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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

- Corncrake protection
- Owls – and how we see them
- Torrile – over 600 heron nests
- Adapting to changes in the climate

Autumn 2016

Above: The future of conservation everywhere – school children visit the LIPU reserve at Torrile, see page 18. Below: A sequence of images showing the erection of an information panel at the Boverio reedbed near Milan. Our help with its purchase is shown in the last picture.

Who is responsible?

Editorial

David Lingard

Politics is not a subject for polite company, but I'm going to delve a little way into politics as it affects LIPU in Italy. My annual Council Tax bill tells me that I am paying for a County Council, a District Council and even a Parish Council and, yes, there are other costs as well. The structure of this bureaucracy is not far removed from that of Italy where we can see Regions, Provinces and Communes responsible for providing various services.

Many are the countries with financial problems at the moment and even the mildest assessment of Italy's condition would say that it is far from healthy – and the Italian national government is trying to improve matters by cutting costs. It would like to remove the whole local government layer at provincial level saying that this would improve efficiency and make great savings in expenditure.

The problem for us is that the Raptor Recovery Centres operated and managed by LIPU are almost all funded by the province in which they are located – and the province no longer has any money. LIPU finds itself with a difficult decision – does it close the centres, or divert precious funds to keeping them open and continuing an operation which has always been financed with public funds.

It is another example, and there are many more around Europe, of government priorities pushing anything to do with the environment to the very bottom of the list and it is difficult to see how this can be reversed. Over many years we have helped the

Recovery Centres with funds to buy the medicines and equipment needed for their important day to day work and we will continue to do so. However, this does not relieve the government of Italy at national, regional or provincial level of its responsibility to protect the wild creatures entrusted to its care.

OWLS, HAWKS, DOVES & CO.

by Danilo Selvaggi, Director General

Birds in our everyday language – between cliché, legend, and truth.

Some time ago, one of our members sent us an e-mail in which he politely expressed his doubts about LIPU's protests at Palazzo Chigi (the official residence of the Italian Prime Minister) against the Prime Minister's constant use of the owl metaphor, which sees these birds as harbingers of bad luck. According to the member in question, although his use of the metaphor was questionable, this figure of speech is simply a common idiom on which no time should be wasted. Soon after, we received another e-mail, followed by another, and one more – but this time thanking LIPU for the stance taken and asking us not to give up.

Stop Denigrating

I didn't understand. LIPU was not protesting – that is, not in those days and not for those reasons, so neither compliments nor criticism were founded.

So what was happening? The mystery was soon resolved. The cause of the misunderstanding was a satirical article that had appeared in a prominent national newspaper. The article stated that according to LIPU, 'the campaign of denigration against owls is threatening the existence of the Eagle Owl, which is quite widespread in Italy.'

I personally answered our members, explaining that the piece was only meant as a joke. However, that was not the end of it. The matter has resurfaced quite often since, and came to the forefront once again a few days prior to this article with the escalation of the political controversy regarding owls – a sign that, after all, the matter of 'owl defamation' must really be leading to a certain level of aversion or at least to some significant reaction.

Can a simple figure of speech be so worrisome? Should the use or the excessive use of such metaphors be censured? Is it 'mis-education'? Can it lead to real problems for animals? Above all, what are the cultural roots behind it?

The Owl in Politics

The owl metaphor is a recurring theme in Italian politics, expressing the divide between two apparently opposite approaches: on the one hand, the reformers who seek – and trust in – change; on the other, the 'owls', accused of pessimism and defeatism . The 'owls' don't believe in the future, they rail against it, opposing any initiative that may bring about change. In one word, they are 'gufano' (from gufo, the Italian for owl) – that is, they don't trust in things and even act so that certain things fail.

The ‘owls’ react to these accusations by highlighting all the positive features of these nocturnal birds of prey to which they are compared. ‘You call us “owls”?’ they say. ‘We’re happy with the comparison. We know that owls are outstanding animals: they can move around in the dark and they have very acute senses; they are the very best example of what is needed in these dark and difficult times in which we live. Owls in politics represent the quest for the right skills; among them, a critical sense and the lucidity needed to see clearly, even – or especially – at night. Owls excel at this.’

