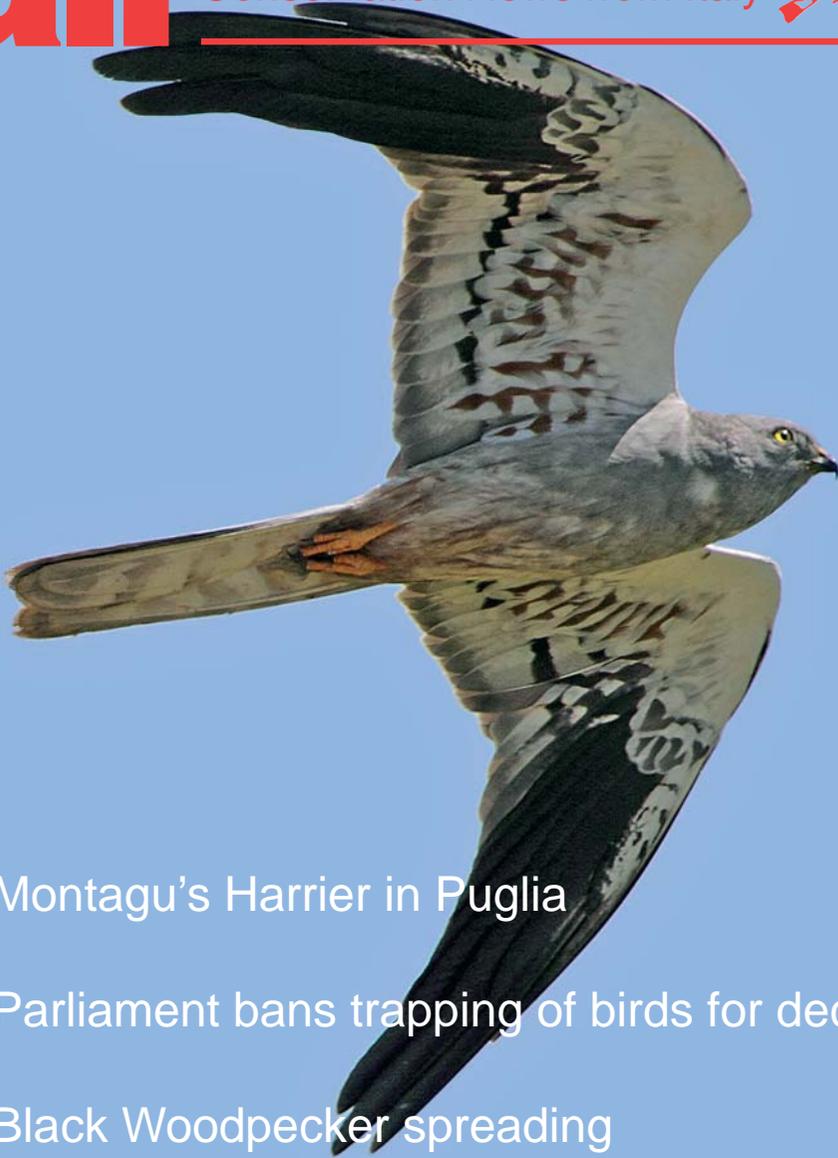


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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



- Montagu's Harrier in Puglia
- Parliament bans trapping of birds for decoys
- Black Woodpecker spreading
- Bologna anniversary

*Autumn 2015*



A snapshot of the young Montagu's Harrier near its nest while being protected by Enzo and his friends from LIPU Foggia and around. See article on page 13.

The picture below is by Michele Mendi of LIPU who was placed 7th and 12th in the British Birds Bird Photograph of the Year 2015 Competition - a superb achievement. Michele is a member from Parma and the image is of Black-winged Stilts on a LIPU reserve.

The excellent cover photograph of a Montagu's Harrier was taken by Luigi Sebastiani, see more of his superb work on [www.birds.it](http://www.birds.it)



# The wide spectrum of conservation work

Editorial

*David Lingard*

**I**n this issue you will read of a success at each end of the spectrum of bird protection, a spectrum measured not in importance but in diversity of purpose.

After many years of uphill struggle against entrenched views among pressure groups and politicians, the Italian Parliament has finally banned the catching of wild birds for use as live decoys. LIPU declared this to one of its aims on its foundation 50 years ago, but it has taken that long to bring success after petitions, campaigns and complaints to the European Commission and Court whose judgement has compelled Italy to enact the new law.

Meanwhile, in Apulia in the south Enzo Cripezzi and his friends has been busy on the ground guarding a Montagu's Harrier nest from foxes and inadvertent damage by farm machinery.

This reminded me of a trip to Hungary twenty years ago when we were trying to locate Great Bustard nests in fields on alfalfa. Long days spent scanning fields for the moment when the sitting female raised her head and looked around while incubating eggs. We would plot the position and the project leader from MME (BirdLife in Hungary) would then speak to the farmer and tell him what had been found.

The farmers invariably co-operated and would fence off squares around the birds; in the coming days they

would reap around these areas which must have been difficult and inconvenient but they were happy to have been given the chance to help.

