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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

- Kentish Plover on the beach
- Seven Species to Save
- Agriculture Policy Reform
- Marine IBAs to be protected

Summer 2018

Cory's Shearwater, the four IBAs designated after a LIPU project supported by LIPU-UK are to be upgraded to Special Protection Zones, see page 18.

Six bunkers in the Peloritani mountains – previously rented by poachers and all unoccupied when we visited – a hopeful sign for the future, see page 27.

Another successful year

Editorial

David Lingard

Nobody likes a boastful person but sometimes modesty can be overdone. As I write we are approaching the end of another business year and a review of progress made is fully justified.

At home I can only admire and thank our members for what has been a truly amazing response to our annual appeal. Despite another slow decline in membership, our members and friends have generously given over £22,000 – my thanks to you all, this has enabled us to fund fully the projects we agreed to support last autumn.

In Italy, we have also enabled successes:

The anti-poaching camps would struggle without our help. The LIPU teams are winning in Sardinia thanks to the leadership of Gigliola Magliocco who is also the warden at the Torrile reserve, near HQ in Parma, when she's not collecting traps and changing local attitudes to the poaching.

The monitoring of raptor migration has been supported annually since 2003 and a valuable dataset has been achieved; however, equally important is the way in which it dovetails into the anti-poaching work at the migration bottleneck at Messina.

Mention of Messina reminds us that LIPU-UK has supported the anti-poaching teams there since its foundation in 1989. LIPU is not alone in the Peloritani mountains but is a respected senior partner in the successful anti-poaching work.

Georgia Gaibani writes about Marine IBAs (Important Bird Areas) and the latest news is that these areas, identified by projects funded by LIPU-UK, after the Italian Ministry withdrew, have been accepted by the EU to be upgraded as Special Protection Zones. Italy may mutter and delay but it will have to comply – well done LIPU!

We help the protection of breeding Bonelli's Eagles, much sought by falconers, and this year the news was mixed. One nest was robbed but all the others were safely protected, the sadness and anger at this loss should remind us all of the importance of the work, the losses would be much worse without our efforts.

There is no room for complacency but we can also look at the progress being made with quiet satisfaction and, because all these successes have been enabled by funds raised by LIPU-UK, I offer you all my sincere thanks.

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DWELLING

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

The rediscovery of an essential verb, for humanity and for other species, that leads to greater care and sensitivity towards natural habitats, and new ways of looking at the environment, the city and nature.

A sandy beach, in late spring. It is here that a Kentish Plover lives: its summer residence; the place where it raises its young.

Enveloped in sunshine, lively, raking the ground with its feet, we see it engaged in the construction of its nest, a tiny hollow in the sand in which it deposits three eggs. Having passed the winter in Africa, this little wader has come back to us, to the shores of Italy and Europe, to give life to the season of love. A few square metres of sand will suffice, no more.

Suddenly, the noise of machinery. A mechanised beach cleaner that rakes up and carries off everything without concerning itself over details, making no distinction between the living and the dead, between materials of human origin (plastic and other rubbish) that should have been carefully removed and the natural debris that we should leave undisturbed as being useful to the beach and dune system and the nesting of birds.

But the beach has now been scrubbed clean for the start of summer. A tragedy if among all that was removed was the nest of a small, sandy coloured bird and perhaps its eggs and newborns, the fruit of its shattered love.

What the Kentish Plover Tells Us

The Italian Kentish Plover population has effectively collapsed. It is likely that barely more than half of the 2,000 pairs thought to be present during the nineties now remain. The cause of the crisis is essentially poor beach management, but that in turn is driven by the pressures of humanity, typically arising from tourism, which in summer come into play on our shores.

And if they do succeed in escaping the mechanical beach cleaner, the plovers are then confronted with numerous other threats: the trampling of nests and eggs; attacks from dogs off the leash, no less lethal for being unintentional; the disturbance caused by 'beachcross' and motocross, the passage of riders on horseback and the incursions or curious or careless bathers. Dangers that add to those posed by their natural predators, such as gulls and corvids, and make the life of the plovers a difficult one.

This tale of the plovers is emblematic. It is the tale of the ways in which they and we inhabit the earth. One keeps watch over a small patch of sand while the other invades the space of others. For one, a piece of beach the breadth of a handkerchief is enough; while the other occupies coast, field and mountain, in an expansion of territory that knows no limits and is forever unsatisfied.

