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Two success stories.

Marco Dinetti tells the less glamorous story on page 24 of working to improve the green parts of urban areas, here in Parma.

An excellent image of a Booted Eagle, or *Aquila Minor*, another of the raptor species showing a steady population increase in Italy.

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## Other Ways to Inhabit the Earth

Danilo Selvaggi

LIPU Director  
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Forty years ago a conference brought together scientists from different disciplines from across the world under the banner of ecology and complex thought. Its message was that we must find new ways to apply science and of inhabiting the Earth. The call today is more urgent still: if we have the well-being of the planet at heart, we must regenerate both consciousness and nature, and in this way save the birds.

In Florence in October 1986, at that time European Capital of Culture, more than seventy scientists and intellectuals from around the world gathered for a symposium titled *Physis: Inhabiting the Earth*, to launch 'the challenge of a global organisation with the power to exit the twentieth century developing a new alliance between man and nature'. It was an ambitious and compelling objective, above all in terms of the vital aspect of seeking an end to the long war between humans and nature, or to be more precise, to the maltreatment of nature to which humans have so often had recourse. To put a new harmony in its place. It was also ambitious in terms of the method by which this was to be conducted: not according to the traditional models of the disciplines, which usually operate along rigid and clearly demarcated lines, but as a field of shared knowledge that would emerge out of the interaction of different materials, scientific, social, humanistic and political.

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## **The Study of the Earth**

The participants came from a range of disciplines, including among others Nobel laureate in chemistry Ilya Prigogine, sociologist Edgar Morin, psychoanalyst James Hillman, and ecology's James Lovelock, the originator of the Gaia hypothesis. From all of these came the same message: the old dividing lines between the sciences are now a barrier to understanding the workings of nature and the behaviour of human societies. Reality does not behave in a predictable fashion capable of being studied at leisure in the lab, but appears disorderly, with a complexity that seems sometimes to be chaos. From this comes the need for a metadiscipline, a unified framework for all the disciplines, with which to study the Earth, the better to understand and protect it. This was the new idea to come out of the event: the revitalising conviction that saving the Earth could be brought about by a change in consciousness. In the same way that human beings must cooperate peacefully together, the different forms of knowledge must talk and act together, to put knowledge at the service of the planet.

## **Hopefulness**

In the meantime the environmental crisis has grown, with new problems arising one after the other, such as the ozone hole, the decline in biodiversity, and the first signs of a changing climate. But at the same time came the spread of awareness of the issue, with concern and the desire to act and participate. There was also the spread of a sense of hopefulness, as if the great wished-for transformation were only a step away and the world could at last set out on the right path, of peaceful coexistence between humans

and the rest of the living world. In a short time ecological culture had entered the institutions, with the creation of ministries, supervisory bodies, offices dedicated to the environment, parties and NGOs, coming together as a worldwide movement at the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992. It was a unique event, with 172 countries represented, the birth of the conventions on climate, biodiversity, and forests, and a contagious enthusiasm. Environmentalism was entering its third phase, following that of the end of the nineteenth century and the modern environmentalism born in the sixties of the twentieth thanks above all to the work of Rachel Carson. The third phase was indicative of the need for a decisive and planet-wide step change on the questions of nature, exactly as had been pointed out in Florence and Rio, and a powerful call out to science and politics for them to work jointly for a transformation in awareness, in governance, in actions and in consciousness, in the cause of a new alliance.

## **Forty Years Later**

What has happened these last forty years? Has this new alliance been used to good effect? What has come out of the enthusiasm and the activism of those days? There are two sides to the answer. On the one hand there were major successes on the regulatory and cultural fronts – beginning with the legal instruments in relation to climate and biodiversity – that culminated in 2020's European Green Deal. While on the other is the awareness of the difficulties of the work of transformation, in the face of a world built largely according to an outdated logic predating the vision of ecology that has given us an overcrowded, energy-devouring world dominated by an aggressive culture that has given many benefits

to human societies but at huge cost: environmental crises, loss of nature, social injustices, geopolitical tensions, wars, and a future full of uncertainty.

