

Misidentification in Mediaset Report Risks Conservation Success of Protected Ibis Species

Mediaset confuses Northern Bald Ibis with Sacred Ibis in presumed ‘invasion’ in the Verona Region

A recent television report broadcast by TG4, TG5 and TGC0M24, Mediaset's most-watched news programmes, reported an assumed devastation of farmland in the province of Verona by ‘ibis’. We feel compelled to correct the inaccuracies reported in this report, which confuses two species with very different appearance and behaviour: the African Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), an invasive species in Italy, with mostly white plumage and a black head and beak, and the Northern Bald Ibis (*Geronticus eremita*), a native species and strictly protected both in Italy and in Europe, which differs from the first one for its black plumage and redish coloured bald head.

The African Sacred Ibis: An Invasive Species

Native to sub-Saharan Africa, the Sacred Ibis has spread across Europe following escapes from captivity, forming feral populations in several regions. It is listed on the European Union’s List of Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern due to its potential impact on native biodiversity. While its diet includes amphibians, insects, and occasionally the eggs and chicks of other birds, scientific studies show that eggs make up only a minor part of its diet—contrary to the claim of the farmer in the TV spot, that the species consumes all the eggs it finds. In Italy, management of the Sacred Ibis is regulated, and control measures are permitted when authorized by environmental authorities.

The Northern Bald Ibis: A Protected Species and Conservation Success Story

The situation of the Northern Bald Ibis is profoundly different: it is one of Europe’s rarest and most threatened bird species, now slowly recovering thanks to decades of intensive conservation work. Its feeding ecology is well investigated. It forages primarily on invertebrates such as worms and larvae, which it probes from the soil using its long, curved beak. This beak is anatomically unsuitable for picking up, opening, or consuming bird eggs. Any suggestion that this species preys on eggs is demonstrably false and biologically implausible.

The reintroduction of the Northern Bald Ibis to Central and Southern Europe is being carried out under the framework of a large-scale LIFE project (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000049 | LIFE NBI) co-funded by the European Union. This initiative has become one of the most internationally respected and successful conservation programs of its kind, with a growing migratory wild population reintroduced through coordinated efforts across six European countries including Italy.



Ongoing Threat by Poaching in Italy

However, the species continues to face significant threats, especially in Italy, where poaching remains a critical concern. Scientific monitoring has shown that one third of the losses in Italy are due to poaching — a large portion of which is perpetrated by licensed hunters. **“The province of Verona is a known hotspot for poaching, which is of particular concern to us,”** says Laura Stefani, Italian Anti-Poaching Campaign Manager of the LIFE Northern Bald Ibis project. **“That’s why we are especially worried about the negative implications the recent misleading Mediaset report could have on the conservation of the species.”**

A Species as a Bridge – Not a Barrier

The Northern Bald Ibis could act as an ambassador for sustainable agriculture, considering that its survival depends on landscapes rich in soil biodiversity. Its diet of worms, larvae and other invertebrates makes it a true indicator species for healthy agrosystems.

This ecological role opens up meaningful opportunities for collaboration between conservationists and farmers. Programmes that support sustainable land management can benefit both wildlife and agricultural productivity. Thorough and objective media reporting could effectively interconnect these two worlds, helping to create partnerships where cooperation is most urgently needed.

We therefore request a formal correction by the broadcaster and the removal of the misleading content from the platform. We also urge media outlets to exercise greater care in distinguishing between species, especially in sensitive and specialized topics. **“As researchers and conservationists, we would welcome the opportunity to contribute our expertise to ensure accurate and responsible media reporting,”** says Johannes Fritz, manager of the LIFE Northern Bald Ibis project.

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