



## **GRUPPO TUTELA RAPACI**

### **2019**

2019 was the ninth year of activity of the GTR (Gruppo Tutela Rapaci). The continuity of our actions has allowed to achieve great results in terms of conservation of the target species and the fight against the illegal fledgings removal.

Our activities are possible thanks to the support of the SPA foundation (Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt), LIPU (Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli), EBN Italy and CABS (Committee Against Bird Slaughter).

In 2019 the GTR organized three surveillance camps and carried out the monitoring campaign of the Sicilian population of Bonelli's Eagle. Monitoring also involved some Lanner's breeding sites. The activities started in January with the inspection of the historical occupation sites. In March the main goal of the GTR was the surveillance of Bonelli's Eagle nests. The organized camps allowed the supervision of 10 Bonelli's Eagle pairs.

In addition to these tasks, the GTR has participated to several projects:

- monitoring and surveillance of the Bonelli's Eagle, Lanner falcon, Egyptian Vulture sites with the collaboration of Life ConRaSi staff. This project enables to control the birds of prey of the whole regional territory;
- marking and captive breeding of the Bonelli's Eagle, reintroduction effort of the confiscated raptors with the Grefa (Grupo de Rehabilitaciòn de la Fauna Autoctòna);
- surveillance activity at the nests with the Life Choon project volunteers;
- investigation and appraisal activities of raptors that belong to falconers with the CITES Carabinieri Force.

### **SURVEILLANCE CAMPS**

The three organized camps have been placed in the areas at greatest risk of eagle's chicks robbery. The risk was calculated based on the past experience but also evaluating the organizational aspect. The primary objective is the deterrence against theft but also the direct signal of our presence on the territory. The start-up of the activities was preceded by the dialogue with the Police forces competent per territory.

#### **Camp 1**

For camp 1, we confirmed the historical site in the territory of Agrigento and Caltanissetta. The camp was anticipated by the verification of the nests occupation in January and February. The

surveillance activity started on March 10<sup>th</sup> and the first hatching took place on March 16<sup>th</sup>. The activities ended a few days after the eagles flew off at the end of May.

Five couples were present in the territory surveyed by the camp and in March a sixth couple was also discovered. One among the six couple did not reproduce nor build the nest. A second one built the nest but abandoned the brood after about 20 days. At the end of April this couple moved to a nearby nest without starting any reproductive activity. The other four couples started their reproduction by raising one young per nest, three flew off and one died at the age of 35 days. The dead chick was collected and sent to the Zooprofylactis Institute of Palermo to analyze the cause of death.

The supervision activities were supported by camera traps that belong to GTR, allowing also the monitoring of Lanner's nests within the controlled area, two couples were present, one did not start any reproductive activity while the other raised two chicks.

Eighteen persons participated in the camp activity.

## **Camp 2**

Camp 2 is located in an area that incorporates three couplet, one of them did not occupy the site so the activities were addressed to the remaining two. Three eaglet were born but one died at a young age. The carcass was collected and sent to the Zooprofylactic Institute of Palermo where it was analysed to find out the reason of death. Last year in a site near this area a theft was recorded. The authorities are still investigating about it, that's why we cannot dissolve the privacy. This confirms the importance of the surveillance camps and local presence.

The 25 volunteers who participated to the supervision did not report any particular problem with poachers or interested falconers, infact the activities guaranteed the necessary tranquillity to the nests.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, after about two months of supervision, the eaglet left the nest allowing us to declare the 2019 activity closed in that area.

## **Campo 3**

Camp 3 took place in the territories of Catania and Siracusa. Preceded by frequent inspections in January and February, the vigilance activity started on a daily basis on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Three sites checked, two Bonelli's Eagle sites and a Lanner falcon site.

In the site active since 2012, breeding has failed due to natural causes. The female was observed in incubation from February 10<sup>th</sup> to April 22<sup>nd</sup>. On April 24<sup>th</sup> hatching was noticed to be interrupted, in the nest an egg was still visible but broken.

It is likely that the reproductive failure can be attributed to the bad weather conditions in February 2019, locally characterized by repeated and intense precipitations and even snowfalls.

When, after the fiftieth day of unsuccessful hatching, it became clear that the nesting had failed, it was decided to move the monitoring activity to the Lanner's site.

Between March 30<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup>, four Lanner chicks were born.

240 m from the Lanner's nest, a couple of Peregrine Falcon reproduced and raised their nestlings born 15 days later.

The Lanner fledgings flew off between May 18<sup>th</sup> and May 19<sup>th</sup>. In a period of very serious demographic crisis of this species, having guaranteed the flight of four young Lanner is a particularly important result.

The young Peregrine falcons also flew off two weeks later.

