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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli
Conservation News from Italy



- Poetry and Birds
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Autumn 2019



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Out of danger – the Pochard is off the hunting list (see p 20) but the Purple Swamp Hen was threatened by a wildfire at the Priolo reserve (see p 24). The cover photo is of a Reed Wabler at the same reserve.

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A Change of President, not LIPU

From the new President of LIPU

Aldo Verner

Dear Members,

This is my first editorial as president of LIPU and I am feeling emotional. I would never have thought, in 1982, the year when I became a member of our LIPU, that I would come to represent it as President. An honour and a responsibility, for such a difficult and prestigious role. We have eight exciting years behind us, thanks to president Fulvio Mamone Capria, general manager Danilo Selvaggi, outgoing councillors, staff members, delegates and volunteers from each delegation, our guards. If LIPU has achieved certain goals, if it has become a point of reference in Italian environmentalism, it is thanks to the work of everyone. A job that must continue and for which my commitment will be intense, being aware of the support and affection of all.

What are the challenges we face? The association has reached a remarkable organisational level, with many important internal reforms and the new Statute that ensures that LIPU conforms to the Third Sector Code. Above all, there is our mission, and there are environmental emergencies and volatile political scenarios. We have the advantage of noticing in the field, through the study of birds, how quickly man is changing the world. Common birds that have become rare, snow-covered environments now without snow, habitats that are lost, extreme climatic events. This is also why our work must rise further. Acting on ecological habitats and networks, protecting the most vulnerable hunted species, continuing work for nature-friendly agriculture, protecting urban greenery and working on the

climate-biodiversity relationship. We are enforcing the Action Plan against poaching and obtaining the increase in sanctions, spreading ecological culture, stopping anti-environmental policies such as certain proposals for regional autonomy (making it possible to kill wolves and bears). So much to do, but not too much, if we do it together, with the competence and passion of LIPU.

In the next issue I will tell you something more about myself, but for now I tell you: the President changes, LIPU does not change. LIPU remains the same. A great association that loves nature.



MAY MY HEART ALWAYS

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

Ever since ancient times poetry has spoken of nature in sympathetic terms, removed from those of consumerism and overstimulation. Now, from out of the great environmental crisis, poets and artists are assuming an even more crucial role: that of contributing directly to the salvation of the planet. With a different way of looking at the sky, where birds are flying and singing.

‘Poets have sung of nature since time immemorial, with wistfulness and fear, but above all with hope’.

In 1938, on the eve of one of the most shattering episodes in the history of the world, the American poet e.e.cummings (as he styled himself), wrote his declaration of love to the birds.

‘May my heart always be open to little
birds who are the secrets of living
whatever they sing is better than to know
and if men should not hear them men are old’.

A short time later, the skies of continents would be darkened, with bombs raining down death, the blood of soldiers would daub the fields, and cities become slaughterhouses. An inferno. Yet Cummings, who knew intuitively what was about to happen, was not disconcerted, and did not lose heart, and continued to sing of little birds, which he did in a way that was lyrical and hopeful, as if, in the shape of warblers, wagtails, tits and Long-tailed Tits, a tomorrow would come that brought only good news. Who listens to birds singing will not grow old.

The Joyous Resistance

The woods of Horace, the apple of Sappho, the Skylark and the Nightingale of Shakespeare, the Robin of Emily Dickinson and the cuttlefish bones of Montale – all speak of it, amid a host of others. Poets have sung of nature since time immemorial. Some have done it with wistfulness of heart, recalling things we have lost but that will never return: of youthfulness and nature we are gone from; the countryside civilisation has taken away. Others have done so almost fearfully, faced with a nature that seems distant, that like Leopardi’s moon neither listens to nor answers us, aloof from our affairs. But it is above all the hopeful spirit of Cummings and his

little birds that is woven through and illuminates the history of the relationship between nature and poetry. Why? What is it that binds poetry and nature together most profoundly, to create a powerful combination that is a force in itself, a driving force for the joyous resistance to the powers ranged against it, no matter how implacable?

The Lover of Nature (and Democracy)

In terms of the poetry–nature–hope nexus, Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* is an excellent example. Best known for his poem on the death of Abraham Lincoln (*O Captain! My Captain!*), *Leaves of Grass* is a sort of world book, which the American poet began to conceive in his youth and that for forty years he wrote, ordered, integrated and enriched continually, making of it a unified whole with a life of its own (‘who touches this book touches a man’).