Enzo's efforts were not without drama but were successful and a new harrier was helped on its way into a life on the wing. From grass roots to national Parliament the work is going on - Avanti LIPU!

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## **VICTORY!**

*by Danilo Selvaggi, Director General, LIPU*

### **The Senate has definitely approved the new law: the capture of living decoys is forbidden.**

**M**idday, Thursday 23rd July, 2015. The Senate approved article 21 of the draft legislation number 1962 (European Law 2014) that forbids the capture of wild birds “ by methods prohibited under the Bird Directive.” The text is the same as that passed two months before by the House of Deputies. This time the opposition of the pro-hunting lobby was not strong enough to prevent the Bill being passed into law easily. From now on the capture of small migratory birds to be used as living decoys will not be allowed. This historic success is the fruit of collective action by LIPU, our members and activists, who believed in the cause and kept up the pressure.

### **No more traps!**

Years of submitting reports and complaints, culminated in the campaign, launched twelve years ago , and the delivery to parliament of a petition with

50,000 signatures (later to rise to 100,00). All the work has finally reaped its just reward. We will no longer see traps in operation or have to witness the degrading spectacle of what we can only call the State slaughter of birds. Regions and provinces set up equipment to catch small migrating birds and deliver them into the hands of the hunters, to join the ranks of living decoys. This is indefensible in an advanced country and the time has surely come to say enough.

### **A birthday gift**

It is a happy coincidence that the passing of the law took place during LIPU's fiftieth anniversary year. LIPU was formed in 1965 to put a stop to the capture of wild birds, in those days truly a massacre. The aim of abolition of all killing of birds was written into our first statute in April 1966. Our founder, Giorgio Punzo, achieved the abolition of private bird killing in 1977, but this was replaced by traps set up by the regions, used for long periods each year, positioned along migration routes to lure and catch the birds that were to become living decoys. What could be more alien to a bird whose destiny is to fly freely than to be imprisoned in a cage? Image what it must be like when the great undertaking of migration ends in a net and the darkness of a cage! An unsupportable thought in this day and age.

### **The next struggle**

The new law means that the capture of wild birds to become decoys will be impossible. Now the nets are outlawed, there is no way wild birds can be supplied to the trade which will therefore have to raise birds in captivity to become, sad to say, living bait even though they are illegally captive. So now

there is another task for LIPU and everyone who has the freedom of wild birds at heart. The application of the law must be monitored and any attempt at changing it thwarted. We must be vigilant against any form of illegal capture, such as taking young birds from their nests. But above all, we must institute another big campaign in order to have outlawed the use of any bird as a living decoy. If today's victory has forbidden capture, tomorrow's must be to outlaw the use of any living decoys. Cages must be open and migration free and protected. A wonderful gift for nature and for us for which we will continue to need the participation and support of our people. However, we say a heartfelt thank you for this battle won – a victory for us all.

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## **BOLOGNA, A HOME FOR VOLUNTEERS**

*by Nadia Caselli, LIPU Bologna*

**The LIPU Rescue Centre in Bologna, the capital of the Emilia-Romagna region, has a new headquarters to celebrate 25 years of hard work**

**T**wenty five years spent caring for so many animals. LIPU in Bologna is celebrating the anniversary with the new headquarters in the Corticella district, a new title: CRAS (Rescue Centre for Wild Animals) and a new logo featuring the Long-eared Owl: OTUS.

Having left the tiny offices in the via delle Tofane, for many years the site for our struggles, meetings and reception of animals, today, after so much time, delays, vicissitudes and disappointments, we

have at last a real headquarters and a new appropriate symbol which describes it perfectly.

Those were difficult, busy years, with so very many animals cared for, thanks to the work of volunteers and to support, awareness-raising and environmental promotion activity.



The Rescue Centre has received large numbers of animals (3,540 to be precise, similar to the number helped in previous years) which have been helped and rehabilitated thanks to volunteers collaborating and working together, and to professionally qualified and indispensable vets who help us. We thank them all, and especially Dr Mauro Delogu of the veterinary faculty of Ozzano Emilia.

In springtime we mainly help passerine bird nestlings whilst throughout the year we are busy, out of necessity and because of their biological importance, with day and night flying raptors. Our centre also receives neglected animals which have no other possibility of rescue, amongst which are pipistrelles, hedgehogs, coypus, tortoises and other small animals, some exotic, often problematic ones, but also some which are more demanding such as foxes, dormice and squirrels.

The Bologna section members and volunteers celebrated our first 25 years under the direction of the local manager near the Bologna Avis centre, by showing wildlife photographs and short films about so much rescue activity carried out over those years; on 14 May a party was held with Avis members which highlighted further the Bologna centre on the occasion of 25 years of work.

