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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

- Environmental Apocalypse
- Lesser Kestrel nesting boxes
- ChooNa – volunteers for nature
- The Great Extinction – insects

*Summer 2019*

The excellent photograph of a Barn Swallow on the cover captures all the appeal of the bird and is © Riccardo Trevisani.

The Kentish Plover (below) is being helped in Sardinia, thanks to LIPU-UK and is described in the piece about ChooNa in Sicily on page 25

## Editorial

*Fulvio Mamone Capria, LIPU*

# Thank you

Dearest Members,

As you know, this is my last editorial, after eight years as your president. And there is no better way of greeting you than in remembering the extraordinary AGM held in Milan in May. There were many of us there to discuss nature and celebrate our association: members, delegates, friends, authorities, technicians who delivered quality content. The many young volunteers from Life Choose Nature paid close attention when, Guiseppe Guzzetti, president of the Fondazione Cariplo (our partner in several projects), spurred them into going ahead with passion. Also encouraging were the words of the Minister of the Environment, Sergio Costa, supporting the Habitat and Birds directives and the young as a resource for the future. A special event then, that in Milan, which spoke of the future – ours and that of the planet.

Can we change things? Can we win against global warming and the biodiversity crisis? Luca Marcalli, a guest at the Meeting, said that action was needed immediately to stop the relentless aggression of civilized man towards the Earth. The director general, Danilo Selvaggi, spoke of the article immediately following, thus like Laura Silva and Federica Luoni putting the topic of the decline in insects at the centre of the debate.

We hope that the renewed European Parliament will turn towards environmental politics, agricultural, economic and cultural, emphasising sustainability

and technological innovation, reducing pollution, eliminating waste and rewarding virtue in agriculture by friends of biodiversity. The Europe that we want is that of courage, that which reduces noxious emissions into the atmosphere, safeguards Nature 2000, follows the LIFE projects agreed with LIPU and safeguards species and habitats at risk. We can do it, and so can LIPU, our extraordinary, dependable, association, that also, thanks to its wonderful members, always contributes to the cause of nature, and of which for eight years, I have had the honour of being president.

My deepest gratitude goes to all of you, faithful Members, for the continuity and the love with which you support us. A love that starts with the volunteers in every part of the country, as well as the more peripheral where it is difficult to defend nature, and to the staff who manage an enormous technical task. To the new management board and to the next president, my best wishes, in order that our association continues to grow and train citizens in the respect of beauty, birds and life. I will stay, as ever, close to LIPU and as a volunteer will do my best to save our winged friends. Together with you, in this amazing community that is called LIPU. Good Luck, Happy Summer and Long Live LIPU!

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## BEFORE THE APOCALYPSE

*Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General*

Studies tell us that the environmental crisis is approaching the point of no return. Habitat destruction, extinctions, global warming and the excessive consumption of resources lead to the thought that the future is without hope. Is it still possible to do something? The answer is yes, as long as we set in motion a global transformation in our ways of living, producing and thinking, for a new direction for the planet and human society.

"It is too late. There is no time left". The old fellow in a red cap looks at the children with the air of an old-time head of the house who does not want the truth to be revealed. In spite of his somewhat peremptory judgement he has a kindly bearing. Smiling, the children respond in kind. They do not agree but it does not matter. The streets of the centre of Rome are swamped by a sea of adolescents, with the spring sun shining down. Italy' first climate strike is a success. Flags, colour, chants and music. A party, but one that speaks of serious issues. Among the crowds can be seen a line of LIPU's young members, some wearing the red Hoopoe T-shirt, and some with the white shirt of Choose Nature, holding up a huge banner on which is a line by Gary Snyder, the Californian poet who dedicated his work to the defence of the Earth with the words: "Nature is not a place to visit. It is home"

Indeed, there is something of the Californian, of the power of the imagination in this great line of people that asks for the planet to be treated with respect. There is the same desire to change the world, the same youthful enthusiasm. There is also the result of decades of environmentalism and the attempt to convince governments, industry and the public of the destructiveness of the present model.

A young couple comes past, she fair and he dark-haired, holding hands. The girl carries a white placard with a drawing of a planet in flames, with

written on it in blue the words “You are turning Paradise into Hell” It seems almost to prove the old fellow in the red cap right. Is the hope in the streets of Rome only an illusion? Is it already too late?

