

# ali

Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



- The Season of Love
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- “The Killing” – BirdLife report
- Annual appeal

*Spring 2017*



In this issue there is an emphasis on the challenges faced by the birds of Italy. It's a good thing, therefore, to show the side of birdlife that we love and are working to help. This excellent image is by Mario Barito.

## Migration - mystery or miracle?

Editorial

*David Lingard*

I spent almost thirty years as a navigator in the RAF, a trade now made redundant by satellite navigation systems and computers.

I would quietly congratulate myself on having arrived at the right place and having done so in a huge machine with the ability to stay airborne for, perhaps, 12 hours and, in that time, burn almost 20,000 gallons of fuel.

Then I think of the tiny Goldcrest crossing the North Sea, choosing its own route by instinct, steering by some means I can't imagine and doing this on the energy provided by half a gram of body fat.

I haven't the words to describe the comparison, so I commend Danilo's piece in this issue which looks at both the mystery and the miracle of migration.

The Spring edition of *Ali* carries our Annual Appeal and there is more on that in later pages. We ask our members and friends to support us just once each year and in past years your generous response has been superb. Please help this appeal to be as successful as in the past, give what you can – the need is still there.

Thank you.



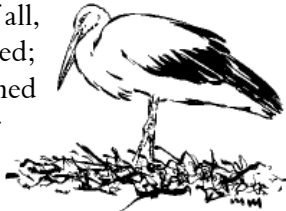
## THE SEASON OF LOVE

by Danilo Selvaggi

Fascinating and enlightening, bird migration illustrates the complexity of nature and its difficult relationship with human culture, at the interface between danger and hope. This is why we have set up Wingsland, the LIPU programme to protect migrating birds and make their journeys safer.

It is a tale of migration that never ceases to amaze me – that of Malena and Klepetan, a pair of White Storks, and the destiny that has united them in both good and ill fortune. For years they migrated together, setting off from South Africa, flying over mountains, deserts and seas to arrive at their destination, a Croatian village called Brodsky Varos, which the two storks had settled on as their nesting place. But then, one day, a rifle shot struck Malena and shattered a leg. She survived but could no longer fly, and at the end of that ill-fated summer of 2002, Klepetan said farewell to his partner and took flight, driven to leave and make his way south. Malena stayed behind alone, helped by the little local community to start a new and sedentary life.

Days and months passed. Autumn came and went, as did the cold Balkan winter, until at last the spring arrived and, to the amazement of all, one day in April, Klepetan returned; returned to Brodsky Varos; returned to his Malena. And then, the year after, and the year after that, and the surprise that is no longer a

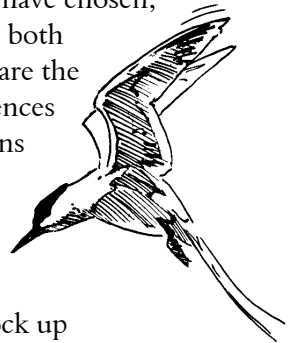


surprise, for the reuniting of Klepetan and Malena has now been repeated for 14 years. In a moment of excitement and elemental beauty, Klepetan arrives; Malena rises and turns towards him; they bow their necks to each other; their feathers tremble and their beaks clack together; and the season of love begins again, on the other side of injury, geography, and time.

## Flying to the Moon, and other Feats

They take flight, and we could just stop there. There is already enough to reflect on – whether for flight's technical aspects or just out of interest, even only considered as a narrative – in the migration of birds. But there are a many other questions to address that are helpful in that they oblige us to look at the overall picture, the better to understand what this complex natural phenomenon means for us and for human society. What do they need during their journey? And what can we do?

Birds migrate to adapt to the changes of the seasons and therefore to changes in their environments: rising and falling temperatures and the availability of food and suitable habitats. They navigate, managing to arrive at exactly the point they have chosen, using a combination of elements, both genetic and social, among which are the capacity to recognise visual references and landmarks, while in conditions of reduced visibility the presence of an internal biological compass allows them to maintain their direction of travel. On their voyages of migration they can clock up thousands of kilometres, which – in the well-known



case of the Arctic Tern – can mean over 100,000 in a year; but even in the more ‘ordinary’ cases they can achieve astonishing feats. One thinks of swallows, redstarts and many species of warbler such as Garden Warbler and Whitethroat, and all the other little trans-Saharan migrants making return journeys between central and southern Africa and the north of Europe. A few grams of flesh and blood, quills and feathers against the vastness of the world and the fury of the elements. But they do it, they overcome, they reach their goal.

