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1st October

EuroBirdwatch 2012

About Eurobirdwatch

EuroBirdwatch (European Birdwatch) is the common event organised by the European national organisations of BirdLife International, a global Partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. Since 1993 on the first weekend in October the BirdLife national Partners invite the public to explore the beauty of birds, especially to experience the magic of bird migration. The wide variety of events organised across the European continent include bird watching excursions, special bird watching events on organic farms, contests for children on identifying birds by their song, bird fairs, excursions to watch birds in national parks and many more activities.

The goal is to encourage as many people as possible to go birdwatching over one weekend, and to record sightings of as many as possible of bird species. Another important aim is to give a good reason to bird lovers for meeting and practising birdwatching.

From the observation stands the number of observed birds and the participating people is reported to the national centre of the BirdLife organisation and from there to the European Centre, which is run by one BirdLife partner. From 2011, the Central-Asian countries have been also included in this unique event.

EuroBirdwatch - BirdLife's annual birdwatching event in Europe - works to raise awareness of the issues relating to bird migration, and promotes efforts needed to save threatened bird species and their habitats.

How to participate

Book your time for the 6 October.

Results of Eurobirdwatch 2011

2011 was the largest ever EuroBirdwatch referring to the national events. BirdLife Partners and affiliate organisations from 37 European and Central Asian countries,

participated, organising 2,200 different events. Almost five million birds of different species were counted. Starling , Little Bunting and Crane were the top three species.

Locally, GONHS will once again be hosting EuroBirdwatch, as Gibraltar's BirdLife Partner organisation.

Our events will be centred around the Alameda Botanic Gardens and Europa Point as follows:

SATURDAY 6th OCTOBER 2012

MORNING

BIRD RINGING 8am to around 11am (the sun comes up higher after then) trained bird ringers will be catching birds in mist nets around the gardens and bringing them to a temporary ringing station on top of the Nature Shop at the Grand Parade entrance, where the birds will be identified, measured, weighed and released. This is a good opportunity for members of the public to take photos of wild birds up close.

BIRD WALKS 9am onwards. GONHS members will be leading walks around the Gardens, looking out for local and perhaps migratory birds. There will be a telescope on the bridge over The Dell from where birds can be seen coming in to bathe and drink at a fountain.

RAPTOR DISPLAY (Birds of Prey) - Our RaptorUnit will be bringing a variety of birds down to the walk between the top of the Grand Parade entrance steps and The Cottage, which should include a variety of eagles, hawks and falcons. The team will be setting up the birds at around 1030am.

Please note that in order to avoid unnecessary stress to the birds these will usually be removed after 1200-1230pm, so please don't come late and miss these wonderful birds.

AFTERNOON

SEABIRD WATCH

3pm-6pm from the Europa Point Marine Observatory. Accessible on foot, by car (Europa Point car-park) or free (for pass holders / holders of Gibraltar ID cards) on the route bus from Market Place to Europa Point.

All are most welcome (please note that dogs are not permitted within the Alameda Botanic Gardens)

Please join us on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gonhs/>

For further information please visit the EuroBirdwatch micro-site <http://www.birdlife.cz/index.php?ID=2299>

A4 Poster can be downloaded here <http://bigfiles.birdlife.cz/EBW12/EurobirdwatchA4.jpg> If printed please ask owner's permission before posting.

Press Contact: ebw@gonhs.org

21st August

GONHS fully supports Government's decision not to allow fishing in Gibraltar waters

GONHS is delighted that the Government of Gibraltar has taken on board the findings of the independent Working Group established to analyse fisheries in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

GONHS fully supports this position.

In its Official Release of the 16th August, Government has clearly stated its position not to allow fishing and further added that it will continue to work with the experts involved to develop robust monitoring and assessment programmes to evaluate, manage and protect the marine environment around Gibraltar.

And it is all too clear from the findings of the Preliminary Report why commercial fishing cannot be permitted in Gibraltar under current circumstances, given the lack of complete data sets and critical information on which sound fisheries management measures and actions can be based. In such circumstances, the precautionary principle must always prevail. Monitoring and assessment programmes must focus not only on species targeted by fishermen, but also on the effects of fishing activity on non-target species and the wider environment.

The Spanish fishermen have reacted to this by threatening to recommence fishing, by questioning the findings and validity of the Working Group's report, as well as the integrity of the Group itself, and even by threatening to once again involve the King of Spain in their campaign to fish illegally in our waters.

