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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

- Rebirth
- LIPU under COVID 19
- New Red List for Birds in Italy
- Gulls – the street cleaners

Summer 2020

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Above, Lammergeier, a Red-listed bird (see page 17) and, below, Yellow-legged Gulls cleaning up our environment (see 13).

Editorial

David Lingard

You don't need me to tell you about the crisis facing us all; there has been nothing else in the news – and nothing else that has so seriously affected us all for as long as I can remember.

Italy suffered grievously in the early stages of the spread of the virus in Europe. LIPU followed the government laws and advice and closed all the nature reserves and centres as well as its national offices. Most of the conservation projects were cancelled or suspended because of the need for workers in the field to be in teams of two or more.

Soon after launching our annual appeal we learned that at least two of the projects we would be supporting would be cancelled or put on hold. Then, after a couple of months, the restrictions were relaxed slightly and with relief and enthusiasm all but one of the projects were resumed.

Yet in the face of all the problems and uncertainty our members and friends showed their faith in LIPU and the appeal this year has been one of the most successful in our history. I have spoken to our friends in Italy about their work, promising to help in any way we can, and they say they are inspired and touched by our loyalty.

I can only say, very humbly, a sincere Thank You to you all, and let us hope the international situation improves very soon.

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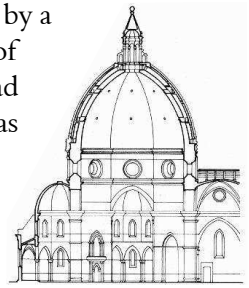
REBIRTH

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

The great crises bring lessons we must not lose sight of: they make us understand our mistakes, and point out to us new directions. And so it is too with the emergency of the coronavirus COVID-19, from which we must emerge better, with fellowship and nature at the centre.

After the Black Death came the Renaissance. The endless dark night of the world, which had taken so many lives and for decades instilled a sense of inescapable doom, was followed by a clear dawn full of great works and of talents without equal. Though it had lost half its population, Florence was the centre of the rebirth, but the wind of the Renaissance spread far beyond the city and became the Spirit of the Age.



Crafts and sciences, economics, politics, health, philosophy and above all the arts grew rapidly, with the great names the whole world has come to know, such as Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo writing some of the most memorable pages in the history of humankind, pages that are not only a source of light for this age, but also markers of beauty and fellowship for those to come who see them, messages in the bottles of time. The messages tell us this: we humans are capable of atrocities but also of pure altruism and achieving great things, and in this way we can realise ourselves, through them, and with brother – and sisterhood.

The New Deal

The Renaissance of the United States, on the other hand, was called the New Deal. It was a social resurrection that allowed the country to emerge from the dramatic period that has passed into history as the Great Depression. The Wall Street Crash, on the Black Tuesday of October 29, 1929, coming out of a combination of financial speculation and the weaknesses of the economic system, engendered a terrifying economic crisis that halved industrial production, destroyed millions of jobs and generated despair and loss of trust, leaving the country on its knees for years, with devastating repercussions for the rest of the world.

Then came Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In 1933, as soon as he was elected president, Roosevelt put flesh on his idea: a gigantic project for a national rebirth starting from the foundations in the most literal sense of the word: the soil and the earth. Roosevelt made a pact, a deal with the American people: if we work together, I promise that America and the rest of the world will be changed. Roosevelt did not start from industry and finance, but precisely from trees and forests. 'Trees keep the fertile earth on the slopes and the moisture in the soil, they regulate the flow of water and of streams, they moderate extremes of heat and cold, they purify the air. To sum up, they are the lungs of America and we must defend them.'

Nature, soil, water, climate, trees: this was in the thirties of the twentieth century, but it sounds more akin to the advanced thinking of the twenty-first.

Three Hundred Thousand Young Americans

Only weeks after Roosevelt's election, the Deal was set in motion. Three hundred thousand young Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 were brought into the plan for the saving and safeguarding of nature in America that fed in, among other things, to the fight against soil erosion and the planting of 200 million trees. Roosevelt added to this a ban on the sale of public domain land and a tax on the use of natural resources, such as the use of land for mining and grazing, through a scheme that would now be called PES, Payment for Ecosystem Services. In 1935, on the heels of these initiatives, came the birth of the Soil Conservation Service, the national agency aimed at combating soil erosion and depletion, a milestone on the road of environmental management.

