

# The red kite returns to fly in the skies of southern Calabria



## The return of the red kite

Since the beginning of 20th century the red kite was common in central and southern Italy.

Later, a dramatic collapse marked its disappearance in vast areas and even in entire regions; this was mainly determined by the unjustified and barbaric human persecution.

For some time this beautiful raptor no longer nests in the southern part of Calabria and only a few pairs breed in its central-northern portion.

In the Aspromonte National Park there is a delicate and complex programme of reintroduction to bring the red kite back to the extreme tip of the Italian Peninsula.

Favourable environmental conditions, adequate protection and general respect are not enough to ensure a spontaneous return. This bird of prey, in fact, nests near the birth area, therefore once disappeared from a territory it hardly resettles there. Especially if, as in this case, in neighboring areas are lacking florid populations able even if very slowly to expand. Therefore, it is thanks to the LIFE MILVUS project that the red kite can return to colour the skies of the Aspromonte.



## The Aspromonte National Park



Rugged, varied and beautiful is the territory that the Aspromonte National Park encloses and protects in the extreme south of the Italian Peninsula since 1994, the year of its establishment.

The Park covers 64,153 hectares between the Ionian Sea and the Tyrrhenian Sea and offers magnificent landscapes dominated by the imposing mountains of the Aspromonte massif, some of which are close to two thousand meters.

Ancient villages climb on the reliefs, from which open unexpected and beautiful views that discover the sea. Time and the forces of the Earth have

shaped a succession of ridges and valleys giving this area of Calabria a geomorphological treasure that includes imposing vertical walls, monoliths and other unique rock shapes. This is why the Park is also a UNESCO geosite.

The valleys with steep slopes, in winter are crossed by rushing waters that in summer give way to large milky rivers of gravel. These torrential rivers called *fiumare* are one of the most peculiar and fascinating landscape elements of the Park.

Around one of the most evocative of them, the Amendolea river, the actions of the LIFE MILVUS project are developed.



## Simply magnificent

Exceptionally beautiful and elegant, the red kite is easily identifiable by its colourful plumage and forked tail. Its extraordinary agility in flight makes it unique: master of the air, changes direction with amazing speed and naturalness, constantly moving and turning its tail. That's why in English this raptor is called the

"red kite". This species lives in hilly areas and low mountains where pastures alternate with farmland and woodland. It builds its nest on trees employing everything (branches, sheep's wool, rags, etc.) and lays 2-3 eggs in early spring. The fledglings leave the nest between June and July.

## A useful diet

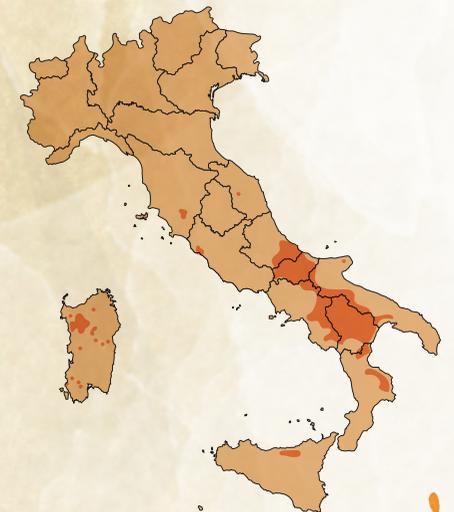
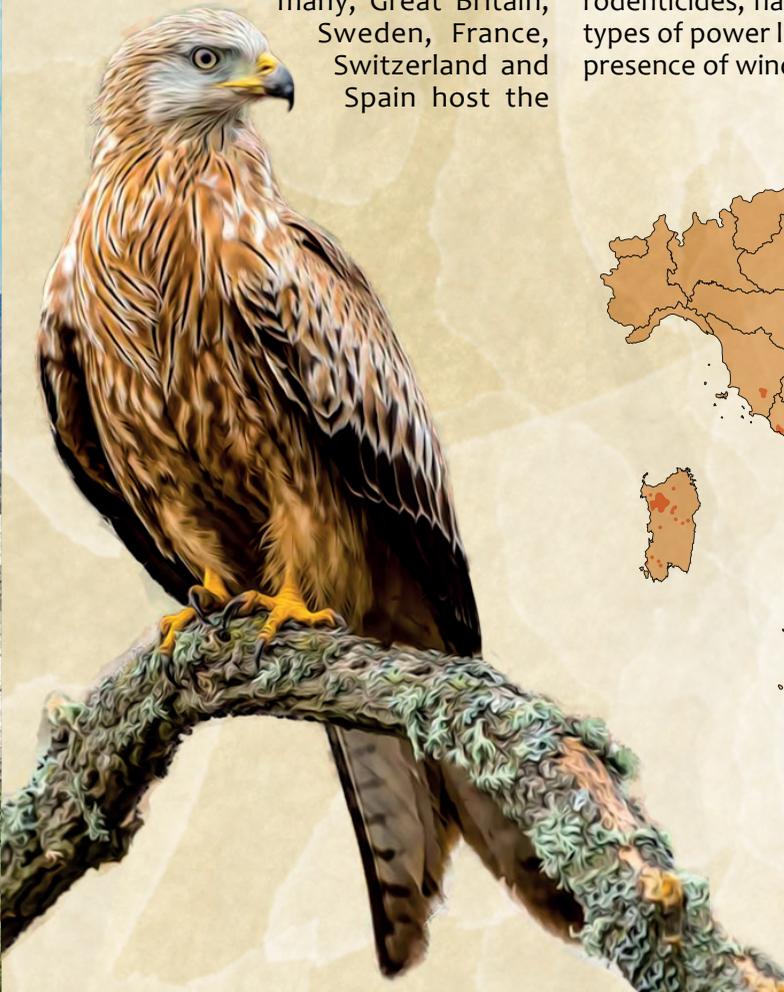
The red kite is a bird of prey with a particular and "assorted" diet. It feeds mainly on dead animals and, limited by its weak legs and beak, preys on small animals such as mice, voles, lizards, earthworms and various insects. It also finds food in landfills.