For those who make a living from fishing, the temptation is always to exploit fisheries in ways that maximise profit. However, ignoring scientific evidence regarding sustainability risks losing resources that are valuable in both conservation and economic terms. Once gone, they will never return.

29th March

GONHS urges Government to stand strong on Nature Protection

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society notes the proceedings of the meeting between the RGP and Spanish fishermen that took place on the 3rd April, and urges the Government to stand firm in the protection of Gibraltar's marine life. It must certainly not acquiesce to terms which, in the fishermen's own admission, were scribbled ad hoc on the back of an envelope during the meeting. GONHS also notes the significant irony in that these fishermen felt that a tacit agreement from 1999, which is illegal, should be upheld when other agreements that were set up using legal instruments under the Cordoba Agreement, and which might have gone some way to protect the environment, are now not recognised by the new Spanish Government. GONHS also notes the extraordinary help afforded to these fishermen by the RGP in the writing of their proposals, their translation and presentation to the Gibraltar Government.

The activities that have been carried out illegally since the infamous 1999

agreement, which allowed a specific subset of fishermen to contravene Gibraltar law, have led to serious deterioration of fish stocks and habitats in Gibraltar waters. They must not continue. Such flagrant disregard for the law of the land is scandalous and seriously detrimental to Gibraltar's marine resources. Government's consent would only make things worse.

GONHS highlights that, if our laws are more stringent than those of the EU, then that is Gibraltar's right. In terms of nature conservation, the EU sets a baseline that member states may then improve on at their discretion. It does not impose the use of any types of nets in a member state's waters; the EU simply prohibits the use of certain nets. It is for Gibraltar to decide whether it wants to take this level of protection any further in order to protect its natural resources. These decisions must be based on the best interests of Gibraltar and its environment and not just outside commercial concerns. They must be made in Gibraltar alone, free of threats or harassment from those outside the Rock.

The Nature Protection Act is not unique in going further than European law. We have especially strict laws on ownership of fast launches and possession of tobacco. Far stricter than the EU's or Spain's. Perhaps Spain would want us to relax these too.

Further to the above, such restrictions on fishing are not particular to Gibraltar. Spain imposes extremely stringent conditions on fishing within parts of her waters, including areas close to Gibraltar. This is also true of other European Countries. For example, Spain imposes even stricter measures on the other side of the bay, where Fishing boats are not allowed to fish at all in the 'Parque Natural del Estrecho' close to Algeciras in order to conserve its marine biodiversity, as well as near Algeciras port and the Refinery for other practical reasons.

GONHS says: "They know they can't get away with fishing in their reserve, but think that by coercion they'll be able to get away with it in ours. We do not see flotillas of fishing boats heading to Punta Carrero in a bid to get the Spanish Government to allow them to break their laws. GONHS is very encouraged to have heard our own Government's position, as relayed in the local press, that it will not compromise on any of Gibraltar's laws in the case of fishing or any other subject. To allow fishing with nets in Gibraltar waters, Government would need to amend the Nature Protection Act (NPA). GONHS are 100% confident that Government would not do this. So far, we have seen positive initiatives from this Government related to the environment and conservation. We are expectant and confident that this will extend to the fishing issue. GONHS stands completely and steadfastly with Government's position that the NPA cannot be contravened to allow commercial fishermen to plunder our marine biodiversity as has happened in the last 13 years."

Gibraltar, with its very limited waters, can ill afford to allow detrimental practices within our waters. Our natural environment is too small and fragile to sustain such damage. We must act to ensure that our biological assets are effectively conserved.

GONHS has for many years been involved in the conservation and improvement of Gibraltar's natural marine resources. It was instrumental in providing advice during the drafting of the Nature Protection Act in 1991 and has gone to great efforts to create reef habitat by building artificial reefs. These are important refuges for sea life and our organisation looks forward to further work on this front for the betterment of our biodiversity and quality of life for residents of the Rock.

