

From the President of LIPU

by Danilo Mainardi

The environmental crisis that has overtaken the Galapagos islands is not just another in a long line of disasters for us to worry about and then forget. It is something more than this, and it simply is not enough just to talk about ecology. What is required in order fully to appreciate the desecration that has taken place, is an awareness of what this area signifies for humanity.



It would not be amiss for us to take another glance at what Darwin, as a young man aboard the Beagle in September 1835, wrote in his diary, where he describes the feelings that overcame him on setting foot on the archipelago for the first time. For it was there, in that pristine "laboratory" of nature, that he realised how fundamental was the effect of isolation on evolution. He was able to estimate the effects of natural selection in an area totally severed from the rest of the world. It was these

observations that gave rise to a complete overhaul of man's understanding of biology into what came to be known as Darwinian theory, a theory that has had a profound influence on humanity.

This is what the Galapagos represent. We must recognise the gravity of what has happened and not overlook the symbolic significance of these islands, nor the implications of the damage done to them.

HUNTERS ARE GIVEN 10 BILLION LIRE (£3.3 MILLION STERLING)

by Armando Gariboldi

Of all the questions we are asked by our members, there is one that crops up repeatedly and needs answering:

Why is it that the hunters, whose numbers have more than halved in the past twenty years, are still such a potent force? Certainly not because they are favoured by the general public, nor because their ranks have been swelled by the young (the average age of the Italian hunter is getting higher and higher). Nor can it be attributed to their ability to manage wildlife, for hunting in Italy depends largely on rearing and importing wild animals, to be released a few days before the shooting season starts. And yet the hunters are still able to influence high-level policy-making as well as decisions taken at local level.

The reason for this strength is to be found in the aggressive nature of the group as a whole, and in their tried-and-tested political persuasiveness, not to mention the sixty or so activists in Parliament spread across the entire political spectrum, whose

job it is to present a united front, with the support, need it be said, of the arms lobby.

Just before last Christmas, this “Hunters’ Party” carried out a combined operation during the hotly-contested debate on the Budget proposals. The operation succeeded in blocking an amendment that would have allocated about 10 billion lire (£3.3 million sterling) to the National Parks, and also managed to have the money redirected, through the Regions, to the hunters. This disgraceful episode was carried through at the taxpayers’ expense, with the connivance – or indifference – of several members of the Government, who ought to have supported the amendment favouring Protected Areas. We feel, consequently, that it is our duty to speak out against certain individuals and to remind them of their responsibilities in Italy and throughout Europe.

At about the same time, the hunting group in Brussels attempted to gain approval – for the umpteenth time – for their motion for a change to the Birds Directive. A proposal by the Italian deputy Ebner, however, was not debated because of the “quorum” rule, and for this outcome we owe thanks to our network, BirdLife International, for marshalling its forces against yet another example of the brazen-faced arrogance of those who put their vested interests above those of the majority of their countrymen.

HUNTING

An outstanding example of fiscal injustice: 10 billion lire destined for Protected Areas rerouted to the hunter’s coffers.

by Armando Gariboldi

On 18 December 2000, while the Senate was engaged in approving the budget, it rejected a Government proposal that 50% of revenues from the gun-bearing tax should NOT be returned to hunters for the management of wildlife habitat. The Government also proposed that these resources should be used to support protected areas. The

government proposal was defeated: 121 against, 41 in favour, 21 abstentions.

Fiscal Injustice

This situation highlights two serious issues. The first is connected with the source of the funds and the recipients: giving a 50% tax rebate to an elite (the hunters) means not so much “using the money that was ours anyway”, as the hunters claim, but turning fiscal injustice into an established principle. If this kind of largesse were applied in other areas, like housing, it would result in a 50% reimbursement of property taxes to all home owners. The second issue is that the government amendment was rejected by 85 Government senators (who voted against or abstained), who should have voted in favour of the proposal. Once again, we see evidence of a cross-party, pro-hunting alliance.

Because it is not easy effectively to challenge shoddy practice in politics, and is especially difficult for organisations like LIPU, who prefer not to be identified with a particular political persuasion, we have decided to publish the names of all those Senators who voted for this 10 billion handout to the hunters, so depriving our parks of precious resources. This is such a serious matter that we feel duty-bound to reveal the names of the politicians involved to our members, who can then come to their own conclusions.

Given that we are in the middle of an election campaign, and in order to avoid any misinterpretation of our purpose in publishing the list, we have avoided all reference to political parties or constituencies. We want to focus attention on individual Senators and their accountability.

HOW WOULD WE SPEND IT?

The 10 billion lire allocated by Parliament to the hunters makes us reflect on what could have been done for the environment with such a sum. Let’s look at the total amount of Government funding earmarked for the running of the 18 National Parks. Last year, this stood at roughly 100 billion lire. The outlay for a medium sized park, such as

the Val Grande, is around 2 billion, and for the wealthiest – the Abruzzo National Park – 10 billion. With that sort of money, LIPU would have been in a position to run eight times as many Reserves, or purchase a good 600 hectares of first-class wetlands and 3000 hectares of mountain terrain. With just one billion, 6 or 7 Rescue Centres could have been kept going for a whole year, or a big reintroduction project of an extinct species, such as the Sardinian Black Vulture.

