

From the President of LIPU

Danilo Mainardi

THE VALUE OF PEOPLE

I have been connected with LIPU for some time now, and have known several Directors. Each has been different but LIPU owes much to them all. Each has left his own mark on an ever growing association.

The reason I am writing this is because the Executive Council has accepted the resignation of Nino Martino, for personal reasons. In the circumstances, the council could not do otherwise. He has only been with us for a relatively short time but he also has taken his place in the evolving story of LIPU and will always remain one of us. Thank you Nino for all you have done.

On this occasion I have spoken of Nino, but I am conscious of the many people who support

LIPU. It is possible to put them into two categories, the so-called staff and the volunteers. But I realise from my everyday dealings with all kinds of people that there is scarcely any difference, because I find real competence in volunteers, as well as ideals and passion among staff members. Nino, who was in charge of all the staff, was just so, as are all the others.

There will now be a transitional period when three Area Directors will take over joint responsibility, Claudio Celada for conservation, Elena D'Andrea for communication and Annamaria La Nave for administration. They make a fine trio, let me tell you. They have competence, motivation and a great will to get on with the job. In transition, yes, but stationary, absolutely not. That I know for certain.

LIPU is making progress. Let us help it forward and help nature,

maltreated and in peril as it is, but where there are increasing signs of hope. There are many problems, including hunting and illegal killing, and an agriculture that is ever more inhospitable for birds and other animals. LIPU is taking action over these issues. It is our force of volunteers and their work, but also your subscriptions and donations for specific campaigns that will allow us to press on with these actions.

195 SPECIES IN DECLINE

Tree Sparrow, Grey Partridge, Red-backed Shrike, Crested Lark, Green Woodpecker, Stonechat, Skylark and many other farmland birds are in severe decline across Europe.

by Marco Gustin

In a volume reissued from a few years ago entitled *Birds Of Europe: Their Conservation Status*, BirdLife International has evaluated the condition of European birds. The book was and is alarming: 195 species, or 38% of European birds are at present in decline, that is to say that over a third of our breeding species are at risk. Many indeed give the impression of still being common, but have actually been greatly reduced in the last 20



years. But in what habitats is the decline steepest? There have certainly been losses in wetlands, whose total area has been notably reduced with the reclamation work of the last century, and which continue to suffer transformation.

Farmland however has also had to pay heavy tribute in this respect. From northern Europe to the Mediterranean, many habitats (woods, marshes, grassland), have been converted into agricultural land. In the past this allowed some species to steal a march over others, settling in abundance into the new environments offered by man. Agricultural areas thus originally became places rich in birds, because the farmed countryside was characterised by diversity and extensive modes of production. In the last 40 years however, agricultural methods have been subject to increasing intensification, with a consequent reduction in the number of breeding species. The massive usage of fertilisers and pesticides, for example, has reduced the reproductive success of many birds, leading to their progressive disappearance.

Declining Skylarks

The Tree Sparrow has been reduced by 90% in England in the last 20 years, and many others such as the Grey Partridge and Crested Lark have undergone a major and widespread fall in numbers. On the continental scale, many species, among which are the Red-backed Shrike, the Green Woodpecker, Wryneck, Turtle Dove and Stonechat, if not exactly rare, are

now in a phase of steep decline through the removal of hedges which previously bounded every parcel of land.

Again from England come alarming figures on the Skylark, the archetypal farmland bird, for which a decline of 50% has been estimated from 1980 to the present. Land ever more polluted and fertilised, the devastating reduction in ground-dwelling invertebrates which are a vital food source, as well as the loss of fields of stubble, another important resource during winter, have greatly reduced the European population of this species. Researchers from the RSPB are trying to chart the decline, with experimental studies and a programme of investigations into use of the habitat during the breeding season.



A Change of Culture

What is happening in Italy? As far as the Skylark is concerned, we have about 2% of the European breeding population, while our country may also have an important role as wintering quarters. It must be noted however that a lack of long term information does not allow for an accurate evaluation of

numerical trends. We do not have direct evidence of decline. It is certain that the millions of birds which arrive in Italy in winter find an ever more inhospitable agricultural habitat. As if that were not enough, in Italy, the Skylark may still be hunted!

Nevertheless, economic instruments already exist for those who would want to improve agricultural areas (as for example EC Directives 2078 and 2080). These are used little and badly because the ruling culture in the agricultural field is still tied to maximising production. The conservation of birds associated with farmland must therefore go alongside a profound cultural change. LIPU can give strong support to promoting this minor revolution.

A BITTER HARVEST

EU farming policies are boosting agricultural output to levels that are overwhelming ecological equilibrium, and threaten millions of birds with extinction.

by Giovanna Pisano

At four in the morning, my alarm clock goes off. I quickly yield to its insistent din, get up and silence it and soon I am ready to set off and save the birds.

The usual trip to Brussels, with a troubled mind at the outset, this soon followed by thoughts about "the cause", which keep me awake for the rest of the journey. On arrival, I am gripped by a fervour that makes me want to stand in front of a combine

harvester and stop it, Tiananmen Squarestyle. There's no mistaking my Latin blood!

I work for the RSPB, LIPU's British partner, and part of the BirdLife family. I go around telling politicians and experts in the European Union what's wrong with agricultural legislation in the Community. I explain why intensive farming, which all of us taxpayers and consumers subsidise, is killing, year by year, millions of birds that live on and around farms. Being massacred are the 173 species that feed and nest in farming areas. Of these, 70% are in a very poor state, and declining.



