

# NEWSLETTER N. 1

LIFE18 NAT/IT/000917 - Progetto LIFE MILVUS



September 2023



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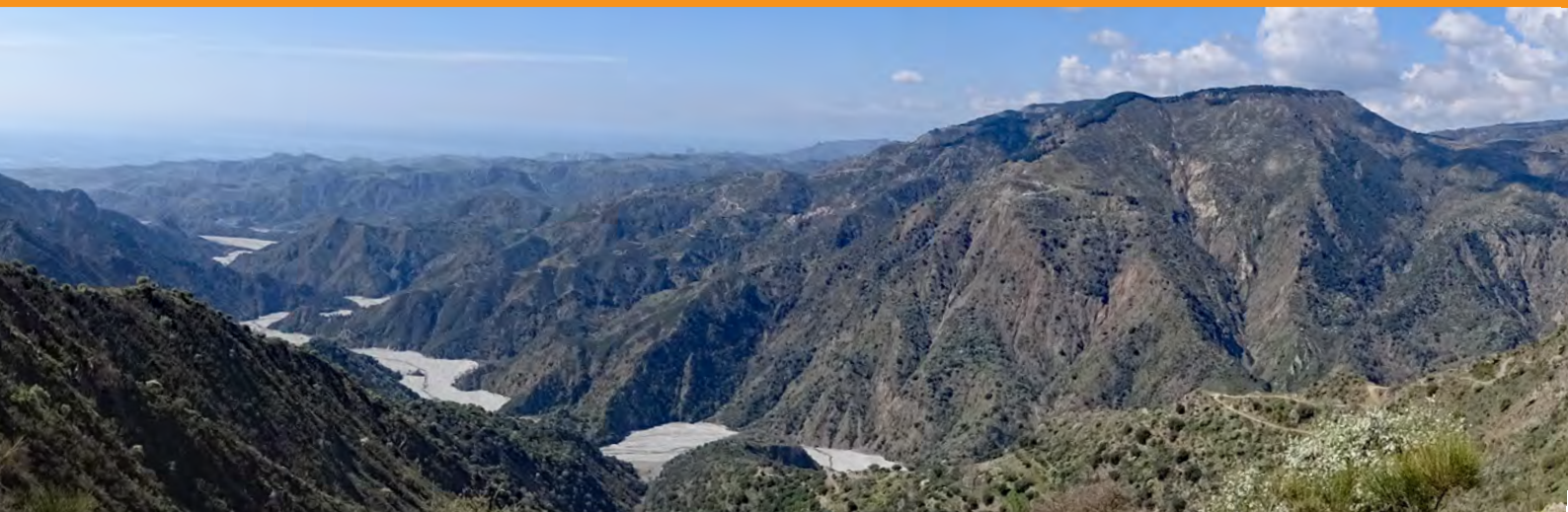
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REGIONE CALABRIA

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## First red kite release in the Aspromonte National Park (ANP)

On 27 July 2023, eight young red kites, hatched in Switzerland, were released in the Aspromonte National Park: it was the first release geared to reintroducing, over the course of a few years, this magnificent species in southern Calabria, where it disappeared several decades ago.



With a few agile wing flaps, the eight specimens left the two acclimatization aviaries that had hosted them for nearly over a month. They now fly around the release area and occasionally use a feeding platform which is supplied in order to support them in their first period of freedom.

The GPS devices, with which the birds are fitted, enable the LIFE MILVUS team to monitor their movements. Cameras installed in the area make it possible to observe them and read their identification rings while they are feeding.





### Story of a collective effort

The release of the eight young red kites in the ANP is the result of a combined international effort by the Park Authority staff, institutions, associations, Italian and Swiss ornithologists.

On 23 June 2023, after an approximately 1,700 km drive, these birds of prey were placed in two aviaries overlooking the wild Amendolea River, in the southern part of the Park. Facing them, a splendid panorama, but very different from what they were used to watching only two days earlier: the countryside of the Fribourg Canton.