Now, if it costs 1.2 billion lire to build 1 kilometre of motorway, a similar amount spent on the environment would bring enormous benefit and facilitate the implementation of substantial projects. It is one more reason not to keep quiet when we witness how our national “administrators” come to their decisions. The environment is synonymous with health and good quality of life, priorities that our political representatives can not be allowed to ignore. Ever.

MAN TO THE SLAUGHTER

Shooting kills people too. At the close of the hunting season, 30 people are reported to have been killed in shooting incidents. This is the deadly result of a pursuit that is becoming increasingly dangerous, not only for the animals, but for the hunters themselves, their relatives and friends, and for any unsuspecting passer-by who happens to cross the path of a bullet.

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

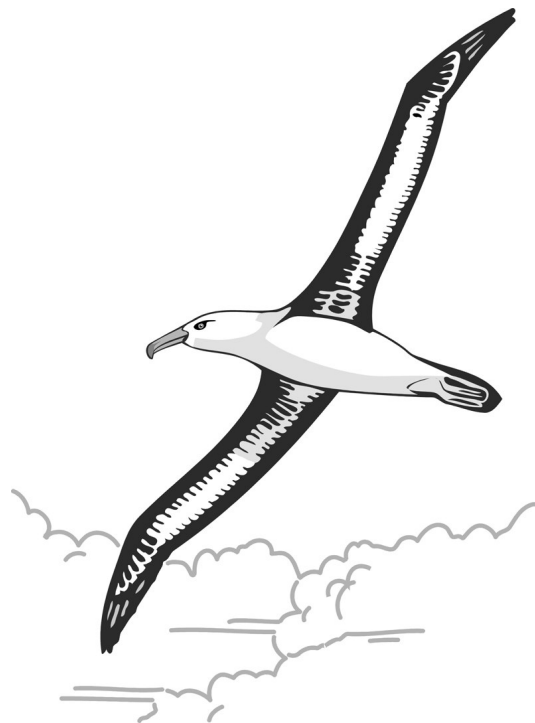
SOS FOR THE LORDS OF THE OCEAN!

Because of ever increasing industrial, irrational, and destructive fishing there has been a steep decline in the albatross and other marine birds. BirdLife International has sounded the alarm and offers a remedy

by Marco Lambertini

There are some creatures, amidst the infinite variety of life on our planet, that stir up deep symbolic emotions. Imagine five metres of wings opened like a sail to the wind, ‘lost’ in the immensity of

the ocean, elegant in flight, majestic and stupefying in their ability to ride the storms and brush the spray of the waves. Imagine all this and then it appears - an albatross.



Few of us have seen one, although pictures in documentaries and magazines, and accounts and stories, have made the albatross one of the most fascinating and well known birds on our planet. But this beautiful inhabitant of the oceans is today endangered like a third of all sea bird species in the world that are undergoing a steep decline. There are at the moment about 100 species that are on the red alert list of birds threatened with extinction. Many are gulls, terns, petrels, penguins, pelicans and...the albatross.

The death traps.

Once again birds are pointing out to us the state of our environment, in this case our seas. The degeneration of the state of the seas and coasts is the cause of this decline in birds: pollution and coastal development, but above all the preposterous and destructive fishing industry. About 80 million tons of fish per year (there were 17 in 1950) are landed, in addition to 30 million tons caught and thrown

back, dead, into the sea. A waste and a useless wanton destruction, all due to non-selective practices used in the fishing industry. A technique that is particularly dangerous for marine birds is 'long-lining', which involves the lowering of 'millions' of hooks into the ocean to catch tuna, 'Toothfish' and other off shore fish. A vessel can lower in one single shoot a good 100 km. of line with 10,000 hooks. The albatrosses follow the big fishing boats and, at the moment when the hooks are lowered, dive on the bait and swallow the hooks too, getting dragged deep down, drowning. About 10,000 albatrosses and shearwaters die like this each year in the southern ocean.



Almost all the species of albatross are declining and some species have only a population of a few thousand individuals. The largest of them, the wandering albatross, has a population of 30,000 individual birds but is among the species most affected by longline fishing and has declined rapidly in the last few decades.

The BirdLife Campaign

Various measures could be adopted to make the hooks sink rapidly, or they could be lowered immediately to such a depth as to be out of reach of the albatross. It is a matter of publicising these techniques and convincing the crews to use them.

It is not only applicable to the albatross but also to petrels and other marine birds, both in southern latitudes and in the northern seas, even potentially in the Mediterranean.

BirdLife International, the worldwide network of more than a hundred organisations for the protection of birds, has launched an international campaign against the killing of the albatross through longlining. The aim of the campaign is to force the adoption of preventive measures by the fleets of all the principal fishing nations (eg, Japan, Korea, Russia, Taiwan, Peru, Chile, Spain and others) and to take measures against illegal fishing boats because of the destructive fishing methods that they use.

LIPU, the Italian partner of BirdLife, supports this campaign by publicising information, putting pressure on international organisations, such as the FAO, and by thinking how to raise funds to support this important international project.