26 March

Rhian leading Research on Ants

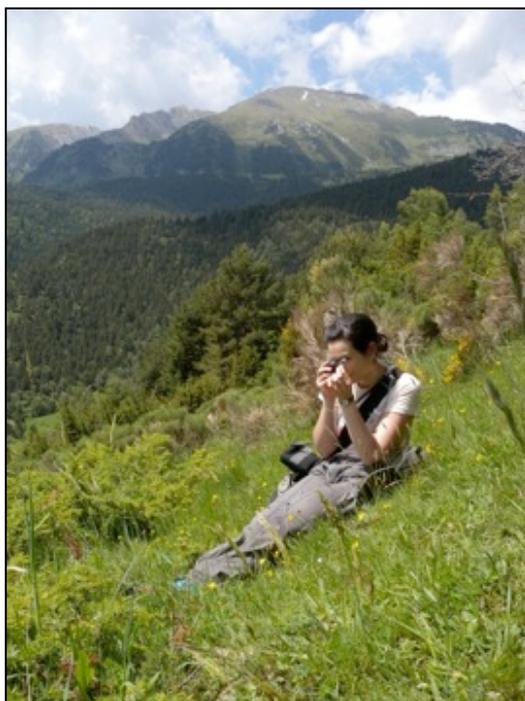
GONHS Invertebrate Section member Rhian Guillem has recently had an important paper entitled "Using chemo-taxonomy of host ants to help conserve the large blue butterfly" published in the prestigious journal *Biological Conservation*. The paper reports the findings of a study, carried out as part of Rhian's PhD with the University of Sheffield, which aimed to simplify identification of ants that are tricked into rearing the Large Blue Butterfly by its caterpillars.

The Large Blue Butterfly is a globally threatened species that became extinct in the UK in 1979. Since then, populations have been reintroduced in Great Britain but its status is still fragile.

As part of its life-cycle, the caterpillar of the butterfly is adopted by *Myrmica* ants, which it tricks by smelling like the larvae of the ants and emitting sounds like a queen ant. However, caterpillars only develop well in the nests of *Myrmica sabuleti*, usually dying in the nests of the closely-related *Myrmica scabrinodis*. These ants are very difficult to tell apart visually, even for trained experts, but Rhian and her team have discovered that hydrocarbons found on the surface of the ant can be used to distinguish the two species. This is crucially important to reintroduction programs, as successful reintroductions depend on the correct proportion of *M. sabuleti* being present at the site.

The new method allows surveys of *Myrmica* ants at proposed reintroduction sites to be carried out accurately and efficiently. The importance of the study is such that *Planet Earth Online*, the online magazine of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), carried an article on it recently, entitled "Ant identification boosts blue butterflies" (see: <http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/news/story.aspx?id=1176>).

Apart from her PhD subject matter, Rhian Guillem has a strong interest in European and Mediterranean ants and has published other papers about ants, some in conjunction with Dr Keith Bensusan, also a GONHS Invertebrate Section member. She has so far recorded an incredible 51 species of ants from Gibraltar, including some that were new to Europe and one that she described as new to science!



Rhian busy identifying ants in the Pyrenees

Rhian's valuable contribution to her area of expertise, and particularly using taxonomic methods to aid in conservation issues, is an excellent example of the great work being conducted by members of GONHS, and the Invertebrates Section has asked Rhian to give a talk about her findings later on this year here in Gibraltar.

The full reference for the paper is:

Guillem RM, Drijfhout FP, Martin SJ. (2012). Using chemo-taxonomy of host ants to help conserve the large blue butterfly. *Biological Conservation*. 148: 39-43. Published online 20 February 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2012.01.066>

21 March 2012

GONHS concerned at Windmill Hill

One of the most important areas in Gibraltar for many species including plants, birds, and many invertebrates (including protected species) is Windmill Hill. Because of this Windmill Hill has been designated as a Site of Community Interest (SCI) under the EU Habitats Directive. This means that any developments or works require a screening process and Appropriate Assessment. And so GONHS was shocked several days ago to see a large area of Windmill Hill where vegetation had been cut down.

This had happened without consultation despite there being an MOD Conservation Group specifically constituted to assess issues of this type, and which despite GONHS' several attempts to ensure MOD's use of the Group, MOD has for several

years now, shown no interest in doing so. In addition, the Ministry for the Environment were unaware of the works and upon further enquiries, it transpired that the MOD, through Defence Land Agents, had authorised this without consultation, because the Navy requires the erection of a very large aerial in the area.

This is not the first time that the MOD has initiated works at this site without proper consultation, either with GONHS or the Gibraltar Government and GONHS calls on the MOD to stop the works with immediate effect, and asks the Government of Gibraltar to ensure that the MOD follows due process to guarantee that the ecological diversity and well-being of the area is safeguarded.

A spokesperson for GONHS stated that: 'GONHS will find out the legal position regarding the MOD's commencement of works without following required processes under the EU Habitats Directive. We don't want a repetition of this type of incident in the future. And we will be monitoring very closely what happens with this case. There are enough threats to our wildlife that come from outside Gibraltar, without the need to have to be fighting with those that are home-grown.'

