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Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli

Conservation News from Italy

LIPU

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Summer 2026

Above is a beautiful view of the Flamingos of the LIPU reserve at Priolo, with a fitting background of Etna.

Left, the painting of St Francis, by Giotto di Bondone, to be seen in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Italy.

Speaking to the Birds

Danilo Selvaggi,
Director General
LIPU

The eight-hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Francis is a time to restate the message of ecology, especially in relation to the birds, and to reflect on the change in direction that environmentalism has brought to the world. It is a vision in which LIPU is deeply involved, inspired by the lessons of Franciscanism, one of solidarity, spirituality and nature.

It happened in 1219 or 1220, when Francis, then aged thirty-eight, was returning from Egypt after his meeting with the Sultan Al-Kamil. It was then, on a spring morning near Pindarca, on the road from Bevagna to Cannara, that Francis talked to the birds.

In the World

In those years the poor brother of Assisi was preaching far and wide, making his words – spoken in person – the instruments through which he encountered the world. To spread the word was to transmit the Christian message, in the then startling Franciscan version, but also to bring good news to the world, which was needed, then as now. Words, however, are not only what is spoken but are also what is received and understood. Words are when there are two actors in the play who understand each other, speaking and listening. Why then talk to the birds? What could the birds have understood of what Francis was saying? What was there that Francis wanted to say to them?

Predator among Prey

Though the time and place when and where it occurred were known, and there were some eyewitness accounts, details of the episode are sketchy, as with most of the events of Francis's life, but it quickly became a subject for artists in the following decades. The most notable of the pictorial representations of the Sermon to the Birds (along with that of the anonymous Maestro di Francesco) was painted by Giotto in about 1295 in the Upper Basilica of Assisi. Francis is shown facing the birds, inclining slightly towards them, while the birds, scattered across the ground, look up at him in amazement. Above, at the centre, a raptor, perhaps a Kestrel or a Sparrowhawk, is diving towards them. It seems to be attacking them, a predator in pursuit of its prey, but it is more likely that Giotto was portraying its haste and desire to join with them. They are there, and I too am coming. A raptor among the sparrows, the quails, the finches and the larks, the last his favourite birds. And Francis there with them.

We could, on the other hand, read the event in ways beyond the context of religious belief, for example through the optics of the culture of ecology.

Participants in the Conversation

The stories also tell us that the birds, which had been vocal up to then, fell silent to give attention to what Saint Francis was saying. From a religious point of view it would be easy to see the event in conventional terms, as a parable, or an account of a miracle, how Francis spoke to the birds of the goodness of God, and of how grateful they should be, upon which, taking the lesson to heart, they flew away rejoicing. We could, on the other hand, read the event in ways beyond the context of religious belief, for example through the optics of the culture of ecology. In this case, as well as focussing on the familiar theme of Francis's deep love for nature, we should bring to the fore another vital component of the event and perhaps its main protagonist: the word. Francis spoke to the animals as if he truly understood them, as if words were not something alien to them. He considered them to be participants in a conversation. Worthy of being talked to, and with the power to understand.

... had put at the centre of existence that of the human, reduced everything else, nature, animals, plants and all the living world, to the status of a side dish.

At the Roots of the Crisis

The first to propose Saint Francis as the patron of nature, or to be more exact, of ecologists, was the American historian Lynn White Jr., at the end of the Congress of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington in December 1966. White's speech, published in Science the following year and titled "*The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*" was widely attacked because of its critique of Christianity in terms of its impact on the environment. White attributed the origin of the ecological crisis to the advent of the monotheistic religions, among which Christianity, which had put at the centre of existence that of the human, reduced everything else, nature, animals, plants and all the living world, to the status of a side dish. The world is an ensemble of goods and materials at the disposal of humans. In a word, anthropocentricism.

The Disappearance of Guardian Spirits

In addition to this general critique, White added another, more specific one: the cancellation of animism – that vision of the pagan world that by giving every living thing (every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill…) its own guardian spirit systematised a regime of spiritual protection for

nature. A genius loci stood guard over every element of nature. Whenever humans wished to make use of the gifts of nature, they have to invoke the guardian spirit, and implicitly or explicitly ask for forgiveness. But when Christianity replaced the pagan cults the sense of guardianship was emptied out, resulting in a series of damaging consequences for the environment, bringing us eventually to the current ecological crisis.

'Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook,' wrote White, 'it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.'

A Democracy of All God's Creatures

Even so, White added, the history of the Church has known, on at least one occasion, a voice radically opposed to such ideas: that of Saint Francis, 'The greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history'. The poor brother of Assisi, said White 'proposed what he thought was an alternative Christian view of nature and man's relation to it: he tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation'. In other words, he worked to promote a relationship that was no longer that of ruler and ruled but one of mutual dependency, like that sung in the Canticle of the Creatures, one of brother- and sisterhood. Our brothers and sisters are not only the sun and the moon (the historic objects of poetry and worship), but the wolves, the ants, the worms and the mud they live in; all forms of life, even those thought of as being inimical and other. This Franciscan vision, which by circuitous routes was to become that of ecology, brought down whole castles of received opinion and helped to enable the rewriting of the organisation of the world. No more kingdoms or monarchies, no human sovereignty, but a democracy of all God's creatures. A structure of connections that hold together, so that the objectives of all no longer diverge but converge, harmonising to call out for new forms of interdependence.

... he was in reality reproving those who were not listening to him, who were not giving sufficient attention to their message, to the messages of nature.

To Humans Too

In his writings, White never failed to touch on the theme of Francis's address to the birds. To the traditional reading of the tale, of a Francis who exhorted the birds to praise God, whereupon they 'flapped their wings and twittered in spiritual ecstasy', White appended one of a moral nature: Francis was talking not only to the birds but to humans. In preaching to the birds, he was in reality reproving those who were not listening to him, who were not giving sufficient attention to their message, to the messages of nature. Looking at it this way we can turn to the theme of the word and attempt to understand how new, in the ecological sense, was the discourse of Francis, and the ecological valency that the word, that defining characteristic of the human, then assumes.

The Word Overthrown

We live by the word. We are always talking, to every one and every thing. We talk to people, but to dogs as well, to the trees, to books, to the sky and to household objects, to the dead. We talk in our sleep and we talk to ourselves. We talk even standing in

silence. The word is the air that we breathe, the sea in which we immerse ourselves, our very own native habitat. At the same time, the word is the instrument by which we exercise power. It is the logos, the thing that divides us from the rest of nature and puts us at the top of the pyramid, the throne of ice from which we issue our commands. It is here that the culture of ecology brings to us something new: the overthrow of the kingdom of words. The word is not for issuing orders but for cementing relationships. We sit isolated at the top of our tower, abstracted from the Earth, when we should be on and in the Earth, between nature and the birds. To speak, in ecological culture, is meeting and getting to know, is paying attention to the existence of others and their worlds. That is to say, it is also to listen.

What Do You Think, Brother Sparrow?

Read in this way, the conversation of Francis and the birds assumes a further significance. On the road from Bevagna to Cannara Francis stopped not to speak but to listen, to hold a dialogue. In leaning towards the birds, his air is of a listener rather than a predator, the very image of one lending an ear. It is a thoughtful invitation to the birds to come forward, to express their vision. Francis wanted to hear what they had to say, to know the world of these fellow citizens of Earth better. What is it you do, what do you think, brother sparrow, Sparrowhawk or finch? What pains you, and what gives you joy? What advice do you have for us humans? Looked at in this way, the event takes on a much more contemporary sense, clear and powerful. To talk to the birds today, in a time of ecological crisis, means to take on board the fact that birds, their colours, and their songs, are not here for the sake of our aesthetics, but have a vital

"I propose that Francis be made the patron saint of ecologists"

role to play in the world's ecosystems. It means that we should consider their needs, too often ignored or even suppressed. The travails through which birds are living, from the crisis in natural habitats, from poaching to pollution, to the barriers to migration as well as to short range movements, are signs we see nature as unfriendly at best, and at worst even hostile. A grave error. If they could speak, the birds would tell us to change our tune, to do better. They would suggest that we behave more sustainably, more respectfully. And this in essence is what birds do, perhaps also with Francis himself: more than the beauty of nature, their song, for a moment sad and grieving (though not resigned), transmits too a well-founded anxiety.

