

ali

Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



- LIPU – Sixty Years of success
- Farmland Bird Index – 25 Years
- Cranes in the Po Valley
- Annual appeal

Spring 2025

SINCE 1965

Danilo Selvaggi, LIPU Director general

The sixtieth anniversary of LIPU's foundation one spring day in Naples is an opportunity to revisit in part the path it has taken since, along with that of environmentalism in general, and to assess the importance of our work and the tasks that await us. For birds, for nature, and for all.

History, leavened with a certain amount of myth, tells us that Giorgio Punzo decided to found LIPU exactly 60 years ago, on a spring day in 1965, after reading in his newspaper the disturbing news that the Italian government had granted a derogation to hunters, allowing them once more to indulge in the terrible practice of Spring shooting. Arriving from Africa to breed after a journey filled already with natural hazards, migrating birds would be greeted with a fusillade. Hundreds of thousands of guns raised skywards. 'It is a ridiculous decision', the Professor must have thought. 'Enough is enough.'

The Promise

Neapolitan by birth, Giorgio Punzo was a secondary school teacher, as dedicated to culture as he was to nature. Nature in general and birds in particular were his passion, along with philosophy and the Classics. He had graduated in Biology and Philosophy and started a university career prior to moving into school teaching, all the while developing his ideas as to how he could act personally to halt the devastating processes that were assailing nature in Italy in those years, among which the hunting and the trapping



Common Cranes seen in record numbers near Pavia in the Po valley, see page 27



The Farmland Bird Index shows that birds like the Tawny Pipit (left) and Stonechat are in serious decline, see page 15.

Thanks to member, Dave Wragg, for the excellent image of Red-footed Falcons on the cover, the pictures on this page are © David Lingard



... developing his ideas as to how he could act personally to halt the devastating processes that were assailing nature in Italy in those years, among which the hunting and the trapping of birds stood out.

of birds stood out. Birds were trapped and shot in enormous numbers. Sheer destruction. And so there came the famous morning in spring 1965. Punzo read the article about the spring hunt and at that moment, on the balcony of his house – so we are told – a Blue Rock Thrush alighted in its cobalt livery. In awe of its beauty, Punzo promised it that he would take action from that hour, and immediately set about founding a society to save birds from the fate that others had marked out, and in that place and at that moment the idea of LIPU was conceived. At 32 Via Ugo Ricci, Vomero, Naples, thanks to ugly news and a beautiful bird. Blue.

Against the Destruction

A few months later, on November 13, 1965, the manifesto of the new association was signed in Rome, in the zoo at the Villa Borghese. Gathered in Rome's autumn sun were Marta Fabris and Michele Camperchioli, the young Roman couple who were LIPU's first volunteers, then the bird lover and nature writer Vittorio Manassé, as well as Ermanno Bronzini, the zoo's director, who became LIPU's first honorary president, and of course Giorgio Punzo. Once this was done, Punzo went back immediately to travelling Italy to look for support and members with skills, recruiting among others the late Longino Contoli and Fulco Pratesi and two members of the British Institute in Florence, Robin Chanter and Ian Greenlees. The logo chosen for the new organisation was like a Tao symbol in the form of two doves. Its name was eloquent: LENACDU, for Lega nazionale contro la distruzione degli uccelli, the national league against the destruction of birds, which spoke for itself in terms of the situation at the time, and in doing so inevitably made central the idea of

The Decree divided wild animals into two: game, to be shot, and vermin, to be exterminated.

destruction and the wish the stand up to it. In terms of the relationship between humanity and nature, destruction was the sign of the times. Nature was put completely at the mercy of human whims and destined, if nothing were to change, effectively to disappear.

For Our Sole Purpose

The law governing hunting at that time was Royal Decree 1016 of June 5, 1939. The decree gave enormous privileges to hunting, extending the season whether as a norm or by the activation of derogations for the spring hunt in particular, to make it effectively year round, from August to April. Trapping with nets was completely legitimate, as were the taking and destroying of nests and eggs. The Decree divided wild animals into two: game, to be shot, and vermin, to be exterminated. Among the latter appeared eagles, kites, Goshawks, Sparrowhawks, the Eagle Owl and in reality all raptors of day and of night, as well as Jays, shrikes and corvids. The two million Italian hunters had an almost entirely free hand, sustained not only by favourable legislation but by a culture that stood fully behind the practice of hunting, that gave blessing to it in churches, boasted of it in conversation, and assigned to it a role of prime importance as bulwark against the dark and mysterious world of wild animals. For these wild animals – in some cases only a step away from extinction – there was a lack of any framework for their protection, but above all there was no sense of justification for their having an independent existence. The general attitude was that nature, if not actively harmful, existed only for the benefit of humans: for our sole purpose. LENACDU's task then was enormous, and not for hunting alone.

Thousands of kilometres of coast were ruined forever by speculators who enriched themselves to satisfy the demand for hotels and second homes.

