

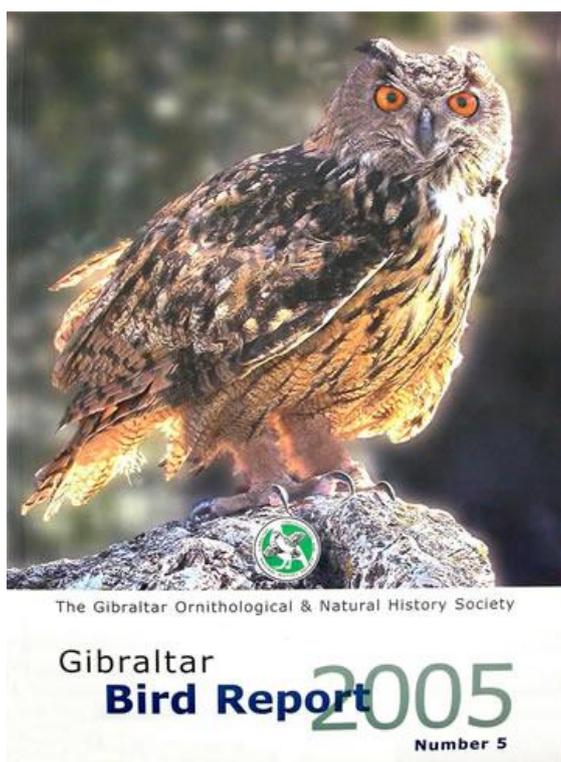
2006 PRESS RELEASES

16 December 2006

2005 BIRD REPORT PUBLISHED

The Strait of Gibraltar Bird Observatory is now up to date with its bird reports. The latest, the Gibraltar Bird Report 2005, edited by Dr Ernest Garcia, has been published within 2006. It is the largest so far with 84 pages full of information and depicting one of the local juvenile Eagle Owls (photo by Leo Hayes), on the front cover. This is one of the birds that was reared by the successful pair that colonised the Rock after an absence of about 100 years.

Articles include a summary of the historical and present status of the Eagle Owl in Gibraltar, the results of a winter wetland bird count in northern Morocco, the status of free-flying parrots including the probable nesting of the Blue-crowned Conure, a look at a roost of White Wagtails that existed in the past and a short account of the vagrant Yellow-browed Warbler found by the editor in a supermarket! The rest of the report analyses the year's bird observations in a comprehensive systematic list and also includes a review and the results of the bird ringing campaign at the Jews' Gate Field Study Centre. The quality of this report and its contents continue to improve in no small way thanks to the efforts of all of its contributors and observers, many of whom are visitors to the Rock. Copies are available at £3.50 from The Nature Shop in Casemates or at £5 including p & p from [GONHS](#).



16 November 2006

MOROCCO RESEARCH CONTINUES

The ecological research and conservation project in northern Morocco, run jointly by GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) and the Scientific Institute of Rabat-Agdal Mohammed V University continues. This project is part of GIBMANATUR, an EU Interreg project.

A team from both institutions and from Tetouan University is currently in Morocco carrying out a bird ringing and census programme, which is revealing extremely interesting results giving new insights into the behaviour of migratory birds in the region of the Strait. These results will be published in an extensive report at the end of next year.

The team in the field at the moment include GONHS Overseas Ringing co-ordinator Ian Thompson and Amezian Mohamed, from Tetouan University, who was awarded a scholarship by GONHS earlier this year to assist with his research.



Amezian Mohamed ringing in the Smir marshes.



A Bluethroat, one of the target species in this autumn's programme.

15 November 2006

GONHS PLANTING ON UPPER ROCK

Last week saw members of GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) putting conservation into practice.

Members of the Society's Cliffs and Caves Section and of the Botanical Section got together to work on saving what is probably Gibraltar's most important plant species. Members abseiled down a cliff at the top of the Rock in the area of O'Hara's Battery, placing a number of young plants of the Gibraltar Campion, *Silene tomentosa* in crevices in the rock face. This plant is unique to Gibraltar and is possibly the rarest plant species in Europe. It was saved from extinction in the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, where these young plants were grown from seed. Last week's exercise is part of the Biodiversity programme to re-establish species that have been lost from Gibraltar.

As a separate project, GONHS members also planted 20 young pine trees of two species, Aleppo and Stone Pines, in order to try to replenish these trees, many of which have been lost in recent years due to drought.



Gibraltar Campion returns to the cliffs

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Tree planters anonymous

1 November 2006

STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR BIOSPHERE RESERVE GONHS working for Gibraltar's inclusion

Recent press reports have referred to the possibility of the inclusion of Gibraltar in a UNESCO international, which has apparently been supported by some Mancomunidad politicians. GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) can reveal that it has in fact been working behind the scenes in order to try and achieve the inclusion of Gibraltar's protected areas.

The "Reserva de la Biosfera del Estrecho" was proposed several years ago, to include protected areas in Spain and Morocco, including the Parque Natural de los Alcornocales and the Smir marshes near M'diq, areas in which GONHS has active research and conservation projects which are ongoing. GONHS immediately made representations to the Junta de Andalucía stating the logic of Gibraltar's inclusion in a network that is centred around the Straits that bear its name.

Moreover, protected areas in Gibraltar even pre-date many of those in Spain and Morocco.