## Two Wars

Humans have always had the capacity to see Hell on Earth and to tell tales of it. It has been done in part to exorcise it, as if by talking of the apocalypse it could be avoided. It is a sort of psychological sleight of hand, related to the so-called Fallacy of Optimism, that everything will work out of itself in the end, or of the Fallacy of Tradition, that what worked in the past will go on working in the future. The twentieth century brought a series of upheavals: the catastrophe of the two world wars, then the cold war that followed, with the risk of global destruction, and finally the advent of the ecological crisis, with a combination of critical features which have begun to change the narrative of the apocalypse, abstract and therefore harmless, into something more immediate and real.

In *Our Plundered Planet*, one of the first ever works of environmentalism, the American zoologist Fairfield Osborn tied the notion of war in the strict sense to that of the “war” over the environment: “The impulse to write this book came towards the end of the Second World War. It seemed to me in those days that humanity was engaged in two major conflicts. There was the war, the echoes of which were heard everywhere, and the other, silent war, un-noticed but all the more deadly for it, that of man against nature. The final outcome of this second war, if we do not put a remedy to our actions in place, will create sufferings for human beings of an extent and nature as yet unknown, such as to threaten the very existence of the human race”



It was 1950. Osborn received many accusations of scaremongering and lack of scientific rigour. “We are not in any danger” was the mantra of both scientists and politicians, according to which the progress of humankind, which would continue forever, and was also the best guarantee of being able to carry on as before, without the slightest fears.

## The road to apocalypse

The series of early environmental disasters, from the smog deaths in London in 1952, to those from mercury in Minamata in 1956, from the Torrey Canyon oil spill in 1967 to the Bhopal and Chernobyl catastrophes of 1984 and 1986, did not change attitudes, Even while our imagination was becoming saturated in uncertainty, that has found its way into stories, novels and cinematic works which have begun to tell of the destruction of the planet. Scenes of desertification, the disappearance of the natural world, of plants and trees gone to dust, the lack of animal life, and an oppressive sensation of the absence of a future, and the humans, where they have survived, ask: how did it come to this?

Emblematic, to give but one example, is the desolate novel, *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy, which tells of a planet in ruins and of the journey of a man and his son towards a future that waits to be created. Which is to say: the road we are on now is bringing us to ruin. We must look to find another. But all of this has not made us change course. We have continued along the same road.

Today the environmental crisis is a given. It is a crisis that is all-encompassing, interconnected and already well advanced, with at least three modalities: a crisis of consumption, (the using up of resources at a rate higher than the planet can provide) a crisis of nature, (the destruction of other forms of life), and a crisis of climate (the overheating of the Earth with all that it brings in its wake).

A three-headed monster, it is hard to stand up against, and even harder to overcome.

## Earth Overshoot Day

It arrived this year in mid-May, now seven months early. The overshoot day is the day on which we in theory come to the end of our annual allocation of the Earth's resources and go into "debt" eating into our reserves for the future. The first year in which it was calculated, in 1971, the average day of overshoot, that is to say, averaged out between the different countries of the world, was December 21st, a mere ten days of overshoot. Ten years later in 1981, it fell on the 12th of November, with the day of falling into the red coming 49 days early. In 1995 it was 87 days, coming in October 5th, and on September 23rd 2000 it had reached 99. Only last year. 2018, it came on August 1st, but by this year as we have noted above, it had leapt to May 15th. What does this mean? It means that by the middle of last month our allowance of natural resources for the year had already been spent. It means that as a result of our excessive consumption of water, trees and other resources, we are from that day on going into ecological debt, which will have to be paid for, and which some are already paying. It means that we want to have an extra planet at our disposal where we only have the one,



and one which we are exhausting. It means that we are plundering the Earth, like a box of ever more fragile treasures that we call biodiversity.

## A million species

Published at the beginning of May, the 2019 Report of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), gave us an up-to-date account of the gravity of the situation for the world's biodiversity. From the 1500 pages and more of the report, contributed to by 132 countries, we find that a million species are at risk of extinction in the next few decades, among which are 10% of insects, 30% of marine mammals, 33% of reef corals, and 40% of vertebrates. Human activity has radically altered 75% of the land surface, and through it we have lost 20% of natural habitats, with many others soon also to be lost.