Where Once Were Meadows and Stone Curlews

The problem is not confined to beaches and the coast. Of critical importance to many species of birds, grasslands are some of the most endangered habitats in our country. Dry grasslands, for example, are semi-natural environments formed over the passage of time through the interaction of nature and man, who shaped them through low-impact, extensive forms of agriculture. Places of flowers and butterflies, of winds and of silences, the favoured habitats of Stone Curlews and Nightjars, the dry grasslands are now disappearing to make way for the expansion of vineyards for Prosecco (as in the case of the Friulian Magredi), in a business model partly overheated by the irresponsible support of local agricultural policy.

A similar fate is about to befall the unimproved grasslands of the Po valley, between Emilia and Lower Lombardy. Here, the disasters are called maize and soya – vast expanses of anonymous agricultural land, each field like the one before, that has taken from nature every last bit of variety, every last poppy, tree or hedge, and sacrificed it to the monotony of production.

In landscape terms, in terms of being able to take pleasure in seeing a varied picture, the damage is immense, but the damage done to the conservation of nature is even greater: there are many bird species that depend on the dry grasslands to breed (the Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Lark, Woodlark, and the Stone Curlew, already mentioned), and many that feed there: from the Red-footed Falcon and Lesser Kestrel to Montagu's Harrier, the Ruff and the Ortolan Bunting. And then there are the steppes of Puglia and Sardinia, subject to stone removal and irrigation, transformed into areas of forced agricultural production regardless of the fact that they are little suited to it, if at all. So much water expended for so little end product – a process delivering little economic benefit but causing so much damage in other ways, among others to the Little Bustard.

'Birds inhabit the grasslands discreetly, in perfect harmony', says Giorgia Gaibani, LIPU's Natura 2000 and IBA officer. 'When these are destroyed, they are forced to move somewhere else, to look for suitable sites that are at the same time becoming ever rarer and more fragmented. The crisis for many

bird species turns on this above all: the destruction, the degradation or the fragmentation of their natural habitats'.

Venus's Looking-Glass and Mayweed

In real and present danger, to continue the theme of endangered nature, is the marvellous Piano di Castelluccio at Norcia in Umbria, in the Regional Park of Monti Sibillini. It is one of the most striking landscapes in Italy on account of the extraordinary display of wild flowers that light up the plain in May and June: the yellow of Charlock, the red of poppies, the violet-blue of Venus's Looking Glass, the white of Mayweed and Ox-eye Daisy. A vision out of a dream. It has come to pass, however, that among the projects for the revitalisation of the area following the tragedy of the earthquake is that of the Food Village, a commercial centre with services, parking and other types of infrastructure. 'It is a temporary undertaking, without using concrete or the destruction of the soil', claim the management team; but all the time the project is gaining pace, the concrete is being poured, and another little piece of Italian nature, one way or another, faces going up in flames. The usual classic dichotomy: economy or nature, development or countryside, consumption or 'death'.

The Economy of Consumption

Meanwhile, the most recent data gathered by ISPRA, the State Institute for the Protection of the Environment, confirms that in Italy, despite a slight slowing of the pace, the loss of soil continues to increase. 'About 23,000 square kilometres of the national land surface', the Institute states, 'have been irredeemably lost up to now, and with them their

respective ecosystem services'; in the last few months alone we have lost natural fertile soils from an area equivalent to 5,700 football pitches.

The attempt in parliament, during the previous administration, to approve a law that would address the issue failed due to the attacks of the building industry but also those of other, less obvious agencies (the regions, the communes, and agricultural bodies), who played a purely obstructive role. So, 60 years after the wave of speculative building that set in motion the destruction of the Bel Paese, the Beautiful Country, Italy is again going to have to reckon with the degradation of nature, amid a lack of legislation, uncertain or ignored regulations and inadequate sanctions.

In like manner, it recalls the micro-disasters inflicted on Natura 2000 sites by constant fiddling with the concept of the Impact Assessment, the instrument aimed at halting the negative effects of a project on biodiversity. A problem that – as can be seen from the proceedings launched by LIPU – has led to Italy being made the subject of a Community investigation that could eventually lead to a decree favouring better environmental regulation.

There persists at any rate a fundamental cultural opposition, the radical difference in philosophy between those who insist on the necessity of a changed economic and cultural model, however difficult and far off (we must protect natural habitats, promote different forms of agriculture, build more liveable cities and more sustainable economies), and the traditional logic according to which commandeering ever more of the land's surface and throwing up buildings willy-nilly represent the true

model for development, the only motors for the only economy we know: the economy of consumption.

