MINISTERO DELL'AGRICOLTURA
DELLA SOVRANITÀ ALIMENTARE
E DELLE FORESTE

RETE PAC
Connessioni che seminano opportunità

Fondo europeo agricolo
per lo sviluppo rurale:
"l'Europa investe nelle zone rurali"

2025

COMMON FARMLAND BIRDS IN ITALY

Update of population trends and Farmland Bird Indicator for the National CAP Network

LIPU

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Related web sites
http://www.lipu.it/
https://www.ebcc.info/

The English and Italian versions of this brochure, with the technical reports in Italian, can be downloaded from:
www.reterurale.it

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Rete Nazionale della PAC & Lipu (2025). Common breeding farmland birds in Italy. Update of population trends and Farmland Bird Indicator for National CAP Network

Cover photo
Eurasian Wryneck by Luigi Gennari

THE 2025 IN A NUTSHELL

- 33,5%
FBI - Italy decline of the indicator over 26 years of monitoring (**2000**-2025)

-58%
FBI - Europe
(**1980**-2024)*

-52%
FBI - EU
(**1980**-2024)*

* For further information, please visit the following website o **www.pecbms.info**

71%
species in decline

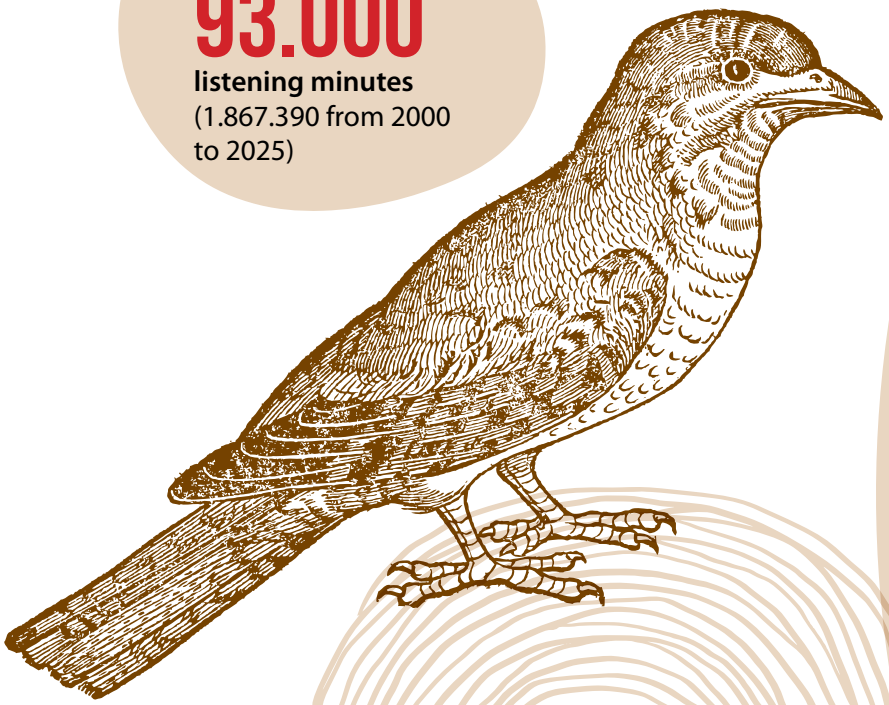
-38%
FBI-hilly areas

140
experts in the field
(538 from 2000 to 2025)

102.653
bird records
(2.005.761 from 2000 to 2025)

635
monitored cells
(1.775 from 2000 to 2025)

93.000
listening minutes
(1.867.390 from 2000 to 2025)



THE 10 SPECIES MOST AFFECTED IN AGRICULTURAL AREAS:

- EURASIAN WRYNECK **-76%**
- TAWNY PIPIT **-73%**
- STONECHAT **-71%**
- RED-BACKED SHRIKE **-65%**
- TREE SPARROW **-61%**
- ITALIAN SPARROW **-60%**
- GREENFINCH **-59%**
- SKYLARK **-54%**
- YELLOW WAGTAIL **-49%**
- SERIN **-47%**

IL FARMLAND BIRD INDEX

Birds have been identified as an effective bioindicator due to their sensitivity to environmental changes, their easy detectability, and their suitability for large-scale habitat monitoring.

The **Farmland Bird Index (FBI) - bird census** is a national-scale monitoring project of bird populations linked to agricultural environments, which takes place every year.
Its aim is to calculate the indicator of the same name defined as Context Indicator C36, namely the Index of bird populations in agricultural environments, as part of EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) 2025-2027 program, both at national and regional level, in line with the previous program 2014-2022 (it then represented Indicator C35).
In Italy, this census is one of a kind for width of monitored area (country-wide, including islands) and duration: from a previous monitoring called MiTO2000 (Monitoraggio Italiano Ornitologico), started in 2000 on a voluntary basis, the project has gradually grown under LIPU's guidance and coordination taking on the present name and structure. Since 2009, the project has benefited from the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry (MASAF, formerly Mipaaf), thanks to a funding from Rete Rurale Nazionale (until 2024) and Rete Nazionale PAC (since 2025); this has led to a stronger project organization, and granted ongoing data collection and systematic analysis on a yearly basis.