Eight editions, from the first in 1855 up to the last one, from his deathbed in 1892. In the tens and then hundreds of poems in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman sang of democracy, friendship and the prospect of a world (America, but in reality the planet as a whole) in which humanity would finally live in peace, ‘hand in hand’. A future ‘glad and sublime’ in which ‘the States they melt, they depart, charging the water and the land with names’, and in which, in short, nature becomes a true home, the place in which humanity realises itself. A nature not detached from us but different only in its shapes and colours. A nature that is loved and spared from harm.

*‘Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with*

blue!

Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!

Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!

Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!

Smile, for your lover comes'.

Liberated from the Ego

Among the many themes that are the foundations of Whitman's great philosophical poem, there is one of great importance to this essay. We might refer to it as 'liberation from the ego'. To live as part of Nature, so that, just as happens in true solidarity and friendship, it helps us to escape the prison of our individualism, and thereby that of egotism, narcissism, and from insatiable and often unhealthy appetites that drag us down and end by making us hypocritical, neurotic and aggressive. The message of Whitman is that the experience of nature (and of poetry, which is an essential guide to it) frees us from those physical and mental chains, and like the little birds of Cummings, makes us genuinely open to the world. An aesthetic pleasure not mixed with greed for possession. The desire to feel, to be part of, but not for ownership. True freedom.

*'...now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
And again as I walk'd the beach...
My ties and ballasts leave me...
I am afoot with my vision'.*

Wolves, eagles, quails, buzzards, bears, sea daffodils, buckwheat, all the innumerable forms of life that populate the poetry of Whitman become our friends, welcome companions through life, and our stories

become richer, with more in common with those of others, whether humans, animals or plants. A thousand differences but a unique destiny.

Here then, says Whitman, is the gift that nature brings to us: an existence that is all-embracing, full of life, and healthy. One might add that this is a principle increasingly affirmed in medicine and contemporary psychology, which recommend both to children and to adults (as for example by Britain's National Health Service) the taking of a dose of Nature and immersion in woodland as prevention and as a cure for a whole suite of pathologies: from obesity to cardiac problems, from attention deficit to various types of unhappiness and stress.

To sum up, the poetry of Whitman is not only an artistic manifesto. It is a social programme.

Our Bodies are Made of Star Stuff

'Whenever possible I go out to be with nature. I go with my children to the parks of Rome, to look for creatures of the understory with Anna, the youngest, or we may go out on trips from morning to evening. By doing this we have found that Lazio is a place of unimaginable beauty. One place stands for all: the Nature Reserve of the springs of the Aniene in the Simbruini mountains. There are places where one's perception of time changes completely, that is so fragmented in the cities. And in those places of course you have to be uncontactable, abandoned to nature. Mobile phones there are forbidden.'

Writer, radio presenter for RAI and above all one of the most interesting contemporary poets in Italy, Maria Grazia Calandrone is convinced of it: that the

relationship between nature and poetry is 'total'. 'Poets, just like other human beings, are animals and the appeal to our animal nature is the collective root to the rest of existence. We are nature, first and foremost. Our bodies are made up of the same substance as the stars, and not of pixels and televisual images. Poetry records nature and helps us to regain it. He who forgets this fundamental datum, that the essential being of our bodies is the same as that of a tree or a meadow, is destined to live under a burden.'

Calandrone terms a burden what Cummings calls old age, but the sense is the same: poetry and nature are forms of lightness (the body at one with the stars); they are a conquering youthfulness, running ahead of us at the beginning of a path through the woods, not a weight on our shoulders. We can say along with Pablo Picasso: it takes a very long time to become young.

