

ali

Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



- White
- Silent Marshes
- Marbled Duck
- Hunting in 2016

Winter 2016



Bearded Reedling

photo © David Lingard

The superb high key images gracing the covers of this issue illustrate the theme of “White” by Danilo Selvaggi.

The photographs are of a Great White Egret by Massimiliano Bencivelli and a Ptarmigan in winter plumage by Emilio Ricci; both clearly accomplished photographers.

Left and below: Wetland birds are in need of protection in most parts of the world as you will read in this edition.



Marbled Duck

photo © Maurizio Ravasini

Science or petty politics?

Editorial

David Lingard

With every passing month the world’s scientists produce more and more evidence that the planet is warming. The icecaps would certainly appear to be melting and the weather seems to be becoming more unstable.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that burning fossil fuels is releasing the carbon dioxide which was locked away millions of years ago when the atmosphere could not support life as we now know it. Making matters worse is the unending destruction of forests which are one of the most effective means of removing this greenhouse gas from the air and replacing it with oxygen.

Danilo Selvaggi is the author of our first piece in this edition and he looks at the changes that are affecting the Ptarmigan and making its survival ever more precarious. I have had very positive comments on previous articles written by Danilo, our Director General, and I am sure that this thoughtful essay with the title of “White” will be just as interesting.

To return to the subject of global warming there has been a recent claim that it is all a hoax, but that leaves us all with a simple choice – do we believe the almost unanimous scientific body or Donald Trump? For me the answer is simple.



WHITE

By Danilo Selvaggi, Director General

The colour of snow and of the page yet to be written on, whiteness makes us mindful of those treasures that the world risks losing, such as the great glaciers and the Ptarmigan.

‘Some years it began to fall in the autumn. One evening, the air would come out of the north, and all that night you could feel it seeping through the walls. The next morning, there was the snow. A few spits of colour here and there: the brown of shivering birds; the red of a famished fox as it crept into the courtyard. Everything else was white.’

Arturo talks in a lowered voice, with a melancholy but distant expression, almost serene, and wears a checked shirt that seems to belong to his past life. He has seen over eighty years pass, both the good and the bad, so that the light in his still-young eyes contrasts with a bent back and a deep weariness that never goes away.

‘It’s the city’s fault,’ says Arturo, who has lived in the city for nearly three decades, though this place of complexity and chaos has never seemed a home to him. His true home was, and remains, the mountains of the Apennines of the Tuscan–Emilian border, which he left in the 1980s for a new life. ‘The city saddens and poisons me. I’ve never got used to it, with the madness of all this coming and going, of grey, and of noise. In the mountains I worked hard but in peace. I breathed, talked to people, and lit the fire, and when the snow fell, even though it made the day’s work harder, I felt good.’

Turning around, he makes a gesture with his hand. ‘Do you know what’s missing in the city? Two things that a man’s life should never be without: the silence, which makes you understand who you really are, and whiteness, which makes you understand the true nature of the world. And above all, I miss the whiteness.’

The Whiteness of the World

The colour of innocence, or at least it is presumed to be so. The colour of beginnings. The colour of the empty page that awaits the first words. Perhaps in the beginning the world was really like that, not dark but white. It was the great opportunity. It was the chance to repopulate the void but without suffocating it. But instead, humanity took the road of making too much – of production without end.

Production for growth, to fill all available space. Production to conquer. Production so as not to die. Producing (and surrounding ourselves with objects) so that we would not feel alone, as if we were terrified of emptiness; threatened by the white.



In the all-time classic that is *Moby Dick*, there is an extraordinary chapter entitled ‘The Whiteness of the Whale’, in which Hermann Melville has Ishmael, the main narrator of the tale, say that the fear provoked by the whale came not from its ferocity but from its colour.

‘There was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him - confessed Ishmael - which at times by its intensity completely

overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me’.

Behind the white, according to Ishmael, ‘there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood’. Something elusive; something that both exists and does not exist. An inhuman void.

In short, the fundamental theme of Melville’s great tale (and perhaps the tale of us all) is really this: the white whale is the unexpected; it is that which we cannot control. It is the silence of things we do not know. It is the nature that eludes us and that we cannot tame (and which we therefore cannot exploit). It is the fear of discovering our weakness and mortality. A fear of the void that unleashes in us an angry and violent reaction.