The Report on biodiversity of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation echoes that of IPBES, analysing the situation above all from the point of view of the services it provides to humankind: out of about four thousand wild species considered essential for the sustenance of a large part of the world's population, about a thousand are at risk. The situation is particularly serious when it comes to insect pollinators such as wild bees, bumble bees and butterflies (for which see the later article), on which three quarters of the fruits and grains used by humans depend.

## Revontulet

And then there is the climate emergency, perhaps the most far-reaching of all. It is an extremely complex phenomenon, yet it may easily be summed up: the enormous release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere caused by human activities (industry, transport, agricultural intensification, domestic consumption) is causing an un-natural rise in the temperature of the Earth. The forecasts, above all those of the IPCC, the international organisation that occupies itself with the theme tell us that without remedial action, by implementing the Paris Accords in full and containing the warming to no more than 1.5 degrees, the consequences for the planet will be devastating: the disintegration of glaciers, sea-level rise, coastal flooding, desertification, extreme weather, incalculable damage to human societies and to life on earth. Something very similar indeed to the apocalypses we have read about and seen in films and novels. The recent UN report on the climate emergency in the Arctic, Global linkages, has put it in no uncertain terms, with projections forecasting that not even the Paris Accord would be sufficient: winter temperatures in the Arctic could rise by three to five degrees by 2050, then by as much as eight by 2080, with all that entails for the region and the planet as a whole, so that the Arctic, a place of dreams and magic, could be transformed into a hell, a true hell of our own creation.

Legend tells that the Aurora Borealis, one of the most astonishing of all natural spectacles, that in Finnish is called Revontulet - glacier fire - is created by the tail of the Arctic Fox, which, brushing the glaciers of the High Arctic as it runs alongside them, makes them glow. The native peoples thought these fires were a sign of the eternal beauty of the world. With the glaciers falling apart already and the fox losing its habitat even as we speak, the display of the Revontulet has taken on another meaning. More than an aurora, it is the fire at the end of all things.

## Denying the existence of a problem, and standing in the way of a solution

For a long time, warnings about the environment were simply ignored. More than that, contradicted, through a form of scientific denial intended – by means of specious arguments – to show that this environmentalism amounted to a baseless prophesy of doom, and that hardly any of the fears being expressed were realistic. Time has shown the opposite to be true, shattering the credibility of the denial of the science but not the force of the opposition, and accordingly the denial has changed from a scientific to a cultural one. If we cannot deny the problem (yes, there is an environmental crisis), let us oppose the philosophy behind it. Why should people have to compromise their well-being? What would we gain? If we must pay the price of progress, well then, let's pay it! We can limit the damage through technology, without any change in behaviour. The solutions being put forward by the environmentalists are socially unsustainable and culturally unacceptable and have to be avoided.

Here then is the heart of the problem, a political one. Science has understood what is happening, but now it is up to the politicians, now it is up to the public. If the crisis comes out of the model of development, the model must needs be changed, and profoundly, as must the culture that supports it. There is no room for doubt: a revolution is needed.

## Economy versus nature

Of what would this revolution consist? A global change in our ways of living and consumption, beginning out of the need to stay within what Johan Rockström of the Stockholm Resilience Centre has defined as the planetary boundaries. In Big World, Small Planet, Rockström seeks not only to demonstrate the limits, which include, among others, biodiversity, land use, water consumption and the excess of nitrogen and phosphorus in fresh water, but has made it clear that by it is still possible by staying within the limits to have a happy and prosperous way of life, and that to change it does not mean a change for the worse.

The central plank of the necessary change is the overcoming of the enduring opposition of nature and the economy. "Today – writes Rockström – we live in a way in which nature stands on one side and society on the other. Environment against development, with no contact between the two. Well that era is over. There has to be a new paradigm. The only thing holding us back in the end is the obsolete and remarkably stubborn belief that what worked for us yesterday will work well tomorrow".

