

ali

Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli
Conservation News from Italy



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Winter 2019



Above: Members of LIPU take part in a march, in Rome, to protest against the burning of forests. Below is a view of the peaceful wetland of the LIPU Oasis of Crava Morozzo in the north of Italy, see page 13.



**From the
President of
LIPU**

Aldo Verner

Dear Members,

I had the pleasure of being at Crava Morozzo – the first oasis in LIPU’s story – upon the celebration of its fortieth birthday, just as I attended the twentieth birthday celebrations at Santa Luce and Castel di Guido. Every member should experience at least one of these events, to appreciate the beauty of these areas restored to nature but also to see, with their own eyes, what the work of volunteers can do – the fruit of dedication, effort, skill and imagination. The same imagination, then, that Franco Bergese, Ada Gazzola and Tomaso Giraudo had when they ‘saw’, at the end of the 1970s, that those cultivated fields and two small hydroelectric plants near the Pesio cascade could become a splendid oasis, the first in what is now a long series. LIPU’s oases are precious places of great natural value, but are also of real importance for people, who thanks to them rediscover a lost link with nature.

Nature: a magical word that we in LIPU have in our hearts. In the pages of this fine winter issue of *Ali* you can read of some of the things that LIPU has done in 2019 to defend nature. Science, projects, environmental education, the protection of game species, the fight against poaching – so many successes are due to the professionalism and enthusiasm that we put into all our initiatives, from north to south, into our voluntary schemes, and into the work of our staff, work that every year makes us proud and worthy of the trust that you, dear members, regularly place in us.

On the subject of poaching, while our young people are involved in Sardinia in the removal of traps aimed at small migrant species, there follow – one

after another – confiscations, and reports from LIPU’s wardens against ‘absent-minded’ hunters and poachers who shoot at cars, use forbidden tape lures, or keep birds caught in illegal nets. Our wardens are volunteers who, together with the forces of law and order, dedicate their free time to opposing these destructive practices. It would be lovely to live in a world that had no need of oases and hunting wardens, where the laws were always respected. At the moment, though, this is not the case. And so it is necessary to increase the number of wardens, have them in all regions, and extend their activities. With this in mind, I am asking our members to think carefully about the possibility of becoming a LIPU warden, working directly for the protection of nature. We want to increase the size of the team, to reinforce it, and to proceed in such a way that the land is safeguarded as far as possible and that the law is respected.

THE JUST

by Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

They work in silence, often secretly, contributing to the betterment of society and in defence of the common good. They are essential for the defence of nature because they help the cause and through their positivity inspire others to follow. LIPU is blessed with many of them (members, donors, volunteers), and can achieve its goals – thanks to them above all.

Olga Owens Huckins lived in a little natural oasis at Duxbury, Massachusetts, a sanctuary for wild birds

cared for with passion on a daily basis: the feeders topped up, water in the bird baths, careful management of the plants; constant attention repaid by the arrival each spring of the little songbirds, and the galaxy of songs, flight, and joy they bring with them. Then, one day, there was silence. The birds had disappeared and did not return.



So in January 1958 Mrs Huckins wrote to the biologist Rachel Carson, already known in the United States for her books on the sea, and more generally for her love of nature. ‘birds are no longer singing, and spring is silent now, what can we do?’

The Whole World in My Garden

Mrs Huckins could never have imagined the explosive effects of this letter. Once she had received it, Rachel Carson began to work on the case, and discovered many similar ones across the United States, leading to her revealing the role that DDT – sprayed indiscriminately across both farm fields and green urban spaces, and contaminating the insects it was intended to kill – had in the poisoning of the songbirds that depended on those insects for food. A lethal industry, denounced by her in her legendary book *Silent Spring*, which in 1962 broke with the force of a tidal wave on the agricultural industry in particular and on global culture in general, in some respects transforming it. The story of modern environmentalism starts here, with the scientific knowledge and courage of Rachel Carson. But before even that – and this is the interesting point – was a simple letter, handwritten by an unknown woman

called Olga, from an out-of-the-way garden in New England. A garden cared for by her as if it held the whole world within.

Almost in Secret

In the world there are leaders, celebrities, influencers, and then there are those such as Olga Huckins. People who work silently and alone, even secretly, for the good of all. A not unheroic work, because in many cases heroes do indeed labour alone, at times with the mark of the tragic on them, because the mission of the hero (even if also in this particular respect, of the anti-hero, or indeed of anyone) leads to living self-sufficiently, through the strength of one's own body and spirit, however dramatic the difficulty of the quest. But above all, to labour with belief, decisiveness, with the persistence of water dripping onto rock, and the serenity of one who knows what it is to be on the side of right and to do what is right. The great Argentinian writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges, in a poem of true universality, described such people as being truly 'the just' Let us look at the poem, as it is worth reading in full and will help with the development of our theme.

