

From the President of LIPU

Danilo Mainardi

We have all learned about our home country, the boot of Italy, ever since primary school, but when I think of it now, and as I know more about ecology, I see that it is suffering from some kind of disease. I see the boot has leopards' spots: large dark ones, which are the national and regional parks, and small grey ones, other protected areas of various kinds such as nature reserves and local parks. Then there is the rest of the country, the light coloured area, and it is here where the sickness lies, where ecological balance has been lost. If we want the "boot" to get well again, the leopard must become a black panther. The grey spots are under serious threat. We must all take up the struggle to ensure that all these places, from the largest to the many small ones, which are no less important, are not reduced or even removed completely.

FOLLOWING THE SWALLOWS

*Armando Gariboldi,
Director General*

Here we are at the gates of a new spring and ready to talk about swallows once again. The LIPU Swallows Project grows each year, with new activities aimed at focusing public attention. Other organisations, too, have taken up the theme, and this cascade effect was one of our principal aims when we started. This spring we are taking some small but practical steps by asking Communes to make changes in their building regulations which will favour swallows. By the time this Ali Notizie is published we will also have presented the remaining 100,000 signatures to the European Union, at an opportune time when new community agricultural policies are being discussed. The second Day of the Swallows will take place on 21 March. It will be an important occasion for all members and friends to support one of LIPU's main projects, and one which is becoming better and better known throughout the land.

A PROJECT WITH PRACTICAL RESULTS

Umberto Gallo Orsi

While the swallows have been spending the winter in sub-Saharan Africa, and getting ready to come back north again, LIPU has been working hard to give them a cordial welcome. As well as presenting our 130,000 signature petition, LIPU has been working with a BirdLife task force in lobbying for changes in the Common Agricultural Policy, to promote a more respectful attitude towards the land, the environment, animals and our own health.

Many swallows have already been ringed and this allows us to follow their wanderings. More will be ringed by LIPU in 1999 at six important roosting sites in Italy. Swallows gather in wetlands at the end of summer to feed up before their return flight, and it is important to protect these areas as well as their breeding places. Many organisations of various kinds have joined the "100 Farms for Swallows". It is a practical example of how every farmer can work with respect for nature by following the ten Golden Rules suggested by LIPU. At many of these sites, where a scientific ringing programme is being co-ordinated by the IFS (National Institute for Wildlife), LIPU is involved in a nest census and the ringing of nestlings. It is also important to make farmers aware and provide them with correct information. LIPU has a project in hand, in collaboration with the Emiliano-Romagnola Breeders' Association, to monitor insects, mainly flies, which are in the animal sheds. They are working towards the use of integrated methods of control which avoid the use of insecticides whose effects are damaging to both man and swallows. As well as introducing insects which parasitise fly larvae, it is planned to install artificial nests and to ring young swallows, so as to evaluate the positive effects on reproduction and survival. LIPU is also publicising the prohibition on destroying nests, even outside the breeding season, as required by the Berne Convention.

THE FIRST LIPU RESERVE FOR SWALLOWS

From Rome comes an important piece of news for the Swallows Project: on 21 March, LIPU's President, Danilo Mainardi, will open the Castel di Guido LIPU reserve, the first protected area dedicated to swallows. In collaboration with the local environmental authority LIPU has established a reserve of 2000 hectares on a farm in a beautiful area of ecological importance astride the via Aurelia about 4 km from Rome.

The Commune of Rome had entrusted the area to the Environmental Authority with the requirement that in their farming practices they should give preference to biological methods, low environmental impact and extensive wetland cattle rearing, which is in danger of dying out. At this point LIPU came along with the Swallows Project. There are many swallows here, as well as many other species.

The Castel di Guido will be a unique place in Italy, where human activities and nature can be observed side by side. Our children will be able to learn about plants and animals and also to understand what the nature of farming must be if we are to have a cleaner, healthier and more beautiful future.

THE MAYOR OF YOUR TOWN TOO CAN HELP SAVE THE SWALLOW

Gabriella Meo

We are hoping for a fine day on 21 March when LIPU takes to the streets. The actions we have taken so far in the Swallows Project have only been possible with the participation and generosity of so many of our members and friends. Changing the destiny of just a small bird like the swallow requires a great deal of effort and time, but the practical results which are now clear to all are giving such a lot of satisfaction that our only wish is to go forward with even more courage and strength than ever.

