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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy



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Autumn 2025





This young Red-footed Falcon shows the colour ring on its leg which can be read from a distance with a telescope, see page 13. An Audouin's Gull - one of the species threatened by marine by-catch.



The dramatic cover image is © Henley Spiers an expert underwater photographer.

A Mariner Reborn

Danilo Selvaggi
LIPU Director
General

A habitat of extraordinary richness and interest, the sea is being put under enormous pressures that compromise its future along with ours. From its panoply of habitats through to individual species such as the Scopoli's Shearwater, we must take better care of the sea, and change our ways to bring regeneration to its environments and our thinking.

Crossing the Equator, the ship was seized by a violent storm that hurled it towards the freezing South Polar seas, where, beset by fogs and snows, and trapped by mast-high ice, with sloping masts and dipping prow, it found itself adrift. In a lost and seemingly lifeless corner of the ocean, the situation was desperate, and desperation seized the crew. How could they escape their fate? Then a great white bird appeared, an albatross, that approached the ship and began to follow it, eating the fish that the sailors caught. And with it, there came a wind from the south to bring them back to their course and to hope. Perched on the mainmast of the ship, it seemed a bird of good omen, a symbol of salvation. Then, unexpectedly, the tragic act. Taking up his crossbow, the Ancient Mariner took aim at the albatross, shooting and killing it. Without reason, almost unintentionally, as if seized by a sudden uncontrollable impulse. And despair fell again on the ship.

The Origin of Evil

Composed between 1797 and 1798, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is regarded as Samuel Taylor

Coleridge's greatest work as well as being a fundamental text of English romantic poetry. The poem's obscurity and symbolism have given rise to many interpretations, from the religious to those linked to a journey of initiation, or ones of conversion and change.

One theme, about which Coleridge had been considering writing an epic poem that addressed it directly, but that instead emerged naturally in the writing of the *Rime*, was that of the problem of evil and its origins – how and why it comes about – and of its consequences and how it may be remedied. This, in effect, is the crux of the story: an evil and motiveless act against a victim, the albatross, 'the bird that loved the man', that was not only innocent but a benefactor, the bringer of good news and the wind to bring them to safety. A victim that was a creature of the sea and the sky, the great stage on which the ballad is set, the greatest and richest ecosystem in the world.

It is in connection with this that Coleridge's ballad has today gained increasing ecological resonance. Is there a link between the thoughtless act of the Ancient Mariner and our own? If the Ancient Mariner's killing of the albatross was an offence against the sea, what does that say about what we are doing to it?

Taking Control

In 2019, in the first report from IPBES, the global organisation for the study of biodiversity and ecosystem services, came worrying confirmation of the impacts of human activity on nature, on a grand scale, modifying 75 per cent of terrestrial habitats and

66 percent of marine. The second figure is in many ways the more startling. We are used to looking at the sea and believing it, if not intact, at least to be healthy. The reality is otherwise. The environmental problems of the sea are many and growing, especially in view of the ever-increasing strategic role being thrust on it in increasingly varied ways: not only for commerce and transport but for communications (for example the submarine cables for network connections), for military bases, the new routes becoming opened up by the breaking up of sea ice, the construction of offshore wind installations, the placement of the massive servers needed to power artificial intelligence and more, not to mention the notions either of turning the sea in its entirety into a free-for-all rubbish dump or a location for future human cities. 'Control of the sea is the power of tomorrow' was in essence the conclusion of a recent series of parliamentary hearings, with interested parties including diplomats, academics, military and experts in geopolitics, the specific theme being that of the role of Italy and Europe in the Indo-Pacific region. In other words, a new form of race to gain power over the sea. It is not an appealing prospect, all the more when added to the already long list of factors creating problems for the life of marine environments.

Plastic, Harbours and Boats

According to Roberto Danovaro, ecologist and former president of the Anton Dohm Zoological Station, and author of *Restaurare la natura*, the sea is under unprecedented pressure and many ecosystems are being rapidly degraded: 'The problem of plastic pollution is increasingly grave, and has increased ten-fold since 1980, affecting 267 species, among which

are 86 per cent of turtles, 44 per cent of birds and 43 per cent of mammals. There is the damage done by the permeation of agricultural fertilisers, causing eutrophication of water bodies. The main problem, however, is the loss of marine habitats, down mainly to the construction of marine infrastructure and by bottom trawling. In Italy we have 137 industrial harbours and 537 for tourism, structures that cause physical damage to the habitats, which is aggravated by the often casual anchoring of small boats close to shore. In this country there are over 160 thousand of these, that drop anchor dozens of times every season, often smashing up or uprooting areas of sea grass and urchins.'