THE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

The sampling plan[1] divides the national territory into 10x10 km UTM squares; at present, every year at least 500 of them are monitored. Based on a standardized protocol, the census is carried out by a network of professional counters and expert volunteers, coordinated by LIPU and set up at regional level. The chosen technique is by 10-minute listening points, taking place during the breeding season (May-June), at sunrise, in good weather conditions. Each square includes at least 15 listening points, located in just as many squares with 1 km side, chosen through a statistical randomization procedure. For each listening point, all heard and seen species are noted along with geographical coordinates and environmental data. These data are then collected by LIPU for filing, validation and statistical analysis with the support of expert providers.
The Farmland Bird Index (FBI) and the Montane Grassland Index (FBI_{pm}) are the two main indicators calculated; they summarise the population trend of 41 bird species (28 for FBI and 13 for FBI) selected for their strong, vital connection to agricultural environments.

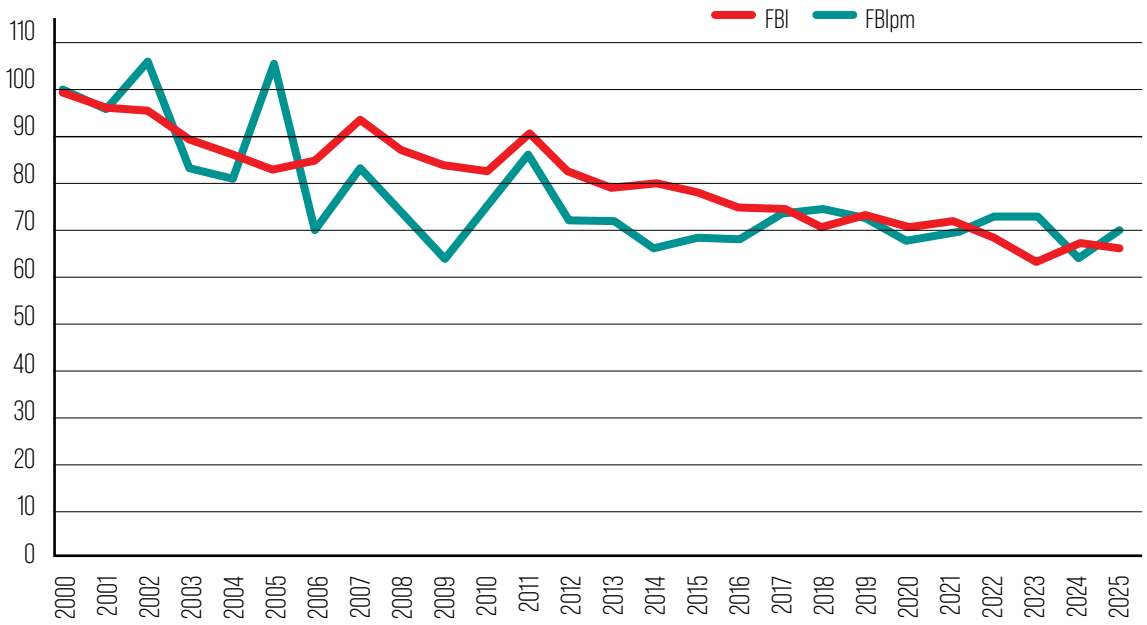
THE MONITORING OF BIRD POPULATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

The Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS[2]) is a transnational project coordinated by BirdLife International and the European Bird Census Council (EBCC), aimed at collecting comparable, high-quality data on common bird populations in Europe. In fact, the condition of ecosystems can be measured through an ongoing monitoring and analysis of changes of bird species in space and time. Data collected in Italy in the FBI project are submitted to the European database yearly, and contribute to calculating the aggregate index of European common farmland species.

[1]: http://reterurale.it Rete Nazionale della Pac & LIPU (2025). National Farmland Bird Index and population trends of species in Italy in the period 2000-2025. Methodologies and database.

