

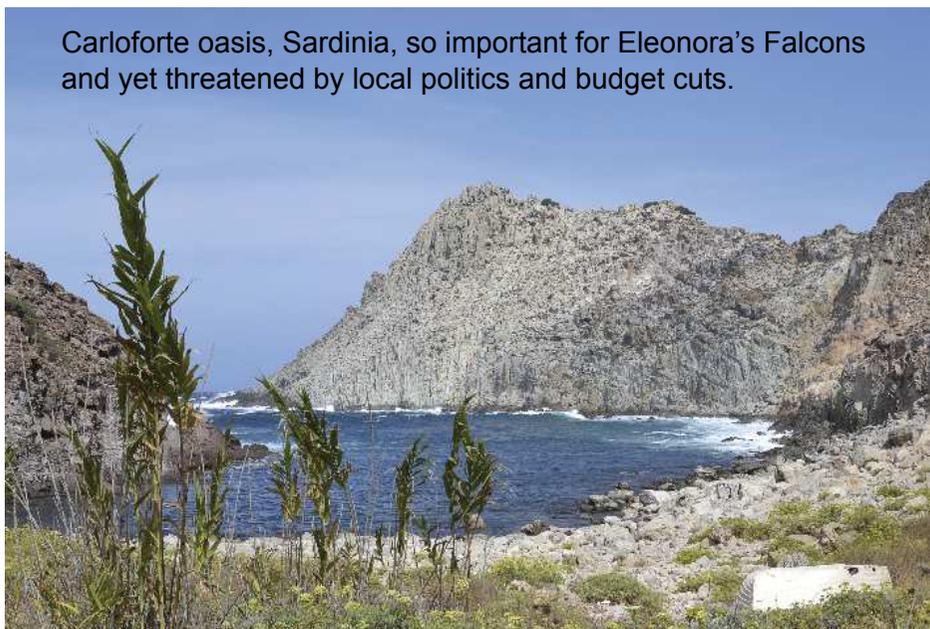


- White Stork success
- Caged birds as decoys now illegal
- Castel di Guido rises from the ashes
- Poisoned nature



A small reedbed (1) but an important one for the Bittern – it has been saved from the hunters with our help.

Carloforte oasis, Sardinia, so important for Eleonora's Falcons and yet threatened by local politics and budget cuts.



## Looking back and feeling better

### Editorial

David Lingard

As the end of the year is nearing it is a good opportunity to review the work of the last twelve months and we can see some positive progress and read some good news.

Things have been moving quickly on the matter of trapping birds to use as decoys. I received an email from Claudio Celada, LIPU's Conservation Director, a few weeks ago in which he said, "For the first time the Minister of Regional Affairs states very clearly that regions should not allow capture of birds to be used as decoys. Not the final victory yet but a good step".

We can read of further progress with pressure from the EU making it impossible for the Italian government to avoid implementing a total ban on the practice, we will greet that ban with satisfaction.

LIPU volunteers have been working in the area around Capoterra in Sardinia to stop the trapping of thrushes and many other wild animals and birds. I joined the camp a few years ago and saw how important, and difficult the work is. Claudio told me, "our target area in Sardinia has been designated as a Natural Park. A very good step. We hope this will contribute to halting poaching in the area".

Two important steps in the struggle to protect birds from the illegal poaching and I can now report another step which will save birds from the hunters.

## Small steps, perhaps, but real progress

It's only small but it can make a real difference – LIPU has entered into a partnership to buy a small reedbed near Milan to keep it out of the hands of hunters. A local group, established for over 30 years, has been fund raising with the aim of buying a small 2 hectare reed bed which adjoins their nature reserve, but they were still short of the purchase price and the local hunters' association was showing an interest in the area.



A proposal was put to us and your trustees were keen to help in the best way we can – we promised to make good the shortfall which was a matter of about £5000, and to act swiftly to win what was turning into a race against the hunters. Thanks to our prompt help, LIPU has bought the reed bed, a home to Bittern and Purple Heron among others, and has entered into a partnership with the local group to manage the site in the future.

Once the dust had settled and the ink dried, LIPU President, Fulvio Mamone Capria posted the following message on the LIPU message board system:

*“Dear all, going back to the purchase of the reedbed I would like to thank wholeheartedly again LIPU-UK and David Lingard who follows us with brotherly friendship and allows us to make our biodiversity dreams come true. As I was telling you yesterday, thanks to the economic support of LIPU-UK we managed to snatch the reedbed from a surely negative transformation.*”

*This won't be the first or the last of our purchases, I can assure you.*

*LIPU-UK has been supporting us in our, often – ambitious, projects for decades and we are extremely grateful for their close support. For this Italy so beautiful but also too mistreated.*

*From all of us at LIPU we would like to salute our 'British cousins' who remain so close to us with their hearts and with concrete actions. We are scheduling a big interview with David in the next issue, to allow all of our great supporters to get to know him.*

*Regards,  
Fulvio”*

Daria, who translated it from the Italian offers this comment on style, “I am translating exactly as it is here, this is a common language that politicians etc use but it is very nice”.

