



## **GRUPPO TUTELA RAPACI**

### **2021 ACTIVITY**

2021 was the eleventh year of activity of the Gruppo Tutela Rapaci. Unfortunately it was also the second year of the COVID pandemic and this represented a further challenge for our organization. However, the continuity of our activities still allows us to obtain great results in terms of conservation of the target species and the fight against the phenomenon of illegal taking of the chicks.

Our activities are possible only and exclusively thanks to the support of the SPA foundation (Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt) and the associations EBN Italia, CABS (Committee Against Bird Slaughter), ALTURA (Association for the Protection of Birds of Prey and their Environments) and Lipu (Italian Bird Protection League).

In 2021, in continuity and based on the experience of last year's lockdown, the GTR organized three surveillance camps and carried out the monitoring campaign of the Sicilian population of Bonelli's Eagle. The monitoring activity of the Lanner Falcon has been increased both in the territorial coverage and in the number of couples monitored.

The activities started in January, verifying the occupation of the acquainted places and searching for new territories. The areas in which the presence of territorial couples was determined were 59. In 56 places it was observed the construction of the nest by adults and 51 couples started hatching. In March, the main activity of the GTR got started: the surveillance of Bonelli's eagle nests. The organized surveillance camps have allowed the control of 12 Bonelli's Eagle pairs. If in 2020 the early organization of the camps allowed the presence of some volunteers from other regions of Italy, who then, due to lockdown, had to remain in Sicily and therefore carried out their surveillance task in a complete manner, in 2021 the volunteers from outside Sicily were not able to arrive and therefore we completely relied only on the availability of Sicilian volunteers who had the possibility and authorization to move from their home to the camp sites. The great dedication of some of them made it possible to make up for the lack of external participants and the surveillance activities were carried out in a complete manner as planned.

In addition to these activities, the GTR was involved in several projects:

- collaboration with the staff of the Life ConRaSi project for the monitoring and surveillance of the sites of Bonelli's Eagle, Lanner Falcon and Egyptian vulture throughout the region and for the selection and collection of 3 eaglets from the monitored sites that were subsequently entrusted to the personnel of the Life Aquila a-LIFE project for the reintroduction of Bonelli's Eagle in Sardinia;
- collaboration with the Grefa (Grupo de Rehabilitación de la Fauna Autóctona) for the branding, raising and captive reproduction of Bonelli's Eagle and for the reintroduction of the confiscated

birds of prey (again this year some of the marked eaglets were those born from nests placed under the GTR surveillance);

- with the CITES Carabinieri Group for the investigation and assessment of birds of prey held in captivity by falconers.

## **SURVEILLANCE CAMPS**

The three organized camps were located in the areas at greatest risk of the eagles' chicks being stolen. The risk was calculated on the basis of the previous experience and also considering the organizational aspect. The primary target is the deterrence against theft but also the strong communication of our presence in that area. Over the years contacts with local stakeholders have increased and awareness-raising activities have certainly given good results.

The beginning of the activities was preceded by arrangements with the Police Forces responsible for the area.

### **Camp 1**

In camp 1, Agrigento and Caltanissetta's territories were confirmed as historical sites. The camp was preceded by the inspection of site occupation in January and February. The surveillance activity started on 24/03 immediately after the birth of the first eaglet. The activities ended a few days after the eaglets flew off at the end of May.

Five couples were present in the camp territory at the beginning. In April a sixth couple was discovered while a historical couple was not detected. Only in June, at the conclusion of all the operations, did an individual reoccupy the territory and in July two individuals were spotted, bringing the number of couples present in that area to seven.

Among the six couples monitored, one did not reproduce but started to build the nest only in May without laying any eggs; another built the nest without starting the incubating. Among the four couples who had reproductive success, three couples raised a total of 4 young, one of which was taken for the Sardinia's project. The fourth couple unsuccessfully started a first hatching, on the second attempt they built a new nest and raised a chick until his first flight in July.

During the surveillance activities, GTR used the supplied camera traps. The Lanner Falcon sites within the monitored area were also checked. Three Lanner Falcon pairs were detected, one did not complete the reproductive activity while the other two raised two and three young chicks.

The field activities were carried out by four people.

### **Camp 2**

Camp 2 took place in the province of Caltanissetta and monitored 2 sites of Bonelli's Eagle. In both sites an eaglet flew off. Many difficulties were encountered in organizing shifts and in finding volunteers due to Covid restrictions because many municipalities in the area were classified as "red". Despite the limitations and using many camera traps, it was possible to control and verify the happy flight of the 2 born eaglets. In total 7 volunteers participated, all resident on site.

