



Let's enjoy some better news!

The last couple of years have been hard work for LIPU and the light at the end of the tunnel has seemed to be just a glimmer in the distance. We have waited a long time for some relief from the unremitting bad news but, at last, with a broad smile, I can include some very encouraging good news from Italy in this first edition of the renamed "Ali".

I sometimes wonder where the boundaries of LIPU's work are, or even if there are any. We think readily of the emotive sides of the work, the brave people like the volunteers in Calabria and Piergiorgio Candela in the valleys of the north as they stand firm in opposing the cruelty and the killing.

There are other things, though, perhaps less emotive, perhaps less dramatic and probably further from the front line, but every bit as valuable to the saving of birdlife in Italy. It is widely accepted that protection of the habitat is the single most important factor in halting and, perhaps, reversing the decline of wildlife on the planet we rent.

What are these other activities carried on in offices rather than in the reserves or recovery centres, in the headquarters rather than in the field? A good example is Patrizia Rossi who works in the field as well as the office to encourage farmers to change their ways just a little to help wildlife a lot.

Another stalwart who gains my admiration for his understanding of the ways of the European Commission and Parliament is Ariel Brunner who, as well as heading the IBA monitoring scheme keeps the struggle alive in Brussels, more of that soon.

Over twenty years ago BirdLife International started the programme requiring members to identify national Important Bird Areas (IBAs). LIPU took on this task in Italy and published the results of five years work in 2000 - an agreed list of 192 sites throughout Italy but, unfortunately the designation of an IBA does not confer any protection on the site. Fortunately, the European Birds Directive does require the redesignation of IBAs as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), or zones in Italy, and

with this designation comes protection of both the habitat and the creatures using it. Italy, and other European nations has been dragging its feet in this process and the only way to ensure progress is through the European courts and enforcement departments.

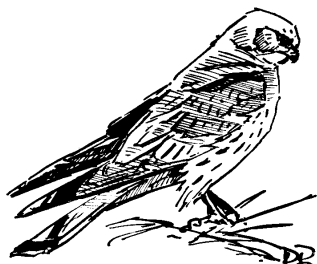


Ariel writes, "I have (for once!) some good news. I've been informed that the EU Commission has formally opened the infraction procedure against Italy on the SPA violation in the Gargano steppe lands. As you will remember we've been fighting this really difficult battle for three years now and LIPU-UK's support has been vital to it. Of course this is only the first step and it doesn't have immediate

consequences on the ground but it's still a turning point. Italy has now 2 months (officially, with real commission time it's more like 4-5) to demonstrate its case (and it can't without taking real measures) then it will be dragged in front of the Court of Justice. I believe we will see some enraged reactions down in Puglia soon!

Another good shot by the EU is the opening of the second infraction procedure, under article 8 of the Treaty, following Italy's condemnation by the court in March for failing to designate our IBAs as SPAs. Since only a few regions have designated their share of SPA since then (and even those only partially), the Commission has started the second phase leading eventually to monetary fines. It will still take about a year before we'll have to pay the penalty but when it comes it will hurt - about 200.000 Euros a day! Panic is already spreading from the ministry to the regions and we have been contacted by a couple of regional administrations asking as for technical details on our IBA cartography- a good sign that something is moving."

I think we can take some satisfaction from knowing that we are involved with so much of this work.



Conservation News from Italy

From the President of LIPU

Giuliano Tallone

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

The 1970s: on the long wave of the economic 'boom' the number of hunters in Italy reached 2 million. But since then...

The struggle of the first environmentalists, including LIPU, led to some historic results: the passing of the 1977 law no.968 in Italy, which brought about the revolutionary concept of fauna as state protected heritage, and of the 1979 Birds Directive no.409 in Europe, which required all European Community States to make important choices on nature conservation, choices which are still valid and applicable today.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Birds Directive, with an important international conference in Parma, we can't but look at the many events that have taken place in the last quarter of a century.

A fundamental principle of the Birds Directive was to instigate the Special Protection Zones (ZPS) for the protection of nesting and feeding habitats, resting places and migration of birds. Thanks to the IBA project, which LIPU and BirdLife are collaborating with, important areas for bird conservation have

been identified throughout the whole continent.

There have been numerous forward steps and today in Italy there are around 2,500 protected sites at EU level; the national parks have grown from 5 to 20, the total of regional and state protected sites has reached 12% of the national territory. The times when regional parks could be counted with one hand seem so far away!

The news of the last few months makes it clear that work needs to continue if retrograde steps in the law are to be avoided. Bad news is always looming: there are more than 15 pejorative proposals against current legislation; we want to collect 100,000 signatures against them. We need to say NO!

In any case the Directive gave precise limits on the species that can be hunted and on the tools for capture (traps, snares, baits) during the hunting season, which closes at the end of winter, setting fundamental and progressive principles.

Today the Birds Directive seems like an old travelling companion and new directions are unfolding towards biodiversity conservation at an international level, as well as the global level of BirdLife International. Together with the European Union, the Ministries for the Environment and for Agriculture Policies and other environmental bodies, we can be proud of having contributed, for 25 years, to the approval and application of historic measures

for the conservation of birds in Italy and Europe. Thank you LIPU!

The Birds Directive is 25 years old. An important milestone in the struggle to protect birds and their habitat.

by Claudio Celada, LIPU Director of Conservation

Many of us are at times bound to wonder whether the founding, and subsequent strengthening, of the European Union has been, on the whole, something positive or otherwise for the environment. Among the numerous targets of scorn of the sceptics is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and although we are loath to admit it, their criticisms are often supported by undeniable facts. Data on the size of certain bird populations, published by the British Trust for Ornithology - the BTO is the recognized scientific authority for ornithological research in the UK - point to a clear decline throughout the EU in the past 25 years of a number of species that depend on a farming habitat. The statistics indicate clearly that the kind of agricultural enterprise promoted by the EU is not compatible with the conservation of an important element of biodiversity: in a word, birdlife.