One Poet Above All

In answer to the question as to who above all is the poet of nature, Maria Grazia Calandrone has no doubts: Pier Paolo Pasolini. 'Pasolini has the gift of transforming every object in nature into poetry, including his own body. His relationship with nature is that of a nostalgia for a primal, elemental world, probably infantile and therefore cruelly innocent. A world the poet sought all his life, throwing himself into Africa and India, when the iron of consumerism had begun to enter into the Italian soul. Dismayed at the conformity, feeling angry at the betrayal of his own obsessive view of the world, Pasolini chose to fight. And as we know, he fell. And with him also fell for too many years the figure of the poet of society, active in the world. The point made here by Maria

Grazia Calandrone is precious, because the main battleground for poetry and society fought on by Pasolini was to be precisely that where we find the normalisation of consumerism. The fifties, sixties and seventies in Italy would be years of change, which in many respects were brutal. Against the great and positive work on improving the literacy of millions would be set a traumatic impact on the fabric of the country: in a few decades rural communities were destroyed, men and women were wrenched from the earth and transported to factories, and the countryside was maimed, urbanised, and homogenised by intensive agriculture, so that natural habitats began to suffer greatly. The language of civilisation was framed in technical terms and it was as if nature and poetry (the poetry of commitment, of engagement with the world) were being hurled into defeat together. These were the years of the economic boom and the boom of the bomb. These were the years when the environmental movement began its long and difficult struggle.

'Who follows the tracks of birdsong will sooner or later arrive at their self. At the least known being of all.' (Maria Grazia Calandrone)

The International for Nature

And today? What in truth can poetry do today? All the great poetical works of the centuries have not sufficed to halt the plundering of the earth. What concrete action can poets, writers, musicians, architects, photographers or video artists take in the face of the many-faceted and fearful environmental crisis that surrounds us? 'What can words sow' – asks the French poet Jenine Salisse – 'for the gardens of the world to become fertile again?'

'The world around us', adds Maria Grazia Calandrone, 'presses on us ever more; the demography of the planet is churning; the economic and ecological demands are becoming ever more urgent. In this phase of planetary restructuring I believe it is essential for Western poets to turn themselves to the service of people and nature, as they have never forgotten to do in countries outside Europe.' That is to say that across the world there is an outpouring of works and catching of conscience on the part of an ever-growing artistic community, a sort of artistic International for Nature: the poetry marathon in New York's Greenwich Village against the destruction of the forests; the artist Bernie Krause, who recorded five thousand hours of poems about animals and gathered them together in a work for the Triennale of Milan; the Italian Davide Monacchi, who did likewise with the sounds of natural habitats 'before it is too late'; the musicians from across the world who work together in the project Musicians for Climate Action and have started to transmit concerts and events on the internet; the Roosegarde Studio's work *Waterlicht*, which simulates a flood to bring home to the viewer the disintegration of the glaciers; Iceland's Bjork, who with the album *Biophilia* asks humanity to transform itself into nature, to understand better both the mysteries of the cosmos and day-to-day suffering; Duccio Demetrio, who has founded a school of econarration at Anghiari; the many novels centred on the environmental crisis and what we should do to address it, and so on up to the Japanese artists who ask children to go to the trees to apologise to them for the harm inflicted on them by adults and to promise a new alliance.

It is something that brings me in mind of the Letter to the Trees written in 1994 by Florentine poet Mariella Bettarini. An intimate portrait of life from one who sees in the trees close relatives standing alongside us. 'Beloved trees, I am almost one of you, though I have not your limbs and branches... among humans I am a tree, among trees I am all too human, but I will stand up with you nonetheless, who are and who will be my rootstock, my posterity and family, all in all.' A community regained. An ancient empathy regained. A new alliance.

The Only Way to Salvation

A new alliance is exactly what is needed in the twenty-first century. To end the division between human and non-human communities and definitively to construct one that is planetary. An undertaking that must come immediately, for the urgency of the environmental crisis is beyond measure. A task that poetry, art and culture must bring their help to. An undertaking that must be promoted by the gurus of the media and the influencers of the web, with their hundreds of millions of followers for whom only a few words from their idols would be sufficient for them to change their way of life and actively to enter into the new International for Nature.

But before this collective enterprise, there is a need for Cummings's call to be absorbed by each one of us: may our hearts remain always open. Open to the little birds and to nature, to society, and to others than ourselves. Always. The more the world shuts down, the more our hearts must open. The more the quest seems impossible, the more our hearts must open.

We must move away from despair and disenchantment, defeating all notions of defeat, to cast away coldness and cynicism (which can often afflict scientists and environmentalists both). We must do the science, change politics and the economy, direct technology to be to the benefit of all, but above all keep open our hearts. It is the precondition. It is the secret to living that the poets have passed to us, but the Nightingales have taught. Only this way can we be saved.



POACHING

Giovanni Albarella, Institutional Relations

Poaching – the End of the Road?

