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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

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Summer 2014

Honey Buzzard
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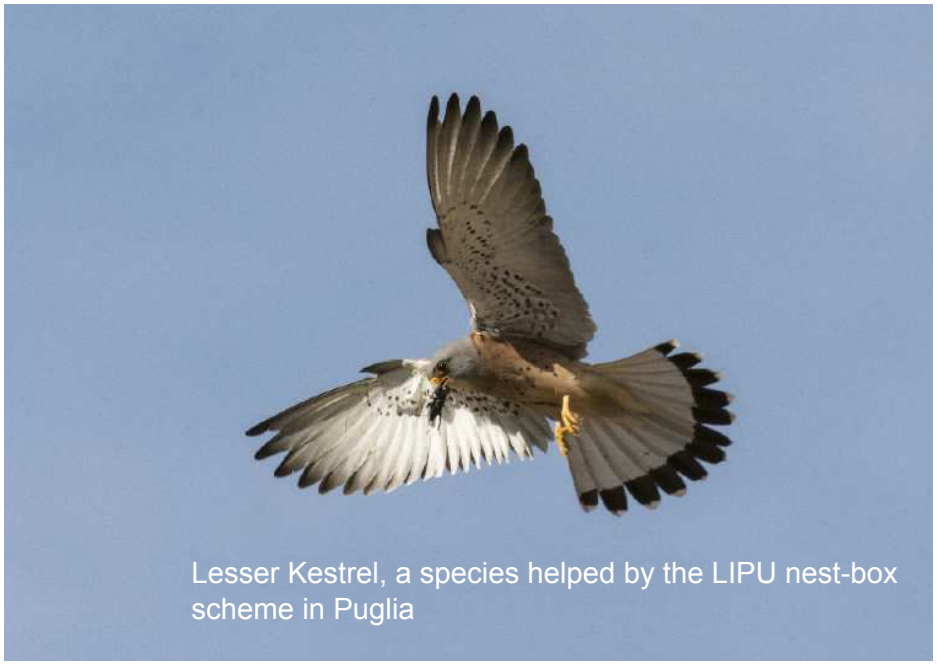

Lesser Kestrel, a species helped by the LIPU nest-box scheme in Puglia

Editorial

David Lingard

European vultures under threat

How does one write critically about the EU without being branded a rabid Eurosceptic? Yes, I am a sceptic but, I hope, not yet rabid.

The very highly paid staff of the European Commission churn out directive after directive to justify their positions but, so often, fail to do this in a "joined-up" manner.

Some years ago, one section banned farmers from leaving carcases where they fell on pain of some terrible penalty and, not long after, Griffon Vultures were seen in the Netherlands searching for food. After some discussion between departments common sense prevailed and the vultures could, once again, thrive and clear away the dead livestock.

Now we have another example of not looking at the "big picture" – who has not been alarmed by the catastrophic decline of vultures in India and Pakistan? It did not take long for the cause to be identified without any doubt at all - it was use of diclofenac on the cattle of the region. India, to its credit, banned the use of the drug as soon as the facts were known and, soon after, another drug was found which offered the same benefits for farm animals but which poses no threat to vultures and eagles.

In March it was announced that the old drug, diclofenac, has been authorised for veterinary use in Europe and is in production with the potential to ravage this region's scavenging raptors.

From the President of LIPU

Fulvio Mamone Capria

I have just one question for the bureaucrats of Brussels - why did you not ban the veterinary use of this drug years ago?

More can be seen on the Birdlife website at: http://www.birdlife.org.uk/europe-and-central-asia/news/vulture-killing-drug-now-available-eu-market

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THE MOST AWAITED CHANGE

Birds are born to fly in the sky and to travel thousands of miles, following their instinct, to reproduce and renew nature's miracle. I have always felt very sad seeing birds caged, where those little creatures are restless, flap their wings against the cage trying desperately to be free and hurting their beak and wings, sometimes severely, in the process. A horrible spectacle. To force them to live in such sad and unhealthy condition is a terrible sin, the worst that humans can inflict on them. When we think that in Italy there is a law that allows the trapping of some wild species and the subsequently confinement in cells made of wood and steel where, for months, they will no longer see daylight it is clear that we find ourselves in front of a 'legalised' barbaric practice. With the campaign No ai richiami vivi ("No to live lures") LIPU exposes this abuse. On 8 April we sent more than 50,000 signatures to some MPs and started an bureaucratic movement, as well as proposing to MP a change in the law, backed up by testimonials, associations and citizens, which would remove this horrible practice from the Italian Law. Despite the difficulties encountered due to the uncertain political scene, there is an important and positive piece of news: the Minister for the Environment and the Rapporteur (liaison officer) of the European Law 2013 have publicly condemned live decoys. This keeps us optimistic about the possible outcome of this difficult battle of civility.

