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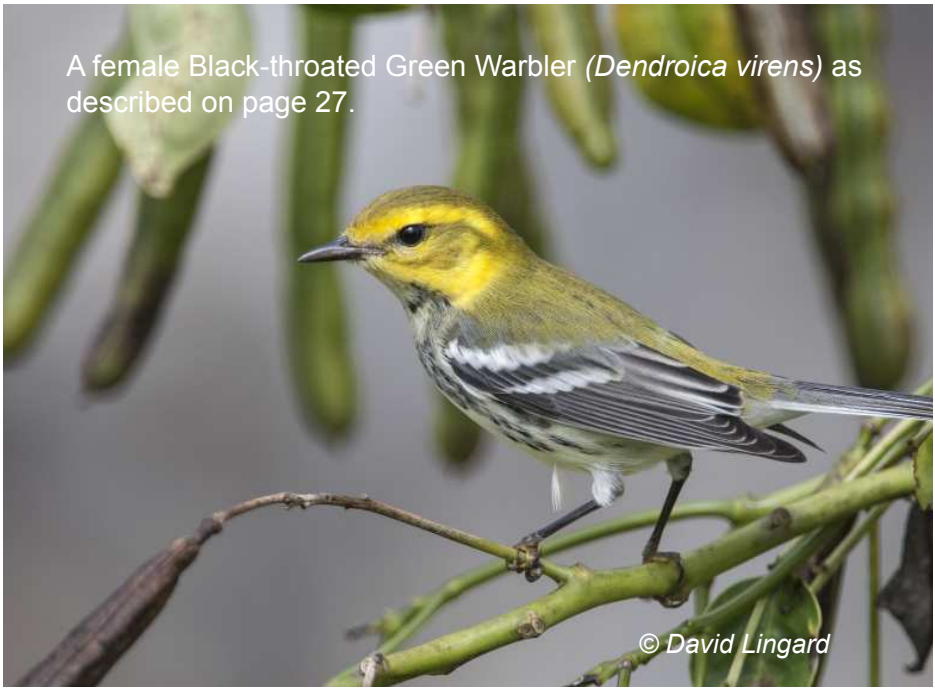
Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

- The Night
- Urban Ecology
- Major update to IBAs
- Historic warbler research

Winter 2024



A Bonelli's Eagle which, along with the Lanner Falcon will enjoy better protection with the extension of IBAs in Sicily.

The Regeneration of Nature

From the President of LIPU

Alessandro Polinori

Dear Members,

Another year draws to a close. A year full of difficulties, in a world that knows wars, problems and environmental suffering, but also one full of satisfaction and hope. For example, the satisfaction of the things LIPU has done and experienced, which have been many and of no small magnitude. With volunteers, staff, and many members and donors, we have succeeded in creating new oases, reviving recovery centres, stopping wild hunting proposals, fostering species and habitats, achieving results for the sea and sustainable agriculture, and engaging people of all ages by devoting hundreds of thousands of hours to our wonderful mission: to spread an ecological culture that concretely respects biodiversity.

One success out of all deserves to be mentioned: the passage of the Nature Restoration Law, the European law on nature restoration that will allow the regeneration of habitats and species in distress, and that will also benefit us. Now that's a word I really like: regeneration. A word that goes well with the upcoming holidays and the beginning of the new year, in which to invest new energy and, indeed, all the hope possible. You will read a lot about nature in this issue of *Ali*. In the opening article, our editor Danilo Selvaggi talks about the fascinating topic of the night, and how we can appreciate the dark, discover the incredible life that populates it, and learn to live with it while respecting and benefiting biodiversity. Next, the Focus talks about LIPU's great work of updating Italy's IBAs, the most important

areas for birds, which have increased from 172 in 2002 to 249 today. There are cries of alarm about the many species of migratory waders, in some cases diminished by more than 30 percent, and about the mismanagement of urban greenery in our country, with a series of clichés debunked by Marco Dinetti.

Away from *Ali,* and in a context where selfishness seems to prevail, to the detriment of an ecological vision, we participated in Kazakhstan in the meeting of BirdLife International's partners from Europe and Central Asia working on common future programmes. This year, as I travelled thousands of miles from north to south, I met the most beautiful Italy, that of the great LIPU family. To you, to all of you go my heartfelt thanks for the honour of being your president and making myself useful for the fantastic cause of nature. Thank you!

THE NIGHT

Danilo Selvaggi, Director General, LIPU

Long equated with danger and evil, the night in reality is a theatre of life, full of tales worth telling, from the birds whose home it is to the migrants who journey by it and the fireflies that bring to it their magic. Sullied by light pollution and noise, the night is also a key to understanding the need for moving to a saner and more environmentally friendly way of life.

'Watchman, what hour of the night is this?' In the well-known passage from the Book of Isaiah (21, 1–12), the night appears as the type of human suffering, as the period of trial that must be fought through to return to the light. Wars, famines, illness and loss… The watchman tries to peer through the gloom, for the first small glimmer, and therefore hope. Is it near, the end of the night? There is an ancient antagonism between humans and the world of the night-time, a relationship that has for too long seen us fall into the shadows ourselves, but that today is demanding a different approach and a redefining of our experience; a different concept of the night and all it contains and represents. An ecological concept.

