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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



- Brabbia Woodpeckers
- Live Decoys – still hope
- Po delta ecotourism
- Lanner in Lazio

Autumn 2014

Kentish Plover at the nest but in danger of disturbance,
see p 10

photo © Roberto Sauli



Gannets bred successfully for the second year at Portovenere,
near La Spezia

photo © Ercole Buoso

“Not me – I’m exempt”

Editorial

David Lingard

It has often been said that the Treaty of Paris of 1951 was designed to take care of German industry and French farmers – and the latter have seen their interests protected since then by the Common Agricultural Policy, the CAP.

Over the years since then, scientists and environmental NGOs, including LIPU, have been warning that intensive farming practices are destroying habitats, changing ecosystems and causing large declines in wildlife numbers; and these policies are applied to the spending of €360 billion which is almost 40% of the EU budget.

The EU response, in December 2013, was to state that the environment and climate change would be core issues in the revised CAP. It would mean that 30% of direct payments to farmers would be conditional on three “greening” measures.

That these promises to “green” the policy have not been met is the conclusion of a paper, “*EU agricultural reform fails on Biodiversity*” published in *Science*. The authors reveal that the measures introduced are accompanied by conditions which will exempt over 88% of farmers in the EU and over 48% of agricultural land.

BirdLife’s Head of EU Policy, Ariel Brunner, who worked for LIPU before moving to Brussels, said, “We now have scientific evidence stating that the “new” rules are almost as bad as the old ones and are dramatically inadequate to save nature. What now?

We can only hope that Commissioner Ciolos and his successor will not ignore the new evidence. On our side, we'll keep campaigning for a review of the new CAP and, at national level, for governments to use the flexibility they're given to stop the destruction of farmland ecosystems.”

We wish the BirdLife advocates well in their task.

THE BATTLE

By Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU's Director General

Only four votes prevented the passing of the law against the capture of birds to be used as live decoys. Meanwhile, Europe agrees with us: no more captures of wild birds. LIPU's action goes on until successful.

Only four votes away from a great result: put down on paper in the Italian law, the ban on the capture of wild birds to be used as live decoys. After restless days, lobby actions and high-level institutional meetings, the joint Commissions for the Environment and the Industry of the Senate were called upon to vote.

It is 9 pm on Wednesday, 23 July. The vote is for the “bad” amendment, which would continue to allow the capture of birds and their use as live decoys. This amendment, however, contains more restrictive elements on the matter.

In the event it is rejected; the next step would be the vote for the good amendments, those to ban the

practice, those that we support. We are on the knife's edge, as the battle is fought vote by vote. There are 38 Senators and it seems that it will end in a tie.

According to the rules of the Senate, in the event of a tie (19-19), the "no" would win and therefore the bill would pass and LIPU would win. However, that is when two presidents of the board, Mr. Marinello (New Centre-Right Party) and Mr. Mucchetto (Democratic Party) whose vote is not customary, decide to cast their vote, too.

Their vote, as well as the Government's change of mind – going from partly supportive of our argument to non supportive – convinced the last few waverers.

Result: 22 – 18 for those in favour of the live decoys; only four votes away from victory. There is great disappointment but we were very close to succeeding in an endeavour that seemed impossible at the start. A few days later, on July 28, we received great news from Europe: the capture of birds as live decoys must be banned at all times. This is the first big success for LIPU and its relentless work. We will see how Italy reacts.

An extraordinary campaign

Meanwhile, we can say it: LIPU's campaign against the live decoys has been extraordinary so far. We had been talking about it for a while, considering that the battle against poaching is one to which LIPU owes its own existence. So we launched it, with the ambitious objective of erasing this horrible practice that prevents migratory birds from being free and respected, by considering them purely as instruments of deceit and death.

An engaging campaign, especially thanks to the work of many volunteers and employees but also thanks to the support of many LIPU members, Italian citizens, ambassadors from the entertainment and cultural sectors (see the letter of American writer Jonathan Franzen, of which we will report some excerpts below) and the support of MPs and Senators who have allowed us at this first attempt, almost to achieve the result we wanted. If anything, they at least forced the Parliament to pass a more restrictive law than the existing one.

The colours of freedom

Yet, as we said, this is only the beginning. After the letter from Brussels, LIPU started back its action, writing once again to the European Commission and resuming the institutional meetings to convince politicians that the use of live decoys truly is a violent and useless practice that Italy must dismiss.