A Project for Salvation

The debate that followed Lynn White's paper was mulled over, then acted upon. White had concluded the conference by making the case in favour of the brother of Assisi – I propose that Francis be made the patron saint of ecologists – but his whole text was in reality a constructive fact, a stimulus to giving serious thought to the interrelationships between the problems of the environment, religion, and culture as a whole. If in the final analysis the problem is cultural, White maintains, it will not be science and technology that save us but a different set of values. One way or the other, White's analysis, along with the spread of the culture of environmentalism, brought about a new period of reflection on the environment in the Church, with initiatives (including the institution of the Season of Creation) culminating in Pope Bergoglio's 2015 encyclical Laudato si'. A document of epochal breadth and value, it reasserted the ecological and

spiritual message of Franciscanism, distilling in it what Pope Francis called Integral Ecology: the Earth is a shared home that needs integrated stewardship – environmental, social, cultural, and emotional. To care for our earthly home, as an essential part of a global project for salvation. 'Two Francis's, Pope and Saint – said Fr. Antonio Spadara, the Vatican's Undersecretary for Culture and Education in a message sent to LIPU's assembly in Assisi – are separated by centuries but together in vision: the world is not a pop-up shop we can take what we want from but our home. It is for living in, not for looting.'

Putting the House to Rights

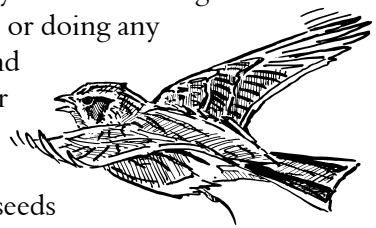
'We are working to improve the area round Piandarca – says architect Antonio Caschetto, director of the Laudato Si' Centre at Assisi, who has long worked to spread the Franciscan ecological message – with the idea of putting into practice here, in the place where Saint Francis spoke to the birds, the vision expressed by Pope Bergoglio in Laudato Si'; we intend to create a place inspired by the principles of integral ecology, starting with the theme of caring for creation. In conjunction with LIPU we are undertaking actions for the renewal of natural habitats, environmental education, and help for wild creatures, and birds in particular. Piandarca is a place of harmony being made ready to be seen as a space for nature, caring, education, hospitality, spirituality and immersion in creation.'

'We are very happy to be involved in the project – adds Alfiero Pepponi, nature photographer and coordinator for LIPU Umbria – It is time to turn hope into action, for putting our shared home to rights, and it is particularly good to do so in the place where Saint Francis promulgated his spiritual and ecological message in his own Umbrian dialect, a language of the Earth that allowed it to spread as widely as possible. Nature is a family in which all can participate in their own way. Far from being overlords of the world, we can be its healers.' Put simply, it is about listening, having understood not only how much beauty there is, but also how much is given to us, and how much is said in the voices of the birds.

... it is particularly good to do so in the place where Saint Francis promulgated his spiritual and ecological message in his own Umbrian dialect,

When the Birds Sing

According to tradition, on the evening of 3 October 1226 at the hour of his death, Francis was visited by larks. Remarkably, as the lark is a bird of the daytime, singing as it rises skywards in the early morning light. But on this occasion, say the Franciscan chronicles, the larks came to Francis in the evening, and sang. Francis loved all birds, but larks above all, to the point of saying to his fellow brothers that if he were able to speak to the emperor, he would ask him to pass a law forbidding anyone from killing or capturing his sister larks or doing any sort of harm to them, and obliging all lords in their castles once a year, on Christmas Day, to throw wheat and other seeds onto the roads so that his sister larks should have something to eat. Wheat and seeds on the roads: the promise of new flowering, for the lark and many more. A thought for a world torn apart by division and wars, and incapable of harmony to this day.



We have to think that on the evening of October 3rd eight hundred years ago, the song of the larks was sad and grieving, yet not despairing or resigned. We must not fall into resignation and despair while there are seeds on the road, and while the birds, the larks and the larks not least, are singing.

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THE GHOST OF THE SOUTH

Snow-white plumage, wings ash grey streaked with black, a ruby red glance: the Black-winged Kite, has nested in our country for the first time.

Matteo Fontanelle, Nature Conservation Area

... changed from being an incidental, rare visitor that appears in an elusive way only for brief stops post-breeding or during winter, to a regular presence,

Mid-August 2025. In a peaceful farming area of Emilia-Romagna, between the provinces of Bologna, Ferrara and Modena, two wonderful individuals of the Black-winged Kite exchange prey in flight. It is proof that nesting of this raptor, distributed mainly in Africa, southern Asia and south-western Europe, has begun in this country. Originating from the Iberian peninsula, the species first colonized France, and then Italy.
Its breeding biology is fascinating and flexible: in contrast with many other raptors, the Black-winged Kite, which prefers open environments, like fields and non-intensive agricultural areas, can raise several clutches a year and breed in virtually any season provided there is an abundance of prey. This opportunistic strategy allows it to exploit new suitable territories.

