

2007 PRESS RELEASES

21 December 2007

EASTSIDE EIA LEAVES MANY QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

The Environmental Safety Group (ESG) met with GONHS this week to discuss and share concerns about the proposed Eastside development. In light of the deadline falling just after the festive period on the 4th January the NGOs believe it extremely important that the public are aware of the many environmental issues this development will have. A statement has been issued on behalf of both organisations as follows:-

"While appreciating the fact that an in-depth and highly detailed assessment has finally been made public on the Eastside Project the NGOs would like the Development and Planning Commission to give due regard to the following issues when considering this planning application.

- That the Government of Gibraltar (GoG) carries out its own environmental impact assessment on the project to ensure the best outcome for Gibraltar, its people, wildlife and environment;
- That the GoG allows longer periods for public consultation for large projects of this type;
- That as regularly suggested throughout the Environmental Statement, further tests and sampling are carried out on the mound **prior and during** any major disturbance to the site (data referred to in the EIA dates back to 2001);
- That - should the project go ahead – fresh data from further testing be made public;
- That while the EIA states (*page 18 Water Quality section*) current bathing water standards at the Eastside regularly fails to meet guideline standards under EC Bathing Directive-which in itself is of concern- that the Eastside Project will exacerbate these standards further, (because of slower current flow and inability to self cleanse in some areas) and that this will require active steps to clean specific areas during the bathing season in particular ;
- That dredging is not undertaken in areas of special ecological significance;
- That the health of workers, residents, bathers and marine biodiversity in the area are prioritised and protected;
- That the profile of the project is landscaped to maximise and blend with the natural beauty of the area which it currently, clearly does not;
- That energy and water efficiency are maximised on new development"

9 December 2007

GONHS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Membership supports Society's Council

GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) gave a strong mandate to its Council during the Society's Annual General Meeting held last Thursday evening.

At the meeting, and as provided by the Society's Constitution, elections took place to the Society's Council. The membership overwhelmingly re-elected the outgoing Council, by secret ballot. GONHS Council consists of twelve members, including a number of ex-officio members who represent particular sections or areas of expertise.

Following the election, GONHS Council membership, as appointed for the next two years, is made up of:

Paul Acolina, John Balestrino, Keith Bensusan, John Cortes, Jean-Paul Latin, Leslie Linares, Charles Perez, Vincent Robba, Eric Shaw, Harry Van Gils, Jill Yeoman and Albert Yome. The Council will meet early in the New Year to appoint the Society's General Secretary from within its membership.

At the meeting, outgoing General Secretary, John Cortes, presented his Annual Report, where he highlighted the activities of the past year, and presented plans and concerns for the coming year.

While pleased with the achievements of the Society during 2007, labelling the last two years as "possibly the busiest in the Society's 32 year history", he also expressed disappointment in certain areas and predicted that development would continue to be the biggest threat to the natural environment in Gibraltar for the foreseeable future. He stated that GONHS had to "continue to work on this problem, with both Government and developers", and said that the Society's Council, if re-elected, would continue to do so.

The full text of the GONHS General Secretary's report will be published shortly and will also be available on the GONHS website.

8 December 2007

JOHN CORTES RE-ELECTED TO ALCORNOCALES BOARD

Dr John Cortes, GONHS General Secretary and Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and has been elected to serve for a third term on the Board of Directors of the Parque Natural de los Alcornocales, one of the largest protected areas in Andalucia, and regarded by experts as containing the best natural woodland in Iberia.

The Board is made up largely of representatives from the different stakeholders, including Ayuntamientos, landowners, NGOs, industries and trade unions. Three of the posts are held by independent members, known as "miembros de reconocido prestigio", elected by the rest of the membership. John Cortes has been elected as one of these three independent experts for the third successive term of three years.

The Board, or "Junta Rectora" works with park officials and the Delegacion Provincial de Medio Ambiente in Cadiz in developing policy in the Reserve and in administering and controlling the use of the park, proposals for development, etc., as well as in promoting research and nature conservation.

John said, "I am delighted to have been elected once again and am very grateful for the confidence shown in me by my colleagues". He added that he will continue to contribute in whatever way he can to the protection of the natural environment in the region.



A typical woodland scene in Alcornocales

1 December 2007

GIBRALTAR PLANT WORK IN A-LEVEL CURRICULUM



Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Biology (8BI01)

First examination 2009

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Biology (9BI01)

First examination 2010

Work on plants carried out at the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens with the collaboration of GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) has been included in the recently published Edexcel GCE AS and A Level Biology curriculum for 2009 and 2010.

