The growing activity of recovery of the wounded avifauna in Italy could be considered as an important statistic mean and a way to check the status of some ornithological populations in restricted areas. In this document we are dealing with recoveries of Little Owl Athene noctua nestlings performed by Lipu (Italian League of Birds Protection) - Bergamo and Cras (Raptor Rehabilitation Centre) - WWF - Crema.

The place of origin of the recovered avifauna is located in two contiguous districts (Bergamo and Cremona) in the Pianura Padana (Lombardia), in places with different kinds of human pressure but with clearly defined industrial (Bergamo) and agricultural (Cremona) units. The 185 recovered Little Owls by Lipu - Bergamo (unpublished data 1990-1999) and by WWF Crema (1996-1999) allow us to gather interesting information on their distribution and, contrary to other Strigiformes (Scops Owl Otus scops and Barn owl Tyto alba), which are declining significantly, the Little Owl population is increasing in percentage from year to year and it means their status is good and established. The recoveries of many nestlings I ranged allowed me to analyse dispersal of juvenile owls and it is indicating a great urbanisation of the Little Owl, which I have already pointed out in previous works with different methodologies (Mastrorilli M., 1997). The choice of nest sites in Italy was a little bit disregarded (Mastrorilli M., 1997 - Centilli D., 1996) and these data represent an interesting comparison with other studies from different countries (Genot J.C., 1994, Jaullard M., 1984) which suggests that the status of Little Owl is different. Data here contained point out a clear and almost absolute preference for buildings (agriculture, factory and urban ones). Here enclosed you can find data relevant to 35 nests that show a new adaptation of the species (Tab.1) to an architectonic structure which seems good for it: industrial pre-fabricated buildings (which are often used for cowsheds and cattle-breeding or for agricultural fittings).

Table 1 - Nests of Little Owl in Bergamo and Cremona districts (Italy) (n = 35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nest typology</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>h &gt; 5 m</th>
<th>h &lt; 5 m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell-tower</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglected house</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial pre-fabricated</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban building</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acknowledgements
I thank Roy S. Leigh for your help in the correct translate.

Bibliography
Centilli D., 1995 - Dati preliminari sulla Cività Athene noctua in un'area dei Monti della Tolfa (Roma) Associazione 19:113
Genot J.C., 1994 - Breeding Biology of the Little Owl Athene noctua in France Raptor Conservation Today 511-520
Jaullard M., 1984 - La Chouette chevêche - Nos Oiseaux - Prangins
Mastrorilli M., 1999 - Caratteristiche dei ricoveri e dei siti riproduttivi di Cività Athene noctua nelle province di Bergamo e Cremona Associazione 23:163
The Little Owl is declining across its range. Population studies have been carried out in most European countries, but DNA and Taxonomic studies are still in their infancy. This Action Plan will use all available techniques to firstly identify which populations are under threat, map the genetic variability of the Little Owl across its range, and match donor populations with the populations under threat, so a reintroduction programme can be carried out.

**Introduction**

Within the Little Owl’s (Athene noctua) range across Europe, severe declines are occurring (Fig 1) even where recovery programmes have been instigated involving habitat management and protection. Research has been carried out in several countries, mainly on the population dynamics of the Little Owl, and this has given us a good understanding of the requirements and key issues to be addressed if the decline is to be reversed. These include food and nest site availability etc.

The Conservation Plan aims to use this information as a baseline for further investigation on the taxonomic differences occurring within the various populations of Little Owl in Europe. These mainly involve the subspecies *Athene noctua vulgaris* from Western Europe (including Britain and Ireland), *Athene noctua* from Central and Eastern Europe. Hopefully this data will provide the basis for a reintroduction programme in regions where the population has declined and loss of genetic diversity is causing concern.

**Objectives**

1. To initiate and continue population dynamic studies to correlate and identify those populations under most threat;
2. To determine and confirm the causes of the current decline and hopefully research ways in which these can be eliminated;
3. To establish a DNA map of the European Little Owl population;
4. To diagnose and prioritise those populations requiring reintroduction programmes in order to survive;
5. To identify suitable captive-breeding stock which might ultimately be used to provide Little Owls for reintroduction programmes aimed at populations under threat;
6. To define criteria and operational guidelines for the reintroduction programmes to be effective;
7. To carry out reintroduction programmes over a 5 year plan with built-in research and ongoing monitoring;
8. To correlate the results of the Action Plan and Reintroduction Programme in conjunction with current population dynamic studies.

**Action Plan**

In general each phase of the Action Plan follows its predecessor, although in some cases the following phase may begin before the previous phase is completed.

**Phase 1**

The first phase of the plan requires the collaboration of all the Little Owl specialists within the International Little Owl Working Group to supply the data to identify the populations under most threat. This will be the basis of the plan and will underpin all aspects of the programme. Current and historical population dynamics studies will be collated and combined to give a population index to signify the severity of the current decline.

**Phase 2**

Will identify the prime habitat and nest site requirements of the Little Owl.

