

THANK YOU LIPU!

As we reach our 35th Anniversary my thanks go to all those who have enabled us to achieve so much for nature: 53 Reserves and Centres.

by Danilo Mainardi, President of LIPU

Since becoming President I have often travelled the country visiting our Reserves. They are often the newest ones where my presence is required in drawing up operating contracts. At other times, however, I also visit well established reserves, perhaps for some special event such as celebrating the completion of improvements or the introduction of a species, or perhaps merely for some bureaucratic necessity. I really enjoy visiting these natural areas and would like to see all our members travel the country, feeling at home in LIPU protected areas. Yes, do go and visit our magnificent Reserves. They are outstanding in their diversity, and this is not only a logical consequence of their particular locations within the country but each one is also the result of different initiatives and ideas: ranging from butterfly houses to walks for the blind. Reserves are something concrete and practical, and through both direct and indirect conservation measures, they protect habitats and species, and also teach how successful conservation can be achieved. But while visiting the reserves do not look only at nature, look also at the people who make the reserves what they are, who protect them, and visit them. There is so much to learn from all those people and to them goes our gratitude.



53 RESERVES AND CENTRES - PEARLS OF NATURE

LIPU reserves, with a total area of 7000 hectares and a wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems, constitute a real “network” for nature.

by Armando Gariboldi

When, in 1979, a group of enthusiasts thought of creating the first LIPU Reserve in a beautiful wetland at Crava Morozzo, they never imagined that they were beginning something which would eventually lead to the creation of a veritable necklace of “pearls of nature”, more than 50 reserves and centres being managed by LIPU and covering over 7000 hectares.

Within these reserves there are about 3200 animal and plant species, including more than 250 birds. It is a true natural heritage of biodiversity within a wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems. The sites were first established to protect nature and have become peaceful places to go “birdwatching”, a foreign word which is now part of the vocabulary of all Italian nature lovers. It is an activity that in Italy was born and grew out of those first reserves, established by LIPU and other environmental associations.

The present network, after a pioneering phase when opportunities were taken only as they arose, is the result of careful strategic planning and agreements with various partners of BirdLife International. The network of LIPU Reserves is fifth in importance in the world.

The future of the LIPU network of reserves, as with all protected areas in Italy, lies in their effective management. Official regulations on

their own are not enough to guarantee their real protection. To achieve that, many LIPU Reserves have been provided with multi-year plans with precise objectives for the maintenance and improvement of habitat and species, and also to encourage more visitors.

One of the principle objectives of the next few years is to consolidate practices in management and use, provide adequate buildings, as well as better trained and equipped personnel, and make the reserves accessible to people with physical disabilities.

As local authorities are referring more and more to LIPU for advice and support in the management of their land, perhaps now would be the right time to ask the Government for actual formal help in guaranteeing the better management of reserves, which have now become important aspects of the national fabric.

A FEW STATISTICS

- There are 6 wetlands of international importance.
- There are 9 kilometres of protected coastline. 17 reserves have been designated as IBA (Important Bird Areas).
- There are 32 observation hides.
- 33 Reserves and 8 Centres are open to the public.
- 108 breeding species are on the list of birds under threat.
- There are 148 aviaries for the treatment and rehabilitation of injured birds.
- Every year the Centres free 1800 birds back into the wild.
- 3200 species of animals and plants have been counted on the Reserves.

- 125,000 people visit the Reserves each year, including 2800 school children.
- Management of the Reserves costs £650,000 sterling a year.

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOR MAN

Nature conservation and the spread of environmental education are aims of LIPU Reserves; the main work of the Centres is the treatment of injured birds and improved public awareness.

by Ugo Faralli

We do it for them. For the hovering of a Kestrel, for the frenetic drumming of a Woodpecker, for the water dance of a Grebe, for the coming and going of migrants. For the croaking of a frog and the leap of deer. For the scented blossoms of orchids and for the majestic spread of a beech tree. We do it for all for them, for nature, and consequently we do it also for ourselves. Perhaps the following phrase encapsulates the whole sense, the philosophy, and the mission of LIPU Reserves and Centres: nature protection and environmental education.