GONHS General Secretary, Dr John Cortes, a member of the Junta Rectora (Management Board) of Alcornocales park, one of Spain's largest protected areas, was present at the Board meeting where the inclusion of Alcornocales was discussed, voted on and approved. At that meeting he made reference to the importance of Gibraltar's inclusion, a statement that was supported by the majority of Board members. Indeed, back in 2003, at the closing ceremony of an environmental conference organised by the Instituto de Estudios Campo-gibraltareses in Algeciras, the closing comments by the chairman, Instituto Director Mario Ocaña, also urged Gibraltar's inclusion. In a statement published by the Instituto in its journal Almoraima, Ocaña states:

"... no comprendemos que sea posible crear un espacio denominado Reserva de la Biosfera en el estrecho de Gibraltar, en la que se excluya - por razones que nosotros ignoramos - la ciudad del Peñón. Es por ello por lo que exigimos, en nombre del sentido común y de las mas elementales normas de buena vecindad que cuando ese proyecto adquiera corporeidad, Gibraltar y sus diferentes ecosistemas, se integren en ese espacio natural protegido."

GONHS has also been in discussion with Government, in the hope that inclusion can form part of the ongoing development in the tri-partite process, and to this end GONHS is preparing a briefing document .

Inclusion in the biosphere reserve would bring great prestige to Gibraltar, with the possibility of attracting outside funding for nature conservation.

GONHS is of the opinion that an Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve centred around the Straits of Gibraltar without the inclusion of Gibraltar, given Gibraltar's good record in nature conservation, would not only be unacceptable, but also bizarre.

31 October 2006

THE AUTUMN GRAPE HYACINTH a new species of flowering plant for Gibraltar

A new flowering plant for Gibraltar was discovered on Monday growing in one of the flower beds of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens at the Alameda. The plant, the [Autumn Grape Hyacinth](#) *Muscari parviflorum*, was found yesterday by the curator of the gardens Mr. Brian Lamb growing in a corner of the Tree Aloe bed, in a clump composed of several plants tightly bunched as shown in the photographs. It was duly identified by the botanic members of the GONHS Biodiversity team Leslie Linares and John Cortes, and is the only *Muscari* species to flower in the autumn. It is not listed in the 'Flora Vascular de Andalucía Occidental' by Benito Valdes and is therefore also a new species for region. This plant is recorded in the Mediterranean area from Spain to Turkey and from Egypt to Algeria but is not mentioned from Morocco.

21 October 2006

GONHS AT CUTTING EDGE OF SCIENCE

This weekend has seen major developments in the scientific work carried out by GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), which is helping to put Gibraltar on the international scientific map.

Two high-powered research teams have been in Gibraltar setting up research programmes in collaboration with GONHS.

Professor John Dittami of the University of Vienna is involved in setting up a programme – full details of which will be released shortly – on aspects of the biology and behaviour Gibraltar's Barbary macaques, which includes using new techniques for analyses of blood, bone structure and physiology.

Dr Dave Matthey from Royal Holloway, University of London, leads a team that includes representation from Birmingham and Malaga Universities, looking at climate change and caves, which has included the setting up of a totally new method of analysing cave characteristics, to be used for the first time anywhere in the world in Gibraltar's caves.

"GONHS feels that this interest from reputable academic institutions, all of which are investing considerable money in projects in Gibraltar, reflects the high regard in which the Society is held internationally and the thoroughness and scientific rigour of our initiatives."

17 October 2006



GONHS AT OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONFERENCE

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) was represented at *Biodiversity That Matters*, a Conference and Workshop on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities organised by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, an association of non-governmental nature conservation organisations in the Overseas Territories and the UK. The Conference was held in the Channel Island of Jersey.

Representing GONHS at the invitation of the Forum, were Charles Perez, Biodiversity Officer, Marine Section Head Eric Shaw and General Secretary, John Cortes, (sponsored by the Commonwealth Foundation).

Sessions at the Conference included a two-day workshop on Environmental Impact Assessments, the battle against alien invasive species, fisheries issues, development in small territories and the access to and use of resources, both financial and non-financial.

John Cortes addressed the Conference on the use of non-financial resources in a much-acclaimed presentation that proved one of the most successful of the event. Eric Shaw contributed towards a seminar on international fisheries, and Charles Perez on the sessions on alien invasive species. These are species of animals and plants that are not native and that prejudice the biodiversity of an area.

There was also a meeting to set up a European Working Group of the Forum, involving Gibraltar, Cyprus Sovereign bases, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney, on the lines of similar, already active working groups for the Caribbean and the South Atlantic.

The Conference allowed the opportunity to exchange experience and ideas with representatives from many territories, including Montserrat, Falkland Islands, Pitcairn, Tristan da Cunha, Bermuda, Ascension, St Helena as well as the UK Crown Dependencies and the UK itself, with representation from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

During the week there was a seminar at to the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (formerly Jersey Zoo), where the GONHS representatives were reunited with Gibraltarian Dr John Fa who is Director of Conservation Science and who led the seminar, and also met with Lee Durrell, widow of the legendary Gerald Durrell who founded the Trust, a well known international conservation organisation based in Jersey.

GONHS describes the visit as entirely successful. It was able to impart of its own experience, and also gain valuable contacts which will be useful in its ongoing programme to protect and enhance Gibraltar's natural environment.



The GONHS Team at the Conference with Sir Philip S Bailhache, Bailiff of Jersey (right)

22 September 2006

EUROBIRDWATCH 2006:

“The biggest Birdwatching event in Europe is back”

Thousands of people from 32 European countries will unite in their love of birds and nature on the weekends of 30 Sep/1 Oct and 7/8 October, in a bid to see the greatest number of birds and species as well as simply spend time in Europe’s extraordinary natural areas.