The Goods of Greatest Value

The New Deal was a programme founded on the revolutionary conviction (now more than ever revolutionary, ninety years later) that the rebirth of a nation, for true and enduring wellbeing, does not simply depend on the algorithms of classical economics (the Roosevelt government, obviously, took many actions in this field as well), but above all on its sense of national identity. To have a care for Nature, for a state, means to count upon goods, which if used wisely are longer lasting, of greater value, and give greater benefits in ways that a voracious economy and an ever more opaque financial system can not.
It was in those years that the America of woods, of campsites, of summers by the lake and of trips into the great national parks and wildernesses was born, that is to say, the America that considered its natural heritage as a precious national asset to be valued and preserved.

Never Too Late

Europe too found the strength and the rationale to reconstruct, doing it following the Second World War, after the concentration camps, after the destruction of the cities and the far distant rumble of the devastation wrought by the atomic bombs unleashed upon Japan (which in its turn knew the meaning of rebirth). The physical and moral rubble was scattered everywhere, as record of the horrors of which we are capable, almost as if to say, no, we have done too much harm, it is impossible to rebuild. And yet, few moments have been more vital than our second post-war period.

The Italy of the fifties and the early sixties was a country of generous hearts and genuine sacrifice, of the desire to leave suffering behind and the wish for a new flowering of consciousness and of society. It was the country of Adriano Olivetti and of his 'community factory', it was the country of television, that alternated between light entertainment and the work of improving literacy. *"Non e mai troppo tardi"* – It is never too late – the programme featuring teacher Alberto Manzi, ran to 484 episodes to teach reading and writing to those Italians who did not yet know how. All in all, a country that tried to look forward with seriousness, faith, and in some ways, authenticity, and in a good part of it, succeeded.

Good Intentions and Short Legs

In effect, the moments of rebirth are the most dynamic and authentic that are given us to live. All

the energies that seemed dissipated come back and are released. The clouds that obstructed our vision are scattered. Despair gives way to the joy of a new opportunity. What is the goal? It is the permanence of a positive outlook. It is to make sure that the justified enthusiasm of such moments is not wasted. To ensure, so to speak, that good intentions do not, as often happens, have the short legs of some lies.

Unfortunately, what has happened in Italy up to now is this: the good intentions have been quickly forgotten, and it has fallen back into consumerism, speculative building, social alienation and the destruction of nature and the countryside, mistakes for which we are all now paying the price.

Etymology of the Crisis

To avoid this happening it is necessary to consider crises in depth, to analyse them, to map out their structural aspects, to avoid the temptation of regarding a crisis as a random event unlikely to be repeated. This is what Nassim Taleb refers to as a black swan: an unforeseeable catastrophic event. In some respects, however, a crisis is never a black swan event. It is a possibility at the back of everything, of our individual and social lives. At the same time, we have to be careful not to be lulled by the consoling idea that the crisis will automatically be followed by renewal. In a complex world with such a high level of risk as ours, this is by no means guaranteed. The extent of constant environmental degradations can unleash problems it is difficult to surmount, and in order to combat this actions have to be timely, heading problems off before they reach critical thresholds, and planning a better course. The etymology of the word crisis takes us back to a Greek

root: krino, meaning to divide or separate. A crisis is the boundary between a before and an after. It is the cracks in the old road, it is the finding of a different route. To emerge from a crisis without changing direction is the same as not to emerge from it. Not to resolve it but simply to let it sleep. To sum up, the crisis has to be a signpost, a lesson from life, so that the rebirth will not be a mere change of clothes and then everything the same as before, business as usual, but a genuine leap to a different level. A spill over in a good way.

Lessons from the Virus

What lessons, then, are coming to us from the pandemic? Many, and all essential. The pandemic tells us that we must not dismantle our nation's health system, which gives security to all. It tells us that we must invest in science and research, to create the best possible conditions for recognising a problem and acting on it. Again, it tells is there is a need to reinforce defences against disasters, for example earthquakes and landslides, to which our country is already extremely vulnerable (if we do it, with time the black swan will find us ready for it and able to minimise its consequences). It tells us too that our lives are often marked by excess, frenetic, dehumanised, and short of time and time for nature.