Concrete Jungles

Italy in those days was a country anxious to redeem itself after the disaster of the Second World War, but exposed to problems of all kinds, for the environment not least, among which was that which passed into history as speculative building, something for which we continue to pay the price. 'From 1950 - wrote the historian Paul Ginsborg in *A History of Contemporary Italy* - in both the urban and rural landscapes of the peninsula there were catastrophic changes; many historic centres were irreversibly transformed, while the outskirts grew into chaotic concrete jungles. Thousands of kilometres of coast were ruined forever by speculators who enriched themselves to satisfy the demand for hotels and second homes. Woods, alpine valleys, fishing villages, lagoons and islands were polluted, destroyed or left unrecognisable. Urban Italy grew without check and in such a disorderly fashion that Italians gained a reputation of being unable to protect their urban and natural treasures.' In just a few years, from 1950 to 1964, 800,000 houses were built, useful in that they took many Italians out of places unfit for purpose, but achieved without regard for safety, without adequate urban planning, and more than that, without any thought for the environment. Development, consumerism, cars and cement became the guiding factors. Italy was looking to rise again from the poverty and rubble, and caught a glimpse of a happier life, without thinking of the cost of the dream, for the most part broken, that so many would have to pay, nature above all.

Smog, Minamata, Robins

The problem, moreover, was not only an Italian one.

Though not realised at the time, the first signs of the ecological crisis were already there, both in Europe and the wider world. In London in December 1952, a mix of industrial smoke and fog created smog, darkening the sky for a week and rendering the air unbreathable. An enormous number of Londoners were admitted to hospital and many, perhaps more than ten thousand, died. At the end of the Fifties, in the port city of Minamata in Japan, came the outbreak of an illness that came to be known as Minamata Syndrome. It was a terrible affliction, with hundreds of deaths caused by the release of methyl mercury into the sea by a local chemical plant and its consequent accumulation in fish, a major part of the diet of the local population. The United States in turn saw, in 1962, the epochal release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, with its exposure of the damage to the environment, to wildlife (most notably the American Robin) and to human life itself caused by agriculture's discovery of chemical pesticides, most notably DDT, and their excessive use over the previous two decades. All took them up, without realising that at bottom they were poisons, and that when the insects that absorbed the poison were eaten by the birds, they too were poisoned. Dying, they vanished from the American spring.

The Great Acceleration

These events, distant from each other in space but close together in time, had an essential characteristic in common: the close relationship between a certain kind of progress and the environmental damage done by its various forms. Industries create jobs but poison the air and the water. Chemical products help agriculture but poison our food, birds, and the earth beneath our feet. The Industrial Revolution gave

The Great Acceleration was the term given to the process that, starting from the Fifties, signified the steepening climb in every area of human activity and exploitation

many new capabilities to human society, giving new force to the old and perhaps eternal human tendency, that of always doing more than the strictly necessary, so that technology and the acceleration of the world gained a new fierce momentum. It is no coincidence that The Great Acceleration was the term given to the process that, starting from the Fifties, signified the steepening climb in every area of human activity and exploitation (water, wood and soil consumption, the volume of material transportation and more) with an equivalent growth in the number of distress signals being raised, such as the loss of biodiversity to pollution, and the acidification of the oceans caused by atmospheric CO₂, all of which established a direct link between production and environmental issues. In other words, progress has a Dark Side. It gives benefits to at least a part of the world's population, but at the heavy cost of the ecological crisis.

A Cultural Leap

In addition to exposing the abuse of chemical products in Silent Spring, Rachel Carson had taken another step forwards. She had raised a cognitive question, showing that environmental problems had at their base a mistaken approach to nature, one that saw it as an unresponsive and insignificant entity, at best a warehouse from which to draw resources and a problem to be controlled when collateral damage occurred. It was, she said, a view of nature that was fundamentally flawed. Control, whether through agricultural substance abuse or certain forms of land management, is an erroneous mindset, an inefficient and ethnically unjust way of relating to what nature has to give. For this reason she proposed a cultural leap: to move from a relationship based on control

to one of true partnership, an alliance to give mutual benefit to both nature and humanity.

Wildlife, Not Game

It was in this climate of opposition to ecologically harmful human behaviour, while also looking for alternative ways, that LIPU, with its vision and its policies, was born. From 1965 onwards the League's actions multiplied and began to bear fruit. In 1967 Law 799 forbidding spring hunting was approved. In 1968 a documentary produced by LIPU detailing the disastrous effects of bird trapping in Italy was shown on Swedish television in prime time, and it had a major impact on international public opinion. The League's magazine, *Pro Avibus*, the antecedent of *Ali*, had begun its quest to inform, speaking of the importance of environmental education and arguing as to the necessity for Italy finally to commit to legislation fit for the purposes of protected areas, hunting, the protection of birds and the conservation of nature. It was in the same *Pro Avibus* that Longino Contoli developed the definition of wild fauna, proposing a move away from that of game, of animals being considered simply in terms of their merits as objects to be hunted, to a broader one recognising their autonomy as wild creatures; an important insight that led years later to the historic Law 157 of 1992.

