

PRESS RELEASE
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After Just One Hour in Italy: Two Northern Bald Ibises Fall Victim to Poaching

Case highlights severe protection failures for migratory birds in Italy

Two critically endangered Northern Bald Ibises (*Geronticus eremita*) — driven to extinction in Europe in the 17th century and now reintroduced through a globally acclaimed LIFE conservation project — were shot on 16 October in the Province of Sondrio, shortly after crossing into Italy during migration. Authorities were able to act immediately thanks to close collaboration between Waldrappteam, the Carabinieri Forestali, and the Pian di Spagna and Lago di Mezzola Nature Reserve.

The two ibises, *Zoppo* and *Zaz*, were part of the EU-funded LIFE Northern Bald Ibis project (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000049 – LIFE Northern Bald Ibis) — the first initiative to restore a migratory bird species by re-establishing lost migration behaviour. Since 2004, juveniles have been guided from breeding sites north of the Alps to wintering grounds in Italy and Spain to teach them new migration routes.

Zoppo was a key founder bird: guided over the Alps in 2017, he became the first sexually mature Northern Bald Ibis in more than 400 years to independently return to the Lake Constance region in 2020, becoming a well-known ambassador for the species. *Zaz*, hatched in Überlingen in May 2025, was following him on her first southbound migration.

In October 2025, the pair left their breeding site and repeatedly attempted to cross the Alps in the Canton of Graubünden, Switzerland — a demanding challenge for this soaring species. On 16 October, they finally cleared the main Alpine ridge at nearly 3,000 meters and landed at a meadow in the province of Sondrio. There they were shot — less than an hour after entering Italy.

“This brutal act not only deprived the project of a crucial founder bird, but it also deeply shook the large international community that had followed Zoppo’s journey for years,” said Roberta Peroni, Waldrappteam’s anti-poaching campaign manager.



Almost all project birds carry GPS transmitters, enabling immediate tracking. Waldrappteam alerted authorities, who quickly launched an investigation, recovered the transmitters, and seized weapons and other evidence from a suspect now facing multiple wildlife-crime charges.

The project team expects a criminal conviction in this case and will also pursue civil action to obtain compensation for the damage inflicted on the conservation project.

Strong condemnation comes from conservation leadership.

“About one third of the losses in Italy is due to poaching,” said Dr. Johannes Fritz, Director of Waldrappteam Conservation & Research. **“The killing of two birds within just one hour of their arrival in Italy is a painful reminder of the grave threat of poaching to biodiversity and the urgency to combat this crime.”**

In Italy, most confirmed poaching incidents are linked to licensed hunters — placing a clear responsibility on national hunting organizations to prevent illegal killings within their community.

Waldrappteam warns that recent changes to Italian hunting legislation have weakened wildlife protections at a time when migratory species need greater safeguards.

“Every poaching case is a warning signal — a visible symptom of systemic failures putting biodiversity at risk,” said Angela Di Pumpo, anti-poaching campaign manager. **“We urgently need policies that protect endangered species, not ones that increase their vulnerability.”**

The organization thanks authorities and partners for their swift and professional response, highlighting the critical importance of strong cooperation to protect endangered wildlife.

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