Moreover, when we come to the subject of nature, it tells us not to abuse it and not to overturn its balances, to discard practices such as intensive breeding, the wet markets, and the international trafficking of wild animals. And it tells us to call a halt to the destruction of ecosystems, an extraordinarily dangerous phenomenon with the tightest of links to the pandemic.

In a nutshell, the COVID-19 pandemic is a manual on what and what not to do, and of things that must be done swiftly, among which is the overriding mission to reconcile nature, society and humanity, to bring harmony to their relationships at last.

Our Man on the Moon

Will it happen? What will Italy do post- virus, and above all, what will Europe do? What will come out of the fundamental environmental tasks signed up to by the EU, starting with the Green Deal (for which see elsewhere in this issue)? It is very much the nub of the question. With the fallout from the coronavirus and the reconstruction to come after, a large part of Europe's reputation is at stake. It will have to act wisely, whether in general political terms, with the laying aside of nationalisms to enter into a truly united community, or in terms of the politics of the environment, placing nature at the centre of things at last.

It is no coincidence that the name given to the European environmental renaissance calls Roosevelt's great project to mind. A pact, a Green Deal, that redesigns industry and the economy to be genuinely sustainable and takes into account the great community resource represented by biodiversity. 'Our objective is to reconcile the economy and the planet', said the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, when announcing a trillion-euro investment plan and dubbing the Green Deal 'our Man on the Moon'.

To this 'Man on the Moon' – that is to say, this attempt to do things differently – many forces object and many are lining up already to oppose it. Too many think that after the virus we just have to carry on where we left off, unsustainably and reckless, in the same 'general malaise' of which Pope Francis himself has spoken. Never could there be an error more grave, never a more botched calculation.

This Way, or the Bottle

In the quiet of the empty city streets through the weeks of the pandemic, bright and strong, the song of tits and wagtails, Blackbirds and Blackcaps, has again been able to be heard. These same weeks have seen the loss of many lives, with so many of the elderly among them, more vulnerable faced with the virus. Family bonds broken in silence, partings in solitude, grief upon grief. Financial woes for the survivors. In such conditions it is hard even to conceive of a rebirth, of Florence in the Renaissance, of FDR's New Deal.

In The Heart and the Bottle, a touching illustrated tale for children (but not only), Oliver Jeffers tells of the relationship between a little girl of four, a lover of nature, and her grandfather, who talks to her about the world, tells her of the hidden life of plants, walks with her by the sea, showing her the incredible beauty of the vault of the sky, full of secrets and stars. She is enchanted and happy, in love with her grandfather and the world. Then, one day, the black swan. She finds his chair empty in the moonlight: her grandfather will never return. The girl's grief is so deep that she decides to put her heart away, placing it in an unbreakable bottle. The desire to live and love is gone and the heart will remain there forever, safe from the dangers and disappointments

of life. Time passes, and the girl grows to become a woman. Without emotions. Then there appears another young girl, who asks questions of her as she did her grandfather. But the answers to the girl's questions are locked away in the heart she has hidden away in the bottle that cannot be broken. Every attempt to break it is vain, until it is the little hands of the girl herself that reach into the bottle to bring the heart back out into the light, for it to be born once more.

Nothing can annul the pain of those who in these months have lost one dear to them, a grandfather, a grandmother. And yet there is a great capacity for regeneration that makes humans what they are. It is the inter-generational project. It is the sharing of consciousness between us, it is putting value on the good and the right things to do. It is to learn from others, to give and to receive, it is the answer from the heart that is at one with the mind and intellect. It is to follow tradition but also to break it, to enrich it with new things and small disorders, to bring good upon the evolutionary path of our culture. It is the message in the bottle, yet outside the bottle. It tells us that we must truly be healed, and not only from the virus. It tells us that we must rethink everything, must organise ourselves better. It is the one way to be reborn, to live fuller lives, it is to become better. To grow in the fullest sense of the term. It is either this way, or the bottle.

