

Words from the President of LIPU

by Danilo Mainardi

As I begin to write this editorial a devastating war is unrolling in ex-Yugoslavia. I do not know how it will turn out but perhaps this tragedy should make us all think about our own commitments, our way of life and our own behaviour.

It is true that our association is aimed at the protection of nature, more specifically at the protection of birds. But we are not blindly obsessive about our chosen special interest and I am convinced, and I hope that you all agree with me, that we in LIPU, being committed to nature, also have a culture of respect for all forms of life, and especially human life. I am also sure that if everyone were to have this same culture and were aware and convinced of the real value of diversity, which is fundamental to our work, certain things could not happen. In the end it is real diversity which is the beauty of LIPU. It is therefore important to be part of it and work for it.

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ENVIRONMENTAL OFFENCES: FINES & CUFFS

by Armando Gariboldi

After a long struggle, all major offences against the environment are now finally punishable under Italian criminal law.

Offenders will not only face fines but may even find themselves serving prison sentences. This is the result of new measures put forward by the Council of Ministers to the Italian Parliament, which has now introduced legislation for 4 new environmental offences: Environmental Pollution, Illegal Transfer of Waste,

Environmental Data Fraud, Destruction of Natural Heritage.

Offences now committed against any protected site, for example, can bring penalties of 1-5 years in jail and up to £15,000 in fines. While some leniency may be shown towards an offender who co-operates with investigations, severe sentences will be meted out to those who wilfully engage in any campaign of destruction as part of some organised gang. The main thing is that we are finally recognising the importance of restoring damaged sites back to their original natural state, which is particularly relevant in cases of large scale pollution.

Whether this legislation can be applied to all damaged sites remains to be seen. History shows that having laws is one thing but the endorsement and application of those laws has left much to be desired. At least those magistrates with courage and insight will have an extra weapon in their fight against the criminal element, but above all there are also signs of a cultural change towards the environment. We are now seeing a culture which no longer views its natural resources as an unlimited supply of riches to be stripped and plundered for personal gain, but rather a common heritage to be preserved and enjoyed with proper care and insight. Although much is yet to be done on this score we are slowly but surely inching our way forward.

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DEFENDING COASTS AND SEAS

by Attilio Rinaldi

There are so many environmental crises in the Mediterranean area, from population growth to chemical pollution, from fishing to tourism. Its physical structure, hydrodynamics and biology

are such that the Mediterranean should be considered as a single entity, with closely connected and interdependent sub-basins. This concept becomes more evident when we consider the social and economic changes that have occurred over the last 50 years, highlighting the considerable deterioration of the sea's natural resources.

The oil ports

The population explosion gives cause for concern. While the population remains stable north of the Mediterranean, its growth in the south indicates an ever increasing strain on natural resources, proper sanitation, education and employment. Faced with such daunting problems, safeguarding natural resources is not high on the list of priorities for the inhabitants of these areas.

The transportation of crude oil also has a bearing on the problem. 40% of Arab oil passes through here, favouring the establishment of refineries along the coasts. There are 19 in Italy, but over 90% of the crude oil is processed in only four ports. In addition, the majority of the oil tankers are virtually coming to the end of their life, i.e. 16 years (average use of oil tankers being 15-20 years) with only 20% of the fleet equipped with modern twin-hulls that would reduce the risks in the event of collision.

Exhausted resources

The fishing industry has traditionally been undervalued; the quantity and quality of its contribution to human food resources has not been appreciated. The Italian seas, like the rest of the Mediterranean, have been subject to heavy over-fishing: some stocks (and biodiversity too) have suffered so much that urgent measures are required to protect some species.

Not to be ignored is the dramatic impact that tourism has had over the last thirty years, resulting in ever more 'concrete' coast lines. These coastline settlements are more often than not contributing quite extensively to the degradation of the shores on which they stand and the ecosystems of lakes and deltas.

