

## The moorland of Malpensa, a habitat that could disappear in the blink of a wing

**Pubblicato:** Sabato 11 Marzo 2023

The alliance among Legambiente, FAI, WWF and LIPU narrates the story of the “False Ringlet” and the “Winter Damsel”. They are two highly endangered species that are nowadays present in the area threatened by the airport’s expansion

**Even insects need safe airport where they can land**, but the expansion of the Milan Malpensa airport could steal them all their living space. This is the case (which was reported by some environmental organisations) **of the False Ringlet, the *Coenonympha oedippus***, an increasingly rare species that survives in **the Gaggio moorland**, inside the Park of Ticino, the natural area that will soon be replaced by the hangars in the new cargo area. The alliance among **Legambiente, FAI, WWF and LIPU** with local organisations and various representatives from the academic world is defending this valuable habitat.

**“The False Ringlet is one of the five most threatened butterflies in Europe,”** Simona Bonelli, Professor of the Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology at the University of Turin, explains. “This species is also included in the Annex II of the Habitats Directive, considering that the majority of the populations known by the scientific literature gradually came up against local extinction. The populations that currently meet the requirements to avoid the so-called extinction vortex are less than five, and the biggest ones survive in the Baragge Natural Reserve (in Piedmont) and in the Gaggio moorland.”

The False Ringlet is joined by the **Winter Damsel, the graceful dragonfly** – or better the graceful damsel – *Sympecma paedisca*, which is in great danger according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Winter Damsel is named after a rather unusual ability for its species. It spends the winter in the adult stage, in a state of hibernation, and it may happen to see them flying also in snowy landscapes on sunny days.

“The *Sympecma paedisca* belongs to the Odonata, a family of insects that has a life cycle with aquatic larva and terrestrial adult,” Bonelli adds, “and those that belong to the *Sympecma* are the only ones in Europe to hibernate in the adult stage rather than in the larval stage. The *Sympecma paedisca* hibernates especially both in Central European or Italian moorlands, where the few known localities of presence are. The currently confirmed populations of this species are all located in moorlands in the western Po Valley.”

**The Winter Damsel has already disappeared in the rest of Lombardy and in Trentino-Alto Adige.** “Over the last ten years, an esteem shows that the Italian population of this species has declined by 80% due to the habitat loss, the use of pesticide and land consumption,” the spokespeople of the coalition against Malpensa Airport expansion claim, “This is the reason why it is fundamental to protect and include in Natura 200 Network those areas populated by the *Sympecma paedisca* which are not defended by the Network, such as the moorland threatened by the Malpensa expansion.”

Translated by Frangella Sofia and Rizzi Vanessa

Revised by N. Dall’Osto

