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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

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- Annual appeal

Spring 2022

Hope for the future.
Choose Nature is the theme of these young Italians at a recent rally.

A fine image, by Michele Mendi, a member of the LIPU Council, of a Booted Eagle in flight. Citizen Science proves that this species is now wintering in Sicily – see page 27.

What is it about spring?

Editorial

David Lingard

By chance, Danilo writes in this issue of the current season at the same time as I feel my optimism rising and it's all to do with this time of the year.

Poets have written of it, seemingly for ever, but every year, at this time, it performs its little miracles. The leaves are coming out. The migrant birds are starting to arrive, the Blue Tits are nest building in our camera box and we are looking ahead with a smile again.

The doom and gloom of the last two years may, at last, be less overpowering and nature is there, as always, to bring cheer and hope into our lives. As the restrictions in our country are lifted, so it seems that Italy is on the point of doing the same and the work of LIPU will be able to resume its previous pattern.

Our friends in Italy are keen to take up the challenge for another year and we are equally determined to help in any way we can and that simple statement introduces our one and only appeal for this year. The projects we have agreed to support are described later in this edition and I am sure you'll agree that all are valuable, please help us and let us see if we can match last year's wonderful total of over £40,000.

EVERY SPRING IS PRECIOUS

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director General

Silent Spring, Rachel Carson's work on our disappearing birds, which changed the face of environmentalism and many of the attitudes of our society, came out sixty years ago. A new book by Danilo Selvaggi tells of its history and demonstrates its relevance today.

' Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song. This sudden silencing of the song of birds, this obliteration of the colour and beauty and interest they lend to our world have come about swiftly, insidiously, and unnoticed…' What is happening to the songbirds of America? The answer was to come in one of the most important and resonant books of modern times.

Raising the Alarm

Silent Spring appeared on September 27th 1962, extensive extracts having already appeared in the weekly *New Yorker*. Its author, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, nature lover and birder, was a talented writer and already well-known for her evocative books on the sea, at the boundary of poetry and natural science. Now however poetry was laid aside. Rachel had a different task to accomplish. The pervasive use of chemical substances to combat so-called pests, from insects to plants and invasive fungi, was not only the source of profoundly mixed benefits, but was also

the cause of massively detrimental side-effects in terms of water pollution, deaths among birds and other animals, and damage to human health. Something had to be done.

Aeroplanes flew over the targeted areas, cities included, and sprayed them with new generation pesticides

A new Frontier for Progress

The chemical question had come to prominence in the early forties of the last century, a so-called new frontier for progress. The discovery of the insecticidal properties of DDT had opened the door to the use of this and other, similar products in the war on harmful insects, and more generally as a barrier to unwanted parts of nature. Americans therefore, but not only Americans, began to use them extensively, and for ever more reasons: for the disinfection of cellars and cupboards, the cleaning of clothes, and for treating gardens and agricultural land, culminating in the massive interventions by the Department of Agriculture in cases of more resistant infestations, among which was what became a *cause célèbre* – the fire ant.

It isn't Working

The mass spraying was carried out summarily, as if in a war zone. Aeroplanes flew over the targeted areas, cities included, and sprayed them with new generation pesticides such as chlordane, heptachloride, dieldrin, aldrin, endrin, and of course DDT, which became the main example of the issue. Poisons rained down indiscriminately both on the areas to be treated and on household verandahs, like manna from heaven.

The results, however, were not forthcoming, other than in very limited ways. Insects that were supposed to have been eradicated came back, sometimes in even greater numbers, with the same outcome when the spraying was repeated. Moreover, these operations were anything but harm free; the poison entered food chains, the very web of life, and struck places it had no cause to.

In the case of the Michigan robins, one of the defining examples of the silent spring, Rachel Carson brought to light the connections of the simple but lethal mechanism, like Chinese puzzle boxes, that were the cause: elm trees, affected by a fungal infection, were sprayed with huge doses of DDT; in the autumn, the contaminated leaves fell from the trees, and when the rains came, were turned into mulch; this in turn was eaten by the worms which absorbed the poison, and which then either died or effectively became vectors. Finally. in the spring, the return of the migratory birds, especially the American Robin (*Turdus migratoris*), saw them eating the poison-bearing worms, with the end result being that, stricken by the poison, they fell dead or lost fertility.

