

# A LAND TO TAKE OFF... A LAND FOR LIFE

## Biodiversity at Ajaccio airport in pictures



### Why a photography exhibition ?

Far from being mere functional areas, airports are home to unsuspected biodiversity.

The grasslands located on airport land play a key role in the conservation of flora and fauna on a national scale. They represent almost 500 km<sup>2</sup> of preserved green spaces, not used for agriculture or grazing - in Ajaccio, the platform surface is 180 hectares, 125 of which are grassland !

Through this photographic exhibition, we invite you to discover the botanical and animal wealth of our coastal airport, an ecosystem that we are seeking to understand better in order to protect it more effectively.

### The association and the airport...

Since 2015, the “Aéro Biodiversité” association has been working to preserve and enhance biodiversity at French airports.

Ajaccio is one of the pioneers of this approach and has hosted the association since 2016.

To distinguish the airports most involved in sustainable environmental management, Aéro Biodiversité has created the ‘aérobio’ label. It rewards ecological diversity, staff involvement and the awareness-raising actions carried out on the ground.

### The airport in figures

- 324 listed plant species
- 94 bird species
- 9 bat species
- 113 terrestrial invertebrate species
- 341 insect species
- 45 butterfly species



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# ***U FILANCIU,*** **sentinel of the island sky**

*Milvus milvus*

**Size: 60 to 66cm**

**Wingspan : 145 to 165cm**

**Weight : 800 to 1600g**

**Lifespan : 22 to 26 years**

**Conservation status : Vulnerable**

A bird of prey endemic to Europe along with the Iberian eagle, the Red Kite is present all year round in Corsica and at the airport, recognizable by its forked tail, whitish head and white patches under its wings.

Once common, its distribution is now highly fragmented. While migratory elsewhere, it is sedentary in Corsica, where it lives near villages, agricultural areas and open spaces such as the airport.

Corsica is home to the highest population density of this species in the world, in the Reginu Valley in Balagne, but there are many cases of destruction through illegal shooting and poisoning.

*Oiseaux  
de Corse* 

©René Roger

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# A CUPULATTA, silent occupant of the forest

*Testudo hermanni*

**Size : Approximately 18 cm**

**Weight : 700 to 1000g**

**Life expectancy in the wild : 60 years**

**Conservation status : Vulnerable**

**Hermann's Tortoise is the only land tortoise in the wild in France, living only in the Var and Corsica, so conferring a great responsibility for the conservation of the species.**

**A protected and emblematic species, it is nevertheless subject to numerous pressures : destruction and fragmentation of its habitat, fires, mechanization of farming and forestry practices, and predation.**

**Taking it from the wild is illegal, so if you see a Hermann's tortoise that is not in danger, just let it continue - slowly - on its way !**

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# THE CORSICAN SNAIL, symbol of ecological fragility

*Thyrrhenaria ceratina*

**Size : 6.1cm diameter**

**Weight : 11g**

**Life expectancy : 5 years**

**National conservation status : *Critically Endangered***

Buried in the sand during the day, the Corsican Helix is only active on damp autumn and spring nights.

Long considered extinct in the twentieth century, this micro-endemic species of the Ricantu site now occupies just two hectares on the seafront at the end of the Bay of Ajaccio, including an area partially included within the airport zone.

The population of lumachi (snails), estimated at between 6,000 and 10,000 individuals, is now the subject of monitoring protocols and conservation measures carried out on the airport site and beyond.

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# THE ICE PLANT, the unwanted beauty

*Carpobrotus edulis*

*Size : 15cm high, but spread over the ground to cover hundreds of square meters*

*Perennial plant*

*National conservation status : Invasive alien species (IAS)*

Originally from South Africa, the ice plant (commonly known as "witch's claw") is admired for its bright flowers, ranging from vivid pink to yellow. Introduced to Europe to decorate gardens and stabilize sandy soils, this creeping succulent quickly escaped all control. Today, it is considered one of the most concerning invasive alien species (IAS). By colonizing natural environments, it smothers native flora, depletes the soil and reduces plant diversity. At Ajaccio airport, its presence is particularly marked along the coastline. It directly threatens native flora and fragile habitats, notably that of the Corsican Helix, an endangered endemic species.