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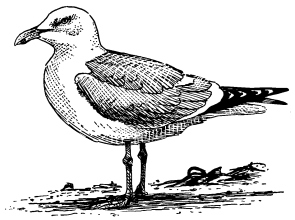
URBAN ECOLOGY

By Marco Dinetti, Director of 'Ecologia urbana'

Street Cleaners from the Sky

Yellow-legged Gulls have increased in numbers in our cities, where food is found in abundance, thanks to the throwing away of rubbish and at rubbish tips.

We call them 'winners'. They are adaptable species, omnivores, and have flexible behaviours. They take advantage of occasions that present themselves, insinuating themselves into urban environments – the more transformed and degraded the better – such as cultivated fields, big squares, industrial areas, artificial waterways and rubbish tips. One such 'winning' species is the Yellow-legged Gull. In addition to living in their natural habitats on islands and cliffs, today they nest in around 50 Italian cities.



The rise in the number of Yellow-legged Gulls has been rapid: in Trieste figures rose from 15 – 20 pairs in 1988 to 520 in 2014; in Pisa, in 20 years, the number of pairs has grown from two to 112. In Rome, meanwhile the first nest was discovered in 1971 – today there are thousands of pairs. Naples began with 14 pairs in 1990; now there are 350. And nesting is not solely confined to coastal cities from Genoa to Spezia, Livorno to Salerno, Venice to Reggio Calabria (the latter being a new entry in the list). The gulls also nest inland, including in Turin, Cremona, Florence and Viterbo, and even urban areas of Sicily and Sardinia.

A 'Restaurant' for the Gulls

According to the data gathered by FAO, between a third and almost a half of food produced in the world ends up in rubbish tips. The cost of this waste – which involves the whole food chain, from the cultivated field to our tables – has been calculated as more than 500 billion euros per annum. Edible food that is thrown away amounts to 1.3 billion tonnes, and gives out 3.3 billion tonnes of CO2, almost all the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the United States and China. Italy is no different: it wastes 25 per cent of its grocery shopping (76 kilograms per person per year).

But where does all this waste food end up? Besides the undifferentiated door-to-door collections and kitchen waste (where such collections operate), it ends up mostly in household rubbish bins from where it goes to the incinerator or to rubbish tips. And it is really the latter of these destinations that offers the Yellow-legged Gull something of an unlimited restaurant. The more rubbish is available, the more gulls there are. They become an indicator of our consumerism and the efficacy of the management and disposal of rubbish.

Aggression, a False Myth

In certain contexts, fish – both living and as scraps from fishing – still represent an important part of the Yellow-legged Gull's diet. While in the cities, in addition to rubbish and dead animals this species preys on pigeons and bats and, in flight, captures starlings and swallows.

There is no evidence yet of a demographic impact on the predated species. Many people report aggressive behaviour especially in spring and summer. This is not Hitchcock's Birds however. In reality it is often a matter of 'anxious' parents defending their offspring, which happens particularly in the period May–June. The newborn young leave the nest, and their parents protect them effectively, driving away any intruders (people included) who get too close. To avoid such problems, in addition to the suitable planning of buildings and products, specialised installations that discourage perching can be installed, as can nets to keep intruders out and threads of suspended wire.

The Other 'Street Cleaner' Species

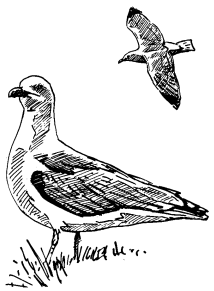
The Yellow-legged Gull is certainly not the only species to take advantage of man's 'rubbish'. In rubbish tips, they are found in the company of Black-headed Gulls, and other species of 'street cleaners' from the corvid family, in particular the Hooded Crow and Magpie. These are present throughout Italy, including in northern cities such as Milan, where the Yellow-legged Gull has not

urbanised itself in a consistent manner. These are species that feed on everything that they find, including refuse and carcases found on roadsides, in dustbins and rubbish tips.