Across America

The range of examples Rachel Carson described was vast. Backed up by ornithologists, naturalists and even oncologists in the case of the damage to human health, she put forward a burgeoning dossier of problems recorded from the whole of America, from New England to California, from Wisconsin to Louisiana. It involved birds of every species: woodcocks, swallows, cardinals, wrens,

... then, out of the blue, they had completely disappeared ...

warblers, quails, pheasants, water birds (via fish from contaminated lakes and rivers), day and night raptors, all the way up to the Bald Eagle, as symbolic as the American Robin as a victim of the silent spring. In the US in 1963 only 417 pairs were recorded. Ultimately, the higher up the food chain a species is, the greater the accumulation of the poison.

'Our area used to seem like a paradise for birds... But then, out of the blue, they had completely disappeared... their songs were heard no more. It felt a strange thing, almost a fearful one.' Rachel collected many testimonies like this, coming out of the experiences of a wide range of people who had found themselves in the same situation and wanted to let her know. And no birds sang. One after another, they had departed or died.

An Offence

The mobilisation of civil society was one of the motives driving *Silent Spring* and one of Rachel's major points for action. The deafening silence that had fallen over their springs touched Americans to the quick. It was an offence against them. An appropriate use of the word, for it was a situation that was unnatural, insupportable and, indeed, offensive. At the same time, events showed how much love people had for birds and nature, and how they were central to their existence. For birdwatching, it was a re-creation of the spirit, the sensation of being in other than human company, the spring. The arrival of the robins, one might say, was the spring, and spring was the arrival of the robins. Therefore, if they did not return, it was as if the coming of spring itself was diminished,

engulfed by a malign force, a demon of darkness and silence. Every spring is precious, wrote Rachel, and people were being robbed of a treasure.

the deaths among the songbirds in the little sanctuary she had, as a result of spraying against mosquitoes.

Letters

Rachel received innumerable letters during the years the book was in preparation, while keeping the subject in the public eye through conferences and pre-publication articles. Among these one was particularly significant. Olga Owens Huckins, of Duxbury, Massachusetts, told her about the deaths among the songbirds in the little sanctuary she had, the result of spraying against mosquitoes. In two days she and her husband found seven, of which one died before their eyes, falling stone dead from a branch of one of their trees. The birds, Olga wrote, all died horribly and in the same way, their bills gaping open and their splayed claws clenched to their breasts in agony. The remedy, she said, was not to double up on the spraying, but to stop it. As soon as she received the letter, in January 1958, Rachel set herself definitively to the task.

The Beginnings of Understanding

And the task was a hard one. Her very status as a biologist came under severe attack, driven by a well-funded and hostile chemical industry on the one hand, and parts of the press and the political establishment on the other, directing their fire both on her science and on her personality. A woman, an hysterical old maid, a priestess of nature, a birdwatcher. What has a woman to do with science? How can a birdwatcher tell America how to live? If Miss Carson was given a hearing,

it would mean abandoning chemical production just to protect a few birds, and the world would go back to the Middle Ages, plagued by illnesses and insects.

In reality, far from the exaggerations of her detractors, Rachel Carson never proposed a complete ban on pesticides, but only a reduction in their use, and a recourse to more natural and effective methods, knowing well that a world growing already more complex in the fifties, could not subsist without technology. At the same time, she knew that the world had also started down a darker road: that of wanting to dominate and subjugate nature, to squeeze from it the final drop. It was not only the issue of pesticides, but rather of the need to bring about a complete change in our relationship with nature, based on knowledge, appreciation and even reverence and a sense of wonder. It was not enough merely to stop harming the environment. What we had instead to do was to love and understand it more.

wanting to dominate and subjugate Nature, to squeeze from it the final drop.

The Season of Nature

Though Rachel Carson's enemies were many, she did not lack supporters, and not only among the public, but also among the same mass media and political establishment , including the President, John F. Kennedy, who personally instituted a commission to study the 'Carson Case', while the Senate set up a series of *ad hoc* hearings, and the *New York Times* even proposed her for a Nobel Prize. There were prime-time television specials. *Silent Spring*, which in a short time had sold 500,000 copies and was going into translation worldwide, was beginning a new

season of its own, one of increased attention to the environment, which soon after led to a long series of laws on the conservation of nature, environmental impact assessments, the reduction of pollution and so on, then at last to the ban on the use of DDT, on June 14 1972, and restrictions on the use of other chemical products. Rachel was by then no longer with us, but it would certainly have brought happiness to her.