From incidental to nesting

The observations of the Black-winged Kite in Italy have been ever more frequent; so much so that in the last 20 years the species has changed from being an incidental, rare visitor that appears in an elusive way only for brief stops post-breeding or during winter, to a regular presence, although localized, during wintering periods or post-breeding dispersion.

The Tyrrhenian region, especially Tuscany (with the Maremma Park) and Lazio, were, for a long time, the preferred destination of these "pioneers", coming, as stated, from France and Spain. They have also overwintered in Sardinia and Sicily. However, until 2025, in spite of occasional breeding displays, no conclusive evidence of such had ever been found in Italy.

An unexpected meeting

The change from incidental “visitor” to nesting therefore marks an important turning point in the presence of the species in this country.

It all started, as we have said, on the 15th August 2025, in Emilia, when 2 elegant silhouettes showed off their beauty in flight. Initially the observers, members of ASOER (Ornithological Association of Emilia-Romagna) had a theory that they were dealing with dispersed individuals, a phenomenon that had already been noted for the species in Italy. However the exchange of prey in flight between the two adults immediately aroused suspicion. This gift between the partners was not only food, it was a courtship ritual, typical behaviour of a territorial pair during the breeding season. So a discreet surveillance was started, carried out at a safe distance so as not to disturb the breeding pair.

On the 26th August construction of a nest was observed, with one adult bringing in branches. On 5th September, nuptial flights and repeated couplings confirmed that the raptors were attempting to breed. The real surprise was on 10th September: the nest was found at only 2 metres from the ground, inside a wild rose bush growing around an old willow. Inside, 2 chicks around 20 days old were looking at the world with curiosity. A crucial detail, because, considering the incubation period (25 -28 days) and the development of the young, it means that the pair were already present and active in the area by June.

Since then the development of the young kites has been rapid. From 24th September they started to move outside the nest, while 2 days later they took their first flight. By 10th October the young already had the skills to soar and were trying the first flights with hovering – the typical posture of hunting in which they remain immobile in the air while beating the wings – following the adults in their patrols.

A challenge for conservation

The discovery of a new nesting species in Italy represents a precious asset for the biodiversity of our territory and demands that we take greater care when carrying out concrete actions for conservation and safeguarding the habitats necessary for its survival.

In view of the fact that the nest is in an area open to hunting activity, LIPU and ASOER have initiated a network of protection, seeing that the period in which the individuals were observed (October) might have hidden dangers. The active contribution of a number of sensitive volunteers was instrumental in guaranteeing the necessary quiet for successful breeding of the species. But what does the presence of this species say to us? Requiring lands rich in biodiversity and poor in the use of pesticides, the Black-winged Kite is a precious indicator of the health of our agricultural landscape. For its protection there needs to be a network of hedges, permanent meadows and uncultivated areas that still survive on our lowland.

Consequently we welcome this new species with a great sense of responsibility. We are conscious that every one of our actions is an invitation to nature so that it continues to surprise us and making this first nesting in Italy only the introduction, in the next few years, of a long story of nature protection.

IDENTIFICATION

Black-winged Kite: *Elanus caeruleus*
Wing span: 31 – 36cm
Length: 66 – 68cm
Weight: 180 – 250g

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NATURE TRIUMPHS

From an open-air landfill to a wetland rich in biodiversity: the Saline di Priolo Nature Reserve has undergone an extraordinary transformation which will now, under the new European Regulation on restoration, face new and complex challenges.

Fabio Cilea, Director of the Saline di Priolo Nature Reserve

The remediation, completed in the mid-2000s, restored ecological continuity to the area and enabled the creation of an archipelago of artificial islands.

Today, it stands as one of the most significant examples of environmental restoration in heavily human-impacted areas of the Mediterranean. This is the Saline di Priolo Nature Reserve, in the province of Syracuse, established in 2000 by the Sicilian Regional Government and managed by LIPU. The reserve protects what remains of a larger wetland area belonging to a system that once stretched along the island's south-eastern coast: a mosaic of brackish water basins, reed beds and salt marsh vegetation that provide a vital refuge for migratory and resident birdlife.