The man who cultivates his garden, as Voltaire would wish.

Whoever is happy that there is music on earth.

Whoever takes pleasure in discovering an etymology.

Two workers in a cafe in the South, silently playing chess.

The maker of ceramics with a vision of shape and colour.

The typographer setting this page well, even if not to his taste.

A woman and a man reading together the final verses of a poem.

One who strokes a sleeping animal.

One who justifies, or seeks to, a wrong he had had done to him.

Who is happy that Stevenson was on this earth.

Whoever would rather that others were right.

These people who, unknowingly, are saving the world.

Who Are 'Just'

Who, according to Borges, are the just? What was he telling us with this inspiring picture? At least three things:

- 1) The just are with those who do what they must do, who cultivate virtue with conviction and without hesitation;
- 2) The just are among those who do some things and not others – to stroke a sleeping animal is not the same as ill-treating an animal. And so to work in the garden, to live for literature, to encourage tolerance, to be mindful of others, to love nature. That is to say, not all ethics are equal; not everything we do or could do is just;
- 3) The just are exactly those; anyone. Not tabloid heroes, not the great and the good, but ordinary men and women who, whether knowing it or not, dedicate their very life to the making good of things.

Paraphrasing, (or turning on its head) a historic definition by Hannah Arendt, they are the simplicity of the good. The microphysics of goodness.

Theory of the Flowering Balcony

Alberto is an architect in his middle years. He works into the late evening daily, save for an hour in the afternoon, when, rolling up his sleeves, he takes up a big aluminium watering can and goes out to water the flower beds of the area, which he has planted himself. Little by little, herbage and colour bring life to the bare smog-grey roots of the trees. One after the other, the flower beds come into bloom, forming

*... I do it because
I want everyone
to live in a more
beautiful place.*

between them a virtual network, a genial symphony of urban nature. The whole aspect of the district has become kinder. 'I do it' says Alberto, 'because this is the place where I live, these are the streets I walk, as do my children. I do it because I want everyone to live in a more beautiful place.'

Alberto's actions have become contagious. Alberto was followed by Paola, then Teresa, then a whole family from the third floor, then a group calling itself 'the Sunday morning team' and then still more besides. And so it is too in other districts, other towns, each with its Alberto, its Teresa, its Olga Huckins. Urban gardens have taken the place of urban decay, trees smothered behind sheet metal have begun to breathe again, nest boxes and feeders have peeped out from the branches. The balconies are in bloom.

Here then are the balconies, the windows, the interface between people and wider society. All bare. All will remain bare. But if one flowers, others will begin to (it is not important for it to happen immediately). The barrenness will progressively come into flower. Greyness will give way to colour. Faded passions will be rekindled. And in a society filled with rancour, which dominates our social existence, a crack will finally open.

Prescriptions Against Rancour.

In an illuminating essay only recently published, entitled *The Twilight of an Era*, the director general of Censis, Massimiliano Valerii, sought to give an answer to a problem that has occupied the Centre for Social Studies for some years: the social fragmentation of our world. The chilling of social relations and the process of retreating into the self

give rise to a system precisely of resentment. The fundamental thesis of Censis, in complete agreement with all this, is that the economic crisis that has for some time gripped Italy, among other nations, is not the only cause, and perhaps not even the true cause, of the country's disquiet. It is above all a moral malaise. It is the loss of sensibility, of rationality, of values, of higher ideals and goals. It is also the loss of relationships, replaced by an atomistic society in which people become shut off, forgetting how to believe in something better, forgetting how to act. 'Christmas causes an explosion of grief, isolation and disenchantment within me. I no longer believe in society,' wrote one individual in a letter to a weekly magazine. The solution to this great and deep-rooted problem, says Valerii, comes from putting ourselves back into play, from the quality of the example we can give. It comes out of hope, not from mere velleities but through practice, like exercise. It comes out of altruism and generosity.

In this respect, the annual analyses on the subject of philanthropy and donations carried out for the Italian Institute for Donations show that the function of donations is not only that, important though it may be, of solving immediate issues (environmental, social and so on), but also that, equally relevant, of reinforcing a sense of solidarity, the ties between people, generosity as a way of designing a new blueprint of the sentiments. A remedy both for specific problems and against coldness, isolation and disillusion. A true prescription for curing rancour.

