



- Birds Directive – 40 years on
- Bee-eaters - a special migrant
- Thousands of thrushes freed
- Annual appeal



After all the talk of a subject such as the Birds Directive, which has dominated this edition, we can take pleasure from this picture of an exquisite little wader seen at the LIPU reserve of Saline di Priolo in Sicily – a Little Stint and, below, its cousin, the Black-winged Stilt.



Nobody said it would be easy

Editorial

David Lingard

It's not always easy to be an optimist. If we look at the state of Planet Earth it is seriously threatened by the one dominant species, a species which has trebled in my lifetime, and, as a member recently said to me, "What amazes me is that the majority of people don't seem to care what happens."

This simple truth emphasises how important is the small minority who do care, people like the staff and workers of LIPU, and all the other similar organisations in different countries. Even more important are the sustaining members of these organisations – it is they who provide the moral and financial support without which LIPU and the others would simply wither away.

I am often asked why LIPU has members in this country – the RSPB for example doesn't have a branch in Italy – and I have no simple answer, but I reply that it says much for our members that they will support a conservation cause in another country. So, in this edition of the Ali which carries our appeal I salute you all, and thank you sincerely for the support you have given to the birds in Italy.

Finally, may I commend to you the most ambitious appeal target we have set ourselves this year. Details of the LIPU projects we have agreed to support are in this edition of the Ali and, as you know, we launch just one appeal in the year. Please support it with the same generosity as you have in the past – my sincere thanks to you all.

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BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

The Birds Directive has completed its fortieth year: an opportunity to think about the relationship between humans and birds and the way in which the conservation of nature can improve our society, with the wish that April 2nd 1979, may be remembered as the day on which wild birds were saved

Let us begin this way then, with best wishes to the Birds Directive – born on 2 April 1979 – for its first 40 years. Best wishes too to those who over the years have worked to apply its laws and to bear witness to its principles. And to those who fight because they are not debased or traduced by sectional interests that lead them away from the common good. Best wishes too to honest politics, to good administrators, to scientists, designers, photographers, to our members and donors, and to those members of the public who have had positive dealings with the Directive and in one way or another have helped to make it work. Best wishes to all of us who have grown up in its shadow, have been enthused by it, or have been worried or uplifted, and to those who have celebrated or grieved but never lost heart. To all who, in this cause, have seen the signal to start again, to open new chapters in our beautiful and complex relationship with nature.

Seeing the Future

It is strange – though not a complete surprise – that the origin of the word auguri, used for wishing someone luck, is directly tied to the world of birds. The stress has only to be shifted from the second to

the first syllable for one to find oneself in the realm of wings and prophesies.

In ancient Rome, the augurs were priests and officials dedicated to predicting the future by the observation of birds. How many there were, of what species, their direction of flight and the patterns they traced in the air: from this data, opportunely interpreted, the priests drew the directions with which to decide on a battle, a political issue or the choices of daily life.

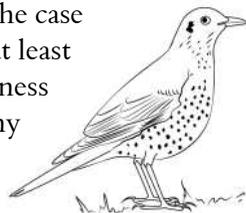
The anonymous French author of the *Compendium of Roman Antiquities* of 1808 notes that ‘In the Roman Republic the title of augur was the most important and esteemed of all’, and that the role of augur was more that of a scientist than a dignitary. That is to say, their activity was a matter of knowledge and not a simple issue of titles and positions of power. The science of these ornithologists, ahead of their time, “consisted of knowing what was foreboding, discerning what were the favourable and unfavourable signs”, and acting accordingly’.

Wishing is not Enough

The most important thing about the craft of augury was in effect its constructive aspect. Holding it to be of little use ‘to predict or discover ill fortune without having some remedy available’, this science did not limit itself to mere speculation but taught how to negate the ill omens with sacrifices and religious ceremonies, but also with actions that guided the choices the City had to make. Which is to say, wishing is not enough – there must be action.

These elements of superstition were complemented

by a pre-scientific form of natural history – an understanding of nature and in particular of the behaviour of birds and how they are tied to events in the weather, the changing of the seasons, and patterns of agriculture. Whether a flock of thrushes would appear before or preclude a storm could be a critical factor in the decision to be made: political, economic, or military, as the case might be. Already then there was, at least in some embryonic form, an awareness that birds display a response to many variables and are an indicator of many phenomena and far from irrelevant.



