

NEWSLETTER N.2

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e-distribuzione





Second Red kite release in the Aspromonte National Park

The Red kite reintroduction programme in the Aspromonte National Park began at the end of July 2023 with the release of 8 juveniles hatched in Switzerland (Canton of Fribourg).

A second operation was carried out on August 7, 2024, with the release of 10 young born in the Canton of Fribourg, 5 born in Corsica (France) and 2 individuals, a young and an adult, treated and rehabilitated at the Wild Animal Rescue Centre (CRAS) in Matera. The last two birds were previously found in difficulty in Basilicata and included in the reintroduction programme of the LIFE MILVUS project thanks to the cooperation of the Basilicata Region.





The operations in Corsica

The ornithologists Carole Attié, Ludovid Lepori and Sébastien Cart of the CEN Corse Association (Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels de Corse) monitored the red kite nests in Corsica, collected 5 young individuals, organized the translocation and managed all the complex administrative procedures. Cécile Jolin, a licensed ringer who works in the U Pettirosu Wildlife Recovery Centre, also collaborated.

The authorizations needed to capture and translocate the birds were obtained in an exceptionally short time thanks to the support of various French bodies (including the Direction Régionale de l'Environnement de l'Aménagement et du Logement DREAL Corse and the Conseil National de la Protection de Nature CNNP).

On June 14, 2024, the young red kites were taken over in Bastia (Corsica) by the project manager of the LIFE MILVUS project, Anna Cenerini, and transferred to Tuscany on a tourist plane flown by Matteo Casuccio. The transfer was organized by the CERM Endangered Raptors Centre Association (VO).

After landing at the Aliscarlino airfield, the animals were transferred to CERM in Rocchette di Fazio (GR), where they spent a few days of rest. On June 21, after a stop at the Wild Animal Recovery Centre of the Lake Vico Reserve (VT), they reached the acclimatization and release centre of the Aspromonte National Park.



The operations in Switzerland

In the Canton of Fribourg field activities were carried out by a team of ornithologists and tree climbers, coordinated by Adrian Aebischer and made up of Pascal Grand, Christian Grand, Valentijn van Bergen, Paul Ducry, Henry Vigneau. In March and April Paul Ducry and Sarah Monod carefully monitored over 90 nests using drones and in mid-June the Swiss team collected 10 young red kites from the nests.

After a short stay at the “Rita Ruch” Recovery Centre (affiliated to the Natural History Museum of Freiburg and directed by Caroline Chatton) and a health check by the veterinarian Dirk Hamburger, on June 20, 2024, the red kites were transferred to Italy by the project manager for the Aspromonte National Park Authority Luca Pelle and the ornithologist Mario Pucci of the Calabrian Ornithological Station.

As in 2023, the operations were carried out with the support of the Swiss authorities (Canton of Fribourg, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment and Federal Veterinary Office of Switzerland).

After passing customs controls in Chiasso (CO), the young birds of prey continued their journey south and stopped at the Wild Animal Recovery Centre of the Lake Vico Reserve (VT) thanks to the availability of the Monti Cimini Institution, the responsible of the CRAS Giampiero Tirone and the operators Sara Vincenzi and Veronica Cippitelli. The day after they arrived in the Aspromonte National Park.



Release into the wild

The 17 red kites from Fribourg, Corsica and Basilicata were released into the wild on August 7, 2024, after a period of acclimatization spent in the release centre located in the southern part of the Aspromonte National Park and after being equipped with metal rings, coloured identification rings and GPS/GSM data logger devices.

During acclimatization and after release, they were managed and monitored by the staff of the Cooperativa Tutela dell’Aspromonte and the ornithologists of the Calabrian Ornithological Station with the support of experts from the CERM Association.



Movements of red kites released in the ANP

The red kites were monitored through the analysis of data received from the GPS/GSM devices and the video surveillance images taken in the release area, which allowed the reading of the coloured leg rings.

Many of the birds released into the ANP perform erratic movements that led them to explore vast areas of Southern Italy and beyond, a completely normal behaviour during the first years of life.

Nonetheless, the red kites released in 2023, after considerable movements, all returned to the release area between August and October 2024.

Flo, for example, since September 25, 2023, had wandered far and wide across Italy between Sicily, Basilicata, Puglia, Molise and Abruzzo, but three days after her release in 2024 she reappeared near the acclimatization aviaries.

Some individuals spent the winter 2023-24 and are spending the winter 2024-25 in central-northern Sicily, where they have been observed several times roosting together with other red kites, probably originating from central Europe.

The first-year mortality of the red kites released in 2023 was low whereas that recorded among juveniles released in 2024 is quite high. Some individuals died of natural causes, but most died of non-natural causes. Among the latter, those ascertained so far are drowning in concrete tanks for agricultural use (in Calabria) and electrocution (an individual electrocuted in Puglia).