We believe that no-one, over 20 years ago, when the first reserve at Crava Morozzo was established and we created the first Raptor Recuperation Centre at Parma, would have bet a single lira on the success, durability and importance of our creations. From a small beginning, over the years it has grown and developed, thanks to the commitment of so many volunteers in LIPU branches and to the work of the staff of the many Reserves and Centres, so that it has now become a consolidated system of protected areas (the Reserves), that manage over 7000 hectares of nature, and of "hospitals" for wildlife (the Centres), where more than 11,000 animals are brought in every year. There is a total staff of over forty at these Centres. The system of LIPU Reserves shelters and protects over 3200 different animal and plant

species, including more than 250 species of birds which can be observed in the course of the year.

The Centres, on the other hand, have a more specific task, at least for many species of birds, and raptors in particular. Their principle aim is to receive, treat and then liberate the thousands of creatures which come in, perhaps suffering from gunshot wounds or weak, poisoned or covered in oil.

The aim is not only to protect and conserve, it is also to educate, to encourage awareness and a liking for nature. This whole process is concerned with both the present and the future, for we cannot lose any more time. That would mean losing even more habitat and wildlife. We decided, some years ago, to make the Reserves and Centres more open to the public, equipping them so as to allow people to see the injured raptors, the nests of White Storks, to observe the slow progress of a turtle and the high-speed twists and turns of a Sparrowhawk, to admire the blossoming of orchids and the hunt of the fox. Not as separate elements, not as individual acts, but as part of a unique living system, coexisting with Man.

A MODEL FOR ALL

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

by Paul Easton.

The main aim of RSPB Reserves has always been to protect and manage habitats which are important for birds, and we intend to continue in that direction by acquiring new areas of land.

Currently the RSPB owns or manages more than 150 Reserves, with a total area of 100,000 hectares, where 62 seriously threatened species are breeding and where a million people visit every year. Bird conservation can be improved immensely if one manages to get the general public involved and in this respect the RSPB has been particularly successful. RSPB Reserves play

an important part in education, giving people the opportunity to appreciate birds in their natural habitat and demonstrating good conservation practices. It is interesting for managers of LIPU Reserves too, who come every year to visit and study RSPB reserves.

It is important that visitors do not disturb the birds. That is why we encourage the general public to come to certain reserves, which are big enough to cope, in order to leave more fragile areas undisturbed; in that way the needs of both birds and visitors can be satisfied. Maintaining the right balance is a continual struggle. The RSPB uses surveys and market research to evaluate the impact and expectations of visitors and, similarly, continuously monitors its conservation work. There is still much to learn and the role of RSPB Reserves continues to grow and evolve; we wish LIPU every success in its own growth and development.

WE ARE NO LONGER THE DESERT OF EUROPE

by Marco Lambertini

I remember the ideas, proposals and strategies of a recently formed LIPU branch in Vicolo San Tiburzio. Crava Morozzo at Cuneo was LIPU's first reserve and it had given those pioneers a great idea ... to create a chain of LIPU Reserves.

I recall the first feelings of satisfaction and victory when the Lago di Montepulciano became a protected area. Up to then it had been infested with hunters and now, as a protected LIPU Reserve, it is full of ducks, Purple Herons, Night Herons and Bitterns.

I remember the bitterness and deep-felt anger when poachers burnt down the visitor centre and observation hide at Massaciuccoli, the day after its inauguration. Today, Massaciuccoli is not only a LIPU Reserve, it is also a Regional Park.

I remember the tremendous improvement in quality as a result of the enormous amount of environmental reconstruction work at the LIPU Reserve at Torrile, and the provision of information boards and easily accessible observation hides. Today I would challenge anyone who visits this wetland and sees its magnificent Black-winged Stilts to imagine that only a few years ago it was just a field of maize.

Just look what it is like today. LIPU, with more than 50 Reserves and Centres, from the Alps to Sicily, and more than 100,000 visitors a year, makes an enormous contribution to the direct protection of birds and biodiversity, and to the spread of an attitude of respect and love for nature.

They are the signs that Italy is changing, from the "desert of Europe" as we used to call it, to a nation that increasingly recognises the importance of nature protection. There are also signs that a world which has never been so aggressive and destructive AGAINST the environment, has also never been more conscious and stimulated FOR the environment.