In a section on seed banks, the document reads:

Growing out

This allows some plants to be grown in the glasshouse to allow the production of 'fresher' seed to be placed in the bank. This is known as regeneration or multiplication. So far, mainly UK native species have been regenerated to improve stock and in support of English Nature's Species Recovery Programme. This has also been done for *Silene tomentosa*, a species thought to be extinct in the wild on the Rock of Gibraltar and reintroduced.⁽¹⁾ This successful research will lead to other examples in the future if viable seed is kept in seed banks. Some species that lose viability quickly will have to be repeatedly grown out to keep stocks fresh.

Both the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and GONHS are pleased that their work in Gibraltar has caught the attention of the examination board and has been chosen, among thousands of similar initiatives around the world, as an example of successful conservation work.

27 November 2007

THE BIODIVERSITY OF MOROCCO

GONHS organises major Conference in Tetouan



THE OPENING CEREMONY Pr. Mohammed Ater, Organising Committee and director, Laboratoire LDICOSYB; Pr. Mohamed Dakki, President of AMAB, Pr. Ahmed El Moussaoui, Vice president of the 'Université Abdelmalek Essaâdi, Pr. Abderrahmane Kamili, Dean of the Faculty of Sciences, Pr. El Hassani, Director of the Institut Scientifique, and Dr John Cortes, General Secretary GONHS and Project co-coordinator

A delegation from GONHS has recently returned from Tetouan, Morocco, having attended a highly successful conference co-organised by GONHS and the Université Abdelmalek Essdi of Tetouan, the Scientific Institute of the University Mokammed V Rabat-Agdal and the Moroccan Biodiversity Association (AMAB). The Conference marked the drawing to a close of some of the work carried out by GONHS and their Moroccan partners as part of GIBMANATUR, and Interreg IIIA project co-funded by the European Union.

The Conference, which proceeded in French, English, Spanish and Arabic, was entitled *The Biodiversity of Morocco: Current knowledge and future perspectives*, and had participation from scientists from Morocco, Gibraltar, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, who are leading ecological research in Morocco.

A wide range of subjects were covered, topics being both terrestrial and marine. There was great emphasis on the need for further research, but also on the importance of putting present knowledge into effect in conserving both terrestrial and marine ecosystems in Morocco.

Morocco has a very wide range of habitats, but the impact of Man is great, and many of the studies considered just how the human population is affecting natural systems.

The GONHS/Rabat Team presented a total of seven papers on their work over the past four years. These were co-authored by the joint team members, and each was presented by a different author.

Professor Mohamed Mouna dealt with the invertebrate fauna of the sand dunes at Martil, a relict site and the only example of unspoilt sand dune vegetation on the Mediterranean coastline between Almeria and Melilla. Dr Souad Benhalima dealt with invertebrates of the Juniper scrub habitat of the site, and extremely rare community with its

closest affinities in the cedar forest of the Middle Atlas. Dr Soumaya Hammada presented the results of the botanical work in the area, highlighting the uniqueness of the plant communities there.

Two of the GONHS/Rabat presentations considered the bird fauna of the Smir wetlands near M'diq. Mohamed Ameziane gave an insight into the breeding waterbirds of the area, which include species that do not nest anywhere else in Morocco, and insisted on the importance of controlling urban development on the site. Dr John Cortes summarised the results of the bird ringing that has been carried out on the site, emphasising the importance of the habitat for birds migrating between Europe and Africa.

Dr Keith Bensusan gave a paper on the work done on invertebrates in different parts of northern Morocco, emphasising work on land molluscs, butterflies, and ants. Several invertebrate species new to Morocco have been found during the course of the project, but Dr Bensusan also highlighted the need to reduce grazing pressure on all habitats in order to benefit biodiversity.

Leslie Linares described the work done to locate sites in Morocco for the species of plants that only grow there and in Gibraltar. He reported on the success so far, and on genetic analyses that are expected to yield results in the coming year.

The abstracts of all the presentations are contained [elsewhere](#) in the GONHS website and the full proceedings will be published next year.

The Conference was opened by the Vice President of Tetouan University, Pr. Ahmed El Moussaoui, several Moroccan dignitaries and by GONHS General Secretary John Cortes. The successful collaboration between Gibraltar and Morocco in the field of ecological research and conservation was highlighted in the opening speeches.

