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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

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Winter 2023

LIPU's national headquarters turns one year old. In this first year of life Casa LIPU has hosted the Bonn Convention (United Nations) workshop on animal culture, a conference on Restoration Law, a conference on the Golden Eagle, various meetings of Italian and international experts and more.

Right: On a serious note this car was owned by a WWF volunteer working alongside LIPU in Brescia (see p25). It shows the risks these courageous people run when confronting the poachers.

THE SACREDNESS OF NATURE

Danilo Selvaggi, Director General

As old as humankind, the idea of the sacredness of nature is written into the origins of environmentalism, and encourages us to think of Nature as not merely a resource to be exploited but as something of transcendent value. Ecological thinking is discovering new means of access to the sacred, making it a reality in the great environmental challenges of our time. And now a new encyclical from Pope Francis is calling us to action.

Though his travels had included a thousand mile walk from Indiana to the Gulf the previous year, when John Muir arrived in the Yosemite Valley in the summer of 1868, coming up from San Francisco along the banks of the San Joaquin River, its beauty was beyond anything he had seen. In its forests, glaciers, and giant sequoias, with eagles rising over the bare granite peaks, he had found, as he put it, his heart's core. The few weeks he had intended to stay became nearly five years. Muir settled in Yosemite, grew a long beard, began a diary with the title John Muir, Earth-planet [sic], Universe, and immersed himself in nature more and more. This was his place. 'I feel sure', he replied to a friend who had asked him to return to civilisation, 'that if you were here to see how happy I am and how ardently I am seeking a knowledge of the rocks, you could not call me away but would gladly let me go with only God and his written rocks to guide me.' In Muir's eyes to be in the presence of nature in the Yosemite made it a place for study, but above all one of contemplation

in the literal meaning of the term, to live in as if in a temple, a sacred place. 'It is by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter.'

Civilisation Everywhere?

... the effects of the uncontrolled expansion of the works of man, whether in the United States or elsewhere, were already being seen.

The foundation of the Yosemite National Park in 1890, often thought of as the act that gave rise to the global environmental movement, was mostly the result of the vision and the labours of this Scottish naturalist whose family had emigrated to the United States. He was a talented inventor and engineer, but after almost losing his sight in an industrial accident he abandoned engineering to devote himself to nature. We had been habituated to think of nature as an inexhaustible storehouse we could raid at will, or mere wilderness to be tamed. Muir's message is the opposite: to bring in civilisation, to bring in urbanisation everywhere, is to open the gates to devastation. In Muir's own lifetime, the second half of the nineteenth century, the effects of the uncontrolled expansion of the works of man, whether in the United States or elsewhere, were already being seen. Material comfort and technology on the one hand, insecurity and environmental degradation on the other. 'Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people', he wrote, 'are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.'

A Transcendent Experience

This last passage takes us to the heart of Muir's analysis, and that of the early environmental

movement, strongly marked by the romantic concept of nature. Nature is not only there to serve us but is an indispensable heritage, and it is that indispensability itself that is a primary good. In those years there was a wide debate in the United States over the opportunity to protect large areas of nature and sequester them from human exploitation. To some it was anything but a good idea: 'What a waste of wood!' railed one Senator, indignant at the notion that parks might give protection to forests. For others, including Muir, the answer was yes, it was not only a good, but the greatest idea possible. To see nature only in utilitarian terms, he reasoned, is to commit two errors: that of overuse of natural resources, but more so, to deprive ourselves of the possibility of access to the experience of contemplation that only wilderness and wild nature can give. Wild nature is a transcendent experience, an ecstasy. It takes a human being outside the self to be face to face with an otherness that industrial society, modelling everything in our image as in a tale told to a mirror, is shovelling out of sight. Standing always before a mirror leads to narcissism alone. Authentic experience comes only from meeting with something that is not ourselves or made by ourselves: the stealthy footsteps of the wolf, the song of warblers in the dawn, the falling of snow in the woods, the mist in an old-growth forest. The protection of areas such as the Yosemite, or Yellowstone, the other major American park to be founded in that time, gives protection to that generator of authentic experience – of which we have an absolute need – that is nature.

Standing always before a mirror leads to narcissism alone.

Set Apart and Preserved

It is from this that the ecological idea of the sacred comes. The word sacred comes from the Latin

sacer and the Semitic *sakāru*, meaning set apart, forbidden, taken out of material use. The sacred, before there was a thought about contact with the divine, is therefore a place removed from dominion, a sanctuary, a locus in which to establish relationships not of material consumption, but higher, spiritual ones. In this sense, the institution of the National Parks of the United States brought into social and political discourse a new way of thinking about their land and a different concept of value, that the land has value beyond the economic. This was well stated by Franco Brevini in *L'invenzione della natura selvaggia* (The Invention of Wild Nature), speaking of the two opposing cultural concepts that at some point are bound to come into conflict. The first is that which says it is for men to transform a nature that has value only if reclaimed to make fit for civilisation. The second, on the other hand, holds that it is nature that should transform us, or rather that nature itself has a value, a great one, which it maintains even if not exploited for profit.