With Different Eyes

Then there came the recovery centres, the oases and birdwatching, the anti-poaching camps in Sardinia and on the Straits of Messina, the battle for parks, the referenda promoted and almost won, the two laws for the restriction of hunting, the abolition of bird

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trapping, the teachings of Danilo Mainardi, the work on different species, and the thousands of members, donors and volunteers who united in LIPU to make its work possible. Together, all these projects went beyond their individual goals, signifying as they did the driving force for a change in Italian culture, one that began learning to understand birds, and looking at them with different eyes, attentive and respectful. To an Italy still locked in a violent tradition of wicked wolves, birds of ill omen and a dangerous and hostile nature, LIPU related a different story: that of the beauty of birds, of the mighty task of migration, of the all-embracing fidelity of storks, of the swallows that return to the same barn, to the same place, year after year. The Hoopoe is not a sign of ill luck, LIPU insisted. Nor are birds in general. On the contrary, they are a blessing as being witness to an equilibrium, a diversity, to a circle of life not restricted to our own. To richness. And the message spread widely, to change mentalities, languages and ideas. Little by little, Italy was changing.

Little Big Things

LIPU's admission in 1993 to BirdLife International, the federation of our sister organisations across the world, was in a way a second beginning. Environmentalism was entering a global stage, the same as on which, the year before at the Rio Summit, the great questions of the future had been raised: the decline in biodiversity, the protection of the forests, sustainable development and climate change. Through progressive and structured planning, LIPU did the same, widening the scope of its projects and putting the theme of birds at the centre of a wider theoretical framework in a systematic approach that retained the identity and the competences of

the association, developed over the course of time and indispensable to a detailed knowledge of the issues involved, but putting them at the service of a greater goal. 'At a certain point in our journey – says LIPU's President (from an early age a volunteer with the Ostia delegation) Alessandro Polinori – after long periods of work on national issues and the legacy of our history, LIPU began to work on the links between birds and habitats, on ecological networks, agriculture, cities, the politics of energy and climate. It was a step forwards that readied us for engagement with the global questions, alongside our partners in BirdLife International, to give support in the attainment of major international objectives, as happened last year with the Nature Restoration Law. We did this, however, without losing sight of our own country: the local involvement, the caring for a bird in a recovery centre, the passion of our members. We have thought and acted both globally and locally. Both together.' It is something that has perhaps been the most notable characteristic of LIPU, ever since that day in 1965: to work for the big things while keeping a focus on the little. A sparrow, a tit, a swift, a broken wing, a nest. The big and the little.

A Blue Day

Nevertheless, the question we sometimes hear still being asked 60 years on is this: why the preoccupation with birds? Why, among so many other problems? It is a question at risk of becoming more insistent, faced with the geopolitical crises shaking the planet. Wars, tensions, the breaking of alliances, anxiety over the future. What do birds matter in such a world? There are a number of replies to this, but there is one already implicit in

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the question: the root causes of the global crises are identical to the issues that birds are falling prey to – greed, the irresponsible use of natural resources, forms of development that are tearing the house down, leading some to seek remedies more damaging still. Birds are citizens of this world as much as we are, and we can learn much from them. They reveal the true face of these crises and tell us how to respond. A page on LIPU's new website explains it this way: 'Birds are connections and insights. A swallow is not only a swallow but a feed of information linking agriculture to the amount of biodiversity in the countryside, to the healthiness of our food, to the health of our landscapes and of our state of mind. It is the same with the great voyages of migration, giving in a sense an overview of the relationships between countries and different cultures, and a picture of the degree to which care for the Earth and peaceful coexistence are present – or lacking – in the world. Who can imagine a world with no sight of birds in the air above us, without their colours and their songs? What sort of a world would it be?'

This, in the end, is what Giorgio Punzo had in mind on the spring day in 1965, a blue day in a time of bird slaughter, when he gave his promise to the Blue Rock Thrush that LIPU would be born. He could neither imagine nor tolerate a world without birds. With no sight of birds in the air above us, without their colours and their songs. What kind of world would it have been? And what kind of world would it be?

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CLIMATE: HOPE IS A PLACE CALLED BELEM

The year 2024 was not a positive one in the fight against climate change. In fact, let's be honest, it was a failure: COP29 failed, coal consumption in China rose, right-wing European governments obstructed the Green Deal, and Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement. Adding to this horror story is the record increase in temperatures. Which, as confirmed by the Copernicus Global Climate Report 2024 published in January, broke the previous year's record, with temperatures now 1.6°C higher than pre-industrial levels. As a result, the year past was not only the first to exceed the Paris Agreement threshold of +1.5°C, it was also the hottest year ever recorded for all continental regions, including Europe but excluding Antarctica and Australasia. And

... considering that only 10 out of the 195 signatories – accounting, collectively, for just 17 per cent of global emissions – have managed to submit their plans on time.

it is clear to everyone that the climate is worsening: the numbers and severity of hurricanes, cyclones, storms, heatwaves and droughts are all on the rise.