The progress made by LIPU in Italy has been steady – always slowed by the resistance of those who do not like change – but I think we can be very satisfied with what has been achieved this year.

\*\*\*

## POISONED NATURE

*By Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU's Director General*

**I**t all started with a letter that Mrs. Olga Owens Huckins wrote to biologist Rachel Carson in January 1958. Mrs. Huckins lived in Duxbury, Massachusetts, in a small natural oasis for wild birds that she looked after with passion: plants and berries,

nests and mangers, food and treats for the birds that repaid Mrs. Huckins' friendship with songs and colours.

However, it had been quite some time that sight had disappeared. No more birds, no more flying shows. Olga Huckins wrote to Dr. Carson to inform her about the problem and asked her for some explanation. What Mrs. Huckins described was not the only case of bird disappearance that Dr. Carson had known. It seemed that the entire Midwestern United States was experiencing this phenomenon. The birds were not returning and American skies were silent. Mrs. Huckins' letter, though, hit the nail on the head – it was time to act.

Rachel Carson decided to do so and carried out a study that, in a few years, would unveil the dramatic cause of the birds' death: DDT, pesticides and chemical substances, heavily used in farmlands as well as in American cities' green areas. Most of the United States, particularly the big rural areas, had been covered in these substances through a kind of chemical carpet bombing.

### **The Death Circle**

Something of this sort happened: in a certain town, some trees were attacked by, for example, fungi spread by beetles. The local botanical services would intervene by using DDT or other substances to eradicate the fungus and solve the problem. What is better than DDT? It is quick, efficient and seemingly harmless, at least for human beings. The plants were sprayed with chemicals and the insects absorbed the poison which killed them or, like the earthworms that ate the dead leaves, they would survive full of

poison. So when in the springtime migratory birds returned and ate those insects, the circle would be closed. Robins, sparrows, orioles and chaffinches died in great numbers or became sterile due to the DDT that in many cases killed the birds "before they even came out of the egg." The chemical crisis would reach its apex between 1958 and 1961, when the US Department of Agriculture declared war to the "fire ant", an invasive insect from South America, by spraying eight million hectares of land with DDT, heptachlor and dieldrin.



### **Awareness and Change**

The publication of Silent Spring in 1962, the report of Rachel Carson's study, was a revolution and caused a bitter controversy with chemical firms which, in turn, furiously attacked the biologist. But the problem was already there. Chemistry is dangerous. We cannot abuse it. Scientists and technical experts studied the topic in depth, some politicians had this issue at heart, American citizens (and soon all the others) were now aware. A wide movement to ban DDT and more in general to limit chemicals in the environment was created and this, at least in part, changed people's habits. But today, 50 years later, can we say that the problem is entirely solved? Or does the excess of chemistry, in all its various forms, continue to represent a hazard for human beings while poisoning nature?

### **Thirty Thousand Chemicals**

Broadly speaking, the risk of human exposure to dangerous chemicals comes from different areas:

Clothes – more and more synthetically manufactured, technological devices such as televisions, computers and DVD readers, deodorants or air fresheners, childrens’ toys. In 2006, the European Union tried regulating this sector through a regulation framework called REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals), whose aim was to record chemical substances manufactured more than one tonne per year and regulate their usage. It is about 30,000 substances, some of which may have dangerous effects, such as cancer, genetic mutation or alteration of the endocrine system. The Italian application of the directive calls for a vast amount of laws and regulations that, however, cannot provide a satisfactory response to the problem.

### **Sensitive to Poisons**

And then comes agriculture, an extremely wide topic that would lead us to issues such as food and water security, human health but also, as mentioned before, to the impact on biodiversity. In 2009 Europe issued a directive on the sustainable use of pesticides and last January, Italy applied it with a decree that defines the National Plan for the sustainable use of chemicals in agriculture. As noted by Patrizia Rossi, head of the Agriculture department at LIPU, “the issue is of paramount importance for human health, for what we eat and drink, but it also has great relevance for biodiversity, particularly for wild birds. Pesticides can poison birds directly or indirectly, as in the case of birds of prey, for example: they eat rodents which, in turn, have ingested rodenticides, that is, poison for mice and other rodents. Moreover, pesticides affect bird populations even indirectly as they reduce the availability of prey items, thus limiting the survival of the adults and increasing the mortality of the chicks.”