What Is Down There in the Shadows?

'In the beginning', wrote Jorge Luis Borges in the poem A History of the Night, 'were blindness and dream and thorns which gash the bare feet and fear of wolves.' For us humans there is also a material difficulty in the way of our functioning at night in the absence of instruments such as fire and artificial light that allow us to navigate and to shield ourselves from the dangers represented by predators, natural obstacles, or for that matter, hostile members of our own species. These circumstances, to be sure, have sharpened and strengthened our intelligence, but have left us also cautious and wary: 'What is the shadow down there? A tree trunk, or a bear waiting in the darkness to attack us?' More than that: the difficulties and the material dangers mutated swiftly into symbolism, in which the night and its inhabitants became emblems of negativity, the images of evil either to fight or flee from.

Dark Lives

Long is the list of creatures of the night, real or imaginary, that have populated the stories, the legends and the religions of humanity. The werewolf, someone under a curse that caused them to assume the shape of a wolf at full moon, spreading terror and death; the black cat – sacred to the Egyptians – became, instead of a kindred spirit, an insidious and malevolent creature of the night; witches, women who practised black magic and worked at their crafts in darkness; bats, with all their associated traditions of monsters and vampires; and of course the birds of the night, from the crow (which though not nocturnal became so in literature as a denizen of graveyards and ruins) to the night-time raptors, the ever-favoured peg on which to hang beliefs about the darkness. 'The owl – wrote Pliny the Younger – is especially funereal, and is especially abhorred in all auspices of a public nature: it inhabits deserted, desolate and terrifying places. The monster of the night, it emits not a song but a scream. It never flies in the direction it wishes, but is always carried a long by a sideways movement. To see one in the city or during the day is a dreadful omen.'

'The owl – wrote Pliny the Younger – is especially funereal, and is especially abhorred in all auspices of a public nature: it inhabits deserted, desolate and terrifying places.

Sin and the Cross

Why is there such persistent demonisation? Certainly there are their largely nocturnal habits, so that these creatures to us are stealthy and invisible, but it comes also out of our need to find scapegoats onto which we can offload the causes of our misfortunes. If a farmer's harvest failed, or a family suffered a devastating bereavement, finding themselves unexpectedly in a state of crisis that the anthropologist Ernesto De Martino defined as a

cultural apocalypse, one way of making the situation tolerable was to find an explanation for it, however unlikely. So if a Little Owl had been singing by a country farmhouse, or a Barn Owl's ghostly flight had been seen by the house of one dying, the owls would become the cause of the event, taking away from those involved something of the inexplicability of the event and unfortunately loading the blame and the loss onto them, in the form of curses, persecution and killings. The sad history of the owls, to pursue the example, continued in a similar vein up to recent times (and still does to a degree), when they were numbered among the noxious beasts even by the law, and many people still persecuted them, above all as a result of this legacy of associations. It is something I have witnessed: one summer morning, by the field where we played football when we were young, we found a dead owl. It was nailed, wings spread out, to a wall. Crucified. This shocking sight was interpreted by an old passer-by, who said that the act, imbued with the religious symbolism of the cross, was in order to expel an evil spirit from the animal, along with the evil it contained, and so setting the world back to rights.

Illumination

The revenge of humans on the night began with the harnessing of fire, then the means of creating light, which made the nights more tractable, especially the long nights of winter, opening new possibilities for human communities: work, reading, and many other activities. In the history The Age of Candlelight, the mediaevalist Beatrice Del Bo goes over the intriguing evolution of lighting in the Middle Ages, through candles, wicks, torches and lanterns, relating how the ways in which the steady advance of lighting

into the kingdoms of the night have changed our lives. Here too the idea of illumination became not only physical but symbolic. The night stood not only for evil but for ignorance, superstition, and the dimming of knowledge, and it is no coincidence that one of the greatest cultural revolutions in history, the Enlightenment, took its name from the overcoming of darkness. Lighting up both the night and the mind: the triumph of science and reason. 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity', said Kant. It is the capacity to see, and 'the ability to use one's understanding without guidance from another'. Not to be guided, in fact, by the shades of prejudice and superstition.

Wonders of the Night

Yet in the light of scientific knowledge, the night, and in particular the night as it relates to the natural world, has taken on a completely different aspect. From the acrobatics of bats under the guidance of sonar, the silent paths of foxes seeking food, and the dazzling spectacle of fireflies, to the newly born marine turtles digging themselves up through the sand to head directly for the sea, it has become seen as a compelling stage for wildlife, and in the process, more fully understood. As for the owls, the Little, Tawny, Barn and Long-eared, the guise of ill-omen has been cast away to reveal their extraordinary gifts: their keen sight, their navigational skills, their swift and silent flight, their filling of essential ecological roles. In short, they are the exact opposite of the malevolent or harmful spirits portrayed by so many traditions. Not all, however. In America, those of the native Omaha tribe tell of the ritual dream in which the Great Horned Owl appears to the people and speaks to them: 'I am the owl. The night belongs to

me. I keep watch while others sleep. Be wise and see far.'

