



- LIPU Hirundine Project
- Annual appeal – Stop the Massacre
- Starlings and other “Problem” species
- Red List – Europe, update

Monster – or misunderstood? A Cormorant blamed for eating fish.
See p 6. Photo: © Michele Mendi



A watch tower on the Strait of Messina – now used by LIPU volunteers mounting their anti-poaching survey. Photo: © Marco De Silvi



The political value of science

Editorial

David Lingard

In the years since I became the UK delegate many things have impressed me about LIPU's work in Italy. The determined opposition to poaching and the dedication shown in helping birds which have become the innocent victims of the poachers, are matched by the strength of the science employed by the conservation department.

The short term solution is the anti-poaching patrols, who bravely fight the battle year after year with a slow but steady gain over the law-breakers. The long term solution is the changing of attitudes of the Italian people, and two groups of people are targeted by LIPU here – the children in the schools who are the future, and the politicians who are deciding policies today. Political change will come only by reasoned debate and only if this is backed by facts which will withstand any challenge because they are indisputably true – not based on weak assumptions and data.

I was in Extremadura at the end of January and the locals were as surprised as I was to see Barn Swallows moving north on the 29th – and House Martins starting the repair of nests. Is it a sign of climate change, or simply an unusually mild winter? Can any conclusion be drawn from this? Of course not – and I mention this only to show the value of long term research such as the LIPU study of the migration routes and behaviour of raptors passing through Sicily in the Spring. I shall be asking for your support for this project now in its fifteenth year as we launch our annual appeal with this issue.

In the past you, the supporters of LIPU, have responded magnificently and we have succeeded in making real changes for the better – please help again, this year, with the generosity which you have shown in the past, generosity which is truly appreciated. Thank you.

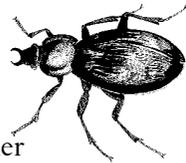
STARLINGS, CORMORANTS, BOARS AND OTHER 'PROBLEM' SPECIES

Danilo Selvaggi, Director General, LIPU

A Story of Self-Interest and Environmental Mismanagement

In Spring 1587, the villagers of Saint-Julien – a village in the French Rhone Alps – appealed to the episcopal judge of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne to take action against a colony of beetles. They accused the insects of damaging their vineyards and sought action to drive them away by 'excommunication or any other appropriate measure'

The judge took note of the accusation, opened a case, and appointed a court lawyer to defend the coleoptera. An usher was sent to the insects, summoning them to appear before the tribunal on 13 April 1587. The beetles failed to appear. However, their advocate argued their case so well that the case was still not closed several weeks later. In light of these unexpected developments, the villagers of Saint-Julien called a meeting on 18 July and decided to propose a compromise. The insects were offered an alternative piece of land in the Grand Freisse area, 'to preclude



... the villagers of Saint-Julien obeyed, with prayers, penance, and processions around the vineyards.

them from eating and harming the above-mentioned vineyards' This alternative site was home to 'several species of trees, plants, and shrubs, such as beech, rosemary, cherry, oak... as well as grass and pasture' In short, a satisfactory alternative to the delicious Saint-Julien grapes.

Repent and Believe in Nature

The outcome of this story – related by Luc Ferry in his book *The New Ecological Order* – is not known; though we do know that the defence lawyer wished to check for himself the quality of the land on offer. However, such episodes were not unheard of in the village of Saint-Julien. Around forty years earlier, in 1545, beetles had once again been the object of a complaint, with an outcome equally unfavourable to the citizens. On that occasion the bishop ordered the villagers to 'repent their sins with sincerity and pray for God's mercy' Probably he sensed the stain of original sin in this clash with nature. And so the villagers of Saint-Julien obeyed, with prayers, penance, and processions around the vineyards. The result, perhaps fortuitous, was that the coleoptera left.

Today this seems hard to believe, but history is full of trials against nature. Lawsuits against animals often ended in so-called admonitions: threats of excommunication against animals found culpable of destroying human assets. However it was not unusual for rulings to go in the other direction, as shown in the case of the Rhone insects.

So, what lessons can we learn from this apparently bizarre incident at Saint-Julien? There are at least three. First, the problem of damage caused by wild

Many Italian regions have defied both national law and European Community directives by allowing the killing of starlings ...

animals goes back a long way. Second, even 500 years ago, judging right from wrong in the conflict between man and nature was not simple, and neither was the result of such judgements taken for granted. Third, the villagers of Saint-Julien settled on a 'natural' solution, which was in its own way both intelligent and advanced.