Something that Speaks to Us of the World

The whole history of the relationship between humans and birds evolved in this way, from distance to closeness: surprise at birds' flight; wonder at their songs and plumage; attempts to be like them; their mythical significance; the wish to know more... up until the first modern ornithological studies and the contemporary natural sciences, which have placed birds at the centre of a grand cognitive design and above all have made them the object of care and protection.

These studies and sciences have brought birds closer to us, depicting them in all the complexity of the great book of nature, with all the weaving and cross-referencing that this implies. A swallow is not only a swallow. It is a bearer of information that tells us of agriculture, the economy, the landscape, food, and good building practice, and the same holds for so many – perhaps all – of the hundreds of species of birds who inhabit our continent and the planet as

a whole. All are at the heart of something greater, a nexus of meaning that speaks to us of the world.

Paris to Brussels (via Texel)

It is for this reason too that in Paris, in October 1950, renewing an agreement dating from as long ago as 1902, the governments of a number of European countries subscribed to the International Convention for the Protection of Birds – ‘realising the danger of extermination which threatens certain species of birds and concerned about the numerical decrease in other species, particularly migratory species and considering that, in the interests of science, the protection of nature and the economy of each nation, all birds should as a matter of principle be protected’. In other words, the line has long since been drawn, and the framework of something more binding can clearly be seen.

Then, in 1971 we see the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and in 1979 the Bonn Convention on migratory species, immediately preceding the adoption by the Council of the European Community in Brussels on 2 April 1979 of the Birds Directive, the cornerstone for the conservation of wild birds on our continent. Nineteen articles and five annexes finally set down for adoption by the member states the measures necessary to guarantee adequate conservation for birds and affirmed that their protection is a transnational environmental issue and a matter of mutual responsibility.

We can be proud of the contribution to these endeavours made by LIPU and its then president Ermanno Rizzardi, as well of its participation in preparing the document agreed in 1975 on the

Dutch island of Texel by the International Council for the Protection of Birds – the future BirdLife International. That document's text became, in effect, the foundation of what, four years later, would become the Birds Directive.

The Eve of the Directive

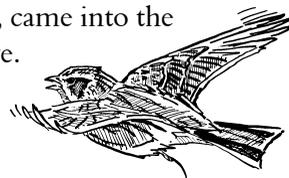
As to the origins of the Directive, there are many stories about the goings-on that preceded its appearance, stories that demonstrate the transformative reach of that event and the not insignificant difficulties it involved. What happened on the night before the text was finalised has been described from many sides: the last-minute agreements and the frenetic final positionings of each member state and lobby group, and most of all that of hunting interests, trying to extract a few more concessions.

The French, for example, fought to the last to allow the hunting of the Ortolan Bunting, a songbird that for centuries had had a prominent place in the culinary tradition of the other side of the Alps and that – largely for this very reason – found itself, at least in France, on the edge of extinction. The attempt having failed, France then began a long struggle with Europe, violating the regulation for a good twenty years until, in 1999, the Ortolan Bunting was excluded from the French hunting list and made almost definitively safe (recently various French chefs, including the celebrated Alain Ducasse, have made efforts to bring the bird back into the kitchen).

Also legendary was the tale of the famous letter c from that article of the Directive (article 9.1) that many member states used wrongly and at length

to authorise derogations for ‘traditional’ hunting. The clause allowed derogation “to permit, under strictly supervised conditions and on a selective basis, the capture, keeping or other judicious use of certain birds in small numbers”. The hunting lobby managed to insert the text at the last gasp, leading to decades of pushing the boundaries, legal battles, and condemnations in the Court of Justice. This, by the way, was the clause through which various Italian regions (Lombardy and the Veneto in particular) tried for years to authorise derogations for the hunting of Bramblings, Chaffinches and other protected songbirds, before being stopped in their tracks by the concerted actions of LIPU (with over 200,000 signatures against the practice collected in 2008) and other conservation organisations.

Even the Skylark, it would seem, came into the final working out of the Directive. Attempts by conservationists to exclude it from Annex 2 – its presence in the Annex would allow it to be hunted – failed at the last moment and the lark unfortunately remained on the list of huntable species. Had things gone differently, that little morning singer, which suffers additionally from serious problems with regard to its habitat, would now be enjoying a much more settled conservation status.