Once Upon a Time There Was Snow

Meanwhile, the snow hardly ever falls now, whether in the mountains or in the city. ‘If for many an age it had been a poetic guarantee of nature’s authenticity, today the snow only covers our highest peaks with difficulty,’ says Carlo Alberto Pinelli, film director and alpinist, who has known the mountains all his life. ‘But that’s not all; we have transformed the mountains into an amusement park, with the use of snow cannons to produce artificial snow along the pistes. Sad ribbons of pretend white that undulate down among yellow meadows and denuded larches. Rather



than the magic and charm of the white of the snows, the true snows of our childhood, they make you think of toilet-roll adverts.’

Scientific research, starting with the major reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed that for years the snow cover of the northern hemisphere has been shrinking and precipitation levels falling, with statistics both telling and ever more robust.

As has been seen, the reasons for this are to be found above all in the phenomenon of global warming, in the unprecedented increase in temperature created for the most part by the abnormal quantities of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by factories, cars, aircraft and buildings. The risks, it need hardly be said, are grave in the extreme and go well beyond a simple romanticised wound to our idealised image of the world; the progressive desertification of the planet, an increase in extreme atmospheric events, and the increasing acidity of the oceans, as well as glacial retreat (there is a new worry, for example, in the case of the Thwaites Glacier in the Antarctic, which scientists think is at risk of disintegration), with consequences for the global sea level and what that will mean in terms of the inundation of low-lying land and the effects on human economies and on plant and animal species.

What Would You Do?

There was something of a sensation when the news came in, a few months ago, that a Caspian Tern had been found raising young on a beach in Alaska, by the Chukchi Sea. We are talking of a place that looks across to Siberia, beyond the Arctic Circle, fifteen

hundred kilometres further north than the places in which this bird is usually found. What is a tern doing nesting there? The answer is in the massive increase in the area's temperatures, which in less than a century have gone from an average of -12 degrees to -5, in the process forcing animals into unprecedented northwards movements.

Martin Robards, of the Wildlife Conservation Society, who has seen the tern, has described the situation as 'a tremendous shock', and as a further confirmation of the northwards migration of many species, such as auks, beavers, Grizzly Bears and Arctic Foxes. A phenomenon that is anything but painless, considering the invasion of the habitats of other species that this unnatural migration entails, as well as the clear risk of hybridisation between species and the predation of nests, particularly those of migratory birds. But what else can these creatures do, but go higher? Fleeing from the heat; looking for snow and ice. Fleeing higher, or to the north, in search of white. Changing their normal behaviour in a forced adaptation that is never easy and is even sometimes impossible. Just as happens here, in the Alps, in the worrying case of the Ptarmigan.

The Ptarmigan's Party Dress

The Ptarmigan has two plumages: one, of dark colours, that it wears for most of the year and that is in a sense its workaday wear, its day-to-day apparel; the other, white and prized, is its winter plumage. A wonderful, white, festive regalia with an elegant black stripe between its beak and eye. The reasons for the change are plainly



mimetic, even as we indulge the thought that the beauty of this transformation – this putting on the white of the winter – is really a homage to the festival of the snow.

The problem is that the party, for the Ptarmigan, is seemingly over. In order to find snow, this sedentary bird, which in Italy breeds exclusively along the arc of the Alps, must climb ever higher. Temperatures rise, ideal habitats are increasingly at a premium, and the Ptarmigan must clamber upwards in search of white, to give purpose to its winter outfit, to have the opportunity to put it on. But above all, to survive.

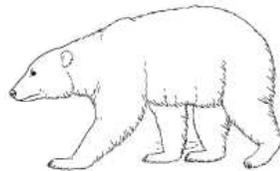
'Starting in the eighties,' says Marco Gustin, LIPU's Head of Species and Research, 'the Italian Ptarmigan population underwent a drastic decline, with a fall of 20 – 30 per cent being recorded for the period 1980 – 2011. The main causes are hunting, which killed many individuals, and the high mountain areas being given over to skiing and other recreational uses, which caused partial damage to habitat. But today there is a new and even greater threat – that of climate change. The latest studies show that there has been a steep decline in the species due entirely to rising temperatures, which are causing a rapid rise in the tree line throughout the Alpine range, Switzerland and Lombardy included. The risk,' Gustin concludes, 'is that, as a LIPU study, currently going to press reveals, around 50 per cent of its available habitat will be lost by 2050.' An outcome that surely must be prevented.