## The Great Balancing of the Books

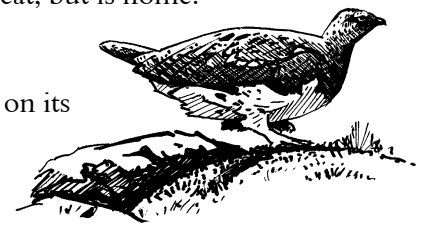
The enormous difficulty of the transformative work to which humanity is called by the environmental crisis must not be underestimated. It means changing the systems of production and culture, and even the very mentality that have been with us for decades, even for centuries. Today, however, we have available the knowledge, the knowhow and the advanced technologies delivering ever less of a shock to the system, to make the change easier to assimilate. We must have definitive plans drawn up and even put into statute such as the 17 objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals contained in the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, of the UN, that has put the things that must be done into the ring. We must have at our disposal the competences and the programmes for the conservation of nature and the better management of resources. We must have the funds for investment, for if only 5% of the more than 100 thousand billion dollars that governments will spend in the next few years was dedicated to nature and to beneficial technologies, we could change the world in no time. More than that, we must make use of another key instrument: the realisation that even from a socio-political perspective, the current model is unsustainable: it produces social inequality, it leads to wars over resources, it is the cause of human migration, it produces never-ending tensions. Maybe yesterday this was acceptable, but not any more. Today it is the road to apocalypse. It will serve no-one. Instead of conflict there must be cooperation.

The Great Balancing of the Books between economy and environment also corresponds to a rethinking of how to relate to others and to nature. We must be attentive as to the rightness of our daily actions, to what we do even in the little things at home, but more generally to align our lives with that of others, our happiness with that of others. Seen from a moral perspective we must rise above the level of egotism and insular communities to that of altruism and a planetary outlook. We have to reconcile what is useful with what is right. There is no other course than to take this moral leap.

## Home

The year 2020 will be for the planet, a year of crucial due dates and new departures: the Global Biodiversity Strategy, a multitude of objectives for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Accords on climate change, the new agricultural policy for the EU. We will know what the true intentions of governments are, how much courage and intelligence they will have. But it is also up to us to press them, to make them understand that we are setting more store by this than by anything else. LIPU will do this, in every action, in every way we can. It is a decisive moment in history and we must not fail.

Meanwhile, our young continue to file past in the sun. Singing, kissing each other, glowing with innocence and commitment to the task. Their parents follow some distance back, proud but with a slightly penitent air. Where were we before yesterday? What did we do before yesterday? It is late, but there is still time. Time for nature, that is not a place to visit but our home. Time for the planet, that is not a place to ill treat, but is home.
The home of all.



The Ptarmigan puts on its best clothes for the winter. The Skylark sings in the clear air of summer morning. The wind whispers in the luxuriance of the rain forest. The tail of the Arctic Fox brushes the glacier and colours the sky, in a new dawning of the world. The depths of the ocean are free at last from being poisoned by plastic. Welcoming cities, and landscapes full of beauty. People meeting, talking, helping, loving. The home of all.

It is late but not too late. There is still time.

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## THE GREAT EXTINCTION

*Laura Silva and Federica Luoni, LIPU Nature Conservation Dept*

It has been talked of for many years, and is now a confirmed scientific fact. At a world level, 40 percent of wild-bee and butterfly species face extinction. Much of the blame lies with intensive agriculture and the use of agrochemicals. LIPU has published a new report, and is urgently appealing for sustainable agriculture.

Let's close our eyes and imagine a typical summers day. Sunshine, a brightly-coloured landscape, singing

birds, flowers spreading perfume, and insects that visit them, busily. In our collective imagination summer is the season of abundance: the time for gathering the fruit of our labours in the fields, with wildlife at its peak. But if we re-open our eyes, we find ourselves in a different world altogether: before our eyes a static and monochrome expanse, the acrid smell of fertilisers and chemical treatments. A landscape from which the beauty has vanished and wildlife is marginalised.

## Continued decline of bees and insects

Our impressions are confirmed by scientific research. An article recently published in Biological Conservation, analysing all available studies of arthropods such as insects and spiders, reveals that at a global level 40 percent of species are in decline, and in some cases have become extinct. It is even more shocking to learn that 2.5 percent of total insect mass is lost each year. Since insects outweigh humans by a factor of 17, it is as if nearly half of our species disappeared each year.