We want to be out in the streets and squares on 21 March to be together and meet once again thousands of people to publicise this important project and to ask everyone to have a greater respect for nature. A major feature of the day will be to launch the new LIPU challenge: the Resolution to Save the Swallows. Without, of course, abandoning our undertakings on the agricultural and political fronts, LIPU has decided also to direct its attention to towns and cities. It is there that every year there is a silent slaughter of swallows, swifts and house martins. The restoration of large buildings with no respect for the nests which are already there, the destruction of eggs and even

young birds just because they "dirty" the surroundings, and so many other things which are done through lack of scruples and in ignorance, are all problems which affect these species.

The main objective of the Day of the Swallows will be to ask for a commitment from the Mayors of our towns and cities: to give practical respect to these inhabitants, and make a start by using laws which are already on the statute book and which would be enough to save thousands of swallows, swifts and house martins. On 21 March many mayors throughout Italy will receive a request to approve LIPU's Resolution. How can they say no? It would be to deny birds the right to live in our towns and at the same time to vote for the impoverishment of urban areas. We must all gather in our town squares and by our presence support the rights of nature and the quality of our own lives.

AGRICULTURE IN 2000

*Giovanni Pisano,
co-ordinator of the BirdLife International
Agriculture Task-force*

The future of European agriculture will be governed by imminent reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy, and to it is also linked the prospects for the environment, the whole of rural society and the protection of the countryside in member countries of the Union. It is a significant opportunity to change regulations which in the last 30 years have caused great damage to the environment. Since it began in 1957, the CAP has subsidised agriculture through guaranteed prices, paid in proportion to production. This has resulted in a move towards intensive production techniques, and, in some cases, an indiscriminate use of pesticides, fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides which have polluted land and water. The change from crop rotation to monoculture has contributed to the disappearance of so many species of birds which were once common in the Italian countryside, such as the Red-backed Shrike and Barn Owl.

LIPU is a member of the "Agriculture Task-force" initiated by BirdLife International in 1992, to bring pressure to bear on those decision-making European institutions which have some responsibility for agriculture, and to promote alternative agricultural policies which will preserve the environment. Since proposals for reform were published last March, LIPU and BirdLife International have organised various activities which have brought environmental problems and their suggested solutions to the attention of the appropriate organisations. So that agriculture in 2000 will have precise regulations which respect nature, we have met experts in the European

Commission, the law makers, to show scientific proof of the dramatic effect that agriculture has on biodiversity. Since last December a LIPU representative has sat on the Agriculture and Environment working group of the European Commission in Brussels. We are also collaborating closely with the Commission in providing scientific data on the decline of bird species. In order to influence opinion at the European Parliament we organised a big demonstration in Strasbourg last September. A number of Members of Parliament participated and through some of them we have managed to get amendments to the future laws. In addition, each BirdLife partner is actively lobbying its own Minister of Agriculture to include environmental protection into the next reforms.

MILLIONS OF BIRDS WILL BE SAVED

Armando Gariboldi

After a great effort, and thanks to the large number of members who responded to our call for help last October, we quickly succeeded in stopping bird trapping and also in blocking attempts by Regional Authorities to ignore the regulations in authorising this destructive and anachronistic form of hunting. In Lombardia, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Toscana they have had to stop these activities or have not even been allowed to start. It has been a great victory for LIPU and environmentalists, united in this important battle.

The immediate threat of the massacre of 4 million birds has been averted and we now go on to the second phase of the plan to give permanent protection to the 7 species on the list (skylarks, fieldfares, redwings, song thrushes, blackbirds, wood pigeons and lapwings) and also to the many other small birds such as tits, robins, goldfinches, chaffinches and greenfinches and bigger ones like sparrowhawks, owls, woodpeckers and swallows. They all risk horrible deaths and on their behalf we are continuing our campaign. Italy is facing action by the European Court of Justice for infringements of the Birds Directive. We are hoping that we may obtain a verdict from that court, perhaps before the start of the next hunting season.