The Heart of LIPU

LIPU is blessed with many of these stories, that is, stories of 'The Just'. It has been so since 1965, with

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the boundless generosity of its founder, Giorgio Punzo, who gave all he owned for the good of nature, and here we are today, with 33,000 members and donors, who represent the heart of the association, never failing to help, even in the most difficult of times.

Gabriella, who acquired for LIPU a pond for migrating birds; Elda and Luciano, who have continually improved it; Adriana, whose major donation made possible the construction of a LIPU HQ and continued support for oases and centres; Daniela, who left as a legacy a wonderful estate in the centre of Italy; and then Domenico, Claretta, Anna, Mario, Clemente, Carmela, the members of LIPU-UK, and so many others, impossible to mention as they deserve. Great and small acts, great and small gifts, one great collective effort, always.

Then there are the thousand and more volunteers who give to the association over 200 thousand hours of their labours every year, in the recovery centres, in the oases, in the local groups and on the streets, in the fight against poachers and wildlife crime, in changing the culture, and contributing individually and collectively to the pursuit of the mission, never tiring or fearing themselves to be 'too small to make a difference'

The Microphysics of Nature

Can, then, the work of one individual make a difference? With certainty, yes. All the more so, in that the work of that individual has a special value in this age, in view of the difficulties faced by governments and public administrators of whatever shade, in a situation of general and almost

complete ungovernability. There is no government or administration, today, in a position to make new, on its own, a region, a city, a state, without the support of the public reaching critical mass. It is a situation that certainly must not act as an alibi for the body politic, or allow it to avoid becoming better (on the contrary, it is urgent that this should happen), but instead represents a condition for change. Individual responsibility, the efforts of all, and reasoned spontaneity are the golden rules, strategically, for the society of the twenty-first century.

All this holds true all the more in environmental matters, if we consider the extent to which civic action reinforces the sense of the common good and how to the same extent the sense of a common good is essential for the protection of the environment. What is nature but the greatest common good in existence? The indispensable patrimony of all and of no one? If there is no sense of a common good, saving nature becomes impossible.

In short, there is another aspect to consider: confronted with the environmental destruction taking place, with the loss of natural habitats and sites, to accumulate a series of targeted actions on the ground, even if highly localised, can make a telling statement. Little areas of wetland – to give one example – managed by small groups of volunteers (and in some cases by one individual, as in the case of Olga Huckins) and scattered across the landscape can give staging posts to wild birds on migration and concrete help to biodiversity, help that can in many cases be vital.

The future of working for nature can also be this: not only the big protected areas, however indispensable,

but little oases, “ of biodiversity, sanctuaries for birds like that of Olga Huckins. A mosaic of natural goods. A microphysics of the conservation of nature.

Everyone

In a way it is like this: every garden contains the world. In every bird feeder are all the birds of the world. This is neither idealism nor pantheism. It is the vision of life as the web of life that makes the actions of all of us worthy and indispensable, even while we think it does not count.

‘The dream of every cell’ writes the geneticist Francois Jacob, ‘ to become two cells’ The same holds true for people: each one of us has the dream of breaking through the dark bars of solitude and powerlessness, to cast off the weight of rancour and resentment, to be together not apart.

Music, tolerance, thought, the game of chess, working ethically, helping those round us, study, nature, trees, the garden, watering the flowers, nest boxes, feeders, managing wetlands, birds. Everyone does what they can, however much or however little it might be, but they do it. What is beautiful, useful, right and proper, what is just; and if we do these things there will be no silent springs for us, no passions grown cold, no Christmases spent in solitude and disenchantment. If we do all this, we will already have succeeded.

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DESTINATION HEAVEN

by Luigi Bertero

Crava Morozzo is 40. It was the first LIPU reserve in Italy and, today, has been enlarged thanks to the addition of a new wetland area – to the delight of the waterbirds that stop here and those who, with passion, created it, as long ago as 1979.

Around 250 species of wild birds; a complex ecosystem with lakes, water meadows and streams; a miniature paradise for nesting birds and a stopping-off place for migratory waterbirds – this is Crava Morozzo, the first nature reserve in LIPU's history.

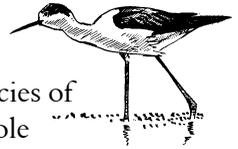
This magical place was born thanks to the dream of Ada Gazzola, Tomaso Giraudo and Franco Bergese, with whom – not without emotion, theirs and ours – on 12 October, we celebrated its fortieth birthday, thinking back to its glorious origins, but above all of the present and the future of the reserve.