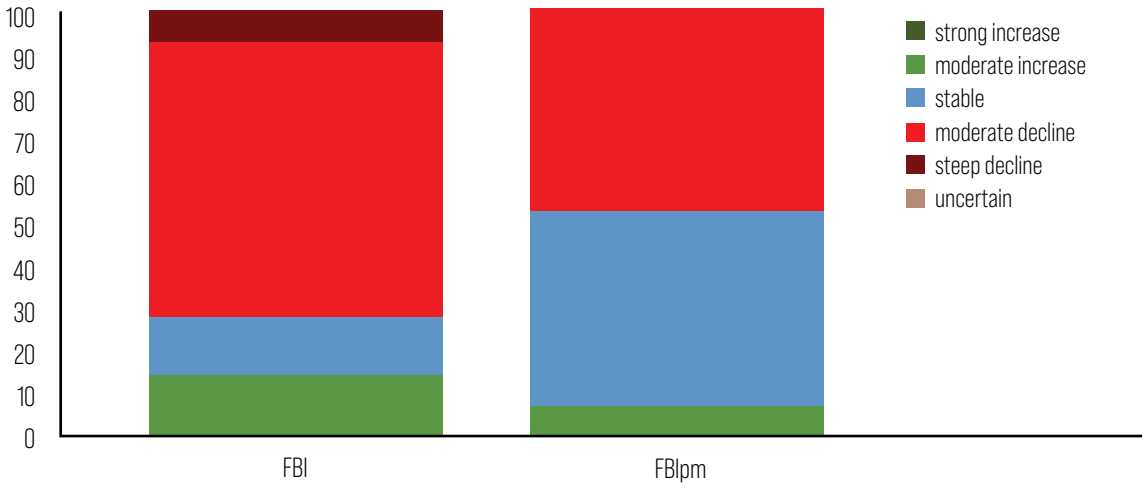
[2]: https://pecbms.info

FARMLAND BIRD INDEX AND MONTANE GRASSLAND INDEX FOR ITALY IN THE PERIOD 2000-2025



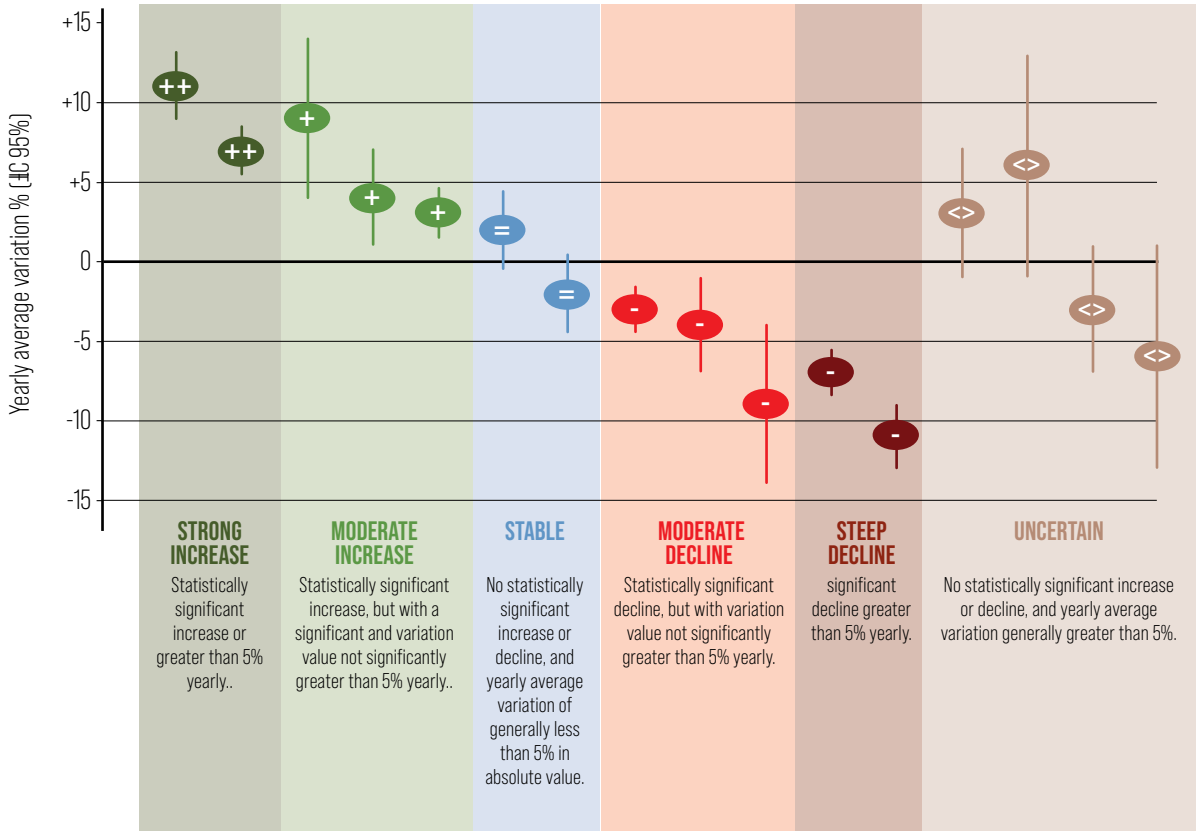
IN 2025, THE FARMLAND BIRD INDEX (FBI) AND THE MONTANE GRASSLAND INDEX (FBI_{pm}) RECORDED VALUES ARE RESPECTIVELY 66,51 AND 70,10 (ASSUMING 100 AS THE INITIAL VALUE IN 2000).