Yet how much of this gets through to the public? How many of us are aware of the extent of the damage being wreaked on the environment by farming practices, not to mention the effect on our wallets? How many people can distinguish between the advantages or otherwise of different methods of farming. traditional and intensive? And just in case you don't already know, here's some bad news for you. This catastrophe is being paid for, to the tune of 110 euros a year, by every one of us taxpayers: a total of 42 billion euros, half the entire

budget of the European Community paid by 376 million people to seven million farmers. many of whom only work parttime. Of course, all would be well if these subsidies helped all farmers and did no damage to the environment. But this is not the case: 80% of the funds go to 20% of the farming community, the wealthiest and most intensive producers, because the principle guiding the way the money is distributed is flawed. The EU hands out money in proportion to output levels: the more you intensify and produce, the more cash comes flowing in your direction. It is our money that drives farmers to maximise output, our money that pays for the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers, and which propels farm animals into ever more confined spaces to be fed on concentrates. The race is won by those who produce too much; the surplus is paid for, then it is destroyed. While many large producers in northern Europe receive subsidies every year amounting to millions of pounds, small farmers are leaving the "business" altogether in ever increasing numbers. The countryside is being depopulated. We now find some areas that are being cultivated overintensively, while others have been totally abandoned. Both are to the detriment of the flora and fauna.

Environmental damage

Is all this the fault of farming and farmers? No, the blame is to be found in unsound policies that make bad use of public money.

For thousands of years, especially in the Mediterranean, man has been working the land, and has created distinctive areas and habitats. These have favoured the influx and establishment of birds and other animals, whose life cycles are intimately linked to farming practices. The incentives introduced over the last thirty years to raise farm production have altered the face of agriculture to such an extent that the result has been the destruction of flora and fauna of biblical proportions. Pesticides have reduced the number of insects and plants that birds and other creatures feed on. Fertilisers have interfered with the rhythm of plant growth and have led to an increase in the use of fungicides and insecticides. Sowing and harvesting cycles have been altered, and the farm labourer replaced by powerful machines. The natural home for birds has been defiled and is no longer welcoming. Employment in rural areas has declined. There have been no winners.

What can be done?



Can the situation be improved? How can we return both birds and those who work on the land

to their rightful place? It can be done, but only with policies and incentives that are fair, that reward construction, not destruction. It is unrealistic to think that we can halt the passage of time and return to the kind of farming that was practised by our ancestors, but many solutions do exist that would help European farming to rediscover the sense of what and how we ought to produce on our farms.

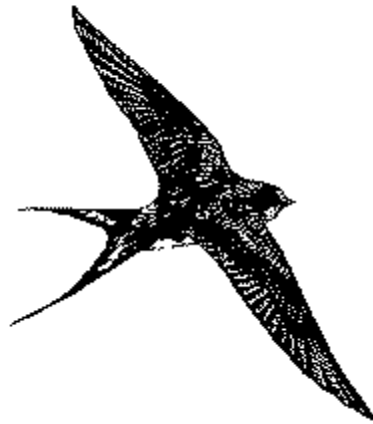
We could, for example, support only those who produce healthy food, those who protect a natural environment, crucial to the preservation of a traditionally farmed countryside. Taxpayers and consumers can change things. I shall be discussing this next time.

OPENING OF THE FARM FOR SWALLOWS

Let us picture a dairy farm on the doorstep of Milan where one can forget the traffic and noise of the city, immersing ourselves in an unsullied natural environment where one can enjoy swallows and other birds as they raise the next generation, and developing a greater understanding of the closeness of the links between nature and our own good health.

We are talking of the Farm For Swallows, created thanks to a generous donation from Esselunga, which will be opened on Sunday 26th May 2002. The farm will be set up within the Parco Ticino, near the Park Centre of the Cascina Venara di Zerbolu. Able to receive visitors of all ages, it will be a place of

recreation and environmental education. It will have the space and the facilities for visitors to spend a day in contact with nature and will moreover be a location for the promotion, through both discussions and direct experience, of an ecological agriculture, close to the welfare of animals but also of our own kind.



The opening programme, to which both adults and children may come, is expected to contain guided tours of the estate, from the layout of the Centre to the paths of the Parco del Ticino, live music, games for the children and organically-produced refreshments. Come one and all!

ENVIRONMENT

THE DAMAGE FROM LARGE SCALE CONSTRUCTION

The indiscriminate use of road transport and the construction of ever more new roads causes serious environmental damage on many fronts.

by Ariel Brunner

The long periods of fine weather that have characterised this winter have been the trigger, especially in northern Italy, for what has been nothing less than an emergency in regard to the build-up of atmospheric pollution in our cities.

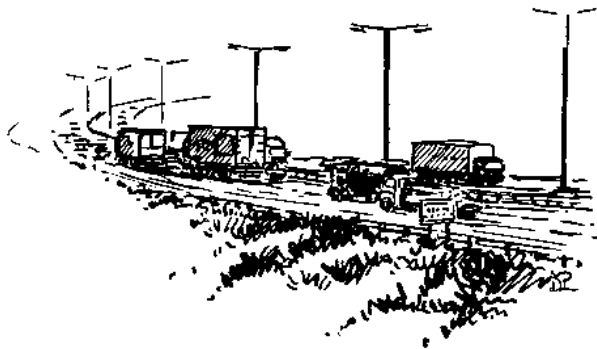
For some time, fine dust in the atmosphere and traffic congestion have occupied the front pages. But atmospheric pollution, in large part due to vehicle emissions, is a long-standing problem which triggers illnesses and reaps victims daily throughout the land. The dust, ozone and carbon monoxide however represent only the tip of the iceberg. A model of society that is based on the indiscriminate use of private transport lies at the base of many environmental problems, above all the climatic changes or greenhouse effect caused by CO2 emissions to which traffic is a major contributor.



Cars, and above all the roads along which they run, have a whole series of other environmental impacts. The construction of every new road brings the destruction of a piece of natural habitat or countryside, with a consequent reduction in the living space available to animals and plants, and the opening up of new quarries, which add to the damage done to rivers and hills. Land covered in asphalt is impermeable, reducing the replenishment of aquifers, and increasing runoff which increases the risk of

floods. Highways moreover create barriers within the landscape, carving up natural and semi-natural habitats into ever smaller islands. Every year, millions of animals die trying to cross these barriers, which in the case of motorways become virtually impassable for many of them. At this point, animal populations left isolated risk extinction through not being able to receive new blood from their neighbours.

Finally, we must note the trail of devastation that is left in the course of the oil that feeds the road traffic, from the tropical forests ripped apart by pipelines to the beaches dead beneath black seas.