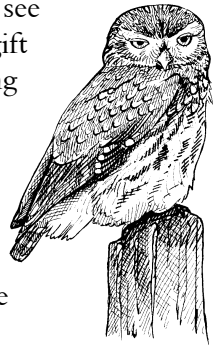
Evil in Mythology

Both negative and positive views stem from the image of owls presented in mythology, from those beliefs that – across space and time – have reached us, depicting these nocturnal birds of prey (both owls and little owls) either as harbingers of evil, bad luck and misfortune, or as good, positive and wise birds.

Undoubtedly, the first interpretation is the most widespread from Asia to Africa, passing through Europe; the idea that owls are harbingers of evil is certainly linked to their nocturnal and solitary habits, their silent, ghost-like flight, and their loud hoots in the night, all of which must have been unsettling for ancient peoples and have become indivisible with the fears and worries that tormented them. Inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Night, of the non-visible realm, owls appear as the chief of the unknown, of magic, threats and even as demons. One morning, when I was a child, I found an owl crucified on the football field where I used to spend my summer days. Its wings were open in a cross shape and had been nailed onto an old wooden door. It was quite shocking, but also intriguing. Who could have done such a thing? It was only years later that I understood the meaning of that gesture, and discovered that the act of crucifying that owl was not a gesture of sudden, gratuitous cruelty but a precise act against ‘evil’: a practice that had been common in many ancient cultures and whose significance had clearly crossed time to reach us. Acts of pure superstition fed by so many stories, beliefs and tales that give these acts such credence that they lead to real bloodshed, and the suffering of real wolves, vultures, black cats and owls. Wolves are evil. Owls are evil. Watch out!

‘Good’ in Mythology

However, as we have already mentioned, there exists an opposite tradition that sees owls as positive animals; symbols of wisdom and know-how; denoting meditation and used to represent monasteries; emblems of judgement and deep knowledge. ‘The eye of the Little Owl shines in the dark, like the glory of knowledge shines among common people’; ‘Wise and constant like an owl’, ‘The owl knows and keeps quiet’ – just some of the common sayings to mention owls. The Native American peoples venerated owls, believing them to be real guides to the human journey, almost as if to say that these birds’ capacity to see in the dimmest light is the biggest gift that any man could wish for. Finding our way when the sun is shining or being optimistic when life smiles at us is easy; it is in the darkness of hardship that the real value of a man can be measured. A man who, like an owl, can navigate in the darkness is a genuine person.



Doves Save Us from World Wars

For quite some time, and before the owl metaphor became so popular, Italian politics was dominated by another bird-related image, that of hawks and doves. This image sought to contrast those in favour of (doves) and against (hawks) entering into dialogue with their opponent. To 'hawks', politics is about attacking, being a predator, aggressive fighting and politically suppressing the enemy. For 'doves', on the other hand, political dialogue represents the quest for a common solution.

The metaphor of doves and hawks has recent and quite dramatic origins. It dates back to 1962, when – at the height of the Cold War – the Soviet Union decided to install missiles in Cuba and aim them at the United States. The reaction in America was twofold: on the one hand, there were those, like the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, Llewellyn E. Thompson, who thought that it was necessary to talk to the Russians and to reach an agreement; on the other, there were those, like the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, Curtis LeMay, who had no doubts about invading Cuba, even if it would lead to a third world war. The two factions were baptised 'doves' and 'hawks', respectively, and from that moment (which fortunately saw the 'doves' prevail) on the image became a cliché of political debate. Nowadays, everyone talks about doves and hawks, perhaps not even knowing the differences between them in real life. 'Doves' saved us from the third world war, but the real question is – how much do such metaphors reflect reality? How accurate are they?

Is the Crow a Bird of Prey?

Another interesting historical episode, this time exclusively Italian, employed yet another bird metaphor. In 1989, a magistrate from the Palermo public prosecutor's office was accused – unfairly, as was later proved – of having defamed his colleagues Ayala, Giammanco, and Giovanni Falcone using anonymous letters. Everyone spoke of a 'crow', the crow in the Palermo public prosecutor's office. But the reasons behind this choice of metaphor are unclear. Why is there a folk belief that crows are unfair, untrustworthy birds that plot and deceive?