A Thousand Years in Seconds

Then there is the question of industrial fishing, that is perhaps of greatest concern. 'Nearly five million square kilometres of marine habitats', adds Danovaro, 'are physically damaged by fishing every year, and by trawling in particular. The environmental effects are grave, with the erosion of the best and richest habitats, the shrinking of meadows of sea grasses such as *Posidonia oceanica*, the Neptune Grass, the loss of kelp forests and the sudden disappearance of organisms over a thousand years old. Some black corals that were present all along the Italian coast, that had lived for over a thousand years and in some cases to fifteen hundred, were demolished in a matter of seconds.'

A thousand years in seconds. It is an image indicative of an approach destructive above all because of its incompatibility with the tempi of nature, the slow pace of its processes, its laborious patience. In a sense it is what happen to the albatross, that skims over the

yards of the ship, embodying ancestral messages and meanings, as if wanting to show them to the sailors, to point a new way out to them, only to be shot.

I Kill You Without Meaning to

The senseless act that killed the albatross leads us, passing from the level of poetry to one that is decisively prosaic, to that problem known as bycatch, or the unintentional killing of marine fauna by the methods of fishing. Every year, in the seas around Europe alone, bycatch accounts for between 130 and 300 thousand victims, including dolphins, turtles, sharks, rays, and, inevitably, seabirds. Finding themselves along the routes of fishing boats and approaching them looking for fish, the animals fall victim to hooks, nets and other devices used in the course of fishing and die in huge numbers. The damage caused to species already in a precarious state of conservation, such as the Yelkouan and Scopoli's shearwaters, the Audouin's Gull and to Shags, is considerable.

The American environmentalist poet Gary Snyder tells of how he set off as a ship's boy on a tanker from Japan in the Fifties, where he was awed by the sight of the great albatrosses that followed the ship looking for food. It was his discovery years later of the dramatic decline in these birds as an unintended consequence of the use of fishing lines deadly to them, and his vision of the albatrosses round the ship, that gave birth to his environmental awareness: majestic birds, with powerful yet graceful flight, that come in to share our company and food. And die as a result. The fishermen, then, can cause harm unintentionally, or at least without intending to directly. In reality, though, the problem of bycatch

should be considered as intentional, in the sense that its dynamics are well enough known to all interested parties, from fishermen to industrialists, from law makers to law enforcers, for it to be known what actions need to be taken to improve things. And this is the central point of the matter: the needed actions are late in coming. We know what the problem is but take no action.

Denial

The finding of more than three hundred shearwaters dead on the coasts of Lazio and Campania last spring was confirmation of the gravity of the situation, and a cue for LIPU to redouble its efforts, including the co-involvement of experts and the public (with further contributions coming from the protected areas of Sicily) in the collection of data usable both for demonstrating the existence of the problem, as if further proof were needed, and its extent, up to now denied. The prevalent attitude among the institutions has effectively been one of downplaying the problem, or denying that a problem exists. In this sense then, the data gathered on the deaths due to bycatch, essential for gaining a more detailed knowledge of the phenomenon, serves also to increase pressure on the administrators, by undercutting their arguments, or rather their excuses, for not acting.

It was exactly because of pressure from LIPU, and in particular a complaint lodged in November 2023, that the European Commission began infraction proceedings against Italy for giving insufficient attention to the measures provided for in the Habitats Directive: to monitor and avoid the unintentional capture of marine animals, and with it the risk of worsening the crisis in populations and species. A

letter from LIPU was sent only a few weeks ago addressed to the ministers for the environment and agriculture, to ask for their urgent intervention. Up to now there has been no reply.

Ode to the Night

Among those accidentally caught, the Scopoli's Shearwater is among the most frequent victims. It is a species of the Mediterranean, a little albatross of our waters, it is found in Sardinia, the Tremiti islands and the Pelagian, in particular the island of Linosa, that hosts the second most important population in the whole of Mare Nostrum. Most of the time the shearwaters live on the open sea, where they can find fish in abundance, that becomes doubly important during the laborious days of raising chicks. The task is great; to catch and swallow the fish, then return to land in the evening to feed the young, by regurgitating part of the food they have ingested. They can travel long distances, in some cases hundreds of miles, from the open sea to their nests. And it is with the fall of darkness that the breeding sites of the shearwaters become special. Their call, a keening song like the cry of a baby or the mewling of a cat, goes up into the air to be multiplied by the tens and the hundreds of birds around them, blending into a threnody that is unsynchronised, yet compelling and hypnotic, like the 'mystical abyss' of a sunken orchestra pit, an ode to the night to follow the hard labour of the day.