In the last few months we have also been involved in the approval of the new LIPU Strategies for nature conservation. In beautiful Comacchio, gateway to the Po Delta National Park, the 2014 Annual General Meeting has initiated the new Strategy which will lead us until 2020, involving a renewed action on ecological education and conservation of birds and their natural habitats. The Budget was also agreed and it confirmed the healthy state and excellent management of LIPU finances, thanks to our professionalism, your ever-present support as Members and a great mission: defend Nature!

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EUROPE – THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

by Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU's Director General

Relaunching the project of a unified continent, which promotes and protects nature

According to the myth, at the origins of the European continent there was an eagle. It is said that Zeus, father of gods, saw a young woman called Europa picking flowers with her friends in a field, by a beach on the Phoenician coast. The grace and the beauty of Europa struck the god, who immediately fell in love with her. Changing himself into a white bull, Zeus went closer to the girl, let her caress him and mount his back then suddenly rode away into the sea carrying her with him. Once kidnapped,

Europa was taken to the island of Crete, in a willow forest, where Zeus was transformed into an eagle and mated with her, thus giving birth to the European descent.

The myth says many things; among them, some are still embedded in the European culture: Europa's love for beauty and nature (the picking of the flowers); the slyness and the power – and its abuse even – displayed by Zeus; the travel from the East to the West; the merging of cultures and horizons and finally politics, because Zeus and Europa's children would spread along the coasts of the continent to engage, not always successfully, in the wise administration of the territory.

Centuries later, myths overcome, Europe has evolved through wars, progress, violence, science, art, peace and civilisation until being a stone's throw from the dream that, at least in part, was behind the myth of that blossoming beach. That is certainly behind the actions of the many forefathers of the European project: a fruitful continent, the harmony of different people who are united by the common desire of living together. A dream that, despite all, risks to dim, if not even crash, in light of the growing anti-European feelings that pervade the continent. Now more than ever the European project is in jeopardy. And this is not good news for nature.

SOS Nature

The European Union, with its directives, is today the most important tool for the conservation of the European and Italian biodiversity. Moreover, we often consider Europe as the last bulwark to protect our natural heritage, launching real SOSs

to save species and habitats that are threatened with destruction. Just as an example, the most recent non-compliance procedure against Italy dates back to a few weeks ago and addresses a problem that LIPU knows well and tries to fight: the capture of small migratory birds and their use as singing decoys. If we manage to stop this practice and delete such a shame from Italian history, it will be thanks to LIPU's tireless efforts in collecting tens of thousands of signatures, mobilising members, volunteers and endorsees. But also because Europe would have implemented its laws to safeguard biodiversity, more specifically art. 8 of the Birds Directive which bans wild birds trapping. In other words, the joint action of people, society and Europe.

Also, thanks to the joint action of LIPU and the Community directives (that have determined two non-compliance procedures), Special Protection Areas (SPA) have been identified. These are a pillar of the Natura 2000 network, as they are fundamental for the conservation of wild birds and their most important habitats. Such joint action has also led to some measures aimed at well preserving these areas. Furthermore, under LIPU's valuable influence once again, Europe could prevent the destruction of many Natura 2000 network sites, which means that the Environmental Impact Assessment -necessary to understand whether and how a project affects nature in those areas- would be employed better by the local administrations, thus ceasing to be a simple bureaucratic device that can be cheated when and how one wishes.

Without LIPU none of this would have been possible or rather not in the ways and the time frame in which they were achieved. Also crucial were the

successfully implemented EU laws and sometimes harsh interventions, including the condemnations by the Court of Justice.

The Environmental Deficit

Of the 114 EU non-compliance procedures against Italy, which range from tax system to transportation, from health to justice, and which place Italy at the bottom as far as European regulations are concerned, 21 concern the environment. Water, air pollution, waste management, birds protection and conservation of biodiversity. A negative record that could cost Italy tens of millions of Euros in sanctions but that is also a warning sign of the strong deficit of environmental attention in the country at a national and perhaps even more at a European level. The question to ask is the following then: why do we need to wait on the so-called "Brussels bureaucracy" to protect treasures such as water and air quality or protect natural marvels that are so close and so important to us? Why can't we ourselves respect and cherish such valuable treasures?

Undoubtedly, Italian politicians, perhaps more than the rest of society, still have an old, distorted perception of nature, which is seen like a stranger that stops economic development rather than being considered as a great opportunity to change the system and improve our lives, making them more fulfilled and satisfying. It is not by chance that the new LIPU's strategic programme 2015-2020 was called "La Natura salverà l'Italia" (Nature Will Save Italy). How much could we gain, in terms of material and non-material wealth, from improved agriculture, from a green economy, from a wiser use of natural resources and ecosystem services,

from the true enhancement of the territory with its countless scenic, cultural and artistic riches or else from ecotourism which is perhaps the most underdeveloped sector in Italy? In other words, wouldn't we live better if nature were at the centre of a sensible safeguard project and investment instead of being marginalised or even destroyed? In that case we would depend less on Brussels, its bureaucracy and its directives. But for now, it is not like that. Europe with its directives, conventions, strategies and non-compliance procedures is absolutely necessary.