The appointment with history has only been postponed. We will go on, until live decoys will only be a bad memory and until that black, lonely, falling feather that dramatically opened our campaign last year will be entirely painted with the colours of the sky and freedom.

The campaign's timeline

February-April 2013

We design and plan the campaign, setting an ambitious objective: the collection of 50,000 signatures and the proposal of a new bill for the complete ban on the use of live decoys.

Summer 2013

The campaign was launched in the press with a very poignant tag line and image: “Captured, blinded, mutilated – legally” with a black, lonely feather falling from the sky.

October -December 2013

The campaign goes live, in the squares, online, with hundreds of LIPU volunteers in action, thousands of members supporting it, important ambassadors endorsing it and culminating in the beautiful letter by Jonathan Franzen on 2 July 2014, of which we will publish a few snippets. In January 2014, 50,000 signatures were collected.

February 2014

The European Commission opens a non compliance procedure against Italy, requiring it to ban the capture of birds and their use as live decoys.

April 2014

LIPU symbolically hands in 50,000 signatures and illustrates the bill to abolish live decoys at the Chamber of Deputies. LIPU also shows an incriminating video exposing the shameful practice of live decoys to the many MPs supporting the bill. In the following weeks, we meet politicians, MPs, senators, the European Commission and the Ministry of the Environment. The LIPU campaign continues to attract more and more signatures.

May-July 2014

It is the critical point of the parliamentary battle. Many MPs and Senators support LIPU’s proposal, which is also endorsed by environmentalists and animal-rights activists. New petitions attract hundreds of thousands of signatures. After holding

**From the
President of
LIPU**

*Fulvio Mamone
Capria*

**From
Jonathan
Franzen**

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out against our pressure, the Government finally presents a Bill containing some restrictions. Then, the change of mind at the last minute.

23 July 2014

For only four votes, the Senate rejects the proposal to ban the capture of live decoys but at least it could not avoid the approval of a more restrictive measure.

28 July 2014

Great news from Brussels: LIPU is right, the capture of wild birds used as live decoys must be banned. What will Italy decide? For now, our battle continues.

Let's keep going!

To all LIPU members, volunteers and employees, to all Italian citizens, ambassadors and MPs who have taken part in this great campaign so far, thank you. Our first result has been achieved: a more restrictive measure has been approved, Europe has clearly stated that the capture of live decoys must be banned and hundreds of thousands of Italians are now aware of this shameful practice.

Continue your support. We hope that, perhaps, on the occasion of LIPU's 50th anniversary in 2015, we can also celebrate another great achievement: no more captured birds, no more live decoys.

Fulvio Mamone Capria,

“I love Italy and I love birds and I would love to see these two friends getting along more ... Last Autumn, LIPU launched a campaign to collect 50,000 signatures, asking the Italian Parliament to finally ban the use of birds as live decoys. The bill

that is now being discussed before the Parliament ... represents a great opportunity for Italy to make amend for the injustices committed to birds and to change its global image for the better ... This is the time to tell Prime minister Matteo Renzi not to miss the opportunity to make Italy a safer place for migratory birds, to put an end to a cruel hunting practice long outdated and to take the lead of Europe, even in the safeguard of its natural heritage”

*Jonathan Franzen,
Santa Cruz, California, USA, July 2014*

GANNETS AND EMOTIONS IN PORTOVENERE

By Paolo Canepa, Representative for LIPU La Spezia

The black head of a new born appears on a photo posted on Facebook. The photo belongs to Daniele Brunetti, from the Olivo di Portovenere Free Beaches Committee. On the 20th May he announced the birth of the Gannet. It is the second year running that this species of bird has successfully managed to nest in Italy – on a boat moored at Portovenere harbour. It was an exceptional event, with a happy ending when on the 10th September 2013, the new born took its first flight.

In order for LIPU La Spezia to be able to continue giving a contribution of two thousand Euros to the owner of the boat, a petition was drawn up



and the “Adottiamo le sule di Portovenere” Facebook group was created.

During the winter we thought about looking for an out of commission boat for the gannets to use, however for various reasons we did not manage to put this plan into effect. In February of this year, we saw the first signs of the Gannets trying to build a nest and on the 20th May, as previously mentioned, the happy event took place.