It is easy to imagine, therefore, the pessimism that is generated by the prospect of EU enlargement and the ways in which it will affect European policies on agriculture. Looking at the problem from another perspective are

those who believe that achieving improved environmental standards is a process that must be implemented by and through European leadership, the guidelines for which should be defined and articulated in appropriate directives. These two positions are not in fact antithetical; both rather accurately describe the present state of affairs. If, for example, it is the case that LIPU shares the preoccupations concerning a farming programme which, even after recent reforms, finds it difficult to pay sufficient attention to the environment, we still find it useful to examine the way that environmental regulations have been discussed and developed by the EU.



Why a directive?

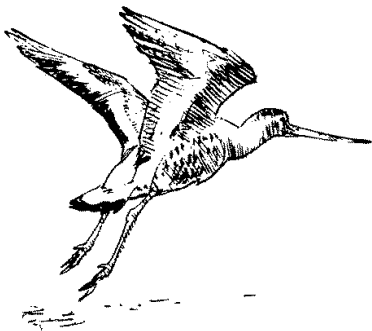
The route leading to an answer has its twists and turns, but with birds in mind, it is worth taking. Let's go back 25 years to 1979. European Directive 409/79CEE comes into force, better known as the "Birds Directive" It is interesting to recall how, 25

years ago, directives on environmental matters were very thin on the ground, yet the problems were countless and unresolved. Why, then, did a directive come about at this time? There is no single answer. There was, it is true, a great need to face up to the problems caused by hunting and its powerful vested interests, which, indeed, still haunt us today. There was also, and there still is, a justifiably emotional desire throughout Europe to halt the indiscriminate slaughter of a common heritage, one more fundamental, even, than Stonehenge or the Colosseum.

LIPU and BirdLife commitments

Because birds move around and cross frontiers, the Birds Directive is mainly concerned with migratory species. Fortunately, the Directive does not deal exclusively with hunting; its basic purpose is "the conservation of all bird species living in the wild in Member States". We have every right to embrace the Birds Directive as our own creation: we have followed its progress step by step; we had a determining influence on the way it was put together, and we debated its crucial details. A European office of BirdLife International and a national branch of LIPU continue to monitor it. A number of its Articles are still being defined, 25 years on, and vigilance is the order of the day. The fate of millions of birds depends on an accurate interpretation of concepts like "a small number of birds that may be hunted" or "allowable delay in the overlap

time between the hunting season and the period of reproduction or migration.” And finally, under constant surveillance is the way in which the Directive is applied in practice, responsibility for which lies with LIPU branches, particularly where hunting or IBAs are involved. IBAs are fundamentally linked to Special Protection Areas and are described in the Directive as an important means of conservation.



So we must ask ourselves whether and to what extent the Birds Directive has contributed to changing the way that nature is perceived in this country. Looking at the mass media, it has to be said that much more attention is devoted to international conferences - the Rio Convention on Biodiversity is a good example. As a consequence, the Birds Directive remains largely unknown to the public. To be quite frank, until a few years ago, even many local environmental officers were not fully acquainted with it. There has been an improvement in recent years, however, as can be seen from the number of training initiatives that have been set up by public bodies and other associations. And now that things are

changing, or perhaps because they are changing, the Directive finds itself coming under fire from certain quarters of the hunting fraternity, those who are unmoved by any kind of inconvenient evidence, even when it comes from scientifically acclaimed sources. These attacks are pursued in an effort to provide wildly inaccurate interpretations of the Directive. Even political threats to amend the law are made, and to allow the killing of species in danger of extinction or to hunt during the pre-reproductive migratory period. And the official excuse for such demented ranting is that the Birds Directive is old and should be brought up to date. Whereas we believe that, aged 25, the Birds Directive is still young and healthy, and we hope and trust that it stays this way for another 25 years.

* * *

An Assessment

by Ariel Brunner

What has the Birds Directive really achieved during its 25 years in existence? How can we assess the value of its efforts after a quarter of a century?

An initial observation concerns the serious delay with which it has been received. In the case of Italy it needed 13 long years before it was adopted through Law No 157, passed in 1992. Similar delays were recorded in many European countries, but now the Directive is effective in all Member States (and in many

of the countries which will enter the European Union this year).

An analysis of the successes and failures of the Birds Directive must start with the two main problems which confront it: regulation of hunting and conservation of bird habitat.



Hunting

The Birds Directive has revolutionised the regulation of hunting activities in Europe and it is the hunting world itself that has most fiercely and most persistently resisted its activities, as well as making repeated attempts to modify them. The Directive is based on the principle that all species are protected and that hunting activity can be seen as a limited “activity” which should not prejudice the conservation status of the species.

The implementation of the Birds Directive has met many obstacles, especially in countries with strong hunting traditions like Italy and France. This has led to delays and misleading

replies to repeated interventions by the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. Special dispensations planned by the Directive have been applied incorrectly and this tendency has recently been reinforced in Italy by their handing over responsibility to Regions. In spite of this, the positive results in terms of conservation are evident. In Italy the acceptance of the Directive has eliminated two months from the hunting season (February and March), has introduced the prohibition of the use of non-selective means (nets, traps, birdlime etc) and has reduced species that can be hunted by 37%, offering protection to species such as the Capercaillie, Bar-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover, Woodlark and Tawny Pipit. However the problem of poaching remains.

The regulations introduced under Law 157/92, together with the establishment of many protected areas, following the adoption of Law 394/91 about parks, and the remarkable fall in the number of hunters, have noticeably relieved hunting pressures in Italy. As a result, during the last decade there has been a great increase in many birds which had been hard hit by hunting, such as raptors, herons and ducks, whose nesting and wintering populations have expanded in their own areas and have become more visible for nature lovers.