The health of the sea

At a more general level, BirdLife is facing the problem of the future viability of fishing and various aspects of ocean pollution. They are looking at preventive measures to avoid the terrible oil tanker accidents that seem increasingly to occupy the front pages of newspapers throughout the world. In short, a big campaign aimed specifically at the conservation of the albatross, and a wider programme to maintain our oceans and to make the fishing industry more respectful of marine ecology. For the protection of the sea, of marine birds, and to try and guarantee seas that are rich and full of fish for future generations.

FOUR SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

- Lower the hooks at night (when many birds are inactive)
- Lower the hooks through a simple tube mechanism, thus freeing the bait at a depth outside the diving range of the albatross.
- Use weighted lines that sink quickly.

- Before lowering the hooks employ plastic streamers from the stern of the vessel to frighten off the birds.

All these simple techniques have been tested and are successful. Used individually or together they could reduce the accidental catching of marine birds by 90%.

THE ALBATROSSES: WHO ARE THEY?

The albatrosses, amongst the world's largest flying birds, are Procellariiforms, tubenoses, like shearwaters, fulmars and petrels. They can have a wingspan of over three metres and a weight of 12 kilos!

Tireless fliers, these wonderful and imposing inhabitants of the ocean spend almost their entire life on the open seas, travelling thousands of kilometres each year and only going to coasts to breed. Their very large wings enable them to exploit the wind and the air turbulence generated by waves, so that they glide with a minimum output of energy. They only settle on the water when there is a complete absence of wind, or to feed on fish and crustaceans.

There is a total of 14 species dispersed throughout the oceans of the southern hemisphere and in the north Pacific. Completely at their ease in the air, on land they are clumsy and only take off with some effort, launching themselves from rocks and cliffs, by running along their own take-off runways or utilising the strong winds that are prevalent in the islands of the southern ocean. They choose remote and inaccessible islands for breeding, where they can nest directly on the ground. The reproductive cycle of the albatross is very slow: they start to reproduce at an age that varies, according to species, from 5 to 11 years, forming monogamous pairs that remain faithful throughout life. They lay just one egg and the young take a whole year before they can fly. The pair therefore only reproduce every two years. Because of this biological characteristic, populations that suffer drastic falls caused by modern fishing techniques can recover only very slowly.

THE SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN – LONGLINES

by Ariel Brunner

The problem of the accidental catching of sea birds on longlines (long wires to which are fixed thousands of baited hooks) is not limited only to the southern oceans. This also occurs in the North Sea and the Mediterranean, and in both cases it is always the Procellariiformi, members of the albatross family, that are most affected by it.

In the North Sea the species which suffers most is the Fulmar, while in the Mediterranean Cory's Shearwater is the most seriously affected. But although longline fishing is carried out by twelve out of nineteen countries in the Mediterranean little is known about the mortality this causes to marine birds in our waters.

The only Mediterranean country for which there is any data is Spain, where it is estimated that accidental catching causes a mortality of 4 to 6% annually in local colonies. If we take into account the fact that Cory's Shearwater spends almost half the year out at sea, where they probably suffer further harm, this amounts to an impact which could be unsustainable in the long term.

In Italian waters these problems seem to be concentrated on the Straits of Bonifacio and around Sicily. Here as in all the Mediterranean, the longlines are used to catch swordfish and blue fin tuna. The Italian fleet comprises some 700 fishing boats, but on top of these are the boats of other countries and especially the huge ships from Taiwan and Japan.

Another group of animals which regularly falls victim to fish hooks is marine turtles. Very many are recovered every year along our coasts after having swallowed fish hooks. In fact fishermen who find turtles on their hooks often simply cut the line leaving the seriously injured animals to their fate.

LIPU PROJECTS

A Euro Project for Colfiorito

The high plateau of Colfiorito is a valuable habitat for swallows and waders

by *Marco Gustin and Alfiero Pepponi*

The marshland of Colfiorito occupies the central part of an extensive and complex system of small upland plains which constitute one of the most interesting and attractive areas of Umbria and of the Apennines. Around the wetlands grows a luxuriant reedbed where tens of thousands of swallows



congregate in autumn ready to leave for Africa. Apart from the marsh the rest of the plateau is made up of meadows which become flooded in spring and act as an ideal stopping place for many migrating waders.

The Project

Because of its high wildlife value a LIFE project is being carried out here from the end of 1999. Financed by the EU and managed by LIPU a series of conservation measures is planned for this special environment. Among the aims is protection of the marsh, which is important for many species of birds, especially bittern, as Colfiorito is the most important breeding site in Italy for this species, and for the surrounding plateau incentives will be offered for a more environmentally friendly agriculture. Intensive farming is a feature of this region and, although it consists of cultivating crops typical of the Umbrian mountains (lentils and wheat), it has a heavy environmental cost because of the high level of pesticides used.

Action

The first months were spent mapping the farming areas to identify those of environmental importance. To protect this region the EU has provided

incentives to promote a less intensive form of agriculture. A second phase provided information about the scheme to farmers, and already an increased percentage of them have declared themselves willing to adopt organic methods using EEC measures.