Journeys in the Dark

There is also the phenomenon of nocturnal migration, which science has revealed and allowed us to observe. It is undertaken by numerous raptors such as Montagu's and Marsh Harriers and the Lesser Kestrel. It is also undertaken by geese and ducks, but above all by many small birds, among them the Pied Flycatcher, Garden Warbler and Common Redstart. 'There comes a certain time – says Marco Gustin, leader of LIPU's section for Species and Research – when small birds begin to feel a sense of restlessness, the need to be somewhere else. In spring it impels them towards their nesting sites, and in autumn to their winter quarters, to recuperate in a milder climate. Small birds choose the night to migrate. They climb to reach heights usually around 500 metres, and begin, in solitude, to make their journey through that night and many more, to arrive at their destination.' Choosing the night as the time to migrate is due primarily to meteorological factors, to the fact that at night they suffer from fewer of the problems associated with the heat. This means that they have to take the risks that nocturnal migration contains, consisting above all of the risk of impacts with wires, power cables, wind turbines and so on. 'It is true that birds fly at high altitudes – adds Gustin – and yet they are often brought down, and in places where there is the possibility of collisions the risk of lethality is high.' In Chicago, to give but one example, there was the notable case where thousands of birds on migration were killed as a result of colliding with the McCormick Place building on the night of October 4–5, 2023.

Moon Watching

As one might expect, this incredible nightly traffic, in which billions of birds fly alone towards their goal, is something of which we see very little. The darkness, the considerable altitudes at which they fly, and the small size of most of the migrants renders nocturnal migration all but invisible. There is, nevertheless, a way in which we can observe it: moon watching, the observation of the moon, which when full is like an illuminated screen against which the birds are silhouetted. They transit across its disc unpredictably and in an instant, so they are not easy to see, but if one concentrates and trains a telescope on the moon without taking one's eyes from it, they can be seen. The technique of moon watching is still little practised, largely because of the limited number of observations it permits. It is, though, a technique of great interest, and one that gives useful information about a phenomenon otherwise difficult to assess, and could give still more if made part of a standardised international programme.

'On the global scale, artificial illumination of the night skies is increasing at 2–6 per cent per annum.'

Too Much Light

But now among the dangers of migration there is also artificial light, the overwhelming presence of which is presenting birds with many new problems. Generally speaking, light pollution has become a major environmental issue that has turned the picture on its head: once upon a time the main problem of the night was its darkness; now it is that there is too much light. 'On the global scale,' says Marco Dinetti, LIPU's head of urban ecology, 'artificial illumination of the night skies is increasing at 2–6 per cent per annum. Artificial light – or ALAN; that is, Artificial light at night – influences the biology and the ecology

of birds, disturbing their circadian rhythms, which follow the alternation of the day and the night. A German study of the Blackbird showed that those living in the city perceived the length of the day as being on average 49 minutes longer than Blackbirds of the woods, equating to a difference of 19 days in the photoperiod. Other studies have shown that LED lighting reduces activity in numerous species of bats, and that street lighting reduces insect populations by between 33 and 47 per cent. There are many things that we could do to contain the problem, but what is certain is that we need darker skies, so that we can give greater security to birds and other animals and be able to appreciate the beauty of the night sky.'

The Starry Sky Above Us

The vault of the heavens is the object of the studies of astrophysicist Giancarlo Masi, curator of the Rome Planetarium and an excellent communicator who is working hard in the fight against light pollution. 'Access to the precious landscape of the skies, with its beauty and immense cultural value, has become almost impossible in our country, the most affected by light pollution in the whole of the G20. The amount of unnecessary artificial light released into the nocturnal environment is indicative of an imbalance in our energy resources, the sensible use of which should lead, above all in these difficult times, to an optimisation of our structure of lighting, public and private. This would allow a drastic reduction in costs amounting to hundreds of millions of euros a year, a regaining of the sight of the stars, and an important reduction in the impact that excessive artificial light has both on biodiversity and on human health.'

Languages of the Night

It is clear that the theme of light pollution is indicative of a more general problem, relating to the excess of human activity. Too many lights, too much urbanisation, too much busyness. Too much everything. We have flooded the night with a torrent of activities that used to take place only during the day, with the result that we have been clicking erase on the night hours, just as we are erasing natural places and habitats, encroaching on and urbanising them. The consequences are negative both for nature and for human health, subjected to overload, stress and disorientation. What is happening to the night therefore becomes a major cultural issue, a signal to change attitudes and behaviour, and to leave at least a little time and space to be freed from our compulsiveness. Spaces for nature other than human, for birds, for insects and for biodiversity. Space for the night, for sleep, for dreams, meditation and poetry. It is this that Altiero Spinelli termed the Language of the Night, a language free of calculation, from the technical and logical reasoning of the daylight hours, that walks the paths of silence and interiority and even into melancholy and solitude, as do those little migrants that fly alone in the darkness and the night towards a distant goal. LIPU's work in this is twofold: on one side there is the action at ground level and the engagement with science and environmental politics to bring about the conservation of nature, the restoration of habitats, the identification of habitats important for birds, and the legal and practical ways to protect them, while on the other there is the encouragement of a culture that favours more diverse styles of life, more careful and aware, that alternates the days of doing with nights of resting and being left just to be. The languages of the

The consequences are negative both for nature and for human health, subjected to overload, stress and disorientation.

night, in fact, as precious, perhaps even more so, than those of the clear light of day.

