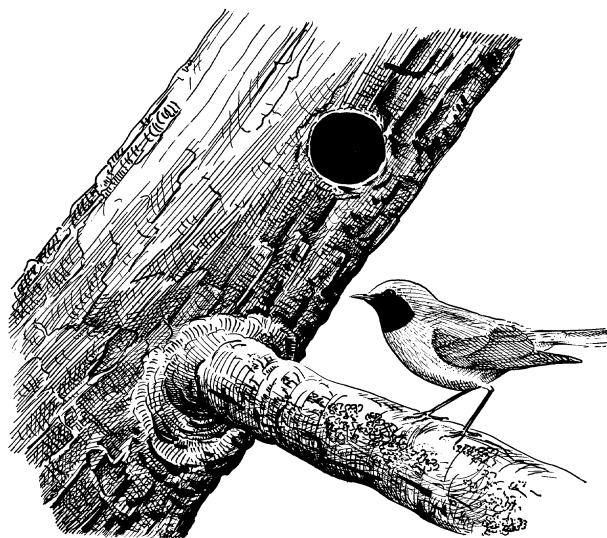
"Birdwatching in Italy? You must be joking! Don't they shoot everything there?" So chorused our friends when we announced that we were the winners of a week's free accommodation and board in Italy's Po Delta, in a competition organised by Delta 2000 at the British Birdwatching Fair last year. "Well, sort of," we replied, "there is a hunting problem in some parts of Italy, and that's one of the reasons why we joined LIPU. But there's plenty of excellent habitat over there and lots of birds to see!". We probably sounded rather defensive, but little did we know that not only was all that we said true but that we on the brink of a few days' outstanding birding.

The first issues were when to go and how to get there. We finally settled on mid-September, when we reckoned on the weather being less hot, with fewer people around and the migration in full swing. We were right on all three counts. The weather proved to be perfect - clear blue skies every day and the temperature in the high 70s, so perfect for both birding and tanning (man cannot live by birds alone!). We certainly never felt crowded by people at any time - most tourists had departed and we saw no other birders - and yet birds could hardly have been more plentiful. New arrivals each day were a constant reminder that the southward sweep towards warmer climes was at its peak.

Getting out there was dead easy. We flew for a bargain £44 each return from London Stansted to Verona (Brescia actually, not far away) and then hired a car to take us down to the Po Delta, a journey of about three hours on a good motorway. Delta 2000 had arranged a chalet for us at

Camping Spina in the Adriatic resort of Lido di Spina, some 100 kilometres south of Venice and right on the edge of the Delta proper. We arrived with some trepidation, having read that Camping Spina was reputedly Europe's largest campsite. Visions of screaming hordes and holiday camp-style regimentation filled our minds. Would breakfast be compulsory at 6.30am? Was it lights out at 10pm? Were we talking self-service school meals in a canteen?

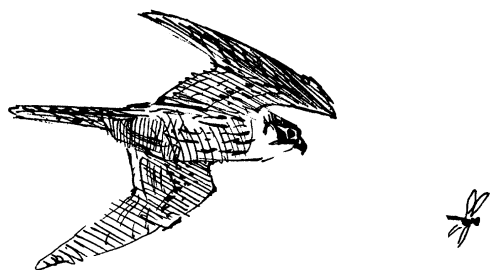
The truth could hardly have been more different. We were almost the only guests left on the site, the peak months of July and August having passed. Friendly and attentive staff made us feel very welcome, the food and facilities were excellent, and what was more, the site itself was full of birds. Landscaped among pine woods and near to some excellent brackish lagoons, the campsite is ideally placed for birding on foot or by bike. Small passerines abounded in the pines, especially Pied Flycatchers and tit species, and we saw both tree and Italian sparrows around the chalets. The scrub on the seaward side of the site produced excellent views of Cetti's Warbler, Red-backed Shrike and Orphean Warbler, as well as many commoner migrants such as Redstart, Whinchat, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Goldcrest.



The adjacent lagoons of Bellocchio are protected from the sea by a sandy ridge, and our first visit there gave us an early glimpse of the huge local population of heron species. Little Egrets abounded, whilst in the deeper water stately Great

White Herons were a common sight. Grey Herons were also present in good numbers, along with a host of wading birds and ducks. Often loafing on posts in the middle were Gull-billed Terns, a scarce breeding bird in the area, and on one day we found several Caspian Terns there. Equally exciting were two Ospreys, which sailed into view as we were watching the terns. A migratory species in this part of Italy, we were lucky enough to see several during our time in the Delta.

One of the most productive birding places locally is Valle Mandriole, an superb habitat of marshland and open water, teeming with birdlife. An excellent tower hide overlooks one of the main lagoons, and from there we enjoyed good views of Night Heron, Spoonbill, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, two Hobbies repeatedly hounding a flock of Starlings, and a Peregrine zooming overhead.



