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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

- Transition
- Griffon Vultures and Diclofenac
- Success in the Face of the Pandemic
- Annual Appeal

*Spring 2021*

A Northern Bald Ibis similar to the one taken into care, and, below, a Golden Eagle – another bird teated in a LIPU Recover Centre, see p 23 for both accounts.

# Success despite all the problems

## Editorial

*David Lingard*

Given all the turmoil and uncertainty we have faced, I think we can look back on 2020 as being yet another successful year. Almost all the projects we supported in Italy were completed, albeit some in a scaled down form, and only one was rendered impossible by restrictions related to the pandemic.

With total clarity our colleagues have discussed matters and agreed to the diversion of some funds to keep things moving forwards, but at the end of the year they still had just over €10,000 unspent.

Your trustees, in agreement with Claudio Celada, the LIPU Conservation Director, see more signs of hope and optimism and have agreed to fund a series of projects around the country – full details appear later in this edition. In years past our members and friends have responded magnificently when we have launched our only appeal of the year and I hope, in all humility, that we can repeat that generosity. We have committed to raising a further €74,000 to pay for these projects and I hope you will agree that the choice of focus is worthy of your support. Please give what you can to make this year another success – Thank you.

## TRANSITION

*Danilo Selvaggi, Director General, LIPU*

Emerging from a desperate situation, the idea of technological transition is central to bringing about the transformation of society with respect to the environment but will not happen without nature being at the heart of a complete rethinking of our lives, and will require a huge effort of the imagination.

On the evening of 12 February just gone, in announcing the physicist Roberto Cingolani as his Minister for the Environment, the new Prime Minister Mario Draghi let it be known that the ministry had a new title, that of Ecological Transition. In the following days Draghi gave further information about the change, saying that among the programmes of the new government would be that of smoothing the path towards a sustainable society, in part by utilising the vast resources of the European Recovery Fund.

*75 per cent of terrestrial and 66 per cent of marine habitats have been profoundly altered by human activity*

A prime minister devoting a large part of his process of installation to ecological transformation is an unprecedented event, one that the world of environmentalism has welcomed with enthusiasm, though also with a degree of suspicion, founded on having to take it on trust that what will come about will not be mere words or worse still a deception, but rather a true turning point.

### From One Place to Another

In general terms, transition is the passage from one state of affairs to another. For example, in spatial terms it is to leave location A, which has housed us in the past, to reach location B, which will host us in the future. A primary meaning of transition is therefore that of trans-location, of transfer. To leave the old house in order to take up a new one. Why do it then? Why take on the upheaval that every translocation inevitably involves? From the environmental point of view, the change is essential because the way we are living in the world has reduced us to a state of profound crisis: loss of biodiversity, global warming, acidification of the oceans, pollution, hydrogeological devastation, squandering of natural capital, and the recurrence of health and other problems, social and ecological, are all on an upward trend. This is the main reason for making the move, in reality due to the need to treat the one house we have in a different fashion.

### In Flames

On the issue of biodiversity, the 2019 report from IPBES, the UN's intergovernmental institute for biodiversity and ecosystem services, defined the current crisis as being "without precedent". In sum, 75 per cent of terrestrial and 66 per cent of marine habitats have been profoundly altered by human activity; the toll of extinctions among plant and animal species is tens or even hundreds of times higher than the background level of the last ten million years, and almost a million species are threatened, including 13 per cent of birds, 25 per cent of mammals and 41 per cent of amphibians.

The global situation is not too dissimilar from the European one and by extension that of Italy, as shown only too well by the red lists and the research of recent years. Here too there are birds

and other species in danger, habitat and soil degradation, pollution. Greta Thunberg has spoken of our house being on fire, referring not just to the climate question but to other things too. "A painful awareness" is the term Pope Francis has used in reference to our fear as to what awaits both the planet and ourselves, if the needed transition is not made.

## Questions

And this is the first question now posed by ecological transition: the extent of the change that is needed. Let us consider the causes of the crises identified by the UN: 30 per cent of the impact is due to bad land use, such as deforestation for the sake of urbanisation and extensive grazing, and 23 per cent to fishing, hunting and logging. A further 14 per cent is down to climate change, an element very much on the increase, with 14 per cent more due to the pollution of soil, water and air. It follows from this that there must be change in the entire range of our activities, and not mere tinkering at the margins.

How is it to be done? How can we rebalance, at the global level, the infrastructure of our industries, commerce, services, and even our accustomed way of life so that our impact on nature can be made sustainable? More than this, how quickly can it be done? Is such an undertaking even possible, when it has been made all the more daunting by the additional burden of the pandemic? And how will people's well-being fare if we are forced to put restrictions on industry and the economy?