Take These Broken Wings

The Beatles wrote Blackbird, the most beautiful of their songs, in 1968, on returning from their journey to India, when though the success of the group was at its peak, their story was approaching its end. Critics and fans alike have long argued over the meaning of the track, apparently simple but in reality evocative and mysterious. What is Blackbird? The memory of a bird that the Beatles heard in the foothills of the Himalayas? A song against racism and discrimination? The transposition into music of a dream of Lennon or McCartney? After nearly sixty years the question has never been resolved, and perhaps it never will. What we know is that its protagonists are a Blackbird and the night. Listen to it again and again, repeating the magic of that night.

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly…
…All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free
Blackbird, fly
Into the light of the dark black night.
Blackbird fly.

And if one were to ask the question, what hour of the night is this? we might reply: we are at the hour when we try to think of it in new ways, to be at peace with it. No longer to fear it, but to feel it is a friend. To rediscover the world, and not hide from the adversity, the challenges and the work ahead. To take courage, and in the heart of this dark black night, take to our broken wings and fly.

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URBAN ECOLOGY

Urban Green Spaces – Some Myths Debunked

Marco Dinetti, Head of Urban Ecology

At the end of winter, it will be nesting time for birds that live in cities. But the people who manage cities commit so many clumsy errors in the pruning of plants. Here is a brief review.

The start of the nesting season for birds is not far away, and by February behaviours will change and intensify. With the arrival of March, all will be busy with twigs in their beaks, constructing their nests. One of the problems that threatens the birds of our cities is the management of urban green spaces.

This often involves interventions unhelpful in both time and manner, fuelled by improbable beliefs and all without recourse to scientific or regulatory confirmation. Let's debunk some of these beliefs, so widespread across the country.

Laws Don't Apply to the Cities

Actually, Law 157/92 does not provide for territorial distinctions and therefore does apply to urban areas. A blackbird's nest is protected whether it is in a wood or a garden. Think of the swallows' nests that are protected even if they are on buildings in cities or small villages. Moreover, Article 21 paragraph 1 bans hunting in gardens and parks, confirming that the law also applies in the urban environment.

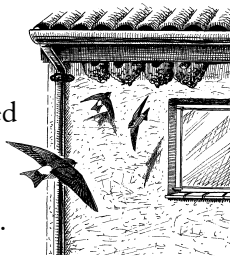
The Law Only Protects Active Nests

In Articles 3 and 21 nests are spoken of in a broad sense, not just 'active' nests. Further, protection is extended to eggs and chicks. From a biological point of view it is obvious that the destruction of a nest while it is being used causes the most damage, and therefore that this particular time of year is the most significant. While much of breeding takes place in spring, from March to July/August, examples can be found in other seasons, including the Pallid Swift and Collared Dove.

Furthermore, the concept of an active nest is dynamic and not static. Thus, a simple survey in the form of a 'photograph' is not enough – observation is required over a long period.

We Have Carried Out Inspections and There Are No Nests

First of all, such checks must be entrusted to people with ornithological qualifications, such holders of ringing licences issued by the Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) or authors of publications in scientific journals. This is because the determination of actual breeding requires special and complex timing, techniques, and instrumentation. There are nests that are large and easy to see (e.g. Magpie, crow) and others that are very obvious (House Martin, Swallow). The majority, however, including those of species that are common in urban areas and along water courses, are small and very well hidden in vegetation. Other species still breed inside small cavities in the trunks and branches of trees, without leaving any signs of their presence.



From a scientific point of view there are other clues associated with nesting that can be clear without physically finding a nest. According to the International Standard of the Ornithological Atlases, 'nesting possible' can be defined by finding the bird, even by song, at the appropriate nesting time and in a suitable habitat (e.g. in city trees). If there is further evidence (territorial behaviour, breeding parades) the level is elevated to the category 'nesting probable'.

Cutting Trees in April Does Not Affect Any Critical Aspect of Nesting

It is practically impossible to register the presence of any bird in an environment containing vegetation.

And this alone is enough to require caution and closer examination.

If a species is found in a reproductive habitat and at the right time (e.g. a Blackcap in a garden in April, or a Cetti's Warbler in May beside a stream), it is reasonable to assume that it is nesting. Admittedly the nest may not be in the tree scheduled to be felled, but we would jokingly say that the felling 'may not destroy the bedroom, but would devastate the living and dining rooms'.