In this regard, LIPU is engaged both at a European level with BirdLife International on the prevention of bird poisoning, and at a national level, through a study of the populations of birds that are sensitive to pesticides, with the aim of suggesting important corrections to farming practices. Basically, favouring a type of farming that greatly reduces the use of pesticides one that completely avoids synthetic products, similarly to what happens with organic farming.

According to LIPU’s research, of which we can give some details, it appears that between 1990 and 2012 Italy recorded a decrease of 32.5% in the consumption of chemicals, particularly insecticides (-46%) and fungicides (-39%), due to



new EU policies and thanks to the introduction of innovative lower dosage molecules (data from Agrofarma-Inea, 2007; 2013). In spite of that, according to the Italian Institute of Statistics, in 2012 only, about 134,000 tonnes of pesticides and 70,700 tonnes of active ingredients were used in national farmlands. Very high quantities that are still worrying especially when taking into account that, in temperate climates, the time of the year in which pesticides are used in farming coincides with the reproductive season of most bird species and the period of greatest activity of invertebrates. LIPU’s study reports that the reduced biomass of invertebrates caused by the use of insecticides has been correlated with the decrease in reproduction of at least four species: Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, Whinchat and Reed Bunting (Gibbons et al, 2014).

## **An Increasing Need for Nature**

The extent of interests at stake means that the chemical industry is still a great driver of agricultural policies, supported by a culture of hyperproduction and global competition, which pushes us to exploit the land. It is also in this context that one has to consider the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP) that Europe and the United States have been negotiating for months and which could open the doors of our continent to American food, often packed with hormones and antibiotics. However, all this happens at a time when the cultural orientation and popular sentiment definitely seem to take another direction. “Organic” choices, rediscovering rural life, small family farms, local production and the “Green Guerilla” itself (the creation of community gardens and vegetable gardens in the middle of concrete jungles) are constantly increasing, as is the quest for healthiness. Almost half of Italians say that they look for quality and authenticity as primary characteristics of food (National Opinion Research Institute /Coldiretti 2014). Almost three million people grow their own fruit and vegetables (National Opinion Research Institute 2013). Over 42,000 Italian companies are engaged in the organic sector accounting for over 9% of the total agricultural land, a European record, which starts paying off even from the Return On Investment point of view. The revenue per family working unit is around 52,000 Euro per year, against 35,000 Euro earned by conventional farming businesses (Bioreport 2013). However, it is not just about “physical” health. A wider philosophy of life seem to touch many: it is the need of simplicity, of escaping chemical and mental poisons, of spiritually reconnecting with nature. It is, then, the

establishment of the ethics of the land, ordinary and simple, through which we can better understand the environment and embrace it with more authenticity.

## **Break the Chains**

Over the past few weeks, the buzz surrounding Diclofenac and the great risk it represents for vultures has been of great interest. In India, its usage for animals (man uses it as an anti-inflammatory) has led to the disappearance of 99% of the population of two species of vultures, through another terrible production chain that pushes farmers to use this drug on animals, for the purpose of increasing muscle bulk), and then in turn vultures would eat the remains of these dead animals. Diclofenac kills vultures by reaching the kidneys and leading to an often painful death. Now, while India has banned Diclofenac for animals, Italy and Spain have just authorised its usage, favoured by the EU’s position that at the moment is quite mild and even contradictory. Indeed, if on the one hand Europe allows charnel houses, that is, dead animals are left for vultures to eat, it would only need those dead animals to be treated with Diclofenac to cause a disaster such as that in India. It is one of many death chains that need to be broken.

Fifty years after Silent Spring, not everything has been settled. We still have a long way to go to rid poison from our lives, but it is worth trying, without believing in the utopia of a zero human impact on Earth or a crusade against the chemical industry, but at the same time, without the fatalist ideal that no alternatives are available for this unnatural world, so often attacked and mistreated. We should not attack the planet, we should understand it and treat it with

care, for its own good and for ours. This was exactly Dr. Carson's belief when she asked herself whether civilisation could declare war on nature without compromising its own existence. And deep down, this was also Mrs. Huckins' desire, the lady from Duxury, Massachussets who, once abandoned by her garden birds, wrote that heartfelt letter. Her garden was terribly silent but still craving music. Its heart was getting empty and poisoned but it still wanted to listen, be alive and be free.

### **The use of pesticides in Italy**

*Source: L'agricoltura italiana conta, 2013*

- 95,000 tonnes of pesticides used in agriculture in 2012
- 798 million Euro: value of the pesticides market in Italy in 2012
- Fungicides: the most used chemicals
- Northern Italy: the area with the highest usage of pesticides (61% of the national total, against 11% in Central Italy and 27% in Southern Italy and the islands).

