

From the President of LIPU

Danilo Mainardi

Every year, the National Conference is a significant appointment for LIPU. I would like to see every one of you because our gathering is an important occasion for passing on information, and where friendships are established and projects are examined. It is a time for taking stock.

This year the Conference takes place at the Circeo National Park from 29 to 31 May. As you are aware, LIPU's primary goal is the protection of birds, but it works in various ways to protect the environment and, we are convinced, the improvement of man himself. Everyone at the Conference will bring their own ideas and information. Together, responsibly, we will plan activities for the coming year, because it is from one Conference to the next that we make progress.



THE DAY OF THE SWALLOWS

When we were very young, every spring our school teachers used to tell us about the long, adventurous journey of the swallows. We used to mark every 21 March by filling our exercise books with pictures of flowers, skies and swallows – so many swallows! But today, for us in LIPU, these are just memories, and in contrast it is the continual and worrying decline in the swallow population which has become one of our more important concerns. We are launching a campaign: on 21 March we are taking to the streets for The Day Of The Swallows.

In more than a hundred towns and cities LIPU volunteers are organising information points where they will meet thousands of members of the public, informing them of the dramatic decline of this species, but especially of the importance of having an agricultural policy which is more in tune with nature. It would be an important change, improving not only the countryside but also our own lives, the water we drink and the food we eat. As well as saving the swallows it will also help all animal species which live in farmland (at least 116) and which are now at risk of disappearing.



SPRING, TIME TO HELP THE SWALLOWS

by Armando Gariboldi,

A symbol for all migrating birds, swallows are now in considerable danger. The European population has fallen by 40% in the last twenty years. We are continuing to repeat that fact until effective measures are taken to change the current negative situation. This is the objective of the Swallows Project, organised by LIPU, and as well as swallows, to save many other species which are threatened by the degradation of the agricultural environment. An action programme has been produced to tackle and resolve, in the medium and the long term, the various problems which are causing the decline in the swallow population.

Lobbying and information

Activities on the political front include the collection of over 80,000 signatures. This petition has already been presented to the Italian Minister of the Environment and is being sent to the European Commissioner for Agriculture. It is being used to bring the problem to the attention of top politicians in Italy and in Europe.

The task of making the general public aware of the problem continues, with fifty articles and news items already published, eleven television features, and full radio coverage. We are getting support every day. Letters come in from people asking us to help the swallows and thanking us for what we are doing. Journalists are now attentive to the problem, and not just for special occasions like the 21 March when Swallows Day will be marked in 100 town squares up and down the country. Throughout the whole of March the large supermarket chain, Esselunga, is collecting finds for the Swallows Project.

100 Farms

Scientific research also continues. We need data, especially on the dynamics of the Italian population and on the impact of insecticides and LIPU is collaborating with scientific bodies to provide this. One example is the national survey of swallows' nests which we are making in collaboration with the National Institute for Wildlife. Data collected by LIPU members this year will be added to technical investigation material. On the agricultural front we aim to have "100 farms for swallows". We are already in collaboration with Agriturist and AIAB (Italian Association for Biological Agriculture) to contact farmers and producers who are prepared to put LIPU's guidelines

into practice, "Agriculture for swallows, for nature and for the health of mankind". But in order to demonstrate the practicability of our proposals we are investing in a pilot project, and taking part ourselves, to generate environmental and management improvements on two large commercial farms at Maranello and Fidenza. They will be the first "Farms for Swallows"



FARMING AND NATURE IN CONFLICT

by *Umberto Gallo Orsi*

What do animal breeders who block roads and railways, olive producers who demonstrate in the streets, and Sicilian orange growers, all have in common with the falling numbers of swallows and a large number of other species which were once common in our countryside? The answer is both surprisingly simple and at the same time, complex: the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy). From its beginning the European Union has had to face up to the problem of the dependency of member states on foreign imports of agricultural products. Europeans consume more than they can produce. The Common Agricultural Policy was formed to regulate production to the internal requirements of the EEC.

Now, more than 45 years after its institution, some results have been achieved, but many new problems have been created. Among them has been consistent overproduction and the need to impose maximum production quotas, such as milk. The waste of resources through intensification, "rationalisation" and the modernisation of agriculture has at the same time caused serious damage to nature and European wildlife. From this, and also from the economic and social points of view, it is now clear that the Common Agricultural Policy is in need of radical reform.

Biodiversity in decline

In Europe the agricultural environment is the most important for those birds which are most at risk, and because of that, LIPU, together with BirdLife International, has proposed a series of investigations and recommendations. 44% of the area of the EU is devoted to agriculture and a good 60% of those species which are in need of conservation depend wholly or in part on that habitat.