In this regard, it might be helpful to consider a journalistic explanation provided at the time, which described the actions of the 'crow' as the 'typical behaviour of birds of prey, that usually move cunningly in the shadows and hit you from behind.' It is rare that one finds so many inaccuracies in fewer than twenty words. It is true that crows are cunning, intelligent, and blessed with a remarkable capacity to learn, but everything else is incorrect: crows are not birds of prey; birds of prey do not always move in the shadows – some do, some do not; and crows are not always ready to 'hit you from behind' in such a cynical way.

This kind of error illustrates the knowledge gaps in terms of the ecological culture that are so typical of Italy, a country that historically has always promoted humanism and its supremacy over science (by the way, it is high time for a big alliance between humanism and science!). Or perhaps, it is a sign of the general distance between us and those other animals we talk about or malign, without even knowing much about them – as if these animals are

not that important and we feel entitled to twist the truth or modify it, even if only linguistically, to suit ourselves.

Champions of Vision and Hearing

The great vision possessed by nocturnal birds of prey is proverbial. However, it is important to note that the expression 'see in the dark', often used when talking about owls, is not entirely correct. Indeed, owls need at least a minimum of light for their visual sensory cells to be activated and their vision amplified. In fact, the most developed of nocturnal birds of prey's senses is not their sight, but their hearing. It is thanks to their highly developed, radar-like hearing that owls can easily move around at night and identify their prey.

Language Awareness

LIPU loves owls, but we have never protested and never will just because someone speaks poorly of them. There are more urgent matters that need to be addressed, and we cannot afford to make the mistake of stigmatising the use of symbols and metaphors, or even everyday language. The human mind works by using comparisons, approximations, abstractions, myths (myths are of paramount importance to our cultural evolution) and – at times – even nonsense. Language, however, must be taken seriously, as language is a reflection of reality as well as a tool for recreating it. We should pay close attention to the use of correct terms and appropriate words; we should know what we are talking about or at least try to. We should pay attention to the consequences of the type of language we employ.

We need both an environmental and a linguistic awareness – we must establish a good relationship with the world, with people, with nature and with animals, starting with our words. It would be a great start. Perhaps owls too would be happy about it.

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LET'S SAVE THE SKYLARK

A total of 30 thousand signatures in a little more than a month of campaigning – LIPU's commitment to support of this seriously threatened species continues.

Lombardy Is Wasting No Time.

'We are asking the Ministry of Agriculture to exclude the Skylark from the regional list of game species as of the 2016 hunting season.' This is the first of many letters that will be sent demanding a ban on the hunting of the skylark. The first addressee – not by chance – is Lombardy, a region in which the species is undergoing a truly dramatic decline. In the twenty years from 1992 to 2013, as a study commissioned by the region of Lombardy itself has shown, the Skylark population has fallen by 89 per cent (Banni et al., 2015), dropping from more than 160,000 to less than 20,000 nesting pairs (see Fig. 1) – an annual rate of decline of some 9.1 per cent. If this trend does not change and the rate of decline continues as it is at present, in the space of 10 years the species will be extinct in Lombardy. The first measure to adopt – and there is no time to lose: ending the hunting of the skylark throughout the region.

LIPU's request has received support from two academics from the University of Pavia, both considerable experts in ornithology: Giuseppe Bogliani and Flavio Ferlini, the latter the author of a series of important studies on the species.

What They Are Saying about LIPU's Campaign on the Social Networks?

'I absolutely agree! Can you imagine one of the most beautiful scenes from Romeo and Juliet without the Skylark? How sad.' *(Claudia)*.
'Heartfelt thanks. I signed yesterday and am very pleased to have done so. The "birds which colour and brighten our way through life and which we at times treat so badly".' *(Maria)*.
'Let's make sure that in the future our children too can watch these birds and hear them sing'. *(Dario)*.
'There are many species that should be excluded from the list of game birds but the skylark is the one that needs it most'. *(Enrico)*.
'We are with you, LIPU. We've signed and shared the campaign and we've renewed our membership. Thank you!' *(Elena)*.

ISPRA Starts Work on Saving the Skylark

ISPRA (Italy's Institute for Environmental Protection and Research) has invited LIPU to take part in the newly established technical round table for the development of a Skylark management plan. This programme should provide for a coordinated action with regards to the conservation and protection of the species.

'We shall take part in the round table,' declared the Managing Director of LIPU, Danilo Selvaggi, 'starting with a strong demand for the suspension of the hunting of the skylark. Hunting is no longer compatible with the conservation of this species.'