New tools in support of a national plan approved two years ago have been put in place. Associations, law enforcement agencies and institutions are coming together to defeat the odious illegal hunting that has done so much damage to our biodiversity.

Sulcis in Sardinia; the Strait of Messina; the valleys of Brescia; the marshes of Puglia. These areas witness some of the worst scenes of the illegal slaughter of wild birds. Poaching is a phenomenon that, though its effects have been reduced compared with times past, still accounts for many victims: Robins, thrushes, and Goldfinches, as well as storks and Honey Buzzards. LIPU, together with

other associations and law enforcement forces, has been fighting for many years to contain this phenomenon; but for some time now the need for a more structured intervention has been evident – one that should actively involve all the institutions. The opportunity arose with a national–regional conference that, two years ago, approved a ‘Plan for National Action’ against poaching, recognised finally by the institutions as a problem of the utmost importance with regard to the safeguarding of biodiversity in Italy. And one that, at the same time, is a question of respect for the law and for civil society.

The European Commission Pilot

Various factors have contributed to the creation of a climate favourable to the adoption of this important measure. Firstly, the European Commission, which in 2013 opened – in conjunction with Italy – a ‘Procedure Pilot’, with the aim of discovering what the country had done thus far to combat poaching and what plans it had to change course and respect, in full, the Birds Directive. Then, the Conventions of Bern and Bonn, which came into force in a coordinated manner with the adoption, also in 2013, of an international Action Plan (named the Tunisi Plan after the city in which it was approved) – a plan that, among other things, invites the co-signatories (including Italy) to prepare national plans to combat poaching. And amidst these developments came the publication of *The Killing*, Birdlife International’s report on illegal hunting in the Mediterranean, which estimates that, each year, 25 million birds are killed illegally, including more than five million in Italy alone: numbers that make one shudder, even in a country – such as ours – well-used to news about

the poaching of birds. The news was reported widely in print and online, raising a considerable outcry.

The Turning Point

But let us return to the anti-poaching plan approved two years ago. The Ministry of the Environment, together with the Joint Research Centre at the ISPRA, ran a consultation process in 2016 involving the forces of law and order, a number of institutions – including various other Ministries and the regions – scientific institutes, and hunting and environmental associations, including LIPU. The important moment of change came in March 2017: the ‘state–regional’ conference approved the National Action Plan to combat crimes against wild birds. But what is that plan exactly? Of the thirty-two actions which the plan spells out, one stands out as being of great importance: that which allows the sanctions imposed in response to illegal acts committed against wildlife to be set to be commensurate with either the gains secured by perpetrating these acts or with the damage inflicted on biodiversity. And there is also the possibility of elevating to the level of indictable offences certain graver cases that, today, on the basis of Law 157 of 1992, are considered mere minor contraventions and often converted to fines, meaning that they are simply resolved by a cash payment. This itself would be a much more effective deterrent than any applied in the current regime.

LIPU in the Vanguard

To ensure that the anti-poaching plan is implemented successfully, a board of control has been created composed of two working groups, one political and institutional and the other technical and operational.

LIPU has an important role in the latter in that it represents, through its own spokesperson [the author] all the environmental associations involved. The Plan also offers important ways of coordinating the different branches of the police (in particular the State Forestry Corps) and NGOs, which apply both to national operational coordination of the organs of security but also to local cooperation in the seven black spots – that is to say, in the seven zones at the greatest risk with regard to poaching. Here also LIPU represents the associations, with Gigliola Magliocco (for southern Sardinia) and Enzo Cripezzi (coastal and wetland Puglia).

To sum up, the anti-poaching plan constitutes an absolutely fundamental moment of hope of a more effective way of fighting this serious environmental and social phenomenon. Nature deserves it, and the whole country will benefit from it.

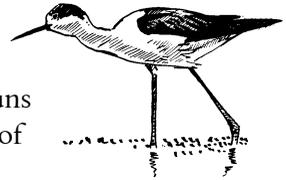
THE REDEMPTION OF THE MIGRATORY POPULATION

Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

This year sees the launch of a project that intends to hand back to the community a vast wetland in Caserta province, to the north of Naples, which until a few years ago was in the hands of poachers and organised criminals. The culmination of a battle that LIPU has pursued since back in 2001.