A Project for Everyone

However, it must be said that Europe is not free of guilt. Neither with respect to its general programme, which is more and more squashed by the obscure arguments of the economic and financial policies, nor, in turn, with respect to the way this programme is perceived. Both issues underpin much anti-European sentiment. Was this, perhaps, the spirit behind its origins, the objective of the European dream? If it is true that Europe was born as a gradual union of technical domains -in 1950 the European Coal and Steel Community and in 1957 the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community, it is also true that the main European horizontal objective is that of a great union of people who would celebrate the fundamental values of humankind – knowledge, peace, dialogue, environment – and promote them around the world. Furthermore, the European project has an important objective which needs to be highlighted: translating big global changes into benefits for the citizens. Facing cultural, technological and environmental challenges and making them agents of positive change for the

society. It is an objective that needs to be redefined and applied coherently to all the most important fields of action. Let's think, for example, about agriculture and the many effects it has in our lives. What do global agricultural policies suggest? That intensive farming is unsustainable and is doomed to fail; that it is good for corporate organisations and bad for citizens, small farmers and for the biodiversity. Yet, Europe has failed once again in this matter by approving a more than disappointing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) a few months ago.

Therefore, relaunching the European project is a vital necessity. To make the dream come true, Europe must find again a warm soul and a beating heart especially in those values that are more long-lasting than figures and financial alchemies. It is also why LIPU, together with BirdLife, has asked European MPs for a serious commitment in matters that are dear to our hearts, so that they could take values such as nature, sustainability and a healthy environment to Brussels and Strasbourg. So that they could defend and strengthen the Birds and Habitat Directives, ask for an effective implementation of the Strategy on Biological Diversity and promote a better Europe that would know how to be the daughter of the forefathers of philosophy, politics, science and how to be the sister of culture, nature and biodiversity. We can still make this happen, if we really want to.

The next few years will be delicate for the European project. But if someone had to kidnap Europa again, the young Europa who picks flowers on the beach, may that not be with the slyness at the origins of the story, but with the courage to change and build a common future of authentic wellbeing for everyone.

THE WIND FROM THE STRAIT

by Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research

The migration of predatory birds' project has turned 10 years old: 25 species have been observed and 30,000 migrate annually. For the next few years to come there are new and ambitious goals to be achieved.

"Thousands of them are flying over our heads. Today we have counted almost 5 thousand. It is a sight to behold". The sun is going down over the Strait of Messina. It is the 8th May 2014 and Andrea and Michele are finalising the Strait of Messina report. This had been a historic day for the raptor migration across the Strait. Almost 5,000 Honey Buzzards have crossed the sea that separates Messina from Reggio Calabria, as well as dozens of small Eagles, Black Kites, Hawks, Pallid Harriers and a rare Egyptian Vulture. Now they are heading for the North, to nest along the Italian peninsula and the rest of Europe.

Every year, thanks to funding by LIPU-UK, a network of people observes the migration of more than 30 thousand birds of prey. It is called Progetto Rapaci Migratori (the Migratory Birds of Prey Project and was started 10 years ago. It focuses on the spring migration of these extraordinary birds along the islands and the main bottle necks of the Sicilian Channel: from the Strait of Messina to Pantelleria and from the Panarea Marettimo up to Ustica. The observation period usually takes place between the 20th April and the 20th May and is concurrent with the anti-poaching campaign organised by LIPU on the Calabrian side of the Strait of Messina. This year, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary, the stations

on the Strait of Messina have joined forces and they are manned for a longer period, from the 10th March until the 20th May; while in Panarea and Ustica the observations have continued from the 10th March until 20th April.

The project has two main objectives. The first is related to scientific and technical data on the route that the birds take, such as the consistency of migration and the analysis of the influence of the wind velocity on spring migration, particularly among the Peloritan mountains.

The second objective is conservation. This involves predicting when poaching will happen and alerting the necessary people when required. Ornithologists, who are located around various sites, inform the coordinator on the Calabrian side of the Strait where the birds of prey swoop down after passing the stretch of sea that separates Sicily from Calabria.

In the 10 years that the project has been running, 25 species of birds of prey have been observed. These include buzzards, which are the main species that the project focuses on, Marsh Harriers, Black Kites, Red-Footed Falcons, Hobbies, Harriers and Pale Harriers.

Due to the amount of data collected so far, in the next 5 years, LIPU aims to analyse the weather data in different sites between 2006 and 2013 in order to obtain a map of prevailing winds in the central Mediterranean and each site during peak days. LIPU also plans to check for any inconsistencies with the prevailing winds during the whole period.

Finally, there is the plan to build a model to predict prevailing winds in the coming decades so as to

predict the routes used by the Honey Buzzard. The stations along the Strait of Messina and the Peloritans will become two permanent ones (Diannamare and Ciccia Mountain). Also, already having sufficient knowledge about the passage of the migratory birds along the Tyrrhenian Coast and with relation to the southerly winds, it will be very interesting to find out about the migration of the hawks in this area.