Until the battle is finally won we will continue to work politically at national and regional levels, as well as directly in the field against illegal hunting and the commerce in small birds for use as live decoys.



THE FASCINATING SPOONBILL

Umberto Gallo Orsi

Thirty years of conservation activities have certainly been fruitful and even though there remains much to do, good results are now being seen. Starting with this issue of *Ali Notizie* there will be a series of articles in which we will portray species of birds which have begun breeding again in Italy in the last 10-15 years. After a quarter of a century which saw the disappearance of species such as the Lammergeier, Black Vulture, White-tailed Eagle, Osprey and White-headed Duck, others have now returned to breed in Italy once again. Some, such as storks, have returned after a few years as the result of LIPU projects, and others, such as the Lammergeier, as a result of international re-introduction projects. Yet others have returned, or arrived for the first time in Italy, as a result of the protection of wetlands.



The characteristic and handsome Spoonbill is immediately recognisable. Until 1989, when it bred in Italy for the first time, the Spoonbill was a regular but scarce migrant and mostly seen in April and May. Since then the breeding population in the Po Delta has leaped to about 60 pairs, and breeding has also been recorded along the river Sesia in Piedmont. It has been observed more frequently during migration, a sign of an increase in the western European population, although the eastern population is in decline.

Spoonbills nest in colonies, in willows, olives and poplars surrounded by reeds, at from 2 to 5 metres from the ground. Three or four eggs are laid at the beginning of May and they hatch in 25 days and leave the nest a month later. Most overwinter along the southern coast of the Mediterranean but some individuals go as far as Senegal and others stay in Europe. Spoonbills have a specialised way of searching for insects and larvae. They move slowly through shallow water in lines, probing the bottom with right and left scything movements of their beaks.

The LIPU Reserve at Volta Scirocco (RA) is the best place to observe spoonbills breeding nearby, and they also visit the reserve to feed and rest. Groups of 20-30 are also to be found during migration at Biviere di Gela (CL), and occasional sightings have been made at several other reserves. The Italian population is about 60 pairs, out of a total European population of some 5,900 to 9,200 pairs, which is over half of the total world population. Spoonbills are widespread in Europe, being found in Russia, Hungary, Spain, Netherlands, Ukraine, Croatia, Greece and Rumania.

AT THE GATES OF MILAN

Mauro Belardi

If we look at an aerial photo of the area north of Milan we see that housing and industrial development is pushing right into the pre-Alps. Town boundaries have become completely lost in a vast urban sprawl, criss-crossed by the busiest highways in Italy. We will also notice there is only one semi-natural and undeveloped area, Groane Park, and within it is the Cesano Maderno LIPU Reserve. The reserve was inaugurated in November 1997, with the aim of protecting and managing the area, and through environmental improvement schemes, returning old industrial land back to nature and usefulness.

One of the more striking features of the report on the first year's activities is the large number of projects undertaken, showing that the public authorities, stimulated by the environmentalists, can overcome bureaucratic obstacles. A new 12 hectare wetland will be created on the site of old clay workings and action is being taken to improve forest and heath. There are plans to develop a teaching area near the Visitors' Centre, as well as two pools and also a walkway which will be accessible to all. Another important outcome has been the close co-operation with the Park and the Commune to use the necessary urban regulations to preserve and create nature corridors, in order to ensure links to neighbouring protected and farming areas are maintained. We are also proposing to redevelop the former railway station into a Centre for Environmental Education. It will not be just a building on an abandoned line, it will be a real "LIPU Station" on a re-opened line, after the opening of Malpensa 2000.

OPERATION ONE MILLION NESTS

As this operation comes to an end our thanks go to all of you.

Thanks for an ever growing number of enthusiastic supporters, for advice and encouragement from over 1500 members.

Thanks to all the LIPU Delegates and Branch workers for their enthusiastic participation.

Thanks to all the organisations which chose our cakes as gifts for their clients and employees, we did not expect such a response.

Thanks also to all those in various sections of the media who contributed so much to our success.

A really fine result!

Now we are getting on with the job of installing the nestboxes: in those areas which were engulfed in flames last year. We will be helping the recovery of woodland and to quicken its repopulation by the birds which were forced to abandon their nests by the fires. We will show that even if there are some people who have a disregard for nature there are also others who work practically to save it. And we are certain we will win!