Today and Tomorrow

Many things have changed by now, and many have improved, but there are still great problems to be found everywhere. 'The agricultural lobby claims that the use of chemical means has been reduced' - says Federica Luoni, LIPU's head of agricultural affairs - 'but the figures do not tell the whole story. The quantities are still enormous, and the persistence of substances in the environment and the underestimation of their cumulative effects leads us to believe that the problems of their toxic effects are far from being resolved. Since 2010 we have reduced the danger by only 15 per cent. Added to that is the deployment of other substances such as neonicotinoids, responsible among other things for the decline in the number of bees, and the persistent use of glyphosate, highly carcinogenic though it is. In some ways it is the new DDT, and it should go the same way.'

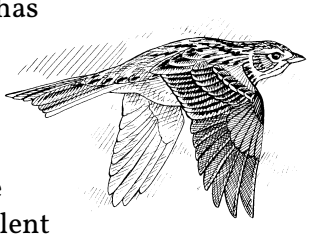
On this subject, the EU Commission is unfortunately ambivalent. On one side it has set out ambitious environmental targets for agriculture, including a halving in the use and the risks of chemical products and the dedication of at least 10 per cent of the area under agricultural

cultivation for the protection of biodiversity. But at the same time it has not made the targets binding, and above all continues to encourage agricultural politics that lead in an altogether different direction. The net result is that the agricultural transition is being eternally put off until tomorrow, and agriculture continues to be the main cause of biodiversity loss. In the world and almost certainly also in Italy.

The total population of the 41 species concerned has gone down by about 8 to 14 million.

Silent Fields

'Our monitoring of birds and the agricultural environment' - says Laura Silva, head of LIPU's Farmyard Bird Index Project - 'gives us a lot of information on the quality of these environments, on which the quality of our own lives depends. Compared then to the start of the study in 2000, today's datum stands at -28 per cent. Species such as Skylarks, Yellow Wagtails, Wrynecks, Swallows and Stonechats have undergone a ruinous decline. The total population of the forty-one species concerned has gone down by about 8 to 14 million. A staggering number, especially if we tie it to the ecosystem services that come with these animals.' All in all, another silent spring, and one that is no cause for surprise. The processes we have set in motion, of the mechanisation of the world, of the hyper-exploitation of the land, cannot but lead to such outcomes and at the same time are hard to bring to a halt. Rachel Carson knew this, well aware of the length of the journey, but aware also that we have without halting to continue along it to the end.



Rachel beyond Rachel

Silent Spring has forged a new environmentalism, aimed at normative change and the transformation of legal and societal norms from the ground up, and changed habits and modes of thinking. All the same, it was not the only event on Rachel Carson's journey. In *Rachel dei pettirossi*, shortly to be published on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Silent Spring, I look to show what a rich and moving story hers is. A story of science, enthusiasm, passion, courage, lucidity, suffering and happiness. The story of a woman who believed in the transformative power of storytelling, in the power of beauty, in a marriage between science and poetry and between poetry and nature. A woman too who confronted the trials of illness and did not allow them to constrain her, right up to the end. An extraordinary example of knowledge and the bearing of witness, among those that should stay with us for life.

A story of science, enthusiasm, passion, courage, lucidity, suffering and happiness.

Will They Return?

There is one particular episode from Rachel's personal life, among the many that deserve to be recounted. It is when, in September 1963, with her friend Dorothy, she witnessed, greatly moved, the migration of Monarch butterflies on the coast of Maine. 'But most of all I will remember the Monarch butterflies, that slow stream of tiny winged forms, one after the other, each driven by an irresistible impulse.' Millions of flakes of orange flame, flying towards Mexico for the winter. Will they return? Many of them, no, says Rachel, but that does not matter. To be involved in the adventure of life and play one's part, that is

the important thing. To savour the taste of every precious moment, and that of every spring. Of every instant this planet grants us and which no evil force has the right to take away. This is what matters above all.

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BIODIVERSITY, NO TIME TO LOSE

A conference, at Kunming in China, will be a key step towards protecting vast areas of the planet. LIPU, through BirdLife International, will be there. Italy must now lay down a strategy that matches the seriousness of the situation.