The World Soul and the Soul-Less World

The idea of the sacredness of nature is almost as old as humanity. It is connected with the birth of symbolic thought, and therefore of religion, as a twofold way of interpreting reality: the physical reality we see and touch and in which we are fed, clothed and sheltered, and the metaphysical world standing within things, such as the soul, or without, like an aura surrounding them. Totems, sacred animals, sacred trees, the powers and metaphysics of the elements: all these were a guide through much of our history, throughout which human culture, or rather religion, was for the most part animistic, in which all things have a soul. The Earth has a soul,

and is full of gods. But cultures changed; animism was uprooted by science and monolithic religion, and that form of connection with nature became lost. It was the historian Lynn White who, in a notable paper given in December 1966 to the congress of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, named the disappearance of pagan animism in the West, in particular because of the spread of the monotheistic religions, as the principal cause of the emerging ecological crisis. How can we protect the world, White asked, if we see it entirely as object, then something to barter, and ultimately just to buy and sell? If we have taken away its intangible inner being? We can not, unless we find a new portal to the sacred. 'More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.' Without stating it explicitly, White maintained an evolutionary account of animistic religion, claiming that the spirit of the trees and of the animals served ecologically to protect them against gratuitous human destructiveness. Use yes, abuse no. Where once we had gods, we now have laws, but when the gods have departed, will laws be enough?

How can we protect the world, White asked, if we see it entirely as object, then something to barter, and ultimately just to buy and sell?

Part of the Dance

To be sure, applying the theme of the sacred to nature is not without its pitfalls, above all for those engaged in science and nature conservation who believe in logical analysis and the importance of data. Yet Lynn White's preoccupations are the same as those of many scientists and intellectuals, who, seeing in the world's loss of soul a serious ecological and cultural risk, are attempting to find a remedy. How? There can be no naive idea of a return to past times, which in any case is impossible, or of

abandoning the hard-won discoveries of science to take refuge in irrationalism. There must instead be a rethinking of reality, a different epistemology, giving a greater role, say, to aesthetics and emotion, empathy and poetry, things that the modern mentality has ruled incompatible with science, but that can and must with science coexist. This is what, among others, the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson has done, giving the theme of the sacred the last word in his scientific work. Bateson formulated his Ecology of Mind, tying it exactly to the idea of the sacred. Why would ecology and the sacred be thought of together? It is because the sacred is religion, from the Latin and Italian verb religare, to bind or connect: our relationship with the divine. It is the same with ecology, in which every living thing relates to another, exchanging information, messages, matter, energy. Science and objective knowledge necessarily distinguish and divide, but reality in ecological terms is an unending flux of interrelationships. In this way, to the idea of the sacred as set apart and protected, Bateson attaches a further significance: the weaving, the dancing together. This is Planet Earth, this is biodiversity, an infinite dance in which all things relate to one another. The crab, the primrose, the swallow, me, you, us. To take part in this dance, said Bateson, to take part in this ecology, to take care of this planet on which we live, is the greatest possible wisdom. To harm nature, on the other hand, is a suicidal folly. 'The organism which destroys its environment destroys itself.'

All Life in Concert

It is of a dance, or rather a concert, that Pope Francis also speaks, in his new statement on ecology, the exhortation Laudate Deum, which returns to the

themes set out in the encyclical Laudato Si of 2015. In Laudato Si an essential point was the change of emphasis that the Pope requested, from Genesis 1,28 ('...and fill up the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over every living thing that moves upon it') to verse 2,15 ('And God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to tend it and to keep it.') Only a few lines, yet a vast distance apart. The aggressive image of dominion yields to that of stewardship. Nature and the world are not to be subjugated, but kept and tilled.

Continuing the theme, the new exhortation also reinforces the idea of the beneficial effect for humans of the sense of being part of the dance of life, of its music. 'The world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition. Nor can we claim that nature is a mere "setting" in which we develop our lives and our projects. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it... Human life, intelligence and freedom of man are elements of nature.' Faced with the 'marvellous concerto of all beings', the Pope adds, we must recognise today that 'human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. All beings in the universe are united by invisible bonds as part of a universal family'. They are words that might seem commonplace to many ecologists, but spoken by the head of the Catholic Church become a cultural revolution and a powerful call to action. The message of Pope Francis is that a billion and a half Catholics should take the environmental challenge seriously and with full commitment, but so also must institutions and governments. It is down to us all. It is time to act.

A law such as this, especially if combined with a strategy for biodiversity, can bring a real change of direction and regenerate our European lands, to both our and nature's benefit.