### **Let's protect them! Bird species at risk due to chemical farming**

- Ortolan Bunting  
This species is often found in open spaces (meadows, grazing and arable fields) with hedges.
- Grey Partridge  
It is a recurring inhabitant of fields, traditional agricultural lands and wild greenery rich in bushes.

- Yellow/Blue-headed Wagtail  
It nests on the ground in cultivated land such as corn and soy crops, and in meadows. The Italian population is in decline.

- Spur-winged Plover  
It can nest in Summer crops (corn, soy etc.) in the first phases of growth but prefers uncultivated land (or set aside) with little vegetation. It eats invertebrates found on the ground.

- Quail  
Trans-Saharan migratory bird that is found in plains of wheat fields and meadows, it eats insects and plants.

- Corn Bunting  
It is found in areas that have natural vegetation like steppes as well as in those with man-made vegetation, like grain fields, with hedges.

- Yellowhammer  
It is found in bushy fields as well as at the edge of forests, but it also inhabits cultivated fields, especially in Winter.



- Skylark  
It nests on the ground in open fields cultivated with fodder or cereals, far from hedges and rows. The Italian population is in decline.

### **Lead, two times killer**

More and more under attack; not only does lead kill animals directly when hunters shoot them, but also is a major hazard for the wildlife (a phenomenon called saturnism). Lead poisoning has been recognised

for quite some time by the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA). In danger are not only the waterbirds which swallow lead pellets, but also kites, eagles, vultures or other birds that eat the remains of animals killed by lead. Solution: a total ban on lead ammunition and their replacement with non-toxic bullets and pellets.

\*\*\*

### **WILD BIRDS CAGED AS DECOYS BANNED**

**W**hilst the Italian edition of the magazine was in production the news arrived that the Government had just banned the capture of wild birds. This is in compliance with the new law and major action by LIPU. Perhaps we can say that we are nearing the definite end of the capture. It is a great result. The campaign against the capture of live birds, caged and used as decoys, has so far been an amazing undertaking, as has had the support of so many LIPU members.

In the September edition of Ali we updated you on the news that in parliament, the absolute abolition of using live decoys, but with very restrictive regulations, only failed by four votes. But here we are a few days later, following the new notification by LIPU, Europe wrote to Italy: the capture of birds for the purposes of decoy must be considered definitely forbidden. Suddenly, after further positive news arrived from the Senate, with the approval of an order of business which obliged the Government to intervene again on the subject, at the risk of a European condemnation of Italy.

And finally, here is the news of the intervention of the Government: the capture will be prohibited. There is still work to do but meanwhile thanks to all of our members. Step by step we are nearing victory: to open all cages, liberate the wings and the song!



### **YOUR VALUABLE HELP**

#### **Introduction**

**D**uring this year we have asked you to help us cope with the difficult situations which we have had to face in various regions of Italy. Thanks to your understanding and practical support, we have in many cases, managed to intercede and resolve the situation. To remind you: 2014 opened with the bad news of the arson at the Oasi Castel di Guido, and was followed in subsequent months, with the threat to two of the most beautiful LIPU bird reserves: Carloforte and Gravina di Laterza. Then there was the major battle against the capture of wild birds to be used as hunting decoys and finally the White Stork, a species on the increase but still threatened. We have initiated many activities aimed at conservation and awareness, such as the many Stork Days last June. All the news follows - it makes good reading!

#### **The New Visitor Centre at Castel di Guido**

At dawn on the 22nd January last, Alessia, the manager of the Oasi LIPU Castel di Guido, notified

us of the terrible fire that had, in the night, destroyed the visitor centre. The exterior was reduced to a pile of rubble and everything that the structure preserved was burnt: the children's designs, the material used in teaching and nature research. In a few hours anger and sadness spread among the volunteers that at this place they had dedicated so much free time and passion. But we did not lose heart. After the initial dismay it was decided: the centre was going to be rebuilt. Taking advantage of support, LIPU asked its own members for contributions towards reconstruction. A leaflet was included in the March issue of Ali, "They will not burn our dreams", and this became the slogan for the campaign. So, thanks to your donations, and valuable support, we can announce the recovery: a new visitor's centre has just been born! It is a huge joy for so many members and volunteers that they can now resume their work.