Light after the Directive

The impact of the Birds Directive on nature conservation was ‘destabilising’, not only in terms of the real benefits gained for the protection of birds but also with regard to a certain cultural shock –an enlightenment linked with the Directive. To

understand this, one only has to read the Directive's fifth premise, according to which: 'The conservation of the species of wild birds naturally occurring in the European territory of the Member States is necessary in order to attain the Community's objectives regarding the improvement of living conditions and sustainable development'. In other words, our own lives are dependent on the protection of raptors, of herons, of swallows, and of ducks, and with them the well-being and the future of human communities.

If the principle does not seem to have been fully assimilated even today, forty years ago it was revolutionary – in both theory and practice – in the context of a historical struggle in which, across many parts of Europe, Italy included, owls, falcons and corvids were still 'creatures of ill omen' or vermin to be exterminated. Today, a good population of birds means greener cities, evidence of biodiversity, a more beautiful countryside, and healthy agricultural practices. The opposite of any ill omen.

This is to say nothing of another essential aspect that comes out of the Directive and that is today a central part of ecological thinking: the principle that science and commitment must go hand in hand. That is to say that, on one side, knowledge can no longer be disinterested, the simple evaluation of data without any motivation for action, while on the other, actions have to be founded on solid information and on sound ecological arguments, cultural as well as scientific, and on 'common knowledge' diffused throughout society and the broader public.

We might say: 'Know them to protect them', a maxim dear to LIPU and one that is also the title of the extraordinary new Guide to the Conservation Status

of Birds in Italy, which has just been produced by LIPU.

Europe

Thanks to the Directive, and therefore to the European project, a number of species have literally been saved, and many have seen their conservation status improved, above all where they could benefit from the full application of the regulations. With the passage of time, our level of knowledge increased, leading to the number of species classified as being of unknown conservation status being almost halved, from 31 to 17 per cent, in the last decade and the corresponding figure for habitats falling from 18 to 7 per cent. The Member States have taken on board the standards and approved the laws, as is the case in Italy with the regulations for Special Protection Areas and Law 157/92 with its safeguards and protected oases.

Biodiversity has become the focus of a growing number of programmes, projects, action plans, institutional initiatives and technical improvements. Among the public, perceptions have changed and a more benign attitude towards nature has grown and continues to grow. People are better informed, thinking of nature as a good thing to be protected, and take action when it is threatened, as when in 2015 the Birds and Habitats Directives were under attack and the Alarm for Nature campaign obtained a record 520,000 signatures.

There is, however, still a long way to go if we are to be able to say that all the promises made that day in April 1979 have been kept. And in some ways, the hardest battles are now upon us – when

the environment faces setbacks at every turn, when the winds of cultural retrenchment dog our progress, when a new world more full of risks than of opportunities faces us. And when the European project, with its defects but also its precious community spirit, is cast into doubt, the question is this: What would become of nature without Europe, without the Community directives?

Bringing the Future to Pass

No, wishing is not enough. Wishes, if they are to become reality, must be earned. There has to be commitment, study, sustained action and self-sacrifice; we must do everything possible to defend what we believe in and love.

So then, the spirit of the augurs may be this. To know and to act. Not an empty ritual but a new promise. That of the future. The promise of wild birds. To wish for the future. Traversing space and time, seasons and worlds. To live in the desert as if it were the sea, and to see the ocean as a bridge. To be small and yet great. To bring healing to yourself and hope to others, who in turn bring hope to you. To be little islands, archipelagos and whole continents. To struggle for environmental rights, for Europe and a better Europe to come. For a better world to come. To live and be together, to build together. To give to the Birds Directive a second and even more auspicious lease of life.

Translator's note: In Italian the word *Auguri* as a greeting has the stress on the second syllable, but with the stress on the first syllable it refers to the Roman augurs.

COLOURS OF AFRICA

Make a date: In May the Bee-eater soars over our country and amazes us once again with its brightly coloured plumage and acrobatic flight.

It is well known that birds migrate across Europe and Africa in spring and autumn. Species of all sizes, with the strangest shapes and showy colours, appear on the Mediterranean stage. Among all those we can see in May, as we relax on our way through our countryside, there is one that will strike us in a particular way thanks to its unmistakably coloured plumage and its wonderful flight: the Bee-eater.