Habitat conservation

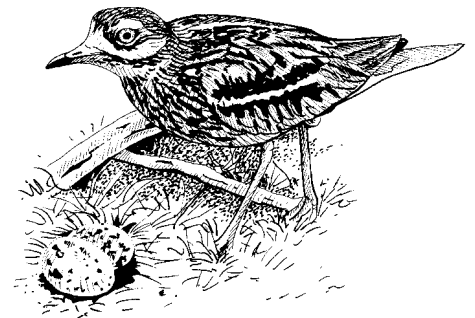
However, progress in conservation of vital habitats for birds

is less positive. The Directive advocates, in a strong but fairly generic way, the conservation of habitats which are of sufficient size and quality to maintain the bird population. The principal means of doing this is the designation of Special Protection Zones (SPZ). These priority protection sites, together with those designated in the equally important Habitat Directive (SIC – Sites of Community Importance) make up the Nature 2000 Network, a fundamental instrument for European nature conservation. Obtaining an effective designation of the sites makes possible repeated interventions by the European Commission and procedures for dealing with infringements by Member States. In the case of Italy the procedure has started: there are now more than 400 SPZs, but we are still far from covering all the individual priority sites of the IBA project. Last March Italy was condemned by the European Court of Justice for insufficient designations of SPZs. In spite of this, only a few Regions have started over the last few months to improve the situation.

Even more worrying is the management aspect. Even when sites are correctly designated, in many cases they continuously deteriorate or are even almost completely destroyed.

Although there has been a general improvement over the last decade for those species that are vulnerable to hunting, there has been a continual decline in those dependent on certain

habitats (pastures, steppe, agricultural land): Little Bustard, Calandra Lark, Short-toed Lark and Stone Curlews are diminishing as their habitats disappear.



In conclusion, the 25th anniversary of the Birds Directive allows us to draw up a mixed assessment. It is certainly a good law which, where it has been applied, has given excellent and visible results. The challenge of the next few years will be to accomplish a real and full implementation of the Directive in every way. Let us hope we can celebrate the next anniversary with no regrets.

Thanks to the Birds Directive in Italy, 400 Special Protection Zones have been designated for birds.

Law 157 was approved in Italy in 1992, revolutionising the regulation of hunting, shortening the hunting season and protecting many bird species.

Over the last 20 years in Italy the number of hunters has diminished by about 50%.

The Birds Directive states that:

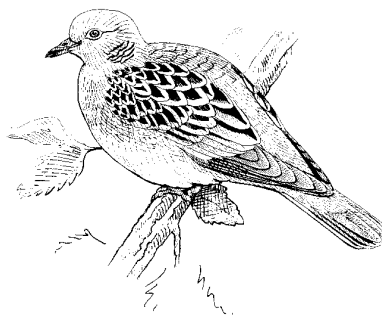
- All wild bird species are protected and their populations must be maintained at an adequate level.
- Member States must preserve, maintain and rehabilitate a sufficient diversity of habitats for all species of wild birds.
- Special Protection Zones must be designated for the protection of species that are specially listed (List 1) and migratory species;
- There is a general prohibition of killing, destruction of nests, collection of eggs, keeping in captivity, commerce, etc. except in specifically designated cases.
- Hunting is allowed only for species on List II; hunting is forbidden during reproduction and return migration and must not in any case prejudice the conservation status of the species.
- Non-selective large-scale methods of capture are forbidden (nets, traps, birdlime, capture from vehicles and boats, use of searchlights, automatic weapons etc).

LIPU and BirdLife protect the Directive in these ways:

- The individual areas of our IBA Project have been accepted as valid by the European Commission by the designation of SPZs.
- The many complaints made by the partners of BirdLife International have

constituted a large part of European jurisprudence concerning the protection of sites.

- There is an ongoing commitment against the excessive use of special dispensations by means of dozens of legal actions (recourse to the TAR, complaints to the European Commission etc).
- Activity in the political lobby and vigilance towards the European Institutions to thwart attempts to abolish the Directive.
- In 2000 the European partners of BirdLife collected 2,000,000 signatures to prevent changes to the Birds Directive.



RESERVES AND CENTRES

25 years for the Reserve at Crava Morozzo (CN)

After 25 years it is the mother of all LIPU Reserves. This is due to the idea and foresight of Tomaso, Ada, Candida, Franco and other LIPU volunteers of Cuneo, who as early as the end of the 70s, struck by the presence of birds in the two artificial basins and the stretch of the River Pesio, and after days of observation and sightings,

initiated the administrative process to convince the local Council to protect the area. They succeeded, and so came into being the Crava Morozzo Reserve, the first protected area managed by LIPU.



To celebrate this important anniversary in the best way, the Reserve will keep the year 2004 as a year of events and initiatives, with the double purpose of all the LIPU Reserves: to unite the actions of conservation to a diligent use of Nature in educating and promoting knowledge and respect. In conjunction with normal management activities, we will be supported by the Pesio Alte Valle Regional Park, and Enel (proprietors of the artificial basins) in theme days and events designed to acquaint the greatest numbers, especially LIPU members, with Grey Herons and Tufted Ducks, newts and dormice, and many of the other inhabitants of the Reserve, in every month of the year.

You enter the Reserve through the Visitor Centre, a typical Piedmontese farm, now a meeting point for schools, families, tourists and naturalists. Nature paths, some accessible to the disabled, information boards and

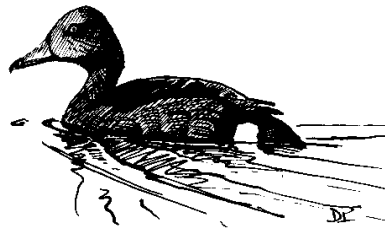
observation hides, help the visitor better to comprehend the environment and wildlife of the Reserve. The submerged hide is a must for birdwatchers and general visitors: thanks to a glass panel installed at water level, with a bit of luck we can watch Kingfishers and Pochard diving, and the slow procession of the many fish that populate the pond.

An Anniversary also for Brabbia Reserve

Instituted by the Lombardy Region in 1984, this pearl of Nature in its setting between the Varese and Comabbio lakes saw the beginning of active management in 1994, after the approval of the Plan for the Reserve. In the same year the Province of Varese entrusted to LIPU the development of environmental education and the provision of facilities for visitors and bird-watching.