### **Bound Together**

The participants at the symposium in Florence maintained exactly this: if there is not a serious attempt at change, the risks to the world are grave. If we do not readjust our approaches to the human and natural worlds, we will continue to understand them badly and behave still worse. The Florence symposium, just as much as the Rio summit, made cardinal errors in assessing the situation and in its forecasts, over-optimistic in terms of the time needed for the change and of the difficulties that such a change would have to overcome, but at the same time identified many essential steps on the way to salvation, starting with the realisation that the world was entering the age of the Earth, and an era of a shared planetary destiny, in which no one could think only of themselves. It is like this: no one can survive on their own. No State, nation, individual, or social grouping can get by in isolation. No single scientific or political programme can hold, or win the winning ticket. We can only survive as one. The key is to be bound together, woven as one.

### **Dwelling in Harmony**

At the centre of the Florence convention, and in the title itself (which also contained the Greek term *physis*, for physics, the natural world) was placed the theme of dwelling. What is it, in ecological terms, to inhabit or dwell? It means to benefit from a well-balanced habitat, and, especially for human beings, to have the spirit adjusted and the

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mind adapted to living there. To inhabit means to be aware of our presence and what surrounds us, be it a house, an apartment, a shared space, a landscape or an ecosystem. To inhabit is not a banality. On the contrary, it is a complex act charged with consequences and implications. The culture of ecology has opportunely placed ideas of inhabiting in the context of others, other ways to act: to meet, to cultivate, to watch over, to live together, to protect and to build, showing that the act of being in a place has to adhere to a fundamental principle: we do not exist in a vacuum. We live always in the *physis*, in nature, a community of beings. For this reason, to inhabit demands knowledge and respect, for the places we find ourselves in, of who is living there with us, and of what is around us.

### **An Empty Space (to Be Filled)**

Instead, in many cases we inhabit the world in ways, neither respectful nor wise, that ignore the needs of the environment and subordinate them to ours. In addition, we often ignore the fact of what an environment is, a community of living beings, and consider it as a *mere terra nullius*, an empty space waiting merely to be filled, to be brought under our control. The consequences of this false premise can only be negative, in the social as well as the environmental sense: cities built at random, suburban sprawl, continuing soil degradation, damage to wetlands and other habitats, green fields turned to monocultures and soaked in pesticides, with negative impacts on people, from health to countryside and amenity, and negative too for biodiversity, including birds. Yes, birds as well, the loss of which is a clear indicator of an unhealthy environment.

*Few things other than birds can illustrate the complexity of the planet, or show the processes underlying the workings of nature and its relationships with human societies.*

## **Where Are They?**

For more than twenty-five years, LIPU has been engaged in monitoring the populations of birds in agricultural environments (formerly Mito, then the Farmland Bird Index), with the aim of understanding the conservation status of birds and the health of agriculture, of the countryside, of the food we eat. The data, however, leave no doubt. In a quarter of a century we have lost thirty-three out of every hundred birds, and the status of some birds is alarming: birds such as the Stonechat, the Calandra Lark and the Wryneck are close to the point of no return, and the situation is little different for high profile and symbolic species such as swallows, sparrows and Goldfinches. In their case too, intensive agricultural practices are leading to loss of habitat and ultimate disappearance. ‘Where have all the swallows gone?’ is the sad and justified question we often hear from people out in the countryside who are finding it emptier than before.

## **The Infinite Web**

Few things other than birds can illustrate the complexity of the planet, or show the processes underlying the workings of nature and its relationships with human societies. A swallow, we might say, is a link that joins nature to the countryside, to the insects, to the hedges, to the smallest pools of water, the food we eat and the great voyages of migration, to Africa, to Europe, to economic models, to national and international politics, to art and the imagination of all. When the ecologist Thomas Lovejoy observed that to be concerned about a bird was to be concerned about the questions of our time it was no exaggeration but

a profound and elemental truth. The birds are an infinite web that tells us how we should behave, to make straight our ways and to bring about a healthier future. We are behind on many fronts but on others we are making progress. The decades of ecological culture have not been in vain. We have the means, the knowledge and the principles to change the path we are on.