Italy: More Concrete

Faced with this desolating prospect, one might expect that the State would lead in reversing this tendency, encouraging alternative and more sustainable forms of transport, above all the railways.

Not so in Italy, which is the European country with the greatest number of cars per inhabitant. New legislation, given formal approval by the Senate at the

beginning of December, is preparing a new wave of concrete and asphalt to break over an already martyred Italian Nature. Even a cursory glance at the eighty-odd major works projected by the government for the next few years will show that it is pursuing a strategy entirely concentrated on road transport. Tens of new motorways will carve up the terrain, including many national treasures (Maremma, Appennines, Straits of Messina), and cannot but encourage the use of lorries and cars, giving us more pollution, more road casualties, more dependence on petroleum.

There is another equally serious issue: the Lunardi Law looks to

eliminate even those few safeguards gained by years of environmental campaigning and rooted in civil society. Big projects in effect will be decided by government and their financing ushered through without using the checks and balances envisaged by the laws currently in force. In this way, whatever works are deemed strategic by the government can be made concrete, sweeping aside rural planning, protected areas, hydrogeological constraints and so on.

RED ALERT FOR ANIMALS

A new type of legislation on hunting with dispensations that offer a wide margin of discretion to the regions.

by Marco Gustin

Our country, on important environmental issues such as hunting activity or protected areas, subjects which have involved so many citizens, is about to step backwards many decades. It is red alert for our fauna and for national and regional nature parks, things that we have, so forcefully, managed to protect during the last 70 years. We have succeeded in establishing protected zones in about 10% of the countryside and in some regions such as the Abruzzi it is over 30%.

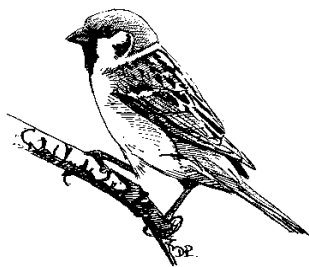
The main problem is in regard to hunting activity. Last February the Senate ratified Berlusconi's draft law no 628, that gives full powers to the regions with regards to hunting, with exceptions. With exceptions to what? With exception to several species, which are protected in Europe and protected by Italian legislation, thanks to law no157 passed in 1992. It concerns passerines with a weight of less than 30-50 grams such as Chaffinch, Brambling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow and Starling.

In Europe it is different.

In all European countries these birds are protected under written directives. Article 9 explicitly states that the member states only, and not the regions, can

make exceptions and then only in the interests of public health and safety; or, for the purposes of repopulation and of reintroduction, they may allow the capture of specific birds in small numbers.

Several times the European Court of Justice has condemned Italy for damaging practices committed autonomously by the Italian regions. Additionally, the Italian Constitutional Courts have ruled many times, that it is up to the state and not the regions to allow exceptions. Exceptions which in our country pander to the hunters and not to majority public opinion on the subject of small songbirds. Biologically, hunting small birds makes no sense.



The population of these species is not quantifiable and consequently we cannot measure the damage sustained.

When to close the season.

Another serious problem is the closure date for hunting. Regions can decide to set their own closure times, as happened this year in Sardinia. Many regions, quite simply, extend the season beyond the January deadline imposed by law no 157 and they allow hunting to continue into February and even March. We know from various studies that

within bird populations, be they duck or passerines, even in the migratory season, birds can be choosing breeding partners. So it can happen that bird populations already stressed by migration have suddenly to sustain big losses due to autumn and winter shooting and that is in addition to combating the winter.

Unfortunately, the text of the law has passed through the Senate and is now in the House for discussion and final approval. (translator's note - Parliamentary Bill procedure in Italy is more complex and different, too, from that in the U.K.)

Hunting in the Nature Parks.

Simultaneously, another problem of equal gravity has arisen. In February, the government environmental commission in the House of Deputies initiated a discussion with regard to hunting in the parks, a discussion that embodies a modification of the law on parks no 394 of 1991. This debate is a backwards leap of 30 years. Each individual park could claim special dispensations from the national law, for hunting activity or road construction, or mining pursuits.

What could occur? Our parks could be at the mercy of the hunting lobby and of all sorts of speculators - an environmental heritage, of its sort, unique in Europe, in serious danger. Native plants, rare and localised species of birds and mammals would be threatened in those few places where, up to now, they survive.

Lots of initiatives are programmed to promote a greater understanding of the natural history and traditional culture of mountain areas.

by Giuliano Tallone

For the majority of us our perspectives tend to be horizontal: distances, maps, sunsets, but there are some areas of our planet that have a vertical dimension and their view points are directed upwards. In past times these places were the ultimate retreat of those who were searching out the last places where they could mark out their fields and raise livestock. Only during the last two hundred years have the mountains, particularly the Alps, become the playground of Europe, with the creation of numerous new sports and an entire literature.



The fragile mountain environment has been intensively used in the 20th century, the progressive and inexorable abandonment of agriculture and the movement down into the valleys have brought about a constant degradation of mountain territory. This is why the General Assembly of the United Nations has declared 2002 the International Year of the Mountain, choosing the sponsoring organisation as the F.A.O. Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The International Year of the Mountain (AIM) is an excellent example of activating Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 approved at Rio in 1992. This objective is to sustain mountain development. The main aims are to promote conservation and maintain development of mountain areas, to increase the awareness and the feelings of the public for mountain eco-systems and for understanding their importance as a resource for the populations they support, to promote and defend the inherited culture of the mountain people, to give attention to conflicts arising in the mountains and promote peace in those regions where they occur.

In Italy the committee for 2002 is presided over by the M.E.P. Luciano Caveri who has procured the secretarial services of director and ex-mountaineer Agostino Da Pollenza (who has scaled amongst others, K2-the second highest mountain in the world), as well as the services of a scientific council, chaired by Professor Annibale Mottana, President of the National Park of Stelvio and president elect of the National Institute of Mountain Research.

The crucial event of the AIM will be the High Summit, a convention transmitted world wide, that will take place from the 6 - 11 May and which will involve five Italian cities - Turin, Aosta, Milan, Catania and Trento. The High Summit will address the relationship between man and the mountains, with five themes, water, culture, economy, risks and future policy. It is

anticipated that such an international video conference will get special media coverage.