The story of Crava Morozzo is long and varied; suffice to say that the reserve was established in 1979 thanks to the first collaboration between ENEL and LIPU and was subsequently transformed into a nature reserve. It was initially grouped together with

In all, proof that nature really is a system to which we – whether we like it or not – belong, and that we must looked after it with care.

the Alta Valle Tanaro regional park and then with the Alpi Marittime regional park. In the early nineties, with my wife, we were able to make available a new area, which was earmarked for waders and in which, with great joy, we soon saw Black-winged Stilts nesting. Recently, thanks to the generosity of Gabriella – who, in memory of her parents, has donated a second new area to LIPU – the reserve has been enlarged. This is important, as we have been able to create, by linking a pre-existing, deeper lake, to a site of shallow water, perfect for waterbirds that stop here to feed on migration, or to nest.

Today Crava Morozzo can count on a range of habitats and each is of considerable importance to nature. Other than the two ‘historic’, ‘re-naturalised’ lakes, there are two water meadows for waders, enclosed by hedges and wooded areas, creating a complex ecosystem in which around 250 species of bird (of the 333 recorded in the whole



province of Cuneo) have been identified – waterbirds and non-waterbirds alike. And there is also significantly important native wildlife – insects and crustaceans (of which the waders are fond) and amphibians and reptiles too. In all, proof that nature really is a system to which we – whether we like it or not – belong, and that we must look after it with care.

In sum, we can say this: the dream of Ada, Tomaso and Franco, the dream of Crava Morozzo, a miniature paradise for aquatic birds, has finally been realised.

THE GREAT FIRE

By Federica Luoni, Area Nature Conservation, LIPU

The summer of 2019 will be remembered for the devastating conflagrations that struck the forests of Siberia and of Amazonia, caused by the current changing climate but also by the unsustainable development of the timber industry and by the creation of areas for cereal production and for pasture.

An August to forget. The Amazonian forest has been burning for weeks, a disaster that seems unending in the face of general helplessness. In a single month, the deforestation of Brazilian Amazonia has increased by 300 per cent compared with August 2018, devouring 1,700 square kilometres of rainforest – an enormous area where indigenous populations and thousands of species of mammals, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians live. Once again, it is man who is responsible for this ‘natural’ disaster. And it is nature that has succumbed, despite general indignation from environmental associations, young people, and the ‘Fridays for the Future’ movement.

Once again, it is man who is responsible for this ‘natural’ disaster.

But let us leave the Amazon for a moment and take a leap back north through Siberia, Greenland, Canada and Alaska. Here, climatic changes have caused an increase in temperature and drought conditions that have made themselves felt with an unprecedented intensity. In these zones, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) measured, between 1981 and 2010, a median temperature 10 degrees above that which was previously typical. And the immense fires that have devastated another three million hectares of the Arctic have incinerated entire ecosystems, releasing into the atmosphere – according to WMO

estimates – 50 million tons of CO₂, equal to the emissions produced by the whole of Sweden for one year.

The Geography of the Threats

But what held our attention regarding the catastrophe taking place during the summer of 2019 was above all the fires in Amazonia, which have increased by 83 per cent in comparison to the same period last year. We can all still picture the tragic images of an Amazon ravaged by flames – fires that have caused the loss of a huge heritage in biodiversity and have placed indigenous communities in grave danger. Yet, in the last 18 years, at a global level, according to a study by NASA the number of fires seems to have gone down by 25 per cent. What, then, are the causes of the reversal of this trend that so characterised the summer of 2019? The answer depends on the geographic context: in the Arctic the fires can be attributed to changes in the climate, in tropical regions to the deliberate destruction of swathes of primary forest. This is leading to a continued reduction in the world's forested area, which, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report *The State of the World's Forests 2018*, declined from 31.6 per cent to 30.6 per cent in the period 1990–2016. This disaster has three principal causes: timber extraction, the cultivation of maize (corn) and soya, and climate change.

The most notable phenomenon is that of tree felling for timber. In tropical forests mostly expensive woods, such as teak, rosewood, ebony or mahogany, are targeted. In northern regions, on the other hand, the aim of felling is paper production, or – ever more frequently – the harvesting of biomass for energy

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production. But the ‘hunger for land’ to create space for the production of food is, today, the most pressing problem, and the real cause of the fires that afflicted Brazil throughout last summer. The global production of so-called alimentary commodities – that is to say, the crops that are the basis of global foods, such as soya, maize, wheat and rice – requires ever greater areas of land. This is due to population increases and to higher per capita consumption of, in particular, meat. Thus, in the forests of Borneo we are seeing the felling of thousands of hectares of primary forest to make way for plantations of oil palms; in Brazil, the same process makes way for soya plantations to feed cattle raised in Europe and China. And now, this year, the election of the new Brazilian president, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who supports the implantation of new centres of production in the forest. It seems that the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest in Brazil has increased since the beginning of 2019, date of the accession of Bolsonaro – according to the Brazilian Space Agency, considering data up until 13 October, an increase of 47 per cent compared with 2018.

