

Press Release

LIFE Northern Bald Ibis & Waldrappteam Conservation & Research
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Puck's Story: Technology in the Fight Against Poaching in Italy and the Responsibility of Hunting Associations

The reintroduction of the Northern Bald Ibis to Europe is a success story, but poaching remains a major threat. During the 2024 autumn migration, eight ibises were poached in Italy. One of them was the male Puck. New GPS technology helped identify the perpetrator, a licensed hunter. The LIFE project emphasizes the potential of technology in fighting poaching and calls on hunting associations to take stronger action.

Over the past two decades, an extraordinary conservation project has been underway to reintroduce the Northern Bald Ibis to Europe, a species that had been extinct in the region for over four centuries due to overhunting. This pioneering effort represents the world's first successful reintroduction of a migratory bird species by establishing a new migratory tradition.

Each year, these birds migrate between their breeding grounds in the northern and southern Alpine foothills and the wintering area at the WWF Oasi Laguna di Orbetello in southern Tuscany. The species has emerged as a symbol of hope in the face of increasing threats to biodiversity.

One of the project's birds, a male named 'Puck,' hatched in the wild in 2021 and successfully learned the migratory route from his conspecifics. Tragically, on November 24, Puck was shot during a stopover in the Apennines, Italy. Thanks to the remote monitoring of Northern Bald Ibis population via solar-powered GPS-devices, an investigation was promptly launched. The data of the bird's device pinpointed the exact location of the shooting and allowed authorities to quickly trace the perpetrator, which is a hunter and member of an Italian hunting association.

Following a house search, the perpetrator's weapon was confiscated, and his Rifle Port License revoked. Roberta Peroni, a member of the European LIFE project, commented: **"The hunter will face charges for the unjustified killing of a protected species and for causing significant harm to an endangered population. We hope for a judgment that reflects the severity of this crime. We will also pursue compensation for the conservation project through a civil lawsuit."**

Johannes Fritz, manager of the LIFE-project, emphasized the importance of advanced technology in combating poaching, states: **"For over 20 years, we have battled against the killing of Northern Bald Ibises in Italy. The Puck case illustrates how innovative technology can help identify poachers and bring them to justice. Moving forward, the use of innovative technologies will be increasingly important in species conservation."**

Puck's death highlights a broader issue: almost on third of Northern Bald Ibis losses in Italy are due to poaching, a threat that also endangers many other protected migratory bird species. The largest Italian Hunting Association, Federazione Italiana della Caccia (FIdC), recently presented itself in a [press release](#) as dedicated partners in protecting species like the Northern Bald Ibis, claiming that poaching is unrelated to legitimate hunting and that hunters are among the parties most affected by poaching.



However, evidence from the LIFE-project contradicts this narrative. In fact, data reveal that illegal shootings in Italy predominantly occur during the legal hunting season and in hunting areas. All identified suspects have been licensed hunters and members of Italian hunting associations, casting doubt on the hunting associations' claims.

Fritz welcomes the hunting associations' dedication to species conservation but calls for action. **“Hunters are not just victims of poaching; many poachers are within their ranks. It is crucial for hunting associations to enforce stringent measures against criminal behaviour among their members.”**

The persistent poaching poses a significant threat to the conservation of the Northern Bald Ibis and other endangered species. This issue is exacerbated by the gap between hunting associations' public pledges and their actual practices. The acute threat to biodiversity calls for stronger collaboration between conservation organizations and hunting associations to safeguard biodiversity and combat poaching more effectively.

Background Information

According to a [report by BirdLife International](#), 5.6 million birds are illegally killed in Italy every year, corresponding to a rate of 19 birds per square kilometre.

In a recent study, [Serratos et al. \(2024\)](#) examined the causes of death in 45 migratory bird species in the Eurasian and African regions. 22% of deaths are caused by illegal hunting.

The European Northern Bald Ibis LIFE-project (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000049; LIFE NBI) is implemented with ten partners under the direction of Zoo Vienna. This initiative unites international research and conservation organizations with the primary objective of re-establishing a self-sustaining Northern Bald Ibis population in Europe; [website](#).

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