GIBMANATUR continues during 2008, with a number of publications containing the results of the work expected during the year.



Part of the GONHS/Rabat delegation

20 November 2007

GIBRALTAR-MOROCCO RESEARCH CONTINUES **Moroccan Researchers on the Rock**

As part of GIBMANATUR, the Gibraltar-Morocco EU-funded Interreg Project, the collaborative work between the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society and the Scientific Institute of the University of Rabat, continues.

Currently in Gibraltar are two Moroccan researchers, Mohamed Ameziane and Abdel Elbanak. Both are undergoing training, as part of the programme, into ornithological techniques. Mohamed in addition is the holder of a GONHS Studentship to assist him in his work. They are working under the supervision of Ian Thompson of GONHS.

During their visit to Gibraltar they have been mainly involved in ornithological research, but have also been introduced to other aspects of Gibraltar's ecology, as well as having visited most of the main sites of interest, accompanied by local GONHS members.

Both will be continuing work in the Smir marshes of northern Morocco, which began as part of this project. GONHS aims to continue working closely with Moroccan scientists well beyond the life of the Interreg project and a great deal of further work is being planned.



Mohamed and Abdelhak on top of the Rock

15 October 2007

SCIENTIFIC PAPER BY GONHS REVEALS CHANGES IN MIGRATION TRENDS

A paper entitled 'Trends in abundance of migrating raptors at Gibraltar in spring' was recently published in a high-profile Dutch ornithological journal, *Ardea*.

Authored by Drs. Keith Bensusan, Ernest Garcia and John Cortes of the GONHS (Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), the paper examines trends in numbers of a range of species recorded at Gibraltar from the early 1970s to the mid 2000s. Species studied were the Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Montagu's Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Short-toed Eagle. Of these, Black Kites, Eurasian Sparrowhawks and Booted Eagles were found to have increased on passage across the Strait, whereas Honey Buzzards and Common Buzzards have decreased. All other species were found to have remained stable. Eurasian Sparrowhawks suffered severely from the use of organochlorine pesticides from the 1950s to the 1970s and have shown a recovery in Europe since these pesticides were banned. The trend detected at Gibraltar reflects this. The decline in Honey Buzzards could reflect slight declines in parts of the species' range. However, other factors may be involved. Larger numbers of Honey Buzzards have been recorded crossing at the Strait of Messina between the Italian mainland and Sicily, and it may be that Honey Buzzards are shifting their route to Europe from Africa. The decline in Common Buzzards is most surprising as the species increased in many European countries during the late 20th Century. These results suggest that many Common Buzzards are no longer flying as far south for the winter, quite possibly as a result of climate change.



Common Buzzard

Photos: F Barrios/GONHS

Egyptian Vulture

12 October 2007

GONHS CONCERNED AT EUROPA POINT WORKS



The works in progress

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has been closely involved as a consultee in the preparation of the proposed improvement works at Europa Point. However, it was shocked to note how last week a large board displaying the plans was erected without warning or discussion precisely on one of the sites which it had previously been agreed would not be damaged.

The site, on the "mound" south of the cricket pitch, holds an unusual plant community which includes protected species. The design and planning of the project, in which GONHS has been fully involved, contained assurances that no works would be carried out without translocation of affected species. However, the works last week proceeded without any steps being taken to avoid environmental damage.

GONHS is disappointed and trusts that the situation will not be repeated when the project proper commences.