The City, the Megacity, and Man

And then there is the sensitive subject of the city, in which – obviously – the idea of dwelling is particularly relevant. Given that the population of urban areas has now overtaken that of rural ones, confirming that cities are now at the forefront of the cultural battle for a different way of 'dwelling', it is to the cities that we must give the most attention, in order to inform, to try out new ways, to demonstrate possible new environments.

Today, cities occupy 3 per cent of the land's surface, but are responsible for almost 80 per cent of global energy consumption and 75 per cent of carbon emissions. And that is not all: on the horizon, if the trend towards urbanisation is not halted, we are faced with a new and disquieting urban phenomenon, that of 'megacities', enormous urban agglomerations that in a number of cases could reach 50 million inhabitants, and in one or two, Lagos and Kinshasa, could top 80 or 90 million.

It is an almost unimaginable prospect: endless expanses of asphalt, concrete, people, lights, noise, rubbish, chaos, alienation; nature banished or reduced to a minimum, or replaced by artificiality; abnormal consumption of resources to sustain the tens of millions of inhabitants and the services that underpin them. There are those who, in a possible future of the megacity, see an exciting challenge for technology and for human ingenuity, and – on the other hand – those who think humanity should be looking elsewhere, that in the future we must re-engage with nature, remember the rhythms of

the earth, soften the effects of technology, however useful it may be in our lives, and orient ourselves towards deeper and more authentic relationships.

'The real crisis of Dwelling', wrote Martin Heidegger, 'is in the fact that men build without ever having learned how to dwell'.

Time We Do Not Have

Exactly thirty years ago, in the spring of 1988, a book collected the contributions of many of the world's most prominent physicists, ecologists, sociologists and philosophers made at a conference in Florence two years previously.

The book, as was the conference, was entitled Physis: Inhabiting the Earth, and was motivated not only by fears of an ecological crisis but also the conviction that the time was ripe for giving life to a new ecological humanism, to a new culture of humankind, founded squarely on the idea of dwelling.

The noted French anthropologist Edgar Morin put it well: 'Our homeland is in Nature, on this Planet Earth. It is the only one we have and the only one on which we can live. It is our friend, not our enemy. We are bound to it in a symbiosis we are only just becoming aware of. Let us hear how we should be stewards of nature and how at the same time we should let ourselves be guided by her. Let us hear as to how we should be promoting a different way of inhabiting the earth, that is more aware of ecosystems, more open to dialogue, that shows greater wisdom in urbanisation, and shows greater dynamism where science and culture meet. It will

take time, perhaps a great deal of time, but we must not be daunted by how short that time is'.

Time spent rereading these words, so freighted with hope, will not have been spent in vain.

Indirectly, many of the extraordinary pointers of this book are seen again now in the Agenda for 2030, the United Nations programme for sustainable development that 193 of the world's countries have signed up to: 17 major objectives, including the conservation of biodiversity on land and sea, the battle to halt climate change, the building of sustainable cities and a comprehensive blueprint for the 'integrated development' of humanity – in a similar way to that spoken of by Pope Francis in the Encyclical 'Laudato sii'.

Equally, many of these points are found even in the EU Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy (see the succeeding article), launched in 2017 to reaffirm the value of the Birds and Habitats Directives and to harmonise them with people's lives. Above all, let us find these same inspirations in our own lifetimes, in the work of LIPU, of conservation bodies, of environmentalists, in urban ecology, in the new generation of architects, of ordinary people, of the communities big and small throughout the world, convinced that our world is too good a place to treat badly, and that the nature of being human should be broader, more intelligent, more friendly than has been the case so far. It does not matter that we need more time ('as far as the planet is concerned, we are still in the Stone Age', says Marc Augè). What matters is that the path is in the right direction and our work not less so.

All before It

The first time I saw a Kentish Plover was on a beach in southern Italy, on a May or June afternoon. From a distance, I watched its frenetic coming and going, pecking at the sand for food. Then, from the nest a chick emerged. Delicate, and smaller than you would imagine. The merest puff of wind. It looked around and in an instant abandoned the nest, armed only with curiosity and courage. It wandered from side to side, watched from a distance by its mother, perhaps a little crossly. It fell over, got up, fell over again, fearless, not even knowing what fear was. The world was all before it. The deserted beach was its alone. The future, with all its unknowns, lay ahead.