Claudio Celada, Director of Nature Conservation
Giorgia Gaibani, head of Land Protection and Natura 2000

In the course of recent history, humankind has endured huge impacts from pandemics, world

wars, and economic and social crises. We have lived through environmental devastation on a massive scale and yet we have never before come so close to breaking point, where the survival of the biosphere and the integrity of the atmosphere – on which our very existence depends – have been called into question. And this is happening now, not in some distant 100 years' time.

The message has now reached the ears of all political decision makers and the public at large, at least in theory: the mass media no longer ignores environmental problems, and has paid them a lot of attention in recent years.

Addressing issues such as the crisis in biodiversity and climate change is complex and difficult, and this is why the task has been entrusted to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Kunming

Decisions within the CBD, as with similar international conventions, are taken by a Conference of Parties (COP), made up of the signatory states. The next and fifteenth conference of the CBD should take place at Kunming, China, between 25 April and 8 May next (COVID permitting). The aim is to agree a post-2020 biodiversity framework – so, a biodiversity strategy for 2021 onwards. The context, a failure to fully implement previous goals.

A delegation from BirdLife International will take part in COP 5 to ensure that crucial targets are approved, and not diluted, during negotiations.

Those who have taken part in this type of conference before will know how frustrating the decision-making process can be, and how it can lead to diluted measures. They will also know that vigilance is needed in the following years to ensure that good intentions lead to effective implementation. But for many areas of the planet, UN conventions and their associated funding remain the only available means of making nature conservation possible.

Both the European Council and the European Parliament have expressed full support for this environmental initiative ...

The European Strategy

The European Union is a signatory to the CBD and will play a crucial role in setting concrete and ambitious targets. These are the same targets set out in its Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Both the European Council and the European Parliament have expressed full support for this environmental initiative, which has the ambition, as stated on its title page, of 'bringing nature back to the centre of our lives'.

Among the most relevant objectives is the development of a system of protected areas, to include at least 30 per cent of both land and sea surface within each member state, 10 per cent of which has to be exclusively dedicated to nature and be covered by 'rigorous protection'. The strategy additionally requires each member state to adopt and implement a national plan for the restoration of nature, putting habitat back into a good state of conservation.

Over the next few months, LIPU will closely follow the implementation of the EU strategy at a national level. In coming years the focus will shift

to verifying that the implementation is complete and correct.

Protect and Regenerate

In keeping with the EU strategy, Italy is working on a National Strategy for Biodiversity 2030, with the overall objectives of creating a coherent network of terrestrial and marine protected areas and restoring terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

In sum, Italy adopted the EU strategy for biodiversity in May 2020, will – in a few months time – launch a global strategy for biodiversity (the CBD), and is about to put its own national strategy in place. In addition, Italy will soon launch a Plan for Ecological Transition, an operating instrument to help implement the biodiversity strategy.

A Real Ecological Transition

Will this many-layered system be enough to take the conservation of biodiversity in the country to a new level? This will primarily depend on how the concept of ecological transition is interpreted: if we continue to plan and to act without giving nature a central role, and to tackle climate change without integrating the protection of biodiversity into the framework, then LIPU has its doubts. If this transpires, we will continue to raise a dissenting voice.

If, instead, the various strategies – each on their own geographical scale but working together in an integrated way – become a key element in halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity, then we

shall be only too happy to share this new vision in a constructive and concrete way. Biodiversity must become the keystone holding together global, European, and national green deals, ensuring the future of all living beings and above all of the ecosystem on which we all depend.

LIPU has defined a clear strategy based on key elements (protected areas, ecological networks, protection of land, conservation of species, and environmental restoration), elements that must form the basis upon which to create the aforementioned 30 per cent of protected surface area (see box). One thing is for sure, past rhetoric, which kept the economy and human interests separate from the conservation of biodiversity, belongs in the past. But there is still no time to lose. Any delay in starting conservation work and restoring our natural capital is not only unnecessary, it will have an unacceptable cost for human lives, health, territorial security, and the community welfare of both humans and the other species that still inhabit our planet.

What is LIPU Asking for?

The new protected areas must, as a priority:

• complete the Natura 2000 network, with priority and urgency being given to marine areas, which require the same relevance as Special Protection Zones (SPZs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCI);

• complete the system of national parks, as identified by law;

• give binding protection to areas that host species and habitats where Italy has an important duty of care and/or endemic species that are insufficiently protected by the current network;

• protect areas that are the object of environmental restoration, as part of the future National Plan for the recovery of nature; and

• maximise the protection of areas that are important for carbon storage.