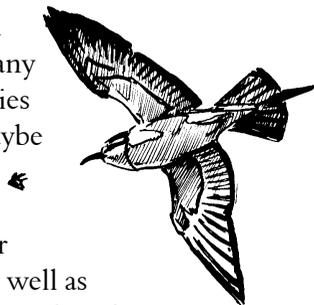
The Winged Harlequin

When spring approaches and migratory birds arrive from Africa, close your eyes and without looking hear its repetitive call and imagine the malachite-green and golden-yellow plumage that gives it such rich, gaudy and exotic colours. The Bee-eater is a winged harlequin: the plumage appears chestnut on the back and azure on the breast, with shades of yellow, green, black and orange over the whole body. Its insistent summer calls remind us of never-ending, sunny August days. The European Bee-eater is an insectivorous species with the scientific name *apiaster*, a name that shows it specialises in capturing bees and other hymenoptera thanks to its long, slender, robust beak. It is forced, at the end of summer, to migrate to warmer climes to find food and spends the winter in the hot African tropics. In Italy the species was not considered widespread in past decades. Today, however, some decades later, various research projects on its demographic distribution show that the Bee-eater is considered to

be in a particularly favourable state of conservation. A real success for a species that has to cross the Mediterranean as well as flying long distances non-stop across the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Sahara Desert, crossing these twice a year.

A Successful Diet

How has the Bee-eater avoided the sad fate that has affected many passeriform trans-Saharan species that follow the same route? Maybe thanks to its diet – more eclectic than was thought and which could guarantee a greater chance of survival for adults, as well as young during rearing. Swiss researchers have found that during bad weather the Bee-eaters change their hunting strategy, coming down to the ground and feeding on coleoptera and grasshoppers. This is different from what they usually do, which is to fly up from a perch and hunt with rapidly beating outstretched wings to capture damselflies on the wing.



It is necessary to underline the parent birds' generosity especially during the crucial stage of feeding their chicks: they offer them the largest prey and eat the smallest themselves, guaranteeing faster growth of their young.

A Nest in the Sand

The way in which Bee-eaters breed is very unusual for two reasons: colonies are composed of many pairs (up to 50) and the birds nest mainly along escarpments above rivers, in active or abandoned

quarries, and on sand dunes on larger islands. Nests are typically made in deep tunnels about 35 metres long, where the female lays her round eggs. The preferred location in the overwhelming majority of cases is a sandy substrate either on flat land or on hills, very rarely in mountainous areas.

All Together in Africa

In autumn the Bee-eaters migrate to Africa and already in August all the members of the colony, adults and lovingly welcomed young alike, are reunited in large flocks. And like their transalpine or Spanish cousins, it is probable that the Italian populations overwinter in the western region of the African continent.

But how can we protect our flying harlequin? We can contribute by conserving the breeding sites in line with the ecological needs of the species and by avoiding excessive human disturbance around the colonies especially during the breeding season. Only in this way can we maintain our hope of seeing Bee-eaters in the future, and of hearing their calls again during spring days.

Scientific name: *Merops apiaster*
Length: 2529 centimetres
Wingspread: 3640 centimetres
Overwintering area: South Africa
Nest: sand dunes, quarries, rivers

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THE NINE CHALLENGES OF THE BIRDS DIRECTIVE

Claudio Celada, Director of Area Nature Conservation, Giovanni Albarella, from the office of Institutional Relations, Giorgia Gaibani, Marco Gustin, Laura Silva, Marco Dinetti and Federica Luoni, staff of LIPU's Nature Conservation Department

A 'pioneer' law: this has been used to describe, and continues to describe, the Birds Directive, from the very day when, in 1979, opening up the way for other European environmental directives, it introduced laws in defence of nature that can still today be considered revolutionary. From the Birds Directive – to take just one example – came the requirement for Member States to identify and protect Zones of Special Protection (ZSP), those areas of most importance for the conservation of birds, thus laying the foundations for Natura 2000, the great network of community protected areas that were to be set up 13 years later in the Habitats Directive.

