

International Birdwatching and Naturalistic Tourism Fair

2007 Edition Special Slow Tourism

April 28th – 30th Fairground & May 1st “Slow” Day

Po Delta Park

Emilia-Romagna, Comacchio (Ferrara)

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PRESS RELEASE N. 13

Learn a story worth the myth of the Arab Phoenix at the International Birdwatching and Naturalistic Tourism Fair

COMACCHIO. Since its first edition, The **International Birdwatching and Naturalistic Tourism Fair** (Comacchio, Fe, 28th April – 1st May 2007) has been characterized by the support of projects for promoting the birdwatching culture: this year the Fair supports the conservation of the northern Bald Ibis, which was believed to be long extinct, but whose survival is still heavily endangered.

It's a story worth the myth of the **Arab Phoenix**: in April 2002 a small colony of the rare bird, whose scientific name is *Geronticus Eremita*, was discovered by the Italian ornithologist Gianluca Serra in the desert of **Syria**, the only colony of the eastern population of the species, which was believed to be extinct after the last individuals in Turkey became extinct in 1989.

This has been the most important discovery in the ornithological world for the last 30 years in the Near East, which has renewed hope for saving this fascinating and enigmatic animal, because the Ibis had been believed to be extinct in Syria for more than 70 years.

This is the reason why researchers have given the Ibis the nickname of Arab Phoenix: it was believed to be extinct, but apparently it has risen from death. The myth of the Arab Phoenix has fascinated mankind from the ancient times: Herodotus, Ovidius and Dante Alighieri to the modern saga of Harry Potter, the Japanese manga and the video game Final Fantasy. It's the bird Noah sent from his ark as a messenger of fertility, as told in the Old Testament; it's the bird Egyptians consecrated more than 4500 years ago; last but not least, it's the bird whose migrations led Muslims to Mecca.

This year, the Fair welcomes the proposal of **Birdlife International** and **LIPU (Lega Italiana per la Protezione degli Uccelli, Italian League for Bird Protection)** to supporting the conservation of this incredible animal; over the past years, the Show supported other associations involved in preserving biodiversity and promoting birdwatching and the respect of nature in Argentina, Ukraine and China.

This engagement of the Birdwatching Fair is but the first necessary support to achieve this important project for preserving the eastern population of the northern Bald Ibis. The particular feature of this project consists of virtually unifying all international territories taking part in the Birdlife network: from the practical point of view, a pool of Italian and Syrian experts will be working together for monitoring and preserving this newly discovered colony.

To protect birds during migration, three individuals have been fitted with a satellite transmitter to monitor their movements and at the end discover their migratory movements and their winter

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Promoting Committee: Regione Emilia-Romagna, APT Servizi Regione Emilia-Romagna, Po Delta Park Emilia-Romagna, Province of Ferrara, Province of Ravenna, Chamber of Commerce of Ferrara, Chamber of Commerce of Ravenna, DELTA 2000, City of Comacchio, City of Ravenna, City of Cervia

Under the patronage of: LIPU – Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli, WWF Italia – Onlus, Legambiente Turismo, Birdlife International, Federazione Italiana Parchi e Riserve Naturali, Touring Club Italiano, EBN Italia - Euro Bird Net, ASOER - Associazione Ornitologi Emilia-Romagna, INFS - Istituto Nazionale della Fauna Selvatica

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areas. After a flight of more than 2.500 km, Syrian birds have passed through Saudi Arabia and Yemen, crossed the Red Sea straits and spent winter in Ethiopia, carefully monitored by BirdLife and RSPB researchers (BirdLife partners in the UK).

BirdLife and the Syrian Government have recently signed a strategic four-year agreement and a specific programme for the 2007 protection campaign. Associations from Yemen and Ethiopia (all BirdLife partners) have also joined the programme for the protection of birds during migration and in winter areas for a better implementation of the preserving programme.

“We are signing an agreement with the Syrian Ministry for Agriculture, to continuously monitor the colony during the breeding period; thanks to satellite monitoring, we will start to search for new colonies in other Near East and African countries. It’s a fight against time to save the species from extinction, yet the first results are encouraging” said **Marco Lambertini, Director of Network and Programme of BirdLife International.**

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