As such, both trends confirm a decline in line with the past few years.
Of the 28 species of farmland birds (FBI) considered, way more than 70% show a relevant decline. Some species which are currently stable suffered a steep decline in their populations in the past few years, therefore they still have a non-optimal status. On the other hand, generalist species that are well adapted to anthropization, such as Corvids, are increasing.



CLASSIFICATION OF SPECIES POPULATION TRENDS

The two main national indicators, Farmland Bird Index (FBI) and Montane Grassland Index (FBIpm), are calculated as a geometric average of the trends of each selected species, respectively 28 species linked to agricultural enviroments (FBI) and 13 species related to montane grassland (FBIpm), listed in the Table on page 7.
Once validated and entered into the complete database, field data are analysed with specific statistical programs to assess demographic trends and time variations (using rTRIM,). The trend for each species analysed is classified in one of the following trend categories (as recommended by EBCC):



INSUFFICIENT DATA
Data about a species' presence are too scarce to calculate yearly population indexes descriptive of ongoing trend, even uncertain.

Placement into one of the available trend categories takes into account not only the extent of yearly average change, but also the precision of the estimate; this ensures a more reliable assessment that is representative of the populations variation status.
It should be emphasized that the classification of species in these trend categories is to be read as a statistical analysis of data, not as a count of populations in absolute terms. Sometimes it may be the case that, from year to year, a species is classified with a different trend; this is because, by adding a year's data, a trend already in place but not statistically significant in the previous years may become clear.

	Common name	Scientific name	Annual change ± SE (%)	Trend classification 2000-2025	Cells (10x10km)	Conservation status[1,2]	SPEC[3]
SPECIES USED TO CALCULATE THE FBI INDICATOR	Eurasian Wryneck	*Jynx torquilla*	-5,64 (±0,31)		626	I	Non-SPEC
	European Stonechat	*Saxicola rubicola*	-5,62 (±0,18)		944	I	Non-SPEC
	European Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia turtur**	-1,59 (±0,12)		1038	P	SPEC 1
	Calandra Lark	*Melanocorypha calandra*	-2,25 (±0,78)		78	P	SPEC 3
	Crested Lark	*Galerida cristata*	-1,02 (±0,15)		526	I	SPEC 3
	Eurasian Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	-2,63 (±0,16)		756	P	SPEC 3
	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	-1,75 (±0,12)		1270	P	SPEC 3
	Tawny Pipit	*Anthus campestris*	-3,29 (±0,44)		238	P	Non-SPEC
	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	-1,30 (±0,23)		334	I	SPEC 3
	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	-1,35 (±0,16)		1100	I	Non-SPEC
	Common Nightingale	*Luscinia megarhynchos*	-0,48 (±0,1,0)		1052	F	Non-SPEC[E]
	Red-backed Shrike	*Lanius collurio**	-3,87 (±0,21)		831	P	Non-SPEC
	Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	-0,90 (±0,17)		915	F	Non-SPEC
	Italian Sparrow	*Passer italiae*	-2,87 (±0,12)		1152	P	SPEC 1
	Spanish Sparrow	*Passer hispaniolensis*	-2,05 (±0,27)		171	I	Non-SPEC
	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	*Passer montanus*	-2,96 (±0,17)		1031	P	SPEC 3
	European Serin	*Serinus serinus*	-1,09 (±0,10)		1281	F	Non-SPEC[E]
	European Greenfinch	*Chloris chloris*	-3,39 (±0,12)		1221	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	-2,86 (±0,10)		1322	I	Non-SPEC
	Ortolan Bunting	*Emberiza hortulana**	-3,11 (±0,74)		112	P	SPEC 2
	Lesser kestrel	*Falco Tinnunculus**	-0,12 (±0,17)		1166	F	SPEC 3
	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	-0,08 (±0,17)		905	F	Non-SPEC
	Greater Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella brachydactyla*	0,23 (±0,71)		149	P	SPEC 3
	Corn Bunting	*Emberiza calandra*	0,29 (±0,14)		848	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	Eurasian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*	1,85 (±0,15)		900	F	Non-SPEC
	Eurasian Magpie	*Pica pica*	1,68 (±0,10)		1072	F	Non-SPEC
	Hooded Crow	*Corvus cornix*	0,21 (±0,09)		1247	F	Non-SPEC[E]
	Spotless Starling	*Sturnus unicolor*	3,4 (±0,45)		150	F	Non-SPEC[E]
SPECIES USED TO CALCULATE THE FBIPM INDICATOR	Water Pipit	*Anthus spinoletta*	-0,97 (±0,38)		141	I	SPEC 3
	Northern Wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*	-0,77 (±0,36)		223	P	Non-SPEC
	Fieldfare	*Turdus pilaris*	-2,07 (±0,63)		105	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*	-5,20 (±0,73)		104	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	Common Redpoll	*Acanthis flammea*	-5,16 (±0,67)		92	F	Non-SPEC
	Yellowhammer	*Emberiza citrinella*	-2,89 (±0,41)		232	P	SPEC 2
	Tree Pipit	*Anthus trivialis*	0,29 (±0,28)		303	I	SPEC 3
	Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	-0,33 (±0,40)		185	F	SPEC 2
	Whinchat	*Saxicola rubetra*	-1,20 (±0,61)		123	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	Ring Ouzel	*Turdus torquatus*	0,09 (±0,74)		100	I	Non-SPEC[E]
	Lesser Whitethroat	*Curruca curruca*	-0,05 (±0,63)		139	F	Non-SPEC
	Carrion Crow	*Corvus corone*	-0,11 (±0,40)		226	F	Non-SPEC
	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	1,33 (±0,22)		602	F	Non-SPEC

