

2013 Press Releases

21 November 2013

Spanish fishing boat fined

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has welcomed the £600 fine imposed recently imposed on the captain of the Spanish fishing boat, Divina Providencia for the offence of fishing with rakes contrary to the current provisions of the Nature Protection Act 1991 (NPA).

It calls on HM Government of Gibraltar not to give in to Spanish incursions by weakening our robust wildlife protection laws and further urges the Commissioner of Police to enforce the provisions of the NPA in BGTW and on land.

GONHS also reiterates its previous request in April this year, that the Royal Navy assist those charged with upholding the law, by providing the necessary security for them to undertake their duties.

European Birdwatch 2013 Saturday 5th October

EuroBirdwatch13 - 20 Years for the Migratory Birds and Their Flyways

Millions of migrating birds will leave Europe in these weeks flying to their wintering places in Africa. Birds overcome thousands of miles and many dangers along their flyways. For the 20th time already, BirdLife International invites people in Europe to take the opportunity on 5/6 October 2013 to discover the fascinating world of bird migration.

The biggest event of the BirdLife partners in Europe celebrates its 20-year anniversary. Since 1993, EuroBirdwatch has attracted tens of thousands of participants each year, sharing in diverse activities or just simply observing the birds as they migrate southwards. This year, the national partners of BirdLife International of 33 countries in Europe and Central Asia invite people

to observe the birds and hear interesting facts about bird migration and threats they face during their journeys. In most countries people will find observation and information posts where everyone can share the knowledge on migratory birds and their flyways.

The majority of the migrating birds are in danger because of land use changes and climatic changes in their breeding and wintering areas and on the crucial stopovers. Therefore BirdLife Partnership is pleased by the number of people fascinated by bird migration, which is rising every year. Only joint action of many people and nations can halt the adverse trend.

For the migrating bird species the existence of suitable breeding areas in the north, saving stopovers on the flyway and appropriate habitats in the wintering regions are vitally important. The aim of EuroBirdwatch13 is to raise awareness for the beauty of bird migration and the needs of the birds taking part in it.

The European Birdwatch is an annual event comprising hundreds of nationally organised activities. On these observation posts the number of birds and participating people are counted and reported via the national centres to the European centre. Last year around 70'000 people took part in 34 countries and more than six million birds were observed on this single weekend.

In 2013 the Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia is acting as the European Centre to process these data. Since 1993, the event has been coordinated by Fritz Hirt (SVS/BirdLife Switzerland) who was one of the initiators of EuroBirdwatch. Among other merits, this was one of the reasons BirdLife International awarded him the Honorary Membership in 2013. The deed of membership was handed to Fritz Hirt by Princess Takamado in the course of BirdLife International's world congress in Ottawa.

In Gibraltar, as the local BirdLife International Partner, the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) will be organising several events, which are open to the public.

The first of these will be a bird ringing demonstration at the Alameda Botanic Gardens, where migratory and other birds will be caught using mist nets and then ringed by licensed bird ringers, with specific measurements being taken, before being released back into the wild.

Later, the Raptor Unit will host a bird of prey display and the unit members will be on hand to provide further information on how each bird is cared for by the unit, which in addition to rehabilitation also breeds rare birds of prey such as the Lesser Kestrel for subsequent release into the wild.

In the afternoon, observers will be at the Europa Point Marine Observatory looking for birds (and cetaceans) in the Strait of Gibraltar.

Key times and locations (all Saturday 5th October 2013)

8am-11am Bird Ringing – on top of the Nature Shop; up Heathfield Steps and left at the entrance to the Alameda Botanic Gardens.

10.30am-12.30pm Bird of Prey Display – between the top of Heathfield Steps and The Cottage.

Please remember that dogs are not allowed within the gardens.

3pm – 6pm - Europa Point Marine Observatory. Below and to the left of the Harding's Battery mound.

For further information on European Birdwatch please visit:

<http://www.gonhs.org/>

<http://ebw2013.vtaky.sk/>

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organizations working in more than 120 countries, which, together, form the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting bird life.

GONHS Concerned at NPA Amendment

GONHS is concerned at reports that the Government of Gibraltar may be taking steps to allow fishing with nets and the raking of sea-beds within BGTW. While the amendment to the Nature Protection Act (NPA) currently proposed does not in itself allow such activity, its introduction suggests that this may be a possibility in the future.

The Society is concerned that any such action could lead to unregulated fishing continuing, given the practical difficulties of enforcement. Licensed fishing and quotas would be as difficult to enforce as the current legislation and they would accrue the additional burdens of having to run a licensing system, check boats and perhaps land catches regularly to ensure that licensees are keeping to their quotas. This appears onerous and unnecessary when Gibraltar itself does not have any commercial fishing activity.

GONHS is especially concerned that some of these fishing practices are extremely destructive to marine habitats, especially unregulated raking, and that a relaxation of fishing laws would lead to further deterioration of Gibraltar's marine habitats. All of this would, if allowed, take place whilst 'no fishing' zones are enforced in protected areas in nearby Spain, including the Bay and Strait of Gibraltar themselves.

It urges the Government to resist allowing any commercial fishing. A temptation to do so should be considered within the context of the difficulties of policing an effective licensing regime and exclusion zones, without which we will continue to experience deterioration of marine habitats and resources.

It is vital that Gibraltar's marine resources are managed carefully in order to ensure proper protection, enhancement and sustainable use of Gibraltar's biodiversity and that of the wider region.