In anticipation of celebrating the first flight of the new born I would like to thank everyone who, by monitoring the nesting, prevented certain reckless people from getting too close to the boat, despite there being a ban in place by the local government.

It has been a real privilege not only to see the gannets but also to observe their parenting behaviour, visible from the sea shore by the naked eye. Words cannot describe how wonderful this has been.

★ ★ ★

THE KENTISH PLOVER, DEATH BY SUNBATHING

By Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research dept

Dramatic decline for the species which is leaving Italian beaches, squeezed out between seaside resorts and the tourist invasion.

In summer, the coasts and beaches of the Mediterranean are invaded by tourists. Children screaming on the sand and adults stretched out in the sun

sunbathing. Few of whom however are aware of the presence at their side of a now rare little bird. This is the Kentish Plover, a bird just a few centimetres in size which the National Red list has classified as in danger of extinction and which languishes in a very poor state of conservation. The population of the Kentish Plover, a shore bird which nests mainly along the beaches of Italy has declined by at least 50% in the last ten years. With a large part of the sub-population which nests in the wetlands of the peninsula having disappeared, the species today is restricted exclusively to coastal sites except in Sicily.

The Italian population is turning out to be, from a numerical point of view, very important. In fact it makes up more or less 11-13% of the European Union population and 6% of numbers throughout the continent, in the majority of cases also in decline in recent years. From 2005 the species has been protected by the European Community which has placed it in Appendix No. 1 of the Birds Directive as a “species of Community Interest”.

But what is the Kentish Plover? It is a small wader about 16 centimetres in length which nests along the Italian coast line. The greater part of the Italian population winters in the more temperate parts of the Mediterranean. In Italy, migration takes place between February and the beginning of May (the peak month for breeding which comes to an end in August) and then from July to November.

The Kentish Plover seems to be threatened above all through disturbance in the coastal habitat. The prime cause is through seaside tourism. Bathers, tourists and dogs which by destroying the nests themselves prevent reproduction particularly

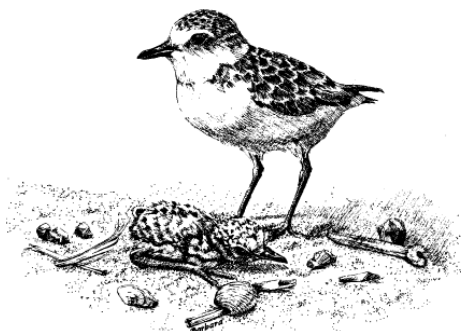
between April and June. The destruction and loss of wetlands (especially along the coast), caused by contamination, by reclamation, by a reduction in water sources, by the excessive removal of invertebrates which provide food and finally by urbanisation constitutes a further threat in the same way as the reduction in the quantity of sediment brought to the sea by the rivers.

The situation of the species hardly looks encouraging, given a general decline unrelieved by any local increases. The heavy pressure to which the nesting habitats are often subjected takes on a negative role of some importance in determining the state of health of these populations.

Because of the risk of extinction that the species has been living through in recent years, many ecological associations, both national and local including LIPU are working in some of the regions essential for the survival of the species, such as Abruzzo, Marche, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto etc. They have done much in order to safeguard the Kentish Plover although the many initiatives completed do not appear to be reversing the downward trend in the population at a national level.

This realisation has brought about the birth of The National Committee for the Conservation of the Kentish Plover whose principal objectives are to produce a national plan for the conservation of the species, to carry out an accurate and up to date census of the Italian population in all the principal coastal sectors of Italy and finally to campaign together with the local administrations for conservation initiatives for its preservation. A focus which we hope could also be made would be to the bathers and the

businesses people, the most dangerous next door neighbours of our charming shorebird.



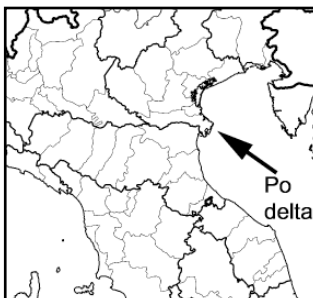
TOWARDS A BETTER QUALITY OF TOURISM

*By Claudio Celada, Director for Nature Conservation,
LIPU*

LIPU has joined the Wild Bird Destination Project which aims to attract European birdwatchers to the Po delta by offering them their facilities and a well conserved environment

The Po delta, a huge, magnificent wetland region situated across the Emilia-Romagna and Veneto provinces, is one of the most valuable areas for bird-watching in Italy, rich in wild birds with extraordinary flight and colours and environments which are as good as any other areas in Europe. But the area needs to be made better known to nature tourists in Europe. It is appropriate that LIPU has decided to support the Wild Bird Destination project at the mouth of the most important river in Italy, financed by PAC (Community Agricultural Policy) with a partnership through GAL (Local Action Group)

Delta 2000, organizer of the Birdwatching Fair which took place at Comacchio last spring, and with other activities designed for 'slow', careful tourism.