The most noticeable decline affects pollinators such as wild bees, bumble bees, butterflies and moths, which are not only key to the reproduction of wild plants, but also play a crucial role in agriculture. A recent study carried out in Great Britain by the Wallingford Centre for Ecology and Hydrology shows that a third of these species are in decline. On the international scale, the 2016 report of IPBES (a panel of scientists from 124 countries who study the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services), revealed that 16 percent of wild pollinators are at serious risk of extinction, rising to 40 percent for species of wild bees and butterflies. Not even the domestic honey bee is safe from this decline. The case of so-called colony collapse disorder is widely reported, and in 2016 caused the loss of 30 to 40 percent of bee colonies in the United States. In Europe too the loss of bee colonies in recent winters has been 20 percent on average, with peaks of 53 percent in some countries according to COLOSS, an NGO dedicated to the study and prevention of losses in bee colonies.

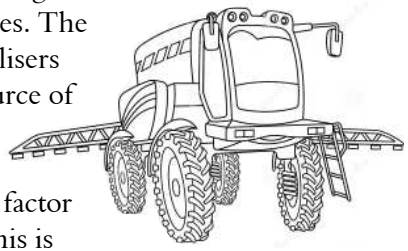
## The causes

When studying complex natural phenomena we usually find multiple causes, some of which are known, some unknown, some acting individually, some acting in combination. Destruction and alterationof habitats is undeniably one of the main causes, even though some scholars stress that this is not the main factor. The biggest single cause is in fact intensive agriculture, and particularly the use of chemicals which affect species both directly and indirectly. Consider that the European farming industry purchases some 374 thousand tons of pesticides every year (Eurostat data) and that around 500 active substances are sold throughout Europe.

Many of these substances are systemic insecticides, which act not only on the target species seen as harmful to agriculture, but on potentially useful species as well. The commonest active components belong to the so-called neonicotinoids, neuro-active insecticides which have a harmful effect on bees, even in small doses. This has been documented by many scientific studies, including the 2017 survey commissioned by Greenpeace from the University of Sussex. These results confirmed the EFSA 2013

conclusions, and have led to a European Union ban on the use of three neonicotinoid insecticides, starting from this year.

It is not only insecticides which cause the loss of pollinators and other invertebrates, but also fungicides and herbicides which pollute water, soil, and vegetation. Soil monitoring studies in Europe show that more than 20 percent of soil is contaminated by glyphosate, one of very many herbicides on the market. The most recent analysis of Italian water by ISPRA reveals that more than 60 percent of Italian rivers and groundwater are polluted with pesticides. The use of pesticides and fertilisers in agriculture is also a source of greenhouse emissions, responsible for climate change, and a second key factor in the death of insects. This is giving many insect populations a hard time, particularly as temporal shifts between the periods of flowering and insect reproduction make it harder for both species to survive; the same as we see in many species of birds.



## Why we must protect pollinators

It is easy to imagine how a drastic reduction in the number of insects, which form the base of the food chain, can affect the whole ecosystem. The Farmland Bird Index is an indicator adopted at a European level for estimating the health of bird species that live in agricultural areas, and indirectly the general state of the habitats in which they live. The Italian survey, conducted by LIPU for the Ministry of Agriculture found that the farmland bird populations have decreased on average by 40% during the last 20 years, reaching as much as 60 percent for species such as Stonechat and Skylark.

Given the services that pollinators provide to ecosystems, such as helping food production, it is easy to see how their disappearance would cause considerable economic damage to the global economy. A whole chapter of the Natural Capital report on Italy is devoted to analysing these services and provides estimates of their monetary value. In 2012 the total value of Italian agricultural production of apples, pears, and peaches was 473.48 million euros, and the pollination valuation for this same sector was 56.96 million euros, 12 percent of the total. In some regions of Europe, North America, and East Asia, the value of pollination can reach 1,200 euros per hectare, corresponding to a global figure of 200 to 600 billions a year. This is a fact, and not just theory. Due to the scarcity of wild pollinators, American farmers have become heavily dependent on paid “itinerant”pollination to obtain a crop. In the almond season when the trees start to bloom, beekeepers from all over the country transport their 1.5 million hives to California. Average charges are 140 euros per hive. On the other side of the earth, in the Chinese province of Sichuan, workers are paid to pollinate fruit trees manually.

To this total we must add several hundreds of million euros a year for medical treatment of human diseases, whether in acute or chronic form, caused by exposure to agrochemicals. This is clearly shown in the 2018 report Change the Earth, published by a coalition led by Federbio of which LIPU is a member.