EuroBirdwatch, the continent’s biggest coordinated birdwatching event, has in the past attracted more than 40,000 people to almost 1500 events, and in 2006 will once again gather together both keen birdwatchers and people simply interested in the great outdoors for a weekend of species spotting and nature appreciation.

“Europe has so many spectacular natural areas – full of biodiversity and species. But often people don’t realise that even within their city, or on their street, there are birds living and thriving. Of course once outside the city boundaries, there are hundreds of species living in so many different habitats – wetlands, forests, mountains, farmland.” explained Adrian Long, Head of Communication at BirdLife International.

“EuroBirdwatch is an excellent chance to get outside and discover Europe’s natural beauty. Even if you have never held a pair of binoculars, or really noticed the birds living all around you, this weekend is the chance to experience what thousands of people around the continent already know and enjoy – birds in their natural environment.” Said Adrian Long, Head of Communications at BirdLife International.

This year the EuroBirdwatch is focussed on highlighting the 4,500 European Important Bird Areas (IBAs) around Europe. These are areas which BirdLife International has identified across Europe to be critical for bird conservation, and home to one or more threatened species of bird. BirdLife partners have organised events in their local IBA’s and will also be using the Eurobirdwatch as an opportunity to educate people about the need to protect and preserve Europe’s extraordinary diversity.

The 2006 EuroBirdwatch event has been coordinated by BirdLife International’s Italian partner LIPU (BirdLife Italy), and looks to be the biggest one yet.

In Gibraltar, events start at 8.30am this coming Saturday with bird ringing at the Alameda Gardens, based at the Cottage near Red Sands Road. During the morning there will be bird watching walks around the Gardens. From 10am there will be a bird of prey display at the Open Air Theatre, and the Wildlife Park will be open until 4.30pm.

As from 3pm, GONHS will have an open afternoon at the Europa Point Seabird Observatory, until about 7pm. The GONHS bird ringing site at Jews' Gate will also be manned during the morning of both Saturday and Sunday, during which visitors will be very welcome, and, if the wind is westerly, there will be observers at the Cable Car Top Station.

EuroBirdwatch 2006 is part of the global WorldBirdwatch event, taking place in more than 100 countries and kick-starting BirdLife International's month-long celebration of birds, the World Bird Festival 2006.



21 September

PIXIE SHOT DEAD

GONHS condemns inhumane and dangerous act

Pixie was born in 1982; at 24 she was the oldest of our resident apes. She was mother of seven, grandmother of 14, and her descendents formed one of the longest studied groups of monkeys anywhere in the world. On 20th September 2006 Pixie was cruelly shot to death. A shot from a 5.5mm rifle ended her life in agony, stretched out on the road by Catalan Bay. She had previously been shot six times. Some resident or visitor to the Catalan Bay area cruelly killed her, ignoring the danger to people, including children nearby, and the fact that this is a protected species, of a kind that is directly responsible for bringing millions of pounds into Gibraltar's economy.

The apes have been bothering people in the Catalan Bay area, but the illegal, inhuman and dangerous act cannot be justified in any way. GONHS was carefully studying the best way to remove these animals and had only two days before it delivered such a plan to the Government, while requesting that steps be taken to cover access to bins in the area and to stop people feeding them, which is making them stay there.

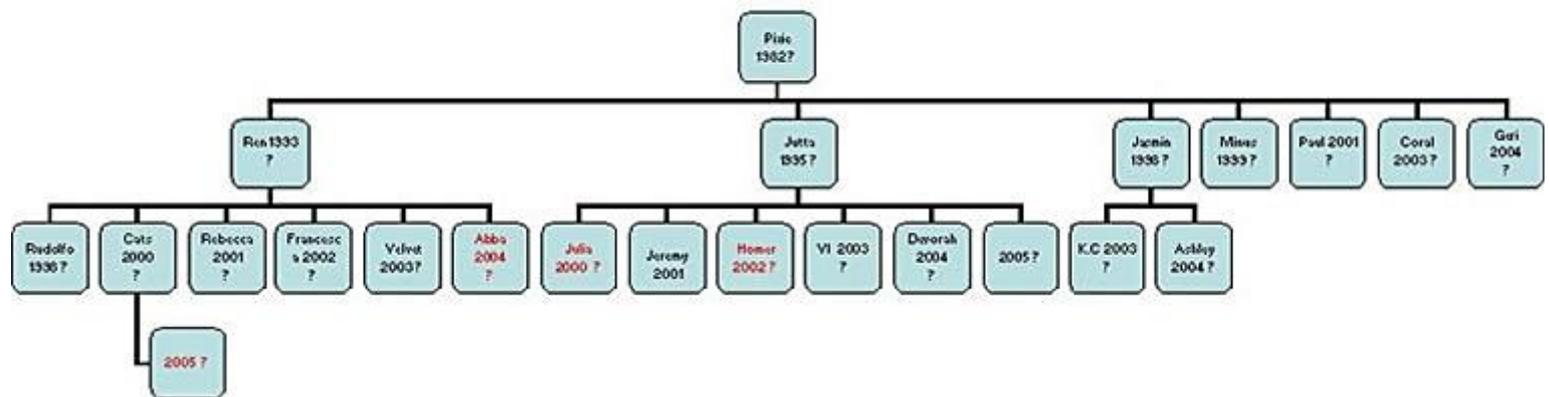
While many people get annoyed at the apes when they are near their homes, it is a proven fact that the only reason that apes accost people for food is that they have been trained to do so by operators in the Upper Rock and by misguided persons in the Town. It is entirely a problem of human making, but ultimately it is the apes that suffer in the end.