LOST MELODIES

The 'green' agricultural revolution launched in the last century has caused a serious decline in biodiversity in agricultural environments. It is now a matter of taking action to achieve policies that finally respect nature and birdsong in the coming years.

Federica Luoni, Head of Agriculture

In the Italian countryside, spring is becoming increasingly silent. Our senses tell us this when we walk through it, often in vain, with binoculars around our necks, and it is confirmed by the Farmland Bird Index project, whose data, collected and processed by LIPU on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, show a 30% drop in the populations of birds in agricultural envi-

ronments in our country. These figures highlight a decline that began several years ago and has led to the disappearance of Skylark singing, Stonechats flying and sparrows singing in many areas of our peninsula. However, they also tell us that in Italian agriculture we can still find some happy islands of spring, such as some areas of the Apennines or the Mediterranean steppes.

The difference between these agricultural systems, which also determines the biodiversity they can host, depends on a key factor: intensification. The hyper-productive thrust of world, and therefore Italian, agriculture began in the post-war period with the so-called Green Revolution, theorised in the early 1940s by the American agronomist Norman Borlaug and applied in much of the world, starting with America. It quickly led to the "Silent Springs" described by Rachel Carson. And it is on this model that Europe's first sector policy, the Common Agricultural Policy, commonly abbreviated as the CAP, is based.

More Food, less Biodiversity

The Common Agricultural Policy officially came into being in 1962, but its origins lie directly in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, whose aim was to boost the economy and prosperity of a continent tested by the Second World War. The original objectives of the CAP were therefore aimed at increasing productivity through very high subsidies. Since the post-war period, the European countryside has witnessed two opposing phenomena. The first has seen production concentrated in the most suitable areas, such as the great plains, with large doses of pesticides and fertilisers being

introduced into the soil, water and air, resulting in a progressive loss of organic substance in the soil and the destruction of the natural elements of the agro-ecosystem that characterised the agricultural landscape, such as hedges, rows of vines and small wetlands. In the second, less productive areas, such as inland areas or mountain pastures, have been progressively abandoned, to the detriment of some peculiar natural habitats but also a reduction in hydrogeological stability and the social fabric.

The decline in biodiversity described by Carson in America also began on our continent in the early years of the CAP. Then, thanks to increased public awareness of the impacts of the agricultural model, supported by the CAP, on the environment and biodiversity, Europe had to take action. In a succession of seven-year programmes, the EU has tried to change the regulations to make this policy, which now accounts for about a third of the European budget, more sustainable. Despite this, the environmental and social performance of the CAP has not shown a radical change of pace, as highlighted by the performance analyses carried out by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and demonstrated by the continuous deterioration of environmental standards.

Land That Lives

In 2017, the European Commission, in view of the 2021-2027 programming, launched a public consultation to ask European citizens what kind of post-2020 CAP they wanted.

The response was not long in coming: more than 260,000 citizens, including more than 33,000 in

Italy, signed the Living Land campaign calling for an agriculture that pays attention to biodiversity and the climate. This call was then taken up by the European Commission as part of the Green Deal, with the issuing of the Biodiversity 2030 and Farm to Fork strategies in May 2020 and the Soil Strategy in December 2021. What is missing, however, are the regulations of the new CAP. Already unambitious since the Commission's 2018 proposal, they have been weakened even further in the long and complex amendment process by the European Parliament and the Agriculture Council (a body that brings together the agriculture ministers of all the Member States), which, instead of incorporating the indications coming from the European strategies, have kept the agricultural model based on intensification almost unchanged.

Due to delays in this process, the current programming was extended for another two years, postponing the entry into force of the new rules until 2023. The new CAP therefore came into force in June 2021, leaving much room for decision-making to the Member States, which are required to draw up their own National Strategy Plan (NSP), also through a process involving all the socio-economic partners, including environmental associations.

A Plan that is not very Green

The process of writing the Italian National Hydrological Plan started very late compared to the rest of Europe and was very slow. After a succession of technical and political meetings at the end of 2021, on 31 December the ministry

sent the plan to the European Commission. LIPU, together with the associations of the CambiamoAgricoltura coalition and a wider group of environmental associations, has tried to influence the plan by taking part in the meetings, commenting on the available documents and presenting a series of concrete proposals to the ministry and the regions. Starting from the Farmland Bird Index data and the needs of birds in agricultural environments, we drew up a list of measures needed to conserve the avifauna, framing them in an agroecological approach, thanks to the support of the Italian Agroecology Association, providing, for example the creation and maintenance of hedges, rows of vines, wetlands, naturalistic management of meadows and pastures, the prolonged flooding of rice fields, the conversion of intensive arable land into non-cultivated areas or permanent meadows in which a percentage of areas for bird nesting and pollinating insects are dedicated.