The Yellow-legged Gull, in short, is in good company. All these species proliferate thanks to the food discarded by man. And their presence will tell us if we are able, in the future, to limit food waste, control our rubbish tips and throw away less. They will be valuable indicators and impartial judges of our ecological footprint.

The Document on the Yellow-legged Gull, produced by LIPU, can be downloaded at www.lipu.it

Editor's note. The Yellow-legged Gull is a close relative of the familiar Herring Gull which is common in and around our shores and, indeed, cities. The Herring Gull occurs in very small numbers in Italy and is greatly outnumbered by its yellow-legged cousin.



ONE IN FOUR IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Marco Gustin, Head of Species and Research

Despite the good news for Bonelli's Eagle and the Griffon Vulture – two of the most threatened species in our country – the latest Red List of Breeding Birds in Italy paints a worrying picture. One in four species remains threatened with extinction.

The fourth edition of the Red List of Wild Birds in Italy, edited by the Ministry of the Environment, Federparchi (the Italian Federation of Parks and Nature Reserves), the Italian Committee of the IUCN, and LIPU, has important news. Let's start with the positive. Two species, well known as being threatened with extinction, are in better health. The first is Bonelli's Eagle – 'critically endangered' in the 2012 list, and now 'endangered'. While the species is still threatened, this is a significant improvement and we have the long-term contribution of volunteers – from LIPU and other organisations – who have protected their nests in Sicily to thank for this. The second is the Griffon Vulture. Following its reintroduction to mountain sites across Italy, it has now climbed in classification from 'critically endangered' to a (relatively) reassuring 'vulnerable'.

Is it all going swimmingly then, for Italian wildlife? Not really. The new Red List reveals that out of 278 species examined, as many as 67 are threatened with extinction. One in four is at risk: 10 (3.9%) are critically endangered (CR), 22 (14%) are endangered (EN), and 35 (8.2%) are vulnerable (VU).

Biodiversity, Threats

Thanks to its geographical, climatic and historical situation, Italy is a hotspot of biological diversity, with endemic species, unique habitats, and

characteristic landscapes. While the surface area is very limited compared with continental Europe, Italy still plays host to one-third of all European animal species, and to half of plant species.

Over 500 different species of birds have been recorded in Italy, with about a half of these breeding here. This places a great responsibility on our country for their conservation, particularly for birds such as the Rock Partridge and Manx Shearwater, where we host a significant proportion of the European population.

But what dangers threaten the survival of so many species of birds? In our country the major threats are changes to, and the destruction of, natural habitat, pollution, climate change, and intensive agriculture.

To these we must add other, more-specific threats, which vary by species and by habitat. For many species, such as the 'critically endangered' Spotted Crake, Little Crake and Black Tern, the key factor is the small number of breeding pairs and an extreme localisation of breeding sites. The same category, CR, also covers some of the passerines, such as the Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting, typical wetland birds.

Many of the species at risk of extinction are threatened by habitat transformation and by changes in agricultural practices. Among these a considerable number of species are dependent on open cultivation and steppe, including the Calandra Lark, Woodchat Shrike, Orphean Warbler and Lanner Falcon, the last of which has declined in a very worrying way. Climate change, on the other hand, has had a

negative impact on species typical of upland habitats, such as the Ptarmigan and Rock Partridge, both classified as 'vulnerable'.

Although the picture is far from reassuring (with 24% of species in decline), there is also positive news. For Italian birds, 28 per cent of the breeding population is stable and 34 per cent is increasing, whereas for 14 per cent the demographic trend is unknown. Some 51 per cent of species are not in imminent danger. In brief, the updated Red List shows an overall reduced risk of extinction for Italian birds, even if some species are in critical decline.

The Origins of the Red Lists

The Red Lists are the world's most authoritative source of information on the risk of extinction for organisms that live on our planet. They act as alarm bells for the protection of nature as a whole and for each species individually. The Red Lists cover more than just birds: the Italian Committee of the IUCN is planning, or has finished reviewing, lists for many other groups of animals, including amphibians, reptiles, mammals, bony fish, dragonflies, butterflies, corals, saproxylic beetles, and bees.

Why were the Red Lists created, and what are their objectives? Sixty years ago the International Union for the Conservation of Nature promoted and recommended the idea that biodiversity should be supported and preserved through an equitable and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.