Polluting man

One of the major causes of degradation is the dangerous waste that human activity produces and which is sometimes simply dumped into rivers to find its way to the sea. Coasts are very vulnerable areas where man has intervened, ironically for his own protection, with structures such as breakwaters and ports, but sadly has caused a very high level of pollution which heavily affects the coastal ecosystem. When we consider that a large number of marine species rely on these shores in their early stages it is imperative that we find preventative measures that safeguard the very birthplace of this rich biodiversity.

As tourism increases the environment suffers

Between the 1970s and the 1990s tourism in the Mediterranean region has grown by 110%.

In 1984 there were 97 million tourists. By 2000 it is forecast that there will be 269 to 409 million.

In Italy coastal marshes are in serious decline.

At the start of the century there were 700,000 hectares.

In 1972 192,000 hectares.

In 1994 less than 100,000 hectares.

LIPU is involved in so many activities

LIPU has always been very committed to the protection of the marine environment. It has coastal reserves, such as Carloforte, Cà Roman and Isola delle Femmine; it protects natural areas such as the Po Delta and the Tuscan Archipelago; it has a very active Recuperation Centre for Sea and Water Birds; it carries out surveillance projects; and it has recently made three new initiatives. This is a group of projects which underline the concern which LIPU has for the sea and coasts.

Centre for Mediterranean Habitat

This is an environmentally degraded area, at the mouth of the Tevere (Tiber), and from the nature point of view it is in a strategic position. LIPU and the Società ATI are regenerating it through a joint project: there are 14 hectares where dunes and pools are being recreated, a duck Centre, a Visitor Centre and walkways. It is the first initiative of its kind in Italy and will help to compensate for the "eating up of the environment" by a new leisure port.

Coastal monitoring

LIPU and the environmental associations MAR and Federpesca are collaborating with the Port Authorities, who are putting a research vessel at their disposal this summer, in a cruise of the protected marine areas of the Tirreno (Tuscan Archipelago, Pontino, and the islands of Ischia, Procida and Vivara). They will make an environmental survey, take a seabird census and talk to local people about coastal protection.

Keeping an eye on Pianosa

The prison has been closed on the island of Pianosa, a few miles from Elba. Now we need to manage this precious diversified agricultural environment, which was created by the prisoners and which now is home to a thriving colony of Red-legged Partridge, the highest breeding concentration of swallows and martins in the Archipelago and a large number of migrants. Its future has been entrusted to the Tuscan Archipelago National Park, from whom we have requested assurance that it will be protected from speculators.

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The EUROPEAN STRATEGY

by Armando Gariboldi

The 34th National LIPU Assembly included a conference entitled "Between Conservation and Exploitation: towards the integrated management of coastal areas" For the first time the European Commission document "An Integrated Management of Coastal Areas" was presented in Italy. It

will serve as a benchmark for the protection and conservation of coastal areas.

A new approach and strategy highlights practical solutions for the prevention of degradation, while avoiding unsustainable pressures. It is a practical programme encompassing needs at both national and European level while still recognising individual local issues.

Man's impact

Coastal areas, known for so long for their traditional local economies are becoming much more desirable to tourists and we are now seeing an increasing number of people actually living in these areas all year round. Consequently we are now witnessing an increase in the general infrastructure, such as the development of new industries. This major 'human impact', albeit useful for the local economy is ironically having a detrimental effect on traditional local activities such as agriculture and fishing.

Protection through integration

The plan is to persuade the nations within the European Union towards better management that would merge or integrate such factors as industry, tourism, marine and fishing, with proper respect for the environment. No mean task, but the only way to make sure that endangered sites are given a realistic chance of survival is through adequate planning and management. Particularly worrying are those activities, for example along the Adriatic coast, but also in Sardinia and on small islands, where attacks on the coastal habitat are not the result of pure and simple illegality, (as in the well known case of the Hotel Fuente at Amalfi, which is now finally in the process of being demolished) but resulting from projects which have been duly approved by the proper authorities.