Photos L.Linares/GONHS



Romulea clusiana



Gynandris sisyrinchium

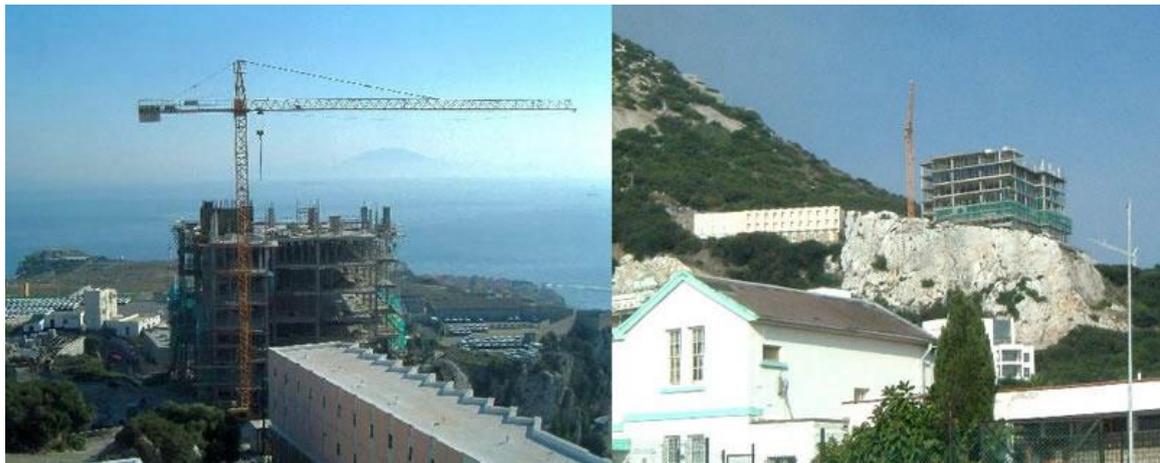
03 October 2007

THE CLIFFTOPS CHALLENGE

Since the start of the project, GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), has insisted that the height of the Sharrock Shand development, "Clifftops", just south of Jews' Gate, is too tall and is ruining one of the most impressive views that can be enjoyed from Gibraltar, for residents and tourists alike.

GONHS has tried in vain to persuade the developers to reduce the height of the building, and has requested that Government negotiate an arrangement with Sharrock Shand to alter their plans and cap the building at a maximum of five floors.

GONHS now requests those contesting next week's elections to undertake to take steps when elected to ensure that the Clifftops building is reduced in height in order to maintain the historic shape of Gibraltar and to re-instate the views from Jews' Gate and from Mediterranean Steps.



The monstrous Clifftops which has still not reached its maximum height.



The view across the Straits as it once was.

20 September 2007

GREEN MANIFESTO

To coincide with the signing on of candidates for the forthcoming General Election, GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) has presented its main aims for the coming four years, which it states are some of what it expects the next Government to aspire to.

At this point in the Earth's history, the environment is a major global concern and Gibraltar must play its part. The next Government must therefore ensure not only that our local environment is attractive and safe for nature and the community, but that it contributes positively to the future of our Planet.

This is a time for vision, energy, and firm action.

The main points are:

Pollution, waste and energy:

- Reassessment of energy needs for Gibraltar and a reduction of our carbon footprint, including cancellation of plans for a new power station until full study is carried out.
- Strict limits on emissions from motor-vehicles and ships, including a requirement for vapour recovery systems for the bunkering trade
Strict limits on noise, as well as restriction of working hours for building sites.
- Recycling of household and commercial waste
- Reduction of light pollution from residential, commercial and public lighting.

Natural environment:

- Inclusion of local natural history and environment issues in school curricula.
- Full enforcement of nature protection laws, including those relating to feeding of macaques and fishing.
Setting up a full network of protected areas, including marine areas, to ensure no further loss of biodiversity.
- Restoration of lost habitats and species and removal of alien invasive species.
- Implementation of Upper Rock Management Plan.
- Implementation of Gibraltar Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Stopping of all further development on green sites.
- Enhanced protection for trees and full tree planting programme.
- Public meetings of the Development and Planning Commission.

19 August 2007

FIRST EUROPEAN BAT NIGHT IN GIBRALTAR

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society will be taking part in its first European Bat Night next Saturday 25th August.

This will be held at the Open Air Theatre, Alameda Gardens, starting at 9pm.

GONHS volunteers will be setting up an ultrasound bat detector with speakers, through which participants should be able to hear an electronic interpretation of bat calls as these forage for insects.

"We would expect to see or detect Soprano pipsitrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Schreiber's bat *Miniopterus schreibersii* and perhaps the European free-tailed bat *Tadarida teniotis*," said a spokesman.

About European Bat Night

The event, organised by EUROBATS, takes place every year in more than 30 countries. Nature conservation agencies and NGOs from across Europe pass on information to the public about the way bats live and their needs with presentations, exhibitions and bat walks, often offering the opportunity to listen to bat sounds with the support of ultrasound technology.

This is the first year that GONHS has taken part in this event.

An Introduction to EUROBATS:

The Bat Agreement

The Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats, which came into force in 1994, presently numbers thirty European states among its Parties, from North, South, East and West.

The Agreement was set up under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, which recognises that endangered migratory-species can be properly protected only if activities are carried out over the entire migratory range of the species.