### **The Return of the White Stork**

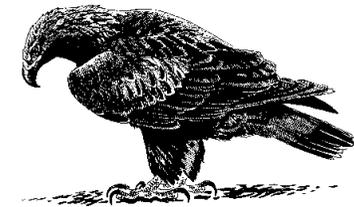
The White Stork was extinct in Italy until half way through the 80s. There were only a few birds passing through our skies whilst migrating on their way from the rest of Europe to Africa. Step by step, with the commitment of LIPU and its volunteers, the stork has returned to nest again in our roofs and bell towers. We are now enjoying the fruit of this amazing project that has developed over the last 30 years. With more than 200 nesting pairs, we have brought back a species known and loved by all, a symbol of conjugal love and fertility. The species, however, is not out of danger, and therefore, our commitment and care will continue in the next few years. This is also thanks to all our members who decided, this year, to support this noble cause, we will not fail to monitor, to ensure help for nesting birds, to lobby

for the protection of habitat. We will continue to publish news and organize open events open to make everyone aware of this beautiful and exceptional migrant.

### **Carloforte and Laterza: Concern and Hope**

A venture started nearly 30 years ago, that of the Oasi Carloforte, in Sardinia, initially aimed at combating the raiding of Eleanora's Falcon nests. But there was a risk of it being ended by the lack of economic support from the Sardinians. Some early steps were taken, but the danger has not been averted. There is also a lot of concern concerning the Oasi Gravina di Laterza, in Puglia, an impressive canyon with an extraordinary environment which is the home of, not only the eight Italian pairs of Egyptian Vulture, but also the Lanner Falcon, the Eurasian Eagle Owl, the Black-eared Wheatear and the Lesser Kestrel. The fate of the reserve is uncertain, LIPU has asked the organisations to continue to manage the area, which up to now has been exceptionally fruitful.

Carloforte and Laterza are two reserves that cannot possibly close. Some extraordinarily important species of birds and two most beautiful places in the Italian landscape are at risk. At present, your support gives us the strength and will to continue the battle. Thank you to everyone. LIPU will not give in.



## FROM THE WORLD OF LIPU

*edited by Andrea Mazza, head of LIPU Press Office*

### **LIPU president receives the prestigious Margherita Hack award**

**F**ulvio Mamone Capria, President of LIPU has received the Margherita Hack prize in the category “Dedication to Animals”. Presented by Don Antonio Mazzi, founder of the Exodus Community, in a ceremony held at the historic Falier palace in Venice on 28 September, the award is for “continuous dedication to the protection and conservation of animals”. “It is a great honour – said the LIPU President – which I wish to share symbolically with all LIPU activists who have worked for nature over the last 50 years.”

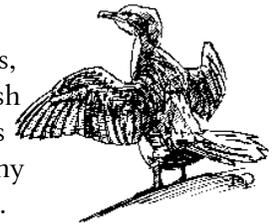
The event, sponsored by INAF (the National Institute of Astrophysics), is judged by a committee of experts and prominent Italians chaired by Francesco Alberoni, with members such as Antonino Zichichi, Vittorio Sgarbi, Ezio Mauro and DonAntonio Mazzi. In other categories prizes were awarded for outstanding achievement in the fields of art, science, social responsibility, civil rights and culture.

### **Terek Sandpiper joins Eurobirdwatch**

Nine hundred events, 23,000 participants, 2.5 million bird records. This year’s Eurobirdwatch, organised by BirdLife International and its national partners in Europe, took place on the weekend of 4-5 October in 40 countries throughout Europe and Central Asia. Within Italy LIPU organised 50 events, covering

oases and reserves, National and Regional Parks, wetlands, mountains and forests. There were 27,000 birds recorded, covering 182 species. The most common sightings were of Mallard, Yellow-legged Gull and House Martin, alongside some interesting rarities. In the Riserva Saline at Trapani, Sicily, LIPU volunteers from Alcamo spotted Terek Sandpiper and Broad-billed Sandpiper (both rare), while at Palude Brabbia nature reserve there was a sighting of Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Among the more unusual species, there were also sightings of Marsh Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Audouin’s Gull, 41 Lesser Kestrel, 106 Pigmy Cormorant and 47 Caspian Tern.



The main event of LIPU Eurobirdwatch was held in the national park of Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona, Campigna, an area, to the east of Florence, which boasts some of the most ancient forest in Europe. Here LIPU organised a seminar on the conservation of forests and birds (see article on page 24-25) and two sessions observing birds in their natural habitat.