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RETURN OF THE PYGMY CORMORANT

(Phalacrocorax pygmeus)

by Umberto Gallo Orsi and Marco Gustin

Since 1994 the smallest of the cormorants, in decline throughout Europe, has been breeding regularly in Italy. Until the early 1980's the Pygmy Cormorant was a regular but uncommon migrant, observed mainly during spring. Then in 1980 the first colonisation was confirmed, 4-5 pairs, at Punta Alberete, then the most westerly point of its range. It is probable that this was the first time they bred in Italy but early records of the species are very unreliable. After this first attempt the Pygmy Cormorant disappeared and was not recorded again as a breeding species until 1994. This is the year of its "official" reappearance, again at Punta Alberete, and since then a small breeding colony of up to 7-8 pairs has become established.

Pygmy Cormorants nest in mixed heronries of Night Herons, Little Egrets and Squacco Herons in woodlands close to rivers and marshes. The nests are about 9 metres above the ground and at the beginning of June they lay 4-6 eggs. The incubation period is 27-30 days and the young make their first flight at about 2 months. They feed mainly on fish. Although belonging to the same group as Cormorants and Shags they are distinguished by a much shorter neck and beak, features which can be picked out at some distance.

Since 1997 the Pygmy Cormorant has also been recorded as a breeding species in the lake of Venezia, with 5-6 pairs, and sightings seem to be on the increase in several other places outside the breeding season, especially in winter. Considering that as a species it is highly vulnerable and that more than 65% of the European population appears to be in decline, particularly in Albania, Romania and the Ukraine, the small Italian breeding population is of some importance. They are the only colonies in Western Europe which seem to be increasing.

What can we do to save it?

The Pygmy Cormorant is one of the priority species for which BirdLife International has produced an action plan. The main breeding populations are in Greece, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria, and this is where action is being

concentrated, to conserve breeding colonies, regenerate feeding areas (lakes), monitor breeding and overwintering populations, and to study the ecology and provide information for fish farmers. In addition, BirdLife International is organising expeditions, hoping to discover more colonies of this beautiful small cormorant in the Ukraine, Georgia and Russia.

In Italy LIPU has identified their breeding areas as IBA's and is working to get them protected, either as RAMSARS or as Zones of Special Protection, in accordance with the Birds Directive of the European Union. The Italian population is up to 7 breeding pairs and the total European population is between 6355 and 7293 pairs.

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THE DANGER OF FIRE

by Ugo Faralli

Fire is a national scourge in Italy, unfortunately on the increase due to changes in climate, woodland and in man himself. Especially in full summer thousands upon thousands of hectares of woodland are burnt down every year in Italy. Precise figures are not available, they vary from year to year according to the number of fires, their location and the area affected, but we are certainly talking of millions of trees and hundreds of millions of animals being involved. It is an insult to our national heritage, our environment and wildlife, that many people deliberately set fire to oak and chestnut stands in the Appennines, Mediterranean brush in Sicily, Sardinia and Liguria, and fir forest in the Alps. Nothing and no-one is safe, not even protected areas and national parks: the 40,000 hectares burnt in 1998 included parts of LIPU reserves at Monte Dente in the Ligurian Alps and at Biviere in Sicily.

There are the classic pyromaniacs who get pleasure from seeing fires raging. There are those who are paid to do it by developers who want to build houses, hotels and roads on the burnt out land (fewer now, fortunately, as a result of new measures). There are those who are responsible through lack of care and attention, and there are

some seasonal labourers and forestry workers who claim it is a normal part of their work.

Fire not only burns and destroys woodland, surrounding areas and wildlife, but we must also add that all these acts, show a lack of appreciation of the value, the role and the importance of woodland which has other distressing results. There is the loss of human life, for example firemen and Forest Guards, the financial cost of fighting the fires, the costs of prevention and public awareness campaigns, damage and destruction to buildings, roads, farm crops and then the cost of clearing up and replanting.