GONHS also urges the Government to continue creating new habitats and enhancing existing ones, including increasing the extent of artificial reefs. The planned marine regulations controlling diving and fishing should be introduced without delay.

Calpe 2013 Conference Caves as Archives

The world around us is in constant flux, but each human lifetime offers an insignificant snapshot within an enormous timescale. Even the accumulated experience represented by recorded history is but a small drop in the vast ocean of deep time. But how do we access the datasets required for detailed scientific enquiry at such an enormous temporal scale?

This year's Calpe Conference, jointly organised by the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) and the Gibraltar Museum aims to answer this question. It will do so by exploring the full extent of information that can be gathered when caves are treated as archives of a changing planet. Gibraltar is at the forefront of some of these areas of research: the Gibraltar Museum and the GONHS Cave Science Unit are, together with their international collaborators, important players in the fields of archaeology, geomorphology and climate science. The local teams and international participants will be delivering what promises to be a far-ranging, insightful and exciting Calpe Conference.

The conference structure has been slightly modified on this occasion by having an introductory day in which speakers will address aspects of Gibraltar's geology and caves in a manner that will be accessible to as wide a public as possible. The day will be a synthesis of all the work that has been carried out over several decades but it will also look towards the future and research into fields that we are only just embarking on now. Saturday 14th September has been picked for this day so as to allow as many people, who might be otherwise at work, to attend. The programme will continue from Sunday 15th to Tuesday 17th September, with an excursion on Wednesday 18th.

Further information and registration forms may be obtained from the Gibraltar Museum (Tel: 200 74289) or its website <http://www.gibmuseum.gi>. The conference, as in previous years, is free for local residents.

Editors: Contacts for further information
Dr Keith Bensusan, kbensusan@gonhs.org
Professor Clive Finlayson at the Gibraltar Museum or at

clive.finlayson@gibmuseum.gi

GONHS welcomes the Fishing Report

GONHS Council is pleased that the long-awaited fishing report has finally been published.

The report concludes and vindicates what GONHS has always maintained: that Gibraltar's environmental protection laws are sound. It also states that there are insufficient data on fishing stocks and the state of the marine habitats, and in these cases the well-established precautionary principle must prevail.

GONHS is confident that once the Gibraltar Government has considered these recommendations, and includes these as an active component of the marine management plan, together with the forthcoming legislative measures, that these will form the basis of future protection and conservation that will enhance the marine environment.

We welcome Government's plans to regulate marine recreational activities in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner. We look forward to an increase in resources for environmental protection and enforcement, and eagerly await monitoring strategies that will provide baseline data of the current state of our marine resources, that will enable Gibraltar to meet its environmental obligations.

GONHS would like to thank the authors and the working group that worked tirelessly in the production of this report.

GONHS Council

GONHS Supports Dr Tydeman's comments

GONHS has followed with interest the comments submitted by Dr Chris Tydeman to the Environmental Audit Committee of the House of Commons on the 17th April, as well as reactions to those comments locally.

Dr Tydeman has a very extensive and impressive curriculum vitae and has ample experience regarding the relationship between the UK and its Overseas Territories in his role as Chairman of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF). Furthermore, he was Chief Scientist with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and established its international marine programme. He also has extensive experience working with the EU and his

conservation work has often included considerable overlap with politics, as is to be expected. He is therefore in a very good position to assess political situations regarding wildlife conservation and comment on these.

Apart from more general statements relating to the Overseas Territories generally, Dr Tydeman commented at length on a resistance to use the Royal Navy for fisheries protection in British Gibraltar Waters. The opinion expressed by Dr Tydeman, namely that the British Government values good relations with Spain far more than it does the interests of Gibraltar, is widely-held among the Gibraltarian public, so it should not come across as controversial locally. The Royal Navy's inaction in adequately protecting local fisheries is difficult to explain in any other context, given that the Navy actually includes a 'Fishery Protection Squadron' that operates in UK waters and British waters around the Falklands. The Royal Navy itself states that the primary task of the squadron "is its involvement in the highly emotive and politically sensitive UK and European fishing industry" (for more, see: <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/Operations/Enduring-Operations/UK/Fishery-Protection>). The Royal Navy's failure to protect fisheries around Gibraltar does therefore raise very legitimate questions.

The comments on the role of the Governor, which have attracted much interest in Gibraltar, were not in fact submitted to the Environmental Audit Committee by Dr Tydeman. These were included in a report that published the proceedings of a workshop held by the UKOTCF in October 2012 on the subject of the UK Government's 'White Paper' on its Overseas Territories. The report clearly refers to the office and role of the Governor in relation to the British Government and not Sir Adrian Johns as an individual (the report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/Workshop2012Proceedings06b.pdf>).

GONHS does not doubt Sir Adrian's commitment to Gibraltar, although it regrets that the Convent simply stated that Dr Tydeman's comments do not reflect the Governor's "public position", rather than providing a more robust and unequivocal statement.

GONHS is extremely concerned with Dr Tydeman's statement to the Committee that he has received "less-than-thinly-veiled hints" from British officials that his report should allow Spanish fishing in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. If this is truly an issue of fishing, such an opinion should be based on scientific data regarding the state of our fisheries and not on wider political considerations, especially when these are taken by Britain in favour of Spain's interests and against those of Gibraltar.

In any case, the Nature Protection Act 1991 is the law currently in force in Gibraltar and GONHS calls on the Royal Navy to assist those charged with upholding the law to do so.