In the end, while the more than 1,500 pages of the NSP include a welcome focus on and support for organic farming, the rest of the biodiversity and climate instruments are put on the back burner, starting with first pillar interventions (more than 70% of the total budget) aimed at supporting the status quo.

Ecoschemes, not Good Enough

Although the reform introduced a new type of intervention, the ecoschemes, which were supposed to support good practices for the climate, the environment and animal welfare, Italy has not taken this opportunity, providing

5 ecoschemes that are not very ambitious and not effective in reaching the targets set by the European Strategies. For example, the absence of an ecoscheme for the maintenance of biodiversity areas (such as hedges and rows of vines) is a serious problem, and even in cases where potentially useful measures are envisaged, such as the grassing of orchards, olive groves and vineyards and the creation of flower belts for pollinators, the commitments requested of farmers contain numerous critical elements that make these measures ineffective in terms of conserving birds in agricultural environments.

The Italian National Development Plan therefore once again delegates biodiversity and climate measures to the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) to be implemented by the regions. But we also know how inefficient this instrument can be. Although there are some good practices in the list of 76 measures from which the regions will be able to draw to build their RDPs, much will depend on how much of the budget will be made available to support them and how much information and training will be provided to the agricultural world to encourage their adoption, especially at district level.

LIPU will continue to fight in the coming months and will ask the European Commission to amend the Italian plan, the Ministry to rethink some of its decisions and the regions to be more ambitious and far-sighted.

For birds and nature, however, there is still hope. If the institutions have once again bowed to the logic of profit and the world of agro-industry,

we, as consumers, can choose to buy from those farmers, more and more numerous, who have decided to change their ways, choosing to produce in harmony with the environment, eliminating synthetic products, recreating spaces for nature, thinking of animal welfare, turning to short and circular supply chains, in an expression choosing agroecology.

And so, songs and flights of birds will finally return to populate our countryside and our hearts.

LEARNING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND US

I Love Wandering, How about You?

The joy of wandering through nature, discovering the delights that usually escape us, accompanied by LIPU in a new project on our sanctuaries and reserves, and in our cities:

Danilo Selvaggi, Director General
Chiara Manghetti, Education department

Walking aimlessly, without a planned route, and most likely with no preset destination: that is what we define as 'wandering', the kind of experience that many artists, philosophers and intellectuals consider precious. Far from being a waste of time, it's a privileged experience for any human being. Wandering, in fact, is an excellent

premise for reflecting on your surroundings with less tension, less rigidity and frenzy, and therefore with an openness to the world, awareness and awe. Wandering puts us in a mindset to better appreciate the places we visit, to let ourselves be seduced by the tracks we follow, to enjoy every step of the journey from beginning to end. Whilst wandering, we can focus on the ground below our feet and the resultant emotions evoked within us, rather than on the need to arrive, at the earliest possible moment, at our destination. And so we discover all around us a world of possibilities that we usually ignore. A world of surprises, of small and large wonder that had previously escaped us. Returning home, after a 'wandering' experience, can mean returning transformed, more serene, richer in experience and emotions.

Happily Lost in Nature

If wandering is an interesting experience in general, doing it in nature is even more amazing: the trees, wind, birdsong, animal tracks, and the much frequented and also the less trodden paths, the living things with which we share these places, especially the most elusive and less visible ones. In itself, nature offers us a series of extraordinary spectacles to enjoy, each one a real blessing. But if we are in the right frame of mind, then those spectacles can be even more compelling. In other words, the attitude of the wanderer is all-important when visiting nature. When we let ourselves go and get lost in nature, rather than controlling our actions and our movements, we happily abandon ourselves, even free ourselves, at least for a while, from the rigour of clocks and the domination of technology.