More fires

Unfortunately, there have been more fires in recent years. The climate is changing, woodland is changing and man is changing. Although these changes may be distinct and independent, together they multiply the damage, the dangers, the destruction and the losses. The climate is drier, there is less rain and snow. Woodland has been abandoned, left without regular management and maintenance work, badly affected by felling, acid rain and other forms of pollution. Man has almost completely abandoned agricultural activity in upland and mountain woodland areas, he lives in cities and is now an urban animal.

Fire is a natural element which man has used throughout his evolution. Thanks to the experience of peasants, shepherds and foresters it has become an indispensable tool in several different types of land management. Although it is difficult to put a positive slant on fire in Italy, it can be a useful tool in the management of the natural environment. It is used in many parts of the world, and in some instances within protected areas, as in the Brazilian cerrado on the edges of the Amazonian rainforest, or in the Parks of Arizona and Pakistan, but it is always used by specialised personnel in limited areas, which have been carefully studied.

What is to be done?

In Italy there is always more to be done to enable good sense and respect for the environment to prevail. Anyone can do a lot to help. We can save thousands of trees and animals with very little effort. This summer, while on holiday or while taking a walk, if seeing a fire just starting to take hold, call the Forest Guards immediately, 1678.41.051 or 1515.

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THE DAY FOR SWALLOWS THROUGH-OUT ITALY

The Day of the Swallows, organised by LIPU to celebrate the arrival of spring, was a resounding success. In many towns and cities crowds of people supported this LIPU project to encourage swallows to return in larger numbers. Thousands of postcards were signed by supporters and sent to the Mayors of hundreds of places across the country. At the time of publishing this issue of *Ali Notizie* we do not know how many of those towns have officially accepted our suggestions for action to save swallows, but we will report in full very soon. We will thus be able to add the precious nests of swallows, martins and swifts to the list of conservation activities that LIPU is actively pursuing at national and European levels. These include counting and ringing, protection of roosts, and the management of nesting sites through the 100 Farms Project.

There was a great celebration in Rome where we opened the first LIPU reserve, Castel de Guido, entirely dedicated to swallows. This will soon be followed by a second, at Rende, where we will inaugurate a new educational walk to teach children how agriculture can be a friend of nature. Up and down the country there have been so many different activities at LIPU reserves in support of this project that it is impossible to mention them all.

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NEWS FROM LIPU

STORKS PROJECT - - A GREAT RETURN

After hundreds of years storks have returned to nest in Puglia. A pair has nested at Cerignola by the river Ofanto, on top of an electricity pole. An interesting point is that in antiquity Cerignola was known as Cicognara and the emblem of the commune is a stork. Local people have enthusiastically adopted the new guests, and if they do manage to breed successfully it will be due largely to the care given by them. However, to avoid disturbance LIPU has organised surveillance, in collaboration with local people, hunting guards and the State Forest Guards. We are making schools and young people aware of this historic event and we hope to encourage the storks to breed successfully and begin to build a stable colony next year.

CORMORANTS - - A VICTORY

After an appeal from LIPU to the TAR (Regional Administrative Tribunal) there has been a great victory on behalf of cormorants in Friuli Venezia Giulia. The decision has also created an important precedent for other regions, including those which in the past, such as Sardinia, have authorised killing of this species which is protected by Italian law. Fish farmers have raised it as an economic problem but have not presented official evidence to support their claims that cormorants are seriously to blame. Shooting will not solve the problem, and to stop cormorants raiding fish farms there are non violent preventative measures which can be taken.

MIGRATION PROJECT - - CENSUS

Among LIPU's scientific activities in 1998 was the ringing project at the Sentina, the most important wetland area in the Marche. The study was carried out by LIPU researchers in cooperation with volunteers from the LIPU Branches of Fermo, Ascoli Piceno and Teramo. A total of 143 species were identified and 1295 birds were ringed. The Sentina covers 180

hectares and is one of the most important spots on the Adriatic coast for migrating birds.