Climate Plans? No Thanks

Then, 2025 opened with the postponement of the deadline for submitting National Climate Plans, which individual countries were supposed to deliver by 10 February as per the Paris Agreement of 2015. Everything has been delayed by seven months, a bleak outlook considering that only 10 out of the 195 signatories – accounting, collectively, for just 17 per cent of global emissions – have managed to submit their plans on time. Among those yet to submit their plans are China, India, and the European Union, the last of which will likely present its plan in the summer since the national plans have to go through Brussels. The EU has, however, confirmed its commitment – through the Competitiveness Compass, a strategic document that guides EU economic policy for the next five years – to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 90 per cent by 2040.

The remaining hope of reaching a global agreement to slow down and stop the rise in temperatures is pinned on the next World Climate Conference, COP30, which will take place in Brazil in November 2025 in the city of Belem, capital of the Amazonian state of Pará. The region is crucial in the fight against climate change in the coming years – a precious place that preserves forests vital to the planet, and where we hope a truly effective agreement can finally emerge.

FARMLAND BIRDS INDEX – THE LONG FLIGHT OVER THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE

LIPU has monitored farmland birds for 25 years, first with the project MITO 2000, then with the Farmland Bird Index. This year confirms the dramatic fall in the numbers of birds in agricultural environments, a decline that can only be arrested by changing our models of production and consumption.

Roberta Righini, Matteo Fontanella, LIPU Nature Conservation Dept

The worrying decline in wild birds that live in European agricultural environments continues. Italy, unfortunately, is no exception. In the country, two out of three species of farmland birds are suffering serious decline, with notable negative spikes for species such as the Wryneck, Stonechat, Tawny Pipit and Tree Sparrow. This is revealed by the latest edition of the Farmland Birds Index (FBI). Monitoring began in 2000 and was carried out year on year by LIPU, thanks to funds from the Ministry of Agriculture within the framework of the National Rural Network.

Gathering and Analysing the Data

The surveying of birds in farmland environment constitutes a unique exercise in Italy due to the length and geographical extent of the study. The methodology applied is well established and standardised: the censuses, which are repeated every year during the breeding season (15 May – 30 June), involve hundreds of data collectors who note down all the species of birds seen or heard in 15 listening

The situation is particularly worrying for 71% of the farmland species, which are in significant decline. The species most affected include the Wryneck (-76%), Stonechat (-71%), Tawny Pipit (-70%) and Tree Sparrow (-66%).

points for every 10 x 10 km area. From these data two indices are calculated: the FBI – that is, the geometric mean, which analyses the trends of 28 target species linked to farmland – and the FBIPM, which concentrates on 13 species typical of mountain pastures.

The Results from 2024: Worrying Signs of Decline

The analyses from 2024 confirm the status of decline in populations of birds in agricultural areas in Italy: the value of the FBI is, in fact, 67.3 (100, from 2000, is considered the reference value). The mountain grassland (FBIPM) index has fallen by more than 8 percentage points with respect to the previous year, with a value today of 65.4. The situation is particularly worrying for 71% of the farmland species, which are in significant decline. The species most affected include the Wryneck (-76%), Stonechat (-71%), Tawny Pipit (-70%) and Tree Sparrow (-66%).

These data also allow us to draw a picture of the structure of communities of birds in our countryside. In the course of this quarter of a century there has been an increase (or a stabilisation) in the generalist species, such as corvids, who manage to adapt themselves better to trivialised and man-made environments. At the same time, specialist species – which are more vulnerable to environmental alterations like loss of habitat, intensification of agriculture, and the use of pesticides – have been drastically reduced in numbers. For their survival, in fact, even the presence of a hedge can make the difference, because such elements of the landscape act as both a shelter and a source of food. The same

happens with stable meadows or flower strips, which play host to a wide variety of insects and small mammals.

The decline is not limited, as might be thought, only to the plains, which do however register the greatest decline (-49%), but extends also to the foothills (-36%) and hills (-37%), which demonstrates how intensification is growing in these areas because of often permanent monocultures, including vineyards, hazel groves and orchards.

To this are added the effects of climate change, including the increase in droughts in the Mediterranean area. The indicator falls even in regions and geographical zones once characterised by stable or even growing populations.

A Quarter of a Century

The FBI project celebrated, in 2024, a significant milestone: the twenty-fifth year of activity monitoring populations of birds linked to the agricultural environment. Started in 2000 with the name MITO 2000 (Italian ornithological survey), as a census conducted on a voluntary basis and extended to the national level, in no time at all the project enjoyed steady development coordinated by LIPU. Since 2009, the support of the Ministry of Agriculture – under the umbrella of food and forestry sovereignty – has allowed a major organisation of the project to take place. Thanks to funds from the National Rural Network, annual, systematic data gathering and analysis has been made possible.