As a response to the environmental crisis then, the first phase of an ecological transition must be a technological one.



## Having your Cake and Eating It

The idea of technological transition is essentially that of having recourse to the most advanced technologies available to us (not to mention the creation of new ones) to bring about that environmental impacts can be to a large extent contained without impacting on our lifestyles. It is an environmental engineering technofix, a "business as usual" approach out of the having-your-cake-and-eating-it playbook: we continue with our usual levels of consumption in a way that there is less pressure on nature, whose dispensary remains eternally full.

Among the innumerable difficulties with this strategy is that ecological problems tend to escalate. If it is the rich world of today that sets the standard level of consumption, what happens when all the rest of the 8 or 9 billion people of the world look for theirs to be the same? And what happens when we ourselves have further increased the demands and the volume of consumption? What sort of technology and how much of it would be needed to support this extra capacity? The feverish work going into environmental engineering and that of the so-called techno-optimists cannot answer such questions, because the fundamental problem remains unaltered: given the current philosophy of life one planet is not enough. We would need another and one more on top of that. The final chapter of technological transition has already been written: moving to another planet.

## Planet C

In Survey Team, a short story from 1954 republished in the second volume of his 1987 Collected, Philip K

Dick anticipates this very scenario. A spaceship takes off from an Earth rendered almost uninhabitable by wars and environmental disasters, and heads for Mars to find if that planet is suitable for humans. On arrival, the astronauts find the remains of a civilisation: palaces, cities and roads, but the planet is deserted, all in ruins. Discovering a huge telescope they approach and look through it to find that it is locked on to another planet, and that planet is the Earth. Finally they understand. We humans once were Martians, who having destroyed Mars abandoned it for Earth, our very own Planet B, giving ourselves a second chance. And now at last here we were again, looking for a third one, Planet C.

*"It's wrong!" Mason shouted. "Two are enough! Let's not destroy a third world!"*

Despair comes upon them. "Tell Davidson we're going on," Halloway ordered. "We'll keep on until we find it. We're not staying on this god-forsaken junkyard." His gray eyes glowed. "We'll find it yet. A virgin world. A world that's unspoiled."

"Unspoiled," Young echoed. "Nobody there ahead of us."

"We'll be the first," Judde muttered avidly.

"It's wrong!" Mason shouted. "Two are enough! Let's not destroy a third world!"

Nobody listened to him. Judde and Young and Halloway gazed up, faces eager, hands clenching and unclenching. As if they were already there. As if they were already holding on to the new world, clutching to it with all their strength. Tearing it apart, atom by atom..."



## The Price of Innovation

That technology is not the solution, or the only solution, is also clear because of the so-called collateral cost of innovation. No technology is painless. Nickel (used for batteries and wind-turbine blades), indium (displays and liquid crystals), tantalum (mobile phones and camera lenses) and other precious minerals are finite resources, the extraction of which is accompanied moreover by enormous environmental and social harm. It falls to this same new minister, Cingolari, who has a strong technological orientation himself, to factor this into his decisions where innovations are involved: "Just as in politics, engineering must understand that every technological development carries consequences with it, from both the social and environmental points of view. Instead of following free and easy business models dictated by the demands of short-term marketing, we must work on our capacity for foresight, introducing a vision of long-term sustainability."

We have come then to one of the key points of the matter, to two key words for an ecological transition in the truest sense: sustainability and vision.

## Nature as Blueprint

The first principle of sustainability is to make peace with nature, learning the way in which it works. We humans are singular creatures: our culture is a powerful creator and accelerator of events with a twofold valency. It can bring great achievements or lead to disaster, destroying in a short time what evolution has produced at the pace of geology. In order to take the better path, it is important then

*Projects for climate, for waste, for transport and the circular economy, but no provision for actions for improving biodiversity.*

to take inspiration from and plan alongside nature, constantly referring back to so-called nature-based solutions, always taking account of its structures and demands (for example the fact that we are not the only species on the planet; that there are millions of other forms of life). In this sense a natural education represents a truly precious journey of culture and learning: it is essential that people in general, and decision-makers in particular, should be aware of the riches and the workings of living systems and value them, for the sake of the political programme and the development of society. To think along with nature is itself a type of innovation, to which we are so far not accustomed. Not a technical innovation but a mental one that can build up advanced forms of social, economic and cultural investments.