Science and Wonder

Tradition links the song of the Scopoli's Shearwater to the myth of the sirens. The song that Ulysses heard was of shearwaters not of sirens, yet still he

was bewitched, just as today are the researchers who work to study, ring and protect them, and who often confess that they are left with heads spinning by their disorienting music, as if science were only a pretext for a chance to drink it in. Science and poetry walk together more readily than we think. 'No one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry,' wrote Rachel Carson, who dedicated most of her professional and emotional life to the sea and wrote memorably about it, seeing it as a place of limitless wonder and a challenge for the future of the world. 'The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, (and the sea about us), the less taste we shall have for destruction.'

Restoring the Sea

What can be done, then, to halt the assault on the sea and to turn back the tide of destruction? 'The first thing - says Giorgia Gaibani, responsible for the Natura 2000 and Environmental Protection group of LIPU's science department - is to increase the extent of marine protected areas beginning with the SPAs and those covered by Natura 2000 in general. There is an infraction procedure in place seeking exactly this. It is then fundamental to take the problem of bycatch seriously, with the task being divided among institutions, the fishing industry, scientists and NGOs, in order to give an effective answer to the problem. We have to put a stop to this ongoing massacre, and LIPU is pressing for this to happen.'

'The regional administrations, in the planning process, must take full account of the maps LIPU has produced on wind installations at sea - add LIPU's Conservation Director, Claudio Celada and head of

Species and Research, Marco Gustin - and provide for sites that are removed from the usual migration routes of both sea and land birds, while also respecting marine fauna and ecosystems that are no less at risk. Marine habitats are to be renewed under the Restoration Law, and not suffer from subsequent damage.'

In support of the Restoration Law, there are four actions to be put in place for the sea, according to Roberto Danovaro, among which is the full application of its provisions. 'We must protect those marine ecosystems that are still intact, so that we reach the goal of at least 30 per cent of the total. With that as the starting point, we must set in motion the vital work of restoring the environments we have been damaging for too long, including sea meadows, coral reefs, mangroves and kelp forests. We must fight against pollution to reduce the releasing of all sorts of contaminants into the sea. And we must confront climate change, whether by reducing the emissions of climate-altering gases or activating planned adaptations to the climatic changes already under way, against the acidification of the sea, increasing erosion and deoxygenation of water bodies. Otherwise, the impact of extreme events will be further reinforced and will bring huge problems for nature, our economies and our health.' All agree, moreover, that to integrate these actions there must be wide-ranging cultural change throughout society.

An Insufficiency of Good

At the end of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* there is hope: the Mariner comes home. He has emerged from the madness of his deed and must tell of it, both for expiation and to prevent it happening again.

The Mariner's regeneration is one of thought, writes Ettore Canepa, due to the fact that he has finally learned to grasp 'the multicoloured beauty of nature and of being'. To leave behind the habit of blindness to the variety and bounty of nature he was subject to before. The Ancient Mariner becomes in a sense, a Mariner reborn.

It is perhaps the most appropriate response to the question that drove Coleridge to write the *Rime*. What is the origin of evil? The cause of evil is lack of thought. It is indifference, the loss of attention. In its origins, we do not do evil through the intention of doing evil, but through the disintention to do good. We fail to be attentive to the good and to the world, as if the good and the world were able to live their own lives without having to be looked after. Evil begins in this way, through a lack of attention, of consciousness, then gains autonomy and grows. And it destroys, kills for no reason, on land or on sea. We have to start again from here, to be mindful of the world's needs and of acting for the good, on land or on sea.

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THE LORDS OF THE RINGS

Successful ringing of the Red-footed Falcon in the Parma plain: two days of observation and measurement to understand the biology of these magnificent birds of prey better.