Cormorants and Other 'Invaders'

Five hundred years after Saint-Julien it is the turn of fishermen from Oristano in Sardinia to launch legal proceedings, this time against the cormorants of their area. In one year the cormorants are claimed to have eaten fish worth two and a half million Euros.



And this case is not unique. Many Italian regions have defied both national law and European Community directives by allowing the killing of starlings – based on little or no evidence – to prevent damage to cherry and olive trees. And then there are the boars, roe deer and other hoofed animals that roam 'like barbarians' feeding on everything in their path. Not to mention Herring Gulls, pigeons, and even bears and wolves, which have moved surprisingly quickly from the brink of extinction to become perceived as a threat to humankind.

This portrait of the damage caused by animals covers a large canvas, filled with controversy and argument. We should not dismiss the problem, but the debate must move on from reflex reaction to seriously considering the full range of factors in play (ecological, biological, socio-economic and ethical). There are three obstacles that lie in the way of wise solutions. Let us call them the three 'deadly sins' of vision, of interest groups, and of technology.

The case of the Sardinian cormorants can help us understand the first of these three sins – 'vision' a flawed world view in which nature is valued in terms of human worth, and its fruits belong to mankind by right.

The Sea, at Five Euros a Kilo

In its 27 September 2015 edition, La Repubblica reported on the Sardinian cormorant case, echoing the accusations of UECCOP and Coldiretti Sardegna. 'In six years their numbers have increased by 86.5 per cent, growing from 8,384 in 2008 to 15,636 in December 2014. They have become a blight on fishermen. In the last year alone they have eaten more than 2.5 million Euros worth of fish. A cormorant eats 310 grams of fish each day. During the six months of peak numbers they ate 537,252 kilograms of fish worth an estimated 2,686,258 Euros (at an average cost of 5 Euros a kilogram).'

Now, how would a hypothetical lawyer respond to these accusations? Let us imagine the summing up: 'First, we have learned, Your Honour, that cormorants eat fish. Just like their fathers ate fish and their fathers before them ate fish. Secondly, we have learned that each cormorant eats 300 grams of fish a day. Is this too much? Should we order the cormorants to go on a diet? We have also learned that a kilo of fish is worth five Euros more or less, which – multiplied by the quantity of fish eaten by my clients – amounts to a loss of 2.5 million Euros. A loss? Whose loss? Who owns the fish in the sea? According to what unwritten rule do fish belong to mankind, and not also to cormorants, to gulls, to shearwaters, or to the bigger fish that feed on smaller fish? And if this is the case, what

Much of the problem of overpopulation that we see today started with the mass reintroductions of the fifties and sixties, all for the purpose of hunting.

are the others supposed to live on? I have chosen not to dwell on the fact that while cormorants have doubled in number, the planet's human population is now approaching some 10 billion, compared with 1.5 billion only a century ago. And they certainly know how to eat fish! To conclude, I suggest that the anthropocentric viewpoint underlying these accusations is both blinkered and fundamentally flawed – The belief that the sea has a price and not a value. The belief that man has rights over nature. The belief that ignores the coexistence of species.'

King of the Problem Species

From this first deadly sin, by nature cultural (both scientific and philosophic), springs a second: the sin of commercial interests centred on the damage caused by animals. Top of the list of problem species is the boar – both for the trouble it causes, and for the insight its case provides.

Much of the problem of overpopulation that we see today started with the mass reintroductions of the fifties and sixties, all for the purpose of hunting. These paved the way for practices that have never really stopped, and which have led to the widespread hybridisation of species. With the introduction of eastern European stock – noted for its large size and prolific breeding habits – huge numbers of boars have spread throughout the country. Boars are of principal interest to hunters, who lend their vocal support to farmers, who suffer crop damage, but have no real desire to tackle the root of the problem. For fewer boars would mean less prey to hunt, less meat to divide and sell, reduced power for the hunting-group system, less damage to agriculture and a reduced opportunity to exploit the anger of farmers.

More boars? More hunting! Never pointing out the obvious: that the number of boars increases because such an increase is in the interests of those hunting them. Clearly a vicious circle.

So the second deadly sin in the handling of problem species is commercial interests centred on the damage caused by animals. For some, the problem has become a lucrative business.