The Skylark and Similar Species

The Skylark is a member of the lark family, as are many other species that live in stable populations in Italy and for which a hunting ban remains in force. Some of these closely resemble the skylark and, at various periods of the year (above all during the hunting season) share the same habitats.

This is the case of the Crested Lark *(Galerida cristata)*, a bird slightly bigger that the Skylark but very similar in appearance and coloration and with which the Skylark can be easily confused, above all in flight. Another 'lookalike' species is the Calandra Lark *(Melanocorypha calandra)*, a bird present in areas of Italy such as Puglia, a region in which the hunting of the Skylark is widely practised. Finally, Skylarks can also be easily confused with the Woodlark *(Lullula arborea)*, although Woodlarks have a much shorter tail.

An end to the hunting of Skylarks would therefore represent – for these three species too (two of which are included in Annex 1 to the Birds Directive) – the definite advantage of preventing the risk of confusion, and an end to the clear disturbance caused by many of the activities associated with hunting.

Haymaking – The Worst Threat.

The disappearance of meadows and haymaking in

those that remain are the principal threats to the Skylark during the breeding season. The Skylark lays its eggs directly on the ground, mostly in cultivated fields. Between laying – which takes place firstly in April and a second time in May – and the fledging of the young there is a period of some 30 days. If carried out before the young fledge, haymaking destroys the nests and kills the nestlings. Usually, haymaking takes place in the first half of May, but climate change (characterized by ever milder winters) is leading to haymaking being brought forward: this year in the Po Valley haymaking took place around 20 April.

30 thousand!

A total of 30 thousand signatures collected in a little more than one month of campaigning. Thank you all, but let's not stop. Visit www.lipu.it and spread news of the campaign to your family, your friends and other nature lovers. Let's save the Skylark, all of us together.

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PLANS

by Claudio Celada, Director of Nature Conservation

A Better Climate

Finding resilient approaches to dealing with climate change is the goal of Mediterranean Mosaics, a project led by LIPU and funded by the Mava Foundation.

At this September's World Conservation Congress, organised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and held on the island of Hawaii, an introductory paper set out the two views that have come to dominate thinking on the future of biodiversity and of our planet. The first, or 'catastrophic', view maintains that we are too late to conserve habitats, species and all the natural resources we depend on, and that we must learn how to survive in impoverished environmental conditions. The second, or 'stubbornly optimistic', takes as its starting point the fact that man has previously experienced and survived a range of environmental crises without necessarily causing irreparable damage. Both these views – in their different ways – lead to the problem being denied, creating a climate of inaction among individuals and institutions alike.

Our approach to many environmental issues, precisely because these issues are of such great significance, runs the risk of being harmed by one or the other of these two narratives. A prime example is the need to counteract changes in our climate, both because of that need's global importance and the huge consequences that these changes could have for our future and the future of biodiversity.

LIPU and the Climate

With this in mind, LIPU has decided to take the initiative – including climate change issues in our strategic agenda for 2015-20, and to take immediate action. The scientific evidence reveals that the problem needs to be tackled by reducing climate-altering emissions, not just those coming from our use of fossil fuels but also those caused by agriculture

and deforestation. It is no longer possible, even in the best-case scenario, to completely stop the changes that are already underway. We need to prepare to adapt ourselves to this situation: in short, we need to manage the inevitable.

The Mediterranean Mosaics Proposal

Exploring ways of adapting to climate change is the focus of the Mediterranean Mosaics project, an initiative supported by the Mava Foundation and led by LIPU in partnership with the Shouf Nature Reserve, Lebanon – famous for its cedars – and Italian Landscape Exploration (ILEX), an organisation based at Fontecchio in the Velino-Sirente mountain range, an area hit severely by the L'Aquila earthquake of 2009.

The word 'mosaics' in the project's title refers to the extraordinarily beautiful Mediterranean landscape and the long human history that has helped to shape its complex, patchwork nature. Mediterranean Mosaics believes that we need to find adaptive solutions to secure both community welfare in a rapidly changing Mediterranean, and the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources.