STRONG INCREASE | MODERATE INCREASE | STEEP DECLINE | MODERATE DECLINE | STABLE | UNCERTAIN | FAVOURABLE F | POOR P | INADEQUATE I

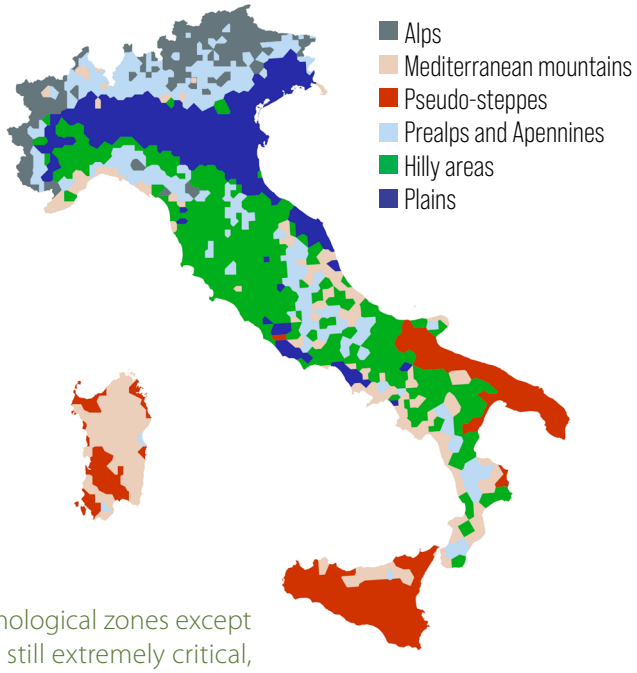
*species listed in the Annex I to the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC

1 Brambilla M., Gustin M., Celada C., 2013. Species appeal predicts conservation status. Biol. Conserv. 160, 209–213
2 Gustin, M., Brambilla, M., Celada, C., 2016. Stato di conservazione e valore di riferimento favorevole per le popolazioni di uccelli nidificanti in Italia. Rivista Italiana di Ornitologia, 86 (2), 3-58
3 Burfield I.J., Rutheford C.A., Fernando E., Grice H., Piggott A., Martin R.W., Balman M., Evans M.I. & Staneva A. (2023). Birds in Europe 4: species of European Concern. Bird Conservation International.

The European wryneck (Jynx torquilla) is a long-distance migratory species that nests throughout most of Italy and is typical of traditional agricultural environments such as orchards, vineyards with trees, scattered woods and shrubby hedges. In Italy, its conservation status is unfavourable, and its population is in deep decline (-76,28% compared to 2000). The main causes of its decline are the loss of old trees, the removal of hedges and the massive use of pesticides and insecticides.
Maintaining and restoring highly natural agricultural habitats, including the release and restoration of rows of trees, hedges and riparian vegetation, is essential to reverse this trend and ensure the survival of its populations in our country.

European wryneck by Luca Villa

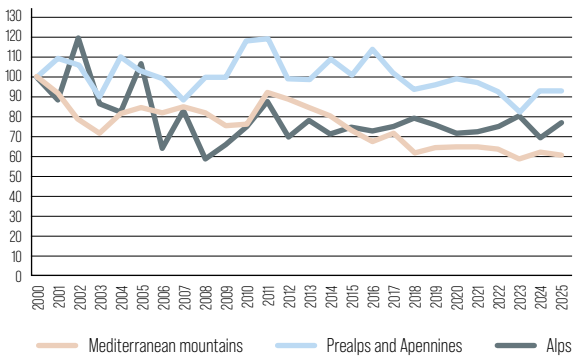
TREND OF INDICATORS IN ORNITHOLOGICAL ZONES