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# THE EUROPEAN BEE-EATER, flight in colour

*Merops apiaster*

*Size : 25 to 29cm*

*Wingspan : 44 to 49 cm*

*Weight : 50 to 70 g*

*Lifespan : 5 to 10 years*

*Conservation status : Least concern*

The European Bee-eater, a brightly-coloured migratory bird, preferring open areas such as scrubland, plains and riverbanks. It hunts in flight, capturing wasps, bees and dragonflies.

On the airport site, it has an abundance of insects to feed on, while bushes, sparse woodland and fences provide suitable perches for hunting.



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# THE ITALIAN EVERLASTING

## IMMORTELLE, the plant with natural powers

*Helichrysum italicum*

**Height : 40cm to 60cm**

**Evergreen perennial**

**National conservation status : Least concern**

A small plant typical of dry Mediterranean moorland, Italian “Immortelle” can be recognized by its bright yellow flowers and intense, curry-like fragrance. It grows in dry, rocky, sunny environments, often in poor soil. The southern part of the airport is home to a large number of immortelle plants, which offer a unique fragrance when they flower from June onwards.

Anti-inflammatory, anti-haematoma, anti-ageing and healing, immortelle has long been renowned for its many medicinal and cosmetic virtues.



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# A BUCCIARTA, hidden in the rocks

*Podarcis tiliguerta*

*Size : Up to 20 cm*

*Weight : Approximately 100g*

*Life expectancy in the wild : 10 years*

*Conservation status : Least concern*

Endemic to Corsica and Sardinia, the **Tyrrenian Lizard** is found mainly in rocky areas and scrubland. Its variable colour, ranging from green to metallic blue, means it is perfectly camouflaged in its natural habitat.

This lizard is an excellent climber, able to move nimbly over rocks and cliffs. Although its population is relatively stable, it is sensitive to habitat degradation, particularly as a result of increasing urbanization and human pressure on coastal areas.

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# THE SAGE LEAF CISTE, the white glow of the maquis

*Cistus salvifolius*

**Size : 30 to 80cm (shrub)**

**Perennial plant**

**National conservation status : Least concern**

A Mediterranean shrub, the sage-leaved Cistus is distinguished by its delicate white flowers and sage-like foliage. It thrives in dry, sunny environments such as scrubland and rocky areas.

The sage-leaved rockrose is one of the species that make up the Corsican maquis, particularly along the coast. When it is in flower in spring, many pollinators can be observed.



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# **U CIOCCIU,** the eye of the night

*Asio flammeus*

*Size : Approximately 40 cm*

*Wingspan : 90 to 105 cm*

*Weight : 290 to 350 g*

*Lifespan : 28 years*

*Conservation status : Vulnerable*

Found on every continent except Antarctica, the **Short-eared Owl** is a discreet bird of prey with a piercing gaze. This owl, with its striped plumage, pale facial discs and large yellow eyes, is most active at night, when it hunts close to meadows and reedbeds. But unlike many other nocturnal birds of prey, it can also move about and hunt in the middle of the day, with a light, silent flight that always surprises.

A shy species that is difficult to observe, the **Short-eared Owl** remains an occasional but remarkable visitor to our airport.



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# CUCKOO BEE, the usurper

*Nomada sp.*

**Size : 1.1 to 1.3cm**

**Weight : Less than 1g**

**Life expectancy : Varies from a few weeks to a few months**

**National conservation status : Least concern**

The Cuckoo Bee is a clever parasitic species that does not build its own nest. Instead, it lays its eggs in the nests of other solitary bees, leaving its larvae to devour the provisions carefully stored by their hosts.

It is distinguished by its appearance, which often mimics that of wasps, with its black, red and yellow body an effective camouflage strategy for protection. Unlike other bees, it does not collect pollen or participate in pollination.