The Bat Agreement aims to protect all 45 species of bats identified in Europe, through legislation, education, conservation measures and international co-operation with Agreement members and with those who have not yet joined.

In Gibraltar, all bats and their roost sites are protected under the Nature Protection Act 1991.

14 August 2007

ANOTHER SHIPPING ACCIDENT WITHIN THE MARINE PROTECTED AREA.



The cargo vessel New Flame wrecked 600m off the Marine Observatory.

C. Perez

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), has expressed its deep concern following the collision between the New Flame and the Torm Gertrud off Europa Point.

It is extremely alarmed that another such accident should have occurred within a Marine Protected Area and within such a short period of time after the Samothraki ran aground within this area.

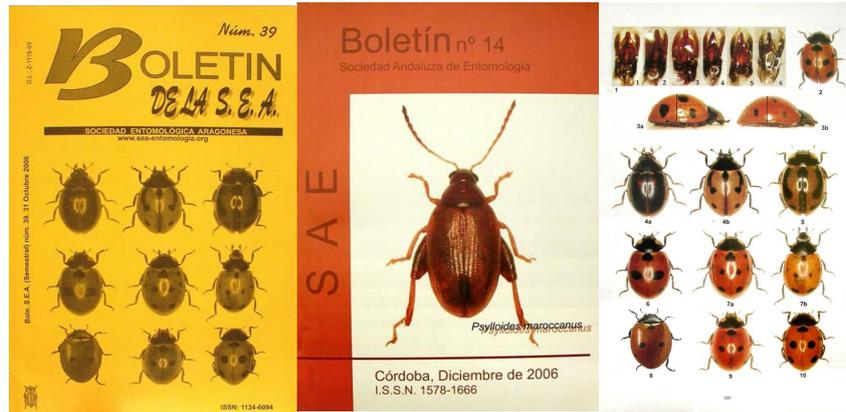
The Bay and Strait of Gibraltar provide a variety of habitats for a wealth of marine species, among them endangered whales and dolphins, turtles, birds and fish and marine invertebrates.

Once again luck, and the swift response of Gibraltar's Port Authority and other essential services, have been able to avert an ecological disaster. The high volume of shipping traffic in the Strait and the number of bunkering operations carrying on in the Bay, are clearly unsustainable and will be exacerbated with the addition of Tangier's new port.

This will make a disaster a very serious possibility without a reduction of marine traffic in the area. GONHS calls on the Gibraltar authorities to impose severe penalties on those breaching shipping and nature protection laws, giving the greatest priority to preventing such accidents by applying the strictest safety standards in respect of vessels calling at or operating from Gibraltar.

13 July 2007

NORTH AFRICAN BEETLES FOUND ON THE ROCK



A recent issue of the highly-regarded 'Boletín de la Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa' included a paper that was co-authored by two Gibraltarian members of the GONHS. The article, by Keith Bensusan, Josep Muñoz Batet and Charlie Perez, dealt with the discovery of a species of ladybird in Gibraltar. The species is *Coccinella algerica*, a North African species that very closely resembles the very common and well-known seven-spot ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata*. This is the first time that the species has been recorded from mainland Europe. The find is significant in that, apart from adding to Europe's known biodiversity, it is also the first time that both *C. algerica* and *C. septempunctata* have been found inhabiting the same geographical area (both species can be found in Gibraltar). The article includes an identification key to all of the *Coccinella* species found in Iberia, North Africa and the Canaries. A composite of photos of all *Coccinella* species considered in the paper, taken by the authors, has been used as the front cover of that issue of the Boletín SEA.

Meanwhile, the latest issue of the journal of the 'Sociedad Andaluza de Entomología' included another paper by Keith Bensusan and Charlie Perez. The paper dealt with two species of leaf beetle which have been recorded from Gibraltar for the first time. In both cases, the records from Gibraltar mark a considerable expansion of their known distribution in Iberia. One of the species, *Psylliodes maroccanus*, had only previously been recorded from Matalascañas in Huelva. A photograph of this species, taken by the authors, also made the front cover of this journal. These papers reflect the intensity and quality of entomological work being carried out by members of the GONHS Biodiversity team as part of the ongoing Gibraltar Biodiversity Project.

26 May 2007

GONHS and WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society will be making its contribution to World Environment Day activities next week.

GONHS members will be manning a stand at the event on Saturday morning at Casemates organised by the Ministry for the Environment where it will be promoting its work on biodiversity conservation.