From its origins to the Flamingos

When this journey began, some 25 years ago, the area resembled a vast open-air rubbish tip, scarred by decades of industrial pressure and neglect by the authorities. The first result – far from a foregone conclusion – was achieved through what is referred to as 'passive management': the rigorous enforcement of regulations, legal protection and monitoring of the area, which enabled renaturalisation processes to take hold, leading to the spontaneous return of vegetation typical of Sicilian wetlands and the gradual transformation of the site into a veritable green lung for the Priolo area.

This phase was accompanied by an increasingly structured form of active management, one of the most symbolic interventions of which was the removal of the oil pipeline that had crossed the salt marshes since the 1950s. The remediation, completed in the mid-2000s, restored ecological continuity to the area and enabled the creation of an archipelago of artificial islands. These new habitats have proved decisive: within a few years, there was an increase in the number of breeding pairs of certain species of high conservation value, such as the Black-winged Stilt, the Little Tern, the Sandwich Tern, and the establishment of new breeding species such as the Pied Avocet. The positive effects of the restoration became even more evident in 2015 with the first nesting of the Greater Flamingo in Sicily, which took place in Priolo itself. From just a few dozen pairs, the numbers have risen, in the space of a few years, to an extraordinary total of 161 pairs today, making the reserve one of the species' main breeding sites at a regional level.

New challenges

Today, however, the restoration process is far from complete. The focus is increasingly shifting towards complex interventions, in line with the principles of

the European Restoration Law, which require the integration of remediation, redevelopment and ecological planning.

Among the most significant prospects is the decommissioning and conversion of the reservoir area of the Enel 'Archimede' power station. This transition is emblematic: from industrial infrastructure to ecological habitat. The demolition of reservoirs and other obsolete structures will enable the creation of a new natural area of approximately three hectares, designed as a buffer zone between the industrial site and the reserve. This is not merely a matter of reducing impacts, but of generating new habitats and strengthening ecological connectivity, thereby increasing the overall resilience of the system. Equally strategic are the measures relating to the safe containment of pyrite ash and the water management of the marsh. The installation of permanent covers over sources of contamination, together with the creation of small lakes behind the dunes and the restoration of water levels through regulation systems, will enable the recovery of ecological functions that are currently compromised.

The demolition of reservoirs and other obsolete structures will enable the creation of a new natural area of approximately three hectares, designed as a buffer zone between the industrial site and the reserve.

The return of the dunes

Meanwhile, whilst awaiting the practical launch of these projects planning is already underway for further interventions and new challenges in the near future, such as the restoration of a dune belt stretching just over one kilometre along the northern boundary of the Saline di Priolo Natura 2000 site.

The project involves removing the stone structures erected in the 1980s to protect the coast, with the aim of recreating environments suitable for the establishment of sand-loving vegetation and vital habitats for the increasingly rare little ringed plover. In parallel, a comprehensive scientific monitoring programme will ensure that the effectiveness of the interventions is assessed over time.

The case of Priolo demonstrates that environmental restoration is not a one-off event, but a long, adaptive and cumulative process. It is the result of consistent management decisions, partnerships between public bodies and private entities, and the ability to combine conservation with transformation.

From landfill to nature reserve, from industrial infrastructure to habitat: Saline di Priolo illustrates that nature, when given the opportunity, not only returns but also creates new opportunities. And that restoration is a concrete vision of the future.

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NEWS FROM LIPU-UK

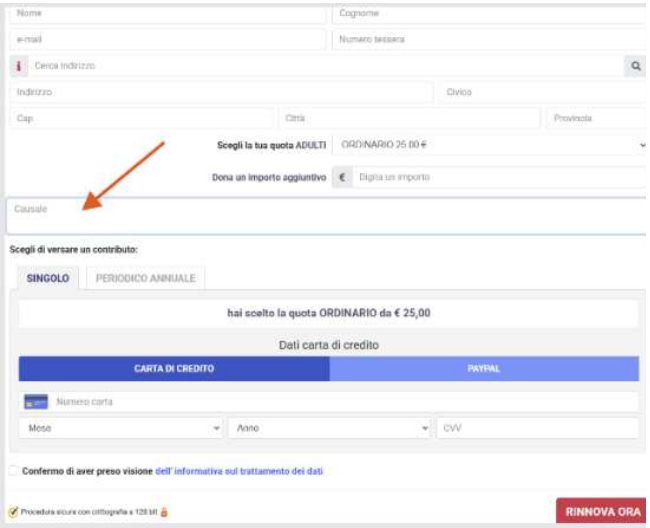
For those of you who wish to continue to support the work in Italy, I can offer two ways to help:

1. AISPA has been a constant supporter of LIPU-UK and, indeed, played a large part in our foundation. I am happy to include a paper written by the secretary Andy Geddes inviting you to join AISPA.