The challenge for the next fifty years will be to convert this changing consciousness into action, practices and policies. And LIPU and its reserves are zealous combatants in this great unstoppable green army.

FROM RESERVES TO NATIONAL PARKS

by Giuliano Tallone

With the development of protected areas in Italy LIPU Reserves were amongst the first to be effectively managed from the points of view of information, education and nature conservation. With the growth of the park system, starting from the mid-70s as a result of pressure from LIPU and other environmental associations, this experience of leading the way has allowed us to experiment with techniques and organisation that have then been exported to other protected areas

in Italy. Visitor centres, observation hides and nature walks were all first provided in LIPU Reserves, thanks in part to experience gained from similar organisations in other countries. My own experience in this development has been as manager of a LIPU Reserve, then of conservation and research projects, and finally as director of a national park, to which I have brought the knowledge which LIPU has developed over the years. Now, the Italian Parks, a great network of more than 500 protected areas, can truly say: Thank you, LIPU!

NATURE IS FOR EVERYONE

To make nature accessible to all, including people with physical disabilities, is one of LIPU's aims and in some of its Reserves and Centres - Torrile, Isola Bianca, Centro Cicogne, Centro Rapaci, Montepulciano, Massaciuccoli - it is already partly possible.

In this interview with architect Fabrizio Ves-covo we are trying to find out where Italy is at present and what steps we should take in the near future.

Architect, have you ever visited a LIPU Reserve which is accessible to disabled people?

Yes, I attended a convention on the subject of accessibility of nature, organised at Ferrara in 1998, and I visited the reserve at Isola Bianca. It was a wonderful experience: we crossed the Po on a specially designed boat and then, on a single seater half-track, electric powered, so it was not noisy, I was able, along with my wife and friends, to immerse myself within the splendid nature of the island.

How does Italy compare with other countries?

Italy has the most forward-looking regulations in Europe, but is still not using them. A law was passed in 1971 but we are only now taking the first steps as people are demanding more.

There is a fundamental lack of special training for architects, engineers and surveyors. The law is only partially understood and is applied literally, resulting in courses of action which often only partially resolve the problems.

In your opinion, what are the most suitable provisions to improve accessibility to nature?

At the Ferrara convention it emerged that the definition “disabled person” is not correct. It is better to say “a person whose motor and sense functions are reduced”, a description which includes, for example, old people who have temporary difficulties in their movement, and mothers with pushchairs.

The people who are involved in accessibility projects almost always think of the needs of a single group, paraplegics. But the number of people who use wheelchairs, in Italy, is only a small fraction of the total number who have difficulty in movement; about 300,000 out of 9 million. This approach leads to errors in design and wastage of resources, by providing facilities which are of no use to most of those people to whom they should be directed.

What is the solution then?

First of all, to understand that there is a wide range of users who have different needs. There are some, for example, who cannot stand for long periods of time and need lots of places to sit down. There should be a special facilities area at the entrance, where wheelchairs and escorts are available, or electric scooters for those who prefer to be independent. Larger parks should regularly allow disabled people, with necessary precautions and checks, to go in by car, or electric minibus. The important thing, in their management, is to enable easy access by various means, allowing everyone to enjoy nature, because nature is for everyone, and not just for the most athletic.



UNWANTED RESERVES

Experience at Massaciucoli shows that environmental protection linked to improvement in quality can overcome distrust by the local population.

by Stefano Maestrelli

The best results from nature protection and conservation require a wide involvement of the people, and collaboration between park authorities and environmental volunteers is particularly fruitful. The experience of LIPU and the park authorities of Migliarino S. Rossore Massaciucoli in managing a reserve at the Lago di Massaciucoli is notable for having developed their vision of environmental protection in a difficult area. When the Park was established in 1979 there was much adverse reaction from local people in an area which is notable for its tourist economy and long-standing hunting activities. The fact that LIPU set aside part of the Park as a reserve for the study, observation and evaluation of the bird population was a different approach to the environment and the land, as opposed to just denying access.