Many have been the battles, over its first 40 years, from which the Birds Directive has emerged victorious. Many have been the attempts to weaken it, attempts that it has challenged and repelled. And very many have been the conservation goals achieved. It is not yet, however, the moment to declare ourselves fully satisfied. Having emerged, new goals await the Directive and are driving its ambitions even farther along the road that leads to the conservation of nature. And this is the aspect of the debate that, today, is of the most interest to us: the next major objectives for the Directive.

We focus on five that do not cover the entire subject but that do highlight important parts of it. It is on these objectives and on the extent to which we succeed in obtaining them that the future of the Birds Directive and of the safety of nature in Europe depends.

Objective 1. Nature at the Centre of Politics in General.

First of all, the theme of the link between nature and the economy is still too divided and conflictual. New environmental emergencies are making the clash between the conservation of nature and development policies appear ever more short-sighted and require that this divisiveness should be settled once and for all. The collapse of the water supply, desertification, growing salinity levels, pollution, the overuse of land, the unsustainable exploitation of resources: all elements that remind us that human communities are an integral part of the ecosystem and that they must settle up with the ecosystem's requirements. Saving nature yes, but also avoiding the consequences that nature delivers when it is mistreated.

This then is the first major objective: to make sure that the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive remain at the centre of policies of economic and social planning; to ensure that their conservation targets are truly installed in economic and territorial planning and in sector policy, starting with those of agriculture. This is, moreover, the essence of the Natura 2000 network, the network's objective being precisely to preserve biodiversity by reinforcing synergies with human activities.

A central role, from this perspective, will be played out through the fundamental interaction between the Habitats Directive and the Natura 2000 network's so-called Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs) . The purpose of the PAFs is precisely to focus, via an integrated approach, the priorities for intervention via the Natura 2000 network in the form of actions for the protection of habitats and species as well as to secure the type and size of funding necessary to carry such interventions out. The Frameworks are also meant to bring together all those actors who are in a position contribute to the integration of these policies.

In this way, the question of governance will be decisive: by whom and how will the network's sites be managed, the ever greater coordination of the various social actors in the management and supervision of the territory, the real involvement of citizens and of stakeholders who are already in the first phases of the processes of participation.

Objective 2. Protection of the Sea.

Over recent years a vast effort has been made to identify and designate Zones of Special Protection on land. And this work, although not complete, has already produced satisfactory results. Now, however, it is necessary to implement Natura 2000 at sea, designating as network sites marine areas of importance with regard to the protection of birds.

The threats facing coastal and marine environments are many and range from uncontrolled tourism to pollution (not just plastics), from overexploitation of resources to the accidental capture of protected animals in fishing nets, and beyond to the very

topical issue of drilling and to other issues with significant repercussions even for human activity itself. For this reason, it is urgent that where the sea is concerned we ramp up our efforts and that a more appropriate system of protection is put in place. With regard to Italy in particular, our country must set up new ZSPs for the protection of sites where seabirds breed and feed, starting with the four areas that LIPU has identified as Important Bird Areas for Cory's Shearwaters (the Maddalena Archipelago, the Tuscan Archipelago, the Pelagic Sicilian Islands and the Tremiti Island Archipelago). These are areas of capital importance on which depends the effective conservation of this species.

Objective 3. Climate Change and the Protection of Birds

The enormous issue of climate change impinges on the Birds Directive. Many of the consequences of global warming have a negative and serious impact on the conservation of wild birds, including, for example the deterioration and loss of suitable habitat. One thinks for example of the wildlife of higher altitudes – as typified by the Ptarmigan, whose future is at risk due to loss of suitable habitat – or of the destruction of wetlands and of mixed Mediterranean habitats on which depend, for their survival, many species of birds, among which some that are completely dependent on reed beds, including the Penduline Tit and the Bearded Reedling, or the rails, which are a cause of particular concern.

When one thinks of such changes of global significance one is tempted to declare oneself quite unable to act. But there are already many successful examples of action that have followed the path

towards a real adaptation to the changing climate and that have not ignored requirements for greater standards of conservation with regard to protected areas or those areas' greater interconnection with management practices that face forwards to embrace future landscapes.

From this perspective, the provisions of the Birds Directive in close combination with its 'sister', the Habitats Directive, are able to offer many cues and useful instruments of a technical, legal and informational nature.

Objective 4. The Protection of Game Species and the Fight Against Poaching.