There is a third way between the two narrative extremes described above; a different path that offers both a vital and an inspiring alternative: to confront the complexity of our age; to work towards solutions that increase the resilience of ecosystems and of human communities; to ensure a future for all of us and for all species. In any case, it is both too late to be pessimistic and too early to resign ourselves to a future without nature and without prosperity.

What is meant by Mediterranean Mosaics?

- At Shouf, in the first phase of the project, our partner ACS is developing techniques for the nursery cultivation of saplings that are already adapted to drought conditions. When planted out, these Cedars of Lebanon will favour root growth over aerial growth, leading to a fall in seedling mortality from 70 to 15 per cent. This eliminates the need for irrigation and its inherent high costs and significant negative environmental impacts.

- LIPU has devised a plan for monitoring Syrian Serin, a Red-Listed species of ecological significance.

- Plans to thin the woods of Aleppo Oak at Shouf will both reduce fire risk and provide the raw materials for making wood pellets, reducing local consumption of highly polluting diesel fuel and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

- In Abruzzo, we are completing restoration work on part of the woodland that runs alongside the river Aterno. This is a microhabitat, resilient to the effects of climate change.

- In both study areas we are focusing on policies connected with water use.

- LIPU is building a predictive model of the distribution of typical farmland bird species in the central Apennines. Another model will help determine the risk of desiccation and degradation of wetlands along the coasts of Sicily and Sardinia, which are Special Protection Areas.

- LIPU reserves will implement a training program on adapting to climate change.

- In August 2016, LIPU – in collaboration with the RSPB, BirdLife Europe, the University of Pavia and the National Park of Gran Paradiso – organised a workshop on adapting to climate change. Held in the beautiful surroundings of Valsaverenche, it provided an opportunity for the sharing of knowledge and experience among our European partners.

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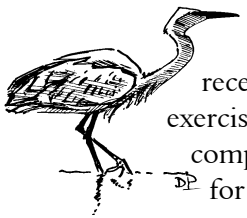
RESERVES

by Gigliola Magliocco, Manager Torrile rserve

The Torrile reserve never ceases to surprise scientists, birdwatchers and visitors alike. In 2016 there were 600 heron nests.

Last year the reserve welcomed around 7,000 visitors of whom 1,700 were pupils from schools in and around Parma. In addition, there were 21 parties of scout troops, summer camps and groups for the disabled: 436 visitors in all. The reserve has promoted new activities and created tailor-made programmes for individual students on themes such as conservation and the use of our senses. Older students study how agriculture can benefit wildlife. The reserve recently hosted a team-building exercise for the employees of a private company and rehabilitation sessions for patients from a local clinic.



An Area with a Rich History

The lowlands around Parma, extending from the Po almost to the Taro Park, benefit a wealth of wildlife, including rare species such the Red-footed Falcon, Lesser Kestrel and Lesser Grey Shrike. In addition, the region is home to many artistic and historic treasures, including the medieval town of Fontanellato and the Reggia di Colorno. This monumental building from the beginning of the 18th century has 400 elegant rooms arranged around courtyards set in the midst of wonderful French-style garden.

Torrile and Trescasali reserve is in the province of Parma, a few kilometres from the River Po and is open to the public on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 9 am to 6 pm. Guided tours can be booked in advance. There reserve has a Facebook page and can be reached by email at riserva.torrile@LIPU.it.

What is now the LIPU reserve of Torrile began life in 1988 when enthusiasts from LIPU Parma began to transform a number of fields formerly used for maize and sugar beet. They created an oasis with natural wetland which took in the disused pools of a sugar refinery on land leased to LIPU by the company. This went on to attract numerous species on passage between the Po and the River Taro. In 2010, the area was transformed into a nature reserve by the addition of another 110 hectares and the inclusion of the springs of Viarolo. Since 2011 LIPU has been managing the reserve, working with the Province of Parma and the management board of the Western Emilia parks. Routes to the hides along paths that are accessible to the disabled have been constructed

using recycled materials. To date, 300 species have been sighted, including rare and accidental species on migration, such as the Red-necked Phalarope, Egyptian Goose, marsh terns, and Spotted Eagle

The heronry, which is one of the most important in Emilia Romagna, is easily viewed from the hides. This year heron nests numbered 616 of which 333 were the nests of Cattle Egrets, 100 of Grey Herons, 95 of Night Herons, 70 of Little Egrets and 18 of Squacco Herons. The nesting season begins with the Grey Herons in March, when they occupy the tops of the trees. The last to nest are the Squacco Herons, which finish nesting in July. The heronry of Torrile has been the subject of research carried out in the context of master's degrees at a number of universities.