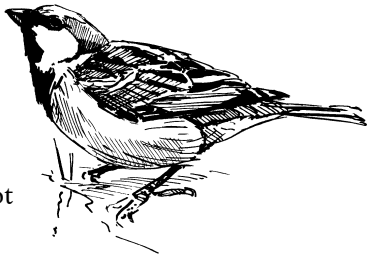
What Are We Doing?

We have modified 66 per cent of marine habitats and 75 per cent of those on land. Out of eight million species a million are at risk of disappearing in the next few decades and 500,000 have been dubbed 'dead species walking'. What have we done to the Earth? The data from IPBES, the intergovernmental agency for biodiversity, shows the scale of the problem, one that information from the IUCN, from BirdLife, and from the ISPRA to LIPU's studies on the birds of agricultural land, serves only to confirm. Everything points to the necessity for biodiversity to be put at the top of political agendas. 'It is for this that the Nature Restoration Law, Europe's law for the renewal of nature, must be approved,' says Federica Luoni of LIPU's agricultural section, 'as well as reinstating the clauses deleted by the European Parliament in the amendments of last July. A law such as this, especially if combined with a strategy for biodiversity, can bring a real change of direction and regenerate our European lands, to both our and nature's benefit.' Nature and ourselves. We must no longer think of them as opposites. We cannot let it continue.

Five Sparrows

When, at the conclusion of his 1966 paper, Lynn White called for the rediscovery of the Franciscan ecological spirit as an antidote to the culture of dominion, and proposed Francis as the patron saint of ecologists, it met with great disquiet from the Church, but now Papa Bergoglio's new Apostolic Exhortation too, published on October 4 2023, St Francis' Day, has urged us to adopt the spirit of the Poor Man of Assisi, the wolf's brother who talked

also to the birds. The Pope's statement therefore could not but make reference to the birds, and this indeed is its starting point, both literally and conceptually. From a passage in Luke (12,6), we see that even a single bird has value: 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight.' Read from a secular point of view, this passage tells us that sparrows (whose numbers in the countryside have declined, according to LIPU's data, by 60 per cent since 2000) are not merchandise or mere liquid assets, or *res nullius*, ownerless and disposable, and were not put here to be poisoned, cruelly treated or trapped. They are equal players in the marvellous concerto we are all sustained by and have a part in. They are both themselves and the whole web of connections and ecologies that includes us, and tell us how life, and perhaps also our societies, for good and ill, work together, that to protect is to protect both them and us, and therefore too our shared home. They have a value beyond all our capacity to know, one that, for all our science and philosophy, politics and history, we have yet to understand.



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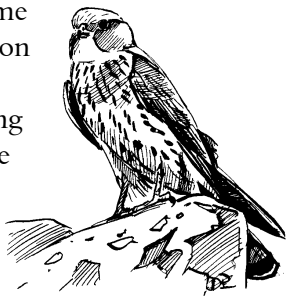
A HOPEFUL FUTURE FOR LESSER KESTRELS IN ALTA MURGIA

It has been a difficult time for this small, rare bird of prey, which has suffered a marked decline in recent years. But a new initiative in the study of the species brings real hope for its protection.

Marco Gustin, Species and Research Manager in collaboration with Giuseppe Giglio, Stefania Pellegrino and Alessandro Ferrarini

The Lesser Kestrel has, since 2006, been the subject of a study involving ringing and assistance, including the rescue of injured birds and those that have fallen from nests. It initially seemed that this programme had been successful, with population growth in Alta Murgia (Puglia), already one of its preferred breeding areas. Sadly though, this favourable trend has reversed in the past three years or so.



Since 2022, however, and thanks to funds from the LIPU Four Species campaign, renewed impetus has been given to this study and to the protection programme for the Lesser Kestrel. But

let's begin at the beginning, and take a look at the programme since 2006, the problems identified, and the solutions adopted since then.

The Beginnings

The LIPU study and conservation programme in Alta Murgia has, since 2006, placed and managed over 300 nest boxes, monitored over 60 roost sites, ringed 3,500 Lesser Kestrels and rescued almost 4,000 birds that had fallen from nests or were injured in other ways. The census data (of birds arriving to breed) had been showing a promising increase in the Apulia-Lucania area generally, and specifically in the Alta Murgia National Park. But as already mentioned that trend did not continue into recent years.

The census data (of birds arriving to breed) had been showing a promising increase in the Apulia-Lucania area generally, and specifically in the Alta Murgia National Park.

The field work had been accompanied by an intense programme to raise public awareness of these birds, with numerous press releases, more than 100 articles published on websites and in newspapers, the distribution of leaflets, and the placing of a webcam in a "nursery area" from 2010 to 2014. The depth of our studies (aided by GPS trackers) revealed for the first time that Lesser Kestrels are not strictly diurnal birds, and are often active at night, frequently travelling tens of kilometres away from their breeding sites.