## Without Nature There Is no Recovery

For this reason too it is truly incredible that the first thing proposed in the Recovery Plan set out by the Italian government might see a complete absence of a programme for the conservation of nature. Projects for climate, for waste, for transport and the circular economy, but no provision for actions for improving biodiversity. LIPU pointed this out in a hearing in the Chamber of Deputies on 9 February, and has done so on many other occasions, putting together a document titled Without Nature there is no Recovery, which requests that the Plan be amended to insert projects to conserve and give value to our natural inheritance and an understanding that ecological transition demands a new cultural consciousness. “Great attention”, the document concludes, “should be paid to the politics of education, communication and culture in the coming years ... Schools, television, new media,



cultural programmes, work in the organisations of the voluntary sector: every part of the cultural world must be assisted in the task of promoting cultural ecology, in the conviction that the best response in any form of crisis – health, social, environmental, existential – lies in care for our Planet, our shared home. It is not a matter of a rhetorical flourish but of a fundamental conviction: that above all, ecological transition is to learn to think and live differently”.

## The Ecological Imagination

In From What Is to What If, his most recent book, the English activist Rob Hopkins (the originator, in 2005, of the concept of ecological transition) relates numerous examples of experiences of transition already undertaken. Neighbourhoods remade into places growing richer in green, food coming from urban gardens, streets coming back to life with passers-by and play, cities that redefine urbanisation based on principles rooted in sustainability, socialisation and nature. Not abstract but living utopias, made possible especially through the ability to imagine solutions different from those we are used to. The imagination: a powerful transformative force to be cultivated and given thought as to how to put it into practice. In effect, the examples cited by Hopkins, as with many others across the world, are not only the result of actions from the bottom up, brought about by local community initiatives, but of ones in which institutions also weigh in, in a collective effort of action and imagination. In many parts of the world councillorships of the imagination, ministers for the future, offices for impossible ideas and the rebirth of nature and more are springing up, with the intention of turning into political programmes for real hope for a better world. This

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has positive results in three ways; for the people on the ground, who become creative leaders; for politics, which becomes about decisions for the common good; and for the world, which becomes richer in colour, opportunities, life, beauty and nature. Here technology becomes a vital force, not to be decried but employed for the great possibilities it offers. The technology that is not a substitute for imagination but helps it to become reality. Not the planet in the service of technology but a technology that aids the planet.

## The Moments After

Much of our future depends on the institutional choices that will be made in the coming days and months. In a while we will know how to learn from the errors we will make, how good the ecological imagination we have managed to deploy, how much of nature can be counted as recovering. It is an important moment, perhaps like nothing else in recent history.

But now, the summer migrants are arriving. Their own extraordinary natural translocation, the perilous journey of migration, is complete. They are here in our skies, to make better our cities, to remind us how beautiful the world is, flourishing, welcoming, creative, generous, diverse. And in a way to ask us, how is it possible to cause harm to such wonders?

A change of planet serves nothing. What is required is change in ourselves. The eyes with which we look to it, the heart in whose affections it is held, the physical and mental ways in which we inhabit it. Ecological transition in the first instance is a life workshop, a reprogramming of our whole existence. The rest is important, to the highest degree, but comes in the moments after.

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## THE BIG WINGS OF THE GRIFFON

After having suffered direct persecution as well as other difficulties, one species has emerged from a critical phase in its path to survival, in part thanks to LIPU's protection and to numerous conservation projects of recent years. The threats to its existence persist, however, and there is still much work to do.

*Marco Gustin, responsible for species and research*

The life of the most common and abundant European vulture has never been easy. Scouring hundreds of square kilometres every day searching for the carcases of domestic and wild animals is not

easy, not even for birds that – like the Griffon – have particularly developed vision and a beak perfectly adapted to a role as a natural garbage collector. Finding the right carcase, hopefully not poisoned, has become – in Italy and throughout Europe generally – ever more difficult.

*At least five species of vulture have suffered very heavy losses in their populations (equal to millions of individuals and sometimes to the disappearance of 99 per cent of total numbers), particularly in India, Nepal and Pakistan.*

In addition to this challenge, Griffons, and in general all the vultures, not strictly predators but carrion eaters, are hardly known for their beauty and agreeable appearance and have more or less always been considered, wrongly, to be aggressive and harmful birds of evil intent – and have paid a heavy price for this unmerited reputation.

For a long time, with disastrous effects on the Griffon, Black Vultures, and Lammergeiers, there has been direct persecution (including by farmers). Pastoral activity has been abandoned, and flocks and herds have progressively disappearance from in the wild, today in many cases being confined in sterile and firmly closed sheds. Finally, the new laws governing the disposal of the carcases of grazing animals have in effect banned carrion.

## Anti-inflammatory Killer

A new threat has appeared recently. At least five species of vulture have suffered very heavy losses in their populations (equal to millions of individuals and sometimes to the disappearance of 99 per cent of total numbers), particularly in India, Nepal and Pakistan. The culprit: diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory used in the rearing of livestock – notably cattle and sheep – that has lethal effects on vultures that feed on the carcases of animals treated with it. The drug ends up mostly in the kidneys and the whole organism becomes progressively affected by it, eventually leading to the death of the bird.