The Importance of Changes in the Climate

Linked to these factors of ‘direct’ threat there is a third and more insidious factor that looms over the forests: the effects of climate change, which are simultaneously the causes and consequences of deforestation.

The increase in temperature and the change in the pattern of rainfall are in fact causing an increase in drought conditions in the Arctic forests increasing the risk of fires, which feed on themselves because of the great quantity of methane present in the soils,

rich in peat. This gas, which affects the climate even more than CO₂, derives from the decomposition of organic materials in which the soils of colder regions are extremely rich. In ‘normal’ conditions, the gas remains for the most part imprisoned in the frozen soil (the permafrost), but increases in temperature cause either ground thaws (thus freeing the methane) or an increase in the processes of decomposition, which liberates other substances. The fires, in addition, produce a dense particulate cloud that spreads across the frozen ground making it melt faster, and so on, increasing in an endless spiral.

A Matter of Balance

The preceding example shows us how the elements of an ecosystem are interconnected and based on a fragile equilibrium, and that a change in even one factor – such as an increase of a few degrees in the median summer temperature in Arctic regions – may cause an overall imbalance that can have serious consequences.

This is the same for the forests of the Amazon. Apart from supplying oxygen, they also influence the water cycle on a regional and global scale. In fact, the rainforest is – as demonstrated by studies at the Brazilian University of Sao Paolo – quite capable, thanks to a complex, recurrent system of currents and evaporation, of ‘recycling’ the water that it acquires through evaporation from the sea, self-generating half of the rainfall that supports the life of this ecosystem. But experts affirm that this equilibrium can collapse. The loss of one more fraction of forest could cause it to dry out, reducing precipitation even more and eventually transforming the habitat into something resembling a savannah.

Second, deforestation for the production of timber, or to create land for cultivation, largely occurs for the further enrichment of the European market ...

What's more, this change would release enormous quantities of greenhouse gas, which would accelerate the decline of the remaining parts of the forest.

Even if such extremes scenarios never become reality, the loss of just a small part of the ecosystem causes serious damage to its very rich biodiversity. Every section of rainforest possesses a high number of endemic species (that is, those that are only found in that area), and once that strip is burned or logged they are destined to disappear. Furthermore, changing the profile of the forest to make way for fields and plantations also alters the ecological value – making them inhospitable – of the strips that lie along the forest's edge, as evidenced by research on hummingbirds of the forests of Ecuador: species density reduces along with the fragmentation and alteration of the forest habitat.

The Role of Europe

These phenomena are operating far from us, which could lead one to suppose that the part played by Europe – and, therefore, by us – is limited and that Europe's political choices have little influence over what happens in another part of the world. But this is not so.

And this for two main reasons. First, the emissions of every individual state, one might say of every individual citizen, contribute to global climatic change. Second, deforestation for the production of timber, or to create land for cultivation, largely occurs for the further enrichment of the European market, which is seeking biomass to produce energy or fodder for intensive livestock rearing. The European Union and its member states must assume

their own responsibilities at a global level and set a good example, by adopting policies in support of the climate and the environment. Starting off with the reform of the CAP – which should in a real sense face up to the challenges of climate change – that should disincentivise intensive production in favour of support for low-impact, local production.

What will, at that point, be fundamental is the definition of the European Strategy for Biodiversity Post-2020. This is currently being developed and will not be able to ignore either the impact that European policies have on global biodiversity or the drive to achieve sustainable development objectives up to 2030.

The Threat is at the Gates

In Europe, the rates of growth of our woodland heritage are positive and the health index of woodland birds, the Woodland Bird Index, has gone down by only 5 per cent since 2000 (as compared with a decline of 55 per cent in agricultural areas according to the Farmland Bird Index). This could lead one to think that our forests are not a cause for concern. Unfortunately this is not so. Climate changes are, in fact, also threatening European forests, and in particular those of the Mediterranean, as evident from the latest report of the European Environmental Agency, which foresees a marked rise in the risk of fire in all the states of southern Europe, including Italy.



This appears to put at risk entire areas of Mediterranean and Apennine forest, increasing the risk to which – each summer – our woods are exposed and transforming whole landscapes into pre-desert areas in which drought could compromise entire agricultural industries.