Twenty Thousand Kilometres of Hope

In the case of the Ptarmigan, LIPU is now fully engaged, in particular with regard to the above-

mentioned study, which runs into that of statistical modeller Alessandro Ferrarini and ornithologist Marco Gustin. 'The study,' Gustin explains, 'is an experiment in modelling that has allowed us to establish – kilometre by kilometre along the whole range of the Alps, for a distance of 20,000 kilometres in all – how much higher, beyond 2000 metres, the tree line for the Ptarmigan will go. The study, equally detailed for the national parks of the Gran Paradiso, Stelvio and Bellunese Dolomites, indicates the specific conservation actions that appear necessary, even urgent and indispensable, if the Ptarmigan is to be saved. In the Bellunese Dolomites, for example, if in the very near future there are no major, positive steps taken in the field of conservation, it is feared that the Ptarmigan will be lost from the range in just a few years.'

The LIPU study will be published soon, and its findings disseminated along with an urgent appeal to public bodies and all interested parties to implement its recommendations. There is a white jewel to be preserved, a white vestment to don once more, and no time to lose. And just as with the case of the Ptarmigan, there is no time to lose either for all those species (the Polar Bear above all) that are experiencing the deep disorientation of destroyed habitats, of loss of food sources, of a world that is symbolically and literally falling apart beneath them.



White Treasures

It is said that white is a cure for anxiety, premature ageing and obsessive thought. It is said that it is the colour of creativity, of a quiet desire for renewal. At

a certain point in her life and from that point on, Emily Dickinson (who had a little of the Ptarmigan in her), took to wearing skirts and blouses only of white. The great American poet saw white not only as a symbol of purity, of an innocence not to be sullied, but also as its exact opposite: the possibility of openness, of acceptance. To preserve the void and at the same time make a home for thoughts, for emotions and for nature. Like the spots of colour recalled by Arturo – the fox in search of food, the shivering birds in the snow – that rendered, and still render, whiteness all the more beautiful and desirable.

There is a deep connection between the gentle sadness of Arturo, that orphan of the snows, and the overwhelming climatic and environmental problems of the planet, between the Ptarmigans ascending ever higher and the onslaught of smoke and concrete that we have let loose upon the world. It is not a question of nostalgia. It is not the dream of a world that is no more, but the wish for a better one. The hope that the assault will come to an end, that there will be a halt to the devouring of the soil, that habitats will be preserved, that the polar regions will be spared the drill, the march of human settlement, the gouge of the mining machine. The hope for a humanity that saves its treasured inheritance, of whatever colour. A humanity still driven by creativity and invention, but not at the cost of destruction; a humanity that will fear and blot out the whiteness no more. No more.

This winter, may the snow fall. Let us meet with the unexpected and let a beautiful fire be lit. It is what I would wish for, for myself and for all.

SPECIES ACCOUNT – MARBLED DUCK

By Marco Gustin, responsible for Species and Research

Threatened with global extinction and classified as ‘vulnerable’ on the Red List, it was considered – just a few years ago – an accidental visitor to Italy. But for the Marbled Duck the wind is changing. Hit previously by a serious decline, since the turn of this century a small number of individuals have been observed on a regular basis, particularly in a few small marshes in Sicily, where two or three pairs have bred almost every year.

More recently, other indications have confirmed that the wetlands of south-east Sicily are, for this species, the most important habitat in Italy. Even if the number of individual birds appearing in Sicily is still very low, it seems that the Marbled duck is colonising a number of areas in the region, and it is likely that it is doing so from its breeding population in Tunisia.

The Splendid Summer of 2016

This is why the observation of two breeding pairs in August 2016 is so important. The first pair was observed in the Baronello wetland and the second in the LIPU reserve of Biviere di Gela/Comunelli Lake, both by the Sicilian ornithologist, Andrea Corso, who has also established the presence of at least 27 individuals in the Roveto wetland, within the nature reserve of Vendicari.

The species, in numerical terms, is ‘growing’, both in the marshes of the Mazara del Vallo district and in the important wetlands of south-east Sicily, which could become the real stronghold of the species in Italy.

Updating The Plan of Action

With these developments in mind, it seems advisable to update the species’ Action Plan, drawn up by the Joint Research Centre almost ten years ago. The actions specified in the Plan were defined with the specific objective of encouraging the colonisation trend then emerging in Sicily. This now appears to be actually happening, especially when one considers that the small nucleus of individual birds that once almost exclusively frequented the district of Mazara del Vallo today seems to have spread to other Sicilian wetlands, in a natural expansion towards southern and eastern Sicily, where the most extensive wetlands of the island lie. The plan, therefore, has worked within the framework of its original terms, but it now needs to be brought up to date in the light of these recent sightings.