The Birds Directive has had a very positive impact on the issue of the pressure hunting exerts on bird populations, providing Member States with stricter rules with which to regulate hunting and to guarantee greater protection for birds. The wider scope of the Directive, let us not forget, means that member states adopt the measures necessary to maintain species of birds at an adequate level of conservation even 'taking into account the demands of leisure and the economy'. This is a very important general principle, a sort of foundation for each application of the directive from which many of its provisions are articulated. But what is, then, the state of bird protection in the Europe of today?

The third 'Birds in Europe' report, the most recent from BirdLife Europe on the state of bird conservation in Europe, tells us that of the breeding species in Italy 16 are globally threatened (Spec. 1) and another 69 are in an unfavourable state of conservation (Specs. 2 & 3).

Faced with this anything but rosy situation, Italy must act by adopting the necessary initiatives; for example by clearly stated management plans in order to bring back to a secure footing the population levels of these birds. And the hunting question has significant implications here given that today in Italy at least 18 game species are in the conservation state 'at risk', five of which (the Redwing, Rock Partridge, Lapwing, Turtle Dove and Pochard) are seriously threatened globally.

And so, the recommendations of the Directive (and of the documents to which it has given rise) point to the exclusion from the list of game species of Spec. 1 species and to the suspension from that list of other species pending suitable management plans being adopted with all the necessary measures, from the upgrading of habitat up to – of course – turning the screw on hunting activity. Special attention should also be placed on hunting during the more biologically sensitive periods, for example during spring migration. The prohibition of hunting at these times must be absolute (as article 7 of the Directive requires), and it is there where Italy is not yet in line with these provisions, for species such as the thrushes, woodcock and various aquatic birds.

Fundamentally we still have the painful subject of the poaching of birds. In 2013 the European Commission opened an inquiry regarding Italy, requiring our country to approve a National Plan to tackle the poaching of wild birds. The Plan has identified seven 'hot spots' of illegality within our borders and a series of important actions (from increasing the reach of laws to monitoring and cultural education) to be put into practice, although today these actions still exist on paper alone. The

fourth new and challenging objective for the Birds Directive is, then, the following: to provide greater protection for game species and to combat poaching with a new determination, securing the full implementation of the Plan and finally bringing about poaching's definitive defeat.

Objective 5. The Culture of Bird Conservation.

And we now come to the fifth and final (so to speak) objective: cultural change via the Birds Directive. When we speak of nature conservation, and in particular of the protection of birds, we are referring to planned activities that require up-to-date scientific information, constant monitoring, the most advanced technical help, data analysis, discussion and detailed study. In sum, a scientific system of considerable reach, capable of providing a reliable picture of the state of health of wild birds and their habitats and of standing as the foundation of the actions necessary for their protection.

However, no campaign of protection will have the necessary duration unless there are also suitable social and cultural conditions. Here, then, is the theme of culture: in a certain sense, the most important challenge facing the Birds Directive and all those who, like LIPU, are struggling to strengthen it and reinvigorate it. Ensure people know the world of birds, promote its values even more and better than today, and highlight the relationship between our lives and the demands we make. This is the line taken by LIPU's Life project – known as NET pro NET – which has worked to promote the Natura 2000 sites through the actions of volunteers and the involvement of local communities, taking the same

route as the project Life Choose Nature, which has recruited 300 young volunteers throughout Italy and set them to work not only on the protection of sites and species but also on the great work of promoting the beauty, the importance, the inalienable value of wild birds. This is not rhetoric. It is a thought out, strategic programme, a focussed and fundamental perspective: a good part of the future of the Directive, and of its forthcoming desirable outcomes, will depend on the extent to which we succeed in making the culture of conserving wild birds prevail and really establish it among the people.

A Challenge that Has Barely Begun

The evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives by the European Commission is still recent; once fully activated, the Commission concluded, this legal instrument will allow us to achieve concrete results of great value. Today, this activation of the Directives should be complete, and they should actually be moving further into the twenty-first century, coupled with greater ambitions and – of course – newer, greater objectives. We are almost able to say: from Natura 2000 to Natura 2100, the challenge of the Birds Directive has barely begun.



FREEDOM!

A great operation on illegal bird breeding conducted by the Forli-Cesena Forest Carabinieri and by the LIPU volunteers. Two thousand birds caught in the wild were seized.