Transatlantic Squirrels and Louisiana Prawns

Animal damage is not only a problem for agriculture; it is also a problem for biodiversity. In addition to damage caused by overcrowding, we also see damage caused by the introduction of exotic species, which can cause deep ecological disturbances in unsuitable habitats. So much so that international reports single out so-called alien species as one of the main threats to biodiversity. Here too we should be honest and tell the whole story. If boars are causing ecological damage to islands off the coast of Tuscany, can we ignore the introduction and reintroduction of species – destined to be hunted – that have compounded the problem of these islands and upset their ecological balance? So how did the grey squirrel arrive in Italy, making life for the native red squirrel impossible, if not through the trade in exotic animals? And the dreaded Louisiana red prawn, a miniature killing machine for river fauna. Is it imaginable that it would have crossed the Atlantic on its own, setting up home near Pavia? Businesses of all types have acted carelessly, ignoring the laws of nature and costing us dearly.



Investigations (and How to Avoid the Truth)

Returning to boars and the problem of overcrowding, it is remarkable how many parliamentary investigations, by both lower and upper houses, have avoided proposing explicit controls on rearing and release. More hunting, yes; but without limits to the rearing, release, feeding and breeding of boars. This is the 'tactic of the tap' - the lawyer for the boars would say at this point. 'The room is flooded. We try to collect the water with a teaspoon, but nobody thinks to turn off the tap.'

(At the time of writing, the Senate is discussing an amendment that might, finally, introduce a partial ban on release. We shall see.)

It seems certain now that the influence of hunting has increased the reproductive rate and breeding success rate of boars, with unseasonal births and a spreading of the population. The use of guns is failing as a remedy, and yet hunting remains the preferred solution, if not the only one. Clear signs of the 'hunting pressure' felt by our local administrations.

Technical Sin

And yet, management plans and technical countermeasures do exist – comprehensive solutions, differing from species to species, but sharing a common idea of environmental management that is far-sighted as well as advanced. It is a shame that many of these solutions languish in desk drawers, waiting for funding or political will that never arrives. And this is the third deadly sin: technical weakness. Certainly it is true that techniques could

... it is not the animals that are invading our city space; it's our towns that are invading the animals' space ...

be improved, and that new data and knowledge is desirable; but we could achieve a lot today already by breaking the vicious circle caused by self interest, encouraging habitat management and changing our vision. Think, for example, of the devastating problem of land consumption. Every day seventy hectares of agricultural and natural land are urbanised: covered by roads, concrete and buildings. Let's put it this way, it is not the animals that are invading our city space; it's our towns that are invading the animals' space, upsetting the natural balance.

And let's not ignore another hot topic, that of climate change. This is not only causing loss of species and of habitat, it is distorting our perspectives, boosting 'unnatural' growth and changing the landscape in unforeseen and radical ways. With my hand on my heart, I don't think the problem is caused by the starlings.

The Other

The problem of the coexistence of human beings and other animals – in this age of globalisation and a hyper-connected economy – is a far-reaching one that should be tackled in all seriousness: openly and honestly. We need to break the vicious circle of interests, such as hunting and commerce, and contemplate restrictions (on boars, or on the trade in alien species for example) and apply these rules strictly. We must expose false accusations of damage by animals, often made as a means of securing 'compensation' We must support the best management techniques, keep a natural balance in mind, and invest in knowledge and practice. We must not give up.

There are no abstract recipes nor miraculous solutions, because the problem is as old as mankind and can only be mitigated, never solved. Above all, we should change our policies with regards to development and land use; in short, we should modify our world view.

We are not alone. There are others on this planet. Other individuals, other populations, other animals. Animals that are small, big, winged, colourful, two- and four-legged. Animals whose only fault seems to be that they move, drink, eat, feed, breed, care for their young, take up space, and are curious. In short, they live. Which is exactly what we do ourselves. The only difference is that they do it so with more discretion and with less impact. It would be wonderful if we could learn not just to live, but to live together. If we could only work, with natural and social wisdom, to promote the common good. It would be wise, wonderful, and desirable. For all of us.

THE 'HIRUNDINE-SAVING' MAYORS

By Marco Dinetti – Head of LIPU Urban Ecology

Swifts, swallows and martins (collectively: hirundines) build their nests in/on our buildings. They feed on insects and spend virtually all their lives on the wing. They are migratory birds, which – after overwintering in Africa – come to visit us at the beginning of Spring to nest in our countryside, towns or cities. There are eight species of hirundines: five swallows and martins, and three swifts. The last are bigger and darker, and they never land except to nest.