This parasitic strategy, although fascinating, highlights the ingenuity of nature and the astonishing relationships between species.



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# THE BUTTERFLY ORCHID, the elegant

*Anacamptis papilionacea*

**Height : 10 to 30cm**

**Perennial herbaceous plant**

**National conservation status : Least concern**

A rare and protected orchid, the Butterfly Orchid grows in dry grasslands, scrubland and open maquis.

The grasslands at the airport, which are mown as late as possible, are undisturbed areas that are favourable to its spring flowering and reproduction.

Keep your eyes peeled: between March and April, the airport's runway edge is decked out in pink-purple tones thanks to the spectacular flowering of numerous orchids!

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# THE CORSICAN BAT, treasure of the night

*Myotis nastrale*

**Size : Approximately 5cm**

**Wingspan : 25 to 30cm**

**Weight : 6 to 10g**

**Lifespan : Up to 30 years**

**National conservation status :  
Vulnerable**

Endemic to Corsica, the Corsican Bat is the only mammal species strictly endemic to France. This rare bat is now classified as "critically endangered" worldwide.

A shy mountain species, it finds refuge in rocky crevices and hunts at dusk, especially in high-altitude forests. Like all the island's bats, it feeds exclusively on insects, which it captures with remarkable precision in mid-flight.

Invisible in broad daylight, it represents a precious - and fragile - part of Corsica's biodiversity.

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# **U FALCU,** **the suspended hunter**

*Falco tinnunculus*

**Size : Approximately 39 cm**

**Wingspan : 65 to 82 cm**

**Weight : 154 to 314 g**

**Life expectancy : 16 years**

**Conservation status : Near threatened**

Present all year round in Corsica, the Kestrel is one of the most familiar birds of prey in our landscapes. It can be recognized by its hovering flight, suspended in the air in search of prey.

Its mottled brown back, grey head in the male and long tail give it a sleek silhouette. The open environment of the airport is ideal for its life cycle: it can hunt, nest and rest.

Sedentary on the island, it still benefits from favourable conditions, but remains dependent on the small rodents and insects it hunts and is vulnerable to changes in farming practices.

To observe this small bird of prey is to discover a fragile balance between wild nature and human activity.



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# THE SALZMANN BROOM, guardian of the coastline

*Genista salzmannii*

**Size : 40cm to 1m**

**Perennial plant**

**National conservation status :  
Least concern**

A rare and protected species, the Salzmänn broom grows in dry, sunny environments. At the airport, it occupies a large part of the moorland near the sea.

It is of major importance in the Ricanto area because the Corsican snail, *Helix Ceratina*, finds refuge in areas where broom is present. A Prefectoral Biotope Protection Order (APPB) entitled "Landes à Genêt de Salzmänn de Campo dell'Oro" protects this species along the entire coastline.

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# A RANUCHJELLA, the green jewel of the water

*Podarcis tiliguerta*

**Size : 4 to 5 cm**

**Weight : Approximately 100g**

**Life expectancy in the wild : 8 years**

**Conservation status : Least concern**

A small tree frog endemic to Corsica and Sardinia, the Sardinian tree frog can be recognized by its green skin, golden eyes and suction-cup fingers, which are perfect for climbing.

It lives in damp areas close to water, including ditches, temporary ponds and run-off basins on the airport platform.

When they are not in the water, during the day, tree frogs hide in the low vegetation near waterholes. They can sometimes be seen in tufts of rush, with which they blend in perfectly !

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# THE SCREAMING STONE-CURLEW, discreet guardian of the great outdoors

*Burhinus oedicnemus*

**Size : 40 to 44cm**

**Wingspan : 77 to 85cm**

**Weight : 370 to 450g**

**Lifespan : 16 years**

**Conservation status : Least concern**

Discreet and mainly active at night, the screaming oedicnemus stone-curlew is rarely seen.. but never by chance. It prefers open spaces with unobstructed views of the surrounding area, such as the Ajaccio airport platform, where it finds a favourable habitat. With its long yellow legs and large golden eyes, it amazes at every encounter. A singular silhouette, both surprising and stealthy, it leaves no one indifferent... provided you're lucky enough to come across it.