In parallel the Italian Committee will consider a number of pre-arranged themes, amongst which will be systematic research on the environmental problems caused by the presence of Alpine Shelters - with the aims of producing environmental guidelines and specific environment certification.

Further information on AIM 2002 can be found on site www.montagna.org or from Guliano Tallone AIM 2002 National LIPU Representative.

ILLEGAL KILLING

Irresponsible and now outside the law, Italians are increasingly going abroad to hunt.

by Umberto Gallo Orsi

Hunting abroad is becoming very popular among Italians and each year hundreds of thousands go to countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as North Africa. Among this army of hunters are some who behave as if the laws of the host country do not apply to them and reports of arrogant behaviour and massacres of many different species of birds are on the increase. Even the local hunters are scandalised by the behaviour of their Italian "colleagues".

It is now clear that there exist real organised gangs that are carrying out illegal hunting

operations abroad and then smuggling the bodies of the "victims" back into Italy. There are many agencies that offer "unique" experiences and "incredible bags". All of them also guarantee to transport the game back to Italy, often through the production of false documents or the bribery of the local officials. In other cases the kills are hidden in the lorries in double floors.

Such is the, to say the least, horrifying picture to emerge from the series of operations carried out by the police in Hungary (1996-7 and 2001), in Bulgaria (1998), Slovenia (1999) and in Italy (two separate operations in 2001). From 1996 to the present, 180,000 slaughtered birds of 106 species have been confiscated. Among these some are species under world-wide threat such as the Corncrake (40 individuals) and the Ferruginous Duck (50 examples). Add to that, 1,522 White Wagtails, 162 Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers, 61,000 Meadow and Olive-backed Pipits, 60,000 Skylarks and 10,000 of both Turtle and Collared Doves.



All of these birds were on their way to Italy, destined to be eaten by the hunters themselves or sold to restaurants as real specialities. It appears that there are many restaurants ready to offer to a select clientele these forbidden

“delicacies”. In the course of the last police operation carried out in Hungary, some 11,758 shot birds were stopped at the frontier on their way to Italy. A few days later a raid, code-named “Balkan Birds” and carried out by the State Forest Rangers and rangers from Friuli Venezia Giulia, led to the biggest confiscation ever to have taken place in Europe: namely 120,000 birds coming from ex-Yugoslavia.

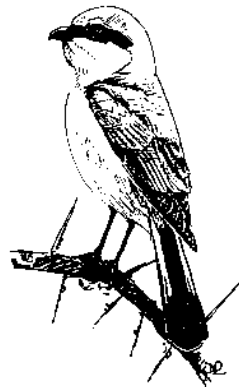
More effective controls

This outcome was made possible thanks to the improved preparedness on the part of the forces of law and order in both Italy and Hungary which has been achieved over the last few years and to a considerable intelligence effort. The MME (the Hungarian partner organisation of Bird Life International) had contacted the Italian Embassy in Hungary and had requested that the Italian Government take responsibility for those Italian hunters who go abroad, a matter which had also been debated in the Hungarian Parliament. LIPU was also involved, calling on the ministries of Agriculture and the Environment as well as that of Foreign Affairs to take urgent action. As with hunting, Italy is also becoming an important market for the trade in all sorts of protected species from all over the world. Over the last few years the number of skins and trophies confiscated by the Italian CITES authorities and by the State Forest Rangers is impressive. In April 2001 a big operation led to the discovery of 8000 animals, alive, stuffed and deep frozen, among which were

Golden Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Eagle Owls, Goshawks and Vultures. Eighteen people have been charged, including an environmental protection agent from Udine and the director of an association of hunters in whose house in Rome they found a Puma, a Zebra and a Gazelle. Bird Life International and the Eurogroup against Bird Crime (EABC) maintains that specific training for the forces of law and order should be the key to the control of the smuggling of protected species throughout Europe.

Action against bird crimes.

The EABC is a network of associations working for the conservation of birds, of which LIPU is a partner as are most of the other partners of Bird Life International. Its purpose is to eliminate this type of crime and to promote legislation which guarantees better protection for wild birds.



The EABC has the following objectives:

- collecting information on crimes against wild birds and on those who commit them
- communicating this information to the legal agencies

(police, customs and CITES authorities)

- assisting the same forces of law and order in the investigation of crimes against wild birds
- promoting contacts between the authorities of the different countries to encourage a co-ordinated effort
- providing documentary evidence for actions by pressure groups

MIGRATORY BIRDS OF PREY

There are many places and opportunities for observing the moving spectacle of migrating birds which repeats itself each year in our skies.

by Luciano Ruggieri and Franco Roscelli

Strait of Messina, May 2001

The raptors are beginning to arrive from far away, appearing a few at a time in the clear sky. A flock of Honey buzzards appears to swirl like a cloud of midges, which disperses and then re-forms, then breaks up again in the haze of the distant horizon. The falcons are passing overhead, high and low in the sky according to the air currents. While some keep to their path over the ridge, others turn towards the sea from one or other side of the Peloritani Mountains. Sometimes they are so low that the rustle of wind through their wing feathers sounds like the noise of a jet plane. Others, such as the eagles and large gliding birds, produce

a more dull and muffled sound. When they fly low, binoculars are no longer needed and it's possible to appreciate the sharp outline of their wings, details of their plumage and even to see into their yellow or black eyes, which look ahead towards a distant and unknown horizon.



Studies of ringed birds have shown that in Spring gliders such as Honey Buzzards, Common Buzzards, Harriers, Storks, Kites, Ospreys, Eagles and Vultures cross the Mediterranean Sea at its main straits: Gibraltar, Bosphorus, and Messina. They arrive directly from their wintering grounds in Africa then head towards central and Eastern Europe, using the Italian peninsula as a bridge so as to avoid flying over water.