On the same day, and as a way of celebrating the value of the natural environment, GONHS will be leading a trip to a nearby Biosphere Reserve, at Sierra de las Nieves near Ronda. This is at a time when GONHS is backing the move to include Gibraltar in the intercontinental biosphere reserve recently created by Spain and Morocco, spanning the Strait of Gibraltar. Details on this trip are available from Jill Yeoman on 74944.

Next Tuesday GONHS will also be participating in the Ministry's events, including a talk to schoolchildren on Climate Change by Dr John Cortes and participation in the afternoon's seminar by Prof Dave Matthey, who is leading a joint Royal Holloway University of London/GONHS reserve project on climate change as reflected in cave environments.

Meanwhile a team from GONHS and the University of Rabat will be carrying out ecological surveys in northern Morocco during the course of this week as part of GIBMANATUR, an Interreg IIIA EU project.

25 May 2007

WESTERN BEACH

The impression given in the press statement by the Gibraltar Tourist Board regarding Western Beach needs to be corrected. The statement reads:

"Sand dunes at the rear of the beach have been levelled in consultation with GONHS (an area with protected plants has been protected). This has extended the usable beach area by approximately 50%. The accumulated sand has also been used to increase the frontage of the beach."

There has indeed been consultation, but the implication in the statement is that GONHS agreed with the removal of an extensive area of sand dunes. This is not the case. GONHS representatives pointed out sensitive areas, and special plants and other wildlife during several meetings on site, and suggested alternative ways in which the use of beach space could be increased, but it was quite clear throughout that any removal of the sand dune habitat would not be with the Society's blessing.

GONHS has surveyed the area this week and is preparing a report on the loss of habitat, and is very concerned at the loss of biodiversity.

GONHS welcomes the use of Western Beach by beach goers in the summer, but does not agree that an area with sand dune vegetation is unusable, as any visitor to Tarifa beach will confirm. Any increase in the size of the beach in the future should be as a result of addition of material from elsewhere.

Among the recommendations GONHS will be making, will be one seeking an undertaking that the sand dune community be allowed to recover as much as is now possible, and that there will be no further interference with this natural system, now extremely rare in the region.