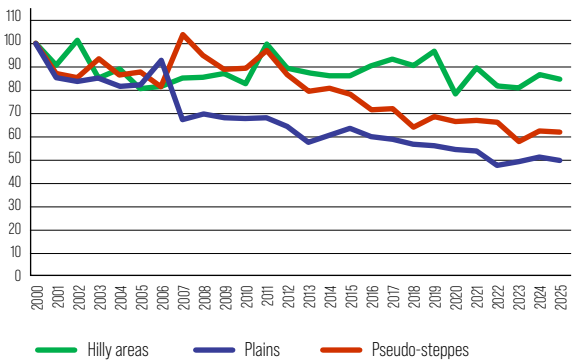


Due to its geographic features, Italy is an extremely heterogeneous territory regarding the environment and farming landscapes. National-scale population trends provide an overview of the situation in Italy, but a more detailed anaylsis is needed to observe local peculiarities which would not emerge on a national scale. With this aim, the FBI indicator is also calculated for ornithological zones, that is, very different homogeneous environments (for example, plains and mountains). To do so, 6 ornithological zones1 have been identified (Alps, Prealps and Apennines, hilly areas, plains, Mediterranean mountains, Pseudo-steppes), each with their own indicator species which, although not limited to that specific zone, represent its ecological characteristics. The indicator has been calculated following the national-scale method: within each ornithological zone, the trend of each species has been calculated, then its FBI.

Data for 2025 show a decline of the indicator for all ornithological zones except for Alps, where it is stable. In flood plains the situation is still extremely critical, with a decline over 50% (-50.19), emphasizing the strong need for widespread restoration actions for the environment. The same goes for upland areas, where a constant decline of indicators has been observed for a decade already, in line with the trend of plains; a timely intervention to reverse this trend is crucial to preserve conservation refugia of typical farmland species. This is especially true for Mediterranean ornithological zones, where changes in farming practices are most associated with the effects of climate changes and with changes in soil use.

1: Londi G., Tellini Florenzano G., Campedelli T. & Fornasari L. 2010. An ornithological zonation of Italy. In: Bird Numbers 2010 "Monitoring, indicators and targets". Book of abstracts of the 18th Conference of the European Bird Census Council (ed. Bermejo, A.). EBCC-SEO Birdlife, Madrid, Pp.77





Which future and role will birds and nature have in permanent tree crops?

by **Mattia Brambilla**

The transformation of ecosystems for production purposes is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity on a world scale, and the intensification of agriculture is one of the main causes for common birds decline in Europe. Agricultural tree crops such as vineyards, orchards, olive groves, poplar woods, hazel groves etc. are no exception. Over the past decades, traditional cultivation methods for these crops have been replaced with different tree plantations, with a higher yield per hectare and easier to manage through machines and automated systems. Orchards with good-sized trees, scattered in a grassland matrix that provided fodder or grazing land for farm animals, have been replaced with much smaller trees, planted in very thick rows, leaving enough room in between for tractor passage. Similarly, modern vineyards are characterized by vines with a relatively simple structure, arranged in rows along the slope (with risk of high soil erosion) to allow passage of machinery. At the same time, the number of treatments has progressively increased to protect crops from a growing number of threats, which

Hilly landascape, from Lipu's archive

are made worse by climate change and extended monocultures, where parasites and pathogens often thrive.