On the other hand, it was not possible to supervise the Lanner Falcon sites because they were located too far away from the volunteers' house.

### **Camp 3**

Camp 3 took place in the territories of Catania and Syracuse. Preceded by frequent inspections in January and February, the surveillance activity began, with daily continuity, at the end of March.

Four sites of Bonelli's Eagle and one site of Lanner Falcon were supervised.

In the site where the supervision activities have been held since 2012, the reproduction has led to the fledging of a young female which has been equipped with a radio-satellite as part of the LIFE ConRaSi Project and which has already begun its period of dispersion by moving to hundreds of kilometers away from the place of birth.

In the second checked site of Bonelli's Eagle, the couple raised 2 eaglets, which regularly flew off in early June.

On the third site, the couple was not spotted until May. Various recognitions had given unsuccessful results but finally, after many hours of surveillance, it was discovered that the nest had been moved to an area that was difficult to reach and located within a private area employed for livestock. In the nest there was already an eaglet which subsequently happily flew off.

In the fourth site, the young Eagle, at more than 30 days of age, died in the nest most likely of natural causes.

On the other hand, the breeding season for both the Lanner Falcon and the Peregrine Falcon was unsuccessful. On various occasions in March and April, the two pairs of falcons were seen but none of the 2 has laid any eggs.

Altogether, the camp involved four volunteers.

### **MONITORAGGIO POPOLAZIONE SICILIANA AQUILA DI BONELLI**

Monitoring of the Sicilian population of Bonelli's Eagle

59 sites of Bonelli's Eagle were monitored.

The 2021 season was characterized by a low number of sites with two fledglings, which is why the number of fledged juveniles was lower than in the previous year, despite the fact that there were more couples with reproductive success than in the previous season.

The following table provides a summary of the monitoring results.

### Bonelli's Eagle Protection Camp 2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total monitored nesting places	43	44	54	42	49	53	45	51	57	59
Nesting places monitored for the first time	2	5	9	2	6	4	0	4	3	5
Occupied nesting places (BE adults in breeding behavior)	28	30	37	37	41	43	39	40	56	50
Nesting places with eggs spawning	25	26	30	30	27	34	33	37	51	41
Number of born chicks	34	26	29	30	28	33	42	32	50	51
Nesting places with successfully fledged juveniles	23	19	19	20	19	20	26	22	33	34
Nesting places which failed (incubation interrupted, no chicks born, dead chick/s)	2	7	11	7	11	14	4	15	18	7
Nesting places with verified eggs/chicks theft	0	1	?	0	2	0	1	0	1	0
Nesting places where one member of the pair has changed since the previous year		4	3	1	4	nd	2	2	nd	Nd
Fledged juveniles	33	28	27	26	27	29	40	28	46	43
Monitoring inspections to nesting places (excluding guarding activities)	228	308	340	n.d.	n.d.	290	n.d.	n.d.	nd	Nd
Number of full time (daytime) guarding camps	3	4	6	7	5	5	3	3	3	3
Number of volunteers involved	77	65	48	46	22	31	38	52	8	11

### COLLABORATION WITH THE CITES CARABINIERI GROUP

The collaboration with the CITES group, now tried and tested, goes on. The GTR volunteers were appointed as judicial police auxiliaries for each operation carried out.

The collaboration took the form of the following activities:

- supply of photographic material and information (plate numbers and names) identified during the control and surveillance of the nests;
- technical support during the preliminary investigation activities;
- technical support during falconers' control actions;
- general assessment of the state of health of the checked animals;
- examination of animals of dubious origin.

During the 2021 season, an adult Bonelli's Eagle was confiscated. At the end of the season, we received news of a second seizure of a young Bonelli's eagle most likely captured immediately after its first flight.

Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic has facilitated poachers because all the ongoing trials have been postponed to 2022. In May 2022 we will be called to attend the court hearings.

Police operations continue to this day and GTR volunteers are involved.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

The number of monitored Lanner Falcon sites has been implemented. The supervised areas were 20 with 14 young fledglings. In some of them camera traps were placed.

The available data for the species indicate that the control of a greater number of sites is a priority to contrast the decline and try to better understand its causes. Given the rarity of the species, the GTR intends to implement the activities aimed to support it by building a team of specialized volunteers.

We thank all the volunteers who participate in the surveillance and monitoring activities and our supporters.



The surveillance camp coordinators on behalf of the GTR

Angelo Scuderi  
Manuel Zafarana  
Saverio Cacopardi