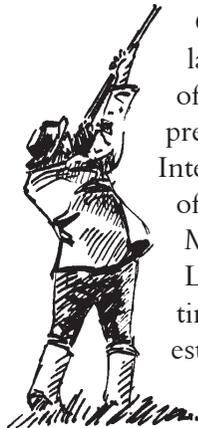
In the autumn, in October, we will organize a festival in the area to include neighbours living near the centre in the via Bertini. Two meetings are planned, the Giorgio Celli prize and an exhibition at a future date. We invite you to visit our website [lipubo.weebly.com](http://lipubo.weebly.com) and facebook for more details.

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### **POACHING: 25 MILLION WILD BIRDS SLAUGHTERED EVERY YEAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

The BirdLife International report, 'The killing', was published recently: Italy is second, after Egypt, for the highest number of birds killed – up to 8 million individuals according to estimates. Malta has the highest concentration of poaching incidents per square metre.

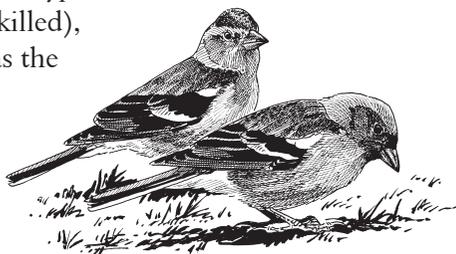
Shot, caught with illegal nets or through glue on branches: 25 million wild birds are illegally killed every year in Mediterranean countries. Italy is near the top of this sad ranking, with up to 8 million birds killed every year, among which Chaffinches, Hawfinches but also large raptors. These are the estimates of the new report, The killing, presented at BirdFair 2015 by BirdLife International with the collaboration of BirdLife partners across the Mediterranean region, including LIPU-BirdLife Italia. This is the first time that BirdLife has been able to estimate the extent of poaching in each country.



Data from the BirdLife report reveal a shocking reality which translated into a real threat to biodiversity, with 80% of illegal killings (equal to 20 million birds in total) occurring in only 10 countries. Top of the list is Egypt, with 5.7 million individuals killed, followed by Italy, with an average of 5.6 million birds (the number is between a minimum estimate of 3.4 and a maximum of 8.4 million individuals). Syria is next (3.9 million), then Lebanon (2.6), Cyprus (2.3), with the bottom of the “top-ten” seeing Greece (700,000 birds killed each year), France, Croatia, Libya (500,000 each) and Albania (300,000).

Among the terrible methods used there are not only fire-arms, but also illegal mist netting and glue on branches, with birds attracted to illegal traps using tape-lures.

The most targeted species by poachers are Chaffinches (2.9 million individuals killed every year), Blackcaps (1.8 million), Quails (1.6 million) and Song Thrushes (1.2 million), as well as species classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List, such as Curlew. In Spain and Italy raptors are also among the threatened species which are victims of poaching, including Egyptian Vultures and Red Kites, as well as Spanish Imperial Eagle (in Spain) and Marbled Ducks (in Italy). In terms of single areas, the worst is Famagusta, on Cyprus (690,000 birds killed), whilst Malta has the highest density of individuals killed per kilometre squared.



Numbers in Italy – Data on poaching in Italy, already summarised by LIPU as part of the Conference “Safe Haven for Wild Birds”, a Life project focusing on poaching, held in Rome on 21 May, show the slaughter of Chaffinches (between two and three million), Meadow Pipits (500-900,000), Robins (300-600,000), Hawfinches (200,000-1 million) and Starlings (100-500,000).

The species already threatened with extinction that are most hit by poaching in Italy are Marbled Ducks (1 to 5 individuals killed, equal to 50% of the breeding population), Red Kites (50-150 individuals, equal to 30% of the breeding population) and Egyptian Vultures (between 1 to 5 individuals, equal to 20% of the breeding population).

The General Director of BirdLife International, Patricia Zurita, stated that “The report shows the terrible extent of the illegal killing phenomenon in the Mediterranean region. Populations of some species that used to be abundant in Europe are now declining, some even plummeting”. Claudio Celada, Conservation Director of LIPU – BirdLife Italia adds “Wild birds, which are an immense treasure for everyone and which do not follow national or international borders, deserve safer migratory flyways. We demand more efforts from Europe and Italy, the latter in particular with an anti-poaching plan at national level, with harsher penalties for those who break the rules, to increase plans for conservation before it is too late”.

The report is available on [www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28\\_low.pdf](http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28_low.pdf)

## Ranking of the ILLEGAL KILLING in the Mediterranean zone

	Birds illegally killed/captured every year	(min – max)
1. Egypt	5,700,000	(741,000 – 10,600,000)
2. Italy	5,600,000	(3,400,000 – 7,800,000)
3. Syria	3,900,000	(2,900,000 – 4,900,000)
4. Lebanon	2,600,000	(1,700,000 – 3,500,000)
5. Cyprus	2,300,000	(1,300,000 – 3,200,000)
6. Greece	704,000	(485,000 – 922,000)
7. France	522,000	(149,000 – 895,000)
8. Croatia	510,000	(166,000 – 855,000)
9. Libya	503,000	(325,000 – 680,000)
10. Albania	265,000	(206,000 – 325,000)
11. Spain	254,000	(103,000 – 405,000)
12. Tunisia	139,000	(50,400 – 227,000)
13. Serbia	133,000	(104,000 – 163,000)
14. Montenegro	130,000	(64,000 – 197,000)
15. Malta	108,000	(5,800 – 211,000)
16. Palestine	89,700	(70,000 – 109,000)
17. Portugal	82,400	(32,400 – 133,000)
18. Morocco	74,400	(23,400 – 125,000)
19. Turkey	59,100	(24,400 – 93,900)
20. Bosnia & H'govina	34,700	(22,400 – 46,900)
21. Algeria	28,900	(17,500 – 40,300)
22. Slovenia	21,900	(140 – 43,700)
23. Jordan	17,300	(13,000 – 21,600)
24. Macedonia	2,100	(600 – 3,700)