The IUCN periodically reviews the Red Lists of threatened species, and since 1944 has made significant updates to the list evaluation criteria, adopting a rigorous system of categories and quantitative measures, setting the world standard for the evaluation of risks of extinction.

Classify to Manage

Today, the IUCN has a membership of over 1,000 bodies, including countries, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and international organisations. In Italy these include the Ministry of the Environment, Federparchi, and major environmental associations such as LIPU.

The extinction risk within each taxonomic group is evaluated by key experts, including ornithologists, who take the lead for the Red List of birds. Their evaluation includes major threats and significant trends over a given period of time.

'The compilation and periodic revision of the national Red Lists enables us to integrate information drawn from the global Red Lists. It also helps us re-calibrate our priorities', explains Claudio Celada, Director of Nature Conservation at LIPU. 'Publication should, however, be followed by practice, where we adopt measures and plans to truly mitigate the problems that affect those species most at risk. Information gathered at a local level is fundamental to species management. It also helps us decide where best to allocate our resources and efforts in areas such as research, monitoring, and actions, with the correct level of priority.'

Let us welcome, then, the Red Lists. Which have become an essential tool for monitoring the state of biodiversity, and at times enable us to take action before it's too late. Bonelli's Eagle is a shining example; through our passion, our efforts, and our resources, we can even work small miracles.

The Species in 'Critical Danger' of Extinction

Spotted Crake
Great Cormorant
Osprey
Egyptian Vulture
Barred Warbler
Little Crake
Black Tern
Bearded Vulture
Sedge Warbler
Reed Bunting

The 'Not Evaluated'

The new Red List covers only breeding birds and excludes overwintering and migrant species. The List also excludes species introduced in historical times, which are classified as NE (Not Evaluated) alongside vagrant species, species that occur only marginally on national territory, and species of recent colonisation.

Guide to Categories

The most important categories concerning the risk of extinction are:

Critically endangered
Endangered
Vulnerable
Near threatened

NATURE AFTER THE VIRUS

Claudio Celada, LIPU Director for Nature Conservation

In addition to the human and social drama provoked by the current pandemic, there is the risk of losing ground with regard to the ecological conversion of the planet. This could be both wrong and dangerous, and LIPU is working with Italian and European partners to ensure that our green road to the future is maintained.

Apart from the human and social tragedy that the current pandemic has provoked, will it also have an effect on nature? The first warning signs came at the very height of the emergency, in the form of requests from euro-parliamentarians and industrialists to defer until the autumn – or even suspend for an indeterminate length of time – the European Green Deal and the environmental strategies linked with it, including the Farm2Fork programme and the strategy on biodiversity. The President of the Czech Republic took these demands further, seeking to abandon the Green Deal completely and to concentrate on a traditional economy, without any 'impediments' whatsoever.

Italy has done no better. Opinions started to be voiced very early about relaxing environmental protections in favour of the resumption of the economy following the pandemic. Proposed relaxations included the suspension of the Appalti Code in order to speed up the allocation of public tendering/contracts and in matters relating to the building trade, among others. Added to the drama of the pandemic there is, then, the risk of the 'sick joke' of a new assault on nature. (Happily, reassuring signs of hope are emerging, in the form of the recent (although delayed) launch of the two strategies by the European Commission.)

Green Deal at the Crossroads

The Green Deal – the ecological conversion plan for European society that was presented at the beginning of the year, with great enthusiasm, by the European Commission – is, then, today at a crossroads. And one of the possible roads turns the clock back to the old ways of unsustainable development. Ideas such as 'return to normality', 'make up for lost time', and 'running faster than before', expressed by leading figures in politics and society, fit whatever obsolete visions we believe are signed up to and undermine whatever efforts we undertake to break loose.

This is why the Italian Green Deal – the plan for laws for the ecological conversion of our country – should from this point on be developing according to plans for laws for the so-called 'environmental provisions'. And this is very important, as it involves ideas that, if they become law, will change the environmental trajectory of the country in many ways, including with regard to hydrological problems, waste management, care for the land, climate, and the fight against poaching, even care for wild animals in refuges. Nevertheless, there are still fears even for the Italian Green Deal – as it comes under assault from the usual lobbying quarters.