Last but not least, even the latest report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation emphasises that without protection for biodiversity, food for human beings cannot be guaranteed in future, anywhere in the world.

### What can we do?

Halting this catastrophe involves a radical change in the way farming is managed, a move from an agro-industrial system towards an agro-ecological system, of which organic agriculture is among the most advanced examples. Organic agricultural practices include the drastic reduction, and often the complete elimination, of chemicals; the presence of wildlife areas within the agro-ecosystems; the sustainable use of water and soil resources, and the use of alternative techniques to protect and improve soil quality and health. And for those of us who are not farmers? All of us, as consumers, can deeply influence agricultural practices. By choosing seasonal, organic, and preferably local food, we can help the process of change. As citizens, we can urge our representatives to support this transition through agricultural policy at a European, national and local level. If we all contribute, the world could regain its colour. A place for listening to the song of birds, a place to intoxicate ourselves with the smell of flowers, a place to enjoy the flight of bees and insects, the legitimate inhabitants of this much-abused planet.

In 2009 the EU adopted the 2009/128/EC directive for regulating the use of agrochemicals, and achieving the sustainable use of pesticides. Italy's first National Action Plan for the sustainable use of agrochemicals was adopted in 2014 and expired on 12 February this year. This plan had serious shortcomings. The new plan is going to public consultation for review, and LIPU will make three recommendations for improvement: greater protection for Natura 2000 areas, with legal controls forcing the reduction and even the ban of pesticides; the creation of pesticide-free areas in public urban spaces, and of pesticide-free buffers near organic fields; and finally a strong commitment to organic farming

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| 40% | of species of bee and butterfly are at risk |
| 2.5% | fewer insects every year |
| 25% | mortality for bees in Europe |
| 10% | fewer farmland birds in Italy |
| 200-600 bn | Euro value from pollination each year |

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### THANKS, GLORIA

*Marco Dinetti, LIPU department of Urban Ecology*

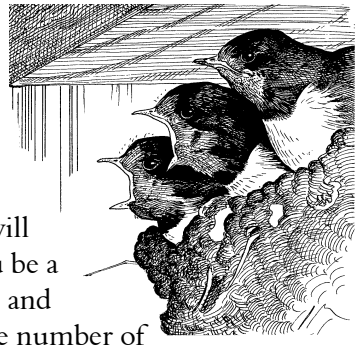
The importance of helping Swallows, Swifts and House Martins to nest.

As we all know, birds nest mostly in the months of April, May and June. In this respect, ornithologists speak of the "nesting calendars" although some species begin to build nests as early as March while others prolong nesting into July and August. Outside this period, nesting attempts are an occasional event or concern particular species.

Francesca Manzia, in charge of the LIPU Wildlife Rescue Centre in Rome, told me the story of the Swallows which thanked Gloria. Gloria lives in

Rome and last year she witnessed the destruction of all the swallows' nests in the garage by very insensitive neighbours. At the sight of such destruction, Gloria and her husband went to the police to report the event because knocking down nests is a criminal offence. They then went to LIPU's rescue centre in Rome to buy an artificial nest and last spring they had a wonderful surprise: a pair of swallows had brought up their own family in that man-made nest.

To help nesting Swallows, Swifts and House Martins, which are in decline in Italy and in the rest of Europe (see "Spec" and the Red List), the appropriate artificial nest can be installed in attics, garages and porches. A ledge under the nest avoids the small inconvenience due to the fall of droppings. Doing this the swallows will "repay" you by letting you be a spectator of their comings and goings and catching a large number of mosquitoes and flies.



A practice to be spread widely. And one to be supported, as has done Paola Ascani, an activist of LIPU's Livorno section, who has promoted a campaign to "reward" people who look after swallows nest in their houses with a special certificate and a sticker.

## PROJECTS

*Chiara Spallino and Ilaria Moschini, Life Choona Comunication Group*

### Society and the Lesser Kestrel

The Communication Group of the Life Choose Nature (ChooNa) project is committed to telling in words and pictures how 312 young volunteers are working to protect species at risk.

Spring is migration time. Not only for birds which in the last few weeks have crossed seas and straits to land safe and sound on the Italian peninsula. It's also the time for 115 young volunteers to arrive at Milan Central Station and at airports in Lombardy from the whole of Italy to participate in Birds 2019. They are some of the 312 volunteers participating in LIPU's Life ChooNa project, which is financed by European Union Life and sponsored by the Cariplo Foundation.