Pixie was an incredible animal, a matriarch, born in the year that the frontier opened, nearly a quarter of a century old, and who had seen Gibraltar change for two and a half decades. She was savagely taken from this life by a heartless individual. GONHS urges the Police to spare no efforts in bringing the perpetrator to justice. The danger to the public of irresponsible persons shooting in public areas is intolerable.



Pixie with grandchild in happier times

The GONHS database, administered by the Macaque Team leader Dr Eric Shaw, with Damian Holmes and Dale Laguea, shows that Pixie had seven children, Ren, Jutta, Jasmin, Minus, Paul, Coral and Geri, the eldest, Ren, born in 1993, and Geri, the youngest in 2004. Her first grandchild, Rudolfo, was born in 1998 and the youngest, Ashley, in 2004. Her great grandson was born last year.



Pixie's descendents. This matriline has been left without its matriarch as a result of the killing.

4 July 2006

BUNKERING SMELLS AGAIN

Following a spell during which smells from bunkering operations appeared to have decreased, the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) has noticed these have increased in frequency and, like the Environmental Safety Group (ESG), which issued a statement last Friday, it too has been approached by concerned residents on the western side of Gibraltar.

Since its involvement in this matter, GONHS has asked the bunkering companies to assume responsibility publicly and not hide behind Government agencies. To this day, this has not happened.

In our own contact with the authorities we have had to deal with several agencies or departments, which can be confusing and makes of the public wonder who to turn to with concerns. It is important that there should be a clearly traceable line of communication that will resolve this problem, ideally one that includes the bunkering companies who, by well established principles now enshrined in Government Policy though the Environmental Charter, will need to pay for any remedial equipment or works. To this end, a hotline to which such incidents can be reported, with an assurance of a considered reply would be helpful.

Procedures should include the real possibility that failure to act may lead to revocation of the licences of polluters, which will work in favour of those companies whose operations do not result in emissions into the air.

In this respect, GONHS adds its voice to the of the ESG in calling for a clarification of lines of responsibility leading to firm action.

30 April 2006

EXPEDITION TO NORTHERN MOROCCO

A team from GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) is in northern Morocco this week on a combined ornithological and botanical expedition, part of GIBMANATUR, the Interreg IIIA EU Project of collaboration between GONHS and the Scientific Institute of the University of Rabat Mohammed V-Agdal.

The expedition will survey the Moroccan Mediterranean coastline determining the presence of nesting birds and of plants. The plants particularly being searched for are those which are only found in Gibraltar and northern Morocco, such as the Gibraltar Candytuft, Gibraltar Thyme and Gibraltar Chickweed, whose status is unknown. If the plants are located, samples will be taken and prepared for DNA analysis. It is likely that these plants have been separated genetically from the time the Strait of Gibraltar was formed, about six million years ago, and they may have developed genetic differences between them.

The team is made up of John Cortes, Leslie Linares and Ian Thompson from GONHS, Omar Bennig from the University of Rabat and Mohamed Amezian from the University of Tetouan.

29 April 2006

TEAM FROM KEW IN GIB

A team from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew was in Gibraltar last week to continue the co-operation between them and the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society.

During their visit the Kew team visited the Alameda Gardens and sites around Gibraltar and the surrounding area, studying the plants of the region. Sites visited included the East Side sand slopes, and a marathon tour of the Upper Rock. They were keen to see all Gibraltar special plants. They managed to see all of them in flower on the Upper Rock, except for *Silene tomentosa*, of which the lone surviving plant on the Upper Rock was still not in bloom. However, this plant was flowering in the Botanic Gardens and is successfully grown at Kew, where it has even survived this last very cold winter.

A Mediterranean bed will be opening in Kew shortly, and much of the research for this has been done based in Gibraltar and in collaboration with the Gibraltar organisations. Seeds from Gibraltar and nearby Spain have also been used to produce plants that are going into the collection.



PHOTO: The Kew Team with Leslie Linares from GONHS at the top of the Rock. Left to right: Kath Moss, Jill Kowal, Michel Pouget, Helen Marriage, Tony Hall, Annie Waddington, Ray Townsend, Leslie Linares (GONHS). Arthur Harper (GONHS), not in the picture, was also present.

22 April 2006

BUTTERFLY RESEARCHERS IN GIBRALTAR

GONHS promotes more international research in Gibraltar

TALK AT JOHN MACKINTOSH HALL ON TUESDAY

Following on from the installation of a permanent nocturnal moth monitoring station in the Botanic Gardens, the collaborative research project into invertebrates, specifically butterfly and moth migration, continues this spring with a visit of a team of 5 researchers from Rothamsted Research in the UK who will be working into the early summer together with the GONHS Invertebrate Section.

The research will include the collection of transect data allowing the monitoring of the arrival of migrants from north Africa and their subsequent departure. It will also involve the use of flight simulators, and collecting data aimed at revealing the importance of sites in Gibraltar as refuelling stops in butterfly and moth migration. Two moth traps will also be installed, one on Windmill Hill and the other on the Upper Rock, in addition to the one currently in the Botanic Gardens.

The team consists of Ian Woiwood, Rebecca Nesbit, Don Reynolds, Duncan Sivell and Phil Gould from UK and Keith Bensusan and Charlie Perez from GONHS. GONHS is grateful to MOD for authorising access to Windmill Hill Flats where the bulk of the work will be carried out.

Ian Woiwood will be giving a talk on Trendsetting in Moth Recording this Wednesday 26th April at 8.30pm at the John Mackintosh Hall, where more details on the Gibraltar research will also be available. All are welcome.