14 March 2012

GONHS welcomes Government's position on the 1991 NPA

GONHS very much welcomes the Government's position on the 1991 Nature Protection Act as confirmed by the Minister for Health and the Environment, Dr John Cortes, who has stated that "the Government stands firmly by the provisions of the 1991 Nature Protection Act and [that] the RG Police is aware of this".

GONHS further welcomes that the Minister has declared, in reply to questions from the press relating to the Fishing Agreement with Spain, that Government does not accept that agreements can be reached by politicians that supersede the laws of Gibraltar without legislative change.

A spokesperson for GONHS Council stated that, "It is about time that the provisions of the 1991 Nature Protection Act were given the serious attention they deserve. The Act is there to make sure Gibraltar's natural heritage is protected and preserved and had this Act been adequately enforced previously, Gibraltar would not be in the bizarre situation where the Spanish Government was able to designate a marine reserve (Site of Community Interest) within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters (BGTW).

It is also important to remember that it was GONHS that originally identified this incompatibility of designation."

7 February 2012

Great Cormorant Death Condemned by GONHS

On the 6th February, a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was found dead at the marina at Ocean Village. The bird was found floating on the water's surface with a hook in its bill. It had apparently taken a fish that was being used as live bait on a line with multiple hooks, which had been left in the water within the marina, possibly targeting the currently healthy population of European Seabass *Dicentrarchus labrax* in this area.



The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society is extremely concerned that this indiscriminate fishing method is being employed. The use of lines with multiple hooks offers little chance for populations of fish such as Sea Bass to flourish in these areas and poses a grave threat to non-target species, such as seabirds that feed on fish. The Sea Bass and other fish species currently use this marina as a spawning ground and are doing well here despite having experienced declines around other parts of Gibraltar. The incident was brought to GONHS' attention by the Gibraltar Federation of Sea Anglers (GFSA), an organisation that has strong concerns regarding the matter and which GONHS thanks for its assistance. GONHS has brought the matter to the attention of the RGP and urges them to take effective action to stop this practice. Great Cormorants breed in Central and Northern Europe and winter in our area. Once a rare sight in Gibraltar waters, they are now quite common around the Rock outside of the breeding season. The killing of all birds is illegal in Gibraltar without a licence.

5 February 2012

GONHS Council Meets Minister for Health and the Environment

On Thursday 2nd February GONHS Council met with the Minister of the Environment, Dr John Cortes. The Minister, who until recently had been the General Secretary of GONHS, had expressed the wish to meet with NGOs as a part of Government's commitment of openness and transparency.

The one hour and 15 minute meeting was very positive and a wide array of issues related to the environment and conservation were discussed. Significantly, the Minister was aware of the issues and he committed to working in conjunction with GONHS for the resolution of problems and to facilitate the input GONHS would have in these issues. Further, the Minister indicated that GONHS would have access to staff in the Department of the Environment, so vastly improving lines of communication with that department and GONHS, creating a productive working relationship.

The Minister also committed to meeting with Council on a quarterly basis, providing a valuable mechanism by which Council is able to brief him of issues and concerns and also to discuss these. With avenues of collaboration and consultation once again open with Government, the new General Secretary, Mr Charles Perez, said that Council was very encouraged that it would be able to more effectively and efficiently undertake its principal aim of ensuring the conservation, and research into, the natural history of Gibraltar.

1 February 2012

New GONHS Council Elected

At a well attended Annual General Meeting held at the Alameda Botanic Garden's Cottage on the 25th January 2012, the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) elected a new Council. Elections to GONHS' Council are held every two years under the Society's Constitution and the following members were re-elected to Council: Paul Acolina, Harry Vangils, Jean Paul Latin, Jill Yeoman and Albert Yome.

Charles Perez was elected to Council, relinquishing his post as head of the Strait of Gibraltar Bird Observatory (SGB0), which is now headed by Dr Keith Bensusan. He in turn has passed his responsibilities as head of the Invertebrates Section to Dr Alex Menez, who although a long established member is a newcomer to the Council.

Other Section heads remain unchanged, and these are Leslie Linares (Botanical Section), Richard Durrell (Caves and Cliffs Section), Eric Shaw (Marine Section) and Vincent Robba (Raptor Unit). Section heads also form part of the Society's Council, but are ex-officio members and are nominated by the each section's members.

At a Council meeting held on 31st January 2012, Charles Perez was unanimously endorsed as the Society's new General Secretary.