Surveying on a long-term footing enables us to assess with a very solid statistical basis the trends

What is happening in our country is not, unfortunately, very different from the situation in Europe more broadly.

in populations of birds and, as a result, the state of health of their habitat. Birds are widely recognised as exceptional ‘ecological guards’ precisely because of their profound link with the environment in which they live and because they are easy to census by song or by sight. The variations in their populations reflect significant environmental changes, supplying valuable indices on the quality of ecosystems.

Reversing the Decline

What is happening in our country is not, unfortunately, very different from the situation in Europe more broadly.

Data from the pan-European project Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, which combined the values from the Italian FBI and those from the other 25 Member States, report a reduction of more than 40 per cent in species typical of agricultural environments in the period 1990 – 2022, with a negative trend in the whole of the EU.

The crisis in biodiversity rings alarm bells that require an effective change in our agricultural model and in our politics if this decline is to be countered. Despite past rounds of Common Agricultural Policy planning – for which FBI is a context indicator – and measures progressively introduced to make our politics more ‘green’, we have collectively been unable to halt either the slide towards uniformity in the agricultural landscape or the use of pesticides and fertilisers, which continue to pose a serious threat to biodiversity.

The European Strategy on Biodiversity 2030 is an opportunity to reinforce the politics of conservation

and promote agricultural practices that respect biodiversity. A start would be the implementation of the principal European legislative act that stems from the Strategy: The Nature Restoration Law. The Law contains two articles dedicated to agricultural ecosystems, establishing binding objectives for Member States across a series of indicators, among which is an increase in the FBI.

To these efforts to restore nature we must add a commitment to a change in the model both of production and consumption: only in this way will we be able to have again springs rich in songs and colours in our countryside.

BIRDS, THE WHOLE WORLD

Claudio Celada, Director of Nature Conservation

Between commitment, innovation and success, LIPU’s mission has thus far spanned 60 years, and continues, with new tools and perspectives. The future of nature conservation is a great challenge that in many ways calls us to reflect on and helps us to understand the significant contradictions inherent in human societies.

‘Caring for the conservation of birds’, said the great biologist Thomas Lovejoy, ‘means caring for the great issues of the world.’ Over its 60 years, LIPU has progressively embraced this principle, developing thought and actions that have brought it from 1965 to the grand challenges of today’s difficult world. These challenges must now be addressed by drawing on the strength of tradition, but also by employing

now comprises 29 areas, covering 5,000 hectares of protected nature and hosting approximately 5,300 species, including over 300 bird species.

still-relevant traditional tools such as oases, recovery centres, projects and our many practical activities alongside new methods.

Oases, Yesterday and Tomorrow

Just a few years after its foundation, LIPU made oases a cornerstone of its activities. Crava Morozzo, in the province of Cuneo, the first in a long series, was established in 1979. It is no coincidence that this is a wetland, a habitat long considered deserving of special attention for its ornithological value and vulnerability. Since then, the oasis system has been grown and consolidated, and now comprises 29 areas, covering 5,000 hectares of protected nature and hosting approximately 5,300 species, including over 300 bird species. There have been four additions in recent years. In 2023, the Oasi Parco Naturale di Pantanello, in Lazio, and in 2024 the Oasi Soglitelle, which tells a real story of land redemption in Campania, alongside the Fucecchio Marsh and Sibolla Lake nature reserves – two vital inland wetlands in Tuscany that are also the focus of habitat restoration and nature recovery for the future.

The Community behind Conservation

The concept of the ‘oasis’, once an innovative idea and still highly relevant, has evolved over decades of the patient inclusion of these areas under the national law for protected areas (394/91), as well as via a more recently employed ecosystemic management approach. Originally designated as wildlife protection oases under the national wildlife protection law (157/92), most oases are now protected as nature reserves or as Natura 2000 sites, following the Birds and Habitats Directives criteria. Their management

BirdLife has identified 12,000 terrestrial and marine IBAs worldwide, 4,500 of which are in Europe (4,418 terrestrial, the rest marine).

has also adapted over time, from individual oases to a ‘network’, and from focusing on individual species of interest to a broader biodiversity approach, framed within the aforementioned ecosystem management perspective. Looking ahead, the focus on adaptation to climate change will become an increasingly important issue in the coming years. Some oases and reserves have entered the IBA Important Bird Areas (IBA) system established by BirdLife International, which has become crucial for avian conservation.

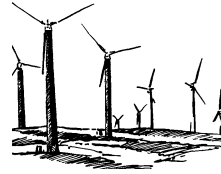
Valuable Sites for Birds and Biodiversity

Over the years, LIPU’s conservation efforts have expanded beyond directly-managed areas. As mentioned in the previous edition of *Ali*, LIPU contributed to the launch of BirdLife International’s new IBA inventory, which – compared to earlier editions – benefits from more comprehensive ornithological knowledge and technological innovations, allowing for more precise mapping of areas and the georeferencing of bird distribution. BirdLife has identified 12,000 terrestrial and marine IBAs worldwide, 4,500 of which are in Europe (4,418 terrestrial, the rest marine). These areas are essential for identifying new protected sites in line with the European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Convention on Biological Diversity. IBAs are critical for bird conservation and contribute to the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) system, which includes not only birds but other animal groups and plants, thus supporting overall biodiversity.