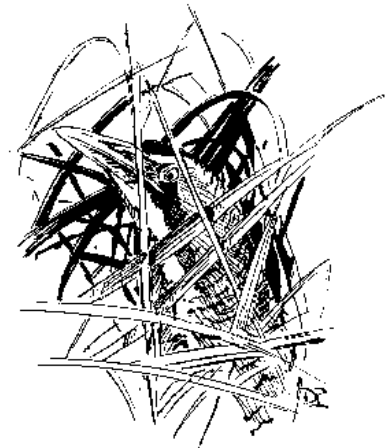
Two observation hides are also planned, one as a visitor centre beside the marsh, the other on rising ground to give a view of the whole area. Another initiative concerns the conservation of habitat for the bittern, by studying methods of cutting the reeds to improve the site for them. Finally, measures will be taken to safeguard the meadows by implementing a special mowing programme.

BITTERN ALERT

As you are birdwatching at a wetland you may notice in the reeds a bird which stands motionless in a strange upright position.

This is the Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) which, like the similar Little Bittern, camouflages itself completely by standing with its neck and beak pointing upwards, which makes it look like a tall reed, a position

that is effective against potential predators which often don't notice the difference.



The Bittern does not breed in colonies like other herons but in separate pairs and it regards only extensive reedbeds as a suitable environment, avoiding, however, those that are too young or too dense. So it is a bird that is very demanding in terms of its habitat and in Italy is in danger of extinction simply because of the lack of suitable nesting sites.

Normally it feeds on small amphibians, fish and insects, which it is very skilled at catching in the water. At present the most important breeding population has been recorded in the Colfiorito marshes. The species seems to have settled in this area fairly recently, since the late '80s and early '90s and it is estimated at 8 to 10 territorial males, with a probable 15 active nest sites.

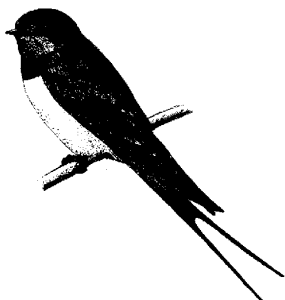
BIRDWATCHING

Spring: The Migrants are Arriving

Northern "guests" not yet departed for their breeding grounds and migrants arriving from the south: this is the ideal time to go birdwatching.
by Luciano Ruggieri and Franco Roscelli

Where to go, if not to LIPU reserves?

It is an Icelandic saying that the arrival of the first golden plover, usually in mid May, is a sign of spring. Similar popular traditions exist in many countries and involve different types of migrant, like the Black-tailed Godwit, the Crane, and naturally, the Swallow, which as early as the 6th century BC was greeted as the messenger of spring in a popular song of ancient Greece. It is a nice way, and a very old one, of linking observations of the natural world with the recurring changing of the seasons.



Signs of Change

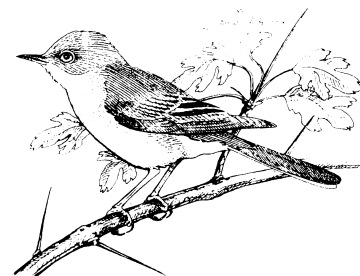
Today, however, because of the great and rapid climate changes which have occurred in the last few years the habits of birds have also changed profoundly. Species which previously abandoned our country to winter in warmer places now more frequently do not leave their breeding grounds; last January, for example, some Swifts, very much birds of summer, were seen in the skies over Sicily, while Black Kites and Black-shouldered Kites have wintered in central southern Italy, and

Black-winged Stilts and Bar-tailed Godwits in the north. In the same way, many early migrants, like Golden Plovers, Cranes, Garganeys and Black Storks are led to migrate even earlier than usual and are now expected in February.

What to see in Spring

So, what can we expect to see in March?

This is one of the most interesting months for seeing wildlife, because alongside the first true migrants, like Common Terns, Hoopoes, Whitethroats, Golden Orioles, Wood Warblers and Willow Warblers, which begin to gladden our woods and wetlands with their songs or mating displays, northern visitors are still present, such as Red-throated Divers, Black-throated Divers, Red-necked Grebes, Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Scaup and Velvet Scoters which have not yet taken off for their breeding grounds in northern Europe. Then in April the breeding season is in full swing and many species are more easily seen because they busy courting or raising young. Birdwatchers should therefore take the greatest care at this time so as not to disturb nesting birds and not to risk being themselves the cause of a brood being abandoned or eggs and young predated.



Some Advice

Go to places properly equipped for birding, eg LIPU reserves, where screened walkways and hides allow close observation of the birds without disturbing them.

All LIPU reserves are interesting in spring but, to recommend a few, it is worth visiting:-

Palude Brabbia (VA) where the very rare Ferruginous Duck breeds

Torrile (PR) whose symbol is the Black-winged Stilt which builds its nest right in front of the hides.

Montepulciano (SI) in Central Italy, whose reed beds host several species of heron.

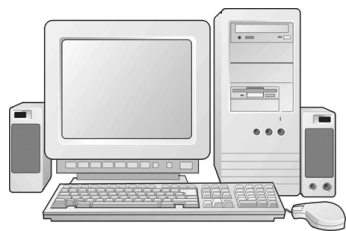
Casacalenda (CB) where the woods hold nesting raptors and passerines.

Sicily, the area which offers great opportunities especially for rare species and accidentals, especially at the **Biviere di Gela** reserve (GL) within the national park of the same name.