### **The Life Gate portal ranks a LIPU oasis as one of the finest in Europe**

LIPU’s Bosco del Vignolo oasis, which lies between Milan and Alessandria, has been included in the top ten places that rate among the finest in Europe. The rankings come from the Life Gate portal: the Lombard oasis, a Site of Community Importance, was accompanied by other Italian treasures such as the National Park of the Cinque Terre and the Casentine National Forest Park. Created in 1998 by

an agreement between the Commune of Garlasco, the Lombard Park of the Ticino Valley and LIPU, the LIPU Oasis boasts woodland species such as woodpeckers, wrens, cuckoos, jays and Golden Oriole, along with those characteristic of wetlands (herons, ducks, Moorhens and Kingfishers), as well as numerous species of amphibian.

### **LIPU Camp 2014**

*Pier Francesco Pandolfini, LIPU delegate for Rome*

The meeting of young LIPU volunteers at Massaciuccoli, with the new language of youth: guerilla marketing and the web, but without forgetting where we came from. Three days in the words of Pier Francesco Pandolfini, of Rome's youth section.

Ideas and projects to be brought to fruition, but above all a renewed common purpose and will to achieve, through the enthusiasm of the volunteers. Such was the happy outcome of LIPU's Camp 2014, the conference under canvas that took place in September at the LIPU Massaciuccoli Oasis in the Chiarone Reserve. Three intensive days, with 40 young and enthusiastic LIPU volunteers and a staff who responded in kind. There was much talk of the history of ecology in relation to the dominant cultural frames, as well as how an ecological culture might change them. We reviewed how the present is linked to the past, in this case by going back over the history of LIPU, and its development through the courage and vision of its founder, Giorgio Punzo.

There were also discussions as to how the realities of communication have changed in the present

day: social networks and guerilla marketing, new languages and cross-fertilisation with other forms of discourse, those intangible ones of the virtual, of psychology and emotivity that are indispensable for continuing to spread our values without any fear of new ways.

Passion, bonding, growth and responsibility are the key words to emerge, and with them the idea of a LIPU that continues to grow and be a source of hope, now and in the future. A LIPU that has a little of both the Hoopoe and the Stork. All in all, an excellent 2014 Camp, that the Rome delegation was pleased to have supported. Another date then, for the 2015 diary, and a renewal that will soon be upon us.

### **In Niscemi, Sicily, a new LIPU local office**

Niscemi is a small town that overlooks the area of Gela, on the south coast of Sicily, and it is here that Manuel Zafarana, a LIPU activist, has created hope for many young people. In a short space of time, he managed to gain approval from the local authorities and obtained buildings in a school ground, which he has been transformed into LIPU headquarters. Around him dozens and dozens of children and young people, in love with nature and passionate about birds, have created the most represented LIPU Junior group in the south of Italy. I could not miss the ribbon cutting at the inauguration of this beautiful place. Many photos were taken, there were smiles all around, a high quality, self-financed film was shown, an interesting debate took place and there was a buffet made by the members of LIPU using typical, local produce. Many families, teachers, politicians and local people help to sustain this unique cultural and social effort. This is LIPU

Niscemi. Voluntary work with a passionate and strong group spirit, wants to protect the environment and birds.

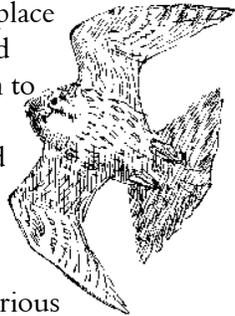
### **A new house for LIPU Salerno**

Last week the inauguration of the new LIPU Salerno Headquarters took place. It is 150 square metres and located within the Istituto comprensivo G.Barra, a school which provides education from primary school up to secondary school. LIPU Salerno offers many different activities including environmental education, ornithology courses, summer camps and environmental courses in schools. The inauguration of the new bird garden will take place in the near future.

### **An unfortunate end for a Merlin**

Found between the provinces of Milan and Pavia, riddled with shots, a Merlin is being cared for at La Fagiana rehabilitation centre.

They were taking photos when they noticed the bird, which has been injured by a gunshot, lying on the ground. The incident took place in Locate Triulzi. Stefano Pretti and Riccardo Trevisani took the Merlin to the LIPU La Fagiana rehabilitation centre. The radiography confirmed that the bird was injured by a shotgun: a pellet had broken its ulna and another two pellets were found in its wrist joint. This is a serious injury for the unfortunate bird of prey and the possibility of it making a full recovery is still uncertain.



## **NATURA 2000: EUROPE INTERVENES**

After cases brought by LIPU and WWF, the European Commission opened an enquiry on harmful applications of “appropriate assessments”, an event which could be decisive for the future of Italian biodiversity.

The long-awaited news came about thanks to the detailed work of documentation and reporting carried out by LIPU and WWF: the European Commission opened an enquiry (in technical terms a “Pilot Procedure”, see below) on the treatment which Italy often reserves for sites in the Natura 2000 network, following the harmful applications of Evaluations of Incidents.