Once upon a time it was thought that birds migrated to the moon. When you think about it, what birds actually achieve on migration is no less impressive. The Fundamental Requirements of Migration

Around 500 migratory species pass along the routes that cross Europe. These can be divided into three major groups, according to their biology and their ecological demands. The waterbirds (ducks, herons, rails and so on), the migrant passerines (swallows and scores upon scores of others) and the bigger soaring birds – that is to say, those larger birds whose migration depends on ascending air currents: storks, cranes, eagles, Short-toed Eagles, buzzards and other diurnal raptors.

Each of these groups has its own characteristics, but all share certain needs that we might dub ‘the fundamental requirements of migration’:

1. that the route is safe – that is to say, no more dangerous than would be the case if there were only natural factors to consider;
2. that along the migration route, the flyway so to speak, they are able to find places to rest and

refuel (small islands for the passerines, wetlands for the waterbirds and so on);

3. that the conditions should be present at their destination to allow them to do what has driven them to make the perilous journey – to overwinter, or to breed.

It is this aspect of migration that brings us humans most into play. To create the conditions whereby species and populations of migrating birds are adequately protected on the journey, or to reduce, in a significant manner, the dangers and obstacles they face: the hunting of species at biologically crucial times, poaching in all its varied forms, the loss of natural habitats or in some cases that of precious individual sites, the presence of physical barriers and environmental degradation, and disturbance during nesting. These are threats that can, taken individually, be severe, but the consequences can be devastating when all of them are added together. It is because of this that Wingsland, LIPU’s new project, is dedicated specifically to migrant birds, as we shall see below.



## Windows on the Sea

About 40 per cent of the bird species that migrate between Europe and Africa have suffered a decline in the last half century. The reasons for this are in many cases either unknown, or known only incompletely. What we do know is that many of the causes can be found, directly or indirectly, in human activity. In Italy the decline of a number of species had a temporal link to a particular historical phase (from the 1960s to the 1980s), which was marked by a

senseless policy of urbanisation, with massive losses to our soils, and the loss of or severe damage to sites and habitats essential to migrant bird species.

It was a point in history at which environmental activism was anything but absent, so there was action to hold back the tide of destruction that would otherwise have carried all away. The creation of LIPU in 1965 was inspired by the need to stop migrating birds being slaughtered by trapping and by guns, a slaughter that then consumed much of Italy. Not only was it possible to hunt almost all species, not only was the hunting season almost interminable – from late summer through to March – there were also opportunities, regularly seized, to activate special derogations that allowed the opening of a window for hunting in late spring to allow the hunting of migrant birds on their return from Africa. And more still, there were the aptly named ‘windows on the sea’ – that is, the concession granted to hunters, referred to as the ‘mariners’, to station themselves along the coast, particularly in the south, allowing them to fire away at will, especially at Quails and Turtle Doves.

Out of this came a gruesome ritual, an affront to reason and sentiment. Imagine the scene: the departure from Africa, the endless journey, the labours and the resting, the obstacles overcome, then Italy at last. Here we are, we have arrived. And how did we, the people, respond; how did the tricolour welcome them? A rattle of gunfire; a rain of birds falling to the waters of the sea or to the coastline. The spring sunshine blighted by lead and clouded by death.

### **The Way We Inhabit the World**

A number of years have passed since that dreadful

time, and much has happened. Law 799/67, which banned spring hunting and the endemic practice of trapping (the first major success that LIPU achieved); the international agreements; the Bird and Habitat Directives; national laws for the protection of species and for protected areas; and more recently the provisions of the Natura 2000 network, also essential to the safeguarding of migrant birds. There have also been advances in knowledge (one thinks of the major works of Peter Berthold, or of Fernando Spina and Stefano Volponi’s Atlas of Bird Migration in Italy, a milestone on the subject in our country), and progress with regard to research methods, such as the scientific use of ringing in conservation projects. The anti-poaching campaign has succeeded in reducing the level of criminal activity, and now concentrates on the particularly resistant problem sites, and the spread of an ecologically-aware culture has made the view that violence is a normal way of relating to nature a minority one. Forty, fifty years, capable of changing the narrative for the better.