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CONSERVATION

Giorgia Gaibani, Responsible for IBAs and the Natura 2000 network

Natura 2000 Network Goes to Sea

LIPU has been asking the Ministry for the Environment to designate the IBA for Cory's Shearwater as a Special Protection Zone (SPZ).

As clumsy on the ground during take-off as it is elegant and light on finding freedom over the surface of the waters, Cory's Shearwater (Calonectris diomedea)is a procellariiforme whose life is closely linked to the sea. It overwinters in the western area of the south-central Atlantic Ocean and only comes back to land to breed. Cory's Shearwater nests exclusively in the Mediterranean Sea, in colonies

situated on rocks, cliffs and volcanic lava. During the brooding period and the rearing of the chick (only one egg is laid) both parents alternate staying on the nest with long journeys searching for food in the sea; and to reduce the risk of predation they return to the nest almost always at night, even on moonless nights.

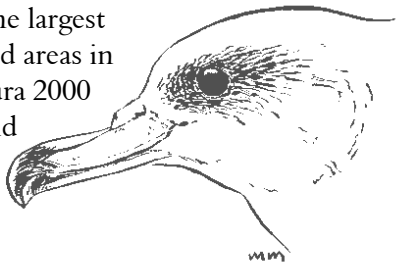
But which factors threaten the survival of such an important species for the marine ecosystem today? Part of the problem lies in the nesting sites, where the Shearwater suffers from light pollution and the predation of chicks by invasive species; other problems arise in the marine habitat, where overfishing reduces the amount of food available and where fishing procedures can cause so-called by-catch – the direct killing of individual adult birds as a by-product of the fishing techniques used.

In order to protect this fascinating pelagic bird, LIPU, thanks to the support of LIPU-UK, carried out a telemetric study in four areas important for the conservation of the Cory's Shearwater in the Mediterranean. These were then inserted into the marine Important Bird Area (IBA) of BirdLife International regarding key sites for the long-term survival of populations of marine birds IBA 221 – Pelagic Islands, comprising the island of Linosa, which hosts what is currently the greatest European colony of Cory's Shearwater; IBA 222 – Middle Adriatic; IBA 223 – northern Sardinia and IBA 96 – Tuscan Archipelago.

Two years ago, in 2016, LIPU asked the Italian Environment Ministry to designate the IBA for the Cory's Shearwater as a SPZ, so that these areas might become part of the Natura 2000 network. LIPU has also asked the Ministry to start collecting data to

identify important marine areas for the conservation of other pelagic bird species, such as the Manx Shearwater, Audouin's Gull, and Shag.

Nevertheless, although the completion of the Natura 2000 network in marine environments is a priority objective at the European and national level, the four IBAs for Cory's Shearwater are still not adequately protected. At the meeting between the European Commission and Italian institutions that took place in Rome on 12–13 February this year, LIPU requested that the Environment Ministry designate the IBA for Cory's Shearwater as a SPZ and asked the European Commission to ensure that this is done. We hope that, soon, the most important Italian colonies of this species might be able to become part of the largest network of protected areas in the world, the Natura 2000 network. This would benefit the sea, Cory's Shearwater, and us all.



MODERN AGRICULTURE AND THE CRISES IN THE AGRICULTURAL ECOSYSTEM

Claudio Celada, Conservation Director

To understand the impact of agriculture on biodiversity and on the environment we can only rely, in an era of 'fake news', on the most solid and rigorous scientific data available to us. Some of these are decidedly worrying: in Germany, between 1990 and 2016, we have witnessed a fall in the

biomass of insects in agricultural environments of 76 per cent. In effect, therefore, the base of the food chain has almost been wiped out at least in those environments. In Europe, since 1908, we have noted a fall of 55 per cent in the abundance of birds in agricultural habitats compared to a general stability in bird populations in woodland areas. At the same time, 80 per cent of extensive grassland in the EU is in a poor state of conservation. The situation is no better in Italy, where in the agricultural areas of the plains we are recording a fall in bird numbers of 42 per cent over the last 14 years – a real collapse in such a short space of time.

These numbers, by themselves, show that the currently dominant form of farming is simply not sustainable. The grave truth is that this type of farming is in large part dependent on the taxes of European citizens through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). To concern oneself with birds is to face up to the world's great problems, as has declared T. Lovejoy, one of conservation's greatest scientists.