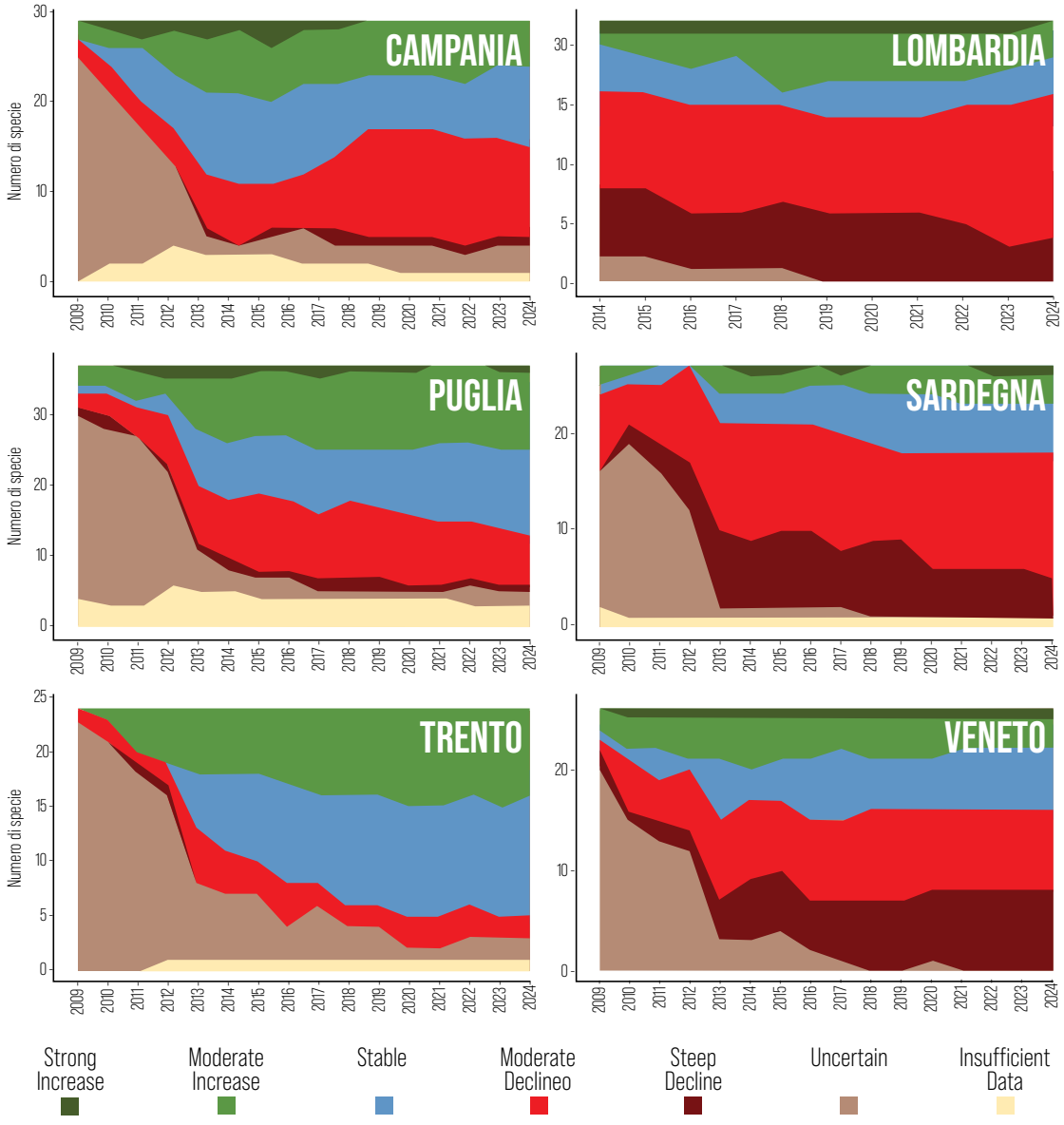
Of course, all these changes have played a significant role for many wild species too. Variations in populations concern not only bird species, but also many other groups for which birds are generally good indicators: what happens to bird populations often reflects the overall trend for most biodiversity. In the case of tree crops, the loss of natural and semi-natural environments and of landscape heterogeneity negatively affects a lot of species, consequently the entire bird community and, in general, the biological community as a whole within these agroecosystems. In fact, the change in crop structure is one of the main causes of the decline or disappearance of many species linked to more open environments with scattered tree and shrub vegetation, such as shrikes or some Emberizidae; on the other hand, it has favoured some generalist and forest margin species, such as some fringillids or Turdidae. The change to smaller plants with a much simpler structure has led to a decrease in potential nesting sites for many birds, while the reduction of grassland areas has deprived other species of essential feeding environments. Intensification of treatments and soil working negatively affects most species, while it can benefit some "opportunistic" ones such as some corvids, that take advantage of stress conditions and increased exposure suffered by other species. Very frequent treatments in crops such as vineyards during the breeding season cause serious disturbance to nesting couples, leading to a high rate of nest abandonment and nesting failure. Intensive management of grassy vegetation under the crop strongly affects floral and arthropod communities, impacting on the availability of essential trophic resources for birds. Continued soil working or even, very frequent mowing cause a significant diversity loss and a decline in plants and invertebrates, with cascade effects on higher trophic levels.

These unfavourable changes negatively affect not only bird populations and biodiversity in general, but also crops themselves. A decline in predators like birds and bats, for example, results in higher levels of pest infestation which, in turn, lead to more damage to crops and the need for more pesticides. The loss of farmland heterogeneity and the decline in biodiversity negatively affect ecosystem services, not only regulating ones such as pest predation or pollination, but also cultural ones such as recreation, aesthetic value and touristic appeal of farmlands.

While this situation is not so encouraging, there are experiences and results that instill hope. In vineyards, simple solutions to manage ground grass can create much more favourable conditions for biodiversity: in particular, alternate management (mowing or soil working every other row) favours birds and butterflies. For birds, alternation of tall grass and short or almost no grass creates a favourable combination of "kitchen" (tall grass, rich in invertebrates and seeds but poorly accessible) and "dining room" (short or thin grass, where birds can immediately spot and catch invertebrates and seeds). For butterflies (and other pollinators), this kind of management ensures that there are always parts with lots of flowers. Instead, soil working and complete mowing eliminate floral resources, which are also very scarce with no management at all, due to a thick layer of grasses that keeps out most nectariferous species. In some settings, both vineyards and orchards, the scarcity of nesting sites can be compensated with nest boxes; provided that environmental conditions are suitable for the other needs of the species, these boxes can host tits, common redstarts, Eurasian wrynecks, hoopoes, spotted flycatchers, and insectivorous species which can contribute to the control of damaging species for crops. Collaboration projects between the research world and local farming businesses resulted in significant improvements for biodiversity (and our society) in a few years, through the study and implementation of measures and good practices to support biological diversity in crops. These actions have showed that more sustainable ways of producing wine, fruit or olives are possible and even feasible, and they are beneficial to farmers too. For this reason, these good practices have been included in the latest CAP programming called CSP, both for eco-schemes (especially no. 2) and rural development. Results will be seen only in the next years, but it is already clear that a joint effort is required for these practices to become common, not just case-specific; only then will permanent crops become environments where life thrives, where wild species and production can coexist for the benefit of all.