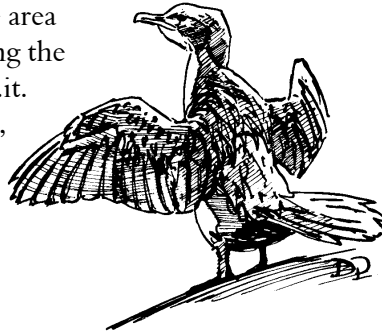
On the other hand, similar rivers, areas of fundamental importance for the conservation of birds, especially those on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, are all included in protected areas and have become important destinations for tourists interested in nature and especially in birdwatching and bird conservation.

Spain has the delta of the Guadalquivir with the National Park of Coto Doñana, and further north the Ebro delta and regional park. In France the Rhone delta is protected in the Camargue Regional Park, and finally the Danube delta in Romania is at least partly included in a very important national park. These are all areas with intense human activity, often with a precarious ecological equilibrium. In some of them, in addition, there is the persistent problem of increasing amounts of hunting and poaching. In Italy, the Po delta, straddling the Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions, still constitutes the most important wetland system for birds in our country. Partially protected by two regional parks (which should have been united into one interregional park), by several Nature 2000 sites and by some state and

regional nature reserves, the delta represents an IBA (Important Bird Area) of immense importance for LIPU.

Nevertheless one still has the impression that the area's attractiveness could be considerably improved to benefit birds, the local community and tourists. This is the objective of the Wild Bird Destination project. "The aim is to attract people interested in birdwatching from the different countries of the European Union", says Danilo Selvaggi, Director General of LIPU. "We are dealing with a discerning and demanding public which is keen to visit a high quality environment. LIPU therefore will help to make the Po delta destination more competitive in terms of environmental quality and accessibility".

These aims are attainable if factors which downgrade it can be eliminated and if birdwatching facilities and ways of regulating the flow of tourists can be put in place. The result will be satisfaction for all and especially for the birds which need undisturbed areas. A system for providing information about the presence of birds in the area will be introduced, using the web platform, Ornitho.it. Conservation of nature, landscape and birds will benefit greatly from more tourism in the Po delta.



THE EGG AND THE BICYCLE

By Ugo Faralli, LIPU Reserves Manager

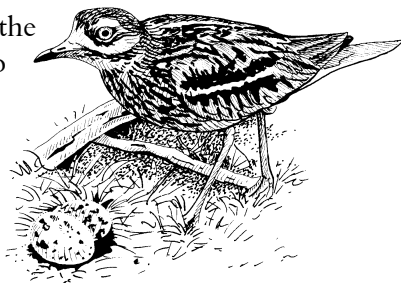
From Egyptian Vultures to Black Kites.

The outcome of the avian “Giro d’Italia” (cycling race) among the LIPU nature reserves. There are important confirmations of success but also bad news from the breeding season, such as Pygmy Cormorants at Cave Gaggio.

Cyclists do it on their bikes, birds on their wings. Athletes’ muscles push on the pedals whilst birds circle in the sky, and whilst the first move from stage to stage and from country to country, the latter stop in our reserves, where they are carefully monitored. This translates to monitoring birds, not only during the breeding season, but also on either side of it, in autumn and winter, to maintain and improve the habitat of those areas where Little Bitterns, Little Terns and Reed Warblers will nest. Work by LIPU members, therefore, is focused on reedbeds and woodland areas, on building rafts or providing artificial nests to present birds with the best possible conditions to breed.