Blackbirds Don't Nest in Trees and Don't Build Nests High Up

Beyond building nests in hedges and shrubs blackbirds can use trees (pines) for nesting and may also nest in elevated positions. A nest has been observed on the fifth-floor balcony of an apartment block in Florence.

Birds Don't Build Nests in Pines

In fact nests of 23 species of avifauna have been found on the Stone pine *(Pinus pinea)* and the Aleppo pine *(Pinus halepensis)*.

In short, there are many unfounded beliefs regarding the management of urban green spaces, each rooted in the common culture of our local administrators and employees. But once again, one only has to listen to the science to realise that a few precautions can avoid a sad, silent spring.

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FOCUS

IBAs, the new bird-friendly areas

Marco Gustin, Species and Research Manager
Alessandro Ferrarini, researcher
Claudio Celada, Nature Conservation Director

In 2002, 172 locations were designated as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Today there are 249. These areas are of value for species protection, and the increase in their number is most welcome.

Thanks to hundreds of hours of work the new list of IBAs has finally been published. Involving dozens of online meetings with BirdLife International, the process also entailed the gathering of huge amounts of ornithological data from across Italy. The redesignation of previous IBAs and the definition of the perimeters of new ones is alone estimated to have required more than 800,000 mouse clicks.

There is no doubt that the IBA programme has been a big success story for bird conservation and biodiversity generally.

The new network comprises 249 areas defined as being the most important in Italy for the conservation of birds. It covers over 9 million hectares – around 7 million on dry land and around 2.5 million hectares of our marine environment.

There is no doubt that the IBA programme has been a big success story for bird conservation and biodiversity generally. Globally around 12,000 such Areas have been identified, and about half of these are protected. In Italy and Europe the programme has always been linked with the Birds Directive of 1979, thanks to the synergies between BirdLife International (then known as the International Council for Bird Preservation) and the European

Commission. Those precious years for nature conservation saw the release of the first schedule of European IBAs in 1981, followed in 1989, 2000 and 2002 by more IBAs in Italy (thanks to the Ministry of the Environment), And now this issue of *Ali* is able to report the latest schedule update, which will be formally adopted in 2025.

The update takes advantage of the latest generation geographic information system (GIS) software, which can more precisely define these areas concerned. Technology has also allowed more data on bird movements to be gathered, and the use of GPS has transformed research, especially at sea.

The Picture in 2002

The 172 IBAs occupied around 6.9 million hectares, made up of roughly 5 million hectares on land and another 2 million offshore.

The largest IBA in 2002 was the Tuscan archipelago, at 463,000 hectares a mixture of marine environment and dry land. The smallest were the Codigoro Marshes (near Ferrara), covering 59.6 hectares, and the South Adda Marshes (near Cremona), at 86.6 hectares.

In 2002 the network covered 16.3 per cent of the land surface of Italy and 3.7 per cent of its territorial waters.

How the Latest Update (2020–24) Changes This

Ornithological data (and hence the IBAs' boundaries) was updated from 2020 to 2024, and 249 Areas have

now been identified, totalling 9.3 million hectares, an increase of 34.8 per cent on the 2002 figure.

There are 96 completely new IBAs, and for the 106 existing Areas that have changed there is – generally – an increase in size. Thirteen IBAs have been removed from the network as they do not meet BirdLife's new criteria or because their inclusion is not supported by the latest ornithological data. The largest new IBAs are the Maremma near Viterbo (Lazio) at 85,000 hectares and Caster di Judicia and Lake Ogliastro (Sicily) at 66,000 hectares, followed by Mount Etna at 58,000 hectares.

The 2024 IBA network covers 23 per cent of Italy's land surface and 4.7 per cent of its seas.

Comparing the IBAs: 2002 and 2024

See the map on page 31

The Main Changes by Area

The Alps. Twelve new IBAs have been added, mainly in Alto Adige, thanks to improved data on several species such as the Ptarmigan, Black Grouse, Rock Partridge, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker and Bearded Vulture. In 1913 the Bearded Vulture had become extinct in the Italian Alps, but it is now slowly recolonising the area.

The Po Valley. The Po (and its delta) is Italy's most important river and of course received special attention. In 2002 two very separate areas, in Piedmont and Lombardy, were covered, plus some stretches in Emilia-Romagna. But this update has considered this great river along the whole of its

path, because of oxbow loops, islands and riverbanks generally, which are important for the Common Tern and Stone Curlew plus many members of the heron family, including the Purple Heron, Night Heron and Little Egret.

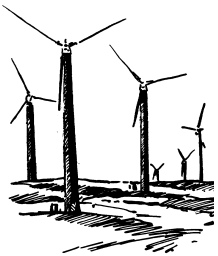
The Maremma and the Tolfa Mountains. The new IBA list identifies a large wetland area known as the Maremma, which spans the boundary between Tuscany and Lazio, stretching from the Valle dell'Albegna and Fiora in the North to Lake Bracciano in the South. This enlarged IBA protects a huge area overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea and stretching a long way inland, now covering 300,000 hectares. This is an extraordinary area, which happily has survived until now in good conservation order and is home to an abundance of bird species of national importance, with especially significant populations of Montagu's Harrier, European Roller, Stone Curlew and European Nightjar together with many raptor species, such as the Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite, Red Kite and Honey Buzzard.

