

## Oasi di Bolgheri

### Libeccio, the European robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) of San Guido

by Paolo Maria Politi, 15.2.2015



“Every winter I come back to the plains, on the western side of Italy, facing the Ligurian Sea, where it's less cold and where I can find a little something to put in my beak to avoid starvation. My house, however, the one where I was born, is located in the high Apennines, in the woods of a small village called Fiumalbo, beyond the ridge where people speak the emiliano dialect (from the region Emilia Romagna). In the summer there is a constant inflow of coach parties who come to the woods to drink Lambrusco and eat salami from Felino (a town in Emilia). But when the autumn mists start freezing during the night, no one can be seen anymore and we robins, as for many other birds of the forest, must seek areas where our survival is a little easier. Accustomed to the alcohol vapors that one breathes in the summer on the Bolognese mountains, since a few years I spend the winter on a farm called San Guido which is located in Bolgheri, on the Tuscan coast, where rumor has it, a renowned wine is produced ....



Libeccio, the European robin of San Guido

photo P.M.Politi

Apart from wine, San Guido has become my home. There are plenty of meadows, rose gardens, ditches with brambles, bare American vine, box and laurel hedges where I am protected from the rain and cold. Here I find something to eat and, for some time now, also well being.

Many people work and live in San Guido: there is a Kindergarten, a very trendy tavern, a diocesan center with Franciscan nuns, a point of information for local wines ... But above all there is a gardener who has become my friend. Every morning I leave the hedge where I sleep and I see him busy with his flowers, his roses, his scissors and his rake. He cuts, crops, binds, hoes; in short, he does a lot of things. But it is the hoe in his hands that draws me because when he lifts the sod, very often I see a nice earthworm which I love to eat. When I hear other people, they call him Mario. I do not speak to him, I do not have the gift of a human voice; but when I get close he does not push me away and I thank him by making a warble which he considers a greeting. In fact, he looks at me kindly and always tells me how beautiful I am. Even though, for some time now he has given me a name: Libeccio, like the local name for a strong South Western wind. He says it is an appropriate name because as the Libeccio I get rid of all other birds who dare to enter my territory.

Because the gardens of San Guido, in winter, are my home. Seeing that I trust him, Mario has begun to spoil me a bit. With the arrival of the cold, as the early morning meadows were covered with a white carpet of frost, he had a great idea. In the hen house where he keeps chickens and pigeons he looked under the hideouts of the birds for the succulent larvae he calls *gremignioli*: the name is as long as the larvae! He puts them in a jar with a white cap. Occasionally, when he puts his hand in his pocket to take it out, I understand what he is about to do and I approach. The first times he patiently put the worm on the ground; but since I was not afraid of him any longer, I approached to the point of taking the larva caught between his fingers.

Then and there Mario was amazed at the confidence I showed him and I must say that he was also a little moved. Around here, in fact, many other robins end up dead getting caught in the traps that unscrupulous and heartless people hide in the woods to catch us. Yet they know that it is forbidden. Still many humans show no sensitivity to the beauty and companionship that robins give us asking nothing in return, only respect.

Soon the spring will come and with Mario's help I will quickly replenish my reserves of fat that I need to get to my destination on the Apennines, where I hope to start a family. Meanwhile I enjoy the gardens of San Guido and the kindness of their good gardener."



Libeccio with gremignioli

photo P.M.Politi



Mario and the Libeccio

photo P.M.Politi