Another dirty, abandoned drum of paint hidden in the grass. For hours the volunteers have scoured the small rubbish dumps that beleaguer the heart of the

Soglietelle. We are in the village of Villa Literno, in Caserta province. In the approaches to the wetland are abandoned rolls of bituminous membrane, tiles, cement, plastic and mattresses. A few hundred metres away waves break on the beach of Coppola Pinetamare village while Spoonbills, Avocets and Black-winged Stilts fly over the wetland in search of food and somewhere to nest. The Domitian coast is a land of strong contrasts: besides important and rare species of wild birds there are illegal rubbish tips and social decay. Until a few years ago this was the undisputed realm of the hardened poacher: from bunkers built at the edges of the artificial ponds they shot at Garganey, Tufted Duck, Pintail, herons, hawks and stilts, which ended up as stuffed specimens in collectors' lounges. Today, instead, thanks to a long battle that LIPU has conducted since 2001, the face of this land is changing. In place of the guns there are binoculars; in place of gunshots, birdsong.



Project Free Flight

In 2006 the Soglietelle became part of the Foce Volturmo-Costa di Licola nature reserve; but only in 2019 did it enter a new and decisive phase of revival and development, thanks to the project Free Flight, financed by the 'With the South' Foundation and its 'Environment Call'. Launched last spring the project is creating permanent protection from the environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity brought about principally by the dumping of rubbish and by poaching. It intends to give the area back to the community, opening the way for guided

visits, making available bird hides, and offering birdwatching lessons and workshops.

The ‘Last’ Will Be the First: The History of Free Flight

This story starts in 1997 when Sergio Costa, Forestry Officer and current Minister of the Environment, together with a handful of men searched around the ponds, confiscating guns and cartridges and reporting dozens of poachers. A few years later, on 23 January 2005, the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Santa Maria Capua Vetere commissioned the Carabinieri Unit for the Protection of the Environment to take charge of the ponds. The raid, conducted with the volunteer nature protection force of LIPU, led to dozens being charged with environmental damage, occupation of State property, poaching, theft, and diversion of public water supplies. It should have been a routine operation. Instead it became a huge legal campaign, borne out of the meeting between Colonel Sergio De Caprio, the legendary “Last Captain” and LIPU volunteers, Rino Esposito and Giovanni Albarella. At that point the ponds were assigned to the judicial care of the Environment Ministry. LIPU for its part gathered 7,000 signatures and put forward a proposal to create a protected area accessible to visitors, with guided itineraries and illustrated panels. The petition was picked up by Campania Regional Council, which established the nature reserve with resolution 2033 of 13 December 2006. The following year the Environment Ministry, legal guardian of the protected areas, initiated a joint action with the Campania region, signing – on 6 December – a specific agreement that determined, among other things, the necessary financial resources for the upgrading and utilisation of the areas prior

to their expropriation in favour of the small town of Villa Literno. With Environment Ministry funds, the heart of the area was fenced, and in it a visitor centre with hides and information panels was built. It was the first decisive step towards safe and proper enjoyment of the area, and from that moment on the Environment Ministry, Campania region, the reserve authority and Villa Literno worked together towards the full protection and enhancement of the area.

The Soglietelle today



From the start of the project financed by the 'With the South' Foundation and also in part by the authorities of the Foce Volturno – Costa di Licola, 133 species have been recorded by the Fauna Variconi and Soglietelle monitoring station of the Institute of Wildlife Management. These include Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Spoonbill, Booted Eagle, Bee-eater, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting. The monitoring station has carried out an extensive ringing programme co-ordinated by the ornithologists Alessio Usai and Gabriele de Filippo. Meanwhile guided walks are taking place among the ponds without disturbing the birds during the sensitive periods of breeding and migration; the volunteers look for rubbish and the Carabinieri patrol the area. In short, the first positive effects of a project that will last for three years are emerging. It is life that is being reborn, finally – after so much degradation, violence and abuse.

Free Flight Partners

The lead partner is the Institute of Wildlife Management, and the partners are LIPU, the Foce

Volturno, Costa di Licola and Lake Falciano authority, Villa Literno , the “Agrorinasce” consortium and the Forestry Corps of the Carabinieri.