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# THE COMMON BLUE BUTTERFLY, the artistic touch

*Polyommatus icarus*

*Size : 2.5 to 3.5cm*

*Weight : less than 1g*

*Life expectancy : Approximately 1 month*

*National conservation status : Least concern*

Small butterfly, very widespread and sensitive to the changes of its habitat, it frequents the flowery meadows, dry lawns, edges of paths, and it loves the open areas rich in leguminous (lotier, clover...), where its caterpillars develop.

On the airport, it finds refuge in the sparse grasslands and flower wastelands. The late mowing and the creation of unmowed areas allow it to complete its life cycle in peace.

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# THE EURASIAN HOPOE, a dazzling traveller

*Upupa epops*

**Size : 28 to 32cm**

**Wingspan : 42 to 46cm**

**Weight : 55 to 80g**

**Lifespan : 11 years**

**Conservation status : Least concern**

Easily recognized by its tawny plumage, large erectile crest and black and white wings and tail, the Eurasian hoopoe is a migratory bird that frequents warm, open and semi-natural landscapes.

These ideal conditions are present on the airport site, a favourable location for its settlement and reproduction. The hoopoe feeds mainly on insects, especially larvae and small invertebrates, which it captures on the ground with its long, curved beak, perfectly suited to the task.

For nesting, it chooses natural cavities: old trees, walls or even abandoned buildings, where it can set up its nest out of sight.

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# THE CORN BUNTING, between grass and tarmac

*Emberiza calandra*

*Size : 16 to 19cm*

*Wingspan : 26 to 32cm*

*Weight : 38 to 55g*

*Lifespan : 10 years*

*Conservation status :Least concern*

The Corn Bunting, a discreet bird, often confused with other passerines. Robust and elegant, it has a large beak adapted to its seed-based diet. It prefers open areas where it can easily find the seeds it needs to feed.

The airport environment, with its vast open spaces, offers an ideal setting for its settlement and reproduction. It is in the hay meadows to the north of the airport that it finds refuge and feeds its discreet life, although its squeaky, repetitive song makes it easy to spot from a distance.

A small bird with hidden habits, it can sometimes be found where you least expect it.

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# THE PLAIN TIGER OR AFRICAN MONARCH, a butterfly passing through

*Danaus chrysippus*

*Size : 7 to 8cm*

*Weight : Less than 1g*

*Life expectancy : a few weeks to a  
few months*

*National conservation status : Least  
concern*

A migratory butterfly with orange wings veined with black, the plain tiger is an occasional visitor to Corsica. It prefers moist, sunny meadows, rich in flowers and large herbaceous plants.

This fragile species is threatened by the disappearance of wetlands and the use of pesticides in agricultural areas. On the airport site, the abandonment of phytosanitary products over the last few years has created a more favourable environment, allowing this rare butterfly to settle here for a while.

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# THE YELLOW TOADFLAX, a beach resident

*Linaria flava*

**Size : 5 to 15cm**

**Annual herbaceous plant**

**National conservation status : Near threatened**

A small plant endemic to Corsica and Sardinia, the Corsican toadflax can be recognized by its spikes of yellow flowers and its straight spur pointing towards the ground.

It is a plant that lives in sand and colonizes beaches and back-beaches, so the airport coastline is a favourable environment for toadflax.

Its habitat is under serious threat from coastal urbanization, marine erosion at certain sites and competition from invasive species such as the witch's claw.

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# THE NEGLECTED SERAPIAS, the delicacy

*Serapias neglecta*

**Size : 5 to 20cm**

**Herbaceous perennial plant**

**National conservation status : Least concern**

A member of the orchid family, the neglected serapias is one of the 16 species of serapias recognized worldwide. It is distinguished by its spurless pink flowers and wide-open helmet. Like the orchids, the neglected serapias thrive in the airport meadows around Ajaccio airport.

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