Defending the Land

Nature conservation requires foresight and a broad-scale vision (global, European, national), but also a

capacity to act locally, focusing on both individual species and ecosystem conservation. Sometimes though, conservation alone is not enough, and political and legal action is also required. Through its growing technical specialisation and a keen understanding of the social context, LIPU has successfully defended nature from external threats, often related to infrastructure projects that damage the landscape and endanger habitats and species. Data collection, technical dossiers, reports, complaints, and legal appeals: the defence of the land is an area in which the LIPU community works synergistically at every level, from local delegations to the international stage.



Europe

It is in particular with the European BirdLife team that LIPU's actions have been truly strengthened and innovation introduced, especially given that nature conservation policies in Italy are often decided at the European level in the form of strategies, directives and regulations. The European level must therefore be monitored closely. In this regard, LIPU's staff rely heavily on Task Forces – working groups that bring together all European partners on specific issues with the aim of coordinating activities on complex topics such as the European Biodiversity Strategy, the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Marine Strategy and climate change policies. Working internationally within BirdLife has allowed LIPU to focus on the primary causes of biodiversity loss and address enormous challenges, having a significant impact on political decision-makers and prevailing cultural models.

It calls for regeneration efforts, including in mountain grasslands for cold-adapted species like the Ptarmigan and the Snowfinch, and in coastal and inland wetlands.

Climate and Nature Together

Regarding climate change, it is crucial (and will become even more so) to address this grave issue by identifying the ecosystems and species most affected by the climate, finding concrete solutions to protect them. In this respect, the contribution of the Nature Restoration Law, the European law aimed at habitat restoration, will be vital. It calls for regeneration efforts, including in mountain grasslands for cold-adapted species like the Ptarmigan and the Snowfinch, and in coastal and inland wetlands. The latter are essential if migrating birds are to rest and nest, but they also play a role in carbon capture, thus contributing to climate change mitigation. This highlights the tight relationship between climate and nature and underscores the importance of ensuring that the energy transition (including the installation of wind and solar plants) does not come at the expense of land and biodiversity. LIPU's extensive work on 'wind risk maps for birds' is a step in this direction.

Protecting Migration and Breeding

Over the years, and thanks to continuous monitoring and research, LIPU has gained a deep understanding of the vulnerability of many species during the breeding season and of the importance of migratory flyways – the routes that migratory birds take across countries and continents, facing numerous threats along the way. LIPU's efforts to protect nesting sites have been, and continue to be, substantial. The populations of Montagu's Harrier and Collared Pratincole, two species that nest on the ground in our agricultural areas, would be far poorer without LIPU's efforts to build partnerships with farmers and

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protect nests each year through intensive fieldwork. Similarly, the Kentish Plover, which nests in highly disturbed habitats such as sandy beaches, has benefitted from the care of many LIPU delegations, with Rende in Calabria and Arborea in Sardinia taking the lead. Bonelli's Eagle in Sicily is making a significant recovery thanks to decades of surveillance conducted by LIPU and other organisations. The Red-footed Falcon is being monitored in Parma and the Lesser Kestrel in Puglia and Basilicata, while the White Stork has spread throughout Calabria thanks to LIPU's excellent project in Rende.

Regarding migration, LIPU has worked to ensure a safer passage for birds crossing Italy. The battle against poaching (in areas like the Strait of Messina, Sardinia, Lombardy, the Po Delta and Lazio) and indiscriminate hunting has led to significant successes, reducing poaching and limiting hunting activities. However, this work is far from finished.

Without LIPU

What would the natural world look like today without LIPU's 60 years of action? Undoubtedly it would be very different – and not for the better. Many species now on the road to recovery in Italy (including herons and raptors) would almost certainly be extinct or on the brink of extinction. Many migratory birds and species linked to agriculture would have quietly vanished. The Natura 2000 network and hunting regulations would be much weaker, with unpredictable – and certainly negative – consequences for birds and habitats. Public awareness would be significantly lower without the tireless work of the recovery centres (now nine), which have not only treated hundreds of thousands

After the many successes of these past six decades, we still face numerous challenges, starting with the crucial Green Deal, which is strongly opposed by powerful lobbies.

of birds but also educated and informed millions of people, reaching their hearts and minds. Patience, perseverance, and a broad-scale vision combined with local action and knowledge have led to LIPU's evolution. And the organisation remains as passionate as ever, driving change in habits, laws and culture.