Planning for the Future

Fortunately, however, all is not yet lost. Science tells us that even today we are still in time to put a brake on the more devastating effects of climate change. On the occasion of the New York summit of last September – the Climate Action Summit 2019 – countries, cities and industries came together to try to achieve zero net emissions by 2050.

Among the priority actions to be put into place in the near future is the ending of the destruction of primary forest – above all due to their role in maintaining the geo-chemical balance of the whole planet – and the designation of ‘integral’ areas on medium and large scales linked to a rational exploitation of productive forests.

It is necessary, furthermore, to aim for the restoration of areas degraded by overuse – so-called habitat restoration – whether at a local level or over vast territories in order to ensure the restoration of a solid network of ecosystems that guarantee ecological connectivity and the renewal of ecosystem services that natural areas provide for man.

This will come about only through careful planning and through the management of initiatives that meet the difficult challenge of protecting local biodiversity by maintaining a watch on the equilibrium of the

entire planet. Institutions, researchers, and citizens must therefore come together and each play their part, so that our most precious asset – that is to say, nature – does not go up in smoke.



2020: A SUPER YEAR FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

A series of international events will take place next year, making this a landmark moment for environmental protection. LIPU will be joining in too, with renewed energy and a new strategic plan.

There is no doubt that 2020 will be a year of extraordinary significance and, let's say it, of great hope for the environment. There will be at least three events of international importance taking place, so important that experts are calling this a 'Super Year' a super year for nature and the environment.

First of all, there will be a new global Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, building on the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biodiversity. This new plan, which is to be adopted at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP 15), in China, seeks to reverse trends in the global loss of biodiversity with a 10-year plan (2020 - 30). Of all the critical environmental problems we face, loss of biodiversity is the most serious, says Johan Rockström author of the concept of planetary boundaries. In fact, adds Rockström, current losses of genetic biodiversity have already crossed the boundary from the yellow zone of uncertainty (increasing risk) and entered into the

... current losses of genetic biodiversity have already crossed the boundary from the yellow zone of uncertainty (increasing risk) and entered into the red zone of high risk.

red zone of high risk. The latest report of IPBES, the United Nations Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, amply confirms this. To give just one example, an estimated one million animal and vegetable species are threatened with extinction, many within the next few decades.

The second event is the approaching deadline for certain of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. This bold, global project for a social–ecological transformation of our world is based on 17 objectives set by the UN, in areas ranging from action against climate change to protection of biodiversity, from sustainable towns to responsible consumption, to education for all, and more. To date, the SDGs form the most ambitious project devised by mankind for making the transition from an unsustainable era to an ecological one. An era where sustainability becomes achievable and in which human development is pursued in radical new ways. A kind of human development that is in harmony and not in conflict with nature. One that will put a halt to land consumption, that will not destroy biological diversity, that will not waste resources, that will not treat nature as a bottomless well, an infinite supply to be raided at our own will. In short: be kind to the planet; heal the planet.

Finally, the third event is the 'concrete' launch of the Paris Agreement on climate change. This marks a step change in the commitments taken on by signatory countries for containing the rise in average global temperature. There will be two key meetings in 2020: the Conference of the Parties, which will take place in Glasgow, and a Youth Conference that will take place in Italy.

'We are approaching this exceptional sequence of events with a level of hope we have never felt before' observes LIPU Director General, Danilo Selvaggi. 'The demonstrations in towns all over the world, the new youth movement of Fridays for Future, the involvement of public opinion, and the growing perception of a deepening crisis: together these are pushing governments to finally take the problem seriously. The first tentative signs are there, but these are not enough, and we should not be complacent.'

What should be done to capitalise on the current positive mood? And what will LIPU do? 'First of all, we will renew our strategic plan, which expires in 2020, with an updated programme that is designed for the times we live in. But primarily we will redouble our efforts to improve the quality of our actions, both in scientific and cultural terms. It is crucial that people support us. We must make it plain for everyone to see that an ecological society is a beautiful, fulfilling, enjoyable society. Following the tremendous work we have already done, we are now faced with another stretch of road, difficult yet exciting for us all.'

Let the Super Year for the environment begin!

WATER, A RESOURCE THAT SHOULD BE CHERISHED

by Laura Silva

When we turn on the tap we are certain that water will flow out of it. We take this for granted but we may not be able to in the future. This

is because we always need more water: the growing world population as well as our production methods are always calling for it. Water, however, is an increasingly scarce resource. A quarter of the world's population is at risk of not having enough, because of climate change, wastage and pollution. All this in a world where heatwaves are, and will be, increasingly frequent. The month of July 2019 was the hottest month in history. According to 2018 data from the ISTAT (National Statistics Institute), Italy – in forty-fourth place in the list of countries suffering heightened hydrological stress – loses 47.9 per cent of the water put into its water supply due to failings in its distribution system.