The battle is still not won and environmental problems remain, not least those that affect migrating birds. To give a general outline of the problem, we could say that – paradoxical as it appears – it had been made more complicated by the gains made by environmentalism. We can no longer protect a single stretch of coastline, preserve a single site, come to the aid of one injured swallow. The ecological struggle is global and demands fundamental changes in both theory and practice. It asks for different ways of managing the land, the rethinking of the relationship between the economy and the environment, and planning for both the present and the future in such a way that policies in general will always take nature into consideration. Change the way we inhabit the

world, such that it can be hospitable for all, human or no: the journey of migrating birds, complex in its very nature, might also lead to this conclusion.

### **Wingsland, or the Country of the Migrants**

‘We must take a step forwards in the quality of our conservation of migrant birds’, states Claudio Celada, LIPU’s conservation director, who – along with Marco Gustin and Federica Luoni – is coordinating LIPU’s activities on this theme, systematically setting out the knowledge and the actions required, at both the national and the international level, as exemplified by the activities of BirdLife International. ‘This is the aim of Wingsland, our new programme for migration. To support individual protective actions, but also to coordinate them to achieve the greatest results.’

‘We have envisaged,’ Luoni explains, ‘tracing the course of a migrating bird to try to understand the dynamics of the journey and its critical features, dangers included. This is the basis on which we have founded the Wingsland strategy, in order to get as close as possible to the real needs of the birds.’ ‘There are at least 27 migrant species,’ Gustin adds, ‘that need urgent attention. Some, such as Red-footed and Eleanora’s Falcons, have been the subject of in-depth studies carried out by LIPU. Besides, if one considers Italy’s great importance for migrant birds, situated as it is at the junction of two hugely important European flyways – the eastern and the western – the scope of our particular responsibility becomes clear.’



Out of the hundreds of species that migrate between

Europe and Africa, the majority return to or fly over our country. Italy is a true ‘Wingsland’: a country for migrating birds. The contribution that Italy can and must make is vital.

### **A Cultural Adventure**

The Wingsland project has set out thirteen specific modules around which to organise the task. These include one on species (necessary in order to be able to identify and thus to be able to come to the assistance of those species assigned the highest priority); modules on mountain passes and bottlenecks, crucial points where birds risk a barrage of gun fire; modules on key sites such as islands, wetlands and agricultural areas; but also on that on the great problem of our time – climate change, the negative effects of which are making themselves felt in terms of migration. Wingsland also aims to be a cultural adventure, involving people at large, creating a movement that has the issue at its heart and puts that issue forward, making of it a compelling case. This last point is of great import, because the issues that rise up political agendas and impose themselves on those who matter are those brought forward with the greatest conviction by the greatest number of people.

In the final analysis, Wingsland signifies for LIPU another little – big dream: to help birds through the acquisition of natural areas necessary for migration. Strategic sites, wetlands, vital areas in which birds can stop over and where they can find rest on their long journey and build up their strength in safety. Areas that can also allow people to observe the spectacle of migration and understand what it means, what beauty is on display.

## The Return

They are arriving. Minute spots in the clear spring sky. There are the large diurnal migrants: Cranes, White and Black Storks, Ospreys and Booted Eagles. There are the tiny songbirds, seeming to disappear in the sky's vastness, often migrating at night, silent and elusive. Alone, in tens, then thousands upon thousands; ever more and ever greater their numbers. They are arriving, with all the hope and the symbolism of life that they bring in their trail; hope that includes, in the season of love, that they will meet when they are here.

The volunteers watch over the pinch points, the forces of order stand guard, the scientists count and record. We keep an eye out for all of them, but we have also, it is impossible to deny, an eye for their welfare. We look skywards for them, anxious to see them, to know they have returned again this year. They who are hastening to keep their promise, to fly back to us over the sea.

The world no longer exists. It is in suspension. Only one thing matters now – to come home.

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### THE CASE OF EMILIA-ROMAGNA: A GOOD IDEA TURNS BAD

*by Patrizia Rossi, LIPU Agriculture Officer*

A huge pile of wood lies beside the Parma River, reduced to chips. Lorries begin to arrive, loading the wood for its hundred-kilometre journey to a biomass power station. It seems to spring from

nowhere, this wood; but then, just as suddenly as it appeared, it disappears. What is going on? I look around and then it dawns on me; the woods (mainly poplar and willow) that had lined the river bank are gone, leaving nothing but a few straggly saplings. Everything has been cut down, ground up, taken away. Nothing to slow the current in spate; the haunt of birds and amphibians destroyed. The only thing left is the bare earth, scarred by the deep tracks of heavy, tree-eating machinery. The birds, which had been feverishly preparing to nest, are no more. The silence is unsettling ...