What is, then, the farming model behind the collapse of birdlife in our farmland? And, how has it come, in Europe, to support an agriculture so little respectful of the environment? It is a story linked in large part to the origins of the CAP, a policy that emerged in the 1960s with the main aim of providing Europe with food. It made an important contribution in this respect, but it encouraged the intensification of farming practice. In the long term, the effects on the environment have been underestimated but today the results are plain for all to see. We produce far more than we need, we waste large quantities of food, we have invested in ludicrous amounts of energy (in particular, bio-carburants), even if

with the best of intentions. Although in its later reforms the EU sought to correct the general drift – including through projects that gave a friendly nod to the environment such as broad-based farming, the principle of 'public money for public good', and trying to give to agriculture the role of guardian of the environment – not really thought-through and never really supported, the results have been disappointing.

The system of respect for the basic rules for environmental safety, known as 'ecological conditionality', has been progressively weakened; the 'greening' presented as a real 'green revolution' of the CAP has, on the admission of the European Court of Auditors itself, been a failure. Rural development has not produced significant benefits for the environment and integration with the Nature Directives has substantially failed.

To Whom are the Funds Going and to What Purpose (or Rather, Who Likes CAP and Why)?

The CAP, which constitutes 37.8 per cent of the budget of the European Union (2014 – 20), as admitted recently by European institutions themselves, does not contribute to solving economic differences between farmers. Indeed, more than 80 per cent of the € 278 million of the first tranche go to 20 per cent of the farmers. For the most part it is a matter of support for incomes (in effect, direct grants). In total, 35 per cent of these funds go to 1.5 per cent of recipients. In large part they are intensive farmers.

The Example of the Plain of Padua

Whilst lacking the great estates found in other regions, the Plain of Padua has increasingly become an area dominated by fields of maize, cultivated to support the intensive raising of stock animals. The result is a 'green desert' that requires a high input of fertilizers and chemicals and a high input of water, all of which produces high levels of greenhouse gas with worrying concentrations of nitrogen compounds in the soil.

Birds and Agriculture: Linked to the Same Destiny

And so, we are rapidly exhausting our natural resources (water, soil, air, habitat, insects, birds). As if our lives and the future of agriculture itself did not depend on these resources, which today – under modern and effective terminology – are coming to be known as our 'natural capital'.

An Opportunity to Reform the CAP

Following the publication of the European Commission's proposals on the CAP, which should come into force in 2021, we have entered into a vigorous institutional discussion. The concepts emphasised by the Commission in its proposals are those of greater responsibility being entrusted to the member states together with greater management flexibility. It is not easy to foresee the consequences of such planning. What is certain is that it represents a radical reform of the existing CAP that will establish environmental sustainability and significant social equity as its point of departure. And the moment has definitely come for a radical change

of approach in the way we run our agriculture, where simple window dressing will not do. Above all, we must take account of the fact that decisions taken soon will have consequences right up to 2027 (the year that the next CAP expires) and, indirectly, beyond. Can we allow another 10 years of unsustainable agriculture? In the face of the rapid climatic and environmental change already underway, we in LIPU think it right to say no.

Another Agriculture

And we are not the only ones to think so. There is, in fact, a growing awareness in favour of healthy and sustainable agriculture. It is not by chance that many young farmers are putting their trust in bio-agriculture or, in any case, in a model of farming that is 'gentle' and non-intensive. In cities, there is a growing desire for healthy food and for growing food. The challenge is to transform this into a movement that counts, one that can no longer be ignored.

The Campaign 'We Are Changing Farming'

To add force to our demands in the seat of the European Union and in Italy, LIPU has set in motion, together with eight other Italian organisations the 'We Are Changing Farming' campaign, which is integrated into a European initiative coordinated by Birdlife, EEB and WWF. In Italy, around 40 organisations have adhered to the campaign. The approach, funded by the Cariplo Foundation, is to explain the CAP to citizens and to get them involved. In this sense, there has already been success, with the participation of 33,000 Italian citizens and farmers in the official consultation

conducted by the European Commission last July. They are asking for, in effect, more environment and more justice. Will they be listened to?

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CAMPAIGNS

Seven species to save

Ptarmigan, Skylark, Turtle Dove, Rock Partridge, Lapwing, Pochard, Redwing. Seven species under threat – from hunting, from loss of habitat, and from climate change. Today LIPU is launching a campaign to protect them, with the invaluable help of its members.