This area is traversed by tens of thousands of migrating birds of prey, especially harriers (Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Pallid Harrier), Honey Buzzards and Black Kites.

Calabria. The Strait of Messina is a major migration route for diurnal raptors, so the IBAs on each side of the strait have been expanded. On the Calabrian side the enlarged IBA includes the Aspromonte National Park and stretches from the Limina Pass to the coast at the strait. This area is traversed by tens of thousands of migrating birds of prey, especially harriers (Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Pallid Harrier), Honey Buzzards and Black Kites. And a new IBA has been identified further up the peninsula

– the 'Marcellinara Saddle', which thousands of raptors pass through, especially in the autumn. Further, the existing IBAs of Marchesato and Fiume Neto, the Trionto valley, and Punta Alice, all of which are important for the movement of migrants eastwards, have all been considerably enlarged.

Sicily. This region is among those with the greatest increase in the number of IBAs, with 15 new sites proposed. Primarily this is about conservation of two species that are especially associated with the island, Bonelli's Eagle and the Lanner Falcon. Nest protection work done jointly by LIPU and the raptor protection group Gruppo Tutela Rapaci (GTR) has been vital in the numerical increase of Bonelli's Eagle, which now has 60 breeding territories in Sicily. The Lanner Falcon, however, seems to be rapidly approaching extinction, and the new IBAs target areas important to its conservation. The increase in IBAs on the island is, nevertheless, dwarfed by the expansion in wind farms (a problem common to many important areas in southern Italy).



Sardinia. There are 12 new IBAs on the island, with a special view to protecting the last strongholds of the Little Bustard, but also – in mountain areas – to proving some help to the Sardinian Goshawk, an endemic subspecies. This region contains Italy's last and most important areas of pseudo-steppe habitat, and the only Little Bustard populations remaining in Italy. Thanks to the work of LIPU and local ornithologists, recent years have seen an improvement in the understanding of its

distribution, and of the ways in which it is threatened by loss and fragmentation of its habitat.

IBAs from 2025 – How to Proceed

... and a third of that (10% of the area of the EU) to be exclusively dedicated to nature conservation.

The IBAs we already possess have been able to make history, and thanks to the strong support of European institutions about 70 per cent of Italy's IBAs have been formally protected as Special Protection Areas, which is an unprecedented result.

The updated list of IBAs is being unveiled at an extremely significant point in time. The European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 calls for at least 30 per cent of the EU's area (including marine) to be under protection, and a third of that (10% of the area of the EU) to be exclusively dedicated to nature conservation. The Convention on Biological Diversity (UNBCD), meanwhile, is hoping to achieve similar targets globally. The European strategy explicitly names IBAs as a tool for identifying new areas in need of protection. And in the future, some of our IBAs may be upgraded to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) – priority areas for protection.

At the same time, we need to ensure that our new IBAs are considered, and excluded where possible from renewable energy projects, especially for wind power. It is going to be a monumental task, and there are years of hard work ahead of us.

But for now let's give thanks to the many dozens of ornithologists whose data have supported LIPU's own efforts to reach the point where this new list of IBAs can be published.

Comparing the figures for the years 2002 and 2025 we can see:

IBAs in 2002

Total area: 6,909,900 hectares

REGIONS WITH THE LARGEST AREA OF IBAs
- Abruzzo (40.1% covered by IBAs)
- Friuli-Venezia Giulia (36.1% covered by IBAs)
- Valle d'Aosta (31.5% covered by IBAs)

AND THE REGIONS LEAST COVERED BY IBAs
- Umbria (5.1%)
- Emilia-Romagna (5.1%)
- Liguria (5.6%)

IBAs in 2025

Total area: 9,396,410 hectares

REGIONS WITH THE LARGEST AREA OF IBAs
- Abruzzo (42.8% covered by IBAs)
- Basilicata (39.5% covered by IBAs)
- Trentino-Alto Adige (38.7% covered by IBAs)

AND THE REGIONS LEAST COVERED BY IBAs
- Umbria (5.4%)
- Liguria (6.8%)

★★★

MACARTHUR'S WOOD WARBLERS

Claudio Celada Nature Conservation Director

A full 65 years after its publication, MacArthur's 'Warbler Study' is still taught on ecology courses. Let's find out more about it.

Robert H. MacArthur belongs among the true giants of ecology. Born in Toronto, Canada in 1930, he is considered one of the founding fathers of vertebrate (and especially bird) ecology thanks to his studies on population and community ecology. He earned his PhD in 1956, at Yale University under the guidance of Evelyn Hutchinson (another founding father of ecology). The subject of MacArthur's doctoral thesis was the concept of the 'ecological niche', applied in his study to five species of wood warblers of the genus Dendroica.