18 April 2006

MEP SMELLS, TASTES AND FEELS THE POLLUTION IN THE CAMPO AREA

On Thursday 13th April, representatives from the Bay Bucket Brigade took the Member of the European Parliament, Neil Parish, on a toxic tour of the Oil Refinery, Power plants and other petrochemical works in the Campo de Gibraltar area. The BBB turned out in full strength and had a full accompaniment of its Spanish colleagues

The MEP was shown examples of zero maintenance on pipes and infrastructure as well as broken down health and safety equipment in place to protect workers on site. The MEP was also shocked and dismayed to see the proximity of these large, aging industrial plants to residential areas, nurseries, schools and recreational areas. He witnessed the nearby cars, patios and playgrounds covered in chemical droplets which had eaten away at the paint and top surface. In his own words Mr Parish said he had previously been made aware of the disgraceful condition of these plants and their devastating effect on the surrounding environment but that today he had: "felt, tasted and seen the pollution with his own eyes".

Mr Parish's view on the apparent lack of local Spanish political support for the residents next to the plants was that this too was outrageous; he was however, hopeful that MEP David Hammerstein, unable to come on this trip at the last minute, would take up this issue as a Spanish MEP and together continue to lobby at European Parliament level for action to be taken.

Mr Parish reiterated his intention to invite the European Environment Commissioner or an official representative to come down and experience a similar close up tour of the Oil Refinery, Power Stations and petrochemical plants.



MEP Neil Parish with GONHS, ESG and GWA representatives next to the plant at Puente Mayorga

Bay Bucket Brigade members:-

Environmental Safety Group, GONHS and Gibraltar Women's Association (GIBALTAR)
PRODENI, CORTEFUEGOS and VERDEMAR (SPAIN)

15 April 2006

ROTHAMSTED LIGHT TRAP FOR GIBRALTAR
GONHS in international invertebrate initiative

Under the auspices of GONHS member Charlie Perez, moth trapping has been ongoing at Gibraltar intermittently since the 1970s. Charlie has made an enormous contribution to the knowledge of Gibraltar's Lepidoptera fauna, and over 400 species of butterfly and moth have already been recorded.

Whilst taking part in a workshop on the effect of climate change on migratory fauna at Cambridge with some other GONHS members, Charlie entered discussions with Ian Woiwood of Rothamstead Research Centre over the possibility of setting up a Rothamstead Light Trap at Gibraltar.

Rothamstead Research has been running a network of light traps since 1968. These light traps can be found at hundreds of locations all over Britain. In addition, a smaller but increasing number of traps is being set up around Europe. The Rothamstead trap network has been instrumental in discerning a sharp decrease in most species of large moths in Britain. As such, its value to conservation as a population-monitoring tool is considerable, and correlations between environmental factors and population trends may help to illustrate conservation problems and to come up with possible solutions.

In October 2005, a team consisting of Ian Woiwood and Jason Chapman of Rothamstead and Don Reynolds of the University of Greenwich came to Gibraltar with the view of setting up projects dealing with the migration of butterflies and moths. The trip was successful and on the 3rd of March 2006, a Rothamstead Light Trap was set up at the Alameda as part of a Europe-wide network. It is hoped that a trap at Gibraltar will provide important information on emergence periods and migratory movements in the Mediterranean, and that these may then be related to patterns observed in Central and Northern Europe.



The Rothamsted Moth Trap at the Botanic Gardens

10 April 2006

NOT GULL CULL

Recent Press report that a young man who had experienced a fall from a cliff near Sandy Bay was working as part of the GONHS Gull Cull Unit are unfounded.

GONHS is very aware of health and safety issues and any access to cliffs for whatever purpose is carried out solely by fully trained members of its Cliffs and Caves Section. It would not send a youth untrained and without equipment to such a dangerous location for whatever purpose.

The public is urged to be conscious of persons accessing cliffs at this time of year as in the past there have been attempts to steal eggs and chicks from Peregrine Falcon nests.

27 March 2006

APE INJURY STATISTICS

The recent answer in the House of Assembly regarding the number of "ape related injuries" treated at St Bernard's Hospital may give the impression that the problem is much worse than it actually is. Some of these "injuries" will be scratches or other minor incidents, while some will have been bites. There were 174 and 160 injuries respectively in 2004 and 2005. The official number of visitors to the Upper Rock is about 700,000 a year, so that the injuries represent just over 0.02% of these, or one person bitten in every 4200 visitors. Put another way, if you went up the Rock 4200 times you would get bitten once. Even if all these had been bites, the problem here is much smaller than elsewhere.

Indeed, our ongoing research, in collaboration both Notre Dame University in Indiana, USA and Vienna University, clearly shows that the vast majority of bites are a result of contacts initiated by humans. Bites often result from interactions involving visitors offering food, which they are advised not to do. One of our research programmes shows that operators who offer food have the effect of encouraging the tourists they look after to do the same, while those tourists who are guided by operators who respect the law and do not feed the monkeys do not.

Our data show conclusively that the rate of biting by Barbary macaques in Gibraltar is extremely low when compared with rates for sites in other parts of the world. Indeed in 17,775 minutes (296.25 hours) of observation, only 0.7% of interactions between monkeys and visitors resulted in a bite compared to 11.4% in Asian long-tailed macaques in monkey sites in Bali.