The first reaction from the local people was one of incomprehension and open conflict. However, the opening of a nature museum and the first educational visits improved relations so that those activities were included in tourist information, not only for the commune of Massarosa, but the whole of Versilia.

Today, the situation has changed and from this experience at the Lago di Massaciucoli it is possible to understand what a huge contribution the work of an environmental association, well directed and well established with the community, can make to the development of the general consciousness of the people. To really appreciate this new and positive climate I invite everyone to come along in August to the Lago di Massaciucoli, during the Feast of San Lorenzo, when there will be evening festivals, with open-air suppers and trips on the lake to see the falling stars.

THE SICILIAN EXPERIENCE

The management of nature reserves: a new challenge

by *Mauro Mannino*

For the last two years LIPU has been managing two nature reserves, Isola delle Femmine and Biviere di Gela, on behalf of the Regional government. The management of these reserves is a new challenge for LIPU; we are progressing from just providing services, such as guided educational visits, to the more complex management of the whole area of the reserve.

This has come about thanks to the special relationship between LIPU and the Region of Sicily, which considers us to be the only spokespersons for the management of protected areas. It is a considerable responsibility but up to now has been very successful. LIPU has two offices engaged in the management of reserves in Sicily, and seven employees. The "Sicilian model" of management of protected areas is very valuable and could be used elsewhere in Italy.

A WOOD FOR BIRDS

by *Gabriella Meo*

It was a record! So many cakes had never been distributed by LIPU as at Christmas 1999.

It was a great success, and, as always, due to LIPU members and volunteers in local branches, as well as the companies which donated the cakes. Thanks are also due to the mass-media which understood and supported the initiative.

Its success was beyond our expectations and shows that in Italy, where there are those who have no respect for the environment and nature, there are also multitudes of people who, when presented with such a project to give trees, respond with conviction and generosity.

The objective was achieved and now, off we go to plant 15,000 trees. This spring, many different varieties will be planted in areas which are very important, environmentally and strategically, for the survival of some very rare species of birds.

In Umbria, for example, Colfiorito is a place which has been really special for swallows for thousands of years. They use it as a kind of bridge between Europe and Africa during their autumn migration. The more places they can find on the way to rest and feed, the more swallows will find their way to the great assemblies in Africa, such as those in Nigeria which LIPU has been involved in managing. In the splendid wetland at Colfiorito trees and shrubs will be planted, for swallows certainly, but the enriching of the environment will also be to the benefit of all wildlife in the area.

At Reggiolo, on the Po Plain, the oaks which have been planted by LIPU will help to recreate a reserve where at present there are only intensively cultivated fields, poor in biodiversity. Here we will help to produce a real environmental improvement by providing something practical and useful for birds and other wildlife.

You can be certain that our gifts at Christmas time will go on growing and gradually, as time passes and throughout the changing seasons, they will contribute substantially to enriching our landscape.

BETWEEN NATURE AND ECONOMICS

Conserving biodiversity protects society from environmental degradation

by *Danilo Mainardi*

Biodiversity is the province of naturalists but it is obviously of interest to other disciplines too. The conference at Erice in December involved a group of ecologists and economists, to discuss what needs to be done, in terms of global policies, to conserve the diversity of life in the

world. This concern is particularly apt in the light of data which show that at least 12% of plant species, 11.7% of bird species, 30% of amphibians and 40% of mammals are threatened with extinction. Let us firstly understand what biodiversity is. It needs to be stressed that biodiversity cannot be properly described just by reference to a simple list of what species happen to exist now in a particular habitat. We must keep in mind that these forms are the result of evolutionary processes which have been going on for millions of years. It is a mass of interrelationships which has reached a level of dynamic equilibrium. It is therefore risky to allow the elimination of even a single species, or to introduce species from outside. Everyone can see how the extinction of a particular predator can result in not only a population explosion of the prey species, but also the appearance of epidemics which until then had been controlled.

It must be pointed out that globally that some 1000 billion pounds sterling are spent annually in subsidies, of which more than a third is spent on agriculture. Of this third, almost 80% results in damage to biodiversity. The conference recommended a realistic change in direction, using subsidies in other ways and controls through the tax system.