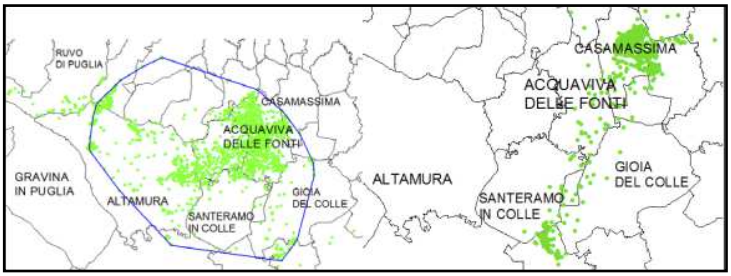
The Importance of a Steppe-Like Habitat

This unexpected nocturnal activity correlates with the decrease in the availability of food in the vicinity of the colony sites, in particular with a reduction in areas of steppe-like habitat (i.e. having semi-natural vegetation, now present almost exclusively within the Alta Murgia National Park). One of our

studies showed that the birds have a clear preference for finding food in such areas, where their prey is abundant and more easily hunted. It's thus clear that to support this species it will be necessary to protect this precious and disappearing habitat.

The New Study, from 2022

Thanks to funds raised through the LIPU Four Species campaign, the study has been expanded to include GPS tracking of Lesser Kestrel colonies beyond the stronghold of the Alta Murgia National Park – namely, in Acquaviva delle Fonti, Casamassima, and Minervino delle Murge (see map). The latter of these areas is located within the National Park but significantly further away from other important urban areas such as Matera, Gravina in Puglia, and Altamura.



In the period 28 June to 12 September 2022, we obtained data on seven individuals (three females and four males, three in Acquaviva, one in Casamassima and three in Minervino Murge). In total, 8,556 GPS points were mapped (4,481 in Acquaviva, 2,917 in Casamassima and 1,158 in Minervino).

This year's results appear to be telling us that the population of Acquaviva delle Fonti is forced to obtain food by moving to the southeast, into the

adjacent regions of Cassano, Altamura, and Gioia del Colle, travelling a distance of up to 82 kilometres, with a less-favoured option of travelling only 45 kilometres towards Casamassima. The colonies of Acquaviva delle Fonti can be seen to suffer from a lack of locally available food, which forces them to move further to hunt than the colonies present in the Alta Murgia National Park. A similar phenomenon was also seen in the Casamassima colony.

These early results highlight that Lesser Kestrel populations found outside the national park (with its extensive steppe-like habitats) could significantly reduce in the coming decades due to the poor quality of the hunting areas surrounding their breeding sites.

The Colonies

We discovered that the Lesser Kestrels in a single colony tend to share the resources available in their area and rarely venture into the territories of neighbouring colonies. This will make it possible to plan interventions that will benefit all the members of a particular colony (young and old, male and female).

We also discovered, however, a particular vulnerability of breeding females, in that the time spent incubating limits the time available to travel significant distances to hunt, forcing them to 'make do' with the food sources close to the colony.
To summarise, we have gathered a great deal of valuable information, which will now enable us to develop a strategy to protect all these populations, thus contributing to the continuing rich biodiversity of this region.

The Lesser Kestrel

A small bird of prey with a diet consisting largely of grasshoppers, beetles and various insects, which it hunts in areas of steppe, prairie and other non-intensively-cultivated environments. Its communal nesting habits (at least in the regions of Apulia-Lucania in southern Italy) are associated with human habitation, nesting, for example in building cavities and attics, but increasingly (in the last 10 years) in nest boxes. It is typically a migrant to Italy, but some birds overwinter there.

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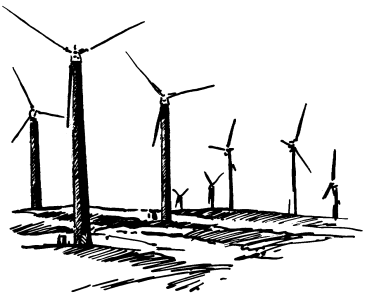
SENSITIVITY TO THE WIND

The project Sensitivity Mapping has constructed maps of the areas in which birds are most sensitive to onshore and offshore wind turbines. In the next few months they will be refined, and then shared with politicians and contractors to help identify suitable areas to install such plants while respecting biodiversity.



Giorgia Gaibani, Head of Nature 2000 and Land Protection

Reconciling wind turbine development and the safeguarding of biodiversity has been dear to LIPU's heart for many years. Sensitivity Mapping

– a project launched in October 2022 – presents an opportunity to achieve this, in a sound, practical programme that favours nature. The first phase, which ended in September 2023, aims to develop maps of those areas in which birds are most sensitive to the possible impacts of onshore or offshore wind turbines, and asks authorities and developers to take this information into account. Funded by the European Climate Foundation (ECF), the project is coordinated by BirdLife International and involves LIPU and the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP).