PROJECT MOONWATCH

Some two-thirds of migrating birds move at night, flying too high to be identified. The Swiss ornithological centre at Sempach is studying migration by observing birds as they fly across the moon's disk. Observing the moon through a telescope it is possible to see a bird every so often and from observations over fixed time periods it is possible to deduce the amount of migration activity. Started in 1994, this international project has already collected much data on migration in the Alpine region. As from 1996 the study has been extended to the Mediterranean, particularly in Italy, to understand how birds coming from Africa to Europe cross the sea, go up the peninsula and then tackle the Alps. LIPU is collaborating in this project with other organisations and is asking for help from ornithologists and birdwatchers. During periods of full moon, from March to October, it is quite easy to gather data, with just some report forms, a good telescope, hot coffee and a few friends for company.

RECLAMATION BRINGS DANGERS

LIPU is urgently bringing serious risks to important areas in Puglia to the attention of the Ministry of the Environment. Some 6000 hectares in extent, they include rare coastal habitats and wetlands at the mouths of the Candelaro and the Ofanto. They have been proposed as future Zones of Special Protection but at present they are at risk of being reclaimed for agricultural purposes. At a time when powerful interests which are intent on exploitation are becoming even more



audacious LIPU is urgently pressing the authorities to be vigilant.

CAMP AT THE MESSINA STRAITS

It is time once again for our annual camp for the study and protection of raptors. It is a long running LIPU project against the illegal shooting of honey buzzards, storks and other species which, in spring, concentrate at the Strait of Messina in order to reach their breeding areas. In collaboration with other protection organisations, the project is supported by the Ministry of the Environment and Agricultural Policy. Volunteers count and identify the migrating birds and also give support to the Police and State Forest Guards. If you want to help to protect these migrants you can participate from 24 April to 23 May. Information from Rino Esposito - Tel. (Italy)03389217764 - 0817374957 or from LIPU Tel. (Italy)0521273043

MILAN: FREE AGAIN

With spring comes once again the liberation of raptors which have been rehabilitated at LIPU centres. On 9 March there will be an event at the La Fagiana Wildlife Recuperation Centre where herons, gulls and owls will regain their freedom. On 21 March at three reserves in Lombardia there will be big events to welcome the Swallow, a symbol of nature without frontiers. On 13 June there will be visits to a stork's nest at Mairano di Noviglio, very close to the Lacchiarella LIPU reserve. LIPU: Via Monte Grappa 18, 20124 Milano - Tel: 02. 29004366

THE ISLE OF HERONS

Anna Rita Golfrè Andreasi

The story of Boscone island goes back to twenty years ago. Before then no-one was really aware of the richness of its environment and bird life, but fortunately a local branch of LIPU had been instrumental in its protection. The first few years were spent in battling with the bureaucrats but eventually, in 1983, Boscone was added to the list of nature reserves in Lombardy and then in 1985 the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests declared it to be a wetland of international importance. At least a hundred species of birds have been observed there, including about a thousand breeding pairs of Night Herons and Little Egrets, the largest and most spectacular colony in the province.

The Lombardy Regional authority has entrusted the direct management of the reserve to the LIPU branch of Mantova. Their work has been largely concerned with the protection and management of woodland as, of the 200 hectares of the reserve, about half is

natural woodland. A small lake has been created and water channels connecting to the Po have been cleared. These channels had silted up and Boscone was being deprived of the water needed by so many species of water birds.

Educational work has been undertaken in schools, libraries and cultural groups, and various publications have been produced; three booklets on the reserve, a collection of slides, an illustrated book, a video and leaflets. Recently an educational walk has been opened, complete with panels explaining the animal life of the Isola Boscone and what is to be seen from the various observation points. The Reserve is open from May to September: booking by telephone:0386.41611.

NEWS

Carloforte, Sardinia: Vandals

At one time poachers used to shoot Eleonora's Falcons, then they became falconers and egg collectors. Now, after twenty years hard work by LIPU, opponents of the reserve are taking it out on the buildings. At the beginning of November they damaged the visitor centre. Volunteers from the Cagliari branch of LIPU are working to restore the building, the heart of the reserve's activities and an important point of reference for thousands of visitors.