He was unconvinced by existing theories of how these birds might be able to coexist when they appeared to occupy the same ecological niche.

Dendroica are brightly coloured migratory passerines weighing little more than 10 grammes. They breed in North America but spend the winter in Central and South America. The species studied were as follows: Bay-breasted Warbler *(Dendroica castanea)*, Myrtle Warbler *(Dendroica coronata)*, Cape May Warbler *(Dendroica tigrina)*, Blackburnian Warbler *(Dendroica fusca)* and Black-throated Green Warbler *(Dendroica virens)*. [But please see the translator's note on species names, below.]

The Studies

MacArthur was interested in studying the interactions between these species in their breeding habitat, the mature coniferous forests of the United States and Canada. He was unconvinced by existing

theories of how these birds might be able to coexist when they appeared to occupy the same ecological niche. So he took on the task of measuring the average foraging distance from the top of the tree and from the trunk for each species, defining 16 foraging areas in each tree and spending thousands of hours observing these wood warblers among the canopy of the trees.

It soon became apparent that each of the five species spent time in different parts of the canopy. For example, the Cape May Warbler preferred the top of the tree, while the Bay-breasted predominantly used central, more internal areas.

The different species used different hunting techniques to catch their insect prey too. There were those that remained airborne for a long time (Black-throated Green Warbler), and those that lurked, only to dash out and grab an insect (Cape May Warbler). To top it all, MacArthur noticed that the actual hatching dates of the young were slightly staggered across these species, another clue as to how they manage to coexist in similar (but not quite identical) ecological situations, even though food supply must surely be finite.

The Relevance of MacArthur's Warbler Study

After 65 years, MacArthur's thesis still holds sway. His 'warbler paper' is still taught in ecology classes, and its central message of coexistence resonates with as much relevance as it ever did – even for human communities, as long as we avoid falling into the cosy traditional ideas of how animal communities work. MacArthur's warblers are fighting for limited resources, but evolutionary processes have allowed

them to optimise the use of available resources and made their coexistence possible.

Robert MacArthur died aged just 42. But in that short life he had also collaborated with E. O. Wilson on the notable 'Theory of Island Biogeography', thus picking up on the work of Darwin and Wallace, who more than a century earlier had realised that islands often hold the key to unlocking evolutionary mysteries. But of course, that is yet another story. For now let me leave you with the image in your mind's eye of a tree full of warblers, managing to coexist peacefully.

Translator's note on species names:
The above article uses common and taxonomical names that MacArthur might have known. But the 'Myrtle Warbler' is now considered to be conspecific with 'Audubon's Warbler' and its new name is 'Yellow-rumped Warbler'. To confuse the issue further, the genus Dendroica is now merged with the genus Setophaga, and the latter genus name is preferred. The second part of the taxonomic binomial remains, however, unchanged!

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NEWS IN BRIEF

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

Following our President's editorial it's time to have a brief look back over the year, and we can derive some real satisfaction from what our friends in Italy have achieved with our help. Thanks to your support we funded 13 projects with a total of €128,000 and

all have achieved their objectives. From a modest €3,000 for the protection of ground nesting Collared Pratincoles in Sicily to €18,000 to complete – as described in this edition – the revision of Italy's IBAs, we have made a difference. Thank you all for your continued support.

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The only cloud on our horizon is the slow, steady, and unrelenting decline in our membership, which seems to be mostly caused by things we can do nothing about. We have tried various campaigns in the general and specialised press and these have had some success, but we are, in a sense, offering a 'product' that works in another country, and that does mean limited appeal. We can only turn to you, you who have already chosen to support this work in another land, and ask if you can recruit more friends or acquaintances who might share our passion.

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A similar appeal is that for anyone with skills in the Italian language to join our small team of translators and play a critical role in the production of this newsletter. This is a case of 'many hands make light work' – a strong team means less work for each individual.

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Our Trustees' Annual Report and approved accounts have been filed with the Charity Commission and may be consulted on its website (search for 1081826 or LIPU-UK). The same documents are posted on our own website at:

https://www.lipu-uk.org/lipu-uk-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-24/

I realise that some of you may not be able to see these and I am happy send a printed copy on request.

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The winners of our Annual Draw were chosen on 3 December and are:

1st prize	£500	Kristine Moore of Powys,
2nd prize	£200	Rosalind Bliss of Derbyshire, and
3rd prize	£100	Patricia Pitts of Thirsk.

Congratulations to them, and thanks to all who took part. Proceeds will help further projects in Italy in 2025.

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Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU's Director General, has been writing leading articles in Ali for many years and many members have written to say how much they have enjoyed his thoughtful pieces. Peter Rafferty, one of our team of translators, with the help of Dave Brooks, our copy editor, has collated *Apertura* by Danilo since 2014 into an e-book and it is now available on Amazon and in the Apple store for a nominal fee.

I have the greatest admiration for Danilo as a Director General and as a writer – I commend this volume to all.