A Red kite, Andrea, was shot in Calabria on October 3, 2024. He had made the most significant

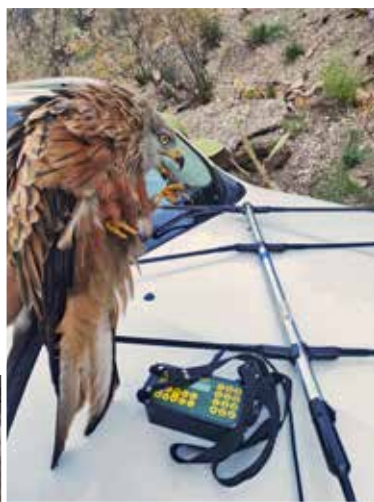


movements of all the red kites released in 2023: in just over a year, he traveled around 12,000 km, reaching first Sicily and then continuing northbound along the Italian peninsula touching Basilicata, Puglia, Campania, Molise, Lazio, Abruzzo, Marche and Emilia-Romagna.

After his long journey around Italy, the young Red kite returned near the release area at the beginning of autumn 2024. South of Reggio Calabria, between the municipalities of Pellaro and Motta S. Giovanni, a gunshot hit him causing a fracture of the ulna of his right wing. Through his GPS it was possible to quickly locate and find him, on the ground, injured and bleeding, and to transfer him to the “Stretto di Messina” Wildlife Recovery Centre.

Thanks to the care provided, Andrea recovered perfectly. On January 19, 2025, he was equipped with a new GPS and then released in Sicily, not far from a dormitory frequented by several dozen other red kites, by experts from CERM Endangered Raptors Centre Association, the Calabrian Ornithological Station and the Messina Recovery Centre.

Andrea's wounding is one of the many cases of poaching against birds occurring every year in Italy. This is just the tip of an iceberg of unknown but certainly enormous proportions because only those cases are emerging involving GPS monitored individuals in the framework of reintroduction or restocking programmes for threatened species.



Activities to tackle wildlife poisoning

On December 4 and 5, 2024, the Park Authority, in collaboration with the Forestry, Environmental and Agri-food Unit Command of the Carabinieri (CUFA), organized a course on wildlife poisoning at the ANP. The course was aimed mainly at the Carabinieri Park Unit staff, the veterinaries of the Local Health Authorities of Calabria and the professionals responsible for monitoring and conserving wildlife.

The course deepened knowledge on the phenomenon and its impact on wildlife, the prevention measures, the management of poisoning cases from a veterinary point of view and the investigation techniques.

A session of the course was dedicated to the activity carried out by the Anti-Poison Dog Units of the Forestry Carabinieri (ADU), which is irreplaceable for identifying the presence of poison, carrying out rapid and effective clean-up operations and identifying elements useful for investigations. The handlers of the ADU of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park (Chief Brigadier Alessandra Mango and Selected Officer Andrea Corsi) illustrated the dog training methods and the field inspections planned and carried out.

At the end of the course, a simulation of a poisoning case was set up which made it possible to explain how to move around the crime scene, how to identify all the elements of interest and correctly proceed with their documentation, collection, conservation and interpretation of the available information.

The teachers of the course were the experts of the CITES Carabinieri Group of the CUFA (Captain Emanuele Barbaro assisted by Marshal Annalisa Brucoli and Deputy Brigadier Barbara Pasquini), the veterinarian Rosario Fico, long-time expert in veterinary forensic medicine, Anna Cenerini, naturalist and responsible of the LIFE MILVUS project, Guido Ceccolini, president of the CERM Endangered Raptors Centre Association and Luca Pelle, responsible of the ANP Conservation and Biodiversity Service.



Power line insulation in the ANP

To minimize the risk of electrocution for the Red kite and many other bird species with medium-large wingspan, e-distribuzione S.p.A. secured 293 potentially dangerous elements of the medium voltage power lines located in the southern part of the Aspromonte National Park (pylons, supports, pole disconnectors, pole-mounted transformers, switches and disconnectors and secondary masonry substations). The interventions concluded in August 2024 and involved four different sections of power lines, for a total of approximately 37 km.

Special insulating kits, insulating profiles and agglomerating tapings covered with anti-UV adhesive tape have been applied to all live parts of most of the elements.



Symposium on avifauna and electrocution

On March 26, 2024, a symposium on avifauna and electrocution entitled “Electrocution of avifauna in Italy: past, present and future” will take place in Rome. The event, organized by E-Distribuzione as part of the LIFE MILVUS project, will be held at the Enel headquarters in Via Boccherini 15.

Symposium programme and information on how to register will be available on the project website www.lifemilvusproject.it.

Night roosts and movements of Red kite in Corsica

In Corsica, the Red kite is considered as a resident species. Outside of the breeding season, some of the breeding adults as well as all the non-breeding individuals use a network of roosts spread across the island.

As part of LIFE Milvus, 20 young red kites were equipped with GPS tags in order to follow their movements and in particular to locate their nighttime roosts. These roosts can then be inspected visually to verify whether they constitute dormitories for the Red kite population.