They need our help. Seven species that for different, important reasons are in a worrying state of conservation. Seven species that cry out for a change in human behaviour. At once. There is no more time to lose.

The White Grouse Is Becoming Less and Less White

The Ptarmigan, with its beautiful white winter coat, is easy prey when there is not enough snow. Climate change and mountain warming together have caused its habitat to shrink, so much so that this species faces being wiped out entirely. According to LIPU's "BirdsClim", a recently constructed model covering the whole of the Alpine arc, climate change will reduce their breeding area – above 1,500 metres – by almost a third within the next twenty years. And this is without taking other negative trends into account: new ski resorts and their accompanying infrastructure

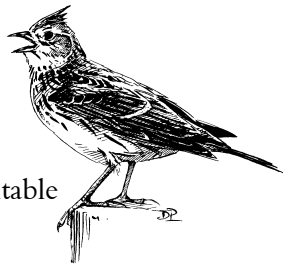
and changes in the quality of vegetation at high altitudes. All of these jeopardise the chances of survival of this species.

And as if this wasn't enough, we increase pressure on the Ptarmigan by hunting, still practised in many Alpine regions, and widespread enough to have a profound impact on such a small population.

The Herald of the Morning

Next we have the Skylark, herald of the new day. A bird LIPU and its members are very familiar with thanks to a previous campaign on its behalf – a campaign that publicised the worrying status of the Skylark and called for its full protection, together with better care of its agricultural habitat and the introduction of a hunting ban. A few months ago, we presented the government (which, like much of the political world, is not very sensitive to the problem) with a petition of 50 thousand signatures gathered during the 'Let her sing' campaign, causing rage and fear amongst hunters, who want to continue killing this bird.

Meanwhile something has changed. The 'bag limits' for this species are getting smaller and smaller; the regions are starting to consider the issue, despite strong pressure from the hunting lobby; and ISPRA, the institute for environmental protection and research, has begun work on a suitable management plan.

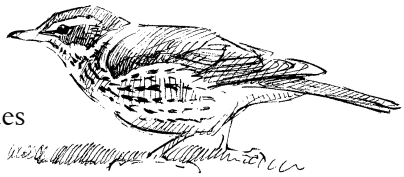


And yet, it is not acceptable that this species can still be hunted. The Skylark is suffering badly from the

ecological degradation of farmland: the shrinking of fields and early mowing, which destroys their nests. Hunting represents a serious, additional threat. Each year two million individual birds are (officially) killed in Italy. An enormous and unsustainable number.

Five Globally Threatened Species

And then there is the Turtle Dove, the Rock Partridge, the Lapwing, the Pochard and the Redwing. Five species that in the last report from BirdLife Europe (Birds in Europe 3) were classified as SPEC 1: threatened on a global scale.



Five species that, besides sharing this worrying classification, are all the target of hunters. A fact that contravenes European regulations, which clearly state that hunting species in a state of unfavourable conservation must not be permitted.

These five species suffer different problems: the Redwing is hunted during both its pre-breeding and post-breeding migration; the Lapwing suffers from the intensification of farming practices; the Pochard suffers from poor water quality, and like so many waterbirds is pursued by hunters (both legal and illegal), critically so in some areas of our country. To take one example, the Po Delta is at the same time a natural paradise and a scene of real butchery, especially in the Veneto.

But the Turtle Dove and the Rock Partridge are the most extreme cases.

Turtle Dove and Rock Partridge

Turtle Doves were already understood to be in decline (SPEC 3) when the second BirdLife International report was published in 2004 (Birds in Europe 2).

Hunting has contributed greatly to the decline of this species in Italy. It is also clear that there is a poor standard of habitat management. For this reason, no part of Italy (above all the south) should permit a pre-season opening of hunting and the widespread carnage this leads to. Further negative factors include the loss and/or change of agricultural habitat throughout Europe, and climate change affecting both the bird's breeding areas and its wintering areas in Africa.

As for the Rock Partridge, this most-beautiful resident species lives in both Alpine and Apennine areas. Italy is home to 25 per cent of the nesting European population, handing to us a great responsibility regarding its protection.

Disruption to the ecosystem presents a serious threat to the Rock Partridge. The population is suffering from genetic changes caused by the release into the wild of individuals bred for hunting purposes. Most of these individuals (Chukar partridge, for example) are genetically different from the local population, and 'pollute' the gene pool, risking hybridisation and an alteration of the species' genetic makeup itself. And finally, once again, there is hunting. Is it possible, is it acceptable, that Italy continues to hunt a species that is at such risk? Knowing that one Rock Partridge out of four lives in our country? The answer is no: it is not possible; it is not acceptable.