The REPowerEU plan

The origins of Sensitivity Mapping can be traced back around 18 months to the EU Commission's REPowerEU plan and its crucial objective of reducing the Union's dependence on Russian fossil fuels. The plan asks Member States to identify areas in which renewable energy projects should be speeded up, commonly described as 'go-to areas'. In response, the Minister for the Environment and Energy Security, Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, last summer announced a forthcoming decree on 'appropriate areas' to host renewable energy installations.

Planning for Protection

The planning of renewable energy generation installations – be they wind or photovoltaic based – and their siting outside areas of high natural and environmental value are necessary if we are to deal with the climate crisis and that in biodiversity in a co-operative manner. We need to avoid taking actions that address the first crisis while aggravating the

second, an error that has, unfortunately, been widely replicated in recent years.

This is why LIPU has, for years, been asking the Environment Ministry to plan the development of renewable energy, both on shore and off shore, in order to avoid siting installations in areas that are particularly important for habitats and species. The most recent example of these requests was submitted in November of last year, when LIPU asked that in the Maritime Spatial Management Plans areas from which renewables infrastructure should be excluded and areas most suitable for its installation should both be identified, in compliance with EU directive 2014/2001/EU on establishing a framework for the planning of maritime space and EU directive 2018/200/EU on promoting the use of energy from renewable sources.

Just as concerning is the fact that these same politicians consider the necessary environmental assessments 'bureaucratic long-windedness' and 'bottlenecks'.

'Non-suitable' Areas

However, what concerns LIPU and the other partners of BirdLife Europe and Central Asia (BECA) is the emphasis politicians place on 'suitable areas' for the development of renewable energy infrastructure, relegating into second place – or rather, simply choosing to ignore – the need to also identify 'non-suitable' areas. Just as concerning is the fact that these same politicians consider the necessary environmental assessments 'bureaucratic long-windedness' and 'bottlenecks'. In fact, these assessments are the indispensable instruments with which we analyse, on a local scale, the impact of renewable energy installations on the environment and nature. In the case of onshore and offshore wind turbines, these impacts are linked to the whole life cycle of the plant, which comprises

construction, operation, and dismantling and eventual replacement. They also involve both the blades and the cables that connect the installation to the main distribution network – harbour facilities can lead, for example, to the destruction of habitats (both terrestrial and marine), to the loss or degradation of feeding and breeding areas for animal species, and to bats and birds colliding with the blades, especially if such facilities are situated on migration routes.

The EU's ambition to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels is fundamental. But if this means mere industrial expansion via the old, developmental, impactful approach and is carried out without the due assessment of possible impacts, it will have very high costs for biodiversity and ecosystems, and will lead to a very dangerous scenario. Leading international scientific institutions are already warning us of this danger, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN body concerned with the scientific assessment of climate change, and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the remit of which includes assessing the state of biodiversity and ecosystems.

The Map of Bird Sensitivity

Using a scientific approach, the Sensitivity Mapping project aims to identify the areas in which on- or offshore wind turbines' impact on birds would be very high, high, medium, or low. In the areas of very high or high sensitivity wind turbines should be prohibited, while in medium- or low-sensitivity areas the siting of installations should be assessed by means of an Environmental Impact Assessment and, where

applicable, an Incident Assessment. Only an analysis of the details, case by case, is able to identify possible impacts and eventual mitigation measures.

Although the project applies only to Italy and Poland, the maps and the methods developed will be able to be replicated in other Member States, showing the EU how to deal with the climate crisis in the right way – so, by protecting biodiversity at the same time.

... it is already emerging that on land many of the most sensitive areas for birds already have wind turbines, above all in the south as a result of unplanned industrial development.

The Methodology

The project comprises two phases. The first, which was conducted from October 2022 until September 2023, resulted in the development of preliminary maps of the most sensitive areas for birds, both on land and at sea, based on the location of protected areas and spatial data on the distribution and migration of several target bird species. The second phase, which started in October 2023 and will also last for a year, will allow these maps to be refined with cartographic data, including on wind patterns and levels and on the current distribution of existing structures (for more details of the methodology used, visit www.lipu.it).

Without Planning, Nature is Under Threat

The onshore and offshore sensitivity maps obtained in the first phase of the project are still preliminary and have to be completed in the second phase, now underway. All the same, it is already emerging that on land many of the most sensitive areas for birds already have wind turbines, above all in the south as a result of unplanned industrial development. It is thus necessary that the authorisation process for further installations be suspended pending the

identification of 'suitable' and 'non-suitable' areas. This must serve as a warning, particularly with regard to the Mediterranean Sea, where the development of offshore wind power is still in an early phase compared to other European seas, and where there is therefore a significant opportunity to influence planning in the maritime space to guarantee that the development of offshore wind power is guided towards areas with minimal environmental impact.