... provide information and guidelines to farmers to encourage them in the direction of organic farming, which brings great benefits to hirundines and other farmland wildlife.

The main actions of LIPU's long-term 'Hirundine Project' – launched almost 20 years ago – have included scientific studies to monitor population trends and provide information and guidelines to farmers to encourage them in the direction of organic farming, which brings great benefits to hirundines and other farmland wildlife.

Another important activity that LIPU has been working on is the 'Saving hirundines' law, which has so far been implemented by 89 town councils across all Italian regions. This law is specific to town councils and reiterates national law number 157/92, which safeguards nests, and is oriented to the refurbishment of whole building as well as building facades outside the nesting period.

This new document is more modern and comprehensive than the previous edition, and it aims to address local town councils and to remind them of the recent laws on, and the internationally-recognised importance of, urban biodiversity. In this document the importance of certain species – such as the Eurasian Crag Martin and the Pallid Swift, which nest in some cities – as a means of mosquito control is highlighted. Further, more technical suggestions are specified in this new document compared to the old edition, in particular with regards to the implementation of building regulations and information points for the general public and schoolchildren.

LIPU wants to launch this campaign and push for a 'biocity' approach to protecting urban biodiversity. Thanks to our local LIPU branches, the document will be available to all those who would like to present it to their town councils.

Among local LIPU initiatives, the Livorno branch's 'Friends of Hirundines', which aims at rewarding people, associations or farming entities that protect nests on their property, is worth a special mention. This is a great idea that we hope to extend nationally.

- **BARN SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

Identification: blueish on the dorsal view with white underparts. Front and throat are dark red. Tail is forked. Flight is elegant.

Where: rural areas, towns, urban areas.

Nest: made of mud and straw, shaped like a half-dome; built inside stables, garages, porches and other sites.

Population trend: 25 per cent decline between 2000 and 2010.

- **HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbica*

Identification: Black on the dorsal view; white rump; white underparts; tail is moderately forked.

Where: towns, urban areas.

Nest: made of mud, closed with a small opening; built under roof ledges, often forming colonies.

Population trend: more than 30 percent decline between 2000 and 2010.

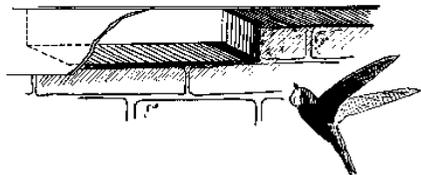
- **SWIFT** *Apus apus*

Identification: all black; long, sickle-shaped wings; tail moderately forked.

Where: towns, urban areas.

Nest: in holes and the crevices of buildings; under roof tiles.

Population trend: estimated population of 1 2 million individuals and an overall stable population trend.



Wildlife-Friendly Building Regulations

The way architects and engineers design and build buildings and other structures is essential to:

- Providing nesting sites for hirundines, birds of prey, Black Redstarts, sparrows, and bats.
- Reducing mortality rates due to collisions with windows and electric cables, and to the trapping of amphibians and small mammals in pipes and canals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOIL

By Claudio Celada, LIPU's Conservation Director

In Italy three square kilometres of soil disappear every day – an unsustainable rate for a material vital for the survival of ecosystems, and of ourselves.

In a celebrated university lecture, an American writer – the late David Foster Wallace – spoke of one shoal of fish meeting another. A fish from the first shoal greets the others with 'Hello lads, how's the water today?' The fish from the second shoal return the greeting, then – after a brief silence – one of the second group asks his neighbour, 'Water. What's that?' With this well-chosen image, Foster Wallace sought to alert us as to how, very often, immersed in what we are doing, we fail to take account of the true nature of the most important things that surround us. And his metaphor could also be applied to our relationship with soil. As much as water and the air, our very existence depends on this fragile layer of organic material, and for a long

The top thirty centimetres of agricultural soil hold sixty tons of carbon per hectare.

time we have taken its existence for granted, without any understanding of how important preserving it actually is.

Just as the Earth's atmosphere is a paper-thin and therefore vulnerable shield between ourselves and interstellar space, soil is a mantle rich in organic material teeming with life, its mineral component only a few tens of centimetres thick. Without soil, almost none of the planet's plants and animals, almost none of its terrestrial ecosystems, could exist. No forests, no food, minimal fresh water, biodiversity depleted beyond measure. While our existence and that of so many other organisms depends on soil, its formation – in turn – is made possible only by the work of a vast panoply of those organisms, which shape, modify and in some cases digest it. But all this needs time. It takes hundreds of years to create a layer only a few centimetres deep of this material that hosts a myriad of organisms both visible and invisible to the naked eye; organisms that ceaselessly work, for us.