This mass of large gliding birds in migration acts as a powerful draw for other migratory birds, such as Red-footed Falcons, Lesser Kestrels, Kestrels, and Hobbys, which, having narrower wingspans, could actually cross the Mediterranean without

getting trapped at the straits. They are free to choose for themselves their preferred route, but instead tend to follow or even precede large gliding birds. The sky fills with successive waves of large and small falcons, gliders and non-gliders and the occasional displaced bird which has been accidentally drawn by the enthusiasm of the migration to follow the wrong route. At Messina there have been sightings of very rare birds such as the Oriental Red-footed Falcon and the Black Vulture.

An intense experience

Observing the migration is a unique and unrepeatable experience. The migratory journey is never the same twice. Sometimes it almost fails to take place because of unfavourable wind or atmospheric conditions; sometimes there are wonderful days when the sky is teeming with thousands of birds. On a single day in May 2000, 9729 raptors were sighted at Messina, belonging to 12 different species.

To watch birds of prey and small passerines in migration can be a very emotional experience, with great moments of joy and personal satisfaction. Finding yourself next to other enthusiasts who explain how to distinguish between the Lesser-spotted Eagle, the Egyptian Vulture and the Saker, or more simply a Kestrel from a Lesser Kestrel, makes you feel closer to the mystery of migration. But one must not forget that for some petty and narrow-minded people, the sight of a migratory bird can mean gun-fire, with shots being

taken from local dwellings or other hiding places, in total violation of law and life.

So if you are interested in participating in one of the many camps organised for the study and observation of migratory birds, always remember that it also involves acting as a conservationist i.e. discouraging these contemptible acts simply by your presence.



When to see them

The best period in Italy is in April and May for the spring migration and in August and September after the breeding season. There are some species which migrate earlier, such as the Short-toed Eagle which passes along the Ligurian coast in mid March, and others which migrate in late autumn. The principal route in spring stretches from Sicily to the continent via the Strait of Messina, which, after Gibraltar and the Bosphorus, is the third most important corridor in the Mediterranean.

In the spring there are other important sites for migrating predatory birds, including Arenzano (near Genoa), Monte

San Bartolo (near Pesaro), the Conero promontory, Circeo, Capo d'Otranto and all the small islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Sicilian Channel. In the autumn, birds of prey amass in other sites, such as the Colli Trevigiani and the west valleys of Piedmont

OBSERVATION CAMPS

The best way to learn about and identify raptors on migration is to go to one of the observation camps held in various parts of Italy.

14 March to 20 May

Observation camp at Monte Conero, Pian Grande (AN)

Organised by the Regional Park of Conero and LIPU. The promontory of Conero is, after the Strait of Messina, the second most important site for migrating raptors. The Park offers free accommodation, but food and travel costs are the responsibility of participants. Information from Marco Gustin Tel 0521 273043, e-mail: info@lipu.it

1 April to 31 May

Observation camp at the San Bartolo Natural Park (PS)

A camp on the Adriatic coast between Pesaro and Gabicce Mare. The Park offers accommodation in caravans and chalets, and helps with cost of food. Booking is essential as there are only six beds available. Information from Parco San Bartolo, tel 0721 371075, e-mail: parcosanbartolo@provincia.ps.it

1 April to 28 May

Surveillance and protection camp at the Strait of Messina. Sicily camp.

Organised by the FMF (Fondazione Mediterranea Falchi) with LIPU participation on Monti Peloritani. Raptors and other migrating birds are observed and counted at various hotspots where they are more easily illegally shot. If shooting occurs the Forest Rangers and Carabinieri are called in to take action.

Information from LIPU 0931 735026 e-mail: voloerrante@yahoo.it

25 April to 26 May

Surveillance and protection camp at the Strait of Messina. Calabria camp.

Organised by LIPU with the Bird Group from the University of Viterbo. This crossing place from Sicily is the most perilous part of their journey in Italy. There are hundreds of illegal shooters on the Calabrian hillsides. The camp has been running since 1984. There is close co-operation with Forest Rangers and Carabinieri. Tel Rino Esposito mobile phone 335 13 16 084 e-mail: rino_esposito@tin.it

THANKS TO YOU

Work in Progress

Straits of Messina

This spring, in addition to its

usual bird-watching camps on the Calabrian side of the Strait, LIPU is also reinstating the camp on the Sicilian side. Our organisation will contribute to the running of this international camp for the protection and study of birds of prey and storks, managed by the Hawks Mediterranean Foundation. It's an important return, of which we are proud, but it also reflects a situation that has tragically deteriorated after the improvements achieved over the last few years. Poaching in Sicily is once again a worrying growth phenomenon, highly threatening to birds of prey, storks and all other migratory birds.

Anti-poaching

Florence

Following months of investigations and an ambush lasting for 5 hours, the LIPU anti-hunting guards, led by Giorgio Paesani, and the Carabinieri of the Environmental Protection Commando Unit, have had great success. Approximately 100 small dead protected birds, including Chaffinches, Greenfinches and Linnets, were confiscated from 3 poachers. The birds were hidden in a compartment under the steering wheel of their car. The raid was carried out at 8.30 p.m. while the car was parked outside the Certosa in Florence. In addition to the birds, guns and a tape decoy were also removed, both of these hunting tools being forbidden by law.

Naples

The State Forest Guards, under Dr Vincenzo Stabile (co-ordinator for the province of Naples) together with LIPU anti-hunting guards, have now ended a massive anti-poaching operation within the province of Naples. There were two areas involved: The countryside around Giugliano where a trap, composed of nets and tape decoys, was located and the citrus and olive groves of Piano di Sorrento where vertical nets of over 200m suitable for the capture of migratory birds were discovered. The raid proved very significant: four poachers arrested, 600 metres of netting removed, 2 tape decoys and cartridges confiscated. Numerous birds were found which were destined to become live decoys, including Thrushes, Larks, Blackbirds and other protected species such as Blackcaps, Robins, Hawfinches and Chaffinches. Some of the animals were liberated immediately, while the injured ones were handed over to environmental organisations.

Translation of this issue is by Bryan Lewis, Alan Morgan, Peter Rafferty, Pamela Tew, John Walder and Brian Horkley – thank you all.

