

Press release Waldrappteam LIFE+12-BIO_AT_000143
Human-led Migration 2015

Safely arrived:

Successful completion of the 10th human-led migration

On August 8 the 10th human-led migration with young Northern Bald Ibises was completed. 18 days after start in the country of Salzburg the team and 28 birds arrived at the WWF reserve Laguna di Orbetello in southern Tuscany. In the course of five flight stages a total distance of 794 km has been covered, with a daily mean of 159 km. The mean flight speed was 45 km/h, with tailwind speeds of up to 76 km/h could be reached.

This migration was characterised by fantastic flights of unprecedented ways. Twice as much birds than ever before were guided towards the wintering area, led by two microlight airplanes with one pilot and one foster parent respectively. For the first time the Alps and the Apennines were crossed directly, way above the actual mountain heights. Johannes Fritz, general project manager and one of the two pilots: “The flights across the Alps and the Apennines were a totally new experience for me; this seemingly infinite dimension, with the mountains far below us, but the second microlight and the birds in immediate vicinity, was an almost surreal impression. I think that the birds got an ideal overview during those flights, which later helps them to find the best route back to their breeding areas.”

On the very same day of their arrival the young Northern Bald Ibises met their free living conspecifics. Thus, a total of 66 birds currently live in the wintering area. A further 19 wild birds are currently still north of the Alps near Salzburg. This group should migrate independently to Tuscany in the coming weeks. The young birds will stay in Tuscany for the next two years. By the end of their third winter, once sexually mature, they are to return independently to their breeding area north of the Alps.

The Northern Bald Ibis is one of the most endangered migratory bird species worldwide. It was native in Central Europe until the 17th century before it became extinct due to the huge hunting pressure. In the context of a reintroduction project, co-financed by the European Union (LIFE+ Biodiversity) with partners in Austria, Italy and Germany, the species is to be reintroduced in Europe. The aim of the project is to found three breeding colonies north of the Alps, in Burghausen (Bavaria), Kuchl (Salzburg) and presumably Überlingen at Lake Constance. A total population size of 120 migrating birds is to be reached. This year the project team took another essential step towards this goal.

Picture download via the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sc/k58gp2fmgagff7v/AADU8MrOwmwkdXNLeTwONd3fa>

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HD footage upon request; demo video: <https://youtu.be/nCW82bawv5A>

Homepage (www.waldrapp.eu)

Facebook Site (www.facebook.com/Waldrappteam)

Contact: **Email:** info@waldrapp.eu

Phone Project Leader J Fritz: +43 676 5503244

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