Playing with Fire

We are increasingly hearing about 'soil depletion', a real and present emergency that is an integral part of the environmental crisis of this age. In the last hundred years, on the global scale, half of all available soil has been lost. This phenomenon could also be quantified in terms of a loss of land surface. In Europe, an area of nearly two hundred thousand square kilometres, more or less the size of the UK, has been urbanised. A study by the Milan Polytechnic has shown that in Italy, where three square kilometres of soil disappear every day, 360,000 hectares of predominantly agricultural land were

devoured by urbanisation between 1998 and 2012. The most fertile soils in Europe, such as those of the Po valley, have been converted into a sheet of concrete, often not even for the building of new homes, but purely in the interests of speculation. Changing the land use designation of a plot to make it available for building has become a major business activity in the last few decades. Building houses and industrial units, then leaving them unoccupied, completes the picture, and current legislation makes it easier to build on agricultural land than to bring land back into use from the ample supply of brownfield sites.

To make matters worse, in our country as in others, the threat to our soil is not limited to urbanisation, grave as that phenomenon is.

Decades of agriculture based on the use of huge amounts of fertilisers and agrochemicals have impoverished the soil – in essence, a living thing – and in the worst cases turned it to dust, right before our eyes. Soils emptied of organic material and of biodiversity; their texture and structure destroyed. There are also soils that have been excessively ploughed, compacted and over exploited, pushed to produce at unsustainable levels.



We have also poisoned many soils, contaminating them with toxins as if the effect of these substances would vanish of its own accord with time. Thus, we are now faced with the prospect of enormously costly remedial work, only a fraction of which has been conducted – whatever the claims of various governments that such work is succeeding.

Nature may save us. But neither nature nor the future will do so if we do not act to increase our awareness of our soils, and preserve them.

We have to respect the soil more if we are to avoid increasing the risk of food insecurity, especially in view of current population trends. It is not by chance that several major powers – and not merely China – have been extremely active in the acquisition of huge tracts of cultivable land, particularly in Africa. Likewise, some EU countries have been undertaking similar operations, and the people of Europe depend to an increasing degree on the productivity of other peoples' soils for their sustenance.

How can we halt the decline of biodiversity if the soil on which it depends is ultimately used up, degraded and fragmented by ever more building, transportation use, and other developments? How is it possible to counter climate change and adapt to it without considering the soil, which stores an enormous amount of carbon whether in organic or inorganic form? Every time we plough a field, carbon is released into the air. Every use of fertilisers contributes to loading our atmosphere with climate-altering gases far more powerful than carbon dioxide.

To keep ecosystems in good condition, to avoid mass extinctions, to work towards more sustainable agriculture, to take up the task of halting the construction of new and damaging motorways, to develop ways for Mediterranean countries to adapt, to take part in campaigns for the protection of soils, to improve existing legislation and affirm the existence of an effective 'right to the soil' as an essential communal good – all these elements and more are strands of LIPU's strategy. Nature may save us. But neither nature nor the future will do so if we do not act to increase our awareness of our soils, and preserve them. Just like David Foster Wallace's fish.

- The world currently loses 50,000 square kilometres of soil every year, Europe 11 hectares each hour, and Italy 70 hectares a day.
- Between 1998 and 2012 Italy used up 360,000 hectares of predominantly agricultural land.
- One hectare of land that escapes urbanisation stores 3.8 million litres of water.
- The top thirty centimetres of agricultural soil hold sixty tons of carbon per hectare.
- In Italy, three million hectares of land have been urbanised – 7.3 per cent of the total land area.
- In Europe, the area of land that has been urbanised has reached 200,000 square kilometres.

(Source: What Lies beneath Our Feet, by Paolo Pileri, Altreconomia Press).

RED LIST – EUROPEAN EXTINCTION RISK

By Marco Gustin, LIPU Species and Research

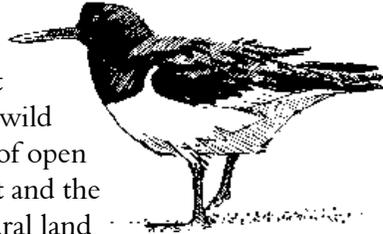
Changes in habitat and climatic variation are threatening a fifth of all species.