So, it is essential to become aware of the situation and for all of us to put into practice measures that will enable us to economise with regard to this essential resource. But which measures? The simplest things we can do are to reduce the flow to taps throughout the house, to install toilet flushing systems with differentiated outlets and double push-buttons, to buy class A⁺⁺ domestic appliances or higher when older ones stop working, and finally to stop losses through domestic installations. A tap that loses one drop per second wastes about five thousand litres of water per year.

It will be more difficult still to change our habits, but we have to do this too. Here are some ideas: have a shower instead of a bath; turn off taps when you are not using them (while brushing your teeth, for example, or between one plate and the next when washing up); use washing machines on full load with ecological and low temperature programmes; wash vegetables and dishes in bowls of water instead of under the tap, then reuse that water to water plants;

water the garden after sunset so that the water evaporates more slowly and is absorbed better by the earth.

Finally, cut down on, or stop, eating meat. This last idea is not a trivial one. The latest study on the hydrological impact of food production, conducted by the European Commission and published in *Nature Sustainability*, is unequivocal: sticking to a diet low in red meat, sugar and animal fat is not only beneficial to health, it reduces our draining of world resources of fresh water. In all, fifteen thousand litres of water are needed to produce one kilo of beef, one thousand to obtain one kilo of wheat. A vegetarian diet would reduce Italy's national consumption of water by between 33 and 55 per cent; a healthy diet that included a reduced quantity of meat would bring it down by between 11 and 35 per cent. This latter idea would not require a great revolution in habits, but would have a revolutionary effect on the planet. Let's do it!

THE IMPOSSIBLE INTERVIEW

Name: **Lonely sparrow** (Blue Rock Thrush)
Scientific name: *Monticola solitarius*

Why do they call you "lonely"?

Because I live, and I breed, in solitude in ravines or old dilapidated buildings, in small and remote areas, in most of southern Italy. Or sometimes, on rugged inland or coastal cliffs.

Are you related to any other species that live in Italy?

I have a cousin who has much more beautiful colours than mine, the red-tailed one who, unlike me, is lucky enough to travel a lot. To visit it I am forced to go to the mountain meadows, which is not really my ideal habitat

Are you a migratory bird?

No, I'm quite happy to stay in the same places where I reproduce all year. Sometimes I make small trips from the sea to the mountains, and back again.

What do you feed yourself?

Thanks to the strong beak, my diet is varied, you would say typically Mediterranean: spiders, grasshoppers, crickets, locusts, earthworms and snails, which I mix with bigger and more succulent prey like geckos and lizards.

How do you see your “solitary sparrow” status today?

Fine, but it could be better. You still know very little about us, although Italy is an important country for our species. And our state of preservation should be improved compared to what it is now.

What can we do to help you, especially us at LIPU?

It would be a great help not to disturb us when we raise our young near your cities. A request, that you could help us by passing onto your species: do not go rock-climbing with ropes in spring on the rocky walls that host our nests, at least from March to May.

What do you offer in return?

We have been the subjects of your most famous poems and every day we help you to regulate the quantity of insects that are part of your daily life.

I'm curious: why do they call you sparrow?

I do not know; perhaps illustrious poets of the past have influenced our name. We are certainly more like a blackbird, at least in size, than a sparrow. I would have liked it better if you had called me a Lone Blackbird.

Dear Friends, it is with great satisfaction that we have news of operations of the Carabinieri Forestali del Nucleo with our Mario Pedrelli, Marco Gustin and other LIPU volunteers. Large-scale operations with seizures of mist nets, of many birds captured to be used as lures (thrushes, Blackbirds etc) to supply the ornithological market, for food consumption (Robins and other small birds), or for keeping as caged birds along with rarer species much less likely to survive in captivity.

It is not the first time that LIPU has participated in these operations, which require months of investigation and accurate research, confident trusting relationships with the police, and many other specialised skills. But the increase in operations, their growing importance and the economic and judicial impact they are acquiring demonstrates how the competence of our “experts” including Mario and Marco, can be decisive in the success of these operations. We can say that the LIPU is a point of reference also for these ultra-specialized anti-

*A message from
the President,
Aldo Verner*

poaching forces.