## **Hope for Habitats**

‘The Nature Restoration Law, the European legislation for the renewal of habitats –says LIPU’s Habitats Director Federica Luoni – is a measure without equal, at least in its objectives. Its aim is that between now and 2050 there should be measures put in place in all habitats, agricultural land included, so that the decline in birds and biodiversity is reversed. It is a measure that has met many obstacles along the way and continues to meet them even now, with the national plans for action still not fully defined. Nevertheless, it gives genuine hope for natural habitats. We must keep up the pressure, as it is an opportunity too great to miss. To this end, along with conservation bodies across Europe, LIPU has sent the government a report with directions as to the best way of putting the measures in place and is pressing the administrations to provide for the accumulated delays to be made good through the involvement of civil society.’

## **Bringing Back to Health**

The greatest challenge of the century: it is in these terms that marine biologist and expert on the restoration of ecosystems Roberto Danovaro defines the Nature Restoration Law. It is a major challenge,

and not only in terms of the environment. What indeed could be more important than to put to rights our home, our only home, the home we have all but destroyed? In order to do it, given the situation into which ecosystems are being driven, it is not enough merely to throw lifebelts where we can. Action is essential to repair damaged habitats and bring them back to health. 'Even if we meet our targets for the protection of nature – he writes in *Restaurare la natura* – and succeed in making the fight against climate change more effective, it would not be enough to bring back a fully functioning planet. To complete the task and return ecosystems to their optimal levels we must also bring back the lost and damaged habitats that are responsible for a large part of the diminution in natural capital that has taken place in recent decades. To bring these important habitats back to health, work on ecological restoration will therefore be indispensable.' Danovaro notes that plans for habitat restoration have become much more ambitious than before, with the UN having declared 2021–30 to be the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and the EU, albeit with difficulty, has taken up the call by launching the said Nature Restoration Law, still waiting to be activated in full.

### **Within You Without You**

At all events, the theme of inhabiting, of dwelling, goes beyond the interventions necessary for the environment, to call for a wider transformation. Our presence in the world has both an inner and an outer aspect, from the habitats outside us to those held within, that is to say our habits and our mental and moral modes of being. The change cannot do other than look at both. If we rebuild our house, and then carry on in the same way that brought it into

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disrepair in the first place, we will end up no further forward. If we do not understand the structure of the space in which we live, the interactions that take place in it, and the life that is contained in and passes through it, we will end up no further forward. It is this on which the moral and scientific message of the Florence symposium turns, with all the difficulty it entails. To take up the challenge of the complexities, to change the ways in which we view nature and ourselves, to think of the world in system terms, to make fundamental changes in the politics of biodiversity to give it the attention it deserves; these are processes more difficult than we can imagine, but are now inescapable. Only this will retrieve the situation and guarantee us a healthy and survivable long-term future.

### **At a Higher Level**

They are singing. The bombs are falling with the rumble of death and the birds of spring are singing. The electrical humming of drones makes deadly the air and they are singing. The world is deafened by the noise, by a madness that seems unstoppable and they are singing. No matter what befalls, the birds, as long as they are able, are singing. They follow the dictates of biology, of the age-old laws of nature, though at a higher level. It is as if, having found other ways of inhabiting the Earth, more harmonious, more economical, more beautiful and peaceful, they are telling us of it in the way they know best: singing.

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### IT'S TIME TO TAKE 'CITIZEN SCIENCE' SERIOUSLY

A study aiming to establish more precise spring migration dates has been published in *Wildlife Biology*, focusing on 23 species that are subject to hunting pressures in Italy. It highlights the importance of the huge amounts of data collected by both professional and amateur observers.

*Marco Gustin, Species and Research Manager*

Spending time outdoors with wildlife has always been beneficial for the human species. The scent of flowers, watching birds and insects go about their business, enjoying the solitude of the mountains or the woods, or even strolling along the beach. It's all 'good for the soul' and undoubtedly good for our mental health generally. But there can be benefits for the species that we encounter as well.

Increasingly those enjoying outdoor activities are recording their observations of wildlife in a way that can be studied by scientists. And this certainly helps

*Every year many millions of birds migrate from Africa to Europe and back again, in the spring looking for breeding locations and in the autumn for a place to survive the winter.*

our knowledge of migratory movements in particular. The era of 'citizen science' is coming of age, an idea strongly reinforced by an impressive new scientific work – a collaboration between Roberto Ambrosini of Milan University and LIPU – published in the journal *Wildlife Biology*.