LIPU IS AGAIN ON THE NET

by *Massimiliano Pighini*

For a long time now, on accessing the LIPU web site we have been welcomed by the phrase "We are renewing the site. Come back later". That has finally vanished. The wait is over and after three months in which our site has not been accessible LIPU's new web pages are "on line". The Internet is being used ever more to communicate and the appearance and contents of our site needed to be changed. Careful planning and restructuring have resulted in a site with quick and easy access. There is information about LIPU for those who do not yet know us, a contact for LIPU members, and information and ideas about Nature.



It is an ambitious site with many pages representing the heart of our great and complex association, from reserves and rehabilitation centres to education and conservation, from voluntary workers giving their free time, to LIPU employees. The site is not only a show case, it also contains news items from elsewhere on the web. It can be used for direct dialogue and through its e-mail address, info@lipu.it, it is most useful for getting information very quickly.

Our web pages are growing, more are in preparation, others are being modified to find the best response to the input of advice and opinions from

the general public. Come and meet us, we await you at www.lipu.it

OPERATION PANETTONI

Another big effort from Operation Panettoni last December brought hundreds of volunteers onto the streets. LIPU supporters of all sorts sold over 16,000 panettoni (traditional Italian Christmas cakes), a record number. Their good will scored once again.

LIPU's intention, working hard and with great enthusiasm to organise this campaign, is to turn something rather ordinary, such as a panettone, into a moment of reflection. The trees that are bought with the money raised by this event are certainly a theme that is worthy of attention.

And now the practical part: planting the trees. There will be three places in which this will happen.

- The splendid pinewood of Castelfusano, at the gates of Rome and which last year was the victim of an arson attack.
- The LIPU reserve of Lesina in the Province of Vicenza, with its Mediterranean scrub and dunes and which, unfortunately, was also a victim of fire.
- At Reggiolo in Emilia, where LIPU has been working to back to the land a more natural look, by recreating the original wetland.



We are already thinking ahead to next Christmas, how to improve the event, how to encourage everybody's involvement and how to get more exposure in the mass media. We want LIPU's Christmas to be something that no-one wants to miss, and a

reminder to all that Nature never takes a holiday and is constantly in need of actions, ideas and help.

REGIONAL PARKS

Attacks still continue

In Liguria the grip of the speculators is threatening protected areas. Parks in the Finalese and Ligurian Alps have not yet been established and local authorities are trying drastically to reduce the areas of others. The Parco Aveto is at risk of being reduced from 11,000 hectares down to only 3,000. The Parco di Portofino risks being returned to the size it was in 1935, from its present 12,000 hectares down to little more than 3000 ha.

It is envisaged that the Apennine parks of Beigua and Antola will see a marked reduction in their area: for the first a cut of more than 50%! The environmental associations, having stopped the fateful reforms of regional laws concerning protected areas, have drafted a document that brings together the absolutely essential issues that must be dealt with in future modifications of the law.

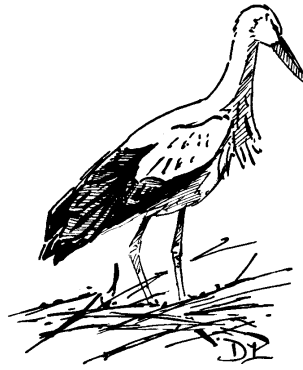
Some of the most important themes are park management bodies, resources for protected areas, the definition of objectives and priority areas. Meanwhile the LIPU campaign for the Parks continues, up to 50,000 signatures will have been collected by the spring and the Association will begin meetings with the Regional Presidents.

THE STORK PROJECT

Overhead power lines

LIPU has initiated research to identify dangerous electricity cables near stork nests in Lombardy and Piedmont.

Electrocution and flying into overhead cables are, in Italy, the principle causes of death of these great



and threatened migratory birds. It is essential to identify all dangerous structures and to propose potential remedies in order to request timely intervention from the various management authorities, such as electricity and railways, and so avoid further loss of precious storks.

THE GRIFFON PROJECT

Up to now nine Griffons have been released in the Parco delle Madonie in Sicily. They were all equipped with radio transmitters so that their movements could be followed. We now know that, of the original nine, three have remained within the Park. It has been a partial success: there were problems with the first birds to be released and a high proportion of the Griffons moved away. Terrible news was received that at Christmas an adult female, liberated in September, had been shot by poachers. In the next three years more Griffons will be released and many education, scientific, and information projects will be developed.



ANTI-POACHING

LIPU has begun collaborating with the NOE (the Ecological Unit of the Carabinieri). Plans are being made for a series of operations to tackle poaching and environmental offences in areas at risk. LIPU experts are also to give a course of lectures on wildlife protection to members of the Carabinieri unit. In addition, the objective is to work together in educational activities aimed at promoting a law-abiding culture in the delicate area of environmental protection.

Special thanks to Maggiore Di Caprio, of NOE, for his support during the course of many meetings. Offences and damage to the environment and natural resources can be reported to NOE by phoning 800253608.