Thanks to the Foundation for the Conservation of Vultures (Vcf), and with BirdLife International and LIPU in leading roles, the campaign BanVetDiclofenac campaigns to forbid the veterinary use of diclofenac (http://www.banvetdiclofenac.com/it/actua-2/). Now it has sharpened its aim and is seeking a ban in European stock rearing, in particular in the three countries of most importance to the species affected – Spain, Italy and Portugal. Already the campaign has raised awareness of this important issue.

*Throughout Europe including in Italy, specific conservation programmes are well underway to use the technique of restocking to return Griffons and Egyptian Vultures as well as Lammergeiers to their rightful place in food chains.*

## Projects and Good News

There is, too, more positive news regarding vultures. Throughout Europe including in Italy, specific conservation programmes are well underway to use the technique of restocking to return Griffons and Egyptian Vultures as well as Lammergeiers to their rightful place in food chains. Thanks to such reintroduction projects in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Abruzzo, Basilicata and Sicily, Italian populations have gone from around 200–250 individuals and 37–42 pairs less than 20 years ago to around 500–750 individuals, corresponding to 170 breeding pairs, based on recent estimates (data from Brichetti and Fracasso 2003, 2020).

## The Last Stronghold

The situation in Sardinia merits a different approach as here the Griffon was never totally extinct, but survived only in the north-western part of the island. In 2015 there were an estimated 34 pairs holding

territory with a population distributed in the districts of Alghero and Bosa.

To reduce the risk of further population reductions in what is considered to be the bird's final stronghold on the island, a European (Life) project called Under Griffon Wings got under way in 2015. The project, which concluded in 2020, emerged from an analysis of the principal hinderances to the growth of the Griffon population in Sardinia, among which were unfavourable demographics, a high mortality rate among the young, continued and frequent poisoning, and low reproductivity. For each individual point a corresponding solution has been developed with the aim of increasing the population's rate of growth and creating an improved conservation framework on Sardinia.

*Vultures, after all, are anything but vermin.*

## The Griffons Are Coming!

With the arrival of 63 Griffons from rescue centres in Spain, 34 abattoirs have been set up to provide food and have been successful in bringing down mortality among young birds and immatures and in increasing reproductive success. Finally, a team of anti-poisoning dog lovers has been set up with the aim of reducing and preventing cases of poisoning, in view of the fact that poisoned meat has caused the loss of 40 Griffons in the last 20 years.
The results have been good: starting from 100–120 individuals the population has doubled to 230–250 individuals; reproductivity has also improved, with the success of pairs holding territory passing from 35 in 2015 to 57 in 2019.

## A List Less Red

Restocking actions undertaken throughout Italy in the last 20 years have seen a significant increase in species numbers at the national level and a notable decrease in the risk of extinction. On the latest Red List – that of 2019 – the Griffon has, in fact, passed from "critically endangered" (Cr) to "near threatened" (Nt).

How should we see this? As an unhoped-for success for a species that is "ugly, dirty and nasty". The difficult story of the Griffon and all other vultures is, however, not over. The risks, including those in the near future, have not gone away. And neither, then, has the need to carry on working in a practical sense as well as culturally to help people to understand that vultures are "on our side" when it comes to Nature, and that protecting them is both useful and appropriate. Vultures, after all, are anything but vermin.

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## STOP THE BYCATCH!

*Giorgia Gaibani*

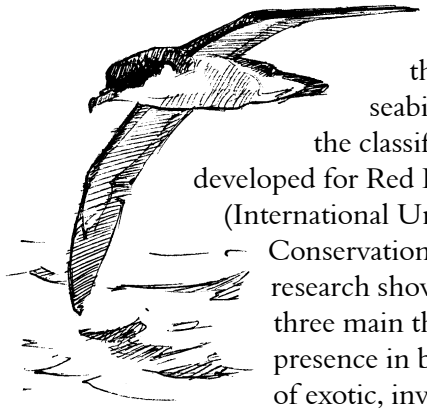
Each year in Europe 200 thousand seabirds die caught by accident in fishing nets. LIPU has proposals to address this major problem.

Flying fast, they skim the surface of the water. Surely seabirds, with such great freedom, can

escape the threat of man? Surely? Unfortunately not: worldwide one-third of the 350 or so known species are under threat. The Balearic Shearwater, with a population just over three thousand breeding pairs, is the most-threatened bird species in Europe, and if things don't change, it is expected to become extinct within 60 years. The Mediterranean is home to birds that are dependent on coastal habitat, such as the Oystercatcher and Kentish Plover, and also to true marine species that spend most of their lives on the open sea, including Scopoli's Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, Audouin's Gull and the tiny Storm Petrel.