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### THE BLACK WOODPECKER: A NEW PHASE OF EXPANSION

The Black Woodpecker has always been considered to be very much a woodland species, and up to a decade ago its reach was restricted to broad tracts of hill or mountain forest. This last decade, however, in the north of Italy and the prealpine area of Lombardy and Piedmont in particular, there has been an ever-increasing number of sightings in lowlands and woods no bigger than

copses. These sightings, at first of odd individuals followed by a number of nesting pairs seemed initially to be restricted to a few unconnected areas, characterised by areas of now unexploited woodland in the middle of a varied array of environments such as the floodplains of the lower Baresotto and the Park of the Ticino.

Observations of these recently-occupied territories, along with some more detailed studies, have led to a deeper understanding of the species and moves to assist a further expansion, in particular in the context of the LIFE TIB project, undertaken by the Province of Varese with LIPU as a partner. One part of this has been the decision to improve the condition of the woodlands that link the alpine areas of the province, where the woodpecker has been historically present, to the wooded areas of the Park of the Ticino where the new pairs had taken up residence, with the goal of creating a link between the two populations. Forestry operations are to include the felling, barking and weakening of non-native trees to accelerate the formation of dead wood in those sites. This has been carried out on large free-standing specimens, to produce food and nest sites for the birds.

Alongside the environmental management the activity of the species has been observed throughout the study area via remote monitoring. This has taken place in 25 locations where individuals could potentially be present following a model for site favourability developed by Brambilla and others. The data coming from this systematic monitoring has been added to the observations that came out of the surveys of the avifauna that were part of the TIB project.

The survey led to the identification in the 2014-2015 seasons of seven uniformly-spaced territories in the area, showing that this species has formed a stable population on the plains, making use of relatively constrained wooded areas and close to habitations; a situation confirmed also by LIPU studies in the adjacent province of Novara to the west of the River Ticino where the presence of the species totally absent just a decade ago is now almost continuous from north to south wherever there are wooded areas with mature specimens along with dead wood on the ground.



It is therefore possible that the Black Woodpecker may be the subject of a further expansion not only in this geographical area but across its range, if there is intelligent forest management aimed at maintaining woodland of good quality, attained by favouring the presence of tall straight specimens and preserving a mix of trees of different ages, as well as increasing the amount of dead wood to hand.

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## **MONTAGU'S HARRIER SUCCESS**

*by Enzo Cripezzi, LIPU Foggia*

I have immense pleasure in reporting that the only breeding attempt in all the south of Italy, from Viterbo southwards, has been a success after some years of monitoring “our” Montagu’s Harriers. This is an historical landmark for conservation.

The pair of harriers has fledged one juvenile (from 2 eggs and hatchlings) defying many obstacles. The fledged juvenile has made us worry but also laugh by disappearing and reappearing in the landscape around the nest. Thanks to the stoic dedication of the female which was drenched in two floods, one of which probably claimed the smaller of the nestlings, while sheltering the nest, we now have one fledging, which may not seem much - but for us is of exceptional importance.

We achieved this despite the thresher passing over the nest that we had identified at the last minute, on the border of two fields, but were unable to contact the landowner until the day of the harvest itself...too late! You can imagine our sadness in seeing the thresher passing over the zone while we were trying to negotiate with the owner, and the pair of harriers flying above the machine in desperation. We were then able to run towards the nest to see in the evening the female landing several times on the same spot, approaching at 30 metres... 10 metres...7 metres... the female flew off to reveal 2 eggs which were still warm. We tidied up the nest as best as we could before running away.

The nest then spent three nights without protection while we bought appropriate net and pegs and waited for the owner to give us the approval to intervene. We could see the female sitting on the nest while foxes roamed the area. We erected the net, not electrified, in record time to disturb as little as possible and we were able to record the first hatching.

An intense monitoring stage followed, during almost every morning and a number of afternoons, to assess that little Fort Apache which also sported some

barbed wire around it. Our typical day was started by an alarm clock at 4am to be on site at 5.30 am and then to work between highs and lows, and fitting in everything alongside everyday work to conserve Lesser Kestrels, Swifts, work on the Stork Day ... We also had to deal with some incursions from a fox by chasing it away, to help the male which pecked it on its head and the female that tried to divert attention to herself. During the last phase we had to face the rollercoaster disappearance of the juvenile as well as the absurd practice of burning the stubbles, dealing with wind turbines and the need to establish a long-term relationship with farmers.