RESERVES AND CENTRES

Entrance to National Parks

With the New Year LIPU has obtained an important recognition: it has been admitted to the Federation of Italian Parks and Nature Reserves, an association of 150 management bodies of protected areas. We are the second environmental association to join the network, and thanks to this LIPU will be able to bring more strength to bear in its activities concerning protected areas.

The aims of the Federation are to improve the management of protected areas, to foster collaboration and the circulation of information, and to encourage among political and economic factions a concept of development that is in harmony with the environment.

NEWS FROM LIPU BRANCHES

Asti: Pigeon Project

A scheme aimed at the reduction of the population of Feral Pigeons in Asti, and set to last three years,

was launched last autumn. The project, financed by the local authority, sets out to address the causes of a population explosion in the birds, without recourse to action against the birds themselves. The cooperation of the townsfolk is felt to be particularly important, and consultation is taking place.

Parma: Bird trafficking

An illegal trade in protected birds was being carried out at the International Ornithological Exhibition at Reggio Emilia, when it was raided by police and members of the Parma and Reggio branches of LIPU. The operation resulted in 7 criminal charges and the confiscation of 105 birds, mainly Goldfinches and Bullfinches, but also four Red-crested Pochard and two Shelduck, species which are particularly threatened. The birds were all wild, and many in very poor condition. Taken into the care of LIPU, those in good condition were released, and the others taken to the Torrile Oasis for recuperation.

LEGAL ADVICE

by Fabio Procaccini, LIPU legal office

MYNAH BURNED ALIVE

Last December, Signora Mancini of Pienza saw a neighbour behaving strangely in the garden. Seeing also that her mynah was missing from its cage, she followed her to her house to find out why, and received the confession that she had taken the bird and killed it by throwing it alive into a wood-burning stove. Shocked, Signora Mancini brought a complaint to the Carabinieri and now asks me what she can do to ensure justice is done. At the moment, all she can do is to address the charge to the Public Prosecutor's Office, and ask that the Assistant Prosecutor in charge of the case ensure that it is brought to trial. Signora Mancini could then introduce a civil case into the process (during the preliminary hearing), to obtain damages and a guarantee that the investigation will be fully carried out. If the law follows its course, Signora A.R. will have to defend charges of trespass, theft, and ill-treatment of animals.

OSTIGLIA MARSHES - A SPECIAL ENVIRONMENT

by Ugo Faralli and Antonio Bernardoni

The marshes were once exploited by the local population, who cut the reeds and marsh grasses for basketry, now LIPU is managing the reedbeds to encourage the nesting of Marsh Harriers and Purple Herons. Where once there were hunters, trapping Teal and Snipe, now there are birders from LIPU, in search of Great Reed Warblers and Water Rail.

This has been the recent history of a marsh, the only one of its kind in Italy, in the centre of the flatlands of the Po river, between the provinces of Mantua and Verona, and known as Busatello. To LIPU, however, which campaigned from the early 80's for it to be given protected status, it is the Ostiglia Marshes.

Unique in Italy in being a wetland raised above the surrounding land, the site is the result of vast works of reclamation and canalisation in the area. With the first intervention of man in the late 19th century, the marsh assumed the function of collector of water from the reclaimed land, and as the reclamation works proceeded, the morphology and hydrology of the area changed, becoming more and more distinct from those adjacent, which were becoming lower through the compaction of the drained peat.



This special marsh, with such great biodiversity, some 3000 plant and animal species having been recorded within its boundaries, could not fail to attract the attention of LIPU, as well as public

bodies. As a result of the campaigning of the 80's, it was recognised first by the Region of Lombardy, declaring it a Nature Reserve in the care of the Commune of Ostiglia and LIPU, and then as a Ramsar site.

To help preserve the site, and increase knowledge and appreciation of its great natural wealth, LIPU has proposed a number of initiatives to the Commune and the Region. As well as consolidating the banks to preserve the marsh, there is also to be a visitor centre and three hides, while the creation of areas of open water within the reed bed will give even greater diversity. With new displays and other informational material, the arrival of Glossy Ibis, of Savi's Warblers and Reed Warblers and more, and the aerobatics of Marsh Harriers overhead, will delight birdwatchers and nature lovers, and stir the curiosity of the hundreds of schoolchildren who will visit the reserve.

NEWS IN BRIEF

CASTEL DI GUIDO

Thanks to increased activity by the hunting authorities, and the LIPU branches of Rome and Ostia, the existence of active poaching, particularly for wild boar, has been revealed within the LIPU reserve, with evidence such as tyre tracks and traps being discovered. It seems strange that poaching, an activity not usually associated with the metropolitan cast of mind, should be found at the gates of Rome. Surveillance, particularly at night, has been increased.

BIANELLO

A positive note is the more frequent recording of Fallow Deer tracks in the Oasis, probably from the nearby park of Roncolo, and which testify to an expansion of the species in the Apennines of Reggio. Roe Deer are increasingly seen, especially at dusk in the clearings.

NATURE'S JEWELS THREATENED BY THE OIL INDUSTRY

Ecuador's tropical forest of Mindo and The Galapagos Islands threatened by crude oil
by Armando Gariboldi

At the beginning of 2001 Ecuador sustained an awful attack on its environment, with two sensational cases involving its main biodiversity hot spots: Mindo Nature Reserve in the Andes and the Galapagos Islands. In both cases the cause of the problem has been the oil industry.