The New LIPU Campaign

And so LIPU goes into action, in the defence of these most-beautiful species. This complex undertaking will require a lot of work, and a multifaceted and coordinated approach: mitigation of the effects of climate change on biodiversity; protection and re-establishment of sites of natural importance and habitats; initiatives for better agriculture; protection of migratory routes to avoid illegal killing; plans for research, monitoring, and modelling, for the better understanding and the better protection of these species. And last but not least, putting pressure on government, parliament, regional administrations, and government institutes to exclude these seven species from the hunting list. It is a difficult task – truly difficult – but we have a duty to act.

We need the restoration and protection of habitats, particularly priority habitats, together with a greater focus on the problem of chemical pollution in agriculture. We must act now. Immediately.

Hunting is a serious additional cause of death for these globally threatened species. This is no longer sustainable and must stop.

Seven Actions for Seven Species

- Propose a law banning the hunting of these species
- Press the Italian regions to remove these seven species from the hunting calendar
- Protect migratory routes
- Involve Alpine regions in a protection programme for the Ptarmigan
- Work on the European Agricultural Policy
- Act regarding agricultural and aquatic habitats
- Involve people to strengthen our campaign

LIPU IN ACTION

by Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

Rome for the Swallows and the House Martins

Until September 30th this year swallows, martins and swifts that are located in the municipal area of Rome can continue to fly peacefully. With an ordinance signed by the mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, to the drafting of which LIPU made a valuable contribution, the protection of nests, eggs and chicks of these species has finally become a reality. The usefulness of swallows for the agricultural ecosystem and for humans is widely recognized: remember that a swallow is able to take 60 insects in an hour for food, which is equivalent, in an entire day, to about 850 mosquitoes or other insects. They are birds that act as "natural insecticides", and that help to improve the health of the city without resorting to synthetic insecticides.

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Tib: the connection is rewarded

Prestigious recognition for the Tib (Trans Insubria Bionet), the Life project that LIPU has completed in recent years with the Province of Varese and the Lombardy Region, supported by the Cariplo Foundation and the European Union.

On May 23rd, in Brussels, an award was presented by Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for the Environment, for one of the best Life projects in Europe in 2016. Tib created a long ecological corridor between the Campo dei Fiori Park , in the Prealps of Varese, and the Ticino Park in the Po Valley, through the restoration of wetlands and the

creation of ecological passages, useful to facilitate the movement of animals and reconnect the divided landscape. Great satisfaction for the LIPU team, rewarded for their effectiveness and management skills.

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NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

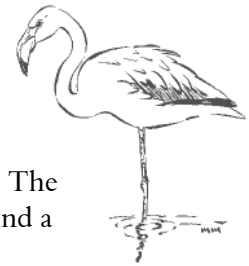
It is expected by the Charity Commission that we monitor the application of the funds we send to Italy. We are fortunate in having an extraordinary colleague in Parma, Claudio Celada, the Conservation Director whose ethics have inspired complete trust among your trustees. Nevertheless, Shirley and I visited Italy in April this year and were able to see lots of LIPU's work at first hand in a busy schedule.

Bonelli's Eagle protection

We flew to Catania in Sicily to be hosted by the local LIPU Delegate, Giuseppe Rannisi and his wife, Loredana and they took us south to see one of the Bonelli's Eagle nest sites being protected by their team of volunteers. The nest was only a few hundred metres from a village where the problems for the eagles had been explained and the villagers have adopted the birds and help patrol the area – any strangers will soon be spotted.

A day was spent at the Saline di Priolo reserve and we walked on the headland, which is beside the present reserve, to see Stone Curlews. There are plans to incorporate this rocky scrubland which extends to the sea into the reserve and this will increase its value greatly. Flamingos breed on the existing fresh water

pools but this is a mixed blessing, it brings good numbers of visitors which helps justify the reserve but the "pink lollipops" are displacing an important colony of Little Terns. The warden, Fabio, is working hard to find a solution for this.



Peace on the Strait

The next day we went north, to the spot which has received consistent support since our foundation – the Messina Strait – and we spent the day in the Peloritani Mountains above Messina town. The weather was fine, the view across to Calabria was excellent and their was complete peace and quiet around us, we counted eight hunters' cabins or bunkers and all were unoccupied – not a shot was heard all day!