Technology? No Thanks

And yes, technology is an important issue. Technology is extremely useful, but also a big problem. These days, technology intrudes into all aspects of our lives. The excessive use of technological devices and our growing dependence on smartphones, computers, iPads, applications, social media are all a distraction to our minds and to our senses, such that we become desensitised and detached from the physical world around us. So, at a time when our link with technology is so strong and pervasive in every type of activity (moving, making purchases, having contacts with people, 'having fun') the idea of getting lost in nature, for once without technology, and being able to enjoy its richness more intimately, can truly be a revolutionary, transformative and rewarding experience.

Wanderers in Nature

This is why LIPU has created Wandering through Nature, a series of events scheduled for the entire month of April at LIPU sanctuaries and reserves, and also in green spaces in many of our cities. Our volunteers and staff will 'guide us without guiding us' to discover nature. They will offer us simple ideas and basic materials designed to stimulate the sense of wandering in us, each of us in our own way and according to our own perspective. They will help us to make a stick to aid our wandering, to document our observations in nature, to create a sound archive, to grasp the rhythm of the place we are visiting (each place has its own rhythm and it is important to understand it and to move in unison). But above all, to live the experience in

nature with the most open spirit possible. In this way, we will observe like we have never before observed a natural habitat, noticing the details, finding clues that reveal invisible presences, enjoying things that at first sight we had not previously noticed, even in places that we have long frequented and know well – that is, we believed we knew well. Volunteers and staff will facilitate the programme but the real guides, ultimately, will be our hidden creativity and our feelings.

And then, without overthinking it, let's put one foot in front of the other and choose to become wanderers too, to wander through nature. It will be a wonderful experience that we will long remember, and treasure for years to come. And perhaps, who knows, we will be able to experience that communion with nature that the great wanderers and nature lovers, including John Muir, experienced. John Muir once wrote: 'I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in'.

* * *

SNIPPETS

Booted Eagles, 78 birds counted

Citizen science was the protagonist of the second simultaneous census of the wintering juvenile eagle in Sicily. Lipu, Afni Sicilia, Cea Odv, Società Siciliana di Scienze Naturali and Cea Messina organised a simultaneous survey across Sicily on 16 January, involving more than 160 enthusiasts.

In fact, until the early 2000s, this eagle used Italy only as a stopover before reaching Africa and spending the winter there. But since then, thanks to the mild winter and the presence of food, there has been a sharp increase in the number of individuals wintering in the south, especially in Sicily.

The data, a preview, speak of 78 individuals of juvenile eagles surveyed, including 17 at the Pino D'Aleppo Nature Reserve in Vittoria (Ragusa).

Record-breaking Sardinia for the Osprey

A record winter for the Osprey in Sardinia: 45 wintering birds were observed thanks to a census coordinated last winter by the Sardinian Osprey Research Group and LIPU. This confirms a positive trend that has also occurred in the Iberian peninsula, probably due to climate change.

This census confirmed that the wetlands in the Oristano area are the most important wintering area in the Mediterranean basin for this species. The highest concentration was at the Mistras pond, thanks to the abundance of fish and the depth and transparency of the water.

In addition, ring reading has shown that several birds come from central and northern Europe and thus share wintering areas with those that breed along the Mediterranean coast.

Sardinia therefore plays an important role in the conservation of the Osprey, not only as an important wintering area but also as a resting place during migration. Finally, since 2020, a pair

has chosen Sardinia's cliffs to nest; there have not been any eggs of this species on our island since the late 1960s: to date, five young have successfully flown away.

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LIPU-UK APPEAL - THE 2022 PROJECTS

The work of LIPU for the protection and conservation of birds has been succeeding for many years now and our support is no longer biased to the anti-poaching work – important though that is, it is a mere shadow of the efforts of previous years.

We have agreed to support twelve LIPU projects in the coming year and you'll see that many are devoted to protecting a single species, the sort of hands-on work at a local level that I particularly enjoyed when I was younger and more active.

Please help us reach our target of €93,000 by giving what you can to a cause in which we all believe; the projects are:

• Consumables for the CRUMA rescue centre in Livorno which specialises in seabirds but treats everything brought to it.

• Reduction of "marine bycatch" the birds caught and usually killed by fishing.

• Protection of Bonelli's Eagle nest sites in Sicily.

• Anti-poaching; the work of rangers in Calabria and at the Messina Strait.

• The monitoring of raptor migration through Sicily and this is co-ordinated with the anti-poaching camps.

• Research into the habitat used by Red-footed Falcons breeding near Parma.

• Protection of Kentish Plover nesting sites in Sardinia and Calabria.