IBA PROJECT - - 4 MILLION HECTARES

LIPU is continuing its task to identify and protect IBAs (Important Bird Areas), which are of fundamental importance in the conservation of species which are threatened or in decline. As a result, the number of IBAs in Italy has risen from 155, covering 3.8 million hectares in 1995, to 192, covering 4.6 million hectares, in 1999. This noteworthy objective has been reached due also to the work of many LIPU volunteers who have reconnoitred the country in search of areas which are important to the conservation of birds. The second aspect of the project is to protect all these areas, in accordance with the measures available under the regulations for ZPS (Zones of Special Protection).

MOLISE - - A CONCRETE RIVER

The LIPU Branch at Campobasso has presented a petition to the authorities aimed at the protection of the natural vegetation and environment of the river Tappino from the senseless felling of trees and illegal tipping. It is the latest in a long list of attacks on the landscape and misuse of public funds. These particular works involve the felling of mature trees allow the banks to built up in concrete and rock. They will also threaten one of the last colonies of toads in the area.

OSTIA - - A GREAT VICTORY

The Litorale Romano stays protected. The Council of State accepted an appeal from the Ministry of the Environment and has reversed the shameful decision of the TAR (Regional Administrative Tribunal) to cancel the establishment of the Nature Reserve. It is a great victory, which will allow an extraordinary piece of natural heritage to continue to be protected, and made possible by the commitment of the Committee of Greens, LIPU, WWF, Legambiente and other organisations. It is a defeat for the speculators who wanted to invade the coastline with even more

concrete and also for the Commune di Fuimicino who would have conceded new areas for hunting. It is a victory which has increased the enthusiasm of LIPU members of Ostia who are continuing to defend "their" Litorale.

PALERMO - - LIPU IN COURT

Having reported an alleged poacher, Mauro Mannino, Director of the LIPU Regional Office in Sicily, found himself charged with slander. In a statement to the magistrates Mannino had named Giovanni D'Anci as being one of those involved in a flourishing traffic in raptors between Sicily and Germany. In court the Director General of LIPU said that in some cases there was an urgent need to save protected animals which required immediate action. The Public Prosecutor's Office has asked for the case to be dismissed.

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RESERVES AND CENTRES

LIPU EXPOSES THE AUTHORITIES

by Ugo Faralli and Fernanda Diana

The Commune of Carloforte in Sardinia has refused to renew their agreement with LIPU for the management of the LIPU Reserve, which for so many years has successfully protected the colony of Eleonora's Falcons and made thousands of visitors aware of their problems.

Within the 235 hectares of the reserve there are 120 pairs of Eleonora's Falcons, many Audouin's Gulls, Peregrines, Blue Rock Thrushes, Marmora's Warblers, endemic species of amphibians, insects and Mediterranean plants. There are still 6 kilometres of unspoilt cliffs. Evidently all this is not reason enough for it to be afforded protection, according to the Commune of Carloforte. It is now two years since the agreement between the Commune, the Province of Cagliari and LIPU expired. Despite our urgent requests, meetings with the Administrators, the willingness of the Province, a petition of more than 3000 signatures, Parliamentary questions

and publicity in local and national media, the agreement has still not been renewed.

It was one of the early LIPU reserves but it is now becoming so degraded that we are seriously worried for its future and for its wildlife. LIPU has been active on the island since 1981, initially to combat theft and traffic in eggs and young of Eleonora's Falcons. At that time a group of members and volunteers from the Cagliari Branch of LIPU set up a surveillance and study camp. As a result of their work, the eventual establishment of the Reserve, management activities and awareness campaigns, the population of Falcons has risen from 25 in the early 1980's to the current 120, thus making a significant contribution to the conservation of one of the rarest and most threatened raptors in the world.