In the second monitored site of Bonelli's Eagle, the couple raised a young female, born between March 13 and 17. It flew off on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.  
 Altogether, the camp has involved 9 volunteers.

## MONITORING OF BONELLI'S EAGLE SICILIAN POPULATION

55 Bonelli's Eagle sites were monitored. Unfortunately a site was checked only after the breeding season ended. It showed clear signs of occupation but it was not possible to verify if it belong to a couple of Bonelli's Eagle. Although it has been known for years, it was not therefore included among the 55 sites.

The 2019 breeding season started with great promises but the bad weather conditions in February led to a high number of failures.

In the following table there's a summary of the monitoring results.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total monitored nesting places	43	44	<b>54</b>	42	49	53	45	55
Nesting places monitored for the first time	2	5	<b>9</b>	2	6	4	0	4
Occupied nesting places (BE adults in breeding behavior)	28	30	37	37	41	<b>43</b>	39	44
Nesting places with eggs spawning	25	26	30	30	27	34	33	<b>41</b>
Number of born chicks	34	28	29	30	28	33	<b>42</b>	36
Nesting places with successfully fledged juveniles	23	19	19	20	19	20	<b>26</b>	25
Nesting places which failed (incubation interrupted, no chicks born, dead chick/s)	2	7	11	7	11	14	4	<b>15</b>
Nesting places with verified eggs/chicks theft	0	1	?	0	2	0	1	0
Nesting places where one member of the pair has changed since the previous year		4	3	1	4	nd	2	2
Fledged juveniles	33	28	27	26	27	29	<b>40</b>	33
Monitoring inspections to nesting places (excluding guarding activities)	228	308	340	n.d.	n.d.	290	n.d.	n.d.
Number of full time (daytime) guarding camps	3	4	6	7	5	5	3	3
Number of volunteers involved	<b>77</b>	65	48	46	22	31	38	52

## COLLABORATION WITH THE CITES CARABINIERI FORCE

The collaboration with the Cites Force has finally reached an operational phase. The reports and information of the previous years have been enhanced and have allowed the start of a large Police operation. The GTR volunteers have been appointed as judicial Police officers in every operation carried out.

The collaboration included the following activities:

- supply of photographic material and information (plate numbers and names) detected during the monitoring activities and supervision of the nests;

- technical support during investigation tasks;
- technical support during falconers control;
- general assessment of the health status of the checked animals;
- appraisal of animals of dubious origin.

At the end of operations, ten falconers have been reported. The GTR volunteers will have to participate in the trial as ornithological experts.

The animals seized during the operations are about 70, belonging to the following protected species:

- Peregrine falcon;
- Lanner falcon;
- Common Kestrel;
- Little Owl;
- Raven;
- Hooded Crow;
- Calandra Lark;
- Woodchat Shrike;
- Goldfinch;
- Hermann's tortoise.

Several greenfinches, serins and goldfinches were immediately released. Even a Lanner falcon, just stolen from the nest, was found dead.

All the confiscated animals were admitted to the Wildlife Recovery Center "Stretto di Messina".

In addition to the animals, 40 false CITES documents and several identification rings were confiscated.

Police investigations have allowed us to understand that theft of birds of prey are directed to those nests that are not supervised by GTR volunteers.

The falconers monitor the areas and carry out the robbery after observing the absence of control.

Police operations still continue and GTR volunteers are involved.

## **REINTRODUCTION OF SEQUESTERED ANIMALS**

In two cases the GTR ornithologists took part in the reintroduction of the confiscated birds of prey in the wild.

In the first case, it was a 18 days old Peregrine falcon chick, while the second case was about 5 young Peregrine Falcons about 70 days old.

In the first case GTR, Life ConRaSi and Grefa jointly suggested the fostering technique. The chick was introduced in a supervised nest where three other fledglings were present and he regularly flew off.

In the second case it was decided to adopt the hacking technique. Although the age of the Peregrine falcons was higher, it was considered the best solution for the case in question.

## **OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Grefa (Grupo de Rehabilitaciòn de la fauna Autoctòna) informed us that, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, one of the Bonelli's Eagle confiscated in 2013 and moved to Spain in 2015 thanks to GTR work, has

finally raised some fledgings that will become part of the reintroduction project of the species in the areas where it is extinct.

The collaboration with the staff of Life ConRaSI has allowed us to have a complete view of the Bonelli's Eagle population present in Italy, to obtain important news on the eagles marked with GPS transmitters and to provide information to the establishment in charge of implementing conservation actions that a simple volunteers group cannot afford.

In camp 2 a successful collaboration was launched with the volunteers of the Life Choon project. Many young people got involved in conservation activities by making a concrete contribution and helping to spread our work.



Many thanks to all the volunteers who participated in the supervision and monitoring activities and to our supporters.



The supervisory camp coordinators on behalf of GTR.

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