More peat-bog than marsh, its existence is owed to the discovery of a previously precious fossil fuel, peat, whose extraction has made a profound impression on the contours of the place, with the creation of extensive sheets of water, called "chiari". These alterations have created a truly considerable environmental diversity. Ramsar Site (the convention signed in Iran in 1979 for the protection of wetlands of international importance), ZPS (Special Protection Zones), SIC (Sites of Community Importance) and IBA (Important Bird Area) are some of the

recognitions obtained for its ecological value.



Then came a LIFE project co-financed by the EU to encourage the presence of some preferred species, such as the Ferruginous Duck and the Bittern. So many successes to celebrate in a year with so many special events.

Torrile Reawakens!

The LIPU Torrile Reserve reopens, showing itself in all its splendour to visitors.

by Maurizio Ravasini, Oasi LIPU Torrile

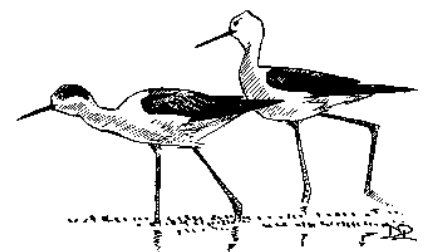
The Reserve will celebrate the arrival of spring with a long-awaited event: reopening to visitors. The workload has been so great, after closing for building maintenance. Now at last it is fully in operation, not only for the reception of visitors and school parties who have already booked a guided visit, but especially thanks to the visitor facilities, which are continually improving.

Awaiting the Stilts

The secret of a Reserve such as Torrile is the ongoing

operational management of both the habitats re-created for the wildlife and also the facilities that allow visitor access to the heart of the Reserve, letting them be in constant contact with the creatures present, but without creating disturbance.

The management of a Reserve much frequented by the public because of the presence of numerous rare species is not always easy, and comprises great demands, including economic ones. And the damage consequent upon recent floods has certainly not helped. Precisely because of this, we are proud to say that today the LIPU Torrile Reserve, with its new observation hides and a kilometre of walkways, has become one of the best equipped of protected areas in proportion to its size.



During 2002 and 2003 work on the pools in fact re-created the original attractive environment and conditions for numerous nesting species. Now we await with curiosity and trepidation the coming of the prenuptial migration of the Black-winged Stilt, which will confirm the quality of the work undertaken. The number of breeding pairs is in fact strongly dependent on the quality of the environment. Consequently there is a need for small islets for nesting, spaced out

along the shorelines at suitable distances from each other. The aim is to have about 100 pairs of Stilts, the minimum number for conservation of the species in Italy.

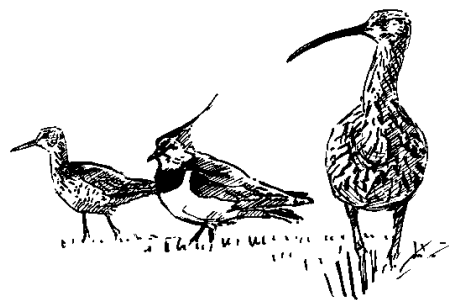
Other birds normally winter in wetlands, where there are wooded riverbanks and numerous sources of prey. They are on the list of species diminishing in Palearctic Europe, and considered rare in Italy. We are speaking of Eagles. One of them, the Great-spotted Eagle, is a frequent visitor to the Torrile Reserve. The first year of its presence, November 1999, it “introduced itself” in juvenile plumage, with white spots, and was promptly nicknamed Svetlana. A frequent visitor to the outer willow-banks of the Reserve, it at once drew the affection of all the staff, and visitors coming from all parts of Italy. In the following years it was awaited as a friend who arrived with the cold weather, and thousands of binoculars scanned the sky from the hides. Every year, lucky glimpses, congratulations, or requests for information followed its presence. It eventually became completely brown and adult but came by every year to greet us. Even in the autumn-winter season of 2003 it made its appearance at the Reserve on two occasions, using the same perches and terrorising the ducks there.

So, then, we have given a panoramic view of some outstanding aspects of the Reserve; the natural riches, the facilities for visitors, the Stilts and the eagle

“Svetlana”....but what are the future objectives? To further improve access, and the grand project of reconstruction of the Visitor Centre, with an auditorium for 50 persons and teaching spaces. Recognition of the status as a Regional Nature Reserve, which would further guarantee security. Projects for environmental education, which are certainly not lacking, and are much appreciated by school parties. Management to protect, protection to observe, observation to manage, are the basic secrets for the operation at LIPU Torrile Reserve, a jewel that must and will grow for the benefit of our wildlife friends.

Reserve statistics

- 2000/5000 duck population at the Reserve.
- 57 species of nesting birds.
- 300 species present on the observation list, among which are rare species such as Imperial Eagle, Lapwing, Slender-billed Curlew and Little Stint.
- 200 Stock Doves, which this year wintered at the Reserve, was the first documented occasion for the Province of Parma.



WETLANDS

by Marco Gustin

If there is one type of environment that can be defined as an Eden, a paradise of diversity, it is a wetland. The water may be fresh, saline, running or still. It may be a marsh, lake, river or sea but 30% of our bird species depend on wetlands. More than 150 species are bound to wetlands in the breeding season.

Types of Wetland

The clearest distinction in types of wetland is between fresh and salt water. Fresh water environments can be everything — from fast running rivers to lakes and pools. There are also bogs which are permanently water logged and those which are only flooded for a period. To these must be added man-made wetlands such as reservoirs for irrigation and hydroelectric schemes.

Saline waters on the other hand are almost all by the coast and support vegetation that is adapted to the conditions. The most important are brackish pools and estuaries and man-made salt works environments.