News from LIPU-UK

THE BTO

By David Lingard

Reading Marco Gustin's article on the new relaxations to the hunting law proposed by Prime Minister Berlusconi, and bitterly

opposed by LIPU and other conservation groups in Italy, makes me think of the differences between that country and ours.

I think here of the lack of population data for birds, Marco says, "The population of these species is not quantifiable and consequently we cannot measure the damage sustained.". Earlier Giovanna quotes British problems backed up with trusted figures for the decline of farmland birds in this country.

The British Trust for Ornithology is the usual source of population data and other high quality statistics concerning breeding success, clutch size and so on. I have been a BTO member for many years and still take part in surveys which range from annual Breeding Bird Surveys to four weeks in the Scottish highlands working for the New Breeding Atlas published in 1992 which was in the category of, "I really should have known better!".

Survey work is very enjoyable and within the capabilities of most of us, it's really satisfying to be able to put something back into a hobby which gives us so much pleasure, and it's good to know that the information when collected and analysed is used to back up campaigning, which is often emotional, with respected facts.

You do not have to be an "expert" to embark upon survey work which can take up as little or as much time as you want, and it can be tremendous fun - if you

would like to know more, log on to www.bto.org or drop me a line and I'll be happy to tell you more.

DISCOVERING SARDINIA

By member Jane Wagner

We took the car to the port of Civitavecchia, one hour's drive from Rome, arriving at 7am to catch the 8am ferry to Golfo d'Aranci. There is more than one ferry company and the signs to locate the right quay are scarce; even Italians find the right ferry with some difficulty. Having pre-booked (always a good idea), the ticket was checked in the port and the cars were marshalled into lines just as at Dover for Calais. Embarkation was completed in about 10 minutes. The crossing took 3½ hours during which you can doze in the lounge, walk the deck or drink at the bar. Unloading took about a quarter of an hour and away you go. The port of Aranci was built north of Olbia to receive the "luxury" travellers for the Costa Smeralda development of the '60s.

My travel plan meant going north to Palau, then taking the small ferry to the port of La Maddalena.

Sardinia is a region which includes a number of small islands such as the archipelago of La Maddalena and three national parks:

- Gennargentu (70,000 ha)
- La Maddalena
- Asinara

all three established in the last

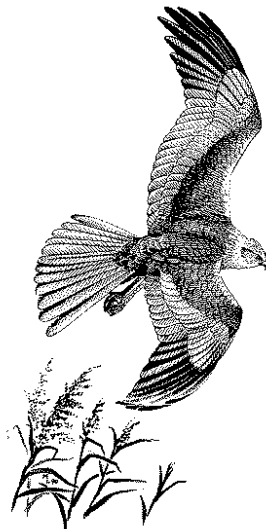
ten years.

I picked mid-September because the main tourist season would be over and Eleonora's falcons would be at their breeding sites.

A causeway joins La Maddalena to the islet of Caprera, covered in Mediterranean "macchia" – dense low bushes over rocks and sand. The limpid sea is that azure blue found on the postcards. Many holidaymakers go for the scuba diving and sailing - activities of no interest to us. Armed with the 1994 'Where to Watch Birds in Italy', the new Blue Guide to southern Italy (in French), maps and an Italian guide to nature reserves, we planned our route from Palau down the western side of Sardinia to include salt pans and other bird sites, Romanesque churches and pre-historic remains. (The Island is famed for its "nuraghe" which call to mind the brochs of north Scotland and there are stone circles and dolmen.) Gérard had learnt that Pattada, a small inland mountain town east of Ozieri, was famed for its hand-crafted folding knives. So after two nights in La Maddalena we returned to Palau, and after visiting one of the planned Romanesque churches not far from Sassari, (Saccargia) went down to Pattada where we booked ourselves into the 3-star hotel "La Pineta" on the hill above the town.

Only about five rooms were occupied (two of which were ours) but the hotel seemed to be the area's mecca for weddings, christenings and birthday feasts.

Our evening meal was not disturbed by any such banquet but we benefited from the fall-out of a festive lunch for some 50 people, which had ended around 5pm. This meant we could then park our car! Dinner seemed to be produced by one man, who also rushed in and out to answer the jangling telephone at reception. My second course (meat based) included some roast suckling pig and pieces of roast kid. In Britain people do not realize how marvellous roast kid is; it is eaten very young (as is Italian lamb) and is far more expensive than the latter. It is reserved for special occasions and feast days like Easter. A treat not to be missed.



Before dinner we made a sortie into town to locate the workshops (mostly unlabelled) of knife makers. Not many folk out and about until around 6pm and then it was groups of elderly men sitting around chatting. There did not seem to be a "passegiata" there but perhaps that came later? We spotted one workshop and went in. The story of the Pattada Knife seems fairly

recent, having begun with a shepherd about four generations back. The traditional knife (unlike those from Corsica) has a straight blade about 10cm long which folds into a bone (not wooden) handle. The bone may be imported (African Zebu) or moufflon or a ram horn. The blade should be steel but not stainless steel. And, of course, the trick is to negotiate a fair bargain as between maker and buyer. We were given an initial price of about £60 while a young American couple who had visited a different workshop were asked three times that price! We did not return to the bargaining game next morning.

Our chef-receptionist of the evening turned out to be the hotel owner. Next morning several kitchen workers appeared to prepare a wedding lunch for over 500 guests. We were given the specially printed menu which comprised five courses, each one of which included numerous dishes. A gargantuan meal, scheduled to last about four hours and to be followed by dancing. The nineteenth century repasts of Normandy described by Flaubert have modern rivals.

The fourth day we went further south through Oristano on the outskirts of which was the Romanesque church of South Giusta. Contrary to the guide book, this was closed in the afternoon so we could only admire the exterior. By late afternoon we reached the resort of Bosa and surveyed the two hotels which were NOT along the beach. One was full and the other, brand new the previous

month, had rooms available. The owners, both successful retail shopkeepers, have launched themselves enthusiastically as innkeepers but the kitchen was not yet ready (nor had their son – the chef – come home) and we dined at the other place. Some bird watching was done in the early evening and next morning on scrubby land nearby. Gérard found the Sardinian sparrow here.