The fledglings hatched in the Swiss canton and were taken from their nests at the age of about 4-5 weeks. Ornithologist Adrian Aebischer coordinated the monitoring of the nests and extraction, assisted by ornithologists and tree climbers Pascal Grand, Christian Grand, Valentijn van Bergen, Paul Ducry and Henry Vigneau. Once captured, the red kites were placed in the recovery center of the Fribourg Museum of Natural History for a few days, entrusted to the care of Caroline Pittet, Boris Baeriswyl and Pascal Schoepfer.

Dr. Aebischer also assisted the Park in obtaining authorizations for the collection and transfer from the Swiss authorities: the Canton of Fribourg, the Federal Office for the Environment and the Federal Office for Food Safety and Veterinary Medicine.

The translocation to Italy was made possible thanks to the favorable opinion of the CITES Commission of the Italian Ministry of the Environment and to the support of the Veterinary Medicine Service (ASL) of Reggio Calabria. Previously, the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) had expressed a favorable opinion on the birds' release into nature and the application of rings and remote monitoring devices (GPS/VHF).

Luca Pelle, coordinator of the LIFE MILVUS project and head of the Park's Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Service Manager, and ornithologist Pierpaolo Storino, of the Calabrian Ornithological Station, initiated the transfer from Fribourg on 22 June 2023. An initial stop was made in Ponte Chiasso to clear customs formalities, then, thanks to availability offered by the Monti Cimini Institution, the animals were able to rest at the Wild Animal Recovery Center of the Lake Vico Reserve (VT), entrusted to the care of the staff of the LIFE LANNER project - LIFE18 NAT/IT/000720 (Veronica Cippitelli and Damiano Antonelli).

On June 23, the journey continued until they reached the adaptation and release centre of the Aspromonte National Park. Here they were cared for by the staff and by ornithologists from the Calabrian Ornithological Station until the day of their release.

For all activities, the Park was able to count on the support of Guido Ceccolini, member of the CERM Association, long experienced with the red kite species.



## Release in nature

Since their arrival at the ANP on 23 June 2023, the red kites have become familiar with the area and completed their growth under the vigilant eye of two cameras enabling the LIFE MILVUS team to monitor their health and behavior inside the aviaries.

On 25 July 2023, a team of ornithologists from the CERM Association and the StOrCal Association fitted the red kites with identification rings (one metallic and another blue with white letters) and a GPS/GSM device so as to follow their activities at all times. Veterinary doctor Olimpia Lai of the Department of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Bari collected biological samples in order to obtain information on the possible presence of heavy metals and metalloids.



On 27 July 2023, the gates of the aviaries were opened and the young birds of prey calmly made their first flight in the wild.

The staff of the Cooperativa Tutela dell'Aspromonte supplies a feeding platform ensuring that an adequate food supply is always available to the young kites who, not being able to count on the support of their parents, need to get to know the area before being able to feed on their own.

## Monitoring

Red kite monitoring involves analyzing the data received from the GPS/GSM data loggers the animals are equipped with, and reading the colored rings thanks to the cameras trained on the feeding platform and the release area.

In August, the young birds of prey carried out some exploratory flights, in some cases covering several tens of kilometers, but all returned to the release area shortly after.

## Power line insulation in the ANP

Electrocution is one of the greatest threats to the red kite and many other bird species with medium-large wingspan. Electrocution occurs most frequently when birds land on the supports of medium voltage power lines having non-insulated conductor cables; the take-off and landing phases are also very critical. When the animals touch the support (grounded) and the conductor (live at 15-25,000 volts) with two parts of their body at the same time, they are electrocuted.