LIPU in Action

This is why the whole of LIPU has immediately moved into action. First, it wrote – along with a group of environmental associations – to the

Environmental Commissions of the Chamber and Senate, asking them to resume parliamentary work on biodiversity, recycling, and climate change, putting ecosystems and natural habitats at the forefront of their considerations. Then, it asked the President of the Council to include an environmental component in the Task Force for reconstruction, and above all to make green issues an intrinsic part of that same reconstruction effort. At the same time, LIPU acted on the European level, urging the Strasbourg Parliament and agencies in Brussels not to abandon the ecological steps that have been taken in recent months. And there have been positive results so far.

Nature Alliance

A strong community environmental alliance has taken shape, comprising the other eleven ministers for the Environment (including the Italian Minister for the Environment, Sergio Costa, alongside the Minister for European Affairs, Vincenzo Amendola), nearly 80 members of the European Parliament, and administrative delegates from important producers, as well as civil society organisations, among which – of course – is our own BirdLife International partner.

Costa took the opposing position to that adopted in anti-environmentalist statements, steering the discussion onto the right path and declaring that the post-coronavirus period should be treated as an opportunity for a green relaunch of our country. There are two phases: pre-COVID, as we had constructed the world before this emergency, and post-COVID, as we might now imagine it. And we must imagine and start to make the future green. This is exactly the situation in which we find ourselves: two phases. The first, an emergency in which the system is unsustainable. The second, a time when we should be acting in a completely different way.

Setting Off Again, but in the Right Way

So much has been written and said in the last months about how the pandemic arose. It is now clear to everyone that our effect on the earth played a crucial and definite role. The destruction of wild habitats, commercialisation of wild species and large-scale animal rearing have enabled pathogens to cross the species divide from wild animals to people (what is referred to as 'spillover'), and the increase in these practises has enabled the virus to spread. Megacities, large-scale events, commercialisation and global travel have done the rest, probably aided by atmospheric pollution, which has lowered the immune defences of many people, damaged their respiratory systems, and even allowed airborne droplets and aerosols to persist, enabling contagion to spread. Now is the time to put what we have learnt into practice. We need to set off again, but in the right way, undertaking decisively a route to the healing of our planet, upon which we all depend.

Restoration and Rewilding

What can be done? We can point out two things that need to be done here. On the one hand, patient work to restore the environment, taking into account cities, the countryside and natural zones, making our town centres environmentally richer, intervening when habitats are threatened, creating ecological networks. On the other, there are huge wilderness areas, natural areas left undisturbed where nature can regenerate in peace. To these two

pillars (habitat restoration and rewilding) of the European biodiversity strategy, recently launched by the European Union, we should add care for the environment. This is why we should put an end to new projects affecting the Alps, even if they come under the auspices of large-scale sporting events like the Olympics. We should consider reopening the Apennines as a laboratory for a new, really sustainable type of economy. And think about the wet zones and the coasts, habitats that have undergone so much destruction, but that could be a launch pad for environmental restoration.

BirdLife International and LIPU have asked Europe to devote 10 per cent of agricultural land to make room for biodiversity, to increase the percentage of protected land and marine areas to at least 30 per cent, and – above all – to make 10 per cent of land strictly protected in the form of natural reserves. And these targets have actually been actually included in the biodiversity strategy just launched by the Commission.

Food: Production and Supply

Finally there's the rest. The next global emergency is just around the corner, and will probably be a consequence of the environmental crises now taking place. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, drought, and reduced soil fertility are all enormous stress factors, and operate on a global scale, weighing the planet down. The advantage we now have is that we have understood – while paying a very high price in human lives and deprivation of liberty – what can happen if we do not take care of the environment and if we do not follow common sense rules. Let's start again from here, and not forget. For example, let's protect food production and supply chains, rejecting any agriculture that wastes natural resources such as water, soil and biodiversity, or employs poisons. Let's anticipate and forestall the coming emergencies. May nature after the virus be more protected and more respected.