The 2014 breeding season has confirmed our expectations, despite ups and downs, with successes, but also, unfortunately, with some ‘disappointments’. The highest step on the podium, to continue the cycling metaphor, is occupied by the Egyptian Vultures in the LIPU reserve, Gravina di Laterza where a star pair, once again, successfully fledged a chick in the ravine near Taranto. Only 500 metres away another rare species, the Black Stork, fledged four chicks: a ‘new entry’ among the successes for

LIPU reserves. The list of newcomers also included Black Woodpeckers with three fledged young in the Palude Brabbia, the two pairs of Stock Dove in the Oasi Casacalenda in the Molise region, and the Stone Curlew in the Saline di Priolo.



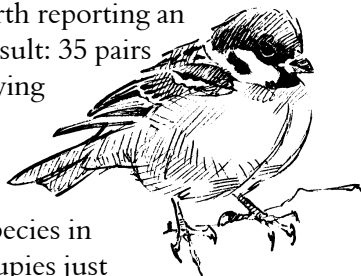
Unfortunately, some species saw a decline in the number of breeding pairs, with the most staggering result belonging to the Pygmy Cormorant in the Cave Gaggio Nature Reserve, where breeding pairs went from 200 to five! Great Reed Warblers in reedbeds, and doves in woodland LIPU reserves also declined significantly.

The same situation was noted for Red-backed Shrikes at Bianello and Little Bitterns at Brabbia and Santa Luce. We just have to wait and see the development of these worrying results, but the aim is to manage the habitat at Cave Gaggio to help the little cormorants rebuild a colony of nationally-important size, with the hard work of the Venetian LIPU volunteers, and improve the other LIPU reserves that show similar problems.

But there is more. The long list of species that settled in LIPU reserves continues with five churring Nightjar males and a pair of Oystercatchers at Ca' Roman. At the Riserva Naturale Paludi Ostiglia there were about 50 pairs of Purple Herons and six territories of Marsh Harrier. Another reserve, Castel di Guido, offered us 11 pairs of Black Kite and two pairs of Short-toed Snake Eagle. More successes

for birds of prey were recorded at Oasi Gravina di Laterza: as well as the aforementioned Egyptian Vulture, species that delighted us with their presence included Lanner Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, and tens of pairs of Lesser Kestrel which used the roofs of Laterza to nest and the LIPU reserve to hunt large insects.

Rafts at the Nature Reserve in Torrile helped 35 pairs of Black-winged Stilt, and the heronry is now composed of 300 nests of Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Little Egret and Night Heron, as well as two pairs of Spoonbill. It is also worth reporting an usual and wonderful result: 35 pairs of Tree Sparrow occupying as many nest boxes at the Oasi Celestina, possibly the highest concentration of this species in Italy, as the reserve occupies just over 10 hectares. Finally, the Saline di Priolo was home to 62 pairs of Black-winged Stilt, 79 pairs of Little Tern and two pairs of Purple Swamphen.



P.S. At the moment of going to press (in Italy), there are over 100 pairs of Eleonora's Falcon on eggs or with hatched chicks at the Oasi Carloforte, while Shags breeding in the Sardinian reserve already completed the reproductive cycle between February and March. Apparently at Carloforte we are the firsts and last.

★ ★ ★

SPRING ALIVE, MORE THAN 176 THOUSAND OBSERVATIONS

By Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

The 2014 Season Comes to an End

The Swallow is always the star of the show and thousands of young people and students are its fans. There has been a lot of enthusiasm for BirdLife International's Spring Alive Project, which is devoted to migration. From February to June www.springalive.net collected data regarding the first observations of migratory birds and created a spring map of Europe online. There were just over 176 thousand observations in 2014 and half of these were the symbol of an excellent spring: the swallow.



Then there was the Common Swift, the Cuckoo, the Bee eater and the White Stork. Thirty seven countries in Europe were involved and a further fifteen from the Middle East and Africa have joined in and will carry out their observations in the next few weeks and months, when the migratory birds will return to the South.

Russia came first with the largest number of sightings, followed by Italy with more than 66,000 sightings in total. This was then followed by Ireland, Belarus and the Czech Republic.

Livia Speranza, from the LIPU Education and

Training Section explains that, “The most fascinating aspect of Spring Alive is that it is a scientific project that normal people, especially school children, can participate in. Being able to contribute to research on migratory birds makes people feel part of something important and at the same time it makes them aware of topics of great importance such as biodiversity conservation and climate change”.