Western Beach then



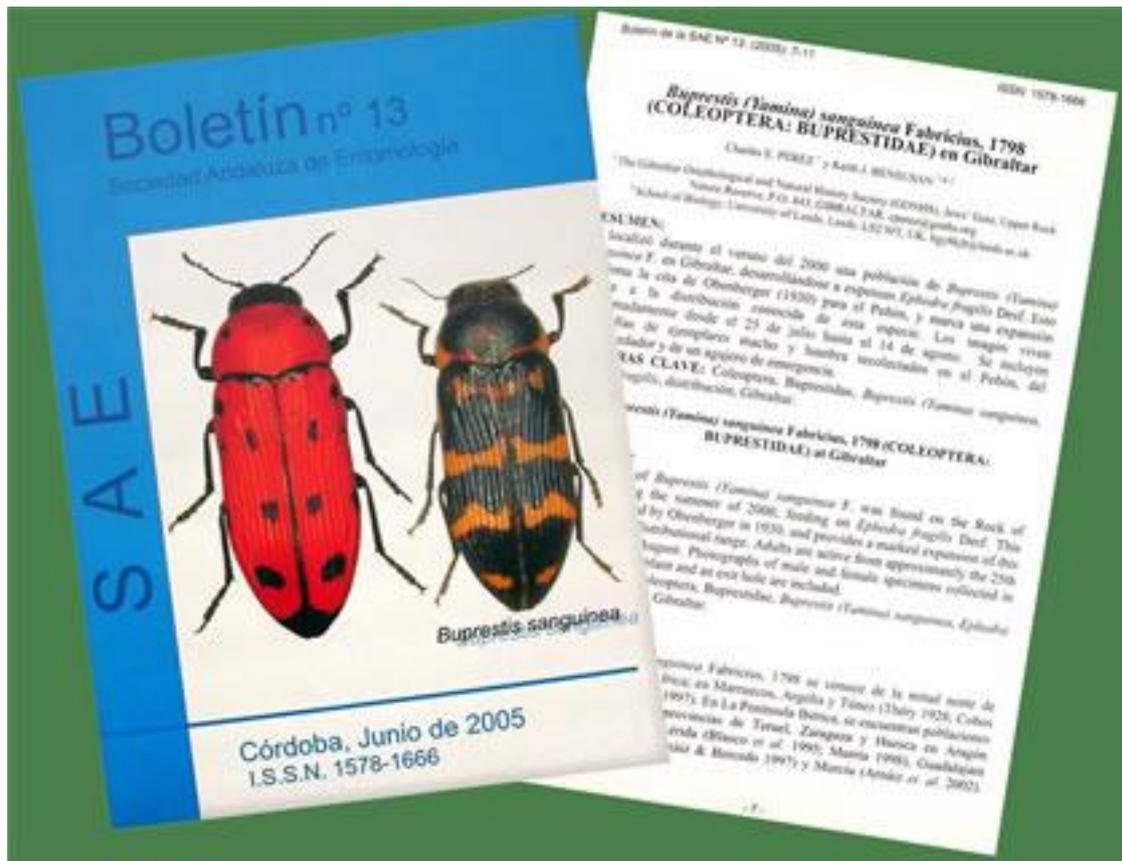
Pacing the sandy waste

11 April 2007

NEW BEETLE DESCRIBED FROM GIBRALTAR



A recent issue of the journal of the Andalusian Entomological Society 'Boletín de la Sociedad Andaluza de Entomología' (2006) carried a paper on a beetle species that has been rediscovered on the Rock after more than 100 years. The paper was authored by Charlie Perez and Keith Bensusan of the GONHS. The species is a jewel beetle named *Buprestis (Yamina) sanguinea*, an attractive and rare insect that is found in North Africa and Iberia. Such is the importance of the find that images included in the paper were used as the journal's cover design. The paper commented on the find and speculated on future areas of research in the species, including its taxonomy. Later that year, an extensive review of the species was published by the authors, together with Antonio Verdugo, in the prestigious journal of the 'Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa'. Mr Verdugo is an Andalusian entomologist who is an authority on buprestid beetles and a friend of his co-authors. The article reviews the taxonomic status of *Buprestis sanguinea* and divides it into four subspecies. The beetles from Gibraltar are ascribed to the newly described *Buprestis (Yamina) sanguinea calpetana*. It is named after the Rock and has so far only been recorded from Gibraltar.



30 March 2007

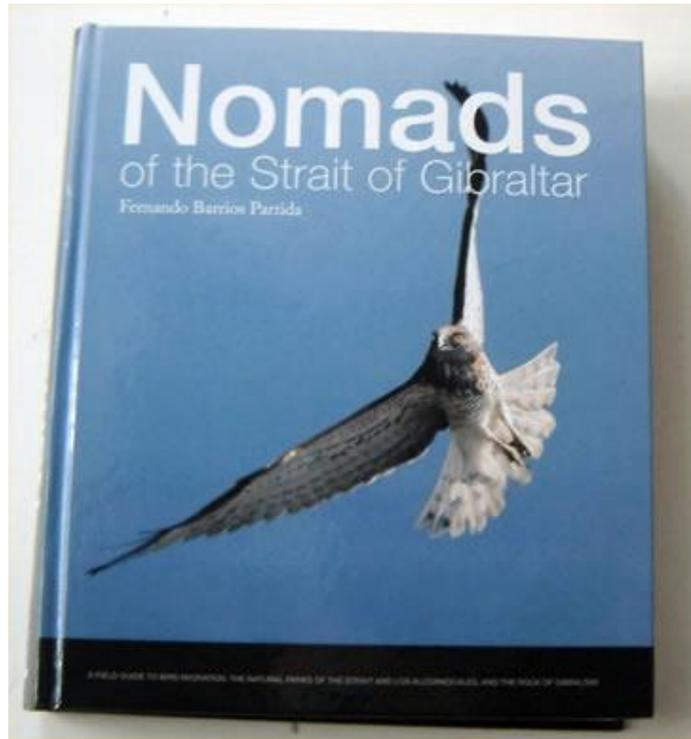
MIGRATION BOOK LAUNCHED

A new book, "Nomads of the Strait of Gibraltar" by naturalist and photographer Fernando Barrios, was launched at the Hotel Reina Christina in Algeciras on Friday as part of an international conference on bird migration and climate change.

In introducing the book, General Secretary of GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) John Cortes, stressed the importance of the region for bird migration and tracked the parallel courses that the author, Fernando Barrios, and Gibraltar-based observers, had charted in observing bird migration on opposite sides of the Bay since the 1960s. He praised the author's extraordinary photographers and the style of the book which is both informative and easy reading.