We tried to understand the behaviour of this species, using information from the harrier group in Viterbo and taking suggestions from Enzo Calevi. A sincere “Thank you” indeed to Enzo and to all the group from which I was already “stealing” tips at the meeting in Rome, we are now practically twinned!

About ten days ago we removed the net with a sense of emptiness, we are exhausted but happy. We also feel richer inside thanks to the flying spectacles that this pair has offered us and for the life lesson that these animals have given us. We have tried to fix in our heart the emotions and worries we lived, especially due to the fox, by taking notes and videos, with the due care, which we hope to turn soon into an output that will be able to involve people.

I almost forgot: our young Montagu’s Harrier is obviously called APULIA (our region in Southern Italy) and you can see a photo of when it was still in the fortified nest.

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## STOLEN WINGS

*by Giuseppe Rannisi, delegate for LIPU Catania branch*

**I**n Sicily, an anti-poaching programme to protect Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciata*) and other raptors is developing well and the results are promising.

Sicily is an important habitat for raptors and hosts the largest population in Italy of three species: Bonelli's Eagle, Lanner Falcon and Egyptian Vulture, with 95, 50 and 60 percent of all pairs respectively. Threatened by habitat loss, changes in land use, human activity and construction of solar farms and wind farms, these raptors also suffer from theft of their eggs and chicks. There is a booming black market in falconry, where young raptors are stolen from their nests and sold throughout Europe and the Middle East.

In the early eighties nest robbing in Sicily seemed to have ended, following the widespread seizure of Peregrine Falcon chicks by the Forestry Corps. However by the spring of 2010, we realised not only that illegal traffic had resumed, but that it was continuing on a large scale. On average 5-6 chicks were being stolen every year. When added to the high mortality rate of young eagles (only 10 percent live to maturity), and the low reproductive success of adults (in 2010 there were just 22 pairs), these losses due to theft would lead inexorably to population decline.

### **Anti-poaching volunteers**

To help protect these raptors, a number of environmental organisations decided to pool their efforts in a joint task force, known today as

the Raptor Protection Group. This group links together LIPU, EBN, WWF, the Sicilian Wildlife Fund and MAN. They have been joined over the years by the Silene Cooperative, the Foundation for Biodiversity and foreign associations such as CABS and FIR. From the very beginning their priority was organising anti-poaching camps to monitor Bonelli's Eagle nests throughout Sicily.

The first camp started during the 2011 breeding season, with 40 volunteers working a three-month rota system. In following years the camps were not only repeated, but also increased in number. The single camp of 2011 has expanded to six camps in 2015. Volunteers set up camera traps and webcams at risk sites to allow surveillance even at night. Their hard work includes monitoring, organising the camps, sharing intelligence, and maintaining close collaboration with the CITES section of the Forestry Corps.

In 2013, thanks to CITES, a number of stolen eagles were recovered. One of these birds was returned to its nest in the hope that the adults would still recognise it. Fifty days after the original theft, the young was equipped with a radio transmitter and released in the vicinity of its parents and the nest. Following a brief moment of indecision, the adults recognised the young and re-adopted it. A further two eagles recovered in 2013 could not be returned to the wild and were sent instead to the GREFA centre in Spain, specialising in raptor recovery, where they will hopefully be able to breed. Any young will be returned to Sicily where they will be released into the wild.



## **Bonelli's Eagle: 30 percent increase**

The camps have achieved lots of positive results. From 2012 to today, some 115 young Bonelli's Eagles have left the nest and become independent, increasing the population of this species by more than 30 percent. Anti-poaching camps have worked as a deterrent against theft, but have not been able to stop it altogether. In 2015 we sadly witnessed the theft of eggs and young from two nests. For 2016 we are planning to introduce a camp in this area, adding to the list of camps organised, and providing even more protection.

## **Take part in a raptor camp**

Find out more on the website of the Sicilian Raptor Protection Group ([www.gruppotutelarapaci.it](http://www.gruppotutelarapaci.it)), including species information, news, reports, and how to volunteer. Raptor camps start every year around the 15 March, and finish when the young birds depart, typically around the end of May.

*Editor's Note: I am hoping to join the camp next year, so if you want to take part I can help with the co-ordination.*

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## **FALCONRY**

*By Marco Dinetti, LIPU Urban Ecology*

## **A Taste of Freedom**

**T**hey wanted to make it a heritage of humanity but LIPU was not in favour of the idea. Falconry is dangerous for nature and cruel for falcons and

eagles because they are taken from their nests and mistreated.

In the air they are free, elegant and proud; however the ground is where they are in danger from the hands of greedy poachers and falconers. What exactly is falconry? It is a type of hunting which started in the Middle Ages and has survived throughout history until today. It is a practice which deprives these splendid birds of prey of their right to freedom and instead forces them to wear a hood, live in a cage and be at the service of man. This is deeply humiliating for these lords of the sky. This is a practice which some people would like to see come back “into fashion” or rather make it a transcendent heritage for Unesco. For many reasons LIPU does not see any justification for this. Birds of prey are not sociable animals and so they do not grow fond of their trainers like dogs do for example. Furthermore falconry displays have a negative influence on people. What is better than watching these birds in their natural habitat, hunting or flying up into the warm sky?