We want to tell you of a special event which involved volunteers working their term of service with the European Solidarity Corps throughout the whole of Italy. In the spring of this year many ChooNa groups undertook to prepare for the moment when their target species arrived to nest. Hundreds of young people concentrated on catching sight of the first signs of the return of a protected bird, from the spectacle of a harrier over the Strait to the flight of pairs of Kentish Plovers across the dunes. This important project involved not only the volunteers working in the field but also those volunteers from the Comunication Group of Cesano Maderno who use a computer or a smartphone to spread the news

about what others are doing to protect everyone's heritage. This team forms the launch pad for the stories of colleagues' experiences, which appear on web and newspaper pages telling of a constant fight for a better future. Instead of putting nests into attics or cleaning beaches, the writers spent the spring months organising the events of Birds 2019, the LIPU gathering for this year and making Milan as welcoming as possible for those who assembled there.

The evidence collected by the young people came from all over the peninsula. In Puglia, anyone who is involved in the protection of Lesser Kestrels speaks fervently about those days: "First of all our ChooNa volunteers protected the Lesser Kestrel by monitoring, protecting nests, restoring and installing artificial nests," says volunteer Grazia Margherita. "We put the nesting platforms on the rooftops of our city, adapting them to the spaces on the buildings, according to the advice of our coordinators. At last the first Lesser Kestrels arrived and some pairs chose our nests. And we even rescued and helped some wounded ones." Then she adds: "At the beginning of March we were eagerly looking forward to the arrival of our little migratory falcon. The Murgia and Matera regions of Puglia host the most important populations in Italy, because the Lesser Kestrel has often chosen to come in to the urban areas and nest on our buildings. Now our challenge is to raise awareness in our local community by means of excursions and school lessons, about how best to co-exist with raptors. Whenever we walk round we always check whether

there are new nesting sites or roosts, and make sure that these sites are not compromised. "

The same watchful attitude was alive in Sicily, as Davide Pepi can testify: "During the 2019 breeding season the Fratino Sicilia group started their own work in March, organising three ecological days in order to provide a clean and healthy beach for the birds when they arrived. We also started creating the first area for nesting pairs in Licata, being careful not to disturb the birds, and installed information panels. It's a great achievement for ChooNa, because it's the first time something like this has been done." The work focused on creating an equilibrium which however fragile and temporary would allow nature to restore little by little its own beautiful domain: "We are satisfied and happy to continue monitoring the Kentish Plover in the Bay of Gela. Think how much joy there was when we found a pair incubating eggs on a beach where we had observed none the previous year, and we are hoping to find even more this year than last."

Meanwhile, further north, the Communication Group was sending emails and tweets, choosing photos and stories, organising the details of the AGM in Milan, deciding on systems and strategies to send the evidence of ChooNa as far as possible. Just like the impatient wait for the bird migrations, the means of encouraging volunteers are care, attention, surprise, respect and team spirit. An inspiration expressed perfectly by the co-ordinator Tiziano Milazzo: " Fieldwork is very important, but it is just

as important to know how to recognise and celebrate that effort: the purpose of the Communication Group is to show other people that young, committed people, who love nature, really exist, and that they are recognised and thanked. It is essential to enable volunteers to meet together, especially considering their direct impact on the safeguarding of fauna and the welcoming of migratory birds. This is why the Communication Group is so important: it provides opportunities for explaining to ordinary citizens the value of these people who are working with ChooNa."

Good communications therefore enable volunteers to share experiences and emotions, and strengthen bonds between them. This was confirmed by the participants in Birds 2019. And at the end everyone left for railway stations and airports, with an upward glance to find their bird friends and the intention to search for them again as soon as possible on beaches, in fields and near houses, looking forward to a future fruitful summer season caring for nature.