The opening of the Pilot case is an event to be welcomed because it could represent a turning point in the protection of biodiversity in Italy. It is never good when one’s own country is put under investigation. Nevertheless, if the aim is to save biodiversity, and if someone does not do the things that should be done, it is just and inevitable that an intervention should be made.

But what can an Evaluation of Incidents do? In the Natura 2000 network sites an increase in human activity must be subjected to a precautionary evaluation exactly according to the Evaluation of Incidents, in order to check that such activity will not damage the protected species and habitat of the Birds and Habitat Directives. Very often in Italy such evaluations are evaded or carried out incorrectly, resulting in devastation of the environment: deforestation, drainage of wetlands, concreting of areas which are rich in biodiversity and so on.

The argument for continuing this behaviour, that otherwise the economy would be penalised by too many environmental encumbrances, does not hold water. In reality this illegal type of conduct offers few direct benefits to the economy, compared with harm to biodiversity and inexorable loss of beauty, public good and ecosystem services (such as contamination of air and water, the build-up of carbon in the soil, channeling of rainwater, production of food and so on), which the whole community has freely at its disposal. This eventually harms the economy.

Last year, therefore, LIPU and WWF sent the documentation to the European Commission accompanied by images showing the harm which has been caused to sites in the network. The European Commission responded quickly to the report, opening the enquiry, and requesting explanations from the Italian authorities. To the case we brought were added reports which several citizens sent to the Commission from all over Italy, confirming the gravity of the situation.

Now it is the responsibility of the main Regions under suspicion to change course, or else to demonstrate that the community regulations regarding the protection of the sites in the Natura 2000 network have not been violated. If not, the European Commission will open a real, appropriate procedure of infraction against Italy, which could lead to a judgement against the country.

In the meantime we will be very careful to follow the case and send any new information to Europe, with the objective of eventually ensuring, even in Italy, the effective, full protection of this priceless treasure which is the Natura 2000 network: birds,

habitat, plant and animal species, in other words our precious, extraordinary biodiversity.

## **NATURA 2000, Treasure of Biodiversity**

The Natura 2000 network is a system of areas ( SICs (Sites of Community Importance)/ZSCs (Special Conservation Zones and ZPSs (Special Protection Zones) ), distributed throughout the countries of the EU, in which the protection of habitats and species is assured by means of balancing nature conservation and human activity. In Italy, the network consists of 2,585 sites, of which 610 are ZPSs and 2,310 are SICs (272 of which are already designated as ZSCs), sites which protect thousands of species.

Italy is amongst the major countries in Europe for the presence of biodiversity and the operation of Natura 2000 is therefore essential.

## **How European Justice works**

- 1) *Violation of a Community Directive by a member State*
- 2) *Enquiry by the European Commission to verify the violation (Pilot Procedure)*
- 3) *Opening of a real and appropriate Infringement Procedure against the State, with a letter of formal notice and presentation of the “charges” (the so-called “reasoned opinion”)*
- 4) *If the State does not respond adequately to the charges, showing that they are unfounded or that it is conforming to the European requests, the Commission refers it to the Court of European Justice*
- 5) *The Court of Justice takes legal proceedings against the State. If the State is sentenced, it has a certain period of time to conform, otherwise it risks a second and definitive sentence, with heavy economic sanctions.*

## URBAN ECOLOGY

by Marco Dinetti, LIPU's Director of Urban Ecology

### Winter, time for bird tables

With the arrival of cold weather you can put out feeders on balconies and in gardens to watch, close up, robins, tits and finches.

The seasons follow on one from the other and after autumn comes winter. Some insect-eating species, such as cuckoos, swallows and nightingales, are obliged to set off on migration which takes them to Africa where they will stay until the following spring.

Those species which are adapted to taking a wider range of food stay with us and yet others join us from Northern Europe to spend the winter in those countries which border the Mediterranean.

The cities, with their micro-climates of at least two degrees higher than the surrounding countryside (whose cause may be found in our heating systems) attract various species which it is great fun to go out and watch.

Without doubt the most common visitor, the Robin, is easy to see: puffed up and confiding but also very territorial, it is the only small bird which regularly sings in winter. Very similar in shape is the Black Redstart which comes down from the mountains to occupy the roofs of palaces and ruins including the open spaces between the platforms in railway stations. On the trees and bushes on public parks and gardens, look out for the tiny Goldcrest and the acrobatic Coal Tit. Slightly less common are

the Hawfinch with its powerful beak and the Siskin which particularly favours Alder trees. If we place ourselves among the hedges of the suburbs, where the Dunnock lurks and where, if there are trees protected by high buildings, a starling roost may occur which can cause on occasion "problems with the neighbours" because of the droppings which fall to the ground.