Andrea Mazza, LIPU Press Officer

The stillness of the countryside is broken by the hum of the cherry picker rising to the treetop. Mario holds up a mirror near the nest to check its contents. If the chicks are the right age, it's time to proceed. Skilled hands lift them from the nest and place them into a large container, which is then gently lowered to the ground by rope. Every detail of the procedure follows a strict protocol: the young falcons are weighed, measured, and fitted with an ISPRA identification ring and colour-coded alphanumeric rings, which allow for long-distance identification and help to track movements and migration routes. Once processed, the chicks are promptly returned to their nests, where their parents are waiting nearby.

A Special Day (or Rather, Two)

We are in the Bassa Parmense – the lowlands of Parma – on the first of two days that LIPU staff and volunteers dedicate each year, between late June and early July, to the ringing of young Red-footed Falcons. The working day begins at dawn, and the row of trees to be checked stretches as far as the eye can see. Several hours of work lie ahead. The team, joined by students from the University of Reggio Emilia and Modena led by Professor Dino Scaravelli, will later move a few hundred metres to check more

nest boxes and ring more chicks. Mario ascends and descends in the cherry picker at each tree along the row, setting the rhythm for the day's operations.

2009: Year Zero

The project began in 2009 with the installation of 60 nest boxes, as part of a LIFE project that ran until 2012 and was supported by LIPU-UK. Over the years, staff and volunteers have installed 200 boxes, 109 of which have been occupied by falcons. In 32 cases, however, the birds opted instead for natural corvid nests. The choices made and the protected habitat have led to a record number of breeding pairs this year – over 150 – making this the most important Red-footed Falcon population in Italy. This is unprecedented since the species began to settle more widely in the Parma lowlands, drawn by the permanent meadows and alfalfa fields typical of Parmigiano Reggiano production. These habitats provide ideal prey, such as insects and small mammals.

As early as 2012, data clearly showed the nest boxes were a success, with a 60% occupancy rate even then. The rings applied to the birds' legs have also proven crucial. Thanks to these, individuals born in Parma have been observed returning to the area, and others have been spotted abroad – in Switzerland, for example, and once even in Hungary. By 2024, 1,300 chicks had been ringed since the project began, with a further 400 added this year.

The population continues to grow and, in part, returns during the spring migration. But from where? And by what route?

A Migratory Population

Let's take it step by step. Leaving the permanent meadows of the Bassa Parmense, the Red-footed Falcon begins its journey. Destination: South Africa and Botswana, where it spends the winter.

'When spring arrives,' explains Marco Gustin, Head of Species and Research at LIPU, 'most of the population returns to Europe, favouring the eastern part and, to a lesser extent, the south and west. After breeding and fledging, by September the falcons are ready to leave again.'

Ring readings have revealed something curious: juveniles that fledge in August first travel to Central and Eastern Europe before continuing to Africa. Why take such an arduous detour, which might seem wasteful at first glance?

'There are two likely explanations,' says Gustin. 'First, the falcons may be searching for greater food availability, which might be lacking in the plains. Second, they may be seeking to join the large eastern populations and form communal roosts before setting off for Africa together.'

Towards the Skies

What would become of the Red-footed Falcon without a suitable habitat to host it? Or more to the point, what would the Bassa Parmense be – what would we be – without this remarkable bird? As we've seen, its presence in this broad swathe of the Parma plains is thanks to a combination of natural and human factors.

With the final nest checked, Mario, Andrea, Marco and all the other participants in this two-day nature event can at last rest, awaiting the final data from the campaign. The cherry picker rises no more. Now it is the turn of the young falcons to take to the skies.

The Red-footed Falcon

Would you like to know more about the Red-footed Falcon, its conservation status, nesting habitat, threats it faces, and what we can do to protect it?

Visit: <https://go.lipu.it/falcocuculo>

A Vulnerable Little Falcon

Scientific name:	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Wingspan:	65–76 cm
Migration:	Long-distance
Habitat:	Agricultural landscapes
Italian Red List status:	Vulnerable
Conservation status:	Poor

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A GREAT 40 YEARS FOR STORKS

The story of the Racconigi Stork and Duck Centre is an important part of LIPU's history. Forty years ago the first pair of White Storks were released there, and now the area has a large wetland rich in biodiversity.

Gabriella Vaschetti LIPU representative for the Racconigi area and scientific director of the Racconigi Stork and Duck Centre (www.cicogneracconigi.it).

There are few species more symbolic than the White Stork. Its size and elegance, plus the ease with which we are able to watch the way it raises its young, make it a bird that we can relate to on an emotional level.