In summary, detailed work will give us important knowledge that will allow us to protect these birds of prey. Andrea and Michele, like all those who spend spring at the observation, will have a peaceful night. On waking up they will start counting again. Nature is safe in their hands.

Forty thousand migratory birds have been observed this year by the project. As usual, the lion's share was the Honey Buzzard, with almost 30 thousand birds counted. This was followed by more than 6300 Marsh Harriers and more than 1400 Black Kites. The Cranes, on the other hand, do not like the Strait of Messina and all 447 of them passed through Ustica.

	Ustica	Panarea	Messina	Total
Marsh Harrier	685	646	5062	6393
Black Kite	93	176	1141	1410
Honey Buzzard	2	0	29284	29286
Crane	445	2	0	447

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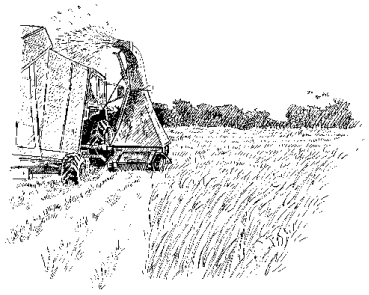
ALL TALK AND NO WALK

by Patrizia Rossi, head of Agriculture, LIPU

Having failed to make parts of the CAP greener, hopes for making agriculture more sustainable rest on Rural Development schemes. But the deadline is nearing fast.

Rural development schemes play a fundamental role in agricultural programmes, promoting sustainable farming and balanced economic development of rural communities. The recent review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) presented an extraordinary chance to strengthen the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for the benefit of nature and biodiversity alike. LIPU, together with BirdLife Europe, proposed that the funds from the so-called 'Pillar I' of the CAP, which for 50 years has been the engine for environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, should instead be redirected to rural development schemes. And the result? In spite of 'greening' (new eco-payments to encourage agricultural practices which benefit the environment), the newly-reformed CAP has watered down the original proposals, and cemented the previous framework which totally disregards all aims of diversification, environmental sustainability, and multi-functionality of the farming industry. It continues to uphold an agricultural model which is clearly in crisis, and can no longer continue from either an environmental or an economic point of view.



Now, having thrown away the unprecedented opportunity of reforming Pillar I of the CAP, we must seize the chance offered by rural development schemes at the national level. Plans must be finalised by the end of this year, with a budget allocated to Italy by the European Union of over 9 billion Euros. Running to a third of the overall CAP budget in Italy, funds will be distributed among the 19 regions and two autonomous provinces. The RDP gives funds to farmers in exchange for commitments or schemes that meet the following three objectives: increased agricultural competitiveness; sustainable management of natural resources, climate adaptation and mitigation; balanced economic development of rural communities.

So, although the RDP has not been reinforced as part of CAP reform, hope is not lost. There is still time for individual governments to improve the 2014 - 2020 programme at the national level. LIPU continues to work so that the whole of Italy can benefit, giving nature a secure and protected space. In short, a 'home'.

Is the RDP important for nature? Examining the case of Emilia-Romagna leaves no room for doubt. Between 1995 and 2008, the region adopted specific measures for 9,500 hectares of land, creating hedges, pools, shrubby fields and coppices, and for an additional 4,500 hectares of wetland. The result has greatly helped biodiversity which has often struggled in the vast ecological desert of the Po valley. LIPU hopes both that the experiment will continue, and spread into other regions.

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STILL SHOOTING ON THE STRAIT
DIARY OF THE CAMP

"The weather has improved and the pace of migration is increasing. Some hawks arrived in the evening and were shot at by poachers: we heard three shots clearly. We soon arrived on the scene , but the three individuals had vanished ." LIPU volunteers engaged in anti-poaching patrols on the Calabrian side of the Messina Strait said that April 30 was one of the most dramatic days. The poachers, although many fewer than in the past, are still there and they still want to shoot Honey Buzzards.

On May 3 : " We headed to Calanna , a small village at the foot of the Aspromonte, where we have reported gunfire ."

On May 10, we read: "Today has seen the passage of nearly 1,300 falcons. Unfortunately, we heard gunshots and we immediately notified the Forestry Corps ."

The camp, which was held from 26 April to 12 May which takes place thanks to the English section of LIPU, LIPU-UK, this year celebrated 30 years since the first such event. It was back in 1984 , when a handful of volunteers began watching over the Strait of Messina, where every year there had been a terrible massacre of Honey Buzzards. The results obtained in the fields in three decades have been remarkable: the numbers of hawks killed has decreased dramatically though poaching still persists. During this year's expedition, supported as always by the Migratory Birds of Prey Project, volunteers have also produced a checklist of the species observed. The highest count is always that of the Honey Buzzard: which peaked on May 7, with more than 2,400 specimens gliding over the Calabrian coast after successfully passing through the strait.

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THE EAGLE HAS FLOWN – AGAIN

After an absence of 20 years a pair of Bonelli's Eagle has reoccupied a historic site in Sicily, which had been abandoned for years. Happily, this rare and endangered species, increases its population on the island. We can take pride in the coordinated efforts of a group of Sicilian organisations, including LIPU, which since 2011 have been guarding the nests of this bird of prey and other species to protect them from the illegal theft of eggs and young for falconry.