Ecological importance

The natural disappearance of thousands of hectares of wetland has brought into focus their ecological importance. They influence climate change, provide a natural method of flood control and play a primary role in maintaining the water table. The Ramsar convention in Iran in

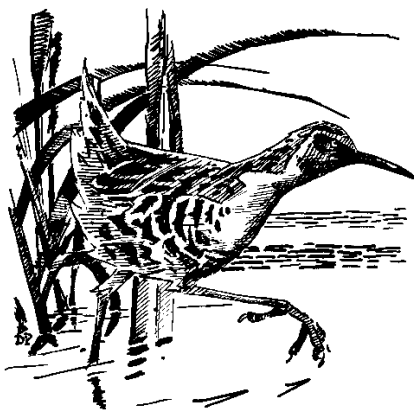
1971 recognised the value of wetlands. A list of those of international importance was drawn up in the hope that they would receive complete protection.

Where are they?

We find areas of wetland that are internationally important in the most beautiful parts of Italy. Areas such as the Venice Lagoon, the Po Delta, Lakes Garda and Trasimeno and the coastal marshes in Sardinia. Areas such as these each support over 20,000 wintering birds.

What are the current dangers?

- The taking of water for irrigation prolongs the effects of the summer.
- The concentration of pollutants.
- Fire and damage to vegetation by vandals.
- The pollution of water by emissions from industry and agriculture.
- The unpredictable changes in water levels between March and July.
- Poaching and excessive hunting leave high levels of poisonous lead.



A journey of discovery for new species of the tropical forest

by Marco Lambertini, Network and Programme Director, BirdLife International

The joy of discovery

"Discovery" is a deeply significant term, a universal attribute of living things, which to a greater or lesser extent, explore new ways of improving their living conditions, for simple survival or to gain new opportunities. The researches of scientists are driven by this unquenchable thirst for new discoveries, and conservationists too share in the excitement of a new find.

New discoveries are made continually in the natural world, in behaviour, the details of the ecology of species, their relationships and adaptations. And above all sometimes comes the unveiling of something previously unknown. Hundreds of new invertebrates are described daily, but also too may come the excitement of the revelation of something higher up the evolutionary scale: for the naturalist, a veritable Grail.

With birds, for the most part, it is a case of making discoveries in obscure and inaccessible corners of the tropics, where the level of biodiversity is at its peak. Often, of course, the new find is an inconspicuous skulker to add to the ranks of the LBJs, but not always. In December 2002 for example, a new raptor, the appropriately named "Cryptic Forest Falcon" was announced

from the area bordering Bolivia and Brazil. From central Brazil too has come the Bald Parrot, with orange head and brilliant green plumage.

The discovery of a new species gives an ingenious new opportunity for its protection. When the Choco Vireo was discovered on the Pacific flank of the Colombian Andes, it was found to be rare, with only 1-3000 individuals, and restricted in its geographical distribution and habitat of primary montane forests. In order to preserve it, the researchers came up with the idea of putting its scientific name up for auction. An American birder, Bernard Masters, bid \$100,000, and the bird now bears the name of Vireo masteri, while BirdLife has been able to purchase some thousands of hectares of its forest habitat in order that it may survive.

Discovery and rediscovery

Some species held to be extinct, or at least not seen for some decades, can rise again unexpectedly from the scrub in the sands of a desert island, or among the leafage of a tropical forest. In October 2003, a group of birders on the small island of Savai'i saw what may have been a Samoan Woodhen, lost since 1873. The rediscovery of a little Fijian passerine, the shy brown Long-legged Thicket Bird, is beyond doubt however, and even made the main evening news on Italian TV and elsewhere in the world. Such discoveries can have great emotional power.

The outcome of new finds is not always tinged with optimism, however, as with the new seed eater, (similar to a small finch), with splendid metallic blue plumage, found on an island of the Caroni river in Venezuela, which was almost immediately submerged by a new dam. Named *Amaurospiza carrizalensis* after the now-vanished island, strenuous efforts are now being made to find the bird in similar habitat of dense spiny bamboo thickets along the river. It would be a bitter blow to lose it so soon after its discovery. We can but hope for a happy outcome.

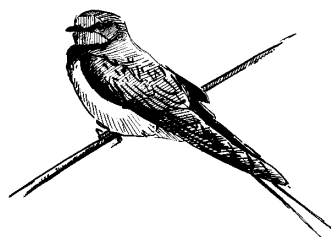
Then too there is the tale of two headline species, the biggest woodpeckers in the world, the Imperial and the Ivory-Billed. Both have been the subject of well-publicised expeditions to find them in Mexico and Cuba, both seemingly in vain. Here too hope still lives on, but alas it is almost certainly the case that these spectacular birds will now not be refound.

Protect the Environment!

Sometimes of course, there will not be new birds discovered, but new populations of extreme rarities. The most notable event recently has been that of the dazzling but reclusive Gurney's Pitta, with its incredible yellow, black, brown and blue colouration, known before only from a population of thirty individuals in a small remnant of forest in southern Thailand, Khao Nor Chuchi. Recent expeditions to Burma have found four separate

groups of the Pitta, and in spite of the deforestation afflicting southern Burma, the size of the forests in the region raises hopes that still more may be found. Similarly, a small but important new colony of Northern Bald Ibis has been found in Syria by an Italian researcher, far from the well-known Moroccan populations, themselves only totalling 200.

But in the end, while always looking to make new discoveries, and hoping for the next good news, we must never forget that the finding alone is not sufficient. We must do all we can to protect the places where new birds may be waiting to be found: without their habitat, there will be no new birds left to discover.



POACHING

Robins still being slaughtered. The latest anti-poaching campaign by LIPU in Brescia.

Every year between September and November hundreds of thousands of birds are victims of poaching in the Brescia region. Robins, Wrens, Tits, Blackcaps, Redstarts and other small birds on their autumn migration are caught in bow traps and sold to restaurants to be served illegally as Polenta e Osei. Despite

condemnation from the media, questions in Parliament and public opinion in general, this cruel ritual goes on. LIPU sends an anti-poaching unit made up of four people co-ordinated by LIPU Inspector Piergiorgio Candela to patrol the area looking for bow traps, nets and snares. If they find birds still alive they set them free.