Still an Endangered Species

This possible expansion does not, however, mean that we should in any way drop our guard – the species is, according to the most recent Italian Red List, still ‘in danger’, and even the loss of a few individual birds could compromise the Marbled duck’s status on the island. Thus, in those areas where the birds are currently present, mortality risk factors should be reduced as should those that lower the breeding success of individual pairs; both these measures should be a matter of priority. This could be achieved by increasing the availability of ideal habitat and recreating, where possible, new wet areas, especially in the marshlands of south-east Sicily.

In order to guarantee the future of this species in Italy, it is essential to work at an international level,

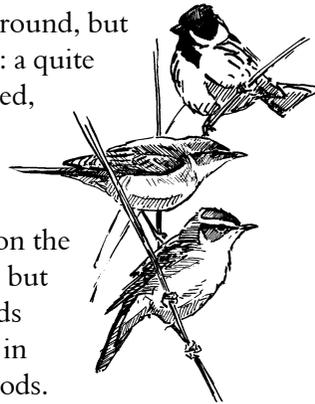
thus ensuring the safety of the populations that have produced the individual birds currently arriving in Sicily – that is to say, the breeding pairs of the African Maghreb.

SILENT MARSHES

From Laura Silva, Department of Nature Conservation

Three valued passerine species at risk due to the serious decline in wetlands

Marshes, peatbogs, pools and lagoons, also lakes and rivers – specialised environments, fascinating landscapes rich in biodiversity, where birds find a suitable habitat even in winter. Wetlands are of crucial importance for various species of passerine. These include the Bearded Reedling (or Bearded Tit), the Penduline Tit and the Reed Bunting, all of which are in serious decline, as are the reeds themselves. The Reedling is a species that frequents the reed beds all year round, but it requires precise conditions: a quite extensive area, partially flooded, and with sections that are relatively old, where the vegetation is dense and tangled. The Reed Bunting, on the other hand, frequents ‘drier’, but nevertheless mature, reed beds with bushes and shrubs that, in time, will form small wet woods. The river banks, where willows and poplars grow, are ideal places from which to observe the engineering abilities of the Penduline



Tit, which in spring constructs a nest in the form of a pear, hanging from the foliage.

Negative Trend

In recent decades, these three species have shown an appreciable drop in the numbers of what were already scarce nesting populations, and in certain historical breeding sites have already disappeared.

The Italian population of nesting Reedlings in the period 2003–06 was estimated at about 600–850 pairs; half way through the 1980s that number had been 4–10,000 pairs. The population of Penduline Tits fell from 10–30,000 pairs in the 80s to a tenth of that figure in the past decade. Lastly, the nesting population of Reed Buntings – 20–30,000 pairs in the 80s has now declined by 50–70 per cent (source: Brichetti & Grattine).

The problem facing these species seems to be loss of habitat, caused by the reclamation of wetland areas, the practice of burning the reeds at the end of winter, and – in spring – the cutting back of marshy vegetation. Water pollution and significant variations in water levels during nesting may also be contributory factors. But the precise causes of the recent decline in these species cannot be determined accurately from the information available. Climatic changes seem to influence distribution and breeding areas, which become more restricted and fragmentary.

Two-Thirds of Wetland Has Disappeared

Wetland areas are basically habitats in which biodiversity can be conserved. But they are among

the most threatened ecosystems in various regions of the world. Human pressure and global warming are constantly putting their delicate and complex balance at risk, and in the last century more than 64 per cent of these environments disappeared. At present, in a large part of Europe and in all of Italy, the combined size of wetland areas is only a small fraction of what, in the past, covered vast areas of the plains, only to be destroyed over the centuries to make space for agricultural cultivation and human settlement. What remains today, therefore, has an even higher intrinsic value for nature and the ecosystem – it safeguards the precious resource that is water and mitigates the effects of climate change through the control of water flow.

What Can Be Done?

To help the Reedling and the other birds that frequent the marshes, suitable management of wetland areas and reed beds is required. The latter need to be kept flooded while levels of water are regulated throughout their various stages of development by means of a cutting scheme carried out in a ‘mosaic’ fashion. If these areas are, instead, left to themselves, they tend to silt up and even turn into marshy woodland. The development of small ponds as outlined in the specific measures envisaged by the PSR (Programmi di Sviluppo Rurale – Rural Development Programmes) can contribute to the creation of new wetlands and reduce the isolated nature of those that already exist.