Birds which were once common on cultivated land are now on the Red List. Also in decline are various plants and mammals, due to the continuing destruction and degradation of important sites for flora and fauna.

It is vital that the CAP should favour those agricultural-environmental practices and rural development which protect and manage the biodiversity of the region. In fact, one of the tests for environmental quality is to determine its level of biodiversity. If biodiversity is in decline it is an indication that the agricultural practices are not ecologically sustainable. LIPU believes that the long awaited reforms of the CAP are necessary, but must be consistent if they are to benefit the rural environment and its economy, and consumers, as well as farmers.

RED FOR DANGER

by *Umberto Gallo Orsi*



Which are the rarer species and those most at risk of extinction in Italy? The answer lies in the Red List; a list which describes at a particular moment the populations and distribution of all Italian species. Each species is judged by a series of criteria, agreed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and is classified into one of the five groups: Extinct, Seriously at risk, At risk, Vulnerable, Low risk.

The use of international criteria allows the Italian Red List to be compared directly with that of other countries and of the world. The classification is based on rarity and the decrease, in numbers of pairs or individuals, and of the area occupied by each species or the fragmentation of its distribution.

To what purpose?

The Red List is a tool for the identification of those species most in need of conservation. It is a standard reference for experts and for the Ministry of the Environment who use it in deciding conservation policies. Anyone can refer to it for the protection of sites which are at risk from human activities.

To this purpose, LIPU and other associations are collaborating to produce the new Red List. A new feature, compared with the now historic Red List of 1981, is that the separate populations of each species and Italian endemic sub-species will now be included.

We go further

The document is the basis to understanding which species are most at risk of extinction in Italy. But the Red List has its limits and imperfections: as in all photographs, what is seen is only that which is within the limits of the picture, and in our case it only covers Italy. It does not take into account how Italy compares with other countries in the distribution of many species, nor any changes in world populations. For example, the Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) is widespread and stable in Europe but in Italy it is rarer than the Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), a species which is decreasing at the global level and as such, is SPEC 1, a species of the highest priority for conservation in Europe.

Some species in Italy will always be rare because, for climatic and ecological reasons, their preferred environment is not widespread. On the other hand, there are in Italy some numerically important species which are rarer elsewhere, and thus even if they are not classified on the Red list as species at risk, their environment in Italy is important for their conservation. LIPU, therefore, alongside the Red List, will produce a Priority List for Conservation.

The first Red List was produced over 30 years ago. Since then the World Red List has been regularly updated and there have been many national and regional versions of it. In 1981 LIPU asked ornithologists Helmar Schenk and Sergio Frugis to draw up the first Red List of Italian birds.

Many things have changed since then and the List, now out of date, is in need of complete revision in the light of changes in conservation of many species and improved knowledge of their distribution and biology.

The Four Species In Most Urgent Need

Conservation must be tackled at the international level and LIPU's priority is in regard to the European situation. The first four species in order of importance are the Lesser Kestrel, Ferruginous Duck (*Athya nyroca*), Corncrake (*Crex crex*) and Audouin's Gull (*Larus audouini*), all of which breed in Italy. There are two others which are present in Italy during migration and winter, Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*) and Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*). The Priority List for Conservation has three categories, maximum priority, medium priority and no priority. It does not mean, though, that we are not concerned with non-prioritised species.



INDICATORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

by Armando Gariboldi

Living creatures are some of the best indicators of the quality of the environment. There are species which are sensitive to contaminants and which are known as biological indicators, because through them we can evaluate a habitat and gain information of its history.

These species range from lichens and fungi to insects, small mammals and, at the top of the food chain, diurnal and nocturnal raptors. Thanks to their high mobility, birds are excellent environmental indicators. They are able to move away rapidly at the first signs of disturbance. Here are two significant examples. It has been ascertained that there is a direct relationship between the acidity of river water and the number of eggs laid by dippers, a species which tends to reduce its clutch size as the acidity of the water increases. There is also a serious impact from lead pollution in the land and in water, coming from hunters' cartridges. Various species of ducks and swans have only to swallow a few pellets to be poisoned to death.



WORK IN PROGRESS

Conference on Nature For All

Having spoken about it in *Ali Notizie* last September, the 1st International Convention on Access to the Natural Environment is due to take place at Ferrara on 2/3 May. The theme, which is very dear to us, is that of environmental protection being to the benefit of everyone in society. The wide range of organisations, companies, institutions, associations, press and TV which have already declared their support has confirmed in the LIPU working group the knowledge of having organised a very important initiative.

Operation a Million Nests 1997

Thanks to an excellent mass media campaign we have collected considerable funds for a Million Nests 1997, our project to set up nest boxes in woods and gardens. Delegates and volunteers from LIPU branches set up their tables in the streets at the end of November, meeting and speaking to thousands and thousands of people about the project. Many already knew about it and there were more volunteers who took part with great enthusiasm.