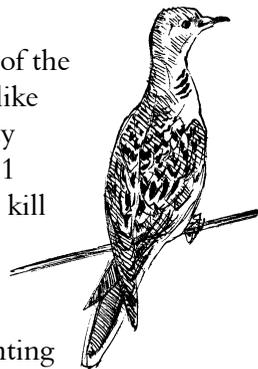
<http://www.asoim.org/index.php/visita-alloasi-delle-soglitelle/>

LESS HUNTING, MORE PROTECTION

Danilo Selvaggi, Director General

The hunting season is about to begin, bringing with it all its problems but also some excellent news: the hunting ban on the Common Pochard and the Lapwing, two of our ‘7 species to protect’. LIPU’s action continues in order to secure further successes and put additional, necessary limits on double-barrelled shotguns.

On 15 September, the third Sunday of the month, the hunt will begin. In fact, like every year, many regions have already brought forward the starting date to 1 September, thus allowing hunters to kill Quails, Turtle Doves and Wood Pigeons. So what’s new for the 2019/20 season? What is the current status of huntable species and of hunting in Italy?



Ban on the Pochard and the Lapwing

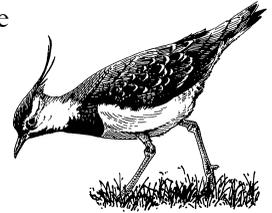
Firstly, some great news. The European Commission has sent a letter to all member states asking for an immediate hunting ban on Pochards and Lapwings

due to the bad conservation status of these two species, which are now part of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) protection list. A request that was promptly welcomed by the Italian Ministry of the Environment, which in turn notified all the regions and ordered them to quickly amend their hunting calendars. As emerged in 2017 from the third volume of Birds in Europe, Pochards and Lapwings are classified as Spec 1, that is – endangered species at a global level. It is no coincidence that these two species (together with Redwings, Turtle Doves, Rock Partridges, Skylarks and Ptarmigans – Spec 3) are part of the ‘7 species to protect’ campaign, which was launched by LIPU last year, and are therefore among those to remove from still ‘very rich’ hunting calendars. In this regard, it is worth noting that the number of huntable species in Italy is still very high (48, of which 36 are birds) as is the number of huntable bird species (16 excluding the Pochard and the Lapwing) that, like the Pochard and the Lapwing, have a bad conservation status. This is an issue that LIPU has raised once again, with a detailed scientific document presented to the Italian regions.

21 Suffering Species

The document, entitled *L'avifauna cacciabile in cattivo stato di conservazione* (Huntable bird species with bad conservation status), highlights the bad conservation status of various huntable species, in light of the most recent scientific information available (starting from Birds in Europe 3) and the necessity for a precautional hunting break for some species or a complete exclusion for the species that are suffering the most.

The twenty-one files included in the document, which focus on as many bird species (among which the Skylark, the Rock Partridge, the Turtle Dove, the Ptarmigan, the Woodcock and obviously the Pochard and the Lapwing), offer an analysis of the current situation – a critical one upon which LIPU has been insisting for quite some time through political pressure, technical documents, appeals to regional administrative courts and reports filed at the European level.



Italian Resistance

But how does Italy respond to these requests from Europe? If, on the one hand, there are very encouraging signs from the Ministry of the Environment, on the other, the regional administrations are the competent bodies when it comes to drawing up the hunting calendars, and it is ultimately up to them to concretely protect the species at risk. The negative regional attitude is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of this issue. Indeed, although the hunters' resistance to any more requests for bird protection is expected, what is inappropriate is the behaviour of many regional administrations, which continue to do their job only partially, paying full attention to hunting needs but very little to protection needs. This is a serious problem, caused mainly by the regional responsibilities on hunting, which are assigned to the various Departments of Agriculture – usually very close to the hunting world (hunters, hunting associations, game meat producers) – and not to the Departments of the Environment. A problem that needs to be fixed by launching a general action that establishes environmental responsibility on this matter, as dictated by the Constitution.

More Protection

Despite all this, over the past few years there have been quite a few improvements made in the political and legal realms: the exclusion of some species from hunting calendars, the reduction of game bags, hunting bans in some areas, maintenance of the long-standing ban on live decoys, the end of hunting waivers for small birds (although Lombardy keeps trying) and the anticipated closure of the season for some species of high hunting interest, such as the Redwing and the Woodcock. The last of these has caused much disappointment among hunters but was pushed through by scientific evidence, biological needs, and a fundamental principle affirmed by the Directive: a total ban on hunting during the pre-nesting migration period, in which many species start their journey as early as January to return to northern European countries where they will be nesting in Spring. This is a very important and delicate biological phase, for which the Birds Directive requires maximum protection. All the attempts made by hunting associations and (unfortunately) regions to ignore this ban have failed so far, even though more and more regional hunting calendars will have to take it into account by bringing forward the closure of the hunting season for some bird species – particularly thrushes and Woodcocks – by 10 or 20 days.