It was here that we had hoped to find the two species that we particularly wanted to see: Pygmy Cormorant and, perhaps even more exciting, Ferruginous Duck. Apparently up to 80 'pygmies' had been present the previous week, but - typically - they had all disappeared the day before we arrived. And although there were plenty of duck present, we could not find any Ferruginous among them. What we did see however were several coypu, introduced into the Delta a few years ago and regarded by some local ecologists as being of positive conservation benefit in the sense that their healthy appetite for reeds helps keep the canals and dykes clear of vegetation, thereby improving the circulation of water around the system. From there we went to nearby Pialasso della Baiona, where we managed to locate a couple of elegant

Slender-billed Gulls amongst the groups of black-headed, although the passing Swallowtail butterflies caused almost as much excitement.

On one day we were taken out by local birding expert Menotti Passarella. Menotti knows the whole area exceptionally well, and took us to several excellent spots that we would never have found otherwise. Foremost amongst these were the rice-fields of Bonifica Gallale. The Delta is Italy's premier rice-growing region, and large areas of low-lying arable land are given over to rice production. The requirement of rice for ample water means that the whole area is full of frogs, which in turn attract herons galore. We saw hundreds of Little and Cattle Egrets there, as well as several Purple Herons and the occasional Squacco, the latter usually lurking unseen in a ditch before suddenly taking flight as we approached. There were also good numbers of raptors hunting over the fields, including both Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, as well as interesting small migratory birds, such as Wheatear and Yellow Wagtail.

With Menotti we also visited the shores of the Valle di Comacchio, one on the largest of the lagoons in the area. Here we found a group of fifty or so Flamingos, which this year nested in the Delta for the first time. Kentish Plover, Avocet and Shelduck were also present, and we were lucky enough to find two Marsh Sandpipers among the large groups of Redshank and Greenshank. The nearby complex of scrub, reedbeds and small channels held Kingfisher, Stonechat, Bearded Tit and yet more Red-backed Shrikes, but the reed-fringed pools still would not yield the two species we had initially been interested in! A road circumnavigates much of the Valle di Comacchio on a raised dyke, and from here we had excellent close views of several Black-necked Grebes, a wintering bird in this part of Italy. Apparently in January and February this area can be full of wintering wildfowl.

The highlight of our day with Menotti came at the Ostellato Pools, another potential venue for the long-awaited Ferruginous Duck. There were no ducks of any description there, but consolation of the most dramatic kind came with the arrival of no

less than six Red-footed Falcons, including three beautiful adult males, which proceeded to hunt dragonflies right in front of us, down to range of a few feet. They were a quite magnificent sight, arguably the highlight of the trip, and somehow rather unexpected, although Menotti told us that they have recently begun to breed locally. Against a backdrop of Black and Whiskered Terns hawking over the pools, they looked truly superb.

One of the great advantages of the Po Delta (in a non-birding sense!) is its proximity to some fantastic cultural sites. We spent a wonderful afternoon in nearby Ravenna looking at the famous mosaics, and Venice is an easy day trip away. We finished our holiday with a couple of days in Verona, where we were still adding birds - Grey Wagtail and Common Sandpiper along the Adige river in the city centre! All in all, we saw 104 species in what were effectively only three days of full birding (the rest spent sunbathing and being cultural), and we weren't trying too hard - no 6am starts for instance! We cannot recommend this part of Italy highly enough for birdwatchers and would urge more people to go there, as this will help the efforts of local conservationists to secure its future and protect the local wildlife more effectively. The staff at the Delta 2000 office were incredibly helpful, and Menotti Passarella was an excellent guide - a real star at picking out the local bird highlights.

Finally, an ironic footnote. A few days after we got back, a friend rang to say that there was an unusual duck at Welney reserve, just a few miles down the road from where we live. We went to take a look - and, yes, it was a Ferruginous. A splendid male, performing right out in the open in front of the main hide. And after all those hours spent scanning the reed-fringed edges of endless pools in the Delta. Of course, no-one was sure where it had come from, but we like to think that it may have drifted up from Italy..... Now we're waiting for a Pygmy Cormorant!



RECENT CHANGES

In Parma, LIPU has a new Director General in Nino Martino who took over from Armando Gariboldi at the beginning of June. Nino has spent his life working in the field of nature conservation and we look forward to making further progress in the future. I hope to print a short profile of Nino in the next issue.

* * * * *

I met Nino late in May when I was privileged to be invited to attend the annual LIPU Congress near Vieste in Puglia. Ugo Faralli, responsible for LIPU reserves and recovery centres was my host and fortunately for me he did the driving from Parma to the south. Although the journey lasted 14 hours it was a chance to talk of so many things to do with LIPU's work in the field.

We broke the journey at Casacalenda LIPU reserve in Molise region and the warden, Carlo Meo, showed us around the wooded hillside which is the reserve. It was then that I discovered how most LIPU reserves are managed. The local commune, the owners of the land, were planning to clear fell the hillside and raise money from the sale of the timber. LIPU entered into some hard negotiations which resulted in the local authority turning completely and agreeing to finance the running by LIPU of the hillside as a nature reserve.