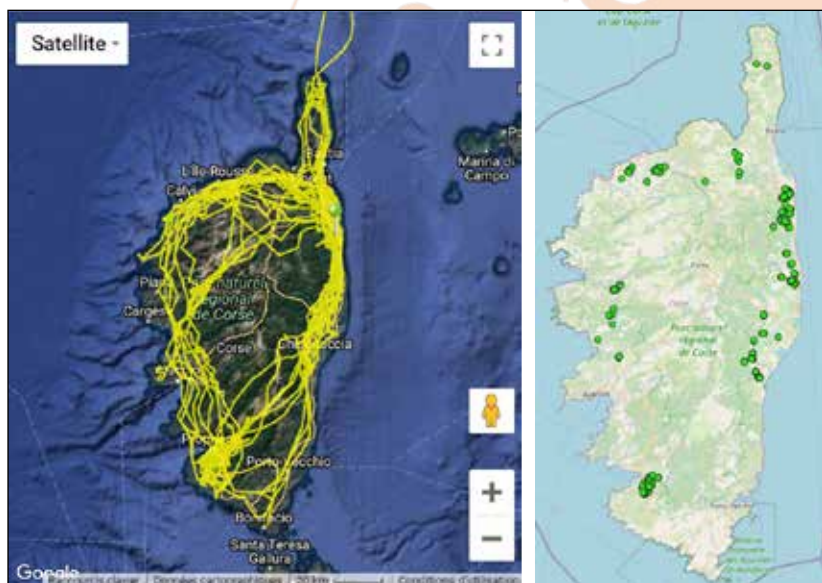


Figure 1 - Daytime movements (on the left) and nocturnal resting places (on the right) of the female 203809 between January and July 2022.



Figure 2 - Location of known Red kite roosts in Corsica in 2023.

Every year, new roosts are discovered thanks to red kites equipped with GPS devices. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively 16, 10 and 32 new roosts were discovered. So, at the end of winter 2023-2024, 123 night roosts were known.

The majority of the Red kite population remains in Corsica (even in winter) but, thanks to birds equipped with GPS tags, it has been discovered that some red kites can leave Corsica for Sardinia. Four individuals, three females and one male, out of the 20 equipped with GPS went to Sardinia (see below). They were three non-breeding birds aged one year and one non-breeding bird aged three years.

GPS n.	Sex	Fledging date	Departure for Sardinia	Return to Corsica
203807	Female	July 2021	June 19, 2022	February 16, 2023
203805	Male	July 2021	June 19, 2022	June 24, 2022
203791	Female	July 2021	May 8, 2024	May 11, 2024
203797	Female	July 2023	May 10, 2024	May 15, 2024

Departures for Sardinia took place in May and June. Three birds came back to Corsica after few days, the fourth bird remained in Sardinia during winter.



Figure 3 - Movements of female 203807 with wintering in Sardinia.

Nest protection and plot clearing

Corsica is home to a large sedentary Red kite population. A survey conducted in 2019 and 2020 estimated a mean of 892 pairs (IMBE/LPO 2023).

The Reginu valley in Balagne is an important area for the conservation of the Red kite in Corsica. Designated as a Natura 2000 Network Special Protection Area (SPA) for the conservation of the Red kite, it hosts between 168 and 194 pairs. This high density was probably favoured by the massive presence of wild rabbits, a species introduced in the 1950s. The widespread practice of extensive livestock farming is another factor favouring the maintenance of open habitats with food resources accessible to kites.

Unfortunately, in some areas the abandonment of agricultural practices leads to the growth of shrubs which close off open spaces and increase the risk of fires. To protect the nesting sites, as part of the LIFE MILVUS project, CEN Corse stipulates contracts with farmers for the reclamation of agricultural land that hosts Red kite nests, thus reducing the risk of fires. Furthermore, a 50-meter-wide buffer zone is guaranteed around trees with nests to prevent disturbance.

During the winter 2022-23, this activity made it possible to clean up 15 out of 22 hectares in a land mosaic pattern, increasing the foraging area and thus reducing the risk of fire for about ten nests located in these lands and nearby.

In the winter 2024-25 the intervention will affect an area of 15.5 hectares, 10 of which will be opened to create a mosaic pattern and protect 5 nests.



Fig. 4 - Method for creating open habitats in agricultural plots hosting Red kite nests.

Documentary on the LIFE MILVUS project

"A colourful sky of kites" is the title of the documentary dedicated to the Red kite and the LIFE MILVUS project produced by the Aspromonte National Park Authority. Made by White Fox Communication (Eugenio Manghi and Annalisa Losacco), the video has a duration of 11 minutes and is available in Italian, English and French on the video page of the LIFE MILVUS project website, on the project's Youtube channel and on the Facebook page of ANP.

<https://lifemilvusproject.it/video/>

<https://lifemilvusproject.it/en/en-video/>

<https://lifemilvusproject.it/fr/fr-video/>



The LIFE MILVUS project has as its main objectives the reintroduction of the Red kite in the Aspromonte National Park ANP 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 S.p.A., Regione Calabria, Conservatoires d'Espaces Naturels de Corse CEN Corse

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