Next day, a Sunday, was meant to include a salt-pan hosting flamingoes, identified in "Where to Watch Birds" and a major nuraghe site, Genna Maria. We got into the right bird area, but there was no sign for the Lipu reserve, so we decided to move on to Villanovaforru. However, there was a further delay because roads were mysteriously closed and guarded with the result that we reached the nuraghe of Genna Maria (Villanovaforru) just before 5pm i.e. closing time. And on Mondays it is not open. So, no visit to the nuraghe. Nearby was a comfortable 3-star hotel, Le Colline, around which a gale force wind blew constantly. We took rooms and half pension. Again, our evening meal benefited from the 30-strong birthday party's menu. Bird spotting was hampered by the wind but the hospitality made up for this.

After the double disappointments of that day, we nevertheless decided to push right down towards the island capital of Cagliari, taking in another Romanesque cathedral at Tratalias near Carbonia. The owner of 'Le Colline' phoned a

small hotel on the island of S. Pietro, our objective, (he knew the owners) and we drove to Calasetta to take the ferry across to the small island of S. Antioco from which a causeway runs to S. Pietro. We reached the town of Carloforte and knowing the hotel to be up near the "tonnara" (seasonal processing plant for tuna) we set off along that single track road about 5pm. S. Pietro is a volcanic rock covered in Aleppo pines and Mediterranean vegetation such as lentisc and myrtle. It was settled in the early eighteenth century by coral fishers originating from Liguria who had been enslaved by the north African pirates and then released. The people of Carloforte trace their ancestors back to this time.



It proved difficult to spot the hotel sign board (off the road, lurking in the bushes) and we located it by a process of logic more than anything. Another family business, and thus I got the Signora on the job of phoning the local LIPU (answering machine in Cagliari) and other locally "likely" numbers so that we could find the falcons' breeding sites next day. I never discovered whether our messages

had reached their target because by then we knew exactly where to go, the cove of Cala Fico, and where it was on the map. So mid-morning saw us at the LIPU camp site down in the cove where we introduced ourselves to the LIPU man, Luciano Durante, himself a descendant of the coral fishers.

After some general chat and bird spotting (blue rock thrush on a rock above the camp), Luciano put us in his small Fiat and took us up the hill to the nearby lighthouse, labelled 'Military Zone : Keep Out' with useful metal gates designed so you could easily clamber round and walk on about 100 metres to the edge of the 300 ft. cliff where Eleonora's falcons were wheeling and crying. Below on rocky ledges, they were feeding their young. At this precise site, there was a French birder from Montpellier, Bruno, with his 'scope. Bruno had first come to S. Pietro some years ago when LIPU asked the French for help in protecting this site. His first trip was for 3 months during which he had to learn Italian and run things too. Each year he comes back for a few days. LIPU presence protects the site against poachers for eggs.

In Italian, the Falcons are called the Queen's Falcons because the fourteenth century Sardinian Queen Eleonara, when drafting the legal code, inserted a law prohibiting the capture of adult Falcons or their young from the nest. The species was officially recognised in 1836. They breed in Europe (August and September) and in mid-October fly

down to Madagascar for the winter.

The saltpans on the edge of Carloforte were to the liking of numerous flamingos and we visited these in the late afternoon. Many more were seen next morning feeding in the pans on the edge of Cagliari where they have even bred some young.

Our last three days were spent moving back to mainland Sardinia, heading for the eastern side of the island to the national park of Gennargentu. We aimed at the town of Dorgali and spent two nights in the hotel S'Adde (Sardinian for valley). The day in the park was mainly a scenic drive but the second night brought some heavy rain and thick mist. During the night we were awakened by strange cries ... eventually identified as migrating grey herons.

The weather quickly cleared and as we drove up towards Olbia we made several hopeful stops for birding. As it was rather breezy, we did not have a lot of success except one spot where we could hear singing ... from low bushes. Eventually, I spotted two birds on a power line, one of which was singing. After careful examination and debate the songsters were identified as migrating wood larks, thanks to Gérard. Other than a splendid lunch overlooking a small bay near S. Teodoro, this was the high point of the day.

The evening ferry brought us to Civitavecchia at midnight and we reached Rome at 01.15.

TRIESTE TO CAPORETTO — PAST AND PRESENT

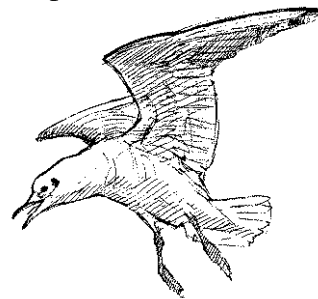
By Peter Allen

The water-front lights were reflected without a ripple in the glass-like surface of the Adriatic. The occupants of the coach had watched with anticipation for the hotel that was to be the base for the start of the tour. British involvement in WW1 in this north eastern part of Italy had brought together a disparate company. The esplanade by the sea seemed forever, but then came big buildings. Which one would it be? A large piazza facing the sea front was passed. Next to it an imposing edifice — Grand Hotel Duchi d'Aosta - too grand surely. Then another just as big bearing the legend Hotel Savoia Excelsior. Living up to its name it could not have been better. Opposite and extending out to sea was the large Stazione Marittima, a reminder of the importance of Trieste as a port in earlier times, but now a modern conference centre. A short distance away along the old railway trunka stood the redbrick central fish market and aquarium.

To give the group a feel of the city and of the very mixed history of this part of Italy a brief tour was taken with a local guide. An indication of the past influences experienced in this corner of Italy is hinted at in the various religious buildings; Serbian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Israelite Temple. San Giusto Hill overlooks the modern city and was almost certainly the site of prehistoric settlement. San

Giusto was one of the last Christian martyrs who suffered as Christianity spread. He is the patron saint of Trieste and the cathedral on the Capitoline Hill, near the ruins of a Roman basilica, is dedicated to him. In contrast to these ancient traces of Trieste is the modern port with its container terminal at the crossroads of European trade routes.

A dark reminder of WW2 is the warehouse building that was converted into a concentration camp in which thousands died.