The study makes use of millions of individual data records collected by researchers and professional ornithologists alongside thousands of members of the public. The study's aim was to learn with greater precision the timing of migration for 23 species that may be hunted in Italy. Every year many millions of birds migrate from Africa to Europe and back again, in the spring looking for breeding locations and in the autumn for a place to survive the winter.

The timing of these seasonal movements can be called 'nature's calendar'. Scientists, meanwhile, call it 'migratory phenology'. But whatever we choose to call it, it is crucial to the fitness and survival of migratory birds, and these 'timetables' have thus become a part of national and EU policies that aim to conserve populations of migratory birds.

### The "Key Concepts"

Within the European Union the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) provides the legal framework for the protection of bird populations and their habitats. This rules that birds that may be hunted should not be hunted whilst breeding or when migrating to their breeding grounds. But as it does not specify actual dates for these periods there exists supplementary guidance known as 'Key Concepts', which supplies this information.

Thus, the Key Concepts document is fundamental to the definition of hunting regulations for each species in the EU, and especially to defining the start and finish of the hunting season.

To this end, the European Commission had required each Member State to identify a 10-day window with regard to the commencement of spring migration for each species that may be hunted in that country. Over the last 20 years this information has been updated several times, taking into account data – from various regions of the EU – based on ringing recoveries, satellite tracking, etc. to get a best estimate of when migratory birds arrive at their breeding sites.

As recently as 2025 Italy updated its 'Key Concepts' data for four species (Teal, Song Thrush, Redwing and Fieldfare), yet discrepancies in spring migration dates between neighbouring countries suggest that the different data and methods used are leading to continuing errors regarding these vital dates.



Among the tools available to scientists is remote tracking technology, which can of course provide accurate information on departure and arrival dates but only for a small sample of migratory birds. A further option is the data obtained from the capture of ringed birds as they arrive at (or depart from) their breeding grounds or wintering areas. But it was felt that both these methods had limitations regarding the depth of usefulness of the data thus collected.

### **Citizen Scientists**

This is where data collection by amateur observers, especially birdwatchers, comes into its own.

Increasingly, this 'citizen science' data will be used, potentially on a larger scale than ringing or radio tracking, to help scientists analyse the migratory movements and phenology of birds.

Since the early years of the twenty-first century there has been a significant increase in online platforms that collect data from citizen scientists, with ebird.org and eurobirdportal.org leading the way. And these have become a useful source of data to help us understand migration dates.

The new study published in *Wildlife Biology* draws heavily on data submitted via the website [www.ornitho.it](http://www.ornitho.it), currently the most significant database in Italy with more than 28 million records. For the 23 species of wild birds in question, the research shows that spring migration to breeding areas begins in early to mid January, and for some species – such as the Song Thrush and Snipe – as early as the last 10 days of December. These dates are significantly earlier than those in the Key Concepts.

### **Key Concepts and the Bird Migration Atlas**

The citizen science data used in the study in *Wildlife Biology* proved, with regard to the migration dates of the species concerned, to be strongly correlated with ringing data from the Eurasian African Bird Migration Atlas (Spina et al. 2022).

Nineteen out of the 23 species studied turned out to start spring migration earlier than the Key Concepts states. In the case of the Skylark, the Key Concepts shows spring migration starting a month and a half later than the study in *Wildlife Biology* found to be the case. The Key Concepts thus needs to be

updated, as protecting migrating birds (as mandated by the Birds Directive) depends on getting this data right.

In conclusion, this study shows that citizen science (here in the form of reports submitted to [www.ornitho.it](http://www.ornitho.it)) has been reliable and valuable in determining the migration dates of species hunted in Italy. It also shows that combining information from different sources of data can reduce the errors inherent in each data type, and thus provide information useful to the determination of effective conservation actions relevant to hunted species.

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### HOW ARE BIRDS DOING?

A new report on the Birds Directive confirms a worrying fall in passerine numbers while the more positive news is an increase in herons, woodpeckers and woodland species. This work, carried out by LIPU, is crucial to checking the effectiveness of conservation policies in Italy.

