

PRESS RELEASE
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21st September: Hunting Season opens, Northern Bald Ibis, symbol of anti-poaching, at risk in Italy

The Waldrappteam voices serious concern for Northern Bald Ibis conservation in Italy, as the 2025 hunting season begins against a backdrop of increasingly anti-conservation policies that threaten this critically endangered species.

Vienna / Rome, September 18, 2025 — The 2025 hunting season opens on Sunday, 21 September, raising renewed alarm for wildlife conservation. Waldrappteam is especially concerned for the Northern Bald Ibis (*Geronticus eremita*), now beginning its autumn migration from breeding grounds in Germany and Austria to wintering areas in Italy — a journey that exposes it to poaching.

The Northern Bald Ibis is uniquely suited to reveal the true scale of poaching: almost every bird is fitted with a GPS tracker, enabling scientists to document illegal killings with unmatched precision. These data show a stark reality — poaching is the leading cause of death for the species in Italy, accounting for over one-third of all losses. What happens to this highly monitored species is just the visible tip of a much larger problem affecting countless other unmonitored species sharing the same habitats.

Thanks to the comprehensive monitoring, the Northern Bald Ibis acts as a sentinel for the general protection of threatened species in Italy. Each confirmed poaching case signals systemic failures that threaten the entire wildlife community. Although the species is slowly returning into the European sky through international conservation efforts such as our LIFE project (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000049), this progress is jeopardized every migration season by persistent illegal killings.

Recent changes to hunting legislation have further weakened wildlife protections. Parliament has approved measures that expand hunting opportunities and is considering additional proposals that would deepen the crisis: extending the hunting season into February when birds are already breeding, allowing wider use of live decoys, shrinking protected areas, excluding scientists from decision-making, and reducing enforcement capacity. Particularly alarming is the authorization of hunting along mountain passes — critical migratory routes for many species, including the Northern Bald Ibis — in direct contradiction to the European Union's Mountain Law.

“Every poaching incident we record is not just a tragedy for one bird but a warning signal for all Italian wildlife,” said Laura Stefani, Poaching Campaign Manager for the LIFE Northern Bald Ibis Project. “We have the data to show what is happening. It is now up to policymakers to act decisively and stop these preventable losses.”

“The Northern Bald Ibis has become an unwilling witness to the decline of environmental governance,” added Johannes Fritz, Director of Waldrappteam and General Manager of the LIFE Northern Bald Ibis Project. “The current trajectory of hunting policy in Italy is deeply concerning, undermining species conservation efforts and damaging Italy's international reputation as a steward of biodiversity.”



Waldrappteam joins other conservation organizations in denouncing this alarming rollback of environmental safeguards. We call on policymakers and the public to defend biodiversity, which underpins our health, economy, and cultural heritage. Protecting wildlife is not just a legal obligation but a moral responsibility to future generations.

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