The idea of working to reintroduce this iconic species was thus an opportunity that LIPU could not miss. It would be a project loaded with “feel-good factors”, given that the bird is a symbol of fertility and prosperity and loved by so many.

The Road to Racconigi

The White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) had not bred in Italy since the 1700s, human disturbance and direct persecution having been to blame. Italy, however, remained on its migratory routes and there had even been a few unsuccessful nesting attempts. In the countryside of the Cuneo region around Racconigi storks were always to be seen in spring and autumn, pausing their migration in local fields. In 1980 a nesting attempt failed due to poaching, and the event triggered the idea of launching a science-led project to reintroduce the White Stork as a breeding species in Italy.

The White Stork Colony

In 1948 the first dedicated stork centre had been founded in Switzerland by Max Bloesch. Almost four decades later, a collaboration between LIPU and the ornithologist Bruno Vaschetti led, in 1985, to the first attempt to re-establish a nesting colony of White Storks in Italy, in Racconigi to the south of Turin in Lombardy.

The first ten storks arrived in Racconigi under the supervision of naturalist Fabio Perco (from Friuli in north-east Italy). Initially they lived in an aviary, but were gradually released into the wild. By the following spring the pair first-released had built a nest, marking the beginning of a new chapter in these birds' story in Italy.

Over the years a stable colony of nesting storks re-established itself, and today around 40 pairs breed in the area, using specially provided platforms around the chimneys of houses, and bell towers and castles in nearby towns. Better still, ringing activities (in Italy conducted under the supervision of the ISPRA) have shown that storks ringed in Switzerland, Germany and France are nesting in Racconigi. Storks ringed on nests in Racconigi, meanwhile, have been spotted in the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Spain, and even in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia).

The White Stork reintroduction project is considered a success, and continues, with the monitoring of breeding pairs and support for the recovery of injured individuals.

The Arrival of the White-headed Duck

In 1989 the White Stork project was joined by the "Duck Project", and its vision of reintroducing the White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), which had been absent from Italy since the late 1970s. Collaboration with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in Slimbridge, UK, and with the Coto Doñana National Park in Spain led to 20 of these ducks being entrusted to the expert care of Bruno Vaschetti. Despite many challenges, he managed to create a suitable breeding

habitat and eventually nearly 100 chicks were produced, 60 of which were used in reintroductions at other LIPU reserves, 40 going to Lago Salso in Puglia.

From Maize to Black-winged Stilts

In subsequent years, alongside many successful projects at the Racconigi reserve there has always been the wish to create a wetland to support migratory birds, along the lines of Slimbridge. Thanks to EU agricultural support grants, in 2004 the Piedmont region implemented environmental restoration projects aimed at "avoiding the homogenisation of the territory and increasing biodiversity". This facilitated a significant restoration project on 15 hectares that had previously been maize fields, creating a wetland area to serve as a stopover point for migrating birds. The species using this wetland vary according to the season. In spring hundreds of waders pass through, including sandpipers, godwits and Greenshanks. Then, in summer Black-winged Stilts and Lapwings nest. In autumn the waders return, especially Snipe, along with sandpipers. Then, the winter birds: Curlews, hundreds of ducks and Common Cranes. Racconigi now hosts a regular winter roost of around two hundred Cranes between November and February.

The "Tree of Life"

The passionate and dedicated support expressed in Racconigi for an iconic species has not only led to a positive result for the White Stork, it has also given rise to many other projects. To celebrate 40 years since the return of the storks a permanent exhibition on the subject of biodiversity will be created, along

with a “tree-of-life” eco-project aimed at increasing bird nesting and supporting the nesting activities at the recuperation centre that has existed at the reserve for 25 years.

How lucky we are! As the renowned marine biologist Rachel Carson wrote, “Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that last as long as life itself”. And we have had the opportunity of experiencing nature “from within”, making it our own, sometimes recreating it, often facilitating it, but continually getting new perspectives on its beauty. And we will always be grateful for the support of the wonderful LIPU community we have enjoyed along the way.

HUNTING: IS THE DISTANT PAST RETURNING?

A bill presented in the Senate opens up unthinkable scenarios against birds and nature: the capture of live decoys, hunting during migration, every possible concession to hunters, and even recognition of hunting as a “benefit” to nature. A leap back sixty years. LIPU and the environmental movement are fully mobilised to stop it.