• Protection of Collared Pratincole nests near Gela in Sicily,

• Protection of Montagu's Harrier nesting sites around Viterbo and in Marche.

• Research into population trends of the Ortolan Bunting in the Marche region.

• Support for "Green Future Citizens", an educational project.

• Support for Local Conservation groups.

Despite all the problems which have beset us since the start of the pandemic, your financial support has been truly exceptional – I'm confident that you will agree with the importance of these projects and I hope you will help us with your usual generosity – Thank You.

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Thanks to the production team for this issue: Dave Brooks, Betty Merrick, Caterina Paone, Peter Rafferty and John Walder.

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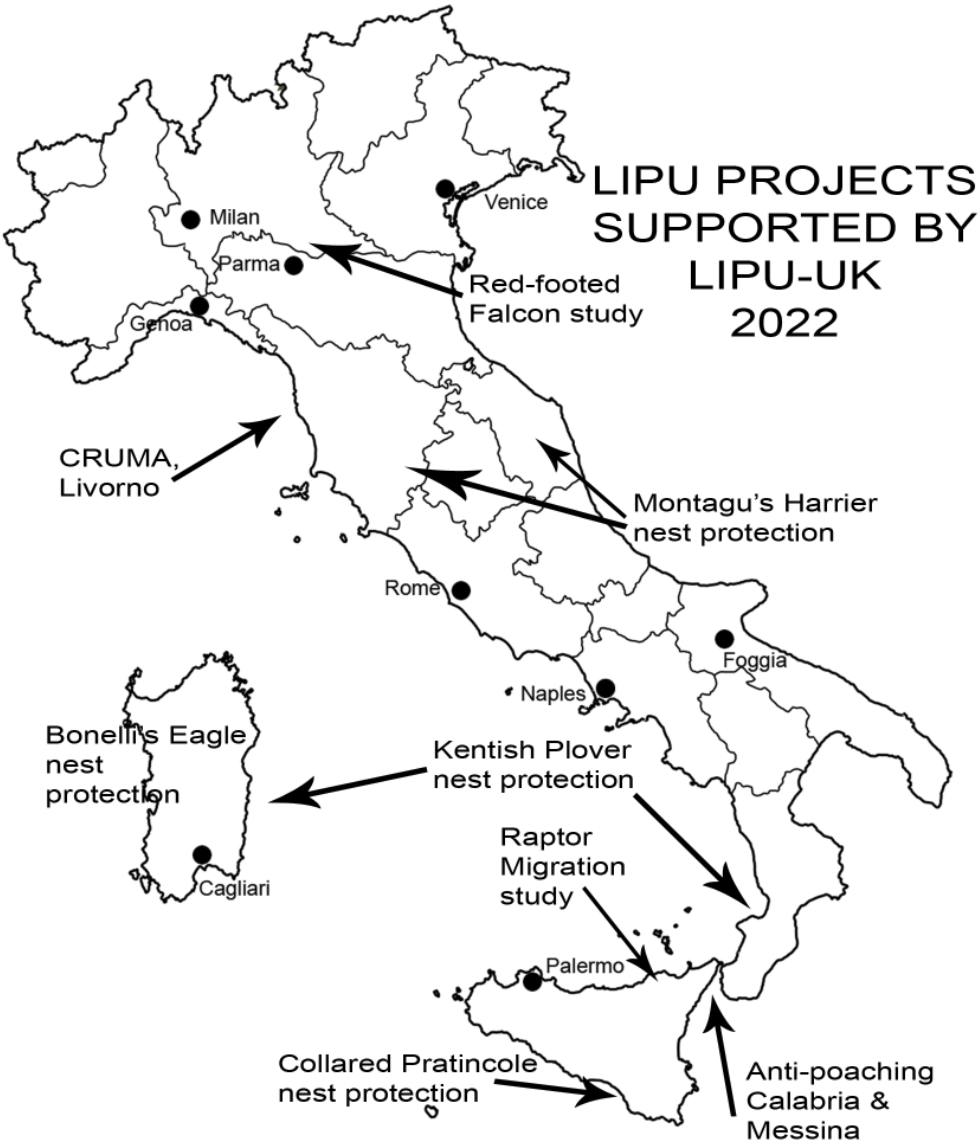

A map showing the location of projects; others such as marine by-catch and local defence volunteers are more wide ranging.

STOP THE MASSACRE
APPEAL 2022
Please help us