Even today birds of prey are stolen from their nests and then sold to rich “gentleman”. Recently, the Bonelli’s Eagle case in Sicily led to a seizure of eagles by the State Forestry Department thanks to the help of LIPU volunteers.

Birds of prey are proud animals and to reduce them to sitting on a falconer's fist goes against their wild behaviour. Besides ethical reasons, there are also laws that strictly protect these birds and are subject to the Washington Convention (CITES). Furthermore,

falconry is on the same level as hunting and it cannot be practised in cities or in non-hunting season months. Finally, there are also conservation reasons, since taking eggs or nestlings illegally from nests puts the survival of these birds in danger.

It is puzzling then why these birds of prey are used at airports or in agricultural holdings as a means to keep away “pests” such as pigeons, starlings and seagulls. Let us think, for example, if there are lions and zebras living in the same area, do the zebras then run away to another place? What would the lions eat? In reality, prey and predators cohabit in the same areas, even though herbivores and small birds try to escape attacks. It is the same as if having falcons in Bologna would drive away the pigeons in Modena or Florence. It is completely absurd from a biological point of view, considering that peregrine falcons have colonised more than 21 Italian cities. In Turin they nest on the Mole Antonelliana, in Florence on the Duomo and in the university squares in Rome. Despite this, pigeons have not disappeared from the old town centres of these cities.

Instead of falcons, trained dogs such as Border Collies could be used because they are capable of also driving away deer and rabbits from airports. There are also falcon-robots available and these can be radio controlled and work as a deterrent. They have a lot of technological advantages and can go beyond the limits of falconry.

Enough with falconry then! If we want to enjoy these birds of prey, then we should do it in nature and educate those who have not yet had the chance to experience the unique and priceless beauty of these birds.

## The position of BirdLife

BirdLife International has written a circular about the risks arising from crossbreeding wild birds of prey and farmed birds. In this text they say that this practice should be banned in order to avoid genetic pollution. Every year in Europe, hundreds of crossbreeds escape from their cages into natural habitats. This is incredibly dangerous, especially for the Saker Falcon, which is on the list of endangered birds.

### ENAC: Falcons are not effective

A circular from the Italian Civil Aviation Authority details the use of falcons at airports. It states that falconry is barely used as it has severe limitations as falcons can only hunt for a few hours a day, they cannot be used at night, on days with wind and rain and they are of little use against large birds such as herons, or aggressive birds such as crows or gulls.



## CAMPAIGNS

*by Maristella Filippucci, LIPU Head of Publicity*

### The 500 thousand wave

**M**assive success in the Nature Alert Campaign to save the European Directives. LIPU second only to the great RSPB in signatures collected

Nature Alert has been the biggest campaign in the unfolding tale of the defence of the Community Directives on Habitat and Birds. In Italy, thanks to the Members, to the Volunteers and to the Activists in LIPU, to the Facebook and Twitter friends, to the bloggers and to the so many testimonials who have mobilised on the social networks, we have achieved a magnificent and unexpected goal: 50,626 signatures in just a few months. LIPU came second in Europe in numbers of signatures collected, only behind the English colossus, the RSPB which does however have a million members.

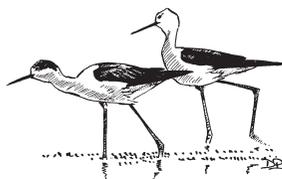
It has been a campaign which has seen the mobilisation on a European level of an environmental coalition comprising some 200 associations and coordinated by the international network, Birdlife International (of which LIPU is a part), WWF, EEB (European Environmental Bureau) and Friends of the Earth Europe, with 28 European countries involved and the objective of collecting 500 thousand signatures. Two days before the closure of the consultation the (European) Commission, in view of the considerable success of the campaign, decided to postpone the deadline by two days, allowing us to add and to go past the previously set goal of 20 thousand signatures.

The associations' campaign began under the auspices of the European consultation organised by the Commission in order to sound out the opinion of the wider public on the Habitat and Bird Directives. The focus is on the second phase of the "Fitness check" (see Ali summer pp12-13), that is to say the progress of the validation of the state of health of the

Directives on Habitat and Birds, recognised as the most important measures for the defence of wild animals, plants and habitat throughout the continent of Europe. Thanks to this, Europe boasts the largest area of protected areas in the world, Nature Net 2000, areas which cover some 20% of European territory and 4% of its marine sites. In Italy, Purple Heron, Lammergeier, Little tern, Bittern and Marsh Harrier have clearly increased their nesting populations thanks to an effective management plan in the Nature 2000 network of sites which host them, demonstrating that the Community Directives on the environment, where they are applied, work.