Before the start of monitoring five years ago, at least 20 Bonelli's Eagles were stolen by the end of the nesting season. During the camps the volunteers have collected data on nutrition and ecology of the species, from the birth of the chicks until fledging. The research has yielded excellent results and now, the uncharted areas suitable for the eagles to breed are very few. Volunteers have found some new nest sites and, importantly, have seen confirmed the reoccupation of historical sites. At the end of June, the field activities 2013/2014 end but the coordination of the associations is already working to improve surveillance methods in the years to come.

50 COMMUNITIES FOR BIODIVERSITY

New protection for two of the most important ecological corridors in the province of Varese, the subject of LIFE project Tib. At last we have agreement for a real network, a formal document has been signed by the government of the Province of Varese, Park Campo dei Fiori, the Ticino Park and 50 municipalities of the province with the support of Lombardia region, to which were added LIPU and the Cariplo Foundation, an important funding partner of the project.

The purpose of the document is to preserve both natural corridors that runs alongside Lake Varese and across the province from north to south, linking the park to the Campo dei Fiori and Parco del Ticino protecting the fundamental ecological connections, also forming a pathway between the Alps and the Apennines and, consequently, between northern Europe and the Mediterranean. Corridors are essential to ensure the movement and survival of many plant and animal species.

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MORE BINOCULARS, FEWER TRAPS

Assemini, in the province of Cagliari, has hosted one of the events planned in the LIFE Project, "A safe haven for wild birds". The initiative was intended to raise awareness of bird migration in the area around Assemini, in particular the Rio Cixerri, the Rio Mannu and the important Cagliari wetlands and also raise awareness of the 72 participants (including 10 children) on the theme of the respect of biodiversity and the problem of poaching in the province of Cagliari. The day ended with the release of two Moorhens and two Shelduck treated at the Monastir Regional Recovery centre.

Also as part of the LIFE Project, LIPU has also concluded the events of the environmental education project, done in five schools (two in Assemini, two in Pula and one in Santadi) with the participation of 700 students. For the first and second prizes vouchers were awarded for the purchase of teaching materials, while some students of the sixth grade have produced a short video against poaching.

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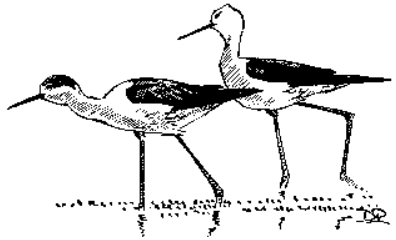
BIANELLO AND CELESTINA, FULL SPEED AHEAD

Excellent cooperation continues between the Province of Reggio Emilia - Department of the Environment, and the Communes of Quattro Castella, Campagnola Emilia and LIPU and together they have agreed that the management of two important natural areas of the province, respectively the Oasis of Bianello and that of Celestina, is to be entrusted to LIPU.

The Contract, signed in 2014 and extending throughout 2015, provides for a contribution of €5,000 by the Province for the first year for each of the two oases.



LIPU STRATEGIES: 2015 – 20

by Claudio Celada, LIPU Conservation Director

Our Objectives, as presented at the Comacchio conference, for the period from 2015 to 2020. Producing works that address the global challenges to nature and the countryside.

These will be the main themes for the next six years: birds, the environment, and the promotion of cultural ecology. To this are added further themes such as soil erosion, climate change and the countryside. The new strategies for 2015-2020 were central to LIPU's 49th convention, held at Comacchio on May 3rd. With "Nature will save Italy": The 2015-2020 strategy for birds, biodiversity and cultural ecology, LIPU has launched a strategic document that will guide the work of the whole association for the next six years. In an era of planet-wide change, and in one of the most difficult periods in recent history both for Italy and for Europe as a whole, there are serious threats to nature, but also opportunities for a positive outcome to the situation.

"Nature will save Italy" is therefore a book of works both concrete and symbolic, a structured list of tasks for the protection of birds and the conservation of biodiversity, and for making cultural ecology the key to the future.

The new strategies for 2015-2020, which will undergo a mid-term review in 2017, are composed of 17 themes and 92 objectives, set out under three headings. The first of these, Italy's treasure-chest of biodiversity. Networks, protected areas, land and sea, contains 40 objectives, organised by nine themes. The heading combines the work on biodiversity with that of land management, with a unified vision that on one hand aims at protecting our most important sites for biodiversity, but on the other widens its scope to be countrywide, uniting our historic themes such as the Natura 2000 network, protected areas, agriculture and urban ecology with arguments on pressing themes such as ecological networks, climate change, soil erosion and the resilience of countryside and communities. The important issue of the marine environment will have a theme of its own.

The second heading, Birds. Knowledge, conservation, and actions for their protection, contains 33 objectives set out in four themes. It is specifically targeted at wild birds, the heart of LIPU's mission, and ranges from aspects of knowledge, research, and monitoring to projects and direct actions for conservation, protection and stewardship.