We spoke to some of the LIPU volunteers patrolling the area and I had the very great pleasure of meeting WWT worker, Anna Giordano from Trapani in the west of the island who has been opposing the poachers on the strait for 38 years – a truly remarkable lady.

With a little sadness we left our Sicilian friends and flew north to Comacchio on the Adriatic coast south of Venice, the site of the Italian Birdwatching Fair set in the heart of the Po delta. Again we were among friends and for the four days of meetings, discussions, symposiums and dinners we were hosted with genuine kindness. The UK delegation, the members, were awarded a certificate of appreciation and, as nothing is given for nothing, I was forced to make a couple of short presentations.

The Boverio reedbed

Plans for visiting a reserve in the Alps were changed after heavy snowfall closed many of the roads in the area but the substitute was an exceptional experience. In 2014 we helped LIPU enter into a partnership with a local group called *Burchvif* based near Novara to the west of Milan and here was the chance to see the results. This was a clear case of, "Small is beautiful" as the reserve is an old oxbow river section of modest size, but as we arrived we heard Nightingale, Golden Oriole, Bee Eater and Cuckoo within the first five minutes – a clear comment on the value of this habitat which is a true oasis in a desert of industrial rice growing.

The team from *Burchvif* showed us another of their reserves, a twenty five year old woodland reclaimed from unprofitable agriculture, and once more we found a superb habitat that was full of birds and other creatures, again small but still beautiful and with an obvious ecological value.

What sort of rice do you want?

However, *Burchvif* is not alone in its wish to see harmony in the countryside and the track into the reedbed is between dramatically contrasting rice fields. On the right is a series of fields using the all too common modern methods – when flooded they are home to frogs and amphibians but as the rice matures they are allowed to dry out and because they have been levelled by laser no pools are left and few amphibians survive and so the herons have to move on... The banks around the pools are sprayed with glyphosate so that no wild seed might "contaminate" the crop and the area supports no life from mid June.

On the other side of the track is Cascina Bosco, a farm run on traditional lines by Roberto and Ilena with help from six year old Cloe. No chemicals are used and green manures ensure the quality of the soil with flooded ditches around their fields for the benefit of all sorts of aquatic life. This year they found a pair of Bittern had nested among the winter planted vegetation so they left that area uncut and the latest news is that the birds have reared young successfully.

As described by Claudio in his piece about the CAP, it is heartening to learn that there is a strong demand for organic food despite the fact that their rice costs twice as much as the industrial counterpart and that, therefore, their enterprise has a promising future. A wonderful mixture of ethics, ideals and practicality – http://www.cascinaboscofornasara.it/

We returned to cooler climes with a confidence in those we had met and real satisfaction that the projects we have supported are making progress – making a difference, long may all this continue.

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GDPR

Four letters to strike fear and confusion into all to meet them. We are all aware of abuses of private data held by some of the largest companies in the world and this year the European Union introduced a regulation to give individuals more control over what is done with their personal data.

This regulation applies to all, not just those in the EU and it will continue to apply to British citizens

after we leave the European Union. It replaces the previous British Law, the Data Protection Act but it is not easy to understand and as there is great deal of confusion about its requirements in some areas.

Let me say clearly that LIPU-UK complied with the Data Protection Act; we are already compliant with the new regulation and the legally required information is included with this edition of the Ali.

Cutting through all the legal mumbo jumbo, the most important things, to my mind, are:

We hold only the minimum personal information necessary to carry out our work of maintaining your membership (renewal reminders) and providing the things you expect such as the Ali four times a year.

We do not divulge personal information to anyone unless you request or agree to it, with the exception that LIPU in Italy needs some information in order to print your membership card.

★★★

My thanks go my production team without whose help this edition could not have been brought to you:

Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

Line drawings are used by kind permission on the RSPB and European Union and photographs are © the respective photographers, I am grateful to them all.

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The Tib Life Project award (see page25) from left to right: Angelo Salsi, Head of Life Unit at the European Commission, Sara Barbieri of the Province of Varese, Paolo Siccardi of the Cariplo Foundation and Massimo Soldarini of LIPU-BirdLife Italia, see page 25.

Soaring majestically over its nest site is this Bonelli's Eagle, protected by a team of LIPU volunteers and supported by LIPU-UK, see page 26.

A Black-crowned Night Heron, one of the many heron species which find food in the organic rice fields of northern Italy.