Despite the prohibition of feeding of monkeys, both on the Upper Rock and in Town, historical research shows that there has only been one prosecution for the offence since the law was originally introduced in 1918. GONHS can only carry out this research and advise accordingly, but it cannot execute the law. But it is clear that, while the numbers of ape bites are in fact very low, they could be lower still if the laws that forbid the feeding of the macaques were kept.

17 March 2006

CLIFFTOPS: REPLY TOSHARROCK SHAND

Following a recent letter to the media by a Director of Sharrock Shand, the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), states that, while not casting aspersions on the good character of the company, it continues to take serious issue with their apparent decision to proceed with the construction of an unduly high block below the popular observation post at Jews' Gate, at the very entrance to the Upper Rock.

GONHS has worked closely with Sharrock Shand in the past, and continues to do so on other projects, but that cannot detract from the fact that the "Clifftops" development will be a blot on the landscape. This view is now widely accepted in the community, and the unquestioned good character of the developer in other areas will not change this fact.

In fact this good character could now be re-affirmed if Sharrock Shand had the courage to change its proposals even at this stage.

GONHS calls on the developer to cancel its second promotional phase and reduce the height of the development, and to consider the following options to offset any resulting monetary inconvenience:

- 1) Reduce profit margins and/or
- 2) Sell all the (fewer) properties at full market value and/or
- 3) Re-negotiate terms on the use of the land with Government.

Sharrock Shand could lead by example by reviewing its plans at this stage and avoid the otherwise inevitable branding of Clifftops as a negative development for the long-term integrity of Gibraltar's landscape.

14 March 2006

GONHS and VETERINARY CLINIC RESPOND TO RSPCA OFFICIAL

The head of external relations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), David Bowles, in his statement during his recent visit to Gibraltar, reflected failed to appreciate the local situation in his comments about the pigeon cull.

It is important to point out that Gibraltar is NOT culling truly wild birds. The pigeons in question are feral – that is domestic birds gone wild, many of them originating in old pigeon coops that have been demolished over the years. They continue to be almost totally dependent on people to feed them. One of the justified arguments against culling truly wild birds is that culling will make them disperse, and so make the problem worse. But because of their behaviour and dependence on people, pigeons in Gibraltar are NOT likely disperse on culling and so this argument does not hold.

Mr Bowles criticised the "high profile" cull as if that were deliberate. Precisely because people feed the pigeons – the real cause of the increase in numbers – they can only be trapped where there are people. It is unfortunate but necessary.

There was also an implication in Mr Bowles' statement that the cull is not being carried out humanely. It is.

His comment that "either Gibraltar is the only country that knows something no other country in the world knows, or the other countries have got it right" is disrespectful of the expertise available in Gibraltar, some of which the GSPCA has used regularly in the past.

Unlike other countries, Gibraltar's small size enables it to take action on a local scale that has national implications. Thus while other countries are unable to significantly reduce their pigeon population, other *towns and cities* are able to, and have done so. Thus Gibraltar has been able to take a pre-emptive step not available to other countries.

Other countries rightly concentrate their efforts on commercial poultry. There is no commercial poultry in Gibraltar, and so efforts here are being directed at the type of bird that is most closely associated with people and that can be effectively dealt with.

The most disappointing aspect of this is that at no time did Mr Bowles, the RSPCA nor the GSPCA contact GONHS or the GVC to discuss the matter. The different points of view could have been aired, privately or publicly, and Mr Bowles would have been appraised of the particular situation of Gibraltar. This did not happen and instead a press conference was called. The comments were particularly unhelpful in questioning the legitimacy of the action being taken in view of the harassment that some of the staff have received during the cull.

23 February 2006

GONHS DISAPPOINTED WITH BUNKERING FIRMS

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has expressed serious disappointment at the lack of reaction from all of Gibraltar's bunkering firms following the challenge put out by GONHS on 19th November last year and the continuing problem with smells emanating from bunkering operations.

The chemical smells continue to affect people throughout the west side of Gibraltar during westerly winds and it has been established beyond doubt that they are directly the result of certain bunkering operations.

It is therefore important that the bunkering companies that use the waters of the Bay either prove that they are not responsible, or admit it, explaining how the incidents occur, what the chemicals involved are, and describing the steps that they are taking to remedy the problem.

It is argued that bunkering is a great revenue earner for Gibraltar. However, the community has the right to expect that these firms, that are themselves earning money from the operations, should act as would be expected of a responsible business in a mature community. Careful selection of fuel quality and the use of modern technology can solve the problem, but at present there is little indication to the public that these problems are in fact being recognised, let alone addressed.

The "polluter pays" principle dictates that whoever is causing the smells must take the necessary action and it is about time that the situation was clarified once and for all. GONHS calls on all the relevant authorities to put pressure on the bunkering firms to solve this unacceptable problem.

23 February 2006

CLIFFTOP IS EYESORE

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) takes issue with the response from Sharrock Shand about the Clifftops luxury development.

No two artists' impressions or photomontages will agree. The developer will want to promote the positive, while it is our duty to point out the negative.

However, Sharrock Shand's public claim that the development will blend well with the surroundings is clearly wrong. Regardless of its design, a seven storey high building on this site will stand many metres above the current contours and break the sky line from many directions. The site can be seen from the north and the south along Europa Road, from the Rosia area, Naval Hospital Road, and many parts of the Upper Rock, as well as from the sea to the west of Gibraltar. The view to the south from the observation platform at Jews' Gate will be spoilt.