This fate has befallen 200 kilometres of watercourses in Emilia-Romagna, where 400 hectares of riverside woodland have been ground up, then burnt, to produce heat and energy. Rare and precious habitats have been destroyed, despite EU protection, and in complete violation of the conditions set out in work permits. Instead of poplars and willows, robinia and false indigo will now spring up – invasive non-native species that impede the regeneration of the former habitat, and in some situations increase the risk of flooding. This is just one instance of a phenomenon that is recurring all along the Italian peninsula.

Why have firms become willing to deforest these rivers on a 'no payment' arrangement – that is to say, apart from the value of the wood that they remove? Until a few years ago poplar and willow were uneconomical to harvest, so much so that forestry handbooks gave riparian woodlands an economic value of close to zero.

Their value, however, is linked to the politics of climate and energy as decided by the European Union. And unfortunately these politics are based



on a false myth: that bioenergy, being derived from renewable resources, must be sustainable. But just as 'all the glisters is not gold', we could add 'not all that is renewable is sustainable'.

Bioenergy currently provides around 65 per cent of all the renewable energy consumed in the European Union, and there are plans to double its usage by 2020 as part of the fight against climate change. It is unfortunate then, that in some cases bioenergy actually increases CO2 emissions when compared with the fossil-fuel combustion it replaces, and often threatens biodiversity because of the additional pressure it exerts on agricultural and forest ecosystems, already used intensively.

The best sustainable use of bioenergy comes from processing biomass residue (manufacturing by-products such as agricultural cuttings, effluent and straw litter), which has no other use. But as the demand for bioenergy grows, sustained by public subsidy, other sources of biomass are being sought (such as tree felling), causing more damage.

In Europe the major sources of biofuels and of biogas are products of agricultural land – products, contrary to what you might think, that are often destined not for food production but to feed biogas digesters. This causes increased pressure on the area under agricultural production at the expense of the natural environment (as has been the case in Brazil) and a corresponding increase in the use of pesticides and fertilisers to increase yields.

Equally questionable is the common practice of uprooting the whole plant to produce bioenergy, leading to a wastage of wood more suited to use

elsewhere in the economy, a reduction in carbon-storage capacity, and – above all – serious harm to habitat and to species.

The fight against climate change means safeguarding and increasing the number of natural carbon reservoirs (forests, peat bogs ...) and setting sustainability limits on the use of bioenergy. We must – at all costs – avoid repeating the experience of wind farms in Italy, where a potential ally in the struggle against climate change has been transformed into an enemy of biodiversity.

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### THE KILLING

While the number of crimes committed against the natural environment and wildlife continues to increase, surveillance is decreasing. So a legitimate doubt arises: is this just a coincidence?

These are hard times for environmental surveillance in Italy: provincial police units have been dismantled; the National Forestry Authority no longer exists in an independent form as it is now part of the Carabinieri (the effects of which will only be seen over the next few months); the new law on the minor nature of offences encourages judges to consider crimes committed against wild animals as 'minor' and simply to file them; various regions are issuing regulations that seem to have been conceived in order to slow down and devalue necessary checks; various administrations are delaying the issuance of decrees with regard to voluntary guards. This is only a small part of a reality that is difficult to understand, particularly considering the number of



environmental infractions that still occur in Italy and the current upsurge in poaching. Government efforts should be doubled; instead they decrease, and one begins to doubt: is this really just a coincidence?

### **The Dream of Many**

‘Tuscany has restricted the scope of voluntary guards to the mere drawing up of conventions with those public bodies that request the service,’ state Fabio Cagliata and Giorgio Paesani from LIPU’s Tuscany centre. ‘However, after nearly two years, no convention has been signed and, in effect, the voluntary guards units have been dismantled and the only surveillance left comes from hunting association guards. It seems that the dream of many hunters – that is to say, monitoring each other, has already become a reality here in Tuscany.’

‘As far as surveillance is concerned, this is the worst time since the sixties,’ adds Mario Pedrelli, regional delegate for Emilia Romagna and member of the National Surveillance Commission. ‘The situation in Tuscany is not unique, though, with similar problems everywhere. In Parma, for example, out of the 25 environmental agents only four are still in place, and they are often used as representatives at meetings. This has empowered hunters, who now feel stronger than ever, and it has also led to an upsurge in poaching, as if the levels we had already were not enough.’