The worst legislative proposal in recent history. A step back in time of sixty years – to before 1967, when LIPU achieved its first great victory with the law that abolished spring hunting and paved the way for an end to bird-trapping. This is Senate Bill 1552, sponsored by Senator Malan and supported by the entire parliamentary majority and the government

itself, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture. In truth, it ought to be called the Lollobrigida Law. But let us proceed in order.

Hunters in ferment

For almost three years, the parliamentary majority has been feverishly active in promoting hunting. In 2022, a budget amendment by the then-MP Foti (now Minister for European Affairs) on wildlife control was justified by the government as a way to solve the problem of damage caused by wild animals. Then came the circumvention of the European REACH regulation banning lead ammunition in wetlands; the extraordinary reform of the Technical Hunting and Wildlife Committee, which equated its entirely political and conflicted opinions with the scientific assessments of ISPRA; and the even more astonishing measure that, in effect, prevented environmental associations from bringing cases before the Regional Administrative Courts. Finally, there was the Bruzzone bill, which would have dismantled Law 157/92 on wildlife protection had not LIPU and the environmental movement blocked it.

These initiatives have been anything but painless. They have created many problems, including new violations of EU rules – for example, on wildlife control and the failure to ban lead ammunition – triggering yet another infringement procedure against Italy for breaching the Birds Directive.

As for MP Bruzzone, himself a hunter, his two bills offered a long list of concessions to the hunting lobby and sought to place ISPRA under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture. When this attempt

failed, Minister Lollobrigida launched a more forceful initiative together with hunting associations, arms manufacturers, and pro-hunting politicians. Originally intended as a government bill, the draft leaked in advance and provoked such widespread outrage that the government stepped back, leaving MPs to carry it forward instead. This is how Senate Bill 1552, presented by Senators Malan, Romeo, Gasparri and Salvitti, came into being.

Lollobrigida's dream

In May, the Minister of Agriculture, Francesco Lollobrigida, triumphantly announced that the government would table a new hunting reform bill. The leaked draft clearly showed its intent to dismantle Law 157/92: new captures of live decoys even by private individuals, hunting after sunset, hunting along mountain passes used by migratory birds, extending the season beyond February, reducing protected areas, undermining the scientific role of ISPRA, and more. Most strikingly, it sought to redefine the law's purposes to include "management" and, astonishingly, to recognise hunting as a positive force for biodiversity conservation. A legal and technical monstrosity, riddled with violations of EU directives and animated by an openly backward-looking spirit – dragging Italy back to the time when wild animals were dismissed as either game or vermin. Public outrage forced the government to withdraw, but without abandoning its intent. Instead, it left the initiative to MPs, with the ruling parties pledging their support.



A disaster on all fronts

Similar to the withdrawn Lollobrigida draft, the new bill includes two long-cherished dreams of the Italian hunting lobby: reopening bird-trapping stations for live decoys and allowing hunting in February, right in the middle of pre-nuptial migration. Either measure alone would be enough to disqualify the proposal. But the bill goes much further: hunting in hunting-tourism estates would be allowed year-round; fixed hunting hides would no longer be limited in number; hunting could extend into state-owned forests; foreign hunters would automatically qualify for a hunting licence; ISPRA's authority would be further weakened; and so on.

Equally alarming are the cultural signals – above all, the change of title: no longer Protection of Wildlife but Management of Wildlife. For hunters (and many farmers), "management" means one thing only: killing animals with a gun. Thus, hunting is perversely presented as "doing good for nature" by destroying it.

No attempt is made to address the critical issues in Italian hunting already flagged by the European Commission, which has launched infringement procedures and issued repeated warnings. On the contrary, the proposal would worsen the situation across the board. A disaster indeed.

Mountain passes and migratory birds

The issue of hunting bans on mountain passes deserves mention. The Lombardy Regional Administrative Court and the Council of State had prohibited hunting on 475 passes identified by ISPRA as crucial migratory routes. Knowing it could

not pass Bill 1552 in time for the coming season, the government slipped an amendment into the Mountain Areas Promotion Bill, despite the obvious irrelevance of the subject. This exposes the blatant illegality of government in hunting matters – and the very real damage they will cause to wildlife, especially migratory birds, which risk once again becoming easy targets.

Back to destruction?

The philosophy and content of the proposed reform of Law 157/92 are crystal clear: to turn back the clock. To sweep away the many national and European measures that, over the decades, have protected and conserved birds. Measures that, though imperfectly applied, have enabled many species to recover – some from the brink of extinction – and have fostered a culture of knowledge, respect, and appreciation of nature. They have also led to a dramatic fall in hunter numbers, from nearly two million in the 1970s to fewer than 500,000 today.