2. If you want to deal directly with LIPU in Parma please let me have your email address as I am collating a list for Valentina Cavalca of the membership department who offers this guidance on things like credit cards, Paypal and bank transfers:

Hi David,
Members who wish to support Lipu can make payments in one of the following ways:

1. PayPal (using our email address: ufficiosoci@lipu.it)
2. by Credit Card, through the website soci.lipu.it. They should enter an Italian address (for example: Via Pasubio 3/bis, 43122 Parma, Italy) in the address field and then provide their actual foreign address in the "Notes" section.



3. by Bank transfer, using one of our two bank accounts (please indicate in the payment reference whether the transfer is for a membership renewal or a donation):

- Intesa Sanpaolo - IT06 R030 6909 6061 0000 0101 658 - BIC/SWIFT: BCITITMM
- Banca Etica - IT58 E050 1812 8000 0001 6665 556 - BIC/SWIFT: ETICIT22XXX

Un abbraccio,
Valentina

LIPU-UK: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

by Claudio Celada, LIPU Conservation Director

In April 2000, after a five-year stay in Canada, I returned to Italy and was offered the position of Director of Conservation at LIPU. Looking back over the past twenty-five years, I feel both privileged and grateful to have been part of so many projects, campaigns, and initiatives dedicated to the protection of birds and nature.

What I could not have foreseen at the time was the remarkable role that LIPU-UK would come to play in this journey. The contribution of LIPU-UK members has had a profound and lasting impact on our conservation work, helping us protect birds and biodiversity throughout Italy.

I still remember my first meeting with David and Shirley Lingard. We spent several days discussing conservation priorities, exploring new opportunities, and considering how the generosity of LIPU-UK members could achieve the greatest possible benefit for nature. Their enthusiasm, kindness, thoughtful advice, and genuine interest in our work made a lasting impression on me. From the very beginning, our relationship was built on trust, openness, and a shared determination to make a difference.

Over the years, that partnership has grown stronger and more fruitful than I could ever have imagined. Thanks to your support, countless conservation projects have been launched, important habitats have been protected, and tangible benefits have been delivered for birds and wildlife across Italy.

As this incredible period comes to an end, I would

like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all our members and supporters. Your commitment, generosity, and belief in our mission have made an extraordinary contribution to nature conservation. The achievements outlined in the following pages are, above all, your achievements.

While no summary could fully capture everything that has been accomplished over the past quarter of a century, the following highlights offer a glimpse of what we have achieved together.

Thanks to your support, countless conservation projects have been launched, important habitats have been protected, and tangible benefits have been delivered for birds and wildlife across Italy.

Endangered Species

Our projects have focused on protecting nests and habitats at different spatial scales, delivering significant conservation results.

The population of the Bonelli's Eagle in Sicily has tripled as a direct consequence of nest protection from poachers, increasing from 20 breeding pairs to around 60 pairs.

The main Italian population of the Red-footed Falcon, located in the Province of Parma near LIPU headquarters, began breeding in Italy in 2000. It numbered around 20 pairs in 2013 and has now grown to approximately 150 pairs, thanks to the installation of nest boxes.

The Kentish Plover is unfortunately still declining, but thanks to the long-term support of LIPU-UK, we now have a much clearer understanding of its distribution and the causes of its decline. Since 2018, LIPU-UK has supported monitoring of the species in two key regions, Sardinia and Calabria. A highly promising LIFE project at the national scale was launched in 2026 and offers renewed hope for the species.

The Collared Pratincole and Montagu's Harrier both nest on the ground, mainly in agricultural areas, exposing their nests to significant risks. Through agreements with farmers and the fencing of nesting sites, respectively around 70 chicks and 50 chicks have been saved. As a result, populations of Montagu's Harrier in central Italy are increasing, while those of the Collared Pratincole in Sicily remain stable.