The Killing, a report produced by BirdLife International and LIPU in 2015, painted a very grim picture of the poaching situation in southern Europe. Every year, 25 million wild birds are captured or killed in the Mediterranean eco-region; a quarter of

these – that is to say, upwards of 5.6 million – in Italy. Even if these figures were not, as they quite probably are, conservative for Italy, they leave no doubt about the impact of this extremely serious illegal activity on birds themselves; an activity that fails to spare even the most threatened species, such as the Egyptian vulture, whose very small nesting population suffers losses of 20 per cent each year due to poaching. From a sociological standpoint, poaching is the practice of those who refuse to accept a new culture; a practice that has elevated wildlife to the status of national and international heritage and which continues to consider animals as objects to be exploited through capture, trade and killing.

However, the most worrisome aspect is not the presence of an illegal phenomenon, which, although serious, can still be defined and therefore legally opposed; rather, it is the existence of a middle ground, a kind of no man’s land in which hunting and poaching seem to coexist. That is what LIPU calls the ‘grey area’ – a dangerous domain in which the line between legality and illegality is blurred and very difficult to define.

### **In the Grey Area**

The hunting season 2016/2017 opened with the news that a Northern Bald Ibis (a species on the brink of extinction and part of an international safeguarding project) had been killed near Grosseto, Tuscany, and that a Booted Eagle had been wounded near Catanzaro, Calabria. As the season progressed, four more ibises were shot, many more protected and non-hunttable species were killed or wounded, and hunting was reported in parks as was the use of banned devices such as electronic decoys, traps, nets

and modified weapons. This collection of crimes shows how, now more than ever, voluntary guards struggle to keep up with the phenomenon and how hunting in Italy cannot be contained within the already vast boundaries of legality.

A clear example of this trend is Operation Recall, a recent initiative carried out in Rome by the local LIPU guards in collaboration with representatives of the National Forestry Authority. The aim of the operation was to combat the use of electronic decoys and it resulted in 21 people being charged, 21 guns and 12 decoys being confiscated and administrative sanctions being issued for a total value of nearly 5 million euros. These figures are quite shocking given the very short time frame of the operation: 20 days of checks over an area that covers less than a single province.’ The grey area is a vast cultural environment’, declares Danilo Selvaggi, Director General of LIPU, ‘that feeds off the remains of a living yet worn-out tradition that has now been revived by recent and unfortunate normative choices, among them the law on the minor nature of the offence. Establishing that crimes against fauna are minor offences, and consequently not pursuing them through legal channels, not only “encourages” people to continue their illegal activities, it also condemns the culture of legality and expands the grey area. We have tried explaining it to the Ministry of Justice, but to this day we haven’t seen any countermeasures introduced and even Brussels is putting pressure on us.’

### **European Hopes, Italian Delays**

As it is often the case with nature-related matters, the answer arrives from Europe. Faced with such a serious situation, the European Commission has

decided to open an enquiry, entitled EU Pilot, that asks Italy to furnish explanations for this state of affairs and invites the country to act immediately against bird poaching. There are many factors that are worrying the Commission, notably illegal activities against the ducks of the Po Delta, the killing of birds in Sardinia and in the province of Brescia, and poaching activities in Puglia, Calabria, and Campania until the Strait of Messina, including those in the Pontine and the Neapolitan islands. Brussels wants detailed information regarding what Italy is doing and plans to do to address the issue. However, Italy’s answer is slow and uncertain – not only is the country doing nothing extraordinary to address the problem (as the situation would suggest), it seems to be actually moving in the opposite direction, considering the problem as a second class phenomenon. Forestry Authority? Gone. Provincial agents? Gone. Voluntary guards? Gone. The long-awaited action plan? Still outstanding.

### **A National Plan or a DIY Plan?**

The European enquiry forced the Minister of the Environment to kick-start the long-awaited national action plan against poaching in 2016. LIPU supported the initiative and contributed to the preparatory phase, asking the minister to act quickly and efficiently. Among the requests put forward by LIPU were the immediate cancellation of the law on the minor nature of the offence and the immediate restoration of an adequate surveillance service, without which any law, project or plan would be, in effect, useless.

However, the process was very slow and a year later the plan is still not in place. Letters, requests and

parliamentary queries have fallen into a black hole with the risk that the anti-poaching plan may be used to respond to the widespread worries. 'Poaching? Don't worry; we will have a plan soon.'