The last warning notice was issued in 2001. Since then nothing more is known of the Slender-billed Curlew. And, unfortunately, other species risk the same fate: almost one species of bird in five in Europe is menaced with extinction. A total of 11 are on the critical list: from the Balearic Shearwater to

Thousands of data have been collected on European species, creating the latest and most up-to-date view of trends, distribution, and size of the populations ...

the Yellow-breasted Bunting; from the Steppe Eagle to the Desert Lark. These worrying data come from the first European Red List of birds, published recently (Autumn 2015) by Birdlife International.

Of the world's over 10,000 species of bird, 533 nest, migrate, winter and live in Europe. Of this group, 18 per cent – 82 species – are threatened with extinction. The 11 in critical danger are listed below. The remaining 71 species have moved out of the 'safety zone' and onto the 'threatened' or 'vulnerable' lists – these include the Oystercatcher, Razorbill, Ptarmigan, Kittiwake and Pochard. But what are the factors that threaten the survival of wild birds? The destruction of open space, the loss of habitat and the degradation of agricultural land and wetlands. And, let us not forget, the environmental impact of climate change.



Nevertheless, good news is not entirely lacking. A total of 20 species are doing better and – where once threatened at a European level – are now of only minor concern (even though some are still threatened globally). These include the spectacular Dalmatian Pelican, the Ferruginous Duck, Stone Curlew, Black Kite, Lesser Kestrel, Long-legged Buzzard, Gull-billed Tern and Great Bustard.

A further 25 species remain threatened at the European level, but are now – compared with ten years ago (when they were critically threatened) – less at risk. This is the case with the Madeiran Petrel and the Azores Bullfinch.

The Red List, the first ever published for Europe, has used the IUCN criteria to measure the risk of extinction for a species, applying them at a regional level. Financed by the European Commission, it is the fruit of years of work involving scientists, conservationists, politicians, birdwatchers and many members of the public. Thousands of data have been collected on European species, creating the latest and most up-to-date view of trends, distribution, and size of the populations currently present on a regular basis in Europe.

It is now up to the political milieu to take action. After all, the birds that are disappearing – or that could well disappear in the future – are just one warning light for a gravely unhealthy planet.

The most threatened species in Europe

- Balearic Shearwater
- Slender-billed Curlew
- Quail
- Yellow-breasted Bunting
- Sociable Plover
- Brown Fish Owl
- Steppe Eagle
- Black Lark
- Desert Lark.
- Great Bustard



LIFE+

By Giorgia Gaibani, manager of Natura 2000 and IBAs

A Strategy for Biodiversity

LIFE+ Gestire ended last month with many useful actions implemented for managing and evaluating the Lombardy Natura 2000 network

Managing and renovating sites in the Lombardy Natura 2000 network and establishing a genuine, long-term strategy that takes into account all the factors in the field means evaluating the various possible sources of funding (community, national, regional) and promoting the integration of nature conservation and other human activities .

The European project LIFE+ Gestire, carried out by the Lombardy region, LIPU, ERSAF , FLA, CTS and Comunità Ambiente , has done just that. The project, co-funded by the European Commission and the Cariplo Foundation, concluded successfully in February 2016.

Launched in October 2012, Life Gestire was mandated to carry out a number of useful actions connected with the management and promotion of the Natura 2000 network – a fundamental instrument for European biodiversity. The mandate included the analysis of regulations in force at different levels (European, national, regional) with the aim of highlighting critical issues and establishing a foundation of knowledge with which to identify solutions in the future. The analysis of those green jobs related to Natura 2000 and the drafting of proposals to incentivize such jobs both considers the

Life Gestire was mandated to carry out a number of useful actions connected with the management and promotion of the Natura 2000 network – a fundamental instrument for European biodiversity.

socio-economic value of the Lombardy Natura 2000 network and helps us to understand the importance of our valuable European environmental heritage.

A financial plan to manage the Lombardy network from 2014 to 2020 was also created, based on costs incurred in previous years and potential sources of financing. As part of the project a scientific monitoring programme was formulated covering more than 50 habitats and around 200 wild species of community importance in the Lombardy network. The possible effects of climate change on certain potentially vulnerable species were also evaluated.

Thanks to work carried out by the project partners, and to the involvement of management authorities, conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites without approved management plans were implemented. In addition to ensuring that, today, all Natura 2000 sites in Lombardy are equipped with conservation measures or management plans, this also prepares the way for Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) to be redesignated as Special Conservation Areas (SPAs). In the same vein, measures necessary for improving the ecological connection between Natura 2000 sites were also identified with the aim that such sites do not remain mere ‘natural islands’, but instead become a real network of protected areas.