From The Problem to The Solution – The Life Project: Integrated Management 2020

From the start of 2016 LIPU has been involved with

the ambitious Life Project: Integrated Management 2020, which sees the Lombardy region as responsible for the management and conservation of the Natura 2000 network in that region.

The project will specifically consider the importance of reed beds in conserving biodiversity. This will include the study of populations connected to wetland areas included in the Italian Annex to the Birds Directive (Allegato I della Direttiva Uccelli), to be carried out in collaboration with the University of Studies of Pavia. Thanks to the technical support of ERSAF, (Ente Regionale per I servizi all’Agricoltura e alle Foreste) – the Lombardy body that deals with services to agriculture and forestry this will lead to the creation of a protocol for the management of reed beds, which will highlight the actions necessary to guarantee an optimum mosaic of suitable habitat for these different species, thus contributing to the conservation of these increasingly threatened birds.



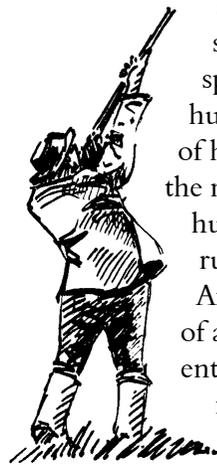
FOCUS ON HUNTING

Facing Extinction

Infringement procedures, European censures and new protection regulations have hit Italian hunting hard. But we should not be fooled by falling numbers of hunters: we need to keep up our guard. ‘Hunting is now impossible in Italy. Laws, regulations, prohibitions everywhere. They’re making it disappear.’ An almost convincing protest

from one particular hunter, voiced on the day after a new regulation came into force that (finally) obliges hunters to record on their hunting permits which animals they have just killed. His words are similar to those of hundreds of others, who have flooded the blogs of those who have a love affair with the double-barrelled shotgun. You could almost believe him.

The reality, though, is quite different. Despite the numerous victories won with regard to the activities of the hunting fraternity over recent years, in Italy hunting continues to harm nature. Protection



measures for individual species are still insufficient, the hunting seasons are too long, and several species in decline are still being hunted. There is also the question of how regulations are disregarded the many cunning tricks used by many hunters, who pretend to respect the rules while behaving otherwise. And finally, the most serious aspect of all, one which itself merits an entire treatise the actions of certain regional administrations, which often manage to bypass national regulations in order to curry favour with the hunting lobby.

All of this shows that LIPU's work to limit hunting is by no means finished. But what is the state of hunting in Italy? Is anything changing? What is happening? And how much damage is hunting doing to nature? What follows is an attempt to understand these questions, starting with a helpful picture of the situation and, above all, of the relevant legislation.

The 'accursed' Law 157

The national legislation that regulates the situation is the, by now historic, law 157 of 1992. 'This law is the foundation which each region must bear strictly in mind when, itself, regulating hunting activities, implementing measures concerning animal life, setting the incidence and duration of hunting seasons, and so on. Following closely on the heels of the abortive 1990 attempt, via a national referendum, to restrict hunting (while each question was met with a huge anti-hunting majority, insufficient voters turned out to make the votes effective), law 157 represented a turning point for Italian hunting. It also set the law for the protection of many species, whether birds or not – required shorter hunting seasons, a reduction in the numbers of species that could be hunted, and stricter relationships between hunters and the territory on which they hunted, and introduced the idea of sustainable hunting (in other words, hunting only if the conservation of the species would not be damaged) and other measures.

Many hunters cursed this law, seeing it as the beginning of the end for their 'passion'. And they were dealt a further blow when, soon after, the so-called 'Spadolini decree' finally prohibited the hunting of various small birds (Sparrows, Bramblings, Chaffinches, Starlings...) and the Black-tailed Godwit. The hunters tried to regain recoup their losses, either by resorting to dispensations (which LIPU fought, reporting these moves to the European Commission and – in the process – collecting 200,000 signatures) or via various attempts to change the national legislation. Fortunately, all failed.

A series of infringement proceedings, European convictions and new protectionist regulations have struck a further blow to Italian hunting, and today it finds itself in difficulty, numerically and culturally. And because of this, hunting practice has also become more unpleasant, with an increase in poaching incidents recorded this year.

New Protection Areas – Old Regions

One thing is certain, the 2016/17 hunting season opened last September, under the banner of the wonderful, positive news of the introduction of hunting cards – a measure for which LIPU has worked so hard: animals killed are noted on the card immediately and not at the end of the day. This may seem a mere detail but it really is a revolution, because the temptation for hunters, at the end of the day's hunting, to 'forget' to note down the animals they have killed has always been very strong, and in the past hunters thus often killed more animals than they were allowed to.