In Seattle the voice of public opinion was calling for extreme care in dealing with the genetic modification of living organisms. Lack of knowledge of the effects of consuming GM foods exposes us to potentially serious dangers. It has been requested that those companies which are already preparing to sell such products should take a step backwards.

It is true that for centuries grafting techniques have been used to combine the best qualities of closely linked species, for example, fruit trees, but it is also true that to interfere with DNA has practical, ethical and economic implications and is quite another matter indeed.

The call from the economists and naturalists at Erice underlines how the conservation of biodiversity is essential to allow opportunities for

development, and limit the exposure of society to risks of undesirable changes in the environment.

WOODPECKERS

Valuable ecological indicators, elusive masters of the forest

by Andrea Corso

Birds have always been considered to be excellent ecological indicators; in fact the presence or not of a particular species can indicate very easily and clearly the state of health of the environment. This is not the case with all bird species: many birds seem to be very adaptable to unfavourable ecological conditions, crows and gulls, for example. Woodpeckers, however, are extremely reliable indicators of the ecological state of woodland, its state of health.

Woodpeckers feed mainly on insect larvae which they find inside the trunks and under the bark of mature trees. Planted woodland, consisting of all young trees, will only have sound trunks available, lacking cavities. There is therefore no opportunity for woodpeckers to find food, nor to construct nests, as they do in holes in older trees. A mature woodland, on the other hand, with a wide variety of species and ages, will be a great mass of foliage, with lots of insects that lay their eggs inside the oldest trees.

In addition, the nest holes excavated by woodpeckers are priceless hideouts for other birds and many small mammals. As if by magic, in a chain reaction, the biodiversity of the woodland will be, thanks to woodpeckers, increased and clearly better than that of a young, monotonous, homogenous wood. Woodpeckers can also be considered to be "accelerators" in the process of the breaking down of the woodland material: in seeking their food they gradually make holes all over fallen trunks and split branches, all helping to speed up the process of decomposition.

In Italy there are several species of woodpeckers, from the commonest, Great Spotted and Green, as well as the less widespread Lesser Spotted and Grey-headed, to the much rarer Black, the Three-toed (only in the eastern Alps), the White-backed (only in Abruzzo, in some restricted areas of Lazio and Gargano) and the Middle Spotted (mainly in Basilicata, Molise, Calabria and Abruzzo).

Some of these species in particular, being more vulnerable and more demanding, are diagnostic elements which can be used to immediately gauge the importance and status of a woodland.

500 KM OF PATHS

Beigua Park, astride the Ligurian Appennines, includes an extraordinary variety of natural habitats, ranging from beech and chestnut woods on east facing slopes to Mediterranean scrub on the seaward side. Travelling along the 500 km of footpaths, one can enjoy landscape of rare beauty on both sides of the ridge: towards the Po Plain and the Alps on one side and towards the sea on the other, when on clear days it is possible to admire a large part of the Ligurian coast. Within the park, LIPU manages Monte Dente Reserve, situated at an altitude between 400 and 1800 metres and covering a large area of wild mountainous terrain. There are many species of birds in the reserve, particularly those of open habitats of pasture and rocks.

THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS

By 1 March two million signatures had been collected by BirdLife International on behalf of migrating birds. The petition against hunting of migrating birds, launched by BirdLife International throughout Europe, has been a great success. The target of 2 million had in fact been exceeded! Our thanks go to all those who helped to achieve this result and we confirm that they are to be sent by Mike Rands, Director of

BirdLife International, to the European Parliament, where they are to be received in person by the President, Nicole Fontaine.

STORKS IN SICILY

Every year since 1993 storks have come to Arancio at Sambuca di Sicilia, 12 km from the sea. At first there was only one pair, then two, but although there were several attempts to nest they all failed. In 1999 two pairs settled in, one nest was abandoned, perhaps before young hatched, but the other attempt was successful. At the beginning of August two young storks flew. In this area, which has been ravaged by irresponsible poachers, there is now a note of optimism resulting from the increased awareness shown by local people. The State Forest Guards were most attentive and enthusiastically vigilant.