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CONSERVATION

by Laura Silva, Department of Nature Conservation, and Mattia Brambilla

Long May He Reign

Confined to the north-east of the country and reduced to only 200 pairs, the Corncrake is suffering from the disappearance of its habitat and from the intensification of agriculture.

Every year it returns to the Italian Alps from sub-Saharan Africa. While its name in Italian ('king of the quails') is impressive, its future is very uncertain. This is the Corncrake *(Crex crex)*, which finds its ideal nesting habitat in the Alpine mountains of Italian regions such as Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia or the Veneto. It nests in permanent pastures where the grass is high enough to conceal it from predators, but not so thick as to prevent it from moving easily. Over recent decades, these favourable surroundings have been markedly reduced in quantity to allow space for urbanisation or for intensive agriculture, especially for the most profitable monoculture, and the pastures have been invaded by woodland. As a result, today the Corncrake nests only in hay meadows on hillsides and on mountain slopes, especially where the hay is not harvested before the beginning of July, allowing the first brood to hatch. It has, though, almost disappeared from the meadows of the plains and valleys where the first cut occurs exactly at the time these migratory birds arrive.

The Cut that Kills

The intensification of agricultural practices and especially the mechanization of mowing has had a dramatic impact on the populations of this species throughout Europe, particularly in the second half of the last century. One of the most frequent causes of mortality for Corncrakes is the mowing of hay by means of cutting blades mounted on fast, modern tractors. These tractors, moving from the outside to the centre of the field, increase the speed at which work is carried out, but also force adult and young birds alike towards the centre of the field, trapping them without means of escape as the area of the field is gradually reduced.

A Dramatic Decline

The challenge in preserving the Corncrake, whose Italian nesting population is made up of fewer than 200 pairs distributed almost exclusively in the north-east of the country, is to maintain countryside created by traditional agricultural activities and the rearing of animals on low and medium-altitude mountain slopes. This means rejecting the idea of abandoning the Corncrake to its fate and, instead, favouring management practices that are compatible with the conservation of the species, especially in Special Protection Zones (SPZs), which shelter more than 50 per cent of the Italian population of the species. In other words, while at one time these meadows favoured the expansion of the Corncrake, now it is the presence of such a special species that can help to save the meadows themselves.

The Role of the RDP

Under the old Rural Development Plan (RDP 2007–13), funds for maintaining meadows either did not provide for measures to safeguard species that nest on the ground, or – even if they did – such regulations were not applied. This brought the Corncrake population to the point of collapse. However, today two RDPs out of three (Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) are financing agricultural, climatic and environmental measures that encourage the management of meadows that are favourable to the species. These measures could be improved but the progress made so far offers some hope; although it will be important constantly to check the effects of this new method of management in order to correct the process if necessary. Only the RDP operative in Trento proposes a different measure with regard to the region's meadows – a measure that does not help protect the species and risks leading to it disappearing forever from the countryside.

Another positive move would be for the groups most concerned (for example, public authorities, consortia, farmers, and research organisations) could adhere to Measure 16 of the RDP 16, 'Co-operation', which allows the planning of different times to cut hay in different areas in order to produce environmental mosaics, thus avoiding simultaneous cutting over wide areas.

In order to reduce the negative impact of agriculture on biodiversity and to value these splendid environments for their inexhaustible and essential flowers, it is necessary that a quota of meadows be managed exclusively or predominantly in a traditional way and that the RDPs should be fit for purpose.

The disappearance of the 'king of the quails' and of its 'realm' would not be an isolated loss – the same fate would also befall a host of the Corncrake's 'subjects', including Quails, Skylarks, Stonechats, Whinchats, Yellowhammers, Corn Buntings and many others. This is a disaster that we cannot allow.

How to Manage Meadows while Preserving Nature

- Maintain a portion equivalent to 15 per cent of the area of the meadow and carry out cutting after 15 August, keeping compact, uncut strips at least 10 metres wide.

- Plan to carry out later cutting following a mosaic scheme.
- Avoid fertilizing poor, dry meadows.
- Reduce the amount of fertilizer applied in autumn.
- Cut hay by moving from a central portion towards the outside of the field.