It is obvious, then, that while waiting for official, institutional measures to be put in place, it is the DIY plan that once again works the best. Thanks to the support of its many members and donors and the important contributions made by the Oak Foundation and many others, LIPU continues its activities: 50 per cent of traps were removed in the Sulcis area; the sale of goldfinches was stopped at Palermo's Ballardò market, where 20 thousand birds are illegally sold each year; voluntary surveillance was ensured from Veneto to Calabria, with important results and public recognition; new projects were prepared, among them formal collaboration with the newly-established CUTFAA, which many are counting on for some of those long-awaited changes.

Yet, the question that we asked at the beginning of this article still remains. Is the combination of these anti-legality choices really just a coincidence? It seems that the killing of living things is linked to another type of killing – the destruction of surveillance and legality. Is such a sentiment really so unfounded? Do Italian institutions really wish to respond effectively to the terrible fate to which wild birds – our marvellous heritage, so full of life and beauty – are destined to succumb?

### **Illegal killing.**

The most affected species – data from The Killing.  
[http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28\\_low.pdf](http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28_low.pdf)

### **In the Mediterranean**

Blackcap: 1.2 – 2.4 million

Rock Dove: 300 – 900 thousand

Song Thrush: 700 thousand – 1.8 million

### **In Italy**

Chaffinch: 2 – 3 million

Meadow Pipit: 500 – 900 thousand

Robin: 300 – 600 thousand

### **The 7 black spots of Italian poaching**

- Brescia and Veneto's valleys: killing and capture of small migratory birds
- The Po Delta: poaching of water birds
- Puglia's wetlands: poaching of water birds
- Pontine islands and the Campanian archipelago: poaching of small migratory birds
- Strait of Messina: poaching of falcons, buzzards and other large soaring birds
- Eastern Sicily: poaching of birds of prey
- Sardinia: trapping and trading of small migratory birds

### **LIPU's president, Fulvio Mamone Capria: 'LIPU and the Carabinieri to rebuild hope'.**

*The loss of the National Forestry Authority is a very serious blow, but we now have a new environmental entity led by the Carabinieri. The new body, CUTFAA (Unit for Forestry, Environmental and Agribusiness Protection), has absorbed the former National Forestry Authority and intends to relaunch the Authority's precious work. I have met its head, Antonio Ricciardi.*

*The Carabinieri have an important environmental tradition.*

They have contributed remarkably towards safeguarding wildlife, but with the newly established CUTFAA the expectations are even higher. In one of the hardest times for surveillance, the Carabinieri are called to be an almost unique institutional point of contact.

*LIPU is working with the Carabinieri to build a special relationship.*

Thanks to the interest of General Del Sette, Commandant-general of the Carabinieri, we have been working on a convention that would allow LIPU and the Carabinieri to join forces in the monitoring and suppression of crimes against wildlife, thus creating, among other things, an ad-hoc archive. This might be a turning point for legality.

### **The 99 that are worth a thousand – LIPU's surveillance volunteers**

LIPU's 99 voluntary guards are active across most of the national territory and are mainly involved in bird protection in the context of killing, poaching and other illegal activities. 'We are strengthening our team', declares Aldo Verner, National Surveillance and Anti-poaching Coordinator, 'thanks to the creation of new regional centres in the south – a delicate region in which our presence is of fundamental importance. In the midst of the institutional crisis that has affected our national surveillance efforts, LIPU wants to grow and is showing signs of energy and enthusiasm.' Besides its voluntary guards, LIPU boasts a network of 1,000 volunteers, who – according to the 2015

Social Budget report – have dedicated a total of 7,907 hours to supporting anti-poaching initiatives, including monitoring 1,535 nests and participating in nine surveillance and protection camps.

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### **A VICTORY FOR NATURE**

The announcement from Brussels made by European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans concludes the campaign Nature Alert for the defence of the Bird and Habitat Directive. The campaign was a great success and gives us hope.

After months during which we struggled with a deep seated fear of a negative outcome, the result turned out to be exactly what we had hoped for. The Directive will not be changed but will be more rigorously applied throughout the Union. This decision was announced by Dutchman Timmermans, to whom Jean-Claude Juncker – EC President – had entrusted the task of reviewing European environmental law, the so called fitness check.

So ends a journey of almost two years that has occupied Brussels technocrats and those of member states and has involved numerous organisations across Europe that mobilised in defence of the Directive.