The Little Bustard is now restricted to Sardinia in Italy and is declining sharply, as it is across much of Europe. Our work focuses on securing protection for the steppe habitats on which the species depends, many of which have been identified as Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). Although the effort is still ongoing, encouraging progress has been made in discussions with the Regione Sardegna. As we enter a crucial phase of negotiations, we remain hopeful that this remarkable species can be safeguarded for the future.

Bycatch of Marine Birds

For far too long, the issue of seabird bycatch was ignored by the Italian authorities. With your support, LIPU was able to demonstrate that bycatch is taking a serious toll on Cory's Shearwaters, Yelkouan Shearwaters and other marine bird species.

As a consequence, a constructive dialogue has begun with the Ministry of Environment, and we hope this will lead to the implementation of effective mitigation measures. At the same time,

the largest colony of Yelkouan Shearwaters in the Mediterranean, located within the Tavolara Island Nature Reserve, is threatened by a proposed resort development. We will remain vigilant and actively engaged in this case.

Protecting Important Sites

Over the years, support from LIPU-UK has enabled us to update Italy's inventory of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), identifying both terrestrial and marine sites of outstanding conservation value.

The resulting inventory now includes 240 IBAs. Protection has already been secured for several of these areas through designation as Natura 2000 sites or national protected areas. Among them are the Isole Pelagie Marine IBA and the Sardegna Settentrionale IBA, two key areas for Mediterranean shearwaters, both of which are now designated as Special Protection Areas.

Complementing these landscape-scale efforts, LIPU-UK also supported our work to identify so-called "climate refugia" — areas that are increasingly important for the conservation of cold-adapted bird species such as the Snowfinch, Rock Ptarmigan, Water Pipit and Alpine Accentor in the Alps.

This support helped trigger the approval of a LIFE project called NatConnect. Within this EU-funded initiative, climate refugia will be incorporated into regional ecological networks and managed as areas of strict protection. The concept has already proven its value: it was successfully applied in a court case that halted the development of a new ski resort in Stelvio National Park.

Monitoring Bird Populations and Migration

Monitoring has always been at the heart of our conservation work.

For many years, LIPU-UK has funded the monitoring of migratory raptors crossing the Strait of Messina, Italy's most important migration bottleneck. Historically, hundreds of birds were illegally shot while crossing the strait. Monitoring has always been combined with anti-poaching camps during peak migration periods, and the results have been remarkable. Today, only a handful of birds are illegally killed each year.

This success story was presented at a meeting of the UN Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), but continued vigilance remains essential.

LIPU-UK has also supported 18 Local Conservation Groups. Their work extends beyond bird monitoring: they act as sentinels for nature, responding quickly whenever new threats emerge.

Anti-Poaching Camps

LIPU-UK has consistently funded anti-poaching camps in several well-known poaching hotspots across Italy.

These camps have helped combat some of the cruellest forms of illegal bird killing, including the use of snapping traps to catch robins in the Alps, decoys to illegally shoot protected duck species in the Po Delta, and mist nets and nooses used to trap thrushes in Sardinia.

In all of these areas, poaching activity has declined significantly. However, we have learned that constant pressure is essential: whenever enforcement and monitoring weaken, illegal activity quickly resurfaces.

These field activities have been accompanied by environmental education programmes in schools and local communities near poaching areas. Over time, attitudes have gradually changed, and relationships between local people and LIPU have steadily improved.

Raptor Centres

Each year, LIPU-UK has supported those raptor rehabilitation centres most in need. Funding for medicines, surgical equipment and food has always been an invaluable contribution, helping injured birds receive the care they need before returning to the wild.

Environmental Education

LIPU-UK has funded numerous environmental education projects, particularly those focused on climate change, aimed at primary and secondary school students.

Over the years, many thousands of pupils have benefited from these activities, gaining a deeper understanding of nature conservation and environmental responsibility.

Land Purchase and Habitat Protection

In cooperation with a local organisation, LIPU-UK purchased two remaining wetlands in the Province of Novara, within the heavily cultivated and urbanised Po Plain. Although small in size, these wetlands are rich in birdlife, particularly herons.

Today, these protected sites support at least five breeding species of heron, demonstrating how every hectare of protected habitat can make a difference.