The bow traps are deadly. They are made with a rod of green hazel [or steel] bent in an arch with a cord. The trap is sprung when the bird, attracted by the berries put in place by the poacher, flies into it. A noose is released which breaks its legs and the victim hangs in agony until the poacher comes to strangle it.

Last autumn the LIPU anti-poaching unit caught and reported 31 poachers, confiscated 11,000 bow traps, 400 snares and 82 nets. As a result, hundreds of thousands of birds were saved from the massacre. However, the LIPU patrols faced threats and retaliation from the poachers. The most serious episode was in October when Inspector Candela, Ida Carlini and two journalists looking for and removing traps, were attacked by a poacher with a scythe and a pruning hook. A little less than a year later the aggressor has been sentenced to 20 months in prison and LIPU has been awarded costs and damages.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Europe: Birds are still disappearing

The reason for the decline of 24 bird species in 18 European countries is agriculture. For some species the decline is as dramatic as 30%. This is the outcome of recent research by BirdLife recently presented in Berlin. The decline of the birds typical of agricultural environments is more evident in Western Europe, where the intensification of certain agricultural practices has caused serious damage to the environment. Of 453 species, which are normally found in Europe, some 150 (equal to a third of the total population) might survive only if environment sensitive and sustainable agriculture is practised. The birds most at risk from intense agriculture are: the Corncrake, sometimes present in the Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions, the Red-backed Shrike and Great Bustard, almost vanished from many European Countries. (BirdLife International).

Climatic changes: Research published in *Nature*

Research published in the famous journal *Nature* asserts that climatic changes could precipitate the demise of a quarter of animal and plant species living on our planet, unless the emission of greenhouse gasses is drastically reduced. As part of the research, scientists from 8 countries examined the effects

which temperature increments have on 1000 species amongst which are plants, animals, birds and reptiles.

Another current study in the United Kingdom, inclusive of researchers from the RSPB, and from the Netherlands, has assessed the possible effects on birds in Europe. The result is that even if some species of birds may adapt to climatic changes by finding other habitats similar to their own, the disappearance of the plants and animals from which they depend, also provoked by global warming, will be the most prominent cause of extinction of species in this new century.

Spain: European block of the National Hydrological Plan

The Spanish National Hydrological Plan, probably the most destructive project in terms of the environment in Europe, has sustained a defeat thanks to the intervention of the European Parliament. It is an important achievement obtained also thanks to SEO-BirdLife Spain, who for years has been engaged with this wicked project.

It is a colossal endeavour, which involves the diversion of a considerable quantity of the river Ebro's waters into hundreds of kilometres of pipes and dozens of artificial reservoirs reaching the driest areas of the southeast. If completed, this project would mean the death sentence for some of the richest and most precious European ecosystems. The reduction in the flow of the river

Ebro would cause irreparable damage to the delta marshlands, which are amongst the most important in the continent. The reservoirs would flood thousands of hectares of woodlands and steppes which host endangered species such as the Iberian Imperial Eagle and the Iberian Lynx. The diversion of water would favour the expansion of intensive irrigation agriculture and golf courses at the expense of Mediterranean steppes. (SEO – Bird Life Spain)



India: Medicine exterminates Griffons

Griffon Vultures are amongst the species which have decreased in numbers by 95% and approaching extinction. The cause: a medicine (Diclofenac) used by Veterinarians for livestock and which, according to scientific research, accidentally kills three particular species of vultures. BirdLife has requested a ban on this pharmaceutical product. (Bird Life International)

First Italian Birdwatching Fair

“Po Delta International Birdwatching Fair”. This is the biggest event in continental Europe and it will take place in this fascinating area of Italy dedicated to birdwatching, in the heart of the protected land of the “Parco del Delta del Po”, between the

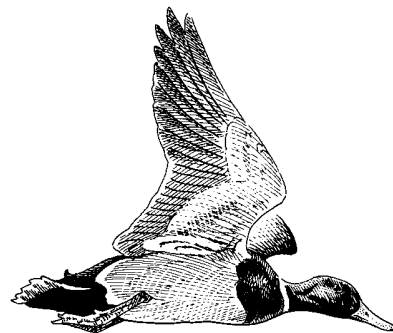
artistic cities of Venice, Ravenna and Ferrara. Launched for the first time this year, avid bird-watchers and others can visit from 29th April to 2nd May 2004 at Comacchio. The Fair aims to involve appropriate organisations and institutions at national and international level.

Many of the events and activities are planned alongside display areas with the splendid background of the Palazzo Bellini in Comacchio. There will be a photographic event, important seminars and conferences including "Waterfowl: experiences and comparisons", culinary demonstrations and wine tasting, sports rallies, guided visits to the Nature Reserve and birdwatching activities. There is a special and rich programme dedicated to schools with didactic laboratories and demonstrations in the Parco del Delta del Po. It goes without saying that LIPU will be present at the Fair. Entrance is free.



Environmental offences: European network.

A European network has been set up for the interchange of information aimed at combating environmental crime. A database is being developed which will be accessible by European police forces working in the field of eco-crime and also by the Regional Agency for the Protection of the Environment (ARPA) and university establishments. The project has been presented at an international conference and is fully supported by the Italian Minister of the Environment. The presence of 22 delegates from EU countries and countries about to join the EU emphasises the sense of willingness to present a common front in this matter.



WORK FOR VOLUNTEERS IN ITALY

I am often asked what openings there are to help LIPU by volunteering for work in the field. This year's opportunities are listed here.

Where: **Marettimo island** (Egadi, Sicily)

Aim: Monitoring migrating soaring birds

Period: 17 April-15 May

Duration: generally one week
Accommodation: in a house (with kitchen)

Number of places available: a few

Cost in Euros: 230

Notes: This site is a part of the project on simultaneous monitoring of migrants in the central Mediterranean. Experienced observers could contribute to standardised data collection.