The third heading, Cultural Ecology, the key to the future, contains 19 objectives in four themes. This sets the work of environmental education in the broader context of cultural ecology, opening it up to themes of cities, local issues, the different objectives of the public and of new forms of communication, giving particular attention to the theme of children having contact with nature as part of a full and balanced development.

To the three strategic headings finally is attached a Programme, in reality an ensemble of projects and actions aimed at a common goal. The Programme, called Wingsland. The land of the migrants, is dedicated to the epic theme of migration with the overall objective of protecting, promoting and setting

value on the extraordinary phenomenon of migration through an across the board approach, various work modules and the full coinvolvement of the interested parties.

An important and notably complex task therefore awaits us. LIPU, in its role as the Italian partner in BIrdLife International, is also called upon to widen its view to the great global and European issues, and to play a structured role in the hierarchy of actions necessary at both national and local levels, as with the others to be found in the strategies.

Six years of hard work therefore await us. The road is mapped out, it only remains for us to follow it.

LIPU STRATEGIES - BULLET POINTS

- 17 themes; 92 objectives; 3 headings
- LIPU's strategies for the period 2015 -2020, titled Nature will save Italy: The 2015-2020 strategy for birds, biodiversity and cultural ecology, is composed of 17 themes and 92 objectives. The document is subdivided into three main headings:
- Italy's treasure-chest of biodiversity. Networks, protected areas, land and sea.
- Birds. Knowledge, conservation and actions for their protection.
- Cultural Ecology, the key to the future.

Breaking News

LIPU is about to activate the Programme Wingsland. The land of the Migrants, aimed at bird migration.

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VULTURES, ALARM IN EUROPE

by Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research Manager

After the serious problems in India and Pakistan, Diclofenac is now threatening European birds of prey. LIPU asks the government to remove the drug from the market and offers an alternative.

It thrives in the carcasses of animals and is fatal to anything that consumes it. European vultures are under threat from Diclofenac, a killer veterinary drug. The substance, registered and authorised in Italy in 2010 and in Spain in 2013, is extremely dangerous for vultures and its use in India and Pakistan, has already brought, in just a few decades, the populations of the White-rumped Vulture (Gyps bengalensis) from the Himalayan areas of India and Nepal, the Indian Vulture (Gyps indicus) and the Slender-billed Vulture (Gyps tenuirostris) to the verge of extinction with a dramatic reduction of 99 %. India has now banned the drug in an attempt to halt this serious decline (see Ali June 2013).

This threat has also recently been menacing Europe, which has 4 native species of vulture, all on the IUCN red list: the Egyptian vulture is classified as "endangered" and the Cinereous vulture as "near threatened". The Griffon and the Lammergeier after decades of decline are on the increase thanks to reintroduction projects but nevertheless are not safe from extinction.

Unfortunately, in Italy, any evaluation of the risks caused by Diclofenac was carried out exclusively regarding microfauna in the soil and its dispersion in water with no consideration of the destructive effects on carrion eating birds. An alternative to Diclofenac is now available: Meloxicam, which has proved to be both safe for vultures and efficient in domestic veterinary use.

It is therefore urgent that action is taken to ban the veterinary use of Diclofenac and LIPU has asked the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Health for the immediate withdrawal of its authorisation in Italy, one of Europe's most important producers and exporters of the drug in the hope that Spain too, which is home to large populations of vultures, follows this example.

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LET'S OPEN THE CAGES

Delivered to Parliament: another 50 thousand signatures against the use of live lures. The campaign gets under way and obtains the support of the general public and the world of politics, including the Minister for the Environment

The streets of central Rome are still almost deserted first thing in the morning. The LIPU volunteers, together with the president and the staff, are getting ready to go into the press room of Parliament. They are carrying with them hessian sacks full of signatures and a hope: that of never again seeing small birds being used by hunters as live bait, shut in cages from which they will never be set free.

The deputies arrive in the press room. They want to know, to get involved and to take part in the discussion. LIPU, symbolically, hands over to Parliament another 50 thousand signatures of citizens who want to say stop to the use of live lures. It then asks them to support an amendment to the European Law 2013 which should put an end to them for ever.

Starting in August last year, the Campaign "No to Live Lures" has gone on to mobilise thousands of people amongst the citizenry and expressions of support from the scientific and cultural communities - such as Vivian Lamarque, Licia Colo, the singer Daniele Silvestri, Francesco Petretti – and obtained the support of the biggest environmental and animal associations in Italy. Through these months of intense campaigning and work with the authorities many have been the unexpected and positive signs which make us really hopeful. The work of raising awareness at the European level , also carried out thanks to the MEP Anrea Zanoni; the involvement of the Italian parliament; the opening of the infringement procedure (n.2006/2014) by which the European Commission has placed Italy in default for contravention of the Directive on Birds, specifically for the use of live lures not forgetting the recent condemnations inserted by the minister for the Environment, Gianluca Galletti, according to whom "that of live lures is an unacceptable practice" for which it is necessary to find an "exit strategy", and by the rapporteur for the European law 2013, Michele Bordo, who has declared himself personally in favour of the outlawing of live decoys.