Also important is the shorter length of the hunting calendar, and especially the earlier closing date for the hunting of thrush and woodcock. Only two weeks' less hunting – but biologically immensely important as these birds start their migration towards northern Europe.

Many regional administrations have, however, favoured hunters by their actions, nullifying the idea of protected areas. This has forced LIPU, again and again, to seek recourse in the courts, as has been the case in Liguria, Lombardy and the Veneto region with regard to the incorrect use of



the hunting card (with various exceptions), and in many other regions, from Liguria (again) to Umbria and Puglia, where the periods during which hunting is permitted were extended, against the advice of the Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA). In addition, many species with a negative conservation status are still on the hunting calendar.

Shooting Under the Red Cross

In total, nineteen, half of the species that can be hunted in Italy, have an unfavourable conservation status. Any country sensitive to nature would have already implemented strong restrictions on hunting. These would include the exclusion of various species and the postponement of the opening of the season, proposed for the third Sunday in September (and even for the first Sunday of September, if one counts pre-opening). Such measures would affect mainly the populations of aquatic birds nesting in Italy, some of which (for example the Gadwall, Garganey, Pochards, and Tufted Duck) are declining in numbers, the earlier closure of the season and even the banning of lead shot.

The Future of Hunting

The continuing fall in the number of hunters, their ever higher average age, and the fact that society is more and more respecting nature continues to put Italian hunting in a difficult position and makes it a, culturally, extremely marginal activity. One hunter even went so far as to write to a hunting association, stating 'either things change or we will die out'. Do hunters really intend to change? On the one hand, certainly, there is recognition that cultural

changes demand less hunting. But on the other hand, there is an attempt to revive the 'good old days', pushing the regions and even Parliament (or the European Union) to relax the pressure on hunting. To do this, the hunting lobby employs subterfuge advancing the idea of controlling problematical animals (for example the dreadful Tuscan laws on the hunting of ungulates (hoofed mammals)), applauding the abolition of hunting controls (a very serious problem, which will need to be reconsidered) or, finally, collecting data that show that the animals are fine and nature is fine, and therefore that there really is no problem. But that problem really does exist.

The future of hunting in Italy is uncertain but it is appropriate at this moment to raise one's guard and to act with even greater decisiveness so that guns become scarcer, and are replaced by eyesight, notebooks, cameras and binoculars.

Hunting and the protection of birds: the main regulations.

BIRD DIRECTIVE. This is the basis of European legislation for the protection of wild birds and for the regulation of hunting, and affirms the principle that the practice of hunting is subordinate to the conservation of birds. The Bird Directive comprises a very important preamble, 20 articles, and 7 annexes. It deals with hunting in particular in articles 7, 8 and 9.

LAW 157/1992. This is the Italian version of the Bird Directive. It establishes, amongst other things, hunting procedures; the need for planning, measurement and sustainability; applicable seasons and birds that may be hunted, and sanctions for those who break these rules. Hated by many hunters

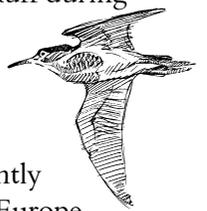
because it is considered too restrictive, in reality it is not applied in many of its aspects and is also often infringed by hunters themselves.

NATURE 2000 NETWORK DECREE. This 2007 decree of the Department for the Environment – to which LIPU made a major contribution – provides details of the conservation measures employed for the sites of the Nature 2000 network. It amends some of the restrictions provided on the subject of hunting.

ARTICLE 842 OF THE CIVIL CODE. Amongst the regulations most often discussed, this article allows hunters free access to all private property that is not enclosed by fencing. It was the object of the famous referendum of 1990, which only just obtained a quorum.

These four species should be excluded from the list of birds that may be hunted:

RUFF. The conservation status of the Ruff is particularly critical in the whole reproductive region of the Western Palearctic. Hunting the Ruff during autumn migration and overwintering would make the Italian population unsustainable.



WOODPIGEON. While this species currently has a favourable conservation status in Europe, demographic trends with regard to the nesting population in Italy are not sufficiently understood.

PTARMIGAN. The status of this species in Italy is worrying. Along the Alps the Ptarmigan is suffering the effects of environmental changes, probably linked to climate change. This is causing the reproductive

nuclei of various mountain complexes to become reduced and isolated and they are not breeding sufficiently to enable any individual, even under controlled conditions, to be taken.