Where: **Messina Strait**, Calabrian site

Aim: Anti-poaching camp

Period: 24 April-21 May

Duration: one week (24-30 April; 1 May-7 May; 8 May-14 May; 15 May-21 May)

Accommodation: in a house (with kitchen)

Number of places available: one per week

Cost in Euros: Free, costs covered by LIPU; major contribution by LIPU-UK

Notes: Food: Vegetarian (not strictly)

In general people who take part to this camp are asked to follow carefully rules for safety issues. We always go around in group. This site is also a part of the project on simultaneous monitoring of migrants in central Mediterranean. Experienced observers could contribute to standardised data collection.

Where: **Carloforte**

Aim: monitoring Eleonora's Falcon colonies

Period: August and September

Duration: one week

Accommodation: In the LIPU-UK building

Number of places available: a few
Cost in Euros: 240
Notes: LIPU-UK camp site

Where: Near **Monte Arcosu**, Cagliari, Sardinia
Aim: Anti poaching. Dismantling lace traps set in high numbers to capture thrushes
Period: 31 October-7 November; possibly second week of December also
Duration: one week
Accommodation: In the Monte Arcosu WWF field station
Number of places available: two, maybe more
Cost in Euros: covered by LIPU; except for accommodation which will probably be covered by WWF (to be confirmed)
Notes: camp run by LAC (Lega Anti Caccia). LIPU for the first time participates.
Same rules as Messina Strait camp apply.

If you are interested in any of these projects, I can put you in touch with the organiser.



PRESSING CONCERNS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change

Our planet is warming up at alarming rates through the emission into the atmosphere of gases which contribute to the greenhouse effect, by absorbing solar radiation and trapping it within the atmosphere, re-emitting it in the form of heat. This is due principally to the use of fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas), alongside supplementary factors such as deforestation, which releases back into the air the carbon that had been bound up in the trunks of the trees. If that were not enough, the greenhouse gas emissions are still rising, through the dependence of the global economy on oil, the consumption of which is still growing strongly.

Fish Stocks

The world's oceans are currently being plundered at a rate well beyond sustainable levels. Industrial fishing, through the use of ever more sophisticated instrumentation and equipment, and often, as in Europe, subsidised by governments, is rapidly impoverishing the heritage of the oceans. The majority of commercially exploited species are in steep decline, and many fish populations are on the point of collapse.

Crises in water reserves

The increase in population, with the accompanying constant increase in consumption, puts

increasing pressure on the limited hydrological capacities of the world. In 1960 there was available globally 17000 cubic metres per person per day: now it is 7000. By 2025 half the world's population will have insufficient water. And its quality? Every year 9.3 million people die from diseases related to a lack of clean drinking water, a fundamental right denied now to 1.4 billion of the world's citizens.

Water is a brutal measure of inequality: estimated average consumptions range from 350 litres per day for a Canadian family to 165 in Europe and a mere 20 in Africa.

Deforestation

Only a fifth of the world's old growth forests remain intact. The rest have been destroyed, maimed or fragmented. Some ecosystems are on the brink: the Phillipine rainforests and the Atlantic Forest of Brazil have suffered losses in excess of 90%. The causes of deforestation are numerous: conversion to grazing or industrial plantations, intensification of traditional nomadic agriculture, felling for wood products or firewood and so on. The main cause however is industrial scale logging to send timber to western markets, which often opens up the way for other activities, following along the roads, and the alteration of the structure of the forest.

Large Scale Dams

Big Engineering in the shape of dams has one of the greatest

environmental impacts. The hydrology of rivers is altered, and the corridors of movement for aquatic life are cut. Sediment transport is interrupted, which increases erosion at the coast, while huge areas are submerged, often including important ecosystems such as forests and wetlands. The number of large dams in the world has now exceeded the staggering figure of 45,000. There are also huge social consequences: over 80 million people have been displaced, often with minimal compensation, in the last 50 years. The dam of the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtse in China, now approaching completion, will be 186 metres high and send a million and a half people on their way.

Crisis for biodiversity

It is recognised moreover in the scientific community that global biodiversity is going through its worst moment in 65 million years, since the mass extinction of the end of the Cretaceous which saw the vanishing of the dinosaurs. The potential rate of extinction is hard to estimate, but an idea of the scale of the problem may be gained from consideration of the group most familiar to us. It is estimated that 12% of bird species are in danger, or 1186 species in all. Of these, at least 182 are on the threshold, with less than a 50% chance of surviving the next 50 years. Among the causes are the destruction of their habitats, in particular of tropical forests, competition from introduced species and direct persecution.

News from LIPU-UK



Since the Berlusconi government gained power there have been many attempts to change the Hunting Law (Law 157) and at the beginning of March we had the good news that Minister Alemanno had withdrawn his proposed changes.

Sadly, this victory was only one, there are still many more changes being proposed and debated, so the campaign goes on and LIPU is calling for 100,000 signatures to support it in its opposition to the changes to the law.

An assessment of the situation by Danilo Selvaggi is:

Alemanno's Bill has been withdrawn but there are 15 other disastrous proposals before Parliament, all of which we have been contesting for the last year and a half. They are still there and have certainly not been withdrawn, and will not be in the near future. The withdrawal of Alemanno's Bill is an important success but that is not the final whistle. Not only will the Petition continue but we must get going with other important issues.

The next few months will be decisive and we must not soften for one moment.

When Alemanno was interviewed a certain tone came over, but that was to be expected from a politician. But it has been a stinging defeat for him and all who have supported him in his campaign.

They are now in serious difficulties. They will clutch at straws. Minister Alemanno declares that they have withdrawn the Bill because there are other proposals before Parliament covering the same subjects. Are they just discovering that? They have been there for eighteen months, so why did he present his Bill?