*Marco Gustin, Head of Species and Research*  
*Claudio Celada, Director of Nature Conservation*

Six years after the previous edition, the updated Report on the Birds Directive came out at the end of 2025. It is a substantial work, gathering data at a European level on the state of conservation of wild birds from 2019–24. During 2025, ISPRA, with input from LIPU, analysed the data, highlighting results that are in some cases positive, while others are rather worrying. Egrets are doing well for example, as are woodpeckers, and woodland birds like the

*... its influence extends beyond our continent, and concerns various migratory routes and in particular the African-Eurasian flyways.*

Tawny Owl and Eagle Owl. Raptors are stable, while galliformes such as the Common Quail, ptarmigan and Capercaillie are doing badly. For passerines, unfortunately, there continues to be a decline that seems unstoppable. This is confirmed by the last Farmland Birds Index study, coordinated in Italy by LIPU.



But before analysing the details of the trends by species, let's take a step back and contextualise how this important work – essential to influencing and managing strategies for the conservation of wild birds – began.

### The Birds Directive

The Birds Directive (hereafter the Directive), adopted by the countries of the European Union in 1979 and by Italy in 1992 with a relevant law on hunting, has revolutionised the conservation of avifauna in the whole of the EU.

Given its special relevance as an instrument for the conservation of migratory birds (not only, therefore, of sedentary species), its influence extends beyond our continent, and concerns various migratory routes and in particular the African-Eurasian flyways.

Many migratory birds – especially so-called trans-Saharan species, the group that has declined the most in recent decades – benefit, thanks to the Directive, from formal and substantial protection. This happens in certain phases of their life cycles, where they reproduce or pass part of their migration in the EU. Further, the Directive has inspired the

conservation of avifauna outside the Union, through the worthwhile dialogue inherent in the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity.

From a legislative standpoint, in Italy the Directive has shaped the legal picture on hunting, allowing, during the '90s, a significant leap to be made in the protection of both migrant and resident avifauna and of our biodiversity in general.

### **The “Reporting”: Populations and Trends**

Since the principal aim of the Directive is ‘the attainment for all species of birds an adequate level for conservation’, it follows that it is absolutely essential to be able to monitor their state of conservation.

In effect, the Directive provides, in Article 12, that each Member State supplies, periodically, and for each species subject to protection, the information necessary for a precise assessment of their state of conservation. This documentation takes the name ‘Reporting of the Birds Directive’. Similar activity supplies information on habitats, and on other animal and plant species protected by the Habitats Directive.

And so it is possible to obtain a more coherent picture of the populations of species and of the habitats of interest to the European community. In particular the numbers of breeding pairs or individuals overwintering, short- and medium-term trends, human pressures, threats, and the effectiveness of measures of conservation introduced including the contribution of the network Nature 2000 can be analysed and updated in a systematic way.

*Vultures such as Griffon and Lammergeier are also increasing thanks to reintroductions, of the former in Abruzzo, Sicily, Calabria and Sardinia and of the latter in the Italian alpine regions.*

This volume of organised data is already, today, the basis for the effective implementation of the Nature Restoration Law, which will come into effect this year.

### **The new picture, 2019–24**

During 2025, ISPRA, with input from LIPU, processed and analysed the results of the Reporting, in particular updating the size of nesting populations and those overwintering and on migration for some species of raptors to show the trend for the medium term (2000–24) and the short term (2013–24).

An important contribution to the Reporting was made by analysis of the Farmland Bird Index project for around 100 common species.

### **Raptors**

Practically all species are stable, increasing, or at least with unknown trends. Only the Lanner Falcon (down by 79% of its distribution in the long term) is in strong decline in all the regions of the south including Sicily, which remains the principal stronghold of the species. The Kestrel, meanwhile, (-9.3% from 2013 to 2024) is experiencing a moderate decline. Species such as the Red Kite are increasing in southern and central Italy thanks to a reintroduction project. Vultures such as Griffon and Lammergeier are also increasing thanks to reintroductions, of the former in Abruzzo, Sicily, Calabria and Sardinia and of the latter in the Italian alpine regions. Short-toed Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Red-footed Falcons



– the last of these thanks to the excellent work of LIPU and a local conservation group in Parma – have seen a notable increase in their numbers of nesting pairs, especially over the last decade.

### **Quail and Ptarmigan**

One group that remains of concern from the previous Reporting are the galliformes. The only migratory species, the Common Quail, has shown a moderate decline, of 32.5%, in the medium term (2000–24). Unfortunately, the other, sedentary species are also in decline, from the ptarmigan to the Capercaillie, while the trends for the Hazel Grouse, Rock Partridge and Black Grouse remain unknown due to a lack of data.