SKYLARK. Distinguished by an unfavourable conservation status in Europe and a status considered negative in Italy, nesting populations in Italy have shown a downward trend of 30 – 45 per cent over the last 20 years. It also resembles species that may not be hunted, such as the Woodlark, Crested Lark, Calandra Lark and the Short-toed Lark.

Wild animals, a heritage for all

In the past, hunting was a source of sustenance. But this is no longer the case. Hunting today has nothing whatsoever to do with providing food, but is a violent and dangerous ‘pastime’ that has caused a great deal of damage to nature and to people. Wild animals, according to Italian law, are an “essential heritage of the State” and belong to the community. Why should anyone have the right to kill something that is the heritage of everyone? LIPU’s invitation to all is, as always, to abandon guns and embrace binoculars and cameras, in order to observe and cherish instead of killing.

Lead, the silent killer.

Lead kills not only in the form of ammunition but also silently, over time. The dispersion into the environment, especially when it is damp, of the lead pellets used in hunting represents a non-negligible cause of mortality for wild birds. Studies conducted under diverse environmental and territorial conditions show how lead poisoning leads to the

deaths of millions of birds.

In Italy today a partial ban is in force, which applies only to wetlands inside Natura 2000 sites and which, as a result, is only partially applied. Banning the use of lead in shot should be extended over the whole Italian territory (as has already happened for fuel, none of which now contains lead), and this should include the prohibition of both transporting and keeping cartridges containing lead, a measure that would make it possible to control such a ban.

FROM THE WORLD OF LIPU

By Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

Castelporziano opens to the public

The Presidential Estate of Castelporziano has opened its gates to visitors, offering a range of nature, heritage and archaeological walks. Guided tours are also on offer – limited to 30 people at a time and led by volunteers and trainee volunteers. LIPU is helping by providing ‘green’ volunteers from the nearby Mediterranean Habitat Centre at Ostia, and from the Oasis of Castel di Guido.

The estate is situated near Ostia some 25 kilometres from the centre of Rome, and was purchased in 1872 by the Kingdom of Italy as a hunting estate for the Savoy royal family. In 1948 it became a presidential estate and in 1977 was closed to hunting.

Extending over six thousand hectares, the estate forms part of the Natura 2000 network and has been

a State Nature Reserve since 1999. It contains most types of coastal Mediterranean ecosystem, with over 1,000 species of plants and 3,000 species of animals, alongside important historic and archaeological features. Moving inland from the sea, the land covered by the estate takes in an extensive beach, dunes, 'backdune' wetlands and Mediterranean macchia, followed by areas of holm oak, pine woods, mixed oak lowland, natural pools, cork oak, pasture and arable land.

It is particularly interesting to find oaks typical of a Mediterranean climate and oaks typical of a continental climate together in the same woods. Evergreen species include holm oak, cork oak, and Spanish oak, while deciduous species include Turkey oak, English oak and Italian oak. In the cooler, wetter areas we find other trees, such as poplars, narrow-leaved ash, maples, and white and oriental hornbeam. The less accessible areas have an abundance of ancient trees, containing at least twenty-nine monumental trees of a total of seven different species.

The estate's complex habitat supports an important population of Italian roe deer, Maremma wild boar (pure blood animals of the northern Italian strain), Italian hare, and Fallow deer, as well as Red deer and freshwater turtle. It also provides shelter to many insectivorous species of bird, along with the Golden Oriole, Tawny Owl, Barn Owl, Sparrowhawk and Black Kite, the last of which nests in large colonies.



In Naples, buses turn to LIPU

Birds need protection. The inhabitants of Naples will now be reminded of this daily thanks to the new environmentally focused livery of the city's red 'City Sightseeing' buses, presented to the public on Tuesday, 6 September in the square beside the Angevin fortress. The rear panel displays a logo publicising LIPU and designed by the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design of the Second University of Naples.

This is the second year in a row that the City Sightseeing Company has given publicity space to LIPU. The project was set up by the LIPU provincial delegation, the Sun company and Antonietta Sannino of the City Sightseeing Company, and was chosen from among 80 submissions.

Sign Up to Soil Protection

One million signatures: this is the target of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) 'People4soil' campaign, which is seeking effective community legislation to stop 'land take' (the area of land 'taken' by infrastructure itself and other facilities that necessarily accompany infrastructure) and soil degradation. In Italy the signatures will be collected as part of the 'Salvaisuolo' campaign, promoted by a task force formed from the following associations: ACLI, Coldiretti, Fondo Ambiente Italiano, LNU, Legambiente, LIPU, Slow Food, and the WWF. You can learn more and sign the on-line petition at both www.salvaisuolo.it and www.people4soil.eu.