Legal and Illegal

The fight to reduce the damage caused by legal hunting must be added to the one against real poaching and the various, widespread, big and small illegalities that often go hand in hand with hunting and that determine what we define as the ‘grey area’

of Italian hunting. Supported by 30,000 signatures, the bill drafted by LIPU proposing a temporary hunting ban in areas affected by poaching will soon be sent to MPs so that they can endorse it and turn it into law. This initiative was further supported by a petition linked to the 'Life Abc' project in which LIPU demands, among other points, increased hunting surveillance and stricter sanctions, starting with the recognition of animal theft during hunting as a crime, as established by the National Action Plan against Bird Poaching.

Stop

'Let's stop for a year. Let's not go hunting. Then they will beg us to go hunting again'. This is the view of a hunter and was shared in one of the many hunting blogs, but there is also a widespread belief in the hunting world that double-barrelled shotguns are indispensable to the natural balance; that the well-being of wildlife and particularly of migratory birds depends on the use of bullets and shotguns. Such views have been disproven by history, more so today than ever before, when climatic and environmental disruptions as well as the destruction of natural habitats require a whole different level of responsibility towards nature. So, as the 2019/2020 hunting season is about to start, LIPU agrees: stop. Find something else to do. And not just for a year.



THE REBIRTH OF PRIOLO

'The fire reached the reserve at 1 pm, when the thermometer was showing 42 degrees and pulled a

strong “Libeccio” wind.’ Thus begins the story of Fabio Cilea, Director of the Saline di Priolo Nature Reserve, as he remembers that on 10 July 2019 his reserve was destroyed by fire. ‘The reed was the first to catch fire. For a moment it seemed that the wind had calmed down. But the truce didn’t last long.’ The intervention of the Forestry Corps, the Civil Protection (fire brigade) , and two Canadair water bombers was useless in the face of the violent flames. In a few hours, the reserve was destroyed. ‘The next day an apocalyptic scene unfolded before us, but the young flamingos, and the other animals of the wetland, were all in their places, safe and sound. A symbol of hope for the recovery of the Priolo salt pans.’

From that moment there was intense solidarity for the Sicilian reserve. Institutions and companies in Syracuse rallied support, organised clearance and safety work and held a successful fundraiser. And then there was the commitment of many volunteers and local production companies. ‘We will do everything to bring back the Saline Riserva di Priolo bigger, more beautiful, and more welcoming than it was before.’ Wild animals deserve it. People deserve it.

★ ★ ★

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

The news item above is particularly poignant for the author as we have visited it twice during visits to Sicily – a beautiful island and about as far away from the Godfather and Montalbano as one can get. A coastal wetland, it is important for breeding colonies of Little Tern and, on the scrubland shown on the inside back cover, Stone Curlew. Visitors

bring income and they usually want to see the Flamingos but the reserve has much more to offer.

Welcome

A warm welcome to all our new supporters and members who have joined us following the publicity campaign we recently launched in Birdwatch magazine. The campaign has been far and away the most successful we have ever carried out, and – as I write – we have 56 new friends to help us in our work; we are grateful for your support and hope you will continue to help us for a long time to come.

LIPU-UK will not pester you for donations each month, as some charities do. We have only two fund-raising events each year: in the autumn we offer draw tickets, which I hope you will buy (see below for more information), and in the spring will run our annual appeal to raise funds for LIPU, enabling it to pursue the projects we have agreed to support in the coming year.

Legacies

We have always felt that it is distasteful to solicit legacies actively, but we are nevertheless truly grateful to those who remember LIPU in their wills. In the last year LIPU-UK has received bequests from:

Kathleen Bagen
David Worrall
Muriel Lewis and
Ailsa Chamberlain

We are extremely grateful to each.

LIPU-UK as a charity in the future

I write this at the end of our financial year, full details of which will appear in our Annual Report in due course, and I can confirm that we have had another very successful year thanks to the support of all our friends and members.