The second phase of the project anticipates advocacy work with policymakers and the major players in the wind power industry to ensure that the maps produced and the scientific methodology used in Sensitivity Mapping are both taken into consideration. This means the development of sensitivity maps for other species and habitats, the identification of 'suitable areas' at a national and a regional level, and the assessment of the impacts of individual projects. In short, everybody must understand that without a reliable plan for wind turbines, biodiversity is threatened, and that in such an event we risk falling short on both challenges: that regarding climate change and that regarding nature. And this must not happen (again).

The 10 species most at risk on land:

1. Egyptian Vulture
2. Lammergeier
3. Bonelli's Eagle
4. Red Kite
5. Montagu's Harrier
6. Black Stork
7. Little Bustard
8. Marsh Harrier
9. Golden Eagle
10. Red-footed Falcon

and off shore:

1. Greater Scaup
2. Cory's Shearwater
3. Black Tern
4. Black-throated Diver
5. Red-throated Diver
6. Gull-billed Tern
7. Shag
8. Storm Petrel
9. Audouin's Gull
10. Slender-billed Gull

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THE OLYMPICS

The Earth's Gold Medal

Claudio Celada, Director of Conservation

The 2026 Winter Olympics project is still failing to guarantee adequate attention is paid to nature. The renovation of the bobsleigh run has been abandoned, an important success. But the only real olympic victory will be full sustainability of the works.

On 24 June 2019, a few months before the COVID crisis began, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the winter Olympics 2026 to Milano Cortina, justifying its choice on the grounds of the ecological sustainability of the Italian bid.

More than four years later the organising committee's website informs us that the Games are little more than 800 days away, and ecological

sustainability – as far as an event like the Olympics can be sustainable in an Alpine area – seems to have dwindled to nothing.

Despite repeated requests from environmental associations – LIPU included – and current obligations as a Member State of the European Union (EU), the strategic environmental assessment that gauges the individual and cumulative effects of the works involved has never been produced. The Games are to take place in several Alpine areas (Valtellina, Cortina, Val di Fiemme, Anterselva) around Milan, and the first and most important mainstay of sustainability – respecting EU legislation on environmental matters – is being ignored.

... while the Foundation has convened periodic meetings with environmental associations, these have been pure formalities ...

Avoiding Confrontation

With regard to the active participation of civil society, requests for essential dialogue have often also been ignored, and there never was the real will, either on the part of the main organisations involved (e.g. the Environment Ministry) or that of the Milano Cortina 2026 Foundation, to confront critical environmental issues. The IOC made the involvement of civil society a condition of nomination. But while the Foundation has convened periodic meetings with environmental associations, these have been pure formalities aimed only at discharging its formal obligations, and do not constitute a major move to make the planning of the works more sustainable.

Cortina: The New Piste Should not Be Built

The case of the bobsleigh run at Cortina is just the tip of the iceberg, but illustrates well the lack of any real sensitivity to protecting the region. Fiction

constructed ad hoc and centred on the 'restoration' of an old and illustrious run, promises of considerable funding that would bring enormous benefits to the local community, and – finally – the discrediting of environmentalists who said no to the development: all the ingredients of a toxic cocktail. Should it be at any cost that we build a structure with an enormous impact on the Ampezzo forests, one that, the Games over, will never be used? Prohibitive and rising costs, the devastating impacts on the forest ecosystem, the impossibility of respecting the timeline on the part of the constructors: all point towards an immediate search for other solutions, such as reusing the run at St. Moritz. At the same time, the fate of the Cesana Torinese bobsleigh run, constructed for the Turin Olympics in 2006 for an event with only a few dozen Italian participants and currently in ruins, and the exorbitant cost of rebuilding it, are testimony to the need to think carefully and in a really sustainable way – from both an environmental and an economic standpoint – about how we develop our mountains. Fortunately and finally, Gianni Malagò, President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, announced that this completely unnecessary project had been abandoned. A wonderful success for LIPU and the other organisations 'at the Olympic table'.

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Sustainable Alps

This is not about pitting a passion for sport – which many LIPU members share – against safeguarding nature. Instead, we need the professionals in the field to acknowledge the necessity of not continuing to erode residual natural Alpine spaces, which are becoming ever rarer. And this is a question that all in the sporting world can no longer avoid.