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FROM THE WORLD OF LIPU

by Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

The CorriLipu Run, a fun run at Castel di Guido

This June, along the trails of the LIPU reserve of Castel di Guido, near Rome, the first CorriLipu Fun Run took place. The event, staged with the help of the Amateur Runners' Friendly Association, had as its goal the raising of funds for LIPU's wildlife recovery centre in Rome and for the Castel di Guido reserve. Early in the morning over 250 runners took up the challenge of the reserve's rough tracks of the reserve – crossing the paths of swallows, owls and kites – while the runners' children and supporters went on nature walks round the reserve. The run over, there were prizes for the winners in the various categories, and the Association's president handed proceeds from the event over to LIPU. The sum, around 1,200 euros, will go towards medicines and food for the animals being sheltered at the LIPU recovery centre, and to financing anti-poaching measures within the Castel di Guido reserve. At the end of the day a Kestrel that had been shot by a poacher and had convalesced at the recovery centre was released.

At Massaciuccoli, Twenty Years of 'Adventures in the Park'

'Adventures in the Park' is twenty years old. It was on 16 June 1996 when the first 10 children took part in the first summer camp at the Chiarone nature reserve (LIPU's Massaciuccoli reserve) in the Regional Park of Migliarino San Rossore Massacciucoli. From that starting point, the project has gone from strength to strength, with a total of 2,650 children and teenagers spending the summer with LIPU over the years. This remarkable anniversary was celebrated on Sunday, 19 June in the presence of the president of the Regional Park, Giovanni Maffei Cardellini; the Park's director, Andrea Gennai; the municipality of Massarosa's director of sport, Raffaello Giannini, and LIPU president, Fulvio Mamone Capria; along with LIPU members of staff Ugo Faralli, Head of Lipu Oases and Reserves; Reserve Manager, Andrea Fontanelli; and Marcello Labate.'The secret of this success,' said Andrea Fontanelli, 'is undoubtedly the quality of service and of the education on offer, and in addition the idea of responding to the demands of the children rather than to the anxieties of their parents. The children of today, in fact, need more independence and we must recapture that dimension of "wildness" that is expressed in a spontaneous and physical rapport with the elements of nature that surround them – an experience that is increasingly denied to them in their everyday lives.'

Since 2000 the Reserve, having always had to put up the 'No Vacancies' sign, has held a camp for teenagers entitled 'The adventure continues', in response to requests from those who wish to go on spending their summers there. In addition, since 2013 the Park has run the 'I'm Staying Here Too' project,

in collaboration with the Pisa Autism Association. The project makes possible the placement of one autistic child in every edition of Adventures in the Park. While these placements are for a slightly more limited period, they give these children an important experience in terms of developing their personal autonomy.

The Dragonflies of the Gaggio Reserve

Thirty-one species of dragonfly were observed at the Gaggio reserve on the occasion of the compilation of the Dragonfly Atlas of the Plain of Eastern Veneto, published by ANS. Thanks to the presence of standing water and the richness of the vegetation of banks, grassland and woodland – ideal habitats for many species – the Gaggio reserve is the most species-rich wetland on the plain.

Thirty species were observed, with one more on the River Zero, a few hundred metres upstream from the stretch that runs alongside the reserve. Of the total of 31 species observed and photographically documented, 10 belonged to the suborder Zigoptera and 21 to Anisoptera. Among species red-listed in Italy, *Coenagrium pulchellum* of the Zigoptera suborder and *Sympetrum depressiusculum* of the Anisoptera were observed.

Cuneo: 50 Nesting Boxes for Tits

Fifty nesting boxes were put up in the parks and streets of Cuneo by LIPU volunteers as part of the project 'Cuneo – A Nest of Biodiversity' developed by the municipality of Cuneo and the local branch of Legambiente.

The boxes are for tits for the most part (with a few for Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Short-toed Treecreepers and Little and Tawny Owls), and were made in the carpentry workshop of the Prison of Saluzzo using reclaimed wood. Each is personalised with one or more of the names of those who sponsored the initiative.

LIPU Foggia

The School in the Trees is the title of the booklet produced by LIPU Foggia thanks to hundreds of pupils of Foggia's Pascoli - Santa Chiara school having set out upon a course of discovery, from voluntary work to bird feeders, from poaching to owls and birding.