Particulat thanks must go to the Mava Foundation which has supported the campaign allowing the associations, among which is LIPU, to be able to take part.

Lots of endorsements of the “shout” of #NatureAlert Geppi Cucciari has been the leader in chief of this campaign launched on her, social network supported by Gianni Morandi, Rita Pavone, Fiorello and Fiorellino, Nek, Alessia Marcuzzi, Fiorella Mannoia, Neri Marcorè, Luca Argentero, Miriam Leone, Edoardo Leo and Claudio Bisio, who have lent their voices to the Italian version of the video produced by Birdlife International to promote the campaign and which may be watched on Youtube and LIPU’s Facebook page



## FROM THE WORLD OF LIPU

*Compiled by Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer*

### **LIFE TIB Project, Major works complete**

Work has now been completed for the Life Tib or Trans Insubria Bionet, the project for the preservation of biodiversity promoted by the Province of Varese, the Region of Lombardy, LIPU and the Cariplo Foundation, with the assistance of the EU. Thanks to actions for environmental improvements and the renewal of the connections between the natural environments in the ecological corridor that links the parks of the Ticino and the Campo dei Fiori, the project has sought to alleviate the impact of infrastructures on wildlife. Five hundred metres of drystone walls were constructed for reptiles and amphibians, with eight new wetlands and five underpasses, while 500 metres of power lines were made safe for birds. For small mammals there were three new underpasses, with improvements to five passages along watercourses, and alterations to three pre-existing underpasses to make them more wildlife-friendly.

For some species dependent on the presence of dead wood (beetles, insects, bird and bats), a plantation of 860 willows is projected, with another 30 to be pollarded; overall in the wooded areas there has been work done on 600 trees and numerous nest boxes put in place. The effectiveness of the works will be subject to monitoring ([www.lifetib.it](http://www.lifetib.it)) (Massimo Soldarini)

### **Leaving is Living – a viral video**

A lively soundtrack, the comical ballets of stilts, owls half asleep and other engaging images lead into an attention-grabbing finale that brings home to all the great respect that is due to the miracle of migration. These are the ingredients which have given impetus to the viral video from the Leaving is Living campaign, bringing it to the milestone of over 650,000 views in the three countries in which it was promoted, of Spain, Italy and Greece.

Conceived, produced and promoted by the J Walter Thompson agency, the video (which can be seen on LIPU's youtube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/lipuvideo>), it was aimed at a young audience, for which reason it was circulated on social media (Youtube and Google as well as Facebook). Seeing it unfold in three languages has been a source of pride for all in a work that brings together three BirdLife partners, acting jointly for the first time in the field of communications and awareness raising, with the single objective of ending poaching in the southern Mediterranean. (Maristella Filipucci)

### **Torre d'Isola, a decision for Swallows**

Following a proposal from LIPU Pavia, the Commune of Torre d'Isola has issued a by-law this July for the protection of swallows, swifts and martins. Prominent in seeing this through have been the mayor Roberto Casimiro and the councillor for the environment Giulio Siranni, who followed up the request of LIPU's workers almost immediately, showing exceptional interest in and sensitivity to the protection of nature.

“To safeguard these species - said *Ciro Acquaviva*

of LIPU Pavia - it is important to increase interest among the public, but the by-law from the mayor and the council of Torre d'Isola is only a starting point. It is only with the full involvement of people at large that we will be able to give full protection to nesting swallows”.

The hope is that other communes around Pavia will follow the example of Torre d'Isola, and bring enthusiasm and civic pride to environmental issues.

### **Montagu's Harrier, a historic flight**

It has happened at last. In spite of the threat from foxes and combine harvesters, a pair of Montagu's Harriers has seen one of their young fledged. A nest which has made history for southern Italy, through the determined assistance of the exceptional team at LIPU Foggia, beginning when some of them spotted the nest right in the middle of a farmer's field. With the nest being positioned astride two different plots, the only chance of identifying the proprietor, and to avoid the harvester destroying the brood, was to locate them on the very day the harvest was to take place. But just while discussions were under way, the relentless harvester passed over the nest, to the great despair both of parents and birders. Following the movements of the female, however, the eggs were rediscovered still warm. The nest was rebuilt, and it was decided to set up protective netting to defend the nest site, not least against the local foxes. After many ups and downs, four o'clock alarms and many pains, the task went forward, with the looked-for prize at the end. The young harrier, Apulia, took to the air, safe and in good health.

## **Michele Mendi, Seventh and Twelfth in Bird Photograph of the Year**

Four Black-winged Stilts dancing in the water before the golden backdrop of the Torrile Trecasili reserve, near Parma. With this shot Michele Mendi, a volunteer for LIPU Parma, a member of the national committee and an enthusiastic nature photographer, gained seventh place in the prestigious Bird Photograph of the Year 2015, a competition founded in 1976 by British Birds and won this year by the Hungarian Lake Csag. Michele Mendi, the sole Italian among the top twenty, also gained a prestigious twelfth place with a photo taken in Spain (Embalse del Oso), of two Red Kites. A record achievement. Congratulations to Michele from the Ali editorial team. (<http://britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/bird-photograph-of-the-year/>.)