The participation process was also important for Life+ Gestire. In order to ensure a direct link with the territory and to lay the foundation for integrated and shared management of Natura 2000, a range of different stakeholders were involved in certain of the project’s activities. Of particular interest, 67 E3 ‘Public Consultation and Involvement of Stakeholders’ action meetings were conducted,

Life Ip Gestire 2020. It is a truly massive project , worth a total of over 17 million Euros ...

bringing together – in total – more than 1,600 participants, including representatives management authorities and other local bodies, agencies, universities, associations, regulatory bodies and employers.

Finally, among the main outputs of the project, Gestire’s programmatic document and the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) each deserve a special mention. The first consists of a cognitive framework of the Natura 2000 Lombardy network , composed of all the information gathered as part of the project and plans for the network’s management until 2020, with general and strategic objectives elaborated. Meanwhile, the PAF outlines priority interventions for planning the multi-annual management of the Natura 2000 network, obtained from the programmatic document and its supporting budget.

Gestire 2020 Is Approved

In order to fulfil a large part of the primary actions identified by Gestire through the programme document and in the PAF , the Lombardy Region has submitted and received approval for a new community project , Life Ip Gestire 2020. It is a truly massive project , worth a total of over 17 million euros , involving the Lombardy Region, LIPU, ERSAF, FLA, Community Environment, together with WWF and the State Forestry.

See: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=5436

... just an area in the Province of Cuneo where hunting was prohibited ...

Natura 2000 in Lombardy

Lombardy hosts 242 Natura 2000 sites, equivalent to 15 per cent of the entire region, of these 193 are Sites of Community Importance (SCI) and 67 are Special Protection Areas for birds (SPAs).

In 2015, 47 SCIs under conservation measures as ‘specific sites’, were declared Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Within this network of sites are 61 species of community interest (included in Annex II of the Habitats Directive) and 87 species of bird (included in Annex I of the Birds Directive).

OASI - LIPU NATURE RESERVE NEWS

By Ugo Faralli, Manager of LIPU Oasi and Reserves

Dreams Become Reality

Last November LIPU celebrated the anniversary of the historic opening of its first reserve, Crava Morozzo in Piedmont

The celebrations included dynamic yoga with Nadia, children’s active reading sessions with Daniele and Federica, bird photographs with Enrico, and – finally – the release of a rehabilitated Tawny Owl and Little Owl.



The programme of events with which the Crava Morozzo reserve celebrated the first 35 years of its existence last November

was both thrilling and extremely full. Our association organised the event with all the bodies that have shared in this long and fascinating adventure: Marguareis Regional Park and the districts of Morozzo, Rocca de' Baldi, Mondovì, and Enel, all of which generously supported the event.



Created way back in 1980, Crava Morozzo was LIPU's first reserve. But even then the association's activities in this region had already begun. Like migratory birds, Tomaso, Ada, Franco and other LIPU birdwatchers from Cuneo gathered there like a group of garganeys in Spring or pochards at the start of Winter. It was their enthusiasm that gave birth to the reserve, which – at that time – was just an area in the Province of Cuneo where hunting was prohibited thanks to the support of three districts. Then came the first agreement with Enel, whose artificial basins, which had always supported migratory birds, were transformed into the reserve's wetland. Over time, the first structures required for visiting and school trips were installed, more ponds were established for birds and wildlife and the first observation hides were built. Later the park was formed and the 'oasis' was transformed into a nature reserve, becoming part of the system of protected areas in the Piedmont region. This process still continues in other LIPU 'Oasi'.

Crava Morozzo really was first in every sense, from the first idea of caring for natural areas to the first protected birds in the reserve.

Crava Morozzo really was first in every sense, from the first idea of caring for natural areas to the first protected birds in the reserve. It was also the first to install information boards and observation hides for birdwatching and photography, and to offer guided visits for schools. Above all it was the first concrete example of how people no longer thought of such an asset merely as something that could be transformed into a rubbish dump, a commercial centre, an industrial zone, or a trap for snipe or woodpigeon. Without the experience set in motion at Crava Morozzo, the Eleonora's Falcons at Carloforte, the orchids at Bianello, the Little Terns at Priolo, the egrets at Torriale and the salamanders at Casacalenda would never have been protected.