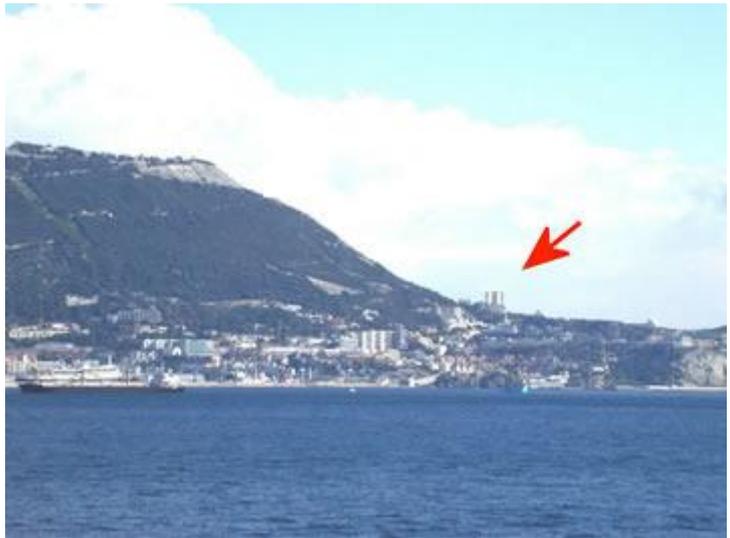
If the project goes ahead as at present, the public will be able to judge for itself whose interpretation is correct. In the meantime they can choose whether to believe an organisation that has laboured for 30 years to protect Gibraltar's environment, or a firm that was closely involved in promoting the funicular, which no-one ever doubted was clearly not in keeping with the surroundings, despite all their assertions.

In its discussions with the developers, GONHS suggested ways in which the building's height could be reduced. GONHS once again calls on them to find ways of reducing the height of the building, to bring it into true consonance with its environment

21 February 2006

CLIFFTOP EYESORE

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) dislikes the plans for “Clifftops”, a seven storey development recently announced by Sharrock Shand on the southern access to the Upper Rock.



While not questioning the legitimacy of the planning approval provided to this project, it does not agree with its dimensions in view of its visual impact. The photographs published by the developers show the tower in a splendid setting, and indeed it will have splendid views. However, viewed from other angles, there will be two major impacts. From a distance, the block will stick out and spoil the visual line of descent of the Upper Rock to the south. Worse still, from the observation platform at Jews’ Gate and from other areas such as the access to Mediterranean Steps, it will impact strongly on the view of the Straits, blocking what is a unique and magnificent view, with the roof of the development almost level with the Jews’ Gate observation platform.

GONHS does not object to development on this site. It is already a concrete platform, green areas around it will be protected, and the development will carry a green roof. However GONHS feels strongly that this development is far too tall for this location and has urged the developer to reduce the number of floors. Despite assurances from the developers that the visual impact will be small, GONHS is convinced that the development will spoil the open view of the Strait from parts of the Upper Rock, compromising their tourist potential, and of the Rock from many vantage points. It therefore once again calls on Sharrock Shand to redesign the building as a lower structure more in keeping with the historical contours of the Rock of Gibraltar.



A view of the Strait



Not so much of a view



Before



After

16 February 2006

Gibraltar Biodiversity Year 2006 TALK ON ALIEN PLANTS

Botanical Co-ordinator Leslie Linares is starting the Gibraltar Biodiversity Year series of talks organised by GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), on Tuesday at 8.30pm at the John Mackintosh Hall.

Illustrated with photographs, the talk will deal with "Alien Plants", that is plants that are not native to Gibraltar but which, in many cases, grow widely. Although attractive, many are harmful to local species.

Leslie will describe the plants, show the locations where they grow, discuss whether or not they are harmful, and in those cases, suggest possible measures of control.

31 January 2006

GONHS and BOTANIC GARDENS IN BIODIVERSITY RESTORATION

The Gibraltar Campion, *Silene tomentosa*, is a plant that grows in the wild nowhere other than in Gibraltar. Rediscovered from apparent extinction in 1994, the three surviving wild plants died in 1995 and its survival was only ensured thanks to its propagation at the Botanic Gardens of the Alameda.

Attempts to re-establish it in the wild have met with limited success, but efforts continue.

Recently, taking advantage of the wet spell that Gibraltar is experiencing, members of the Botanical Section of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) transferred young plants of the Campion which had been grown in the Gardens by Mario Mesilio of the Botanic Gardens, to a carefully selected location on the Rock. A total of 8 plants of various ages were planted out, in the hope that they will form the nucleus of a restored wild population of Gibraltar's most unique plants, and one of the rarest plants in the world.

This is one of the practical nature conservation activities being carried out as part of Gibraltar Biodiversity Year.



Leslie and Arthur planting a young *Silene tomentosa*

15 January 2006

GONHS WELCOMES PET ORDINANCE

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has welcomed the coming into force on 12 January 2006 of the [Pet Animals \(Sales\) Ordinance 2005 \(PDF\)](#) , recently announced by [Government](#).

GONHS and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic had been working on this issue along with Government for some years.

The benefits of the new law include the protection of the public from the sale of illegal or diseased animals or animals too young to be removed from their mothers which could soon die.

It also affords protection to the animals, by making pet dealers legally responsible for ensuring that persons buying pets will be able to care for them adequately.

And by ensuring that only animals born in captivity can be sold, this will prevent the encouragement of trade in wild caught animals, which can place great pressure on wild populations of rare species.

GONHS wishes to take the opportunity to remind the public that the release of pet animals into the wild is also illegal. It is cruel to the released animals which may not adapt well, or to our native species that can suffer from competition or predation by the new arrivals.

Anyone wishing to dispose of an unwanted pet can ask advice from GONHS.