In other parts of Italy the nuclei of Rome, Caserta and Naples there are other routine control activities with raids seizing nets, electro-acoustic calls and live or dead birds caught illegally. In these operations the local law enforcement agencies know the seriousness and preparation of our volunteers.

This is the main road to having a powerful impact against criminal activities, whether local and disorganised or in the hands of groups of criminals who are also committing other crimes. For this it is necessary to recruit more volunteer guards through new training courses and prepare them for an activity that is certainly inconvenient, but of great satisfaction. We have regions in which the LIPU has always been active, has Oases and Centres but does not have a Corps of guards to defend them. We must be grateful to our guards and experts like Mario Pedrelli and Marco Gustin for taking the time away their work and their families, to achieve these great results on behalf of us all.

THOUGHTS FROM LIPU-UK

I was tempted to apologise for the tone of this issue – doom and gloom seemed to be the tone, but isn't that a true reflection of the state of nature – and not just in Italy? Sometimes it's quite hard to be an optimist but a look around will still give rise to hope.

Despite the fact that the great majority of people simply don't seem to care, there is a dedicated core who do. I am thinking of the dedicated scientists

and other conservation minded people – the serious minority who dedicate their lives to work which will benefit us all; not for them huge salaries, often quite modest, but they always have the satisfaction of knowing that they have done their best.

These are the people we think of – but what of those behind the scenes. The lawyers and their teams, often working *pro bono* who take on the state and the regions in the courts and score victory after unsung victory. Just this month the courts in Sicily have upheld an appeal by LIPU, Legambiente and WWF which has taken three thrushes off the list of species “approved” for hunting. Fieldfares, Redwings and Song Thrushes should be able to fly safely on their way.

Of course, there are also “the Just” and, as you have read, that includes the members of LIPU-UK – I can only join with Danilo in saying a sincere Thank You.

As in every edition of the Ali, it would not have been possible without the help of our production team who were: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Gill Hood, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder

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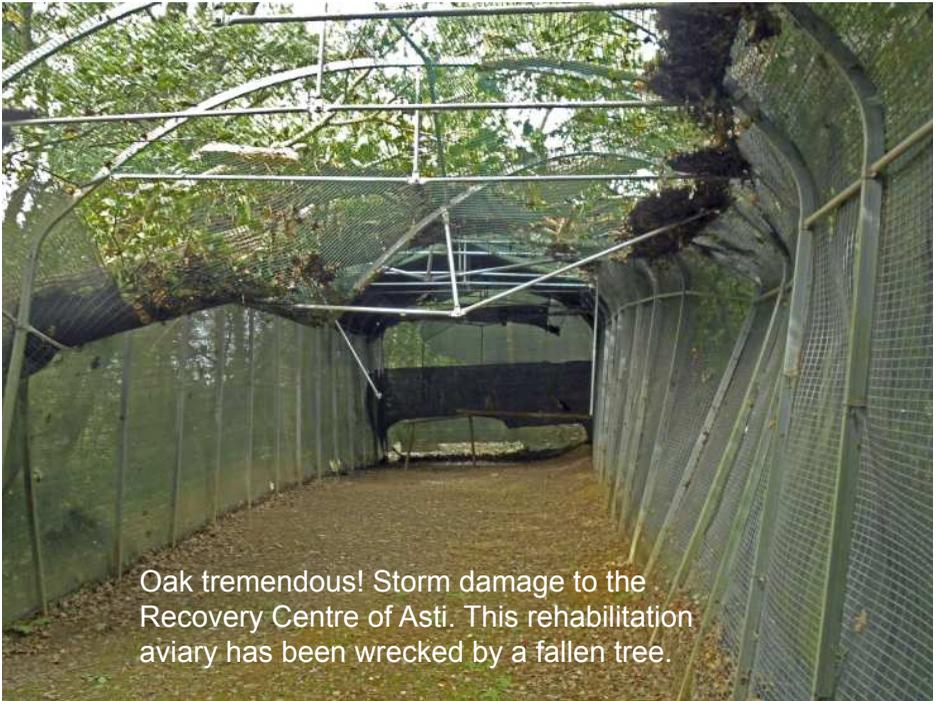


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A Flamingo seen at the fire-ravaged LIPU reserve at Priolo in Sicily. The oasis is recovering well and visitors are returning to see the birds. Local companies and other organisations have raised large sums for the recovery work.



© David Lingard



Oak tremendous! Storm damage to the Recovery Centre of Asti. This rehabilitation aviary has been wrecked by a fallen tree.



A Pygmy Cormorant seen near Comacchio in north eastern Italy— the small colony of this species was unaffected by recent storms and flooding .