This, in truth, is the ultimate goal of the bill: to reverse a cultural trend. Yet, despite support from hunting associations, the most pro-hunting government in memory, and the gun industry, the attempt runs counter to a deeply rooted public awareness. Still, the risk is unprecedentedly high. A return to destruction – or at least to laws that enable it – is a real danger.

Meanwhile, under the cover of this pro-hunting climate, several regions are moving to reintroduce traditional exemptions for hunting protected species, particularly starlings and chaffinches. This practice, abolished over a decade ago following LIPU's efforts

and a European Court of Justice ruling, is now being revived. The Conference of Regions has authorised the killing of 230,000 starlings and 581,000 chaffinches. Unacceptable.

What we will do

LIPU and the wider environmental movement have begun mobilising. The coalition of associations to which LIPU belongs has launched a public information campaign to highlight the dangers this bill poses to both nature and human safety. LIPU has also launched a major petition addressed directly to the Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, urging her to intervene and stop a measure fraught with grave environmental harm and multiple EU law violations.

At the same time, LIPU is activating the entire BirdLife International network so that across Europe a clear message is sent: migratory birds are a heritage of humanity, to be treasured and safeguarded.

We face one of the greatest challenges in our history.

We must win.

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TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE GREAT THINGS

A gesture of generosity that translates into concrete action for nature and animals, and it tells of the love of two people, deeply united.

Annamaria decided to support LIPU with a large donation to remember the love that still binds her to her husband Flavio, who died some years ago.

Her generosity has allowed us to carry out many projects, in various places throughout Italy, including those which, over time will protect species and natural habitat. Her support demonstrates that a simple gesture can achieve great things but that even in our own small way we can restore hope to nature and biodiversity.

New life for the swift tower

With part of Annamaria's donation we have been able to renovate an old swift tower, a type of construction, along with many others still in existence, is still used by one particular species, the Common Swift. Thanks to Annamaria's donation, the availability of the Comune di Seriate (in the province of Bergamo), owner of the historic building, and the hard work of our local volunteers, we have been able to restore one tower of great conservation importance.

The tower was already equipped with small nesting cells, but they had been closed after a previous renovation. This is a very common problem in urban environments that particularly affects swifts as it deprives them of nesting sites, making the species more vulnerable. This is why this project was so important to LIPU; thanks to our intervention, hundreds of cells (824 to be precise) have been reopened so they can once again be repopulated by Common Swifts. Already this year about twenty pairs have bred in the tower, raising around 40 chicks. We hope that there will be more next year.

The project aims to promote and protect wild species in cities, which are increasingly suffering from reduced breeding spaces, due to renovation which

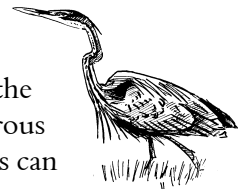
fails to take account of their presence. Not only birds, but also reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates find places in cracks and holes in the walls in which to survive.

The light of Flavio and Annamaria

The second project which we were able to realise, thanks to Annamaria's donation and which we want to tell our readers about, was one that saw the complete renovation of an entire cabin within the Pantanello Natural Park, one of the thirty LIPU oases and reserves.

The Oasis in question is situated in the "Giardino di Ninfa" natural monument, established in 2000 and covering approximately 100 hectares of ponds, marshland, wet meadows and small streams protected by various ecological standards. Three woodlands with oak trees, wetland vegetation, clearings and uncultivated areas complete the site's natural habitat.

This precious site is the result of a complex, detailed naturalistic engineering project which has allowed the conversion of a disused farm into a wetland of extraordinary and unique environmental and conservation value. Indeed, it provides shelter to over 150 bird species, including the Ferruginous Duck, the Purple Heron, the Short-toed Eagle and the Marsh Harrier. In addition numerous mammals, reptiles and amphibians can be found.



Once again, thanks to Annamaria, from now onwards, anyone visiting this oasis will be able to

admire the biodiversity and enjoy the beauty of the surrounding nature from the new cabin.