### **Hérons and Storks**

There is excellent news for herons and other species of wading birds. Several have enjoyed a considerable increase in numbers, in some cases exponential, as is the case for the Cattle Egret (with an increase of 150% in a short period (2013–24) and for the Great White Egret and the White Stork and Black Stork (with populations, respectively, of more than 320 and 50 breeding pairs, the latter mostly in central-southern Italy). Little Bitterns and Black-crowned Night Herons are in decline. Populations of Grey Herons, Purple Herons and Eurasian Bitterns are stable.

There is good news too for the Spoonbill (up by 175% in the short term; now 300–500 pairs), the Glossy Ibis (+600% over a short period, now with a population estimated to be at least 150 pairs), and the Pygmy Cormorant (with more than 4,000 pairs

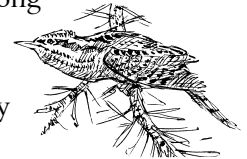
*Among the owls the situation is very positive, especially for woodland species such as the Tawny Owl and rock dwellers such as the Eagle Owl*

nesting in Italy). All are species that until less than 20 years ago were very rare in the country, but the short- and medium-term trends now reveal an exponential increase.

### **Woodpeckers and Other Woodland Birds**

The woodpeckers, probably as a result of a significant increase in Italian forests, are species that are definitely growing in numbers. The figures are as follows (short and medium term, respectively): Great Spotted Woodpeckers (+33.4% and +85.9%), Green Woodpecker (+6.6% and +50.2%), and Black Woodpecker (+30.9% and +162.1%).

Only the Wryneck, the single migratory species of the group, has shown a dramatic decline: in the medium term (2000–24) there has been a strong drop-off in numbers, of -76.5%.



Among the owls the situation is very positive, especially for woodland species such as the Tawny Owl and rock dwellers such as the Eagle Owl (both showing +5–10% in both the short and medium terms).

### **Doves and Pigeons**

While among the pigeons there are species that are doing well, both numerically and in terms of the trend, including the Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon (+138% and +751%, respectively, in the medium term), the situation for the Turtle Dove seems critical (-25.6% in the short term and -21.9% in the medium term), and in spite of this evident decline it still remains a huntable species in many regions.

## Passerines, An Endless Decline

Thanks to the Farmland Birds Index project it has been possible to analyse the medium- and short-term trends for around 100 species of passerines.

For around one-third it can be said that there is an inexorable decline (moderate or strong). Species linked to agriculture are subject to the greatest decline, as was highlighted by the Index's latest report in 2024. Of the larks, most are in decline: Calandra (-26.7% short term, -25.2% medium term); Skylark (-50.8% medium term); Short-toed Lark (-37.7% medium term). The only exception is the Woodlark, which has increased its numbers by 58.7% in the medium term. Pipit and wagtail numbers are also down: Pied Wagtail -23%, Yellow Wagtail -47.8%, Tree Pipit -23% and Tawny Pipit -70% (all figures medium term).

Also doing badly are the wetland passerines, among them the Reed Warbler (-70% in the medium term); emberizids such as the Yellowhammer (-23.2% in the short term), and above all the Ortolan Bunting, which in the short term has seen a collapse in its Italian population (-63.2%).

## The Usefulness of the Reporting

The updating of the Reporting on the Birds Directive for 2019–24 allows us to assess the effectiveness of national policies, and the results of the conservation measures adopted in the last six years, emphasising both successes and areas requiring improvement. The data supply essential elements via which to monitor progress with respect to the objectives set out in the National Strategy for Biodiversity.

*The regulations, which came into force in August 2024, will commit resources to measures to reverse this loss of biodiversity, above all in agricultural environments, and to combat climate change.*

Although many species have turned out to be improving in terms of conservation – including herons, raptors, both daytime and nocturnal, and species of the woodland environment – the latest Reporting updating reveals that there are still too many species for which status is an unknown. Many species once considered common or very common, including Barn Swallows and Skylarks, are today in sharp decline.

## A Future Called the Restoration Law

It is from these latter considerations that the European Commission set out to develop one of the most important measures for protecting European nature: the Restoration Law. The new European law on the re-establishment of nature will aim to allocate more economic resources to areas and species for which conservation is now an emergency.