Mindo, situated near to Quito, Ecuador's capital, is a wonderful 200,000ha tropical montane forest supporting over 450 bird species (about 5% of the entire world avifauna), of which a dozen are in extreme danger of extinction. Mindo also supports many endemic species of amphibians as well as jaguar, bears, monkeys etc. It is a true natural jewel that is at risk of being permanently damaged by an oil pipeline, being planned by a consortium of companies including Italy's AGIP-ENI. The pipeline will also bring other environmental problems through the construction of a service road, as this will encourage new human settlements and a greater exploitation of the forest through felling and creation of cattle farms. It is an already familiar scene in South America and is associated with fragmentation of natural habitats and the loss of sensitive species.

AGIP's statements

World opinion has been rallied against this project and has lobbied for the pipeline route be revised so that it passes further south and does not cut this precious ecosystem in half. LIPU and its BirdLife International partners have instigated a campaign on the Internet and national media and have succeeded in exerting pressure on the consortium of companies involved. As a result, the President of AGIP has contacted LIPU directly and has indicated that his company is reassessing the pipeline route, and the other companies involved in the consortium have also contacted BirdLife International.

If, as far as one can ascertain, the only route for the pipeline is across the forest, LIPU will campaign for:

- i) a construction site which does not include a service road,
- ii) for the creation of a fund to protect the forest and,
- iii) to provide incentives for the local community to avoid felling trees and deforestation.

Galapagos Islands

World attention focused again on Ecuador as a result of another serious environmental problem. On 16 January, an old oil tanker sank near to the Island of St Cristobal in the Galapagos Islands causing a spillage of almost 900,000 litres of crude oil into the sea and resulting in an oil slick over 1,300km². The beach where the shipwreck occurred was the most heavily affected by the black tide of oil and to a lesser extent a few islands nearby. For two almost two weeks, the movement of the oil slick kept the world in suspense, but fortunately the sea current eventually swept the oil out into the open ocean where the action of waves and sun will break it up. The colonies of marine iguanas, albatrosses, sea lions and pelicans have thus been saved, although the impact upon this fragile ecosystem will not be entirely painless as the affects are beginning to show on the fields of seaweed, the staple diet of the iguanas and hundreds of species of fish.

One has to ask oneself how it has been possible to propose oil pipelines or carry oil in old wrecks in areas of recognised environmental value. What is the use of having such places declared World Heritage sites if, in reality, the obligations to protect them are not taken seriously.

LIPU, through BirdLife International, is appealing to the world community to intervene to prevent these and other dangers occurring in such places which are often located in poor countries. However, we should not forget the Mediterranean Sea, where 25% of all world oil is transported by sea, and where oil tankers travel through important environmentally sensitive areas such as the lagoon of Venice or the coast of Sardinia, and

where Italy's only facility (when damage occurs) to deal with "oiled" seabirds is CRUMA, the LIPU Centre at Livorno.

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

CARLOFORTE RESERVE, SICILY

The Sardinian authorities have at last agreed to renew the contract with LIPU for the management of the important reserve on the island of S. Pietro off the south west coast of Sardinia. This reserve is important to the breeding success of Eleonora's Falcon in Italy as there is a colony of about 120 breeding pairs.

Sadly this, one of the most beautiful of the falcons, is at risk from the thieves who steal eggs and young birds for the falconry trade in the Middle East. LIPU has, in the past, held a protection campo throughout the breeding season and is keen to continue this year.

A modest new building to house the volunteers at the camp is needed and LIPU has appealed for help with this important project. I am happy to say that LIPU-UK and AISPA, in partnership, will help our friends in Italy complete the building in time for the camp this Summer and thus play an essential part in the protection of this beautiful bird.

APPEAL 2001

Full details will be in our next issue but at this stage I can say that this year's appeal has been another wonderful success thank to the generosity of you all. So much so that we have been able to take on extra tasks such as the building at Carloforte above. The Appeal has not yet closed so if anyone thinks they may have missed it - it's not true, you can still help the vital work of LIPU.

A BOOK REVIEW - TO AID LIPU

Graham Bell of Northumberland has studied birds all his life, has merited such posts as membership of the British Birds Rarities Committee and is now the founder chairman of the Northumberland Bird Club.

Graham is supporting our appeal this year by donating a number of copies of his book, "Encounters with Birds ... in prose and poetry" to be offered to members of LIPU-UK. This 48 page book is full of personal anecdotes and I read it from cover to cover with interest and not a few quiet chuckles. It would make an ideal present for anyone with an interest in birds, but you might decide to hang on to it and give a couple of pairs of socks instead!

If you would like a copy of Graham's illustrated book please send a cheque for £5.00 which includes post and packing and a small contribution to LIPU funds and I will send a copy by return. To give an idea of the style I reprint a favourite passage below. It relates to the climax of his search in Siberia for the beautiful Ross's Gull - a bird that had fascinated him from his earliest days with birds, I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

"On we flew until we saw something (to me) even more special: some small white birds sitting on a very marshy bit of tundra. Yes, this was really it at last: nesting Ross's Gulls! Again we alighted swiftly and I waded out into the freezing water, slithering on the uneven, slippery ice below the surface and trying to maintain my balance with camera gear, tripod, binoculars and telescope swinging round my neck. As I got within telephoto lens distance of one pair at their nest, my eyes filled with tears; whether it was emotion at finally achieving my life's ambition or whether it was the temperature of the water rapidly filling my wellies, I can't remember..."