## **Twenty Five Million birds killed every year in Southern Europe**

Birds shot, trapped or victims of liming, 25 million wild birds are being killed every year around the Mediterranean. These disturbing figures come out of the new report on illegal killing brought out on August 25th by BirdLife International to mark Birdfair 2015 in England. Italy, with 5.6 million birds killed on average, is among those at the top of the table, second only to Egypt. A staggering figure for our country, exceeding those of Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus, all weighing in at over two million slain. When it comes down to individual areas, the worst is that around Famagusta in Cyprus, with 690,000 victims, while the worst in terms of killings per square kilometre is Malta. Among the species most afflicted by illegal hunting are the Chaffinch (2.9

million killed per year), the Blackcap (1.8 million), the Quail (1.6 million) and the Song Thrush (1.2 million). The figures for Italy, previously released by LIPU on March 21st on the occasion of the conference for the Life project, tell of a massacre of Chaffinches (2-3 million) Meadow Pipits, Robins, Hawfinches and Starlings. The endangered species hit hardest by illegal killing in our country are the Marbled Duck (50% of the nesting population), the Red Kite (30%) and the Egyptian Vulture (20%). ([www.lipu.it](http://www.lipu.it))

### **Tuscany – New Birdwatching courses**

October in Tuscany, rich in new birdwatching courses. In Florence, there are lectures on urban birds, green spaces, bats and trees. At the Fortezza Vecchia in Livorno, with the support of the Livorno Port Authority, there are talks on bird gardens and excursions to the Isle of Gorgona and the Santa Luce nature reserve. Then, at Pisa, there are to be talks on identifying urban birds and their songs, with others on birds of the wetlands, as well as excursions to the Pisa Botanical Gardens and the Chiarone-Massaciuccoli reserve.

### **Late News**

The Italian Government is about to approve a decree on the rationalisation of administration, including the cancellation of Corpo Forestale dello Stato.

In parallel, provincial police forces, who are currently in charge of monitoring and enforcing environmental laws run a serious risk of being cancelled, due to administrative simplification.

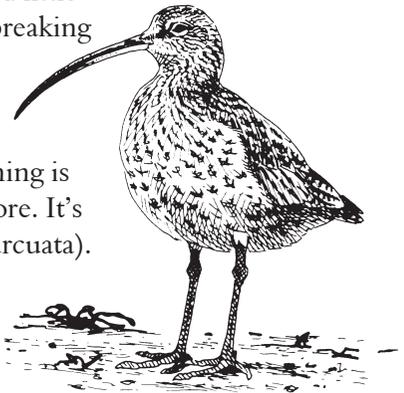
LIPU, WWF and other organisations are deeply concerned that environmental crime will become rampant due to lack of control on the territory.

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### **Winner of the National Competition of Illustrations of Nature 2015, Bird Category**

*by Michele Soprano, who used a DSLR - 300mm + 2.0x - f 5.6, 1/500s, ISO 100, remote shutter, tripod to create the winning image of a Curlew (see page 31). Here is his account:*

**I**n winter the Comacchio Valleys are an exceptional place. It's the 25 January and for the first time I am exploring the valleys in search of inspiration for photographs. Dawn gradually reveals kingfishers, ducks and herons. By halfway through the day the morning mists are long gone: the early afternoon sun pierces the low cloud turning water and air golden. I move along the track which joins two valleys whilst about three hundred curlews fly back and forth over the water and stop just short of it at a point out of sight. In the distance a little island of vegetation breaking up the uniform profile of the liquid expanse attracts my attention: something is moving along the shore. It's a curlew (*Numenius arcuata*). It crosses the golden expanse, its long legs creating a brilliant trail.



It moves slowly as if it's sleepwalking. The curlew is a long way away from me, I quickly open my backpack, increase the focal length from 300 mm to 600 mm and get the shot I had hoped for. Looking into the light removed many of the colours visible to the human eye and the nearest vegetation frames the photograph. The golden morning light makes this moment extra special. Having allowed me to click a few times, the curlew takes four steps and turns its head to sleep. The opportunity to capture any more has vanished, and as in any photographic endeavour, the greatest challenge for me is always to transform into a photograph the scenes of natural life which I have had the privilege of witnessing.

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Line drawings in this issue are used with the kind permission of the RSPB.

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As always, this edition of the Ali could not come to you without the hard work of our team of translators. My thanks go to those who worked on this Autumn edition, Barbara Avery, Joanna Bazen, Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

Our congratulations go to the translator having a rest this time – Giusy Fazzina in Trinidad who recently returned to Siracusa in Sicily to be married.

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Above, this evocative image of a Curlew by Michele Soprano was the winner in the “Birds” category of the National Niche Competition of Illustrations of Nature 2015, see page 29. Below: “Hands Off the Birds Directive” – the petition is presented in Rome.





At last this should be a thing of the past!

Thrushes seen in cages in northern Italy. The practice of catching wild birds to keep in cages as lures for others is finally banned in Italy.