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Press Release Waldrappteam LIFE+12-BIO_AT_000143

**Illegal Hunting of highly endangered Northern Bald Ibises in Italy:
Livorno Province, Tuscany, is a hot spot for losses**

In October 2014, a four-year-old male Northern Bald Ibis named HELLA was found dead in the province of Livorno, Tuscany. The X-ray showed pellets in the body, a clear indication for illegal hunting as the cause of death. Illegal hunting in Italy causes about 70% of the mortality to the reintroduced Northern Bald Ibis population. Such a high rate of loss caused by illegal hunting must also be assumed for other endangered migratory species. The province of Livorno, Tuscany, became a major hot spot for illegal hunting on this highly endangered bird species.

The male HELLA belonged to a population of about 40 reintroduced Northern Bald Ibises. At the end of September 2014, he departed from the breeding area in Bavaria down towards the wintering area, a WWF reserve in southern Tuscany. On 22nd October, a hunter found HELLAS body north of Piombino, in the province of Livorno. An X-ray showed numerous shotgun pellets in the body of the bird.

Two years earlier, in 2012, two Northern Bald Ibises named GOJA and JEDI were shot dead during autumn migration. This incident happened just 6 km north of the place where HELLA was shot. Due to GPS transmitters, which all birds of the project wear on their backs, these two individuals could be detected still alive. But they were so severely injured, that their life could not be saved. Thanks to the immediate support from the Provincial Police of Livorno the offender could be identified. It was a member of the Italian hunting association *Federazione Italiana Della Caccia*. A lawsuit against this hunter will probably take place in April 2015. The Waldrappteam aims to participate as a plaintiff.

Also in 2012, a further migratory Northern Bald Ibis named DOMINO was shot near Cecina, just 30 km north of HELLA's locality. This bird survived due to emergency surgery, but could never again be released due to the heavy violations of one wing.

In 2011, we received the last transmission of the GPS signal from another Northern Bald Ibis just 500 meters south of the site where HELLA was found. The body of this bird disappeared. Thus, since 2012, in a stretch of only 30 km, from Piombino to the south to Cecina to the north, four ibises were shot illegally and a further bird disappeared without a trace.

Johannes Fritz, leader of the LIFE+ project: *"Seemingly, the Province of Livorno, Tuscany, is a region with a particular high rate of illegal bird hunting. The people in charge are strongly encouraged quickly and sustainably to take action against this unacceptable threat to endangered bird species!"*

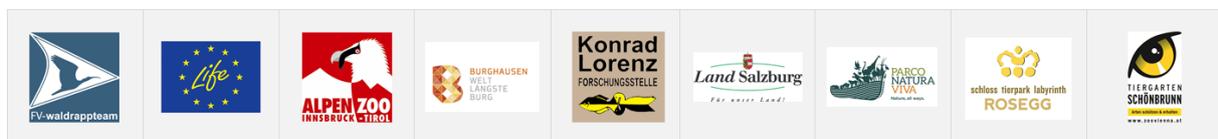
In Europe, the Northern Bald Ibis became extinct 400 yrs. ago, most probably due to overhunting. Currently, this species is one of the rarest birds in the world, close to the brink of extinction and listed as highly endangered on the Red List. Since 2014, a EU funded LIFE+ project with eight partners from Italy, Austria and Germany under the leadership of the Waldrappteam aims to reintroduce this species, with breeding areas north of the Alps and a wintering area in Tuscany. The project is the first attempt ever to reintroduce a continentally extinct migratory bird species. The European Commission particularly acknowledges the potential of the LIFE+ project to contribute to the implementation of the EU nature policy.

In October 2014, representatives of *Federazione Italiana Della Caccia* and of *Confederazione Cacciatori Toscani*, two major Italian hunting associations, became honorary patrons for birds from the reintroduced population. Jane Goodall, primatologist and UN messenger of peace, acted as patron of the ceremony held at Parco Natura Viva near Verona. An agreement was signed committing the hunting associations to continuously and actively support the reintroduction project, with the particular objective to reduce the threat of illegal hunting on Northern Bald Ibis and other endangered migratory species along their Italian flight paths.

J Fritz: *"It is now in the hands of the hunting associations to take responsibility and stand by their commitment, supporting enlightenment in the case of HELLA and doing everything possible to avoid further losses, particularly in the Livorno Province, Tuscany."*

Illegal bird hunting is a major threat for endangered migratory bird species. Elaborated conservation attempts in the breeding areas are thus nullified. It is of particular value to the project to demonstrate the problem of illegal bird hunting with concrete numbers: From 2002 to 2012, a total of 60 Northern Bald Ibises were lost in the project. Around 70% of them have been found shot dead or disappeared particularly during the hunting season in Italy.

J Fritz: *"Such a high rate of loss must also be assumed for other endangered migratory species. Without a reduction of this high mortality rate, no sustainable conservation of the populations is possible."*



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