The debate on the European law 2013, including the vote on LIPU's amendment supported by the 50 thousand signatures, was put back until after

the European elections of 25th May. And so, at the moment we go to press, we do not yet know the outcome of the matter. The destiny of small birds could actually be decided in the next few days and could be a destiny of hope and a new horizon of liberty. Cages opened at last. No more live lures, no more captures of wild birds. And that is what LIPU wants. We want to see migrating birds free. Consequently, on that hessian sack, emptied of its signatures, we shall put a little cards on which there will be one word: thank you.

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PERSONAL STORY

By Luciano Durante, responsible for LIPU's Carloforte Oasis

It was a true 'bolt from the blue' Forty years on, here is an account of a special encounter, with the 'little falcons' of Carloforte.

It meets the blast of the northwest wind head on, seeks to stay in the air immobile. It raises its tail feathers and folds its wings. Tilting to one side, it launches itself into a nose-dive, then steeples upwards again at high speed.

I was seven years old when I saw my first Eleanora's Falcon. I was on a boat with my father on one of the many summer outings on which he took me. I loved to go out on the sea with him. So it was that he allowed me to explore unknown places and have new and exciting experiences. He always had an answer to my questions; on this occasion I had announced the presence of the falcons by calling out 'Fawcons'.

His reply made me all the more eager for knowledge. Straight away I began to find out more and to appreciate their beauty, in wondering at their speed, elegance, and the swiftness of their flight.

In those times however I knew nothing of the sad reality that in the following years was to threaten their very survival on our island. Between the end of the seventies and the beginning of the second half of the eighties, in fact, there was intense activity by poachers connected with the theft of eggs and chicks from their nests which threatened disaster to one of the finest colonies in the Mediterranean. But thanks to the constancy and passion of a group of volunteers from all over Europe, and united under the banner of LIPU, this fate was averted. The intervention of the volunteers allowed me along with many of the young of that time, to get to know better Eleanora's Falcon, the Falcon of the Queen.

Some years after I got to know 'Aunt Ferna', or rather Fernanda Diana, the person who more than any other involved me in this project, and who taught me much on the respect for and the protection of nature. Fernanda was then LIPU's delegate for the province of Cagliari, while I was just commencing my studies in biology. By chance one day I went with a colleague, one of her nephews, to an exhibition of photography organised by LIPU, and the very next summer I was to be found as a volunteer on my first anti-poaching camp, on the island where I now live, 'the isle of the falcons'. My career as a volunteer enthused me still further and led to still more involvement.

Having a continual presence on the ground was to help us consolidate things even more, its

increasing importance leading after some years to the foundation of LIPU's Carloforte Oasis, 414 hectares now set aside as a permanent refuge for wildlife.

For more than 20 years then, thanks to LIPU, I have been bound up with this fantastic place, of which I am now the head, and notwithstanding that many of the problems surrounding poaching have been resolved and many environmental battles won, there can still be a few incidents, as when a couple of years ago I came across a foreign photographer with an international reputation in the act of putting a camera into a nest among the chicks, which shows that you can never relax your guard.

Over time, I have had the good fortune to know many of the young who gave impetus to this wonderful story, many of them having joined me on the journey, witnesses to a voyage of 8000 kilometres renewed with each year. Thanks to them, to the falcons and to LIPU.

Inosim, the island of San Pietro

It was the Phoenicians who first named this Mediterranean island Inosim, the Isle of the Falcons. An inscription from the third century BC found at Cagliari dedicated to Baalshemen, The Lord of Inosim, God of storms and the weather, who was depicted as a raptor, is testament to this. The name was handed down, becoming in Greek *Ierakon nisos* and in Latin *Accipitrum insula*. The falcons would have been a highly visible phenomenon during the seagoing season, which was almost invariably in the summer.

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BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

by Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research manager

In French Polynesia, BirdLife has brought new hope to a species on the brink of extinction, the Tahiti Monarch

Despite its rapidly disappearing habitat and predators always on the prowl, there is good news for the Tahiti Monarch, a species that in 1998 had been reduced to a population of just 21 (and 4 couples). Thanks to a project by the Manu, the Polynesian Ornithological Society (BirdLife French Polynesia), and the tireless efforts of volunteers, ecologists and schools, 2013 was a record year: the number of chicks increased four-fold, the wild population rose to 50 with ten nests. A real success story, especially regarding reproduction, when compared to the record minimum recorded 16 years when the Polynesian Ornithological Society first began to control the invasive species on the Society Islands. The Tahiti monarch, classified as "Critically endangered", is endemic to the island of Tahiti in French Polynesia. The delicate situation, made clear by the red list of threatened species, is due to loss of habitat and introduced predators (such as rats and some species of ant), a situation further exasperated by the recent torrential rains.