The links to the downloads are:

Apple: https://books.apple.com/us/book/white-whales-and-black-swans/id6738432762

and an even longer one for the Amazon download:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0DNTXVKWJ/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2PIT6YJAXO14R&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.TFUBHvoM_RjgrwaWCR21TA.3_3rAGcVDxFUzCC0pUbzCcLWC_1X1MoOaarQL6wr82U&dib_tag=se&keywords=danilo+selvaggi&nsdOptOutParam=true&qid=1732398590&s=digital-text&sprefix=danilo+selvaggi,digital-text,62&sr=1-1

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As always, this edition of Ali could not have been produced without the help of the volunteers of my production team who, for this issue, were:
Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Andy Merrick, Lesley Tompkins and Peter Rafferty.

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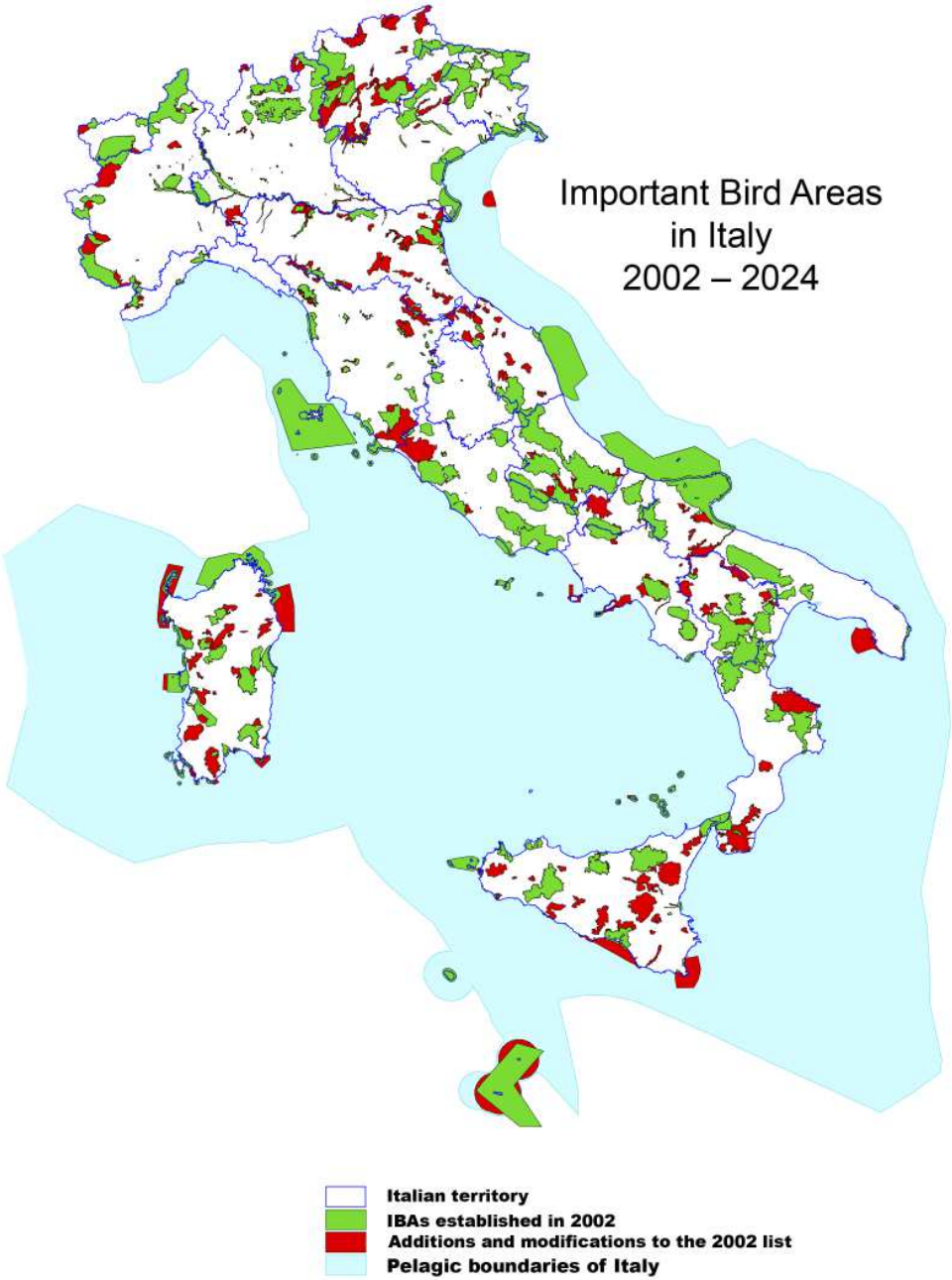
Important Bird Areas
in Italy
2002 – 2024
Italian territory
IBAs established in 2002
Additions and modifications to the 2002 list
Pelagic boundaries of Italy

‘The owl – wrote Pliny the Younger – is especially funereal, and is especially abhorred in all auspices of a public nature: it inhabits deserted, desolate and terrifying places.’ But he wasn’t an ornithologist ...