The Great Challenge

In all of this the role of Europe and of Italy is crucial. We must believe in change, promote it properly, and see it sustained enthusiastically by our citizens. We must carry out our strategies for biodiversity and the fight against climate change. We must make sure that international rendezvous like the Conference on Biodiversity, set for October in Pechino, are not missed, but rather are relaunched (even if that means on another date), in order to reinforce the positive signs that are emerging, including the Chinese prohibition on the sale of wild animals in markets.

These will be difficult months. The challenge is great, the greatest that there can be: establishing a green, fair future. LIPU will play its part, more convinced than ever, supported by its members.

Key Points of the European Green Deal

The main objective of the European Union Green Deal is to make Europe the first continent with zero climate impact by 2050, following economic competitiveness criteria and the principle of solidarity (summarised by the motto 'no-one excluded').
For LIPU, the Green Deal is crucially important since under its umbrella are found the Strategy for Biodiversity and the 'from-field-to-table' strategy, a means of providing sustainable food.

Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans will be in charge of guiding and co-ordinating the work on the European Green Deal. LIPU will be following the negotiations, from the proposal made by the Commission to approval by the European Parliament.

Some Figures on Italian/European Habitats

In the European Union, protected mixed forests are in a poor state of conservation and the situation is worsening (Ispra report on the State of Conservation of Habitats and Species – Habitat Directive).

In Italy, at least 12 out of 23 species that prefer agricultural land for nesting are in a poor state of conservation *(book, Conoscerli, proteggerli)*.

In Italy, only 14 out of 59 species of birds that nest in wetlands are in a favourable state of conservation.

Sardinia's wetlands lost 64 hectares per year to urbanisation between 1990 and 2012 (Mosaici Mediterranei).

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THE IMPOSSIBLE INTERVIEW

Common name: Lesser Kestrel
Scientific name: *Falco naumanni*

What does your name mean?

It is a tribute to the famous German naturalist Jonann Andreas Naumann who wrote, in 1804, an important book on birds entitled Naturgeschichte der Vögel Deutschlands

Are you related to other species that live in Italy?

I look very much like my cousin kestrel *(Falco tinnunculus)*, with which the less experienced birdwatchers often confuse me. You recognize me because, compared to him, I am leaner and have yellow claws!

Is it true that you are increasing in numbers?

Yes, finally, after a long period of decline all over Europe. We have adapted, at least in part, to the changes you have caused in the agricultural habitat, especially in southern Italy.

Are you migratory birds?

Yes. In the winter we all go to Africa across the Sahara desert. There are those who stop immediately below in the Sahel belt, others continue to South Africa.

What do you feed on?

Insects, especially locusts, grasshoppers, crickets. But also rodents whose protein, in late spring and summer, helps us to feed our chicks. In winter, we eat what we find in open spaces in Africa, especially insects such as termites. We have a good ability to accumulate stocks by exploiting the most abundant species.

But how can we help you?

We ask farmers not to sprinkle the countryside with insecticides, not to destroy the steppe areas in southern Italy since they are the ones that are fundamental for us to find the most important prey

and safely raise our chicks. Finally, we ask for more attention in renovating buildings : we live there too !

.

What do you offer in return?

With our presence we help you to control many insects, especially locusts and grasshoppers that in certain years can be really harmful to your crops.

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TAIL FEATHERS

First reports are coming in from the protection camps for two raptors threatened by the middle eastern falconry trade. The Bonelli's Eagles have had another good year and the methods developed there have been applied to a pilot project for Lanner Falcons nesting on the mainland. So far, so good, and all the parties involved will now develop plans for next year to protect more of the falcons' nests.

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Production of the Ali would be impossible without the help of my production team who for this issue were: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Gill Hood, Caterina Paone and Peter Rafferty.

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Above, Lesser Kestrel bringing food to the nest (see page 28).
Below, Birds at risk through loss of habitat,
a Great Reed Warbler (see page 22).

© *Roberto Sauli*

A pair of majestic Griffon Vultures; once “Critically Endangered” and now listed in the latest Red List of Breeding Birds in Italy as “Vulnerable”. This positive progress has been helped by a LIPU reintroduction scheme in Sicily.