The importance of the project was underlined on the occasion of the first edition of the BirdLife People's Choice Award, created to recognise the best nature conservation project within the BirdLife partnership. More than 2,000 people, 43% of the votes, chose the Manu project for the protection of the Tahiti Monarch on the Society Islands.

The project is part of the BirdLife Preventing Extinction programme. “2013” – explains Hazell Shokellu Thompson, interim director general of BirdLife International – “saw a number of successes. My congratulations go to the Manu for their hard work in controlling the invasive species that threaten the survival of the Tahiti Monarch on the Society Islands”.

It is still early to predict whether the Tahiti Monarch has been saved from extinction but news such as this is always good news.

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NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

Another business year closed at the end of June and I am happy to report that all projects which we agreed to support will be funded in full. Many thanks to all supporters and members who made this possible, without you we are nothing.

Thanks also to my team of translators who, for this edition, were: Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Giusy Fazzina, Tony Harris, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

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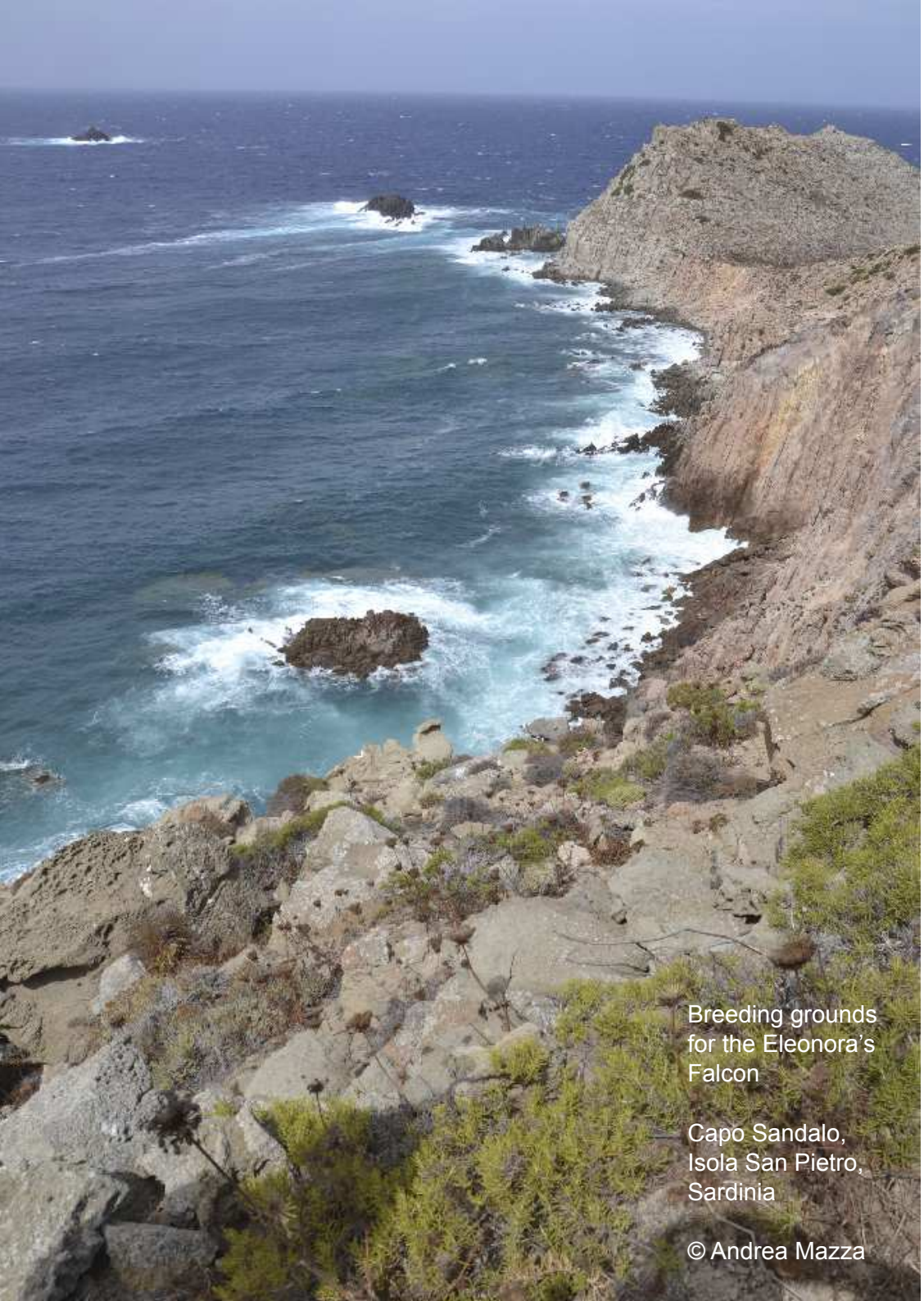
Luciano Durante, warden of LIPU’s Carloforte reserve in Sardinia.

and the bird for which the reserve is so important – a dark-phase Eleonora’s Falcon, photo © Michele Mendi



Breeding grounds for the Eleonora's Falcon

Capo Sandalo, Isola San Pietro, Sardinia

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