By collecting nearly 70,000 signatures in support of the Nature Alert campaign – more than nearly any other organisation – and by its constant lobbying LIPU has played a decisive role. 'This is an exceptional victory,' explains LIPU

President Fulvio Mamone Capria, 'which has given new life to the Directive and put the natural world back at the heart of the European project. We are overjoyed. We have here an extraordinary success: on one hand, we have avoided a watering down of the Directive (for example, the relaxation of laws on hunting and restrictions applied to areas of importance for wildlife) and, on the other, it offers the real possibility of the revival of policies that support birds, the environment and biodiversity; policies that are certainly needed at the highest level.'

There is yet another reason why the campaign's success should be considered so precious. Care of the natural world can and must be considered of fundamental importance to all of Europe's citizens.

It is not just banks and economics that matter but the protection of nature too – the beauty of the landscape, the return of swallows and storks, and a healthy environment. This must be a renewal of the European dream, which LIPU is so delighted once more to have been part of. Our heartfelt thanks go to the tens of thousands of members and sympathisers who supported the campaign.

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### **LIPU IN ACTION**

*compiled by Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer*

#### **Better protection for Foce Carapelle**

Foce Carapelle, situated between Manfredonia and Zapponeta in the province of Foggia (Puglia), is one of the most important migration stopovers for many

species of bird, including Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Little Tern, Slender-billed Gull, Cormorant, Turnstone, Oystercatcher, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, as well as duck and heron. LIPU has recently taken over the management of this site, on behalf of the Capitanata Consortium. With the help of Spar Southern Italy (which will supply local branches with eco-friendly bags bearing the slogan 'Together for Nature'), and help and co-operation from Bio&Paper, LIPU will provide hides and information panels for the benefit of tourists, locals, and students.

#### **Urban Green Spaces: a new LIPU publication**

Continuing the series dedicated to Nature Conservation, LIPU has just published a paper on urban green spaces. This is an important theme, recognised for example by the United Nations agenda for sustainable urban development, and underlined by a thought that is worth reflecting on: trees are capable of expressing themselves, of making friends, of feeling love or distress. Only, as they lead long lives – sometimes of many centuries – they do everything more slowly, imperceptibly. They exchange airborne biochemical messages of well-being with each other, which reach our brains through our sense of smell. So when we walk through a wood we find that both our blood pressure and our breathing improves. These living beings, which give us so many eco services and benefits, improve the quality of city life and deserve our deepest respect.

The LIPU paper asks us to embrace an approach that takes biodiversity into account by adopting guidelines for the ecological planning and management of

public parks and spaces and of private gardens. The paper also covers bird gardens, municipal regulations with regard to trees, urban wildlife reserves, and nature trails. (by Marco Dinetti, Head of Urban Ecology).

### **Sardinia: 10 poachers reported**

A total of 900 birds were seized, including 430 robins and 500 thrushes, along with 50 kilos of Sardinian venison and 2,500 snares and traps. The special operation was planned and carried out in Sulcis, Sarrabus and Giara by the Territorial Inspection Service of the Forestry and Environmental Surveillance Corps, and involved personnel from the Forest Stations of Capoterra, Pula, Teulada, Sinnai, Muravera, Barumini, Campuomu and Castiadas and the Area Investigation Division.

As part of the operation the Forestry Corps removed nets and other traps from a large area, helped by volunteers from the LIPU anti-poaching camp based in Sulcis.

### **Palermo: 300 goldfinches freed**

Following a combined operation involving the Forestry Carabinieri and the Provincial Office of Palermo, two bird trappers have been charged with the mistreatment of animals and with dealing in and the possession of protected species. During the operation, around 300 goldfinches were seized, and all were later freed in Favorita Park. Giovanni Cumbo, LIPU delegate for Palermo, has publicly thanked the military for this operation.

### **The magnificent 100**

The 'Save the Swallows' resolution for the protection of swift, swallow and house martin nests has now been adopted by 100 towns. A complete listing, from 1999 to date, can be found in the handbook Biodiversity and Sustainable Urban Design, published to mark the holding of the National Convention for Architecture and Wildlife, which took place on 10 March 2016 in Livorno. (The handbook is available from the LIPU shop.)