Our Guiding Principles

Throughout all these years, we have remained committed to:

- Prioritising projects run by volunteers and helping them cover direct expenses, while employing professionals only when specialised expertise was required.
- Using LIPU-UK-funded projects as catalysts for larger conservation initiatives involving additional partners. This approach has led to major developments in areas such as Kentish Plover conservation, marine bycatch mitigation and climate refugia.
- Maintaining continuity, because effective conservation is rarely achieved through short-term projects.

A Final Thank You

After many years of extraordinary collaboration, LIPU-UK is now closing. However, we sincerely hope that many LIPU-UK members will remain part of the wider LIPU family.

With your support, we have protected species, preserved habitats and achieved real conservation successes. Today, we need your support more than ever as we continue our fight for nature.

This is a deeply emotional moment for me and my team. LIPU-UK has been far more than a funding organisation. You have been part of our family throughout every challenge, every success and, occasionally, every setback.

Before concluding, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your continued support. Special thanks go to the trustees of LIPU-UK (Lesley Tompkins, Matt Hines, Pat Dugard, Shirley Lingard) for their wisdom, friendship and dedication, and of course to David Lingard, whose commitment knew no borders.

Without David, none of this would have been possible.

David, your friendship will remain with me and with the entire LIPU team forever.

Thank you.

* * *

LIPU IN ACTION IN BRIEF

More protection for migrating birds in Scossicci

The "Fondazione Opere Laiche Lauretane e Casa Hermes" is a charitable organisation based in Loreto (about 20km south of Ancona in Le Marche) and founded in 1935, which has both social and environmental aims. This foundation had bravely succeeded in rescuing a 400 hectare coastal site at Scossicci from the hands of hunters. In November 2005 an agreement was signed between that organisation and LIPU (represented by our president Alessandro Polinori) to jointly manage the site, which includes three ponds near the mouth of the Musone river which are an important part of the Adriatic migration routes, and close to the Monte Conero Regional Park.

The aim of this joint project is to create a sanctuary to protect our winged friends on their migration journey, by restoring the local wetlands to their best condition. To raise awareness of this initiative we have already organised birdwatching outings for children from Loreto and Porto Recanati. (Valentina Iesari, National Councillor and delegate for the Macerata - Civitanova Marche branch of LIPU).

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IN RETROSPECT, LIPU-UK, 1989 – 2026

David Lingard, LIPU-UK Delegate

The British branch of LIPU, the Italian BirdLife Partner, was founded in 1989 by Roger Jordan and his wife Jill, in Chelmsford, Essex and none of what followed would have happened without their early work.

The branch was thriving when Roger's health forced him to step back and seek a replacement for the unpaid role of UK delegate. After a career in the RAF I should have known better than to volunteer, but I did and I have not had a moment's regret ever since. It has been a privilege to help the members of this branch support the work of LIPU in Italy.

Soon after finding my feet, LIPU appointed a new Conservation Director, Claudio Celada, and

this started a close business partnership that has continued to this day. I'll not follow a route of mutual admiration but will just say that our work would not have succeeded were it not founded on complete openness and trust which developed into true friendship.

Our work together settled into a routine where, in October, Claudio and your trustees would discuss and choose the projects LIPU would like us to support in to following year. The aims and budgets of each would be examined and agreed; LIPU in Italy would get on with the work and we would attend to raising the necessary funding.

The transparency I mentioned became clear when, in a number of years, Claudio reported an underspend in one or more projects and suggested a diversion to other work or to carry the funds over to the next year. Your trustees found this degree of openness to be remarkable and, as you can imagine, the trust and confidence in our friends in Italy grew and grew.

All that remains is to thank all those, past and present, who have contributed to the success of the venture. Trustees have been essential to the management and compliance with charity law. Translators and our copy editor, without whom the quarterly Ali could not have been produced but, above all, our loyal and generous supporters without whom nothing could have been achieved. I thank you all.

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A personal page

Claudio and I on the LIPU reserve, Carloforte, on the island of San Pietro, Sardinia. We both had more hair then - but it was 10 years ago!

Below is my first "visit" to Calabria in the mid 70s, the shadow tells the story.

Later I was based at Aviano in the north and there met members of LIPU and one thing led to another ...

White-winged Snowfinch

One of the mountain species to benefit from the establishment of “climate refugia” – areas that are increasingly important for the conservation of cold-adapted bird species such as the Snowfinch, Rock Ptarmigan, Water Pipit and Alpine Accentor in the Alps.