The community benefits from an increase in visitors to a region which is not rich and the success of the scheme can be seen in the provision by the commune of buildings for a recently opened bird hospital which is managed by Carlo's wife, Angela.

Excellent co-operation between the community and LIPU but the future of the reserve will always rest on the continuing good will of the local authority - I will return to this in more detail in a future issue.

I am not a fluent Italian speaker, no, I am not even a speaker of the language so it was a shock when I was asked to say a few words on the second

morning! I wrote what I wanted to say and Ugo translated it and I practised most of the evening before. It did get a lot easier and more fluent (?) as the level of wine moved down the bottle!

I listened to various addresses and was impressed by the commitment and dedication shown by all the speakers - even if many of the words were unknown the spirit came over very clearly.

After dinner on the last evening a large cake was presented to Armando and then the best kept secret of the meeting was over when I found that I, too, had to receive a presentation as I described earlier. It was a very emotional moment, standing among friends on your behalf.

Somehow, in the midst of all this we managed a little bird watching at a superb wetland to the south of Manfredonia called Daunia Risi - the place where the reintroduction of the White-headed Duck is taking place and further south still to Gravina di Laterza home of Egyptian Vultures and breeding Lanner falcons.

The long journey back to Parma was broken by a visit to Colfiorito a beautiful lake with reedbeds set in a high altitude pass in the mountains. Bitterns boomed as Ugo explained that there are eels in the lake that have to climb many thousands of feet in their migration from the hatching grounds in the Sargasso Sea - and we think we are so very clever!. It was late when we reached Parma but we finished the day in that way which we would love to copy if we enjoyed the Mediterranean climate - sitting in the piazza at midnight with good food and a glass of wine.

The following day was for buying fresh Parmesan cheese, a visit to the local Torrile reserve and then to the airport for the afternoon flight home - a super trip which I'll remember for ever.

Line drawings used in this issue are by kind permission of the RSPB

TRANSLATION

The translation of the Ali Notizie from the Italian has been done members of our team of translators:

Gary French, Steve Langhorn, Alan Morgan, Pamela Tew, John Walder and Brian Horkley.

Thank you all.

AND FINALLY...

We are already into the traditional holiday season and many of us will be travelling to interesting places so may I make a plea?

I really enjoy putting together the newsletters and my aim is to make them as interesting as possible; to that end I am keen to print articles of general interest in addition to those very important ones translated from the Italian.

An example in this issue is that by James and Sue who had such a good time in the Po delta, but it doesn't have to be in Italy, it doesn't even have to be about bird watching...

A happy editor is one with a small stock of articles ready to use when he has a page or two to fill - so how about letting the frustrated author loose and sending me an article for the future? Thank you.



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LIPU-UK Autumn Draw - 2001

After last year's successful prize draw when we raised nearly £1,800, we are again holding a draw this Autumn with an exciting list of prizes. I realise that some people may not enthuse over this kind of fundraising, so please discard the enclosed tickets if you prefer not to participate.

The closing date is **Saturday, 20th October, 2001** and the ticket counterfoils and moneys should be returned to **Mike Berry** (whose address is on the tickets). Cheques should be payable to LIPU-UK. Please don't bother to return the unsold books this year.

We really appreciate the efforts of members in trying to sell as many books of tickets as possible to help our vital fundraising. Note that the ticket price this year is a more convenient **50p**, and that the books contain 10 tickets each, thus coming to a nice round **£5!** Each member (unless you've expressly asked not to receive them) should find two books enclosed, but please don't hesitate to contact Mike Berry on 01283-733238 should you need further books.

The prizes this year are a mixture of 'bird-related' and non 'bird-related' – reflecting many people's comments that last year's prizes lacked appeal to friends who were not particularly interested in birds or wildlife generally. The following is a fuller description of the prizes:

The **Star Prize** is **£500** cash. After that, there is a choice of the following:

- **12 bottle case of wines from the premium wine regions of the world (worth £75)**
- including a gold medal winning classic claret, a crisp, dry gold medal Sauvignon Touraine, a sumptuous white Burgundy from France, a medal winning 7 year old red from Spain and a cherry scented Chianti from Italy.
- **Double CD-ROM "Guide to British Birds"** (latest version 6.01 - courtesy of *Birdguides*)
- This is an excellent way for both beginners and more experienced bird-watchers to study birds and bird song. This is one of the best bird-related software packages on the market.
- **Framed print by Derbyshire artist Pollyanna Pickering** (courtesy of *Pollyanna Pickering*)
- Pollyanna is an award-winning artist who has long held a fascination for painting endangered wildlife subjects, including the tiger, in their natural habitats.
- **Double Video from "Bird Images" of Waders of Europe, Asia & North America**
- personally signed by Bill Oddie (narrator) and Paul Doherty (photographer). This superb video set contains over 100 species with some marvellous images and bird calls.
- **One year's subscription to Bird Watching magazine** (courtesy of *Emap Active Ltd.*)
- This monthly publication is an excellent read with amazing pictures.

We are most grateful to all those who have donated prizes for this year's draw.