All this would be – relatively – easy today, in the new millennium. But it was much less simple during the 1980s and 1990s. So, together with yesterday's and today's administrators, mayors, councillors, presidents, directors, and park wardens, we celebrated 35 years of Crava Morozzo, looking back over events and developments, and aware of the debt of gratitude owed to those 'inventors' – Ada Gazzola, Tomaso Giraud and Franco Bergese. Our celebrations began at Castello di Rocca de' Baldi accompanied by our president, and continued in the reserve itself in closer contact with nature, remembering the hundreds of schoolchildren from the area and the countless families that have passed through, seen, breathed, and enjoyed the reserve over the years. Crava Morozzo nature reserve: only 'natural' for Crava and – so – also for us.

* * *

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

LIPU-UK Annual Prize Draw

Each year we hold our annual prize draw and it continues to go from strength to strength. However, if you don't like draws and would rather not receive tickets please tell me as I don't send tickets to those who have said they don't want them - this will save you annoyance and me printing costs.

For those who do take part, you might be surprised to compare your chances with those of similar draws held by larger organisations. Our prizes are simple and are very popular; the first prize is a cheque for £500 and there are two more of £200 and £100. Last year, 225 people bought tickets - so that must offer a better chance of winning than most others!

The draw is also a steady source of income and showed a "profit" of about £2,500 so to all those who bought tickets in the past and to those who will buy tickets in the coming year, a heartfelt thank you.

Proving that lightning can strike twice in the same place, this year's first prize of £500 was won by Mrs E Beswick of Norfolk, who won the second prize last year! The second prize went to John Clark of Notts and John Glazebrook of Suffolk won the third prize.

LIPU-UK Annual Appeal

Unlike some charities we ask for your support only once a year and, this year, your help is just as much needed as in the past. Many countries are

still struggling with the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and Italy is by no means alone in this. However, when times are hard and economies have to be made it is a sad fact that governments see nature conservation as an easy target. Regions and provinces are holding back funds due to LIPU under maintenance contracts for reserves and LIPU is having to divert funds to bridge this funding gap. We are sure that this messy situation is only temporary but it does mean that the help we give this year will be even more urgent than before.

Each year Claudio Celada, the Conservation Director, offers candidates for support and from those your board of trustees choose those they wish to help. We have set ourselves the target of raising €80,000 for the seven projects below and €10,000 for membership dues fully realising that this figure is not going to be easy to achieve. That said I am sure you will agree that the following projects are fully deserving of our support:

1. Anti-poaching in Sardinia, at the Messina Strait and around Palermo in Sicily.
2. Protection of Bonelli's Eagle nest sites in Sicily.
3. Raptor migration monitoring through Sicily.
4. Nest boxes and research in a Red-footed Falcon colony in Parma.
5. Filling in gaps in the Breeding Atlas in its final year.
6. Thrush Conservation Research Project, the birds are migrating earlier and are being killed.

7. Raptor Recovery Centres – the ever present need for instruments and medicines.

Last year you – friends and supporters of LIPU-UK – gave almost £24,000 in the annual appeal and all the projects were successfully funded and completed. Please give us what you can and make this appeal as successful as those in the past.

In addition to gifts from individuals I am happy to thank the following for their generosity: The A S Butler Charitable Trust, the Clare Lees Trust, the G W Trust, the Peter Smith Trust for Nature Conservation and the Valerie White Memorial Trust.

Bird clubs and similar organisations who helped us include: the Manx Ornithological Society, Wakefield Naturalists Society and, finally, the Anglo Italian Society for the Protection of Animals (AISPA) gave its magnificent support continuing a partnership which has become very special. My thanks go to all who have helped and especially to those who are about to come to the aid of birds in Italy in the year ahead.

As always my thanks go to the translators and others who helped the production of this edition of Ali: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Abigail Cummings, Daria Dadam, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

Line drawings are used courtesy the RSPB and the photographs are © David Lingard (front cover) and others as credited.



A dramatic close-up image of a wild boar in Italian forest. See p8.
Photo: © Maurizio Bonora



A House Martin (*Delichon urbica*) gathering mud to build its nest.
See p 12.
Photo: © David Lingard

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A black bird, possibly a frigatebird, is perched on a branch. The background is filled with a dense network of branches and some green leaves. A thin, curved wire is visible in the upper part of the frame. The overall scene is somewhat somber due to the dark bird and the presence of the wire.

**STOP THE MASSACRE
APPEAL 2016**

Please help us