Beyond 60 Years, the Future

So, what happens next in such delicate and challenging times for nature and the world? After the many successes of these past six decades, we still face numerous challenges, starting with the crucial Green Deal, which is strongly opposed by powerful lobbies. Within this, the Nature Restoration Law marks the beginning of large-scale environmental restoration. After protection and management, the focus is now on recovering lost and degraded environments. This, alongside defending the European Union and its environmental regulations, is the work that awaits us in the coming years and decades. We aim to reverse the trend of biodiversity loss and regain nature, building on the community that LIPU has created: a community of loyal members, invaluable delegations (including LIPU-UK), oases and wildlife recovery centres, environmental guards, local conservation groups, technicians, scientists, educators, and communicators. This magnificent organisation will be crucial to our facing the future and taking Lovejoy's message even more seriously: protect birds, care for the world.



... together with the farmer who owns the field, we see the mother return to the nest.

LIPU IN ACTION

The Journey of the Montagu's Harrier

The wheat field was freshly threshed. We cautiously approach one of the nests identified after weeks of work. Hopes of finding Montagu's Harrier are slim, but we notice a dark dot from afar. It was mother harrier, on the ground in a protective attitude. The hope of maintaining this small population of Montagu's Harrier was suddenly rekindled. We waited for the mother to move away and decided to get closer: much to our surprise, the nest was miraculously unharmed; inside it, two eggs and two little heads rising. The pair, however, could never have protected it from predators, the heat, and the weather. We fence off the nest with electrified netting and cut and replant, as quickly as possible, some vegetation. We watch and wait, and the reward comes: incredulous, together with the farmer who owns the field, we see the mother return to the nest. The days pass, the chicks grow. We ring them before they take wing. We equip one of them, whom we call Esperanza, with a GPS so that we can follow its movements. After the first flights, near the nest, in Capitanata, the bird of prey first reaches another area of Puglia and then Calabria. Having reached an area near Catanzaro, however, the signal disappears. After a month and a half of anxious waiting, the GPS reports the bird in Niger! But then the first questions arise: Will she find her native land confiscated by expanses of photovoltaic panels or gigantic wind towers? Despite the worry, we are confident that she will make it. Esperanza is a fantastic messenger of peace and her feat will give us the strength and will to build a positive future for Montagu's Harriers
(Enzo Cripezzi, Foggia delegate)

Cranes in Pavia, a Record Year

The annual Crane census in the province of Pavia, coordinated by the LIPU delegation under the leadership of ornithologist Francesco Gatti, took place on 26 January. Twenty volunteers waited for the birds at nine observation points along the banks of the Pavia Po river, where during the winter the cranes return to sleep after spending the day feeding in stubble-rich agricultural areas. A guaranteed spectacle thanks to groups of 100 or more individuals in flight, in total over 2,000 cranes were observed – a record number for a species that has seen a steady increase in its numbers wintering in the Po Valley in recent years.



LIPU-UK ANNUAL APPEAL

This edition of *Ali* celebrates 60 years of LIPU and its dedicated work in Italy, with LIPU-UK proudly contributing for more than half of that time. LIPU-UK was founded in 1989 by Roger Jordan, who would have been proud to see what has been accomplished since then. In financial terms alone, we have raised over £2 million, ensuring it has been wisely and effectively spent on a wide range of conservation efforts – many of which would not have been possible without our support.

A prime example of this was shared by Claudio Celada, LIPU's Conservation Director and a valued friend as well as a partner. He highlighted the results of the recent revision to the list of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), a project supported for years by LIPU-

UK. One major success has been in Sardinia, where the regional government has banned the construction of wind farms in IBAs, with similar initiatives underway in other regions.

Since LIPU's founding – when the Anglo-Italian Society for the Protection of Animals played a crucial role in its birth – so much has changed for the better. We in LIPU-UK have helped drive that progress by supporting projects across Italy, thanks to the generosity of our members and friends. Unlike many charities, we don't inundate you with fundraising requests; we rely on just one appeal each year. That time has come, and we invite you to continue your generous support.

This year, we have committed to raising a total of €115,000 to fund the following important initiatives:

- Preventing the bycatch of marine birds around Linosa and Lampedusa, home to the Mediterranean's most important colony of Scopoli's Shearwaters.
- Protecting nesting Bonelli's Eagles and Lanner Falcons in Sicily, and Lanner Falcons in Apulia.
- Conducting anti-poaching patrols in black spots, including the Brescia Pre-Alps, the Po Delta, the Messina Strait, and parts of Sardinia.
- Annual monitoring of migrating raptors through Sicily, coordinated with the Messina Strait camp in Calabria.
- Research and monitoring the breeding of the Red-footed Falcon in Parma province.

- Monitoring and protecting Kentish Plover breeding sites in Sardinia, and for the first time, in Calabria.
- Completing the revision of the 2002 Important Bird Areas Atlas by assessing which of the 249 IBAs meet Key Biodiversity Area criteria and securing protection for priority sites.
- Identifying and protecting Collared Pratincole nest sites to prevent disturbance.
- Protecting nest sites of key Montagu's Harrier populations and tracking their movements with GPS devices.
- Continuing research on the movements and threats to the Little Bustard in Sardinia.

The map on page 31 shows where these projects will be carried out.