### **Anti-poaching camp to return to the straits**

The LIPU anti-poaching camp will return to the Calabrian side of the Straits of Messina, running from 22 April to 6 May. There will be two consecutive camps (22-29 April and 29 April-6 May) consisting of five people each, who will keep watch on migration routes and monitor the progress of the migration. Should cases of poaching be observed, the volunteers will alert the Forestry Carabinieri. For further information, contact Giovanni Alberella ([giovanni.alberella@lipu.it](mailto:giovanni.alberella@lipu.it)).

### **Sissi flies again**

Last December, a golden eagle was returned to the wild by the recovery centre at Ficuzza (Pa). The bird was found three months earlier by the Forestry Corps for Sicily (Castelbuono branch) with a serious injury to its left wing. Named 'Sissi', the bird is part of the Life reintroduction project in Slovenia.

### **White storks: a growing trend in Lombardy**

A total of 77 clutches, 182 birds hatched and 165

fledglings: these are the results of the 2016 white stork breeding season in Lombardy. The data, collected and analysed by Pierfrancesco Coruzzi, Lombardy spokesman of the LIPU working group, shows a clear growth trend from 2013 to today. The monitoring took place in the provinces of Milano, Lodi, Pavia, Brescia, and Mantova.

### THE LIPU-UK ANNUAL APPEAL

LIPU-UK's purpose is to raise funds to support LIPU's vital work in Italy. With this firmly in mind, the most serious challenge we face is the slow but steady decline in membership. Despite our best efforts that decline continues – we welcome five new members who joined following my talk to the RSPB High Peak group yet still have fewer members than last quarter. Why? A letter from a member apologising for not using on-line banking – ‘because I am 98’ – suggests that the seniority of many of our members, members who have supported our purpose splendidly for so many years, is one of the main factors at work here.

As we redouble our efforts to reverse this worrying trend, I turn to you, the supporters of LIPU, with – as always – this year's only appeal for funds. Despite the financial challenges that affect us all in some way and all the uncertainty surrounding us, LIPU-UK must stay true to its purpose and this is why we have agreed to support the following projects in the year ahead:

- Migration of raptors through Sicily – year 14. This survey dovetails with the anti-poaching camp and continues to provide valuable knowledge of migration patterns.

- Anti-poaching – the work goes on in Brescia, on the Messina Strait and in Sardinia. I saw the peace that reigned at Messina last spring but we have to be there to stop trouble flaring up again. The campaign against illegal trapping is seeing some success, but there is still much to be done.
- Supplies for Raptor Recovery Centres – the provision of drugs, dressings, etc. where they are most needed.
- Protection of the nests of Bonelli's Eagle in Sicily – in 2016 over forty young eagles fledged to fly free rather than into the hands of Middle-eastern falconers. LIPU volunteers were among those guarding those nest sites.
- Red-footed Falcons are breeding around Parma, home of the LIPU headquarters; we are helping to provide nest boxes to help the colony grow.
- Thrushes appear to be migrating earlier, and thus their spring migration could occur during the hunting season. Research that provides strong data is required if LIPU is to present a case for their protection.

We need to raise €63,000 in order to fund this work fully and I hope you will agree that all these causes are worthwhile and worthy of our support. Last year, you – our friends and members – responded magnificently, raising over £24,500. I hope we will see a repeat of this splendid level of support this year. As well as donations from members and friends, we are grateful for the valuable support we receive from trusts and grant-making bodies.



My thanks go the following for their generosity:

The A S Butler Trust gave £200, the Clare Lees Trust sent £300, the Shirley Pugh Trust donated £150, the Mitchell Trust gave £500, the Peter Smith Trust for Nature Conservation gave us £2,000 and the Valerie White Memorial Trust donated £250.

Bird clubs and groups were represented by the Gwent Ornithological Society, which donated £50; the RSPB Highland Group, £100; Wakefield Naturalists Society gave us £15; the Manx Ornithological Society raised £41; and the SOC Stewartry Branch made a donation of £190 – sincere thanks to them all.

Finally, I am grateful that, for another year, AISPA, the Anglo-Italian Society for the Protection of Animals, continued its valuable support. AISPA played an important part in the founding of LIPU, and its support for LIPU-UK over the years means that a special bond exists between our organisations – my sincere thanks, once again.

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My thanks go, as always, to those who have helped produce this edition of the Ali: Joanna Bazen, Dave Brooks, Giusy Fazzina, Caterina Paone and Peter Rafferty.

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Pictures from the anti-poaching camps show illegal lures, above and right.



The picture below shows the futility of it all. What is the point of shooting such small birds?



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**STOP THE MASSACRE  
APPEAL 2017**

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