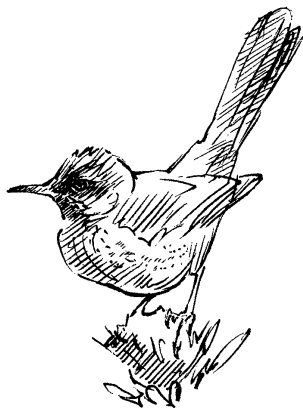
The truth is that it was all part of political ploys by him and his supporters to attack proposals by Sig. Vascon, Onnis and others. However, when Berlusconi realised that it would reflect badly on him personally we presume that he then intervened and advised Alemanno to drop it. So politics has had a lot to do with the outcome. Someone came to realise that the pressure was continuing and the whole subject had become rather delicate.

In conclusion, the campaign and the petition continue, and will go from strength to strength.

We can help in many ways. I have already sent out a request for support to all our members who have email addresses and asked them to pass on the message to friends and colleagues.

I am sure many more of you have access to the Internet and I urge you to visit the LIPU web site and sign the petition which is in English as well as Italian. http://www.lipu.it/tu_petizione_100000firme.htm# is the address - click on the flag beside the title to access the English page and please tell as many people as possible.

For those with no computer who would like to help I can send out paper forms if you just give me a call or drop me a line. This campaign is one, I believe, which we will all want to support and as I write this the total of signatures collected has just passed 16000 - a tremendous start, but still a long way to go.



The article which follows was held over from the last issue because of shortage of space. However I think it is so interesting that I'm happy to include it now even though it may have

lost a little of its topicality. It is written by a German researcher who is researching the migration of Honey Buzzards:

"This autumn we have been able to track the outward migration of an adult male Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*) from northern Germany in great detail by means of an 18 g solar powered transmitter. We received more than 10 locations per day most of the time. Tracking Honey Buzzards with transmitters of another producer in the past has resulted in much less locations. Here are some details regarding the migration:

In the early morning of 27 August 2003: Departure from the nesting place few kms from Kiel (Northern Germany). The bird raised two young this year.

27 August: In the late morning passing the eastern edge of Hamburg.

2 September afternoon: Passing the German-French border slightly south of Luxembourg.

4 September at lunch time: Arriving few kilometres from Bordeaux (SW France)

7 September at noon: Crossing the Pyrenees at Orgambideska.

10 September afternoon: Crossing the Straits of Gibraltar to Africa thus taking three days to cross Spain from the Pyrenees to the straits of Gibraltar.

12 September in the evening: Arriving in a roosting area south of the Atlas mountains (Morocco) SE of the village of Ait Aissa some 77 km NE of Ouarzazate.

21 September in the morning:

Leaving this roosting area.

21 September at noon: Crossing the border of Morocco and Algeria.

29 September: Arriving roughly at the southern limit of the Sahara.

30 September: Leaving Mali and crossing Burkina Faso and Benin the following days.

7 October: Crossing the north-western border of Nigeria.

9 October: Arriving in the wintering area in southern Nigeria, 5°48'04" N/ 6°34'34" E (33 km west of Ihialo and some 123 km NNW of Port Harcourt).

The wintering range seems to be very small. According to the best locations (LC 3) received so far it has only an extension of 2.56 x 1.58 km.

We are very keen to learn more about this wintering area. Anybody having any knowledge about the general area is kindly requested to get in touch with us. Any other hints on how to get more information would also be appreciated.

Kind regards,

Bernd Meyburg"



TAIL FEATHERS

LIPU - UK Publications

LIPU - UK publishes four magazines each year, **HOPOE** in January and **ALI** in March, June and September. These are based largely on selected items from the Italian **ALI** published in Italy at about the same time, with extra material from members of LIPU - UK. All members of LIPU - UK receive the magazines in English and copies of the original Italian magazine can be sent on request.

The **LIPU - UK website** is at www.lipu-uk.org It holds an archive of past publications and links to much other information and photographs.

Two e-mail newsletters are published, generally every few weeks depending on the amount of material available.

Frammenti is in English and consists of items culled from Italian and other sources. If you would like to receive it please request by e-mail to David Lingard at david@lipu-uk.org.

Frammenti Italiani is entirely in Italian and contains some of the items that appear in Frammenti before translation. If you are interested in receiving it please request by e-mail to Brian Horkley at bhorkley@aol.com.

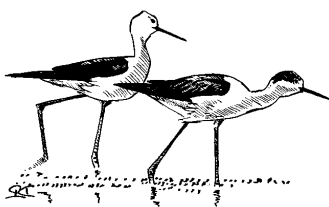


FINE ART PRINTS OF BLACK-WINGED STILTS

Some while ago Richard Hull, a well known wildlife artist was commissioned to paint a picture of these elegant birds for a limited edition of 750 prints

They were offered to members for £40 (unframed) but now we are able to offer the final few at a special price of £17.50 including postage and packing.

I have a descriptive sheet in colour which I'll be happy to send out to anyone who thinks they



might be interested in having one of these beautiful prints. .

RECOVERY CENTRE NEWS

Stop Press news from the LIPU Recovery Centre at Livorno shows that the following birds of prey have been treated there in the last few months

Honey Buzzard	2
Kestrel	14
Barn Owl	5
Eleonora's Falcon	1
Little Owl	2
Buzzard	29
Sparrowhawk	21
Long-eared Owl	1
Hen Harrier	1
Marsh Harrier	1

SUMMARY

I'd like to offer a few words of summary to conclude this edition of the Ali (Wings).

Despite the last item which shows that the problems of poaching are not yet over I think we can see signs of real progress and in particular we can see positive results in the areas supported by LIPU-UK.

We have helped provide so many of the things mentioned in this issue, support for the Calabria camp, the hostel at Carloforte, the IBA mapping facility and many others - thank you all.

This year's appeal has been successful and I am sure we will reach our target to support the projects described in the Hoopoe, but if you've not had the chance to contribute it's not too late.

The translation of this issue by Cicely Adelson, Barbara Avery, Joanna Bazen, Ambra Burls, Alan Morgan, Peter Rafferty and Brian Horkley

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