*The numbers show that this is a major threat. It is estimated that every year in Europe more than 200 thousand seabirds are caught in fishing gear and die.*

In 2019 BirdLife scientists published a quantitative assessment of threats to the world's 359 seabird species, using the classification system developed for Red Lists by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). Their research shows that there are three main threats: first the presence in breeding colonies of exotic, invasive species such as rats, which prey on eggs and especially on chicks; second the effects of climate change; and finally, bycatch, or the accidental capture of birds in fishing gear. There are other threats too, both on sea and land, such as over-exploitation of fish stocks (and the corresponding decline in prey for seabirds); destruction of coastal habitats; pollution by light, noise, and hydrocarbons; and impact from offshore wind farms.





## Bycatch

The accidental capture of species in fishing gear is known as bycatch and poses an extremely serious threat to marine species, including seabirds, turtles, cetaceans, elasmobranchii (including sharks and rays), corals, and sponges. The fishing can be professional, recreational, or for sport, and this "accidental" (or "accessory") capture is unintended. Bycatch species are not generally eaten.

Of the different kinds of fishing gear, longlines have the greatest impact on seabirds, especially shearwater. The birds are attracted by the bait (particularly small sea fish) and are hooked or entangled by the line as it is set. As the line sinks they drown. Gill nets (which are fixed nets) are also a problem, particularly for diving birds such as Cormorants, which can become entangled and drown as they fly nearby, either by chance or attracted by fish already caught in the net.

The numbers show that this is a major threat. It is estimated that every year in Europe more than 200 thousand seabirds are caught in fishing gear and die. The true figure is probably higher still, as this estimate only covers two of the most-dangerous types of gear, and accessory catch data is rarely recorded. In short, the impact of bycatch, of other human activities, and of climate change is causing a steep decline in marine avifauna. The reduction of bycatch must therefore become a priority, for the protection of these birds and other groups of animals.

## Mitigation Measures

Reduction of accessory catch needs to be the aim of not just environmentalists and scientists, but also of

regulatory authorities and of fishermen themselves. Bycatch has a negative impact both on the quantity of fish caught and on profitability, through smaller catches, wasted bait, and damage to fishing gear. We need to work together to find efficient solutions that are acceptable to everyone. But what can we actually do? There are mitigation measures that have proven, in some cases, to be extremely effective in reducing accessory catch size. Setting longlines in daytime, with few (or no) weights, and using fish as bait, maximises the risk of accidental capture. We can improve the situation by adding weights to the line so that it sinks more quickly and the bait become less accessible to birds. If, in addition to weighting the line, setting takes place at night when birds are less active, there will be another significant reduction in bycatch. Finally, the use of bait that does not attract birds – such as crab, prawn and octopus – can save lives. And these are not the only measures that can help reduce mortality. Avoid discarding fish waste overboard while setting fishing gear. Set the gear when there are fewer birds around. Set lines equipped with "bird-scarer" flags or acoustic deterrents.

*However, while some progress has been made, we are a long way from reaching the objectives set by the EU.*

## What is LIPU asking for?

The need to reduce bycatch has been acknowledged for many years, and the European Union has created various plans to tackle the problem, starting with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive for marine environmental policy (2008/56/CE), then the Action Plan for reducing incidental catches of seabirds in fishing gear (2013), and now the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which requests that bycatch be eliminated or reduced to a minimum. However, while some progress has been made, we are a long way from reaching the objectives set by the EU. Moreover, the data on seabird bycatch is haphazard and not suitable for either assessing the situation or for preparing efficient solutions. And let us also note that the network of SPZs (Zones of Special Protection) for marine habitats is very incomplete.

In short, to eliminate or significantly reduce the problem of bycatch, LIPU has six proposals:

- Quantify the size of the problem at a national level by collecting data (such as including catch records in the electronic logbooks of fishing vessels) to establish the state, extent, and trend with regard to seabird bycatch.
- Implement measures to minimise the level of bycatch (see preceding paragraph), particularly where we have information that bycatch is taking place.
- Protect at least 30 per cent of the marine surface, as required by the EU Strategy for Biodiversity for 2030, and complete the network of marine SPZs as soon as possible. This must be based on scientific criteria, starting with areas identified by LIPU as Important Bird Areas (IBA) for the protection of Scopoli's Shearwater.
- Establish measures for the management (fishing included) of all protected marine areas, according to clearly defined conservation objectives.
- Promote research into mitigation measures for different fishing methods that will reduce the size of bycatch and work better for fishermen.
- Ensure that fishermen are aware of the advantages of bycatch mitigation measures, and train fishermen in the best way to use them.