**Phase 3**

Will determine the prime causes of the decline throughout the Little Owl’s range in Europe, and assess the controlling factors affecting the population at the present time.

**Phase 4**

From the population index, agree and prioritise which populations need to be involved in any reintroduction programme.

**Phase 5**

Sample DNA from differing wild European populations and map out the variations in relation to known subspecies and their distribution. Comparative material will be taken from captive stock in order to quantify their suitability for inclusion in reintroduction schemes.

**Phase 6**

With agreement from appropriate government departments and state conservation bodies, use birds of known pedigree from managed and monitored conservation breeding programmes (incorporating the UK & Ireland Owl Taxon Advisory Group) to reintroduce the species into suitable habitats. The species will then be assessed in these areas and their development monitored. Research has been carried out in several countries, mainly on the population dynamics of the Little Owl, and this has given us a good understanding of the requirements and key issues to be addressed if the decline is to be reversed. These include food and nest site availability etc. With agreement from appropriate government departments and state conservation bodies, use birds of known pedigree from managed and monitored conservation breeding programmes (incorporating the UK & Ireland Owl Taxon Advisory Group) to reintroduce the species into suitable habitats. The species will then be assessed in these areas and their development monitored. Hopefully this data will provide the basis for a reintroduction programmes in regions where the population has declined and loss of genetic diversity is causing concern.

**Reference**


**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Current Population Estimate</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>c. 100,000 breeding prs in 1976, 110,000-330,000 prs in 1999</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3000-10,000 Pairs</td>
<td>Small Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4000-12,000 prs in 1950</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxemburg</td>
<td>3400-4200 prs in 1960-80</td>
<td>Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>40-60 prs in 1992</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>9000-12,000 prs</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>8000-12,000 prs</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>3000-11,000 prs</td>
<td>Large Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4500-8000 prs in 1998 up to 30% decline</td>
<td>Declining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>5000-6,5000 prs</td>
<td>Small Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>12,000 prs</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>22,000-40,000 prs</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1-10,000 prs</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>30000 prs</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>150-1100 prs</td>
<td>Small Decline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total European population estimated at c.246,000 prs

Jean-Claude and I would like members of the ILOWG to help implement this Conservation Plan by acting as co-ordinators in their countries, so please contact us if you would like to become involved, or want further information. We are also looking for funding for the plan, if you can help with this, or you can provide some ideas we would be very grateful.
Athene noctua

Decline of Little Owl, which was very common in Austria before, is noticed since the 1970ies. Main reasons for this decrease are due to habitat changes associated with increased agriculture, intensification and mechanisation of agriculture as well as re-saving and replanting of old orchards and meadows. Little Owls used to roost in old barns and farm buildings and closing of barns and meadows prevents birds from using these places as a roosting site. In the past 28 years since its inception a total of 102 nesting tubes have been installed. They are constantly monitored in pre-1983 (H. Furrington) so-called Little Owl habitats (fruit orchards). Since implementation of the new design the Little Owl has been able to enter the nesting tube and build its nest. The tube was placed in the marten's enclosure. After several failed attempts by the marten to destroy the nest, we concluded that with a 2 12/16 inch distance between the first and second wall, a 1 4/8 inch displacement of the entrance holes and 2 5/8 inch entrance diameter, it was impossible for the marten to reach its prey (Furrington 1979, Furrington & M. Exo 1983). It was observed that the marten tried to enlarge the entrance hole with his teeth. Therefore, we decided to exchange all remaining Little Owl habitats (fruit orchards).
The Symposium

The German owl group «AG Eulen» is organizing an European owl symposium supported by scientific and nature conservation organizations from Germany. The symposium will be held at the «International House Sonnenberg - St. Andreasberg» (about 100 km SE from Hannover) in the central Harz Mountains, from 12 - 15 October 2000. Field trips will be integrated, e.g. into the Harz Mountains. Before and after the owl symposium there will be the opportunity to visit the Expo 2000 in Hannover and the highest mountain of northern Germany, the «Broken».

The scientific program will include the specific thematic topics: effects of the forest fragmentation, population dynamics and limiting factors, dynamics of species distributions, interspecific relationships, species conservation.

Species and contributions

Contributions should be restricted to the following species: Eagle, Hawk, Pygmy, Tawny, Ural, Great grey, Long-eared and Tengmalm’s owl.

Papers, posters and other contributions like films, videos and slides are welcome on any aspects of biology and ecology of woodland owls centered on the main topics:

What does woodland offer to owls?

How owls use woodland resources?

Contributions should be in English or German and abstracts are preferred in an electronic format.

For further details

For guidance note for abstracts submission, registration and any other details, please contact:

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In the next issue of ATHENEWS®

• Experience of reinforcement of Little Owl in France by Jean-Claude Génot.
• Programme of contributions for the ILOWG meeting, on November 2000.

The second issue of the ILOWG’s members’ bulletin is printed by DIOMEDEA France, a non profit organization which works for ecological and environmental purposes.

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