NEW BIRD WATCHING AND NATURE COURSES IN OCTOBER

A new proposal has been put forward by the LIPU Urban Ecological Sector. The second Nature and Bird watching course, organized by Unicoop Firenze and LIPU, will run from the 24th October until the 5th December. This will allow people to become familiar with, study and protect nature and birds in the city. The course will take place in Florence and will consist of three sessions (lessons and laboratory work) on the 24th October, 14th November and the 5th December.

From the 8th to the 25th October in Pisa (Ghezzano) the Bird Watching in Winter course will run. There will be classroom based lessons, an optional excursion to the Island of Capri and lessons in the Botanical Gardens of Pisa. In Livorno, between the 9th and the 19th October, LIPU is offering a bird watching and ornithology course, consisting of three sessions and an optional excursion to the Island of Capri. For further details, prices and enrolment please contact: marco.dinetti@lipu.it or telephone: (+39) 347 035640.

THE BLACK KITE COMES HOME

It flew thousands of kilometres to arrive in Rome but then the welcome that it received was not a triumphant one. A Black Kite that had been attacked by a group of crows was found in a bad state. After being cared for, for a few weeks at the LIPU Centro Recupero di Roma the bird was released into the LIPU Castel di Guido Oasis, near Rome, where for a long time there has lived a colony of black kites. This time the welcome was a warm one. In fact, as soon as the bird was released another Black Kite approached it and the two perched on a tree and then took off together.



SUCCESS FOR THE PROJECT IN CALABRIA

The White Stork

Fifty six White Storks were born between the provinces of Cosenza and Crotona, which is eleven more than the previous year. The end of the breeding season for the White Stork has concluded

successfully, with 18 couples sighted, which is two more than in 2013. This year the Sibari Plain has confirmed Calabria as the most suitable area in Italy for this species of bird, with 11 nesting couples, while the Crati Valley confirmed 5 nesting couples and 2 in the Neto Valley.

This demanding work began in 2003 by LIPU Rende when a simple idea started the White Stork project. The project supports the return of this species in Calabria through the use of artificial nests, a type of large circular wooden platform. The idea seems to have really worked because currently there are 18 pairs present in the region, 17 of which nest on the artificial platform and over 280 storks born in Calabria since 2003 to the present day, almost all of them in the artificial nests.

EUROBIRDWATCH 4 AND 5 OCTOBER

By Andrea Mazza

Millions of birds flying overhead directly towards Africa. On Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 October, LIPU oases and reserves, and many volunteers from our sections, will guide the public into areas of greater ornithological interest to admire the passage of migratory birds during Eurobirdwatch, a Europe-wide event, coordinated this year by Natur& mwelt (BirdLife Luxembourg). Thirty five other partner associations of BirdLife Europe will take part in this event. During the event everyone, big or small, with the aid of LIPU experts, will be able to participate in carrying out a large census of migrating birds. The programme of events will be published on the LIPU website www.lipu.it. The Eurobirdwatch site is: www.eurobirdwatch.eu

SOS LANNER FALCON

By wildlife photographer Julius Ielardi

They arrived well after I did. The long-drawn cackling call, repeated twice, and then again more faintly. Up until that moment the rock face had seemed lifeless. Dawn lit the wood, fields and rocks; first tinged in red, then flooded with light.

The Lanners started the day by mating, an acrobatic union on an overhanging ledge, more a momentary truce between two ruthless aerial predators than an act of love. A brief crescendo of wild cries and then even the echo died away. The male landed near me, as a gust of wind blew part of my camouflage away. This accident cost me twenty minutes of pain, forced into total stillness to avoid betraying my presence, legs doubled, a spike of limestone in my back.

Nature photography makes such demands. There is physical effort: hours of waiting and contorting in the most ridiculous positions, staring into a narrow sliver of sky, waiting for that flying bullet. Frame first with the 500mm lens, then focus, press the shutter and cross your fingers.

Eleven hours of lying in wait, from dawn to dusk, and you too would be ready for bed rather than hitting the road. Thousands of careful steps just to photograph these marvellous creatures, without disturbing them, without making a mistake.

For some years now I have been following my old passion, lying dormant for far too long. The Lanner falcon. Over twenty years ago I got it into my head to study them for my thesis in natural science, up in

the mountains of Tolfa, can you imagine! Today this extraordinary falcon, whose biology is still in some respects little known, is the rarest raptor in Lazio, and one of the rarest in Italy and Europe.