SHOOTING ORGANISATION EXCLUDED

An historic event: as a result of revisions in its regulations it has been decided to exclude Feder-caccia from the Olympic Committee, as well as not to accept applications from hunters in new federations. This signifies a substantial loss of income for the hunters and a big blow to their image. They are bound to appeal but the decision was taken not so much against hunting itself but in accordance with Olympic statutes which define the concept of Olympic sport, and therefore attempts by the hunters to get in by the back door will be more difficult. "Hunting is an unequal contest and sport is not about contests between contenders who do not start at the same level" says Carolina Morace, ex-national woman footballer. "It is only a negative kind of pastime".

REPORT ON ANTI-POACHING ACTIVITIES 1999

As a result of lobbying by environmental organisations, in which LIPU took a leading part, the government is allocating a sum of £500,000 sterling each year for the next three years to the CFS (State Forest Guards). This is specifically for anti-poaching activities and associated control measures. It is evidence of LIPU's efforts towards obtaining this valuable outcome, and also of a closer working relationship with the Forest Guards. In Brescia alone, a LIPU patrol of four volunteers has managed to destroy over 11,000 archetti traps, confiscated 115 nets, freed 385 birds being used as live decoys and sent in 45 reports to the Public Prosecutor in Brescia.

With these new financial resources for the Forest Guards we expect that their surveillance activities will be increased, and that they will investigate a growing phenomenon, particularly in the Centre-South, and which seems to be the tip of a dangerous iceberg, with strong links to criminal organisations.

PADOVA: KESTREL PROJECT

After years of hard work, the Padova Branch of LIPU has been finally successful in reintroducing 6 young kestrels into the wild. They were raised from a pair of birds which themselves were too injured to be released. Thanks to the dedication and professionalism of LIPU volunteers the chicks were cared for by their own parents in the aviary. In the Province of Padova breeding attempts are increasing, now up to 6 certainly successful and another 4 or 5 probables.

A LARGE LEGACY FROM ROME

Thanks to Elena Medicina, a member of LIPU in Rome, who has bequeathed 260 million lire (over £80,000 sterling), we have been able to complete a number of tasks for wildlife

by Antonio Ferrari

To make a will in favour of LIPU is an act of love for nature, and shows a sincere interest in humanity and the future. Elena Medicina had been a member of LIPU since 1984 and nature was very close to her heart. She was closely connected to the Rome Branch and was also much interested in our national projects.

Her great generosity and a desire to protect the environment, as well as faith in LIPU, led to make a bequest towards the work of our association. Thanks to her legacy of 260 million lire we have been able to achieve many of our projects, fully respecting her wishes to effectively protect the natural world.

50 million lire (about £16,500 sterling) has been directed to the Raptor Recuperation Centre at Sala di Baganza, where we have been able to support the work of treatment and rehabilitation of injured birds and buy urgently needed equipment.

It is of great assistance to an establishment which only exists through the contributions of LIPU members and supporters. Torrile Reserve and the Marine and Freshwater Birds Recuperation Centre at Livorno are two other establishments which have no financial support from public funds and where the money has been used to support their practical work in nature conservation.

In addition there are many other activities which LIPU organises, including training and environmental education, all important sectors but traditionally always short of funds. With 60 million lire (about £20,000 sterling) many small projects have been achieved, yet again spreading our message of protection and love for the world we live in. The rest of the gift has been directed to something which is perhaps a little more distant from direct investment in nature, but is no less important. We have finally been able to repay the loan which was used to buy the office accommodation of LIPU Headquarters in Rome. Now, after many years, it is finally fully owned by LIPU.

For all these projects we are grateful to Elena Medicina. We are also grateful to all the other

people, whether members of LIPU or not, who have made bequests to help our work for nature.

In describing the practical projects which have benefited from such legacies we hope that others too will consider this way of supporting our work in the future. In regard to this, I will remind you that, as the director of the “Bequests Programme”, I am always ready to respond to your questions and provide all the information you may need. A legacy is a practical way of giving support, which remains for ever and is not forgotten.

THE ERIKA: AN ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE

by Allain Bougrain-Dubourg, President of the LPO (BirdLife in France)

After the sinking of the ship Erika, the LPO (the French bird protection organisation) made a first estimate of the scale of the catastrophe. In 3 weeks, volunteers collected from the beaches more than 35,000 dead seabirds, of 50 species. But this is only a part, less than 25%, of the total number of birds which fell victim to an incident of marine pollution unprecedented in Europe; the rest sank to the depths before they could reach the shore.