Therefore, these beautiful birds are valuable natural allies of farmers and breeders. They contribute to the preservation of a healthy ecosystem: they eliminate the carcasses of dead animals and keep under control the number of rodents, magpies and crows.

## A species to be protected

In Italy, the red kite is considered a vulnerable species. It is estimated that between 400 and 500 pairs are distributed, unevenly, especially in the central-southern part of the Peninsula. Basilicata hosts the largest number (150-200), followed by Abruzzo and Molise. The Italian numbers are very limited, considering that in other European countries there are thousands of pairs. Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, France, Switzerland and Spain host the

majority of the European breeding population, estimated at 60,000-70,000 pairs. This is almost the entire world population (95%). The red kites that nest in central, northern and eastern Europe in autumn migrate to more southern European countries, including Italy, to spend the winter there. The species is threatened by human persecution, the illegal use of poisoned baits, the use of rodenticides, habitat changes, some types of power lines and the massive presence of wind farms.



## *Reintroduction in the Aspromonte National Park*

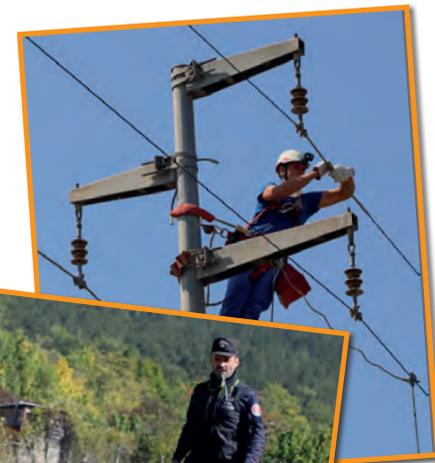
The reintroduction of the red kite in the Aspromonte National Park is based on the release of around 90 red kite fledglings coming from donor areas over five to six years. During spring, expert ornithologists monitor numerous nests and select those with at least two fledglings. In these nests, at the beginning of June, about fifteen young red kites aged between four and five weeks are taken. The fledglings are transferred to the aviaries of a release centre in the Amendolea Valley and here, after about a month and a half, they are released into the wild. A feeding platform supports them during this delicate phase of setting, in which they must learn to know the territory before becoming autonomous from the food point of view. The coloured rings and the GPS tracking devices they are equipped with, together with the work of observation in the field, the use of phototrap and

video surveillance systems, allow to constantly monitor their movements and intervene in case of criticality.



## *Actions for the red kite but not only*

- Activation of five feeding platforms in the southern part of the Park, in collaboration with local and livestock farms. This favours the establishment and expansion of the new population of red kite but also other birds of prey can take advantage of it.
  - Development of activities for the prevention and contrast of the illegal use of poisoned baits and morsels, a very serious threat to the red kite and to many other animals, in collaboration with the CUFA (Comando Unità per la Tutela Forestale, Ambientale e Agroalimentare dell'Arma dei Carabinieri).
  - In particular, deployment of Anti-poison Dog Units by the CUFA for periodic inspections in the territory.
  - Insulation of 250 poles of the medium-voltage power lines (15 kV) by E-Distribuzione S.p.A to mitigate the risk of electrocution for the red kite and other bird species that have medium to large wingspan.
- Initiatives to raise awareness as informing and engaging the local population and tourists, carrying out an educational campaign in schools and the setting up of a room dedicated to the LIFE MILVUS project in the Park Visitor Center located in Bova (RC).





The red kite, a splendid bird of prey that lives almost exclusively in Europe, is threatened by many human activities and infrastructures, therefore it is necessary to carry out concrete and effective conservation actions to guarantee its future. The main objectives of the LIFE MILVUS project are the establishment of a red kite population in the Aspromonte National Park (Italy) and the protection of the areas frequented by the species in Corsica (France).



[www.lifemilvusproject.it](http://www.lifemilvusproject.it)

The LIFE MILVUS project is funded with the contribution of the LIFE programme of the European Union



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