Where nature and industry meet, there is hope

Annamaria, a nature lover, hoped that her donation would also be a source of hope for future generations. Because of this she chose to help us undertake a major project to plant various tree species in the Lago di Santa Luce reserve. Originally an industrial reservoir, a place where nature and industry co-exist side by side, this area now fall within the Natura 2000 network. For over thirty years LIPU has succeeded in creating a protected area in which it can carry out nature conservation, education and local development activities. The trees we planted, all very young shrubs that are more resistant to the local soil and climate conditions, belong to species typical of the region. Over the coming years, these trees will grow, creating veritable gardens ready to welcome people and animals, particularly migratory birds which will be able to feed and rest. Not only that, the creation of this new, natural garden will expand the area in which pollinators can find shelter.

Paradise is not only in the sky.

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LIPU IN ACTION

Palermo – Martins Say Thank You

Thanks to a LIPU volunteer in Palermo, a colony of House Martins was able to continue nesting at San Nicola l'Arena Trabia train station, despite ongoing renovation works. The construction company low-

ered scaffolding nets to allow access to the nests. 'We are grateful to the company and to the Italian Railway Network for their sensitivity,' said Giovanni Cumbo, LIPU's local delegate. 'It was a commendable gesture and good practice towards a declining but ecologically beneficial species that feeds on harmful insects.'

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Livorno: Serin Decline, Woodpigeon Boom

Preliminary data from Livorno's new ornithological atlas, compiled by Maurizio Tiengo of the Tuscan Ornithological Centre, reveal some surprises. On the downside, the Serin, once a 'top ten' species, has plummeted by 75%, and hearing one sing from an aerial is now a rare event. Other finches are also struggling: Goldfinch numbers are down 18%, Greenfinches 14%. The Long-tailed Tit – never common – is even more localised. Sparrows are declining too: the Italian Sparrow by 40%, and the Eurasian Tree Sparrow by 55%. The Common Swift has dropped by 59%.

Conversely, the Collared Dove, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Starling have remained stable.

The Yellow-legged Gull has soared by 176% and is now among the most widespread species. The Woodpigeon has gone from absent to ubiquitous in just over a decade, now exceeding 10 pairs per square kilometre. Sardinian Warblers are now common in urban hedges and have increased by 220%. The Robin has also become more visible in green spaces.

As more data are collected, researchers hope to link these trends to urban development and green space

management – and to see whether similar changes are occurring in other cities.

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Offcuts for the Roller

What some see as waste, LIPU sees as useful: marine plywood offcuts donated by Nord Compensati are being turned into nest boxes. Their weather resistance makes them ideal for species such as the European Roller. Volunteer Daniele Levi built one such box, which LIPU Genoa passed on to ornithologist Alessandro Ghiggi in Mantovana (AL) as part of the ‘Turquoise Countryside’ project. Many thanks to the company and to our skilled carpenter.

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A Nest for the Stork

In May, LIPU installed a new artificial nest for White Storks on an electricity pylon in Farazzina, a locality near Milan. With key support from E-Distribuzione engineers, the site offers a safe nesting platform while minimising the risk of electrocution and power outages. ‘This is part of a broader White Stork conservation programme in the Novara plain,’ explains Andrea Ratti, delegate for Novara and Verbano-Cusio-Ossola. ‘Seeing these magnificent birds in our skies is not only a visual delight, but a positive sign for our environment.’ Local residents are encouraged to report any sightings near the new nest to aid in monitoring this protected species.

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LIPU-UK ANNUAL DRAW

If you have not opted out, you will have tickets enclosed for this year's draw. Please support LIPU by taking part – there are three cash prizes and the proceeds will be devoted to the projects in Italy in the coming year – Good Luck.

In a Yorkshireman's drive to keep costs to a minimum, I'd like to offer some thoughts on how to do this so we both benefit. If you have access to computers or smartphones etc please consider:

- Avoid postal charges if you use on-line banking. I hold spare books of tickets and if you transfer funds and email me to say what you have done, I will happily put the tickets into the draw. BACS details: Account name: LIPU-UK Sort Code: 08 92 99 Account Number: 65114517

- If you use Paypal, we are: mail@lipu-uk.org It would help avoid Paypal charges if you use the use the “For friends or family” option rather than for “Goods or Services”.

- I still have books of tickets unused from previous years and if you receive one of these please don't be concerned – all ticket stubs have the same chance of winning whatever the year printed on them.

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My thanks to the production team, who were: Dave Brooks, Andy & Betty Merrick, Peter Rafferty, Scarlet Reynolds with further help from ChatGPT.

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A White Stork like those which have been successfully introduced by the Racconigi Stork and Duck Centre in Lombardy - a project which has celebrated its 40th anniversary.