One is always conscious of the high range of hills that is the backdrop to the city. Along the ridge of these hills runs the border beyond which is Slovenia. This high land is known as the Triestine Carso; to the geologist it is karst countryside. The word "karst" comes from an old word of the area meaning "rock". The rock in this case is limestone and underground rivers have created great caverns. An example of this sort of countryside, but much less rugged, is the karst area of the Yorkshire Dales.

During WW1 soldiers were able to create tunnel complexes in which to live. Much fighting went on as the Austrians tried to get to Venice. The Italian 3rd Army suffered a severe defeat at Caporetto (now Kobarid in Slovenia) and British and French

troops were sent to help the Italians. Trench networks can still be found among the Mediterranean cypresses and cotinus (the decorative smoke tree of our gardens) that cover the hills. Recent forestry has covered some areas with conifers, but remains of trenches can still be made out. Units of the Glosters, Ox. and Bucks. Light Infantry and Northumberland Fusiliers fought in this countryside and also in areas of rolling farmland flanked by very steep tree-covered hills.

The Italian 3rd Army, fighting in flatter land towards Venice, avenged Caporetto with a decisive victory at Vittorio Veneto. This was almost as far as the Austrians got in their attempt to capture Venice.

Mid-June was not a good time for seeing birds. Some Italian sparrows were evident in the grounds of the Sport Hotel in Losson di Meolo (in the Province of Venice). Walking in the village two Americans thought they heard an owl in the foliage of a tree. After investigation of this report they were assured that the calling was in fact coming from a pretty little pigeon called a collared dove. Full marks for being interested and who knows what might come from the incident? Gulls at Trieste were too far out to sea to be identified, but at a shrubby place outside the town of Palmarena a nightingale sang loudly all the time the party was in the vicinity looking at the ruins of an ancient star-shaped fort. The bird was doing its bit to raise people's awareness of nature, or

to use the Italian's interesting sounding word, "sensibilizzazione"!

And so that a wreath may be laid in memory of those who gave their lives so that others may live in peace a visit was made to the peaceful war cemetery outside the little town of Giavera. Then home called.

ITALY, ROMANIA, MALTA AND GREENLAND

By David Lingard

It is still January as I write and there have been conservation disasters in all these countries in the space of this single month but each has been opposed by conservationists throughout the world swiftly and effectively - thanks to the Internet and e-mail.

There are many discussion groups, covering subjects of all kinds, where one can send a "letter" which will be read by everyone who subscribes to the group - usually hundreds or thousands people from all over the planet.

Just consider what could have been done only ten years ago before so many people gained access to the World Wide Web...



Early in January 2002 a severe cold snap gripped much of Europe including the Po delta in north east Italy. It was so severe that most of the water which was not flowing strongly was frozen hard. A huge number of water birds arrived, fleeing from many places where conditions were even harsher and ducks were bobbing shoulder to shoulder in the few patches of open water.

- Hunting was suspended, but after a week of pressure from the hunters the president of Veneto region, Giancarlo Galan cancelled the ban saying that weather conditions were now back to normal and hunting should resume. Menotti Passarella saw the hunters on the 18th and within hours had e-mailed the LIPU group and displayed photographs showing the real state of weather conditions in the delta. Within two days a formal protest from LIPU was received by Sgr Galan and the facts were sent to the news media. A formal protest was also signed by Mike Rands, director of BirdLife International.

- On the 24th Lajos Nemeth announced that illegal building was going on in one of the most sensitive parts of the Danube delta with dirt roads being created which ran through bird colonies and prevented the normal water levels being preserved. The protest was immediate from all over the world and after four days the Romanian government agreed to stop

the building and ensure that the area is restored to its previous condition - a lighting campaign.

- Malta is always on the front line of protest campaigns - even Italian hunters are "outclassed" by their Maltese brethren for barbarity. The cold weather had driven eight Mute Swans south to settle in St Thomas Bay where a crowd gathered on the cliffs to watch these birds which are rare in the Maltese islands. Then a speedboat roared around the headland with three shotgun toting thugs who shot all the birds bar one. The outrage has exceeded all previous protests and Malta is again in the news for its appalling record of illegal bird killing.

- The colonies of Brunnich's Guillemots and Eider on Greenland have been decimated by uncontrolled hunting over the last century and the Danish government has given some ground with a ban on hunting after 15 February. However, the local government in the south west of Greenland has caved in to hunters' pressures and allowed an extension of one month. BirdLife Denmark has launched an international protest campaign and has published the e-mail addresses of the ministers who are responsible, this is still going on.

By these means the news is made public and the counter attacks are prompt and effective, politicians

cannot easily ignore the people when the protest is also being directed to the newspapers, radio and television...

Lest you feel that these miracles of instant communication are just for stories of disaster and gloom I can show you a much happier side of the coin. A beautiful Snowy Owl has been in Belgium all through the winter and is presently in Veurne on the French/Belgian border.

Photographs and updates on its progress are on the Internet and in two weeks we're going to the Schelde estuary for a few days of winter birding - yes, we'll stop off at Veurne to see this very special bird.

RAPTOR PROTECTION CAMPS

On page 8, the article on the protection camps at the Straits of Messina and elsewhere introduced you to the FMF (The Mediterranean Hawks Foundation). If you should want to take part in the camps with the FMF please contact :

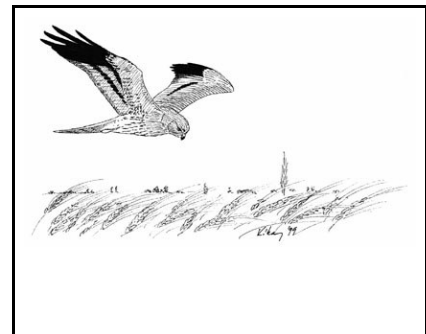
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LIPU-UK ANNUAL APPEAL

The 2002 "Stop the Massacre" Appeal is going well and is on target for raising a similar sum to that of last year; but has not closed and if you should still want to contribute and make this year a special one I shall be happy to receive any contributions. A sincere "Thank You" to those members and friends who have already made this appeal a success.

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