Belluno: New Reserve

The Provincial Administrative Authorities of Belluno have entrusted LIPU with the management of the two biggest wetlands within its territory: the Lago di Santa Croce and the Lago di Busche. These two reservoirs, belonging to the electricity authority, have been the subject of habitat improvement and are now important for many animal species, particularly for water birds. With the help of local volunteers LIPU is initiating various projects to study bird life, make environmental improvements and develop educational activities.

Fire Alarm

A weekend of fire at the Brabbia LIPU Reserve resulted in more than 150 hectares being destroyed. In spite of prompt action by volunteers, firemen and police, 7 metre flames burnt reed beds which are vital for overwintering birds and for butterflies. There was also huge damage to woodland and to buildings and walkways which had been constructed by volunteers. Thanks to firebreaks part of the reserve and the observation hide were saved.

Vandals were also responsible for a serious fire at the Lacchiarella reserve from 4 to 6 February. Despite efforts by LIPU volunteers and the fire brigade the strong wind intensified the flames and 8 hectares of hedgerows were burnt. What has not been lost is our enthusiasm for conservation and

environmental education in one of the most important parts of the Lombardy plain.

NATURAL CUBA

Green tourism in this Caribbean island, in a search for 350 species of birds

Maurizio Ravasini

For the ordinary Italian tourist, Cuba means white beaches, clear seas and fascinating historical cities. But for those who are more interested in environmental conservation this Caribbean island is a veritable reservoir of natural treasures. The island is 1,250 km long and 160 km wide and covers an area of 111,000 square kilometres. There are about 6,000 species of plants, 350 species of birds, 185 species of butterflies and 1000 insects.

Many people aim for the island's seaside holiday resorts but its natural beauty is almost undiscovered and only recently has a network of protected areas been created which will support ecological tourism. The thing which struck me most on my first trip to the island was the greenness, the rampant luxuriant vegetation, the incredibly large plants and trees which still survive even within the city boundaries of Havana, vestiges of the jungle which formerly covered the whole of the island.

As well as its beaches, the Cuban coast also has numerous shallow saltwater lagoons where at all seasons of the year one can come across dense flocks of American flamingos (much more colourful than their European counterparts) and, during migration and winter, have the chance to observe many North American species. In the wetlands groups of ducks are everywhere, swift-flying waders flash about, gulls and terns fish in the clear waters and brown pelicans fly over the waves. The island has 21 endemic species, including the Bee Humming Bird, the smallest bird in the world.

I was very surprised to find how easy it was to observe the birds, including the rarest ones, at very short range. The itinerary had been chosen with the help of local experts and it included areas which up to now have not been used by ordinary tourists.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, NABU

We send very best wishes to our German friends of NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland) which is celebrating its centenary. Founded in 1899, for the protection of birds (Bund für Vogelschutz), it now has over 235,000 members and last year active volunteers spent about 17 million hours working on education and conservation projects. Some years ago NABU's

links to its ornithological past became looser and they worked on a wider front for nature conservation in Germany. More recently however, the oldest German association for nature protection seems to be rediscovering its roots, and is dedicating itself ever more strongly again to birds.

A WORLD STRATEGY

In preparation for the BirdLife International World Congress in Malaysia next October all the European Partners are working on new world and continental strategies for the next four year period. LIPU is making its contribution, in particular by emphasising Mediterranean topics. For example, together with our French, Spanish and Maltese colleagues, we are giving priority to tackling hunting, which is still a serious problem in the countries of southern Europe, and to the protection of some special ecosystems, such as dunes, Mediterranean scrub and forest.

GALAPAGOS: SOS PENGUINS

The vulnerable Galapagos Penguin is being seriously affected by global warming, and particularly by El Niño. When the temperature of the waters around the Galapagos islands is relatively low, the penguins put on weight and they are more healthy, but if the temperature increases, as happens with El Niño, they immediately lose weight. The current population is down to only 4,250, practically half of what it was in the seventies. The effects of climate change on species whose populations are already reduced, and are concentrated into small areas, are putting their survival in serious danger.