The regulations, which came into force in August 2024, will commit resources to measures to reverse this loss of biodiversity, above all in agricultural environments, and to combat climate change.

The Nature Restoration Law is not limited to requiring the restoration of habitats cited in the Directive or the habitats of species, but tackles the fall in biodiversity at a complex level. All the planned actions can be considered not only as solutions for biodiversity but also as mitigations with regard to the climate, adaptation, and pollution reduction.

These actions could bring, in the course of coming decades, the marvellous, but by now rare, song of the Skylark back to our fields.

## FORESTS OF THE CITY

*Marco Dinetti, Head of Urban Ecology*

**P**lanting three billion new trees by 2030: the aim stated in Article 13 of EU Regulation 2024/1991 on nature restoration, better known as the Nature Restoration Law. Together with Article 8, on restoring urban ecosystems, it constitutes a key measure for improving urban green spaces.

People's physical and psychological well-being depends on the benefits provided by greenery – so-called ecosystem services: microclimate regulation, mitigation of heatwaves, removal of pollutants, prevention of flooding, and recreational and social functions. The effectiveness of these services depends, however, on tree size, plant type, and the configuration of green areas.

### **Protecting Trees and Planting New Ones**

In planning today, 'nature-based solutions' are considered financially convenient and are thought to provide environmental, social, and economic benefits.

To improve both the quantity and quality of the benefits derived from trees, two synergistic approaches are needed: protect existing trees and green areas by avoiding land consumption and destructive actions such as felling or drastic pruning, and plant new trees, which includes restoration works that remove asphalt and concrete and return soils to permeable conditions. The former aspect is often overlooked, excessive emphasis being placed on the latter.

## Urban Forestry

One effective action is to create new parks and woodlands on extensive areas of land in peri-urban contexts. This often coincides with reclaiming degraded land, achieving a significant dual environmental benefit.

Creating green corridors along watercourses also has its advantages: regulating runoff, stabilising banks, filtering pollutants, shaping the landscape, and forming ecological corridors for many species.

### **The Culture of 'Erasure'**

Proper knowledge of urban greenery shows that mature trees provide irreplaceable benefits. On very hot days, people seek shade under large trees in historic parks rather than beside young trunks. Moving from canopy shade to a sunlit square may involve temperature differences of up to 15°C.

Good planning must integrate with existing contexts rather than invasively replacing them – an approach unfortunately widespread, and rooted in the idea that nature must be rewritten because it is flawed. This 'culture of erasure' is driven by economic interests and distorted technical approaches.

### **Nature and Landscape**

Not all land is suitable for forestry. Habitats such as permanent grasslands, fallows, scrub, and wetlands must be conserved for their own ecological value. Rigid planting layouts should be avoided, and naturalistic, landscape-based approaches favoured.

Initiatives must also consider available nursery stock, avoiding overly ambitious or unrealistic plans. Without proper care, planting trees risks becoming little more than self-promotional showcase project. Meanwhile, land consumption continues: the ISPRA reports that in the first year of the Nature Restoration Law's implementation, 4,000 hectares of green area were lost, including 600 hectares of tree cover.

### **There will be Failures**

Planting well is only the first step: trees must survive to maturity, reached after 26–33 years – the age needed for new planting to become carbon-neutral.

This process has high failure risk: average losses are 20–30% but may reach 90%. Monitoring of an urban park in Tuscany showed that of 118 new trees, 53 were dead (44.9%), 29 partly damaged (24.6%), and only 36 in good condition (30.5%).

### **Forestation!**

Today the most important national programme in this domain is the measure 'Protection and enhancement of urban and peri-urban greenery', which aims to combat air pollution and biodiversity loss. It targets metropolitan cities with diverse native and certified species mixes. The Ministry of the Environment has funded planting across over 4,600 hectares, with more than 4.6 million plants.

Planting new trees must not, however, justify felling healthy ones. Compensating for the loss of a single mature tree may require planting thousands, as highlighted at an international congress in Merano last June. Indiscriminate felling must stop, and be

replaced by proper training and long-term vision for the benefit of society.

### **Public Green Events**

On 10 April LIPU and Agrofauna will host the webinar "Urban greenery and the Nature Restoration Law". The Ministry for the Environment has also begun procedures to update minimum environmental criteria for public green spaces (CAM).