A slaughter on such a scale is explained by the combination of two factors: firstly, even though the quantity of oil spilled into the sea (10,000 tons) was less than the Amoco Cadiz in 1978 (230,000 tons), it happened right in the middle of the period when seabirds are overwintering in the area. The birds which breed on the coasts of northern Europe (Razorbills, Guillemots, Puffins and Kittiwakes) or on the tundra (ducks and waders), spend the winter in more southern latitudes, either out at sea or in bays and estuaries. The pollution hit them just when they were having to cope with winter and when they were trying to increase their reserves of fat, fuel for their return journey. Most other such catastrophes have, on the other hand, occurred after this vital period for

birds. Secondly, the pollution spread out to sea, and to the south, along a 500 km front, and therefore covering a very substantial area.

The pollution hit the shores of the Vendée and the Charente-Maritime, seriously affecting shore birds such as ducks and small waders, but there were also victims amongst species such as Little Egrets and Kingfishers which also find refuge in sheltered bays. The same fate happened to Brent Geese, of which France has a large part of the world population. There were thus thousands of victims among small birds, Guillemots in particular, which formed 90% of the coastal species affected.

The major concern of the LPO is what will happen to the birds which breed in France, for example on the reserve at Sept-Iles, especially Guillemots (250 pairs) and Puffins (250 pairs). What will happen next spring? Are these species destined to disappear from France at the dawn of the third millennium? The coming months will be decisive for the survival of these birds and for the maintenance of biodiversity.

A THREAT TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Mediterranean is a small patch of water compared with the immensity of the oceans, but it is crossed by 22% of world's oil traffic. According to research, every year 300,000 tons of crude oil and 650,000 tons of petroleum products are discharged into the Mediterranean. Most of the oil tankers which use this route are old ships, not fitted with devices to limit environmental damage, such as double hulls. The Italian coast is therefore at great risk. The critical areas include the Strait of Messina, the area of sea between Corsica, Liguria, Tuscany, Sardinia, Monaco and Provence, and also Venice.

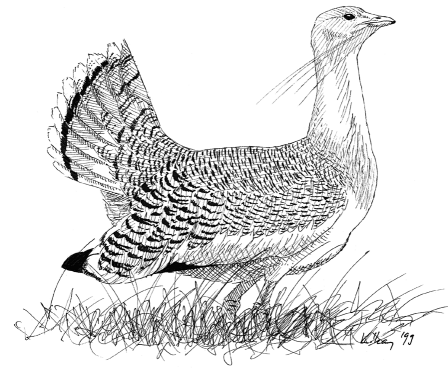
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NEWS FROM LIPU UK

THE YEAR 2000 APPEAL

I am delighted to be able to tell you that this year's appeal for LIPU has been even better than that of last year and we are certain to meet and probably exceed the target we set in our plans to help the work in Italy.

To all those who have contributed so generously I say a sincere Thank You - and to those who might be wondering if they are too late I can say, "No you are not, you can still help!"



PROBLEMS IN HUNGARY

In the Hoopoe I said I would return to the subject of Hungary and I was going to write of my visit in 1994 when I took a team of RAF people to help the Great Bustard Protection Programme.

The news from Hungary, however, is not good and I quote here from the latest issue of World Birdwatch - the publication of BirdLife International:

The Hungarian Ministry of the Environment has rejected all applications for continuing finance for the MME (BirdLife in Hungary) Great Bustard Protection Programme, plunging the programme into financial crisis. The government decision is apparently the result of a lack of interest or appreciation of the importance of the programme amongst government officials.

The Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) is globally threatened and is covered by several international conventions. The species is considered amongst the top priorities for nature conservation in Hungary. The MME Great Bustard Protection Programme has been running successfully for 11 years, with MME co-ordinating and undertaking practical conservation work such as the active protection of nest sites at risk from agricultural practices. Until now, the costs of the programme have been

met by government funds and from donations, but unless money can be found immediately, the future for the 200 Great Bustards living in the project area is uncertain



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