The hands of the volunteers suddenly open. The birds, still incredulous, take courage and fly out. Finally free, after knowing hell. Hour after hour, first a few dozen, then hundreds of small birds held in the cages of ruthless Romagnolo ranchers, come back to life. They start again to sing and soar in the air, happy to rediscover the wild life, free from constraints and gloomy destinies. With the possibility to choose a partner, make a nest, raise the offspring. A normal life, the one desired by the two thousand thrushes, Blackbirds, Fieldfares, larks seized by the Forlì-Cesena forest police, with the collaboration of the volunteers of LIPU, during some checks carried out in three hunters' breeding stations located in the province of Romagna. Most birds were released at once and the rest taken to a rehabilitation centre in Modena for rehabilitation. For them, the return to freedom is only postponed. Five people, however, were immediately reported by the Carabinieri.

But let's go back for a moment, and explain how this took place. We are in January this year. The Forlì-Cesena Forest Carabinieri knock on the doors of a large bird farm. It is the first of the three that will be visited in a few weeks. The veterinarians of ASL and the volunteers from LIPU accompany the soldiers. The suspicion is that inside there are wild birds illegally caught and "disguised" among others raised in captivity, to be sold to hunters as live decoys, as breeding subjects, for ornamental purposes or for other uses.

After the first analysis the suspicions become certainties: many birds were found without the closed identification rings that, by law, must be applied to the legs of the creatures within ten days of birth. The reference is the rings "Foi" (Italian

ornithological federation), which breeders must affix to captive bred birds and which have standard sizes. Moreover, many birds had rings, but they had larger dimensions than allowed, therefore applied fraudulently with birds already in adulthood. In other cases, the attached rings indicated a year which did not correspond to the age of the subject. In all these cases the birds were registered as “born on the farm” on the registers, but instead they were certainly illegally caught in the wild with nets or traps.

The reasons for such cruelty are soon described. Capturing birds in the wild, a practice prohibited by law, is much cheaper than to breed examples of wild species in captivity. Just go to the black market, buy the bird and then mark it with the identification marks of your breeding, registering it as “new born” and then sell it as such. An illicit practice that caused the profits to some farmers in the province of Forlì-Cesena. The buildings of these “farms” can be considered real sorting centres for birds preyed by poachers in the wild with nets and traps, destined to be resold by the alleged “breeders” to hunters who request them.

The role of LIPU in this great operation has been nothing short of extraordinary: for entire days the volunteers have identified the birds, determining their age, removing the rings, and, where possible, returning the animals to the natural habitat. For all the others left in the aviaries, the party is only postponed: taken to the recovery centre “Il Pettiroso” of Modena for a period of rehabilitation, they will soon be freed. The bad adventure, hopefully, is behind us. Now, a new life begins.

The LIPU web site has a very moving record of these

releases and it can be seen at:

<http://www.lipu.it/news-natura/notizie/10-caccia-e-bracconaggio/1301-i-signori-degli-anelli-il-video-sul-sequestro-e-la-liberazione-degli-uccelli-detenuti-nei-lager-romagnoli>

LIPU IN ACTION

Fighting poaching in Campania

Confiscating arms and munitions and reporting poachers to the authorities: these are some of the results yielded by the creation of an anti-poaching operations centre within the police force of the city of Naples, led by Commander Lucia Rea.

The success of the centre is also due to the crucial contribution of LIPU Naples volunteer guards Giuseppe Salzano and Raffaele Tontaro, who have restored the surveillance service of LIPU Naples by recruiting numerous volunteers, who will become future volunteer guards at LIPU. And there is no lack of biodiversity requiring their protection: in the Naples metropolitan area there are 14 protected natural areas, ranging from parks and reserves to Natura 2000 sites.

In Campania, more specifically in the Foce Volturno reserve, on the Licola coast, and at Falciano Lake, LIPU guards guided by surveillance coordinator at LIPU Caserta, Maurizio Paolella, together with the reserve wardens and with the help of President Giovanni Sabatino, have discovered and removed 400 metres of mist nets and freed tens of wild birds destined for the illegal market.