In 1998, and 1999, we have only been able to maintain the surveillance camp with the contribution from Vogelbescherming Nederland, LIPU's BirdLife International partner in Holland, and the participation of courageous volunteers. We ask ourselves why we have to depend on a foreign country to protect part of Sardinia, our birds and our environment, while at the same time our own authorities are not just inactive but are even opposed to our work.

A Falcon in need of Protection

Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonorae*) is a social raptor, small in size but with a large wingspan. It overwinters in Madagascar and in late spring it comes to breed in the Mediterranean region. The world population is estimated to be about 4500 pairs but is in serious danger of extinction due to habitat destruction, poaching and disturbance of their breeding colonies by tourists. Of the 10 colonies in Italy, 4 are in Sardinia and their 320 pairs represent 7% of the world population.

Since 1980 LIPU has organised the surveillance camp on the island of San Pietro and thanks to the 2000 volunteers from all over the world who in 20 years have taken part in this project, the numbers have increased from 60 pairs in 1985 to

120 in 1998. 14,000 local visitors and tourists have been guided by LIPU volunteers within the breeding area, allowing them to see this rare species at close range. It is an extremely positive project of protection and public awareness that we must continue at all costs.

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MORE NEWS FROM LIPU

AN ATTACK ON THE BIVIERE RESERVE

Twenty hectares of marshland habitat, 10% of the area of the nature reserve at Biviere di Gela, and which LIPU has managed since 1997, was destroyed in a malicious fire on 9 March. It was a serious act of retaliation against our conservation work in one of the most important wetland areas in Sicily. To make it more difficult for the fire fighters the arsonists started the fires in seven places. The fire caused an enormous amount of damage: the birdwatching hides were destroyed, and reedbeds and hedges, which will seriously affect breeding of particularly rare birds such as Little Bittern, Moorhen and Water Rail. LIPU is having difficulty in getting people to understand that the Biviere is a nature reserve and, despite what has happened in the past, should be respected as such. LIPU has requested the Prefecture to provide more adequate protection of the area and is itself evaluating measures to prevent fire.

ROME CENTRE

Work is non-stop at the LIPU Wildlife Recuperation Centre in Rome. This winter, in order to treat cold blooded animals, volunteers have built a "glasshouse" which can be heated by infra-red lamps. In the first 5 months of 1999, 612 animals arrived, of which 48 were raptors. The most common cause of their injuries was down to hunters and poachers who were shooting at anything and everything. After the successful treatment of a couple of pipistrelle bats the Centre is co-operating with the Commune of Rome in counting and identifying colonies of pipistrelles in Rome.

SUPPORT OUR SPANISH PARTNERS CAMP AT GIBRALTAR

The SEO, Sociedad Española de Ornitología, the Spanish BirdLife partner, is organising an autumn camp to monitor migrating birds at the Straits of Gibraltar, one of the key migration points for the centre and west of the Mediterranean. For information contact SEO C / Miguel Bravo Ferrer, 25 bajo - E 41005 SEVILLA - Spain Tel. 0034. 95. 464. 42.94
E-mail: migres@seo.org

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NEWS FROM LIPU UK

I opened the Hoopoe by saying what I could see from my window and I'd like to do the same whenever it seems there is something to say. This year has been wonderful for the local robins - I don't know how many nests there were in my garden but for the last few weeks we have been host to what seems like dozens of young birds. I'm now looking at two, one with the red coming through on the chest and another still very speckly and short-tailed - proof of a successful second brood - what a superb sight.

I cannot look at "my" robins, however, without being reminded of that terrible episode of the "Birdman" on television.

The Birdman

Many of you will have watched the excellent series on BBC2 which followed the life of Iolo Williams of the RSPB in Wales. Those who watched the programme on 11 June will have no doubt been as distressed as I was to see the scenes of appalling cruelty in Italy, but this is why LIPU UK is still so important.