07 January 2006

20th ANNUAL WINTER BIRD COUNT

The birding section of Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), (the Strait of Gibraltar Bird Observatory), will be holding its annual winter bird count next weekend, 14th and 15th January.

annual winter bird count next weekend, 14th and 15th January.

Observers will be covering the whole of the Rock in an attempt to catalogue the birds wintering in Gibraltar. The Upper Rock, the coastline, the Town, gardens and the sand slopes on the east side will all be covered simultaneously by different observers.

In GONHS' 30th Anniversary Year, and Gibraltar Biodiversity Year, this is the 20th Gibraltar Winter Bird Count. They have been carried out since 1987 and so allow comparison with previous years.

Notable changes have included the increase in the number, and species of birds using the restored sand slope vegetation on the east side. This ecological success on its own has possibly been the main contributor in the return to Gibraltar of Ravens and Eagle Owls, the increased use of the Rock by other birds of prey, even out of season, and has provided quiet habitat for resting for migratory birds, which last year included the rare Black Vulture and Black Storks.

Further information is available from Keith Bensusan (kbensusan at gonhs.org)

06 January 2006

GONHS IS 30 YEARS OLD THIS WEEK

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) reaches its 30th birthday this month. It is 30 years since, on 10th January 1976, a small group of young birdwatchers met in the upper room of the Gibraltar Museum and decided to form the Gibraltar Ornithological Society.

The group had been keen birdwatchers from an early age. For a few years they had been an informal group within the now defunct Gibraltar Society, and so they now wanted to set up a more formal organisation. They looked for guidance and support to the Curator of the Gibraltar Museum, Jouaquin Bensusan. Mr Bensusan, who became Treasurer of the organisation in which role he served for many years, and who is now an Honorary Member of GONHS, enthusiastically supported the initiative and provided a platform for the foundation of the Society. For many years too, the Society was based at the Museum, and it is clear that were it not for Jouaquin's encouragement and dedication, and his providing of practical support, GONHS would not have existed in its present form. Apart from Jouaquin Bensusan, those present at that first meeting were John Cortes, Clive Finlayson, Ernest Garcia, Mario Mosquera and Charles Perez.

Several years later, the Society added "Natural History" to its title, moving from just "GOS" to "GONHS".

Since then its recognition internationally has grown, being associated as a partner of many of the key international players in wildlife conservation. At the same time its research base has increased to cover many areas other than the birds it started off with, such as Barbary macaque behaviour and ecology, entomology, botany, marine issues, and most recently climate change.

Indeed, on its expansion to include a marine section, it adopted the artificial reef project, which had been initiated by Eric Shaw and is still the longest running habitat creation project in Gibraltar, and one of the world's oldest deliberately created artificial reefs. More recently GONHS has been instrumental in restoring the vegetation on the Great Sand Slopes on the East Side, one of Gibraltar's major conservation successes, and internationally recognised as such. The Society's expansion also resulted in a botanical section, bringing in the expertise of Leslie Linares and Arthur Harper.



Life on the artificial reef (E.Shaw)

At a Gibraltar level, GONHS has continued its membership-based approach, largely run by volunteers, providing activities for members and the community as a whole. Under its Constitution, updated and approved unanimously at a General Meeting in March last year, the Society is governed by a Council made up of elected members and section representatives. It is also represented on a number of Commissions and Committees, both in Gibraltar and abroad.

Apart from work on gulls and macaques, which goes much further than contractual requirements dictate, and among other activities, GONHS runs a bird rehabilitation unit, a caves and cliffs section, and a bird ringing station – again largely through the commitment of volunteers.

In its efforts to achieve a sustained level of biodiversity, not in conflict with sensible social and economic development, GONHS has always strived to arrive at its aims through discussion, never being afraid to make its views heard in the appropriate forum.

The Society feels that it has achieved a great deal in increasing protection and awareness of the environment at all levels in the community and is grateful to all those who have listened through the years.

GIBRALTAR BIODIVERSITY YEAR 2006 is a good way of marking the Society's 30th anniversary, and, while concerned at many of the pressures faced by Gibraltar's biodiversity and environment, the Society looks to the future with optimism.



The restored Great Sand Slopes (L.Linares)

GONHS RELEASES GIBRALTAR BIODIVERSITY YEAR TALKS AND MEETING PROGRAMME

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has released its extensive programme of talks and outdoor meetings for 2006, Gibraltar Biodiversity Year (GibBY).

Activities this year are aimed at promoting appreciation of Gibraltar's Biodiversity as an essential component of Gibraltar's quality of life, and ensuring protection of this biodiversity – our community of plants and animals – as a sign of the good health of our environment.

A healthy environment and social and economic progress are not alternatives, but partners in charting Gibraltar's future, and GONHS aims to continue to send this message to everyone, including, of course, decision-makers.

But enjoyment of our environment is aimed also at the community as a whole and children in particular. In addition to the "official" programme published to day there will be other activities. One of the aims is to promote enjoyment of Gibraltar's natural history sites. GONHS will therefore shortly be launching a guide to nature on the Upper Rock and will be introducing interpretation both on the Upper Rock and at Europa Point.

Gibraltar's Biodiversity, for our size, is startling. We must protect it and we must enjoy it!

GONHS calls on other organisations and institutions to join in celebrating Gibraltar's Biodiversity.

The programme can be viewed on the GONHS website at www.gonhs.org/events.htm. Anyone wishing to be involved in Gibraltar Biodiversity Year should contact GONHS by e-mail at gibby2006@gonhs.org, by post at PO Box 843, or on Fax 74022 or Tel 72639.