ChooNa Figures:

| | |
|---|---|
| 312 | active volunteers |
| 36,491 | hours of voluntary work |
| 19 | volunteer groups |
| 2 | years of projects |
| 42 | days work per volunteer |

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## A SEA OF PLASTIC

In thirty five years the oceans could contain more plastic bottles than fish. An alarm bell has sounded rung by researchers and scientists, according to which 32% of plastic objects at a global level escape collection systems and end up abandoned in nature. Scientists calculate that in the seas by 2050 there will be dumped every minute a quantity of plastic equal to that transported by four lorries full of rubbish. The result of this will be an compromised ecosystem, which will strike at fish and birds without sparing, naturally, man himself. Different studies confirm what is playing out in our seas. Turtles, whales, seals, birds and fish are ending up trapped, suffocated or poisoned while many of them die of hunger despite having stomachs full – of plastic. Research from Imperial College London has revealed that 99% of marine birds, in a not-too-distant future (the prediction is 2050) will have in their bodies plastic objects which will bring about their deaths.

To face up to the really serious problem of refuse in the sea, in April the Council of Ministers approved the Save the Sea bill. This measure represents an important step forward but it is certainly not decisive. Acting in advance, the European Union has approved a directive which provides for the banning of many single use plastics in 2021; Italy, from the 1st of January last has forbidden the production and the sale of plastic-based cotton buds, which represent, because of their incorrect disposal, 9% of refuse on our beaches. Reducing plastic waste, starting with bottled water, is the greatest help that we can give to our seas.

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## THE IMPOSSIBLE INTERVIEW

*by Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer*

*Name:* Hoopoe

*Scientific name:* Upupa epops

*What does it mean?*

The name is onomatopoeic, suggesting the territorial song of Up-Up-Up.

*What relationship do you have with other species in Italy?*

None. I am the only representative of my family. I have eight "cousins" that are found scattered in Africa and Asia. Our cousin called "African" has been considered a separate species for some years.

*Do you come and visit us every spring?*

Some of us have the habit of wintering in your southern regions, but most come from mid-March to mid-April to build nests, often in cavities or nest boxes.

*Is it a long journey?*

Yes, this is because many of us spend the winter in South Africa or in Asia

*What do you feed on?*

Large insects, locusts in the desert areas and in the oases where we rest during the journey, frogs, geckos, lizards, and many insects.



*And today, how are you doing?*

Not badly, but you still know very little about us and our state of conservation is still unknown.

*What can human beings, and in particular us at LIPU, do to help you?*

Considering that we are your symbol, you should try to understand why our friends who live in the Alps are worse off than those who live in the Mediterranean or continental areas.

*What advantages can you offer us in return?*

A graceful and flickering flight, a subdued and repeated song, an aid in controlling the many insects that so annoy you in the summer.

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## LIPU IN ACTION

### The Peregrine Falcon Dome

Four chicks have hatched from the new peregrine falcon's nest on the bell-tower of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in the historic centre of Parma. Great delight for the Parma LIPU volunteers, led by the delegate Michele Mendi, who had followed the nesting. Also involved were the Carabinieri – State Forestry Corps group of Parma, co-ordinated by Commander Pier Luigi Fedele, the Head of Species for LIPU, Marco Gustin and the long-serving LIPU volunteer, Mario Pedrelli.

## Sardinia, Volunteers remove 1200 traps

Volunteers have scoured the woods of the Cagliari region of Sardinia to find and remove traps and take down nets. It has been a very busy time for the 15 LIPU volunteers from this new anti-hunting camp established in collaboration with the Carabinieri. They have removed 1119 traps, the majority designed to catch birds for the illegal restaurant and meat trade. As well as preventing this trade LIPU is working to educate and raise awareness with our project *Against Bird Crime*. We have held classes at 8 schools around Cagliari on migration and the threats birds face on their journey. Among the volunteers participating in the camp were young people from the Chose Nature project.

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## TAIL FEATHERS

I am grateful to the RSPB for the use of line drawings and to the photographers whose copyright is acknowledged.

This issue of Ali was produced with the help of my translation team and my thanks go to: Barbara Avery, Joanna Bazen, Gill Hood, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty, Lesley Tompkins and John Walder.

Finally, at the end of another business year I am happy to be able to you tell that it has been the most successful yet – more news in the next edition of Ali.

★★★

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Matera in Puglia (above) is a breeding stronghold of the Lesser Kestrel and, thanks to LIPU, nest boxes are offered to residents free of charge, see page 23.

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© Michele Mendi

ChooNa – Choose Nature
A LIPU volunteer fencing part of a Sicilian beach to protect nesting Kentish Plovers

© Davide Pepi