A New Museum of Man and Nature

In the province of Salerno, a LIPU delegation led by Gennario Manzo is sponsoring two different events to help present and communicate environmental issues to the public. The Museum of Man and Nature (MUN) has opened at Tortorella, and organises exhibitions and events with a focus on science, nature, the landscape, technology, theatre, music and poetry. It celebrates the beauty and genius of man in all its forms and aims to protect, rediscover and promote the natural and cultural heritage of the region. At Caselle in Pittari in the National Park of Cilento, an environmental film competition was brought to a close with an awards ceremony, attended by LIPU president Fulvio Mamone Capria. In order to celebrate the environment, artificial nests were installed in the town centre by groups of adults and schoolchildren.

Architecture and Fauna – A Conference in Livorno

On Friday, 10 March 2017 the Old Fortress at Livorno will host a National Conference of Architecture and Fauna, organised by LIPU and the Harbour Authority of Livorno. The day will be dedicated to technical and scientific discussions regarding wild animals and the built environment. Topics include opportunities the sustainable building industry can offer to nesting raptors, swifts, sparrows, bats and other species; design strategies to avoid collisions with windows and birds being trapped in standing water and canals; and plans for coexistence with 'problematic' species such as pigeons and herring gulls.

Eurobirdwatch: Nearly Six Million Individual Records

Eurobirdwatch 2016 has been a great success. Held on 1 and 2 October in 40 European and central Asian countries, the event attracted over 25,000 participants, hosted over 1,000 events, and generated 5.8 million records, of which 100,000 were made in Italy. LIPU itself organised 49 of these events. Highlights from our country included the 150 Flamingos seen at the Margherita di Savoia salt works, an Arctic Skua at Ca' Roman near Venice, and a Red-crested Pochard at Chiarone-Massaciuccoli. Other locations recorded 299 Dunlin and the rare Audouin's Gull.



The Eurobirdwatch flagship event in Italy took place at the Ca' Roman reserve on Saturday, 1 October with a celebration of LIPU's achievements since October 2015, following an EUR 48,000 donation from the Chubb insurance company.

For the second year running LIPU held a 'Big Day' competition with four prizes. The first went unclaimed because no group managed to find a Wryneck. The second (requiring a sighting of the secret species, a Swallow) went to a combined group of Palermo and Alcamo LIPU members, who recorded over 100 Swallows. The Priolo Salt Works nature reserve was awarded the third prize, for the largest number of species recorded (59). The fourth and final prize, for the largest group, was awarded to the LIPU Ostia Mediterranean Habitat Centre (70 participants).

LIPU Guards Combat Illegal Hunting in Lazio

Seven volunteer guards from the Rome LIPU delegation, patrolling in Lazio during the days immediately prior to the opening of the hunting season, succeeded in stopping several hunters who were in violation of law 157/92 on the illegal possession of weapons. In the areas around Rome, Cerveteri and Santa Marinella, LIPU guards have reported one individual for illegal possession of firearms and another six people for the killing of prohibited species. A total of six shotguns were seized with the assistance of the Carabinieri and the Rome police.

Stop Press

As we go to press I can announce another successful annual draw which has raised just over £3000 to be devoted to the 2017 projects in Italy. The draw will be made in the next few days and the winners announced in the next Ali - thanks to all who took part and made this another success for birds in Italy.

As, with every issue, this could not have been produced without the help of my loyal band of helpers, who were: Babara Avery, Dave Brooks, Gill Hood, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

Line drawings were used by kind permission of the RSPB and copyright of the photographs used is gratefully acknowledged.



My first contact with LIPU was in 1991 when I released a Kestrel which had been treated by Mauro Caldana at Pordenone.



KESTRELS GO FREE

Three pictures which show the release of a Kestrel successfully treated by LIPU. If possible this will be at a public event to draw attention to the fact that this small falcon is so often shot. There was no event when I was visiting the Celestina reserve in 2005 so I was asked to launch the reluctant visitor – and she really didn't want to leave!

LIPU President, Fulvio Mamone Capria liberates a female Kestrel treated and restored at the Raptor Recovery Centre in Rome earlier this year.

LIPU-UK DELEGATE

David Lingard
Fernwood
Doddington Road
Whisby
Lincs
LN6 9BX



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



A Ptarmigan in its winter habitat and, on the front cover, a Great White Egret