John Cortes has contributed the chapter on bird migration as viewed from Gibraltar, while guest photographers include Paul Acolina, Leslie Linares and Charles Perez.

An interview (in Spanish) with Fernando Barrios can be found [here](#).



Two versions of the book have been published, one in English and another in Spanish, and the English version will soon be available in bookshops in Gibraltar.

12 February 2007



BirdLife representatives meet with President Barroso

Photo Raff Willems

PRESIDENT BARROSO RECOGNISES BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IS A VITAL PART OF THE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso today gave a strong statement about the importance of biodiversity conservation in Europe at a meeting with representatives from BirdLife International, where a new report - "[Wellbeing Through Wildlife in the EU](#)", for which the President wrote the foreword - was launched.

The President congratulated BirdLife on the publication of the report and emphasised the need to effectively communicate – through real life examples - the positive impact of biodiversity conservation on society and Europe's future.

The EU has committed to halt the loss of wildlife (biodiversity) across the EU by 2010, which Mr Barroso concedes has been extensive. He states in the foreword: "Biodiversity loss, and the consequent decline of ecosystem services, is a grave threat to our societies and economies."

The President further underlined that joint action for biodiversity is "a vital, and indeed vitalising, part of the debate on the future of Europe" and is an area where cooperation at EU level has "real added value", for example through the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of conservation areas, which he sees as one of the key tools of the EU to achieve the 2010 target.

"The conservation of wildlife is critical for the prosperity and quality of life of EU citizens" —President Barroso, President of the European Commission

The new BirdLife report highlights (through 26 concrete case studies from across Europe) the importance of biodiversity for the health, quality of life and prosperity of all EU citizens. It shows how long term economic development relies on environmental resources and functioning ecosystems, how access to green space improves physical and mental health and how education in the natural environment benefits current and future generations.

"Among many others, Europe's agriculture, water supplies, and fisheries all rely on a healthy environment, and whether European societies will be able to adapt to the consequences of climate change will also depend on functioning and diverse ecosystems" said Claire Papazoglou, Head of the European Division of BirdLife International. "Of course we must not forget that we have a moral duty to preserve the diversity of life for future generations, too".

RSPB (BirdLife partner in the UK) economist Aniol Esteban, the principal author of the report, said "EU institutions and Member States must realize that investing in wildlife is investing in citizens' wellbeing. The forthcoming review of the EU budget is a crucial opportunity for the Commission to secure many of these benefits to EU Society."

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) is the BirdLife Partner for Gibraltar, and welcomes President Barroso's comments. GONHS has for years been highlighting the importance of biodiversity to Gibraltar. The declaration last year of two Natura 2000 sites in Gibraltar was a significant step forward in gaining European recognition of Gibraltar's value for biodiversity. GONHS continues to call of the Gibraltar Government to ensure the 2010 commitment is met. Another step forward would be the addition of Gibraltar to the Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve that comprises the protected areas in Spain and Morocco closest to the Straits.

30 January 2007

GONHS CONDEMNS ILLEGAL WORKS

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) condemns illegal works that have been undertaken over the weekend at and near a prime natural history site. The works have been carried out at the base of the Talus slope north of Catalan Bay and have involved digging up of the ground, cutting away at the base of the slope and dumping of sand and gravel over protected species.

These works have been carried out without planning permission and therefore contravene the Town Planning Ordinance, as well as the Nature Protection Ordinance.

GONHS was actively involved in discussion with the developer, OEM, which wishes to locate a concrete plant on the site, and the matter had not yet been through the planning process. However, bulldozers moved on site just before the weekend and worked throughout, despite requests from GONHS to halt the works in the interests of good relations and in view of ongoing discussions.

GONHS has objections to the location of a concrete plant on this prominent site, not only for reasons of nature protection, but also because it will impact strongly and negatively on the visual aspects of the east side, particularly as the corner is turned from the industrial area of Devil's Tower Road. It will also impact negatively on tourism. In addition the effects of cement dust on plants and animals, and most importantly on people, has to be assessed and discussed, and the accessing of heavy lorries in the area of the well known and dangerous "black spot" has to be viewed very seriously.

GONHS would, as is usually its policy, have discussed these matters within the planning process and was in discussion with Government departments, as well as OEM, with a view to constructively offering alternatives. However, in view of the manner of the works that have been carried out, it has had no choice but to make this public statement.



19 January 2007

21st 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 this weekend, 20th and 21st 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.

This is the 21st 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.