In this light, the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (PNRR) presents a unique opportunity

in EU history, not only to help society recover from the pandemic, but also to turn towards sustainable development, putting biodiversity and climate at the heart of our recovery plan, boosting the economy, and adopting policies that give real protection to our natural assets. LIPU is asking the government to insert clauses into the draft PNRR for the renewal of marine habitats and the management of commercial fishing activity, including reducing bycatch of species unsuitable for human consumption.

In sum, only a broad partnership can save our seabirds. LIPU is working to ensure that the fast-flying skimming of our seas inspires real freedom.

### The MedBycatch Project

To help tackle the problem of bycatch in a concrete way, LIPU has joined the project MedBycatch. Financed by the Mava Foundation and co-ordinated by BirdLife Europe and BirdLife Central Asia, the project involves partners from various Mediterranean countries: Turkey, Croatia, Morocco, Tunisia, Spain, France, and Italy (where both LIPU and WWF Italia are participating). MedByCatch, which began in 2020 and should finish at the end of 2022, aims to provide political decision-makers with a complete overview of the bycatch problem and influence political decisions in favour of protecting vulnerable species (such as elasmobranchii, turtles, birds, and cetaceans) at both national and local levels. The project also aims to train and support fishermen in the adoption of measures to mitigate bycatch of susceptible species.

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## REHABILITATION CENTRES

### A Bald Ibis (or Hermit Ibis) at the Vicchio Centre

In July 2020 the volunteers at the Raptor Rehabilitation Centre at Mugello were held in suspense by an unusual guest. Bernadette, a female Northern Bald Ibis was spotted in the commune of Scarperia and San Piero (Florence) and rescued after a complicated capture operation co-ordinated by the manager of the Centre with the help of the Forest Rangers from the station at Borgo San Lorenzo, activists from the centre, and the Waldrappteam. The basis for operation involved the managers of the Poggio dei Medici Golf Club, where the injured bird had taken refuge. Bernadette was diagnosed with a fractured tibia and underwent two long operations, which vets from the Waldrappteam carried out. Slowly but surely, she made a complete recovery. This encounter with yet another species rehabilitated at the Centre (the Bald Ibis is extinct as a migratory species in Europe) was a great encouragement and cause of pride for the volunteers, who after five months caring for Bernadette were able to hand her over, in mid-December, to researchers involved in a reintroduction programme.

### A Golden Eagle at Trento

The Eagle was admitted to the Rehabilitation Centre at Trento with a fractured ulna in the left wing. But for this beautiful Golden Eagle, an immature 2-year-old female, the agony had barely begun. Two days after being released the raptor seriously injured its leg while attempting to remove a ring that

*... the Eagle took flight, to the great satisfaction of all the personnel ...*

ornithologists had applied. In spite of medication, the leg did not heal. It was only thanks to an incision in the bone at various points that the blood was able to flow across the two areas of missing skin. The operation – by Doctor Sebastiani – was successful, but the unfortunate bird's difficulties were not yet at an end. Because of the stress and the long period of confinement the Eagle lost six primary feathers from the right wing and six from the left, as well as five feathers from the alula. But while it had to wait another month, in the end, and after four months of care, the Eagle took flight, to the great satisfaction of all the personnel of LIPU's Cras, the veterinary Animal Care Clinic and of the Forest Rangers in the province of Bolzano.

### A Common Sandpiper Caught on a Fish Hook

On the banks of the Ticino, someone noticed a Common Sandpiper in obvious difficulty. It was taken to the LIPU Centre at La Fagiana (Milan), and the staff noticed that a wing was caught up in a fishing line. After a closer examination they saw that the bird had mistaken the hook for prey and swallowed the line as well without being able to get rid of it, and that the line was twisted around the wing. Vet Emanuele Lubian X-rayed the bird and decided on an endoscopic intervention. The operation succeeded, and when it came round from the anaesthetic the bird was found to be in perfect health, and the following day was freed. During a sad and painful year of pandemic, a lovely sign of hope.

### The Life Project's Lanner Falcon at Ficuzza

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre at Ficuzza (Palermo), which specialises in the care and



*In 2020, out of 1,530 birds recovered 237 were diurnal or nocturnal raptors,*

rehabilitation of large raptors, has the advantage of a geographically strategic position given that migratory birds need to rest in Sicily and the island is a perfect place for overwintering. In 2020, out of 1,530 birds recovered 237 were diurnal or nocturnal raptors, among which were a Lesser Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagles, Long-eared Owls and at least 33 Barn Owls. Now, the Life Lanner project set up in 2020 by the Monti Cimini Regional Nature Reserve Lake Vico, the Centre at Ficuzza, as well as other LIPU centres will make an important contribution to the genetic analysis of the Lanner, a very rare raptor in Italy. And as well as genetic analysis, the organizers of the Life group will eventually be given reports of the Lanners presented at LIPU's centres and, in future, samples of or from recovered birds (feathers or carcasses of birds that have already died). The centres might also be able to provide information about the species and about other falcons, which could be used to sketch out a picture of the evolution of the Lanner population on a local and national scale.

## NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

### Frammenti – extra snippets of news by email.

It is many years since we started to email supporters with news snippets, usually taken from the LIPU bulletin boards and these have proven popular. They are sent no more frequently than monthly and the mailing list is kept securely – I never pass email addresses to third parties. If you would like to be

added to this list please send me an email, "Subscribe Frammenti" is enough to join and "Unsubscribe Frammenti" will reverse the process but I hope you'll find the items interesting and relevant.

### Annual Draw 2020

This was well supported and has raised over £2,000, which will be devoted to this year's projects in Italy, of which more later. Four members deserve a mention: the three who won a prize, and David Cianfarani, who sponsored one of the prizes. My thanks go to David and all who took part.

- First prize, £500, was won by Eddie Fonge of Northants,
- Second prize, £200, went to Keith Beswick of Norfolk
- and Third Prize, £100 was won by David Dicks of Hampshire.

Thanks again to all who bought tickets and may you have better luck in the next draw later this year.

### Membership Cards – A Change

I was asked recently why we issue membership cards when many organisations no longer do so. This, and a technical problem, was discussed by your trustees and, as usual, there were arguments both for and against retaining or abandoning the cards.

We have decided not to post membership cards on renewal for a trial period of one year. However, I do hold a stock of blank cards and will be happy to send one if you mention this when you renew. There is clearly a saving of postage, which is always welcome to this Yorkshireman, and I have never known of any member being asked for proof of membership when visiting a reserve in Italy; but, as I have said, I can provide a card if needed.

I hope this will meet with your approval. The matter will be reviewed at the end of the year.

### Sackcloth and Ashes

I am guilty of causing much confusion and I apologise to all who were puzzled by the inserts in the last Ali. Matt Hines, our Chairman, wrote a request for all supporters to see if they could recruit new members from their circle of friends, family and acquaintances. I thought it would be useful to include a couple of recruiting fliers that could be given to any potential new members.

I failed, however, to explain this, and some thought that this was an early launch of the Annual Appeal. It wasn't; details of the Appeal can be found below, to those who sent donations with the slips, please be assured that they have been allocated to this year's appeal. Once again, my apologies for the confusion. (May I take off this hair shirt now?)

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## LIPU-UK ANNUAL APPEAL

As you know, each year your trustees agree – with Claudio Celada, LIPU's Conservation Director – a set of projects that we would like to support in the coming twelve months.

This year the list of projects is complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which interfered with last year's work to varying degrees and resulted in one project being cancelled and its funds being carried over to this year. The pandemic is still with us as I write, and the projects we have agreed on have been carefully assessed as to their chances of success in the face of the restrictions that will be in force.

We want to raise a total of €74,000 to fund the following work:

1. **Anti-poaching measures**. This will enable volunteers and rangers to operate in three areas where poaching is still a problem – Sardinia in December, around Brescia in the autumn and on the Messina Strait for the spring migration.

2. **Migration monitoring**. This well-established project dovetails very well into the Messina work cited above. Collection of data and real-time reporting of movements to the team from the Strait means that the right people can be in the right place, including the Carabinieri.

3. **Bird hospitals**. Support from local authorities if often lacking and we contribute funds for the purchase of consumable items such as surgical instruments and food.

4. **Important Bird Areas update**. This publication is very important, showing clear evidence of where, and why, certain areas are important for birds. For the data to be valid it must be checked and verified regularly, and this project thus also has our support.



5. **Local Conservation Groups**. These groups need help to carry out and expand their work, which is often unsung and costly. Support for grass-roots teams is needed, and we are happy to provide it.

Projects protecting individual species are always important, and this year we have more than usual.

4. **Collared Pratincole**. Last year's efforts to protect nest sites around Gela in Sicily were a success and will be repeated. Volunteers search for nests and ask the farmers to delay ploughing until the young birds leave the nest. All farmers thus approached, so far, have been happy to do this once they know the reason, and two declined the modest compensation they were offered.

5. **Montagu's Harrier**. Another ground-nesting bird, and the same efforts employed for the Pratincole are delivering encouraging results. Similarly, the areas surveyed will be expanded.

6. **Red-footed Falcon**. This delightful falcon has established a breeding colony near LIPU HQ in Parma and research into foraging areas and methods is supplemented by the provision of nest boxes, which have been readily adopted. This project is making real progress, the colony is expanding, and the work will continue with our help.