ROBUSTNESS OF INDICATORS OVER THE YEARS

Long timescale monitoring is essential because it provides an overview of population dynamics of biological species, enhancing trend interpretation. As a matter of fact, because the index is calculated on an increasingly robust and well-organised database, the margin of error due to temporary variations or fluctuations, or to any flaw in monitoring in each single year, is reduced.
Therefore, a data archive spanning over more than 25 years provides a thorough view of the evolution of the trend of indicators, and allows to identify trends and changes in time, thus increasing statistical precision.
This is especially clear when the classification of species based on populations trend is compared to their trends over the years of the project. The examples in the following diagrams clearly show that a higher number of years of sampling (that turns into a higher number of repetitions per listening point and a larger amount of data available for analysis) corresponds to a lower percentage of species with uncertain trend (grey) or insufficient data (yellow). Specific region-related information can be found in annual reports available on Rete Pac website.



CALL TO ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY!

Enhance the sampling plan at regional level with ad-hoc projects to be carried out alongside national data collection

Implement monitoring projects for more rare and/or poorly detectable species such as, for example, some diurnal birds of prey or the little bustard

Monitor how bird and other *taxa* communities react to climate changes, and implement adaptive plans for their conservation

Promote consumption and nutrition styles which are respectful of biodiversity conservation

Promote, support and implement agroecological practices through financial support to companies and land management authorities, as well as an appropriate professional development and information program for both companies and consultants. In particular:

- Create and maintain natural elements of the landscape (for ex. hedges, tree rows, grassy strips etc.) at least on 10% of farmland, to allow for nesting and feeding sites
- Preserve and manage permanent grass-grazing land while respecting the needs of biodiversity connservation
- For permanent cultivations, ensure soil coverage and management in such a way as to preserve bird populations and pollinators
- Significantly decrease the use of external input, such as plant protection products of synthetic origin, especially those which are candidates for substitution

THE KEY ROLE OF RESTORATION

The European Nature Restoration Regulation entered into force on 18 August 2024, also known as Nature Restoration Law, stands as an important opportunity to reverse the trend of farmland birds decline.

Articles 10 and 11 explicitly provide for the restoration of agroecosystems, which are pivotal for the protection of many bird species. In particular, article 10 compels Member States to put in place in a timely manner appropriate and effective measures to improve pollinator diversity and reverse the decline of their populations by 2030, while article 11 calls for restoration measures to enhance biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems by implementing agroecological practices, some of which are listed as an example in Annex VII. Moreover, article 4 compels Member States to put in place the restoration measures that are necessary to improve to good conditions areas of habitat which are not in good conditions, many of which are in fact linked to farming practices, such as grassland or steppe systems.

The Farmland Bird Index, together with the Forest Bird Index, will become one of the key indicators to assess the effectiveness of the regulation enforcement at member state level.

NATIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

Anni 2009-2025 - Ministero dell'agricoltura, della sovranità alimentare e delle foreste

Local financial supporters, regional coordinators and counters for FBI project 2009-2025 (in alphabetical order):

ABRUZZO
Coordinator: Mauro Bernoni (2009-2025)
Counters: Antonio Antonucci, Carlo Artese, Mauro Bernoni, Sante Cericola, Mirko Di Marzio, Mauro Fabrizio, Davide Ferretti, Giorgio Lalli, Marco Liberatore, Antonio Monaco, Lorenzo Petrizzelli, Eliseo Strinella

BASILICATA
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Counters: Tommaso Campedelli, Pietro Chiatante, Simonetta Cutini, Egidio Fulco, Cristiano Liuzzi, Guglielmo Londi, Donato Lorubio, Fabio Mastropasqua, Simone Todisco

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Coordinator: Oskar Niederfriniger (2009-2011), Erich Gasser (2012-2015), Patrick Egger (2016-2025)
Counters: Paolo Bonazzi, Tommaso Campedelli, Tanja Dirler, Patrick Egger, Alessandro Franzoi, Erich Gasser, Christian Kofler, Leo Hilpold, Andreas Lanthaler, Guglielmo Londi, Oskar Niederfriniger,Paolo Pedrini, Iacun Prugger, Arnold Rinner, Francesca Rossi, Udo Thoma, Leo Unterholzner
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“Birds are among the most
accessible indicators of
the state of our environment.
They are also among
the most pleasant.”

Roger Tory Peterson

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