To minimize this risk for the red kites reintroduced into the Aspromonte National Park and, at the same time, to reduce it for many other birds that frequent the area, E-Distribuzione SpA, one of the project partners, retrofitted 263 supports of potentially dangerous medium voltage power lines located near the release area. The conductors were protected by special insulating sheaths, while the live points present on the poles, through which the electric current runs, were covered with a special self-agglomerating insulating tape, protected by an anti-UV tape, or by special isolation.

These interventions were preceded by a study, carried out by Dr. Andrea Ciulla, who identified the potentially dangerous power lines and, based on a precise set of factors, assigned a priority code to each of them.

## Cleaning of feeding and nesting areas in Corsica

In February 2022, three important and delicate initiatives were carried out for the protection of seven red kite nesting sites in the Regino Valley (Corsica); the result of a combined effort by the Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels de Corse (CENC) and some local breeders, the Office for Agricultural and Rural Development of Corsica, the Community of the municipalities of Ile Rousse Balagne and the animator of the Natura2000 network of the FR941200 site – Vallée du Reginu.

In Corsica, one of the most serious threats to the species is fires. The CENC is working in the framework of the LIFE MILVUS project and with the authorities that oversee the Natura 2000 sites to reduce the risk that fires pose in terms of destroying red kite nests or otherwise damaging the areas used by the species for nesting.

Each intervention consists in clearing of the shrub vegetation of several hectares of surface area,



using special mechanical devices. After cleaning up, these areas ensure a viable obstacle to the spread of fire and, furthermore, consisting of a mosaic of different environments, they foster the presence of animal species in special need of conservation, such as the tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) and the woodchat shrike (*Lanius senator*).

To avoid any damage to these species, interventions are carried out in the winter and in ways that do not involve any risk for the hibernating tortoises.

Interventions carried out so far have involved three sites in Balagne, located in the municipalities of Feliceto, Ville di Paraso and Belgodère, a total area of 22.4 hectares, and were made possible thanks to three agreements that the CENC stipulated with two breeders and managers of a riding center located in areas of interest.

In the future, these will be designated for sheep and horse grazing, which will ensure their long-term maintenance as mosaic environments, capable of mitigating the risk of fires and suitable for nesting and feeding of red kites.

Furthermore, the interventions carried out have a positive socio-economic impact on the territory, making new and large surfaces available for the activities of the two breeders and the riding center involved: a virtuous example of how cooperation between those who act in favor of the conservation of nature and those who practice traditional and compatible agro-pastoral activities can prove profitable for all.

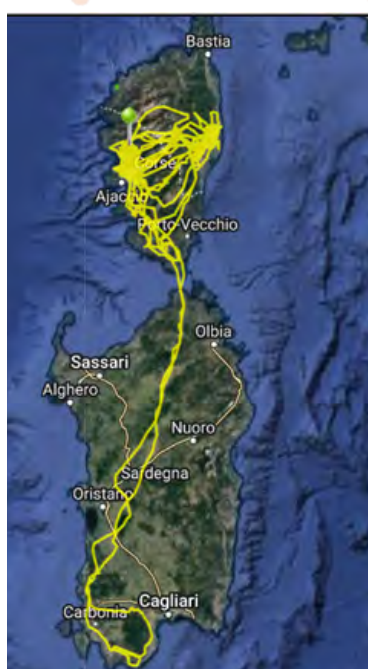
### Red kite monitoring in Corsica

During 2021 and 2023, the Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels de Corse CENC conducted a capture campaign in Corsican nests aimed at fitting GPS devices on young red kites.

A total of twenty GPS devices weighing around 25 g were installed, enabling ornithologists to constantly track the whereabouts of the animals.

Analysis of the data received via GPS provides useful information in identifying key sites for the species, such as nesting areas and roosts, and to detect their greatest threats. Therefore, the data collected is essential in terms of designing conservation measures to be adopted in the future.

GPS data-loggers also made it possible to follow the interesting temporary transfer of two individual specimens, a male and a female, from Corsica to the northern part of Sardinia.