7. **Bonelli's Eagle**. LIPU has been protecting some of the nesting sites in Sicily for some years now and we are keen that this should continue. Protection measures are succeeding and the numbers of this beautiful eagle are increasing steadily.

8. **Lanner Falcon**. Last year's trial project was disrupted by COVID regulations, but it is clear that further work should be done – including adapting the methods used in Sicily for eagles to the protection of these falcons on the mainland – to save them from the foreign falconry trade.

9. **Kentish Plover**. This shorebird nests on beaches in Sardinia and a first attempt to assess possible problems was abandoned last year when access to the beaches was denied due COVID containment measures. There is still a risk for the coming breeding season, but it appears that there is a good chance that we will make progress in 2021.

As you can see, we have a long list of work that we feel is important and will benefit from our help. I hope you agree and will want to support our only direct appeal for funds in the year. Please give what you can – in the past your generosity has been quite amazing and has left me lost for words. Thank you.

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I have to thank my production team again for their excellent work in bringing this issue to you. They were: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Betty and Andy Merrick, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty, Lesley Tompkins and John Walder. Line drawings are used by permission of the RSPB, photographs are the copyright of the credited photographers, who for this issue seem to be the Editor.

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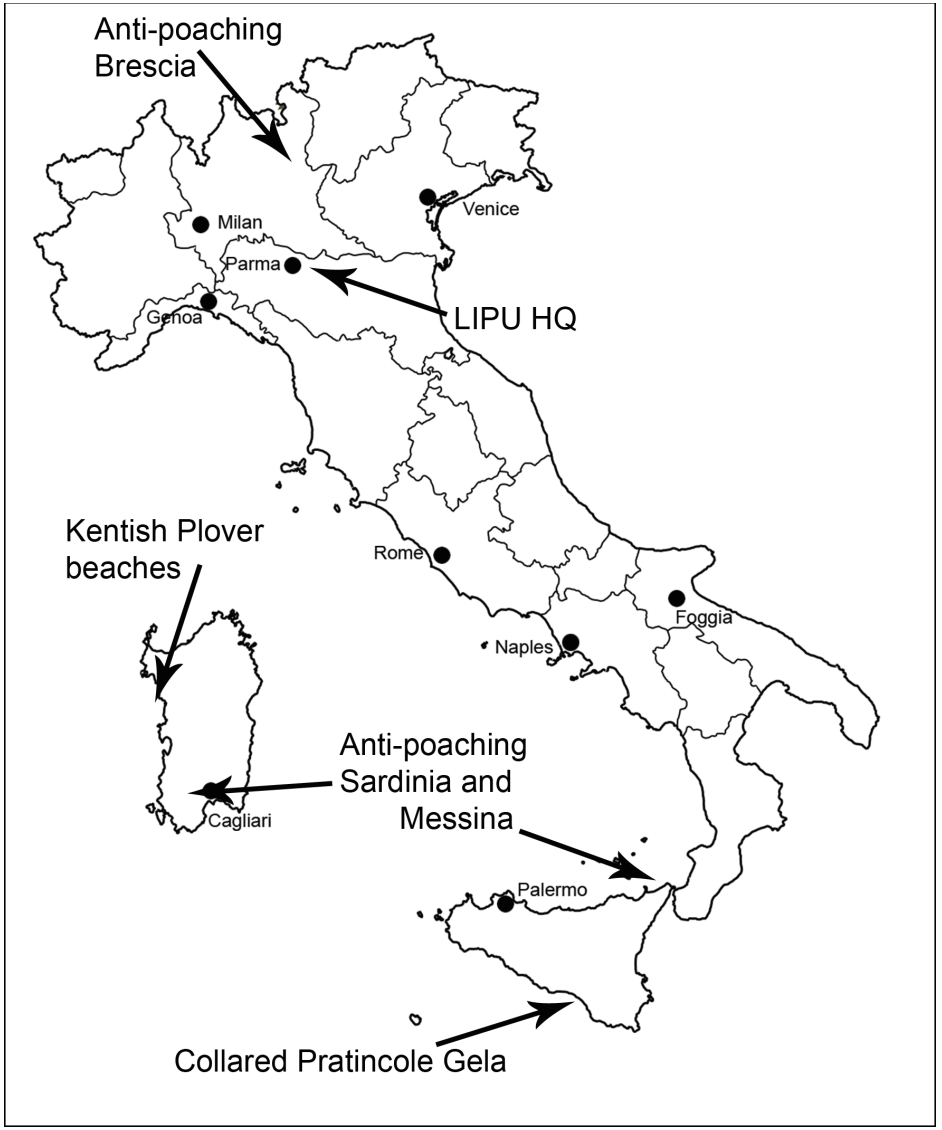

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