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### **FROM LIPU-UK**

The winding down of LIPU-UK should not mean you are unable to support the work of LIPU in Italy if you so wish, and we have been discussing with our friends in Parma how this might be achieved.

### **Subscription Renewal**

The Membership Office will be happy to send renewal reminders if you wish, but postal costs mean that the use of an email account will be essential. To that end, if you wish to remain a member of LIPU, please let me know which email address you wish to use. I will collate the list and send it to head office.

### **Banker's Orders**

I ceased sending postal renewal reminders in December as there was only half a year to go, so my postman has had little to deliver. But members renewing by Banker's Order have continued to

pay. I shall be writing with this edition of Ali to each member affected asking them to cancel these standing orders with their bank before the end of June. We are too small to operate Direct Debits, so the payments must be cancelled by the account holder; please accept my regret for any inconvenience caused.

For various reasons our bank account will be active for a month or two after the end of June to tidy up the loose ends before filing final accounts and reports. Any monies received after that date will be treated as donations.

### **Payments to Italy**

In my experience, the simplest way of making a small payment is to use PayPal. It is not even necessary to have a PayPal account as the payment can be charged to a debit or credit card. I have just tested this successfully using the Payee address [ufficiosoci@lipu.it](mailto:ufficiosoci@lipu.it) and there is an option, if you look for it, of choosing “Friends or family” rather than “Business payment”. The payment will go through in either case, but the former will reduce the service deduction made by PayPal.

### **Legacies**

If you have decided to remember LIPU in your will, please remember to change the legacy from LIPU-UK to LIPU in Italy, which can be contacted at:

Lipu-BirdLife Italia  
Via Pasubio 3/Bis  
43122 Parma  
Italy                      [www.lipu.it](http://www.lipu.it)                      [info@lipu.it](mailto:info@lipu.it)

If all this proves troublesome, may I suggest that you can still help animals as well as birds by supporting the Anglo-Italian Society for the Protection of Animals (AISPA), which has always been a supporter of LIPU and was instrumental in the founding of LIPU-UK.

[www.aispa.org.uk](http://www.aispa.org.uk)                      [info@aispa.co.uk](mailto:info@aispa.co.uk)  
Secretary, Andy Geddes 01273 763988



### **LIPU-UK ANNUAL APPEAL 2026**

As noted above, no renewal reminders have or will be posted this year, but please don't feel left out. This edition carries our last annual appeal, and I am confident that it will raise more for conservation in Italy than in previous years.

As always, we have discussed the proposals of LIPU's Conservation Director, Claudio Celada, and have agreed to support the following projects in the coming year.

- Reduction of the bycatch of marine birds by fishers
- Protection of nesting Bonelli's Eagles and Lanner Falcons

- Anti-poaching patrols in the north and south
- The annual monitoring of migrating raptors at the Messina Strait
- Protection and monitoring of Red-footed Falcons nesting in the Parma area
  - Protection of nesting sites of Kentish Plovers on beaches in Calabria and Sardinia
  - Further updating of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with a view to upgrading them to become Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)
  - Further protection of Collared Pratincole nests in collaboration with farmers
  - Further protection of ground nesting Montagu's Harriers in Lazio and Puglia, again with the help of farmers
  - Monitoring the threatened and relict population of Little Bustards in Sardinia

I am sure you will agree that these are important and deserve our support. Together this requires €102,000, and it would be wonderful if that target could be comfortably exceeded because any surplus will help other conservation efforts. Please give what you can to make this, our final year, even more memorable than previous years. To give the appeal a flying start, AISPA, our longest standing supporter, has donated £4,000 – thank you for that generosity.

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Thanks, as always, to my production team who, for this edition were: Barbara Avery, Dave Brooks, Andy Merrick, Peter Rafferty and Lesley Tompkins.

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**LIPU-UK DELEGATE**

David Lingard  
 Fernwood  
 Doddington  
 Road  
 Wisby  
 Lincs  
 LN6 9BX



Populations are increasing in Italy of these birds, clockwise from top left: Spoonbill, Black Woodpecker, Red Kite and Pygmy Cormorant,



All © David Lingard



**STOP THE MASSACRE  
APPEAL 2026**

**Please help us**