NORTH SEA: HERRINGS

The North Sea population of herrings is no longer at risk. The report of the European committee for the management of herring fisheries and for their proper exploitation has estimated that stocks are now in the order of 800,000 tonnes of adult fish. At this level the species is judged to be at the minimum where its survival is assured. Herrings are much liked in northern Europe and so will continue to be commonplace on Dutch and Norwegian tables.

LIPU ON THE WEB

The address of LIPU's web site is www.lipu.it and here you can also find a newsgroup run by LIPU members for the exchange of opinions and information. Since it started, little more than a year ago, the group has become an important meeting point within the Association and there are already 24 Branches taking part, 55% in the north, 35% in the centre and

10% in the south. The site is continuing to grow although many Branches have still not responded, particularly from the south of the country. News sites can be located at: www.lipu.associazione.it and at <http://www.mailgate.org/mailgate/it.associazione.lipu> The web site for LIPU UK can be found at: <http://www2.prestel.co.uk/fernwood>

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

We are proposing to start the publication of field observations by members and others. It is an opportunity for everyone to communicate significant sightings, and not limited just to birds. The most interesting, supported by photograph and written details, and after having been confirmed by a LIPU committee, will be published.

Flamingos in the Po Delta. More than 400 flamingos spent the summer of 1998 in the Delta, particularly in the area of Comacchio and the Saline di Cervia (LIPU Ravenna). The increased number of sightings within marine wetlands on the Adriatic coast leads one to think that they will soon breed there.

Breeding Spoonbills. In the same area the number of Spoonbill nests increased last spring/summer. It is the only colony in Italy and there are now more than fifty pairs.

Spotted Eagle overwinters. There have been further sightings of this rare raptor in wetlands of the Po Plain: at the LIPU Torrile reserve in December 1998 and also near Milan, where it has overwintered for the third consecutive year.

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LIPU NATIONAL ASSEMBLY 1999

Armando Gariboldi

The 34th National Assembly takes place this year at Numana, on 8 May and the main themes will be the sea and projects connected with coastal management. It is an important occasion and the second time that the Assembly has been dedicated to these themes, this time at the invitation of the European commission and with the support of the RSPB (UK). It will also be a special assembly for the future of LIPU. The new National Council will be elected and strategies for the coming four years will be presented and discussed. There will be visits to the Conero Park where releases of raptors will take place.

CONERO PARK, RICH IN NATURE

The park has varied habitats; rivers, saltwater lakes, hills, coastal cliffs and Mediterranean scrub vegetation. At its heart is Monte Conero which is of great interest to birdwatchers. Thanks to its particular

geographical position it is a major transit point for raptors in spring. Hundreds, even thousands, of medium and large soaring birds can be observed on their journey north. The area is rich in animal life, with 20 species of mammals, 8 amphibians, 13 reptiles and over 200 bird species having been recorded. The typical sweet smelling Mediterranean scrub vegetation is a particular feature, with mixed evergreen and deciduous woodland. In the small lakes there is a small and rare freshwater crustacean, while in the remaining coastal saltwater ponds there are plants which are disappearing from elsewhere in the region.

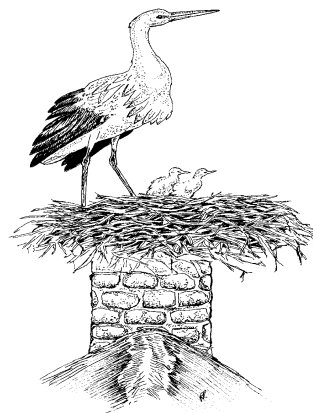
News from LIPU UK

*** VOTING ***

At the National Assembly described above by Armando Gariboldi the election will take place of the Council, and two Committees. Every LIPU member has to right to vote for candidates to these posts; if any LIPU UK members should wish to do so I have the postal ballot papers (in Italian). Please call me or drop a line and I will be happy to forward copies for your use.

*** APPEAL ***

The 1999 "Stop the Massacre" Appeal is going well and is on target for raising a similar sum to that of last year; but it has not closed and if you should still wish 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 the appeal a succes.



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LIPU UK - WORKING IN BRITAIN FOR BIRDS IN ITALY



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