However, a question mark hangs over the continuity of this success as we still have no definite way forward when I can no longer carry out the role of delegate for the British section. We have, in the past, appealed for anyone with an interest in taking over the role to come forward and discover what is involved, but – so far – have had no response.

The last twenty years have been enjoyable as well as challenging and, above all, satisfying. But at some point the time must come to hand over the reins to another and that point must surely be in sight.

LIPU-UK has been registered as a charity since 2001 and has always been run on a voluntary basis and there seems to be no need to change this.

The charity is in good health and although recruitment is always a challenge I am ready to hand over the reins to someone with a little more energy and, probably, lots of fresh ideas on how to take LIPU-UK forward.

I am therefore asking any person who thinks they might have the time to take on this satisfying job/hobby/pastime (delete as applicable) to get in touch and I will be happy to provide a more detailed description of what is involved. There is no immediate rush, and I would expect to ease the new

delegate into the routine gradually, so please don't worry about being thrown in at the deep end.

LIPU-UK Trustees

As a registered charity LIPU-UK is governed by a board of trustees who oversee policy and the day-to-day running of the charity by the Secretary/Treasurer.

Pat Dugard has served as a trustee for six years and we are grateful for the experience and skills she brought to the board. However, she now lives “north of the border” and would now like to stand down – we invite anyone who would like to take her place to get in touch.

The duties are not onerous. We meet three times a year but two of those are made easier, and greener, by video conferencing, with the third meeting – in June – being held at a nature reserve in the Midlands. The trustees keep in touch with events by email and telephone, so although we don't wish to exclude anyone the use of a computer or smartphone is essential.

Please contact me if you would like to help steer LIPU-UK in its work for birds.

A note to the above

The preceding announcements may sound like we are on the edge of extinction but nothing could be further from the truth. I am happy, and still able, to

serve as the British delegate, Secretary/Treasurer and coffee maker but none of us is getting younger and it is sensible to have a plan for the future.

Elections to the various posts in LIPU

All eligible members of LIPU received a voting pack earlier this year and I realise that this caused some concern and we understand that concern. However, the constitution of LIPU requires that every eligible member has the opportunity to vote and if that opportunity is denied then the validity of the whole election would be lost. The results of that election are published on the LIPU web site but are summarised below:

Aldo Verner	President
Stefano Allavena	VP, Council & Board Member
Alessandro Polinori	VP, Council & Board Member
Paolo Lo Deserto	Council & Board Member
Michele Mendi	Council & Board Member
Riccardo Ferrari	Council & Board Member
Paola Ascani	Council Member
Lucia Bassani	Council Member
Cecilia Giorgetti	Council Member
Elia Mele	Council Member
Gabriella Meo	Council Member
Lorenzo Nottari	Council Member
Pierfrancesco Pandolfi	Council Member
Stefano Picchi	Council Member
Andrea Somma	Council Member

Annual Draw

I mentioned earlier our Annual Draw, which offers the chance to win three simple cash prizes for tickets offered at an affordable price. In the past the draw has boosted our fund raising by about £2,000 each year and if more people took part it would, of course, allow us to raise even more. With fewer than 300 participants last year the chances of success are pretty good, as last year's winners would, I'm sure, say. They were:

First prize, £500	Nigel Bowie
Second prize, £200	Daphne Palmer
Third Prize, £100	Ms S Sutton

We realise that not everyone wishes to receive draw tickets and they are not sent to those who have opted out – please let me know if you receive tickets that are not required.

Tail feathers

I hope you will agree that this edition of the Ali has slightly more good than bad news and offers confidence for further improvement. We can be proud of our friends in LIPU and their efforts are certainly bringing results which could only be dreamed of a few decades ago.

I am grateful to my production team who were: Dave Brooks, Giusy Fazzina, Peter Rafferty, Lesley Tompkins and John Walder. Line drawings are by the grace of the RSPB and the copyright of the photographers is gratefully acknowledged.





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The LIPU Nature Reserve of Saline di Priolo on the east coast of Sicily has been devastated by a fire (see p 24 and the inside cover) but these pictures from a recent visit will show the habitat as it was. Stone Curlew breed in the scrub area above, and the lower picture shows a typical path between the lagoons as our small group is being led by the Catania delegates Giuseppe and Loredana.



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Spectacled Warbler, a bird commonly seen in Sicily and given a home on the LIPU reserve of Saline di Priolo

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