Male (left) and female (right) movements between June 2022 and June 2023



On 06/19/2022 the two red kites crossed the sea south of the Strait of Bonifacio separately, two hours apart from each other, and reached Sardinia. The crossing took them a maximum of thirty minutes. The male arrived near Punta Campanile, the female above Lungani/ Santa Teresa di Gallura. The following day the male reached the southern tip of Sardinia; on 06/26/2022 he returned to Corsica. The female reached the Noragugume area and remained there until 02/16/2023. At 10.53 it was located in La Maddalena, at 11.22 on the island of Spargi, and at 12.23 it was reported to have returned to Corsica, in Suartone. It reached its birth area on 02/17/2023 at 1:52 pm. Unfortunately, on 04/27/2023 it either lost the GPS or died. The male specimen is ok!

## Anti-Poison Dog Unit Activities in the ANP

During 2022 and 2023 Anti-Poison Dog Units (ADU) of the Carabinieri Forestry Division carried out inspections in the ANP territory to verify the possible presence of poison baits. No suspicious elements were found.

Unfortunately, the use of poison baits is a widespread practice in Italy, a heinous crime that causes the death of hundreds of domestic and wild animals every year, including rare and threatened species. The poison is used to eliminate potential predators of unattended livestock or game species, damage competition in the search for truffles, kill stray dogs, etc.

For the red kite, this is an extremely dangerous threat, practically a no-retrail death sentence. This species easily identifies small baits of meat on the ground and, furthermore, feeds mainly on carrion. If the meat contains poison, or the animals have died from ingesting poison baits, the red kite has no escape.

ADUs are a very effective tool for detecting poison use and lessening its impact. The dogs are able to identify baits and carcasses as well as identifying pure toxic substances, those proving to be an invaluable adjunct to the forestry police.

The inspections, as part of an agreement stipulated between the ANP and the Forestry, Environmental and Agri-food Unit Command of the Carabinieri (CUFAA), are carried out by the ADUs, jointly with the Park Authority and in synergy with the Carabinieri Parks Group of the Aspromonte PN Department.



## Sparkling population awareness

Both in Italy and in Corsica there are many activities aimed at making aware the local population and tourists in the project areas, supported by the production of various information and educational tools.

In Corsica, tutorials and field trips are available to students, along with public events such as meetings and exhibits. The CENC has also created an evocative exhibition stand that provides information on the project, on the red kite and on the biodiversity of the project areas.

In the Aspromonte National Park, an awareness campaign involved the participation of local farmers and breeders, tour operators and other interest groups. Door-to-door meetings and public presentations were held to illustrate the project's objectives and activities.





During the 2022-2023 school year, an awareness campaign featured specific tutorials to over 800 students from 77 primary and lower secondary school classes. The activity ended with a competition in which 610 students took part, producing 64 drawings or other creative works, individually or in groups. All participants were rewarded and a special prize was awarded to 93 students who, divided in work groups, created the 10 best projects.

The Visitor Center at the ANP in Bova (RC) features a room dedicated to the red kite, enabling visitors to gain all sorts of information about the species, the overall project itself, and immerse themselves in the nature of the Park. It is curated by the Arts & Altro Project.



**The LIFE MILVUS project** has as its main objectives the reintroduction of the red kite in the Aspromonte National Park ANP (Italy) and the implementation of measures for the conservation of the species in Corsica.

*Project areas*

Aspromonte National Park (Italy)  
and Corsica (France)

*Coordinating beneficiary*

Aspromonte National Park Authority

*Associated beneficiaries*

E-Distribuzione SpA, Calabria Region,  
Conservatoires d'espaces naturels de Corse

*Duration*

01/10/2019 - 30/09/2025



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

Realized by: Ente Parco Nazionale dell'Aspromonte

Text: Anna Cenerini

Photos: A. Cenerini, G. Ceccolini, A. Cervigni, A. Ciulla, F. Darmanin,  
G. Martino, CENC

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