Asti – how to respect nature

LIPU's Asti volunteers continue to organise activities to educate people on how to respect nature. These activities, created under the patronage of the School Office of the provinces of Asti and Alessandria, are run both in schools and through in-depth visits to the wildlife rehabilitation centre in Tigliole D'Asti with the aim of letting children and teachers get close to nature and respect injured or temporarily debilitated animals. Interesting creative workshops are also run throughout the day at the rehabilitation centre, with the purpose of expanding people's knowledge of nature. Teachers can access the on-line catalogue, which can be found under the section "Education" at www.lipuat.com.

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

LIPU-UK Annual Appeal

As I said earlier, unlike some other charities, we do not pester and have only one appeal for funds each year. This year we discussed with Claudio Celada, the Conservation Director, a programme of support which is the most ambitious yet – we agreed to fund eight LIPU in the year ahead:

1. **Recovery Centres** There is always a need for help with providing consumables for these hospitals such as medicines and food for the recovering birds. In the coming year support will be given to the hospitals, "La Fagiana" near Milan and "CRUMA" near Livorno.

2. **Bonelli's Eagle protection** LIPU protects four breeding sites in Sicily as a part of a larger programme co-ordinated by GTR (Gruppo Tutela Rapaci) which has successfully protected these birds which are prized by Middle Eastern falconers. Last year one chick was stolen which shows the importance of this surveillance; we have helped with expenses, trail cameras and much more and will continue to do so.
3. **Anti-poaching activities** LIPU-UK has helped the anti-poaching work of LIPU since our foundation in 1989. Since then the situation is greatly improved but the vigilance cannot be stopped, and our support now attracts matched funding from other bodies to increase its effectiveness in Puglia, Sardinia and on the Messina Strait.
4. **Monitoring of Raptor Migration** Since 2004 we have helped LIPU monitor the movement of raptors in their spring migration through Sicily and this included the counting of over 76,000 passing through the Messina Strait. This activity also helps that anti-poaching teams and our support will continue.
5. **Red-footed Falcon** Parma province has the largest breeding colony in Italy and a nest box scheme has proved an outstanding success. In the year ahead we will fund more nest boxes and GPS trackers so the birds' movements and feeding areas can be studied.
6. **Kentish Plover in Sardinia** A study of this delightful plover had worrying results and it is proposed to repeat the survey during 2019 to establish the impact of human disturbance and dogs on the breeding success of this species in Sardinia.

7. **Rock Ptarmigan in the Alps** Climate change and human disturbance with such things as tourism and ski resorts appears to be driving this species toward extinction in the Alps. Reliable data are urgently needed to devise measures to protect this species.

8. **Important Bird Areas (IBA)** LIPU provided the research and census data for the original list of IBAs but that data must be validated and updated if the upgrading of these areas to Special Protection Areas (SPA) is to succeed. A new initiative of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) will also be helped by this work.

Eight major projects for which we need to raise €96,000 and, as a measure of how far we have come, twenty years ago our appeal target was just £24,000. It's a much greater target now, but we are achieving much more in Italy than ever before and the successes far outweigh the disappointments. Please support this appeal and give what you can - Thank you.

LIPU Elections – this affects us all.

LIPU is required by its constitution to hold elections for its officers every four years. We are all full members of LIPU in Italy and if we joined before 7 February 2018 and are paid-up members then we are entitled to vote in the election of officers.

In the past, this mailing has caused some concern so, this year, after much discussion with our colleagues in Parma we have translated the papers into English

to make life a little easier. We understand that members in this country may not be familiar with the candidates, so there will be a short pen-picture of each candidate, and you are encouraged to cast your vote and return the form to Italy if you wish to exercise your right in this election.

For those who wish to cast their votes may I summarise a few points:

You may vote for up to 15 candidates for the Board of Directors and up to five candidates for each of the Ethics Committee and the Audit Committee. The voting papers must be postmarked in the UK by 17 May 2019.

Despite the complexity of this process, it is essential that all members have the chance to cast their vote and the election would not be valid in law if these forms were not posted to you. I have a copy of the Electoral Rules and will send a copy of the document if requested; it is also posted on our blog at www.lipu-uk.org. I hope this explanation is clear and thank you for your understanding.

My thanks go to my loyal production team who, for this edition, were: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Giusy Fazzina, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

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LIPU volunteers dismantle illegal nets set by poachers in Campania see p 26



**STOP THE MASSACRE
APPEAL 2019**

Please help us