If the city borders the sea, or else is traversed by a river, it is possible to see the Black-headed Gull, the Sandwich Tern and the Cormorant.

And so it is possible to go birdwatching in urban areas as well. Let us see now how to attract a greater number of species to your garden.

### Making your bird table

The best way to attract small birds to the house during winter is to set up a table on the balcony, in the garden or the school playground. The usual dimensions are from 20 to 30 cm X 30 to 45cm, plus the roof which should overlap slightly on each side.



On the flat surface you need to fix an outer edge so that the wind does not scatter the food, with small gaps in the corners to allow for regular cleaning. It is a good idea to paint the table with waterproof varnish to make it more resistant to the rain.

## Instructions for the perfect table

- A thick hedge or bush about 3-4 metres from the feeder offers safety to small birds.
- Don't leave food on the ground at night so as not to attract mice and rats.
- If pigeons become too attracted, surround the table with 5 x 5cm wire netting.
- Watch out for cats! Where this is a problem, you need a table hanging from a tree or else fixed on top of a metal pole about 1.5 metres in height.
- Remember that glass is dangerous for birds because they can fly into it; for this reason the table should be placed ten metres or so from the windows, or less than a metre from them.
- Clean the table regularly to avoid unhygienic conditions, removing left-overs which can go off.

## Providing for birds

Here is a list of food appropriate for all species. You can get it in a farm centre or a petfood shop, but for more precise information you could always go to LIPU.

Robins, Blackcaps, Dunnocks, Blackbirds (insectivorous): dry biscuits, crumbs from panettone or plum cake, fresh fruit.

Great Tit, Blue Tit, Nuthatch (insectivorous) diced dry fruit (walnuts and hazel nuts), unsalted peanuts, sunflower seeds, shelled pine nuts.

Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch (seed eaters): sunflower seeds, seed mixture (oats, millet, hemp, wheat), split maize.

## NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

### Conservation Director visits UK

Modern technology means that LIPU-UK and "Head Office" in Parma can and do stay in regular contact and this is achieved by email and, from time to time, the use of free telephone contact over the Internet. Claudio Celada, LIPU's Conservation Director, speaks much better English than I do Italian so there are no secrets or misunderstandings between us.

However, nothing is a real substitute for a meeting in person and we have visited Italy for face to face discussions with all members of staff over the years. This year was different in that Claudio came to us in October with a view to doing a little bird watching and attending a trustees' meeting to meet Tony Gdula and Pat Dugard.

We met the train and took Claudio to his hotel on Friday afternoon and then out to an excellent fish and chip supper! The following day we walked around our local nature reserve and talked of birds and conservation in Italy, in Britain and in other countries.

Sunday was spent at the excellent RSPB reserve at Frampton Marsh near Boston where Claudio was interested mostly in the Brent Geese grazing between the lakes.

On Monday we picked up Pat at Newark then to the Worcester area where we met Tony (Pat lives in Scotland and Tony in Somerset) for the meeting. Claudio now had to sing for his lunch because he

was to present his candidate proposals for projects in 2015 to the board. The discussion was constructive and detailed and we were able to agree to all his requests – just what we are here to do.

Claudio was able to report successful completion of some of last year’s projects and good progress on those still not complete.

A desperate struggle to escape the morning traffic of Lincoln meant Claudio caught his train with only minutes to spare and then “relaxed” at Stansted as Ryanair delayed his flight by almost as much as his inbound one. A busy few days but all agreed that it had been a valuable and worthwhile meeting of minds.

\*\*\*

### TAIL FEATHERS

The translation of the Italian text for this edition has been carried out to the usual high standard by: Barbara Avery, Joanna Bazen, Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Giusy Fazzina, Gill Hood, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder – my thanks to all concerned.

Line drawings are used by permission of the RSPB and photographs are © David Lingard (White Stork Lesser Kestrel and Griffon Vulture), Michele Mendi (Bittern) and Andrea Mazza (Carloforte).



Only a few years ago vultures were starving because of an EU ruling that dead livestock had to be burned – the latest threat is the licensing of Diclofenac for use by farmers.



**LIPU-UK DELEGATE**

David Lingard  
Fernwood  
Doddington Road  
Whisby  
Lincs  
LN6 9BX

**LIPU UK**

Tel: 01522 689030  
www.lipu-uk.org  
mail@lipu-uk.org



At last, and after much campaigning by LIPU, the catching of birds, such as these thrushes, to be used as decoys has been declared illegal by the Italian government.

LIPU: “Step by step we are nearing victory: to open all cages, liberate the wings and the song!”