- Two hunters boasting of their intention to travel to Sicily in the autumn where they expected to kill two thousand migrating birds; not game birds - any birds.

- The heart breaking pictures of Robins caught by the legs in the "archetti" the bow traps which snap the legs of the birds which then flutter for hours until death releases them from the suffering.

It was an important programme for us as it showed the problems we face to a very wide audience - we deserve to enrol many more members and friends as a result. I have a recording of the programme and, with the approval of BBC Wales, I have made a few copies. If anyone wishes to borrow a copy to show to local groups they are most welcome to do so.

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The 1999 Appeal.

Response to our annual appeal has been truly overwhelming. I shall publish full details in the Hoopoe but I can say that at the moment the appeal has raised just over £12,000 and that is a fantastic effort - thank you all. This means that we have been able to make a similar donation to LIPU in Italy to those of previous years and take us within striking distance for next year of reaching a total of a quarter of a million pounds raised for bird conservation in Italy - a really satisfying target! Please note that I said "next year" - I am determined not to use the "M word" as I think it has got to the stage now that this trivialises all it touches and I won't do that to what we stand for.

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LIPU pin brooches

On a much lighter note, I have received some LIPU items from Parma primarily for sale at the Birdwatching Fair in August but if you would like a LIPU brooch I can supply one for the sum of £2.25 which includes postage. Similarly if you do not have a LIPU car sticker and would like one please call me or drop me a line.

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British Birdwatching Fair 1999

As always this will be held at Rutland Water, this year from 20th to 22nd August, and we will have a stand in one of the marquees. If you are visiting the fair please call and say hello.

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Volunteers go to Italy

Really excellent news is that we have had three people make the journey to Italy to help LIPU in a voluntary capacity.

- James Latham of Sale, Cheshire, is studying zoology at university and spent two weeks as part of his studies at the Raptor Recovery Centre at Sala Baganza in the summer. He stayed at the centre and worked with the staff doing anything that needed doing - the standard fare for a "vol".
- Fiona Sharp of Lincoln asked me about James' experience and is going out soon for a spell of four weeks. She is studying Animal Biology and hopes to learn a lot about that subject with PhD students from Parma University as well as do some useful work for the centre.
- Robert Gifford of Braintree, Essex, was the first volunteer from LIPU UK to go to the toe of Italy and help at the Anti-Poaching Camp. He returned to the camp in Calabria, after eight years, and spent a week there in the spring of this year.

Robert has written an account of his journey and an abridged version of his impressions is on the next page. James is also writing an article on his experiences and I hope to publish that in the Hoopoe early next year with, hopefully, the full version of Robert's trip.

If any reader should be inspired to follow Robert to the south in the Spring he'll be happy to offer advice and the benefit of his experience if you call him on 01376 551950.

CALABRIA ANTI-POACHING CAMP 1999

Robert Gifford

It was during the late eighties that I first became aware of the illegal shooting of raptors which takes place in Calabria, Southern Italy every year during the Spring migration. I also discovered that conservationists (all volunteers), were trying to stop the activity and were facing violence on an unprecedented scale with Mafia style tactics designed both to break the will of the conservationists, as well as to intimidate the few locals who are in support of them. I decided to go and support the volunteers and join their anti-poaching surveillance camp in Calabria in 1991.

During my stay there I watched many buzzards, harriers, falcons, storks and eagles pick up thermal air currents while soaring over the Straits of Messina to fly on to their breeding grounds in northern Europe. I then had to watch these birds indiscriminately shot out of the sky. On many occasions I counted 15 to 20 gun shots directed at only 4 or 5 buzzards and harriers. This ratio is common during the migration season.

After eight years had flown by, and I was living again in the UK, I decided to return to the camp. I retraced my journey to Calabria wondering what, if any, changes had taken place. I was pleased that, since 1991, many UK volunteers had been attending this camp on a regular basis and, in the meantime, another camp had been established in the area.