Returning to the biodiversity of the Alps and to their protection and that of the nature that lives there, LIPU and the University of Milan are finalising the mapping of Alpine climatic refuges for birds adapted to cold climates. Despite the occurrence of adverse climatic scenarios, these precious areas maintain their suitability to host those species most affected by the overheating of the Alps, including the Rock Ptarmigan, Alpine Accentor, Snowfinch and Water Pipit. The study provides for a cartographic superimposition of existing (and planned) ski areas and will form a sound foundation from which to define conservation priorities for the immediate future and to assess, objectively and on a wide scale, the impact of alpine skiing and its associated infrastructure. It is legitimate, ultimately, to doubt whether mass events such as the Winter Olympics can still be described as sustainable. Even from a strictly economic point of view, such events no longer deliver the promised advantages. They do, however, contribute to disruption in the public accounts. In sum, we can no longer put off a general reflection on which model of development serves us best today and can actually meet the needs of a complex world, taking into account society's demands and the physical limits of the planet. The gold medal we need is for attention to the Earth.

★★★

A REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINE

Mario is a man for whom I have total respect and admiration in his work to stamp out poaching and bring offenders to justice. His report was passed to LIPU members and I copy it here unedited because I won't risk changing the passion he shows. Ed

It's not easy to write something sensible that has a logical thread (even a temporal one...) after 35 straight days in the field... in Brescia.
Every time, it's complicated. Both for obvious reasons of physical and mental fatigue, and for the succession of multiple emotions (often bordering on the 'terrible' but also some of enormous satisfaction).

I believe that a marathon of 35 days non-stop, with the need to keep attention very high so as not to make any false steps in the study and investigation phases of the phenomenon, as well as not to betray the high professional expectations that the Carabinieri del Soarda have of us, is equivalent to three months of work for an average Italian :-).

It is a personal commitment that is increasing year by year. Having said that, the numbers, which are still provisional (I will work on them over the next few days), but which I have been dying to give you, are dramatically as follows:
- two arrests
- More than a hundred people reported
- Almost a hundred shotguns and rifles seized
- a few thousand cartridges seized
- hundreds of bird nets seized
- Thousands of live and dead birds seized
- 15,000 km by car driven, and hundreds on foot
- Operated in 6 different provinces

I will never tire of reminding and repeating endlessly that, despite the immense effort of ourselves, of many volunteers, and of the Carabinieri del Soarda, in this part of Italy the spread of poaching, the most boorish, the most medieval, the most 'structured' and deep-rooted, does not retreat one iota. For this cursed area, we absolutely must activate every initiative at

every possible level to remedy a phenomenon that has more impressive numbers than anywhere else in the country. I have dubbed this place, without fear of contradiction, the European Passerine Hell.

I would like to end by sincerely thanking for their cooperation our Vicenza Guards, Carlo Catoni, Emiliano De Santis, Andrea Benvenuti for their great professionalism and for putting up with my ' every day saying we sleep tomorrow', Giovanni Albarella for his precious advice and maniacal organisation of the camp, and the SOARDA Carabinieri for their commitment well beyond their competence.

My enormous thanks also go to the President, the Board, the entire Council, the Supervisory Commission, Luca Demartini, and the Directors who believe in these operations, and who support me (and put up with..) sometimes understanding my 'hurry'.

Well, I'll sleep now.
...until tomorrow morning.
Then, towards the Po Delta.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

LIPU IN ACTION

Capitanata, 21 young Hen Harriers fledged

The Foggia section of LIPU has been busy again this year with the search for and protection of the nesting of a small population of Hen Harrier that survives in Capitanata, the only one in all of central-southern Italy south of Viterbo, which is also protected by LIPU. An onerous commitment, with hundreds of

hours of volunteer work in the field to search for pairs and nests, relations with the farming world, and actions to protect them from harvesting and other factors. Thanks to decades of work, the number of breeding pairs has increased to 14-15 pairs today, while 21 young Hen Harriers fledged in 2023.

This is a symbolic species of open habitats characterised by large agricultural and pastoral ecosystems in which other important species such as the Stone Curlew, Collared Pratincole, Lesser Kestrel, European Roller, Red and Black Kites, larks, shrikes, etc. also thrive. These habitats are being increasingly degraded by roads, works and agricultural conversions, but the most dangerous threat is the invasion of thousands of wind and photovoltaic plants, with associated tracks, power lines and large power stations (Enzo Cripezzi, Lipu delegate for Foggia).

The roosting behaviour of the Short-toed Eagle in the Euganean Hills Regional Park.

Research, conducted in 2022 and 2023, was coordinated by Roberto Guglielmi, LIPU delegate of the Vittorio Veneto. The results of monitoring the largest roost of Short-toed Eagles in Italy revealed the presence of up to 30 individuals, mostly immature. The roost was active for the entire summer in both years. From the studies carried out so far by the group, which also includes Elena Rizzo, Beatrice Zambolin and Giovanni Benetton, it seems that the roost has been able to establish itself in the Euganean territory due to the great availability of snakes in the Mediterranean environment of the Park, also facilitated by the absence of breeding pairs of eagles, and, lastly, due to the geographical position of the

Euganean Hills, a crossroads between migratory routes towards, East, South and West. The research has obtained the official patronage of the Euganean Hills Regional Park Authority. LIPU hopes that the Park Authority will be able to protect this site, which appears to be strategic for the movements of the Short-toed Eagle in the entire North-East and beyond.