Education and development too for pupils of the Liceo scientifico of Bovino, independent seat of the Lancia-Perugini of Foggia. Here, in the natural setting of the Monti Dauni, members of class IIG, joined forces with LIPU to undertake a study of the science of nature, with particular reference to the natural context and the landscape surrounding their school.

The Fortezza Vecchia Nature Trail

Displays have, in collaboration with the Port Authority, been put up in Livorno's Fortezza Vecchia to show visitors what birds can be seen there. Fourteen species have been recorded, of which six nest in the rocks of the Mastio or in the fortifications, including the Kestrel, Yellow-legged Gull, Pallid Swift and Spotted Flycatcher. The texts that describe the species are also bilingual, for the benefit of foreign tourists.

Poems in the Drawer

This year's convention of the National Archive of Uncollected Poems, or 'Poems in the Drawer' – the 26th edition – was dedicated to LIPU and to birds. Taking place at Castello di Sorci at Anghiari on 27 August, the convention, organised by Tuscan intellectual Vito Taverna, saw the participation of LIPU president Fulvio Mamone Capria, of the poet and writer Donatella Bisutti, and of the poets of Poems in the Drawer.

Tirreno-Brennero: EU Proceedings

The procedure for the authorisation of the Tirreno-Brennero motorway corridor is not in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive for the protection of the Natura 2000 network and of biodiversity. These are the conclusions of a substantial dossier sent to the European Commission by Legambiente, LIPU and WWF Italia. The analysis supplied to the Commission by the three associations concentrates on the detailed plans for the first phase of the work, which were recently approved by the Ministry for Infrastructure and Transport.

Flamingos in Sicily

One-hundred and thirty chicks – almost triple the number of last year. Jubilation at the Saline di Priolo Nature Reserve where, for the second year running, Flamingos have bred successfully. Last year 50 chicks hatched and all of them also fledged. Thanks to the precious help of Antonello Rizza, the Mayor of Priolo Gargallo, this year it has been possible once more to pump sea water from the nearby Enel power station, Archimede, into the basin to avoid desiccation of the mud flats during the summer heat – a drying out that would have had grave consequences for the survival of these wonderful animals. If you want to admire the juveniles wandering with the adults in the reserve, visit www.lipu.it. We wish the new arrivals a safe journey!

* * *

STOP PRESS

As I work on this, I have just received an email from Claudio Celada with a sequence of images showing the erection of an information placard at the Boverio reedbed, see page 2. The acquisition and improvement of this wetland near Milan was made possible by a grant from LIPU-UK two years ago. The local group, Burchvif, and LIPU own the reedbed in partnership and since its acquisition it has gone from strength to strength, with hunting banned and heron and bittern species breeding this year – a success story we can take pride in.

NEWS FROM LIP-UK

LIPU-UK Annual Draw

As you probably know, we ask our members and friends for funds only twice a year – once in the spring for our annual appeal and at this time of the year for our annual draw. If this is not for you, and you have opted out, you should have no tickets with this edition of the Ali, but if you do have a book of tickets I urge you to take part if you can. The prizes are as simple as we can make them – three cheques are waiting for the first three names to be drawn – and the chances of being one of those three are a lot

better than the National Lottery or Premium Bonds!

Each year the draw raises over £2000 for conservation work in Italy and it will all be devoted to the 2017 projects which will be described in the next Ali - it will take only another hundred people to take part to increase that sum to over £3000 – please give us your support if you can.

Bird Clubs, RSPB Groups etc

I'm busy in October as the season for indoor meetings starts for clubs and groups, I'm speaking about "Birdwatching in Italy and the work of LIPU" to three groups and in the past these talks have been well received and have spread our message to interested audiences. Of course we hope to recruit new members and this is usually successful.

If you are connected with a group who might welcome such a presentation please ask the secretary to contact me and I'll be very happy to agree a date.

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My thanks to my team of translators and helpers who, for this issue are: Barbara Avery, Joanna Bazen, Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Dave Brooks, Giusy Fazzina, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder,

Line drawings are by courtesy of the RSPB, the photographs are © their creators, and the striking image of Squacco Herons on the cover is by Raffaella Scaccaglia.

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Young Tawny Owls

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