Volunteers in the camps have done a lot to protect birds in this area. During the last eight years, with more and more volunteers regularly attending camps in Calabria, their presence has actually driven many hunters from their specially made shooting bunkers, scattering them up into the hills.

Most of the volunteers at the camp I joined are students from a university to the north of Rome where they have their own conservation group called GUFO. Amongst them are some experienced ornithologists and very keen botanists, all

knowledgeable in the flora and fauna of the region.

The UK volunteers, along with their Italian counterparts, have produced some of the best census reports since the camp was first opened. These census reports are absolutely vital, as the Messina Strait is one of the three main migratory routes for raptors etc which fly from Africa to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.

Another vital role in LIPU's mission to stop this massacre is the surveillance and eventual arrest of the poachers. However, as some raptors are still being blown out of the sky, one has to assume that the police are not being given clear instructions from central government as to what procedures should be taken against the poachers.

With approximately 20 volunteers and five rented cars, members of GUFO have shown great professionalism in organising surveillance operations and liaising with the Forest Guards and Carabinieri. Some arrests were made this year which would not have been possible without GUFO's dedication and involvement. I am particularly indebted to Giulio, my interpreter, and Stefano for educating me in the plants and mammals of the area.

The scenery there was breathtaking. To get a panoramic view of the Messina Straits, with Sicily and Mount Etna in the background, and then watch buzzards, harriers and storks gliding through on the thermals is truly amazing.

While on patrol there are always opportunities to observe other species of birds. Beeeaters are always around, Golden Orioles and Rock Thrushes were seen and, during one hot afternoon, the rare Spectacled Warbler and also the Dartford were recorded. If you are fortunate you may even see the Golden and Bonelli's Eagle, both local to the area.

Even if you are not a birdwatcher, just go and see this extraordinary and beautiful part of Italy. The very presence of foreign tourists helps to deter the illegal behaviour of the poachers so why not

learn about the culture and taste some of the finest food in the world? Your presence there could save the life of one of the migrating harriers or ospreys.

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A Coffee Morning

I claim the defence of being a mere male when I say that coffee mornings have always been outside my experience. Jean Jackson of Market Drayton has no such problems and she held a very successful event in May which raised over £100 for LIPU. If other members might be inspired to do the same, please let me know and I will supply a pack of informative literature and other things to help the morning to become a success. Thank you Jean.

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Publications - The Way Ahead

Some while ago I said that I wanted to expand our publications and the first step is my aim to have all of them at least as large as this one. To do that I do need help with articles and you are all invited to send me anything of interest. The dream of any newsletter editor is to have more copy than space - but it never seems to happen. I did receive similar suggestions from quite a few readers some months ago, asking for maps and explanations of where the reserves etc are.

Brian Horkley, our long standing translator and newly recruited Danny Maraia are translating the Italian web pages into English for the Internet but on the last page of this newsletter I print the first of many maps which I hope will be interesting to all who don't have access to the world wide web. Let me know what you think. We start with two places you must have heard a lot about - the LIPU reserve at Torrile and the Raptor Centre at Sala Baganza, both within ten miles of Parma where LIPU is based.

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This English Digest is summarised and translated by Brian Horkley and Danny Maraia:

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Membership Matters

LIPU UK has again decided against any change in the level of membership fee; unchanged since 1989 it will remain £13 for the year 2000.

The running of LIPU UK is financed entirely out of the branch's share of membership fee income - 50% of each new member's fee and 25% of each renewal; the balance is sent with all the other funds raised to HQ in Italy. Given the unique position of LIPU UK, we have to provide many services in this country which HQ provides in Italy.

And finally...

I would just like to say LIPU UK and its successes, which have been considerable, is all about its members and supporters; and in my first year as UK Representative you have all been wonderful - I have enjoyed this year as your representative and look forward to the future with confidence - Thank you.

**Lega Italiana
Protezione Uccelli
(LIPU)**



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