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04 December

Annual General Meeting 7th December 2006, John Mackintosh Hall, 7pm

The first Annual General Meeting of the Society under its new (2005) Constitution took place on Thursday 7th December. The annual accounts were presented as was the General Secretary's Report for 2006.

4 December 2006

Barcelona Visit



Leslie Linares (left) and John Cortes (right) with Institute Director Alfonso Susana in the Herbarium

GONHS joined forces with the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens in a visit to the Botanical Institute at Barcelona and its Director, Alfonso Susana last week