By now the new nests will already have been distributed and set in position. Along with all those which were put up in the previous year they really do enrich the natural environment..

If we just think of these thousands of nests, now occupied by pairs of small insectivorous birds, we can only be proud of having taken part. We can reflect on both its educational and its conservation values.

NATURE IN PIECES

by Armando Gariboldi

We are all now aware that the presence and abundance of wild animals depend not only on the quality of the more or less natural environment in which we live, but also the extent and continuity of these ecosystems. Animal and plant populations which have to depend on natural habitat that has been reduced and completely isolated from similar areas (for example, a small wood in the middle of cultivated fields) are experiencing a true island-effect, moving rapidly towards extinction.

In Italy widespread construction, not only of urban buildings but especially of linear infrastructure such as roads, railways and power lines, has contributed to the breaking up of the remaining natural ecosystems into a series of even smaller fragments. Even though only a few hundreds of metres apart, they are separated and isolated by what are impassable barriers to many animal species.

Broken ways

Let us take the case of a heavily used road which crosses a wood, perhaps near a lake or marshland. Thousands of amphibious creatures which spend the winter in the woodland vegetation and go to water for spring breeding are suddenly deprived of their basic breeding habitat. Many species of birds also run an increasing risk of being

run down by motor vehicles. Unfortunately, arrivals at LIPU's Recuperation Centres confirm this. There are many cases of nocturnal raptors which hunt small mammals and reptiles close to roads and are crushed to the asphalt.

Plans to take action

The problem of environmental fragmentation has, until now, hardly been considered by the various authorities. LIPU is working along three lines:

1. Identify schemes that reduce the impact of these infrastructures.
2. Propose building structures to reduce the barrier-effect, such as underpasses for amphibians and small mammals and overpasses for large mammals, and also provide escape routes from otherwise isolated areas, such as the "prison" zones at motorway intersections.
3. Propose action for environmental reconstruction in marginal zones (alongside railways, below bridges and viaducts).

Here are two examples of action taken by LIPU. Firstly, a study of environmental impact in the Provinces of Siena and Varese, highlighting problems associated with schemes which are already in the project phase, and proposing workable alternatives. Secondly, a complex evaluation project, which is almost finished, in a sample area looking into the impact of power lines on birds, such as the pylons which were projected to pass right under the Griffon colony at Bosa in Sardinia. We have suggested various solutions to the power company, and some have already been agreed upon.

NEWS NEWS NEWS



Birthday Present

Lots of school children go to the Torrile Reserve but one of the mothers had an original idea which is worth copying. To celebrate her daughter's birthday she offered the whole of her class a visit to the reserve and membership of LIPU. They were all excited by the experience which finished with an identification competition of ducks in the wild.

Rome Centre: Eagle saved

We have a prominent new member at our Wildlife Recuperation Centre in Rome: a magnificent and rare Booted Eagle. It had been shot by poachers and underwent immediate surgery to remove 30 pellets. It is now in the care of vets and staff at the centre.

New reserves

Two new reserves have been inaugurated in Lombardy. Cesano Maderno is in the Groane Park and already has an active visitor centre. The Boza Reserve is a former slate quarry, a small jewel of nature, adapted for educational visits.

Campocatino is protected

The LIPU Reserve at Campocatino is at long last within the boundaries of the protected area. It seems now that the question of hunting may be finally closed. Last October 400 people came to see five raptors liberated.

A LETTER FROM LIPU PRESIDENT, Danilo Mainardi

I have been asked why it is important that LIPU exists. Knowing it well, I think of it like this.

- Because LIPU is made up of people who have come to understand the fundamentals about the survival and well-being of nature and therefore of Man.
- Because LIPU is made up of practical people who make an effort to translate their ideas into practical projects.
- Because LIPU is made up of impartial people who work for the betterment of the lives of all, humans, animals and plants.
- Because LIPU is made up of social people who can collaborate with others.
- Because LIPU is made up of people who appreciate biodiversity, and therefore practise a culture of respect and tolerance.

That, to my mind, is LIPU. We started out working to safeguard the world of birds, and that remains our primary interest, but we have followed many roads. With our Reserves, our interventions, our Centres for Recuperation and Reintroduction, but especially through our example and our environmental education work, we are working everywhere for nature.

NATURE IN THE WORLD: STRATEGIES FOR 2000

by Armando Gariboldi, Director General

The year 2000 is now at the door and all over the planet ideas are being expressed on how to cross this psychological threshold and launch Humanity into the new millennium. But at least for those who have a global view of the protection of Nature, the year 2000 will be a year like any other.