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

Annual Report

Our annual report and accounts have been examined, approved and submitted to the Charity Commission. For those with Internet access they can be read on the CC website by searching on our name or number, 1081826, but it is easier to see them on the LIPU-UK blog. I realise that there are many who are not able to access the web and I will be pleased to send a printed copy if anyone requests it. This is not a lack of transparency, it is simply this Yorkshireman's obsession with keeping our running costs to the minimum.

Email

In similar vein, may I ask those who do have the use of email to let me know if they have not already done so. The inexorable increase in postage costs means

that every letter saved is another pound or so toward the welfare of birds and I urge all who can to use email whenever possible.

In addition to the Ali we publish "Frammenti" a digest of news snippets from LIPU which I distribute about once a month – again an email address will allow me to add you to the mailing list.

I never divulge personal data to anyone.

The annual draw this year saw two small changes. Unused tickets printed for previous years were used (see comments about Yorkshireman above) and I put ticket stubs in the "barrel" for those who used Internet banking to take part. This proved popular when the cost of postage is the same as that of a ticket and we'll continue this next year.

Annual Draw
The winning tickets in the 2023 draw were:

First prize, £500, Mrs J Reed of London
Second prize, £200, Carol Taylor, of Powis and
Third prize, £100, Margaret Williams of London

By chance all three winners have been members for more than 25 years.

★★★

Thanks as always to my production team of Dave Brooks, Andy and Betty Merrick, Peter Rafferty and Lesley Tompkins.
The line drawings are by courtesy of the RSPB.

★★★

LIPU-UK DELEGATE

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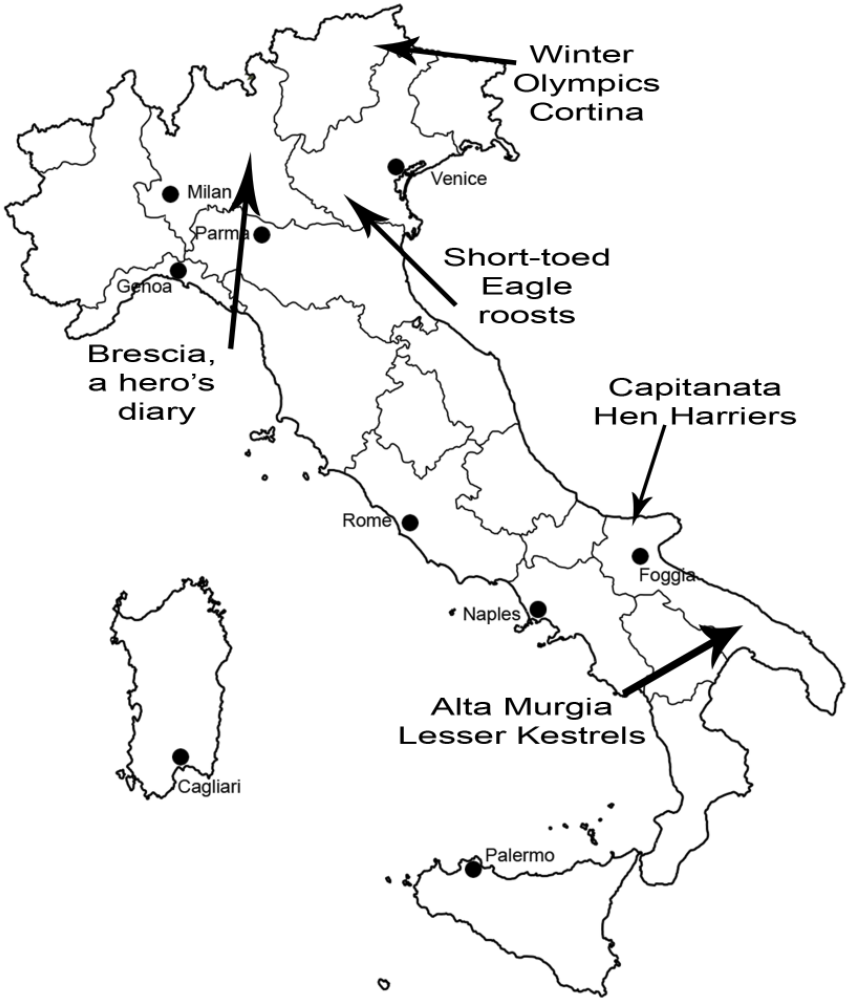

The map above shows the locations of some of the work mentioned in this edition. I had no more idea where to find Capitanata than Claudio would find Heckmondwike (for example). I hope it is helpful.

A Short-toed Eagle, such as those roosting in the Veneto

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