Its ecological needs and its extremely elusive behaviour make it a ghost. The Lanner is less fussy than the Peregrine when choosing a rock face for its nest. It is happy with very little: a sandstone escarpment, a rock cleft between fields. But the Peregrine, no. It is a creature in love with the vertical dimension, wanting at all costs some tens of metres of drop beneath its own ledge. Having visited many breeding sites of Lanner – besides the well-known parameters such as aspect (mainly south or south-east), and height (mainly middle to low) – I have been struck by the absence of projecting rocks. In front of its nest, our Lanner (*Falco biarmicus*) wants only one thing: space. Not for them the opposing side of a narrow ravine or the too-near edge of a disused mine. In this, and not only in this, it proves to be a wiser bird than the Peregrine.

The Lanner's problem lies elsewhere. By dismissing the most spectacular sites from the scenic point of view, such as vertiginous rock faces, in favour of those at the rural edge, it remains outside protected areas; outside the parks. It is no coincidence that in Lazio the breeding sites, some 5 to 7, all lie outside protected areas, or at best (and then in one case only) just on the edge. The same happens more-or-less in Tuscany, and probably also in Molise, Abruzzo, Sicily and elsewhere.

In short the Lanner represents a rural Mediterranean world, of extensive cultivation, isolated farmhouses, lightly wooded areas and wild hedges. A world on its

way to extinction. This is why it is a symbolic species, and why I have developed such a passion for it. We can each contribute in our own ways, me through my job as a communicator, to reversing the decline as much as possible. A decline which has lately grown more marked.

There is an SOS to send. Let's hope we are in time.

Lanner Falcon - a European Rarity

Lanners are rare in Europe, with only 300 pairs. They are more common and more widely spread in Africa, the Near and Middle East. In Italy *Falco biarmicus* can only be found along the Apennines as the subspecies *Falco biarmicus feldeggi*, with a population of 140 - 160 pairs. There is also a large presence in Sicily, where the species is threatened by nest robbery for falconry.

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A NEW FOCUS ON HOMES FOR SWIFTS IN ITALY

Edward Mayer, Swift Conservation UK

Last year saw the launch of a major new initiative to help conserve nest places for members of the Swift family in Italy. Here in the UK only the Common Swift (*Apus apus* – Rondone comune in Italian) breeds but in Italy they are lucky to have the Alpine Swift (*Tachymarpis (Apus) melba* – Rondone maggiore) and the Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus* – Rondone pallido) also breeding. All of them are dependent on buildings for their nest holes and, just like in the UK, the holes and crevices they need are being destroyed through rebuilding, restoration,

renovation and the installing of insulation. Swift enthusiasts across Italy are determined to do something about it and have come together in an initiative called Gruppo Rondoni



Italia, a network of groups and initiatives aimed at conserving nest places for the family of Swifts.

A “Festival dei Rondoni” was held in the Natural History Museum in Carmagnola in Piedmont on 28th June 2014, where representatives from Swift Conservation and other international organisations spoke about efforts in their own countries to help Swifts, and Italian enthusiasts presented recent research and data analysis on Swifts and Swift colonies. There were also examples of successful projects preserving historic Swift colonies. The aim of the new organisation is to develop a strategy for combating the destruction of nest sites through the development and dissemination of best practice and influencing opinion makers such as local government planning authorities, and architects. They have already produced a useful guide for architects to show them how to successfully install Swift “bricks” and nest boxes, and they have developed a concept of “Monumenti Vivi” (living monuments) to try and promote the preservation of historical colonies of Swifts that nest in the scaffold pole holes left in situ by the builders of cathedrals, churches and palaces in Italy, where Swifts have nested for hundreds of years. These holes are now being filled in during restoration because of fear of feral pigeons using them, but they can be easily adapted to preserve the holes for Swifts while eliminating pigeons. This has

been successfully done in the medieval bell tower of the Cathedral of Modena and in a more recent bell tower at Melegnano (Lombardy).

The Swift Festival in Carmagnola was used as a stimulus for the organisation of a number of well attended “Swift Walks” on the evening of the 28th June, in 10 cities and villages of central northern Italy including Livorno, Bologna, Guiglia (Modena), Parma, Piacenza, Locarno (Swiss), Boltiere (Bergamo) Milan and Trieste, modelled on the “Bat Walks” which are now common in the UK. The first Swift Walks were tested in 2013 in Turin, where the Museum of Palazzo Madama adopted the huge Pallid Swifts colony and now offers this to the public as one of the points of interest of the Palazzo. Hopefully the Swifts Walk of 2014 to the Palazzo Farnese in Piacenza will have the same result.