That does not mean that we are not to use the occasion to draw up a balance sheet of the results we have already achieved and to emphasise to the general public both our primary objectives and the most effective projects we have yet to complete. For many years now such strategies have been identified by academics and by environmental organisations all over the world. Now the battle, at times a fierce one, is that of convincing the governments that rule the fate of the planet.

In the forefront are the issues linked to climate change and its consequences: melting of the polar ice-caps and glaciers, a rising sea level, enormous changes in agriculture, spreading deserts, etc. It is also vital to work on the proper management of resources such as fresh water and forests.

In recent years strategies have been directed towards the protection of habitat through the protection of a series of representative species, the so-called “umbrella” species, of which the swallow is a typical example. But let us look at some of LIPU's conservation objectives for the coming years.

At the international level:

- Protection of endemic species, those which exist in a single area in the whole world. A study by BirdLife International has shown that a good 2561 species, over 25% of all bird species, inhabit very restricted areas whose total area in the world is no more than 50 thousand square kilometres. It is vital to preserve these species and habitats that otherwise will be lost for ever, by means of protection schemes which can also be effective in saving a “few” hundreds of square kilometres of forest and mountain.

At the national level:

- Protection of those important sites for birds which are still not protected. The IBA Project covers at present 184 Important Bird Areas in Italy. We must manage to protect all of them, putting pressure on the Government to make them into Special Protection Areas according to Community regulations.
- Protection of species and habitat. Projects for the reintroduction of extinct species and environmental management to save remnants of populations of birds, starting with those species most in crisis, either directly or by taking action on the environment. Among the habitats which need protecting, as well as wetlands, are urban environments (or rather those that have been modified by man), coastal and alpine areas.

Education, public awareness, lobbying. To encourage at all levels a first hand experience of nature and improve individual awareness that everyone can make their own contribution to environmental protection. It is an objective that LIPU has always had and it still remains important today.

RESERVES AND CENTRES

WE SET OUT IN STYLE

by Ugo Faralli

There is an old and well-known saying. “Who persists, succeeds”. That could be, in short, the story of the LIPU Massaciuccoli Reserve. The project began in the early 80's; it was launched in style, then ground to a halt and almost stopped permanently, but was started up again in recent years. In the beginning, by collaboration between LIPU and the Park authorities it was planned to manage a part of the lake within the protected area, totalling 800 hectares. Visitors were taken on guided boat trips, and to observation hides which were accessible by walkways. A Visitor Centre was provided, useful for birdwatchers and LIPU members, tourists and anyone interested in nature.

Meanwhile, promotion of the Reserve was continuing, helping to get people aware of this small area of nature,

famous for Puccini having lived there. Unfortunately all this activity rekindled interest by local hunters who were in contention with the park authorities over boundaries and also with LIPU over the creation of the reserve. They began a severe campaign which culminated in the burning down of the visitor centre and the destruction of walkways and hides.

It was decided to ask for subscriptions from all LIPU members to buy the farmhouse in front of the reserve. Thanks to their generosity, within a few months the building was acquired. Unfortunately, without the necessary funds to restore it and not being able to rely on the local public authorities, these years were not easy for the reserve. There was contention with local inhabitants, lack of understanding from the Park and management problems.

1999: Wildfowl Centre

But these difficulties were overcome and thanks to volunteers from the Pisa branch of LIPU and Andrea Fontanelli, warden of the reserve, management activities and guided visits were restarted. Andrea, with the help of many local LIPU volunteers and national service conscientious objectors, renovated the house, equipped the new visitor centre and guest rooms, accompanied visitors and school pupils, organised summer camps for children and took a census of bitterns and marsh harriers.

Now we have decided to ask the Park if we can manage part of the protected area, the Chiarone Reserve, set up by the Region of Tuscany in 47 hectares next to our main building. But the proposal goes further, with the joint intention of the Park and LIPU to do something new and restart their collaboration. The agreement, ratified in December 1997, is to establish a Wildfowl Centre to promote and make the natural resources of the reserve accessible. This spring will see new constructions in place and next year there will be a new Wildfowl Centre.

TAILPIECE

A few words of introduction from the person who has offered to carry on the work of LIPU UK from Roger and Jill Jordan who founded our organisation and took it to its present proud position. I confess to being nervous, this is a hell of an act to follow but I promise I'll do my best. I am sure I can count on your continuing support for a cause which is so close to all our hearts.

I am in my fifties, married and soon to retire from the RAF, I have been a bird lover all my life but have become more active in recent years and seem to have little time to be involved with much else these days. Shirley and I hope to hear from you as we welcome good ideas and we'll work hard for the aims of the organisation and to make it what you, the members want.

Yours truly,