While much progress has been made, many challenges remain. I am sure you will agree that this work is vital, and I hope you will continue your generous support, as you have in previous years.

NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

Annual Draw

This was well supported and with exceptional generosity by our members, one of whom "sponsored" one of the prizes and all three winners declined some or all of their winnings. All have asked

to remain unnamed so I can simply say Thank you to all concerned.

Legacies

LIPU-UK has always felt that the active soliciting of legacies is distasteful and in the light of that it is particularly pleasing to record with gratitude bequests by Audrey Arkell, Pamela Davey, Brian Hinds, and Diana Wrapson. Their generosity will be remembered in the skies of Italy.

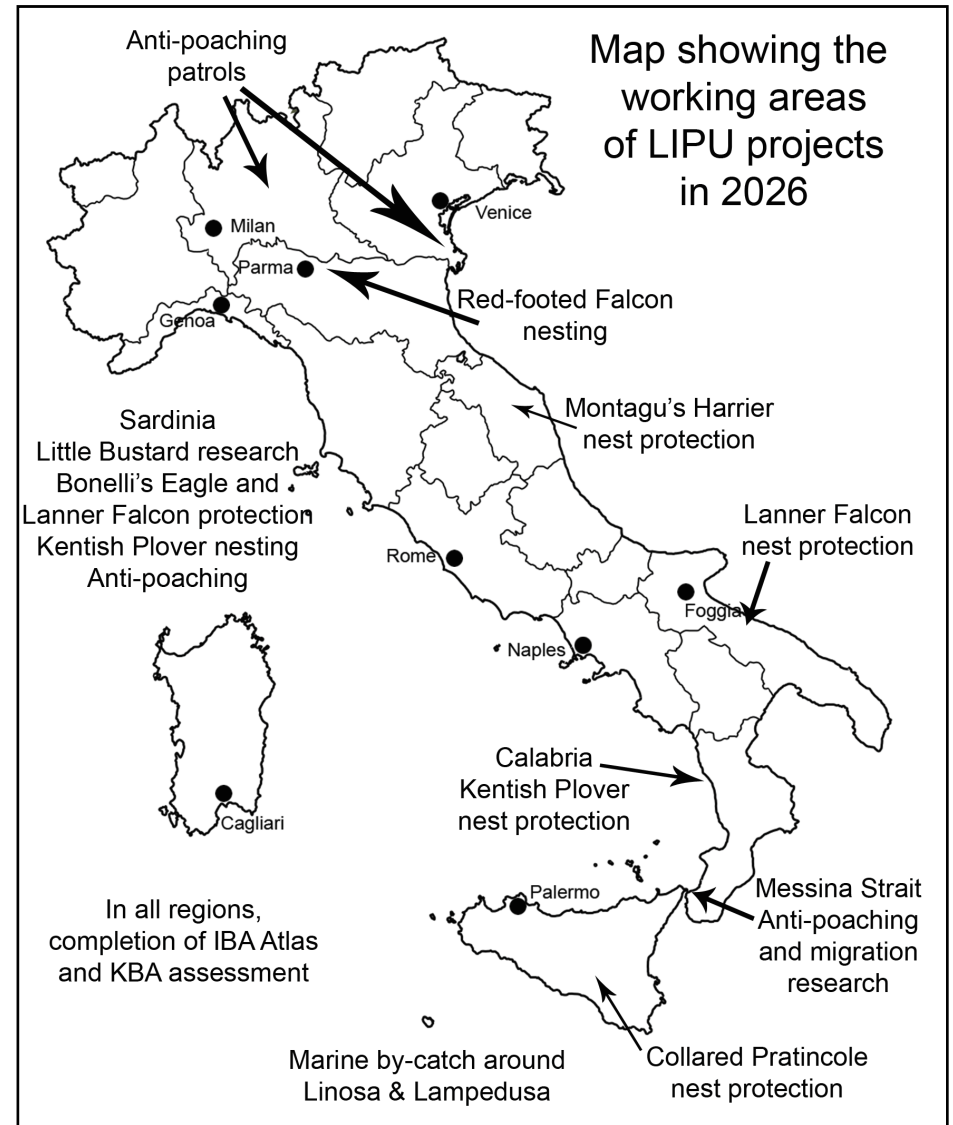
In similar vein I am pleased to record that donations in the last year have been received from the following trusts and organisations: The Valerie White Memorial Trust, The Janelaw Trust, Manx Ornithological Society, Duncan Louis Stewart Foundation, Peter Smith Charitable Fund for Nature and our founding supporter, AISPA.

Help needed

I have received two payments to our bank account with no more detail than that they are from “Mr J H T & Mrs J M”. Our bank cannot help so may I ask the sender to contact me so I can adjust the accounts and, at the very least, say “Thank you”.

Acknowledgements

The production of this issue would not have been possible without the help of my production team, who were: Dave Brooks, Andy and Betty Merrick, Peter Rafferty and Lesley Tompkins. My thanks to them all.



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