When you are next travelling in Italy please do take the time to enjoy the fantastic flying displays which the Swifts put on during their breeding period in Europe. Helpful information about “living monuments”, famous historic sites with dramatic Swift colonies, accredited by the Gruppo Rondoni, will be on line next month (August 2014) at .

The Common Swifts reach Italy from Africa in late April and they will be gone again by early July, but while they are there they fill the skies with drama and their characteristic screaming displays in the early morning and evening. Pallids and Alpines stay much longer, putting on some truly fantastic low-level aerobatic displays, so do visit Italy to see more Swifts, and bigger Swifts, than you can ever see here in the UK!

★ ★ ★

A KARATE MOVE THAT HELPS LIPU

Walking barefoot on the grass, wearing karate-gi and belt. Observing nature and the birds, and helping LIPU. It was a day to remember on May 25, at the LIPU Oasis of Castel di Guido, near Rome.

Thanks to a joint initiative between the LIPU Recovery Centre of Rome, and in particular its manageress, Francesca Manzia who holds a II Dan black belt, and the schools of the Italian Federation of Karate, led by master Vitaliano Morandi (VII Dan), no less than 90 athletes, including 70 children, had a karate training session on the lawns of the Oasis.

This was followed by a guided tour and the release of a Buzzard which had been cured at the Rome Recovery Centre. Donations collected during the day (900 Euro) were allocated to the care of wild animals admitted to the LIPU Centre and reconstruction of the Oasis Visitor Centre at Castel di Guido, destroyed by arson in January.

Karateka around the world unite to help nature!

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

BUILDING OF A HIGHWAY IN A PROTECTED AREA HAS BEEN STOPPED

The Serengeti National Park Is Saved

The East African Court of Justice has stopped construction of a road that would have crossed the National Serengeti Park in the north of Tanzania.

According to the Court, the project is illegal and against regional laws and international conventions. The case was raised by ANAW (African Network on Animal Welfare) in December 2010.

Great concern was also expressed by the World Heritage Committee regarding the irreversible damage that the infrastructure could have caused to “something of notable universal value” due to the fact that this area is also an IBA (Important Bird Area). Chris Magin who is the Senior Partner Development Officer for the RSPB, said “We applaud this decision and we encourage the government to prioritise strengthening the touristic and ecological value of the Serengeti National Park which is an global, ecological gem.

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

Our Annual Draw - 2014

Please buy tickets in our annual draw. We've kept it as a simple as possible - three attractive cash prizes and, for those who don't win, the knowledge that you are helping LIPU's work for the birds in Italy.

The draw consistently raises about £2000 - if just a few more people take part we could make that a lot more!

We are aware that draws like this are not everyone's cup of tea and tickets are not sent to those who have told me not to do so.

Sackcloth and ashes department

There is no prize this year for spotting my “deliberate mistake” - when I was updating the design for the printers I failed to change the dates on the body of the ticket - *mea culpa*. Don't let this put you off – all tickets received will go in this year's draw, I promise!

★ ★ ★

LIPU-UK, as I'm sure you know, is a registered charity and is governed by a board of trustees who are responsible for the long-term strategy and the maintenance of standards in the day to day operation of the group.

There is no fixed limit to the number of trustees on the board and we are always looking for fresh blood to bring other perspectives to the work; and it would be wonderful if that fresh blood could reduce our present average age of almost 70!

If you might be interested in taking a part in the running of the charity please drop me a line for further information with no commitment on your part.

★ ★ ★

I am grateful to our team of translators who have achieved their customary high standard: **Barbara Avery, Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Giusy Fazzina, Caterina Paone and John Walder.**

Line drawings are used by courtesy of the RSPB except that of the Kentish Plover which is the work of Barbara Bacci. Photographs are the copyright of the named photographers.

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A Lanner about to land in the mountains of Lazio.
see p 23

photo © Julius Ielardi



White Storks are succeeding in Calabria see p21

photo © David Lingard

The Po delta

Brackish lagoons in the Valli di Comacchio (the fish basins of Comacchio) are prime bird watching sites deserving more visitors.

photo © Andrea Mazza