THE GIFT AID SCHEME

The changes to the Gift Aid scheme have been a real help to LIPU-UK. For every pound we receive from a UK tax payer, who has completed the declaration, we can recover about 28 pence and so far we have received the sum of £5260. Money to be spent on bird protection in Italy - and it costs you and I nothing.

A common question follows the example of member "Mrs Smith" who does not pay tax but whose husband does. Here it is simple - it does not matter to the Inland Revenue who is the LIPU member and it doesn't matter to me who signs the renewal cheque. So, if Mr Smith sends me a cheque and a Gift Aid declaration (in his own name) then I can reclaim the tax which Mr Smith has already paid..

A second question is, "I enclose a CAF voucher as a donation but my subscription is paid by the bank, should I complete the declaration?". Here, the answer is a clear "Yes", but we will claim repayment of tax only where it is due - in this case on the bank payment and not on the CAF voucher.

Last year our main project supported the anti trapping work in the vallies around Brescia. The following shows some of the results of that work.

BRESCIA 2000

During the autumn migration period, from mid-September to December every year, in the Bresciana valleys (Trompia, Sabbia, and Camonica), above Lakes Garda and Iseo and as far as the Trentino boundary, millions of robins, as well as wrens, nightingales, blackcaps, dunnocks, goldcrests, firecrests and hawfinches are held for agonising hours in spring traps, hanging by their broken legs, waiting to be strangled, and then taken off to be spit-roasted and served with polenta in a traditional dish.

The LIPU team responsible for supervising this area, with only 4 or 5 members, worked from

October to December 2000 and managed to recover some 2000 trapped small birds (80% of them robins, and the rest blackcaps, tits, etc.). They also confiscated and destroyed 10,262 traps and 140 mist nets, confiscated 210 live decoys and served 49 notices of offences. Between 3 and 5 million birds are killed every year by more than a million traps placed by the poachers.

There are perhaps about 3 – 4000 poachers involved in bird trapping, nearly all of whom being local inhabitants of the valleys, where there are large numbers of hunters. Nowadays, after some fifteen years of opposition, most of those who are still active are of the older generation, operating from isolated cottages and Alpine huts. It is the "supporters" of the trade who are coming under closer scrutiny, people who are not themselves directly involved in poaching but nevertheless sustain it. In the Bresciana valleys and surrounding areas there are probably hundreds of restaurants involved in this illegal commerce in slaughtered birds. Poaching is a scourge whose effects are widely underestimated; damage is being done to wildlife, especially birds, during most of the year and especially when they are most vulnerable, such as during the migration and breeding seasons.

LIPU is urging hunting associations to engage in more effective supervision of their own members because although it is true that not all hunters are poachers, almost all poachers are hunters.

It seems that LIPU's efforts are working at home but those who want profit at any cost will find a way to supply a demand as this news item shows:

"In Belgium, the courts have at last confirmed, after 3 years, the sentence of a Dutch importer (Mr. Van Leendert) who in 1997 imported from China some 18.5 tons (about 1,236,000 birds) of passerines destined for the table. Most of the birds were exported to Italy, where they are protected species but where, unfortunately, as we know, "polenta e osei" is still a locally sought after dish, for example in Friuli, Bresciano and Bergamasca."

THE BRITISH BIRD WATCHING FAIR

This event is held annual in August at the Egleton nature reserve beside Rutland Water and has probably surprised everyone, including the organisers, with its ever increasing success.

Each year the proceeds are given to a conservation project run by Bridlife Inetrnational and last year over £120,000 was raised for the "Save the Alabartross" campaign (see the article by Marco Lamber-tini on long line fishing and its effects).

The fair has six marquees and many other attractions and is held over three days in August. There are exhibitors of optics, photographic goods, art and handicrafts and operators of bird watching holidays. There are also stands run by conservation bodies, the BTO, the RSPB and, of course, LIPU-UK. It is our chance to meet many new people and, just as importantly our members - it's great to meet and be able "to put a face to a name" so if you are coming to the fair, please call in and say "Hello".



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

TRANSLATION

The translation of the Ali Notizie from the Italian has always been done by Brian Horkley of Cambridge, but we thought it would be a good idea to involve more of our members in this work and I am happy to thank the following for translating this issue:

Peter Allen, Ian Evans, Bryan Lewis, Alan Morgan, Peter Rafferty, Anne Taylor and Brian Horkley.

Thank you all, without your splendid work we would have no Ali Notizie.

TAILPIECE

Spring is here and I always declare that with the arrival of the first Chiffchaff and that lonely call of his own name from the tree top. Already, in my local area, we now have Willow Warbler, Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover and any day we expect the first of the Swallows returning to nest in the neighbour's stables.

Finally a fervent hope that our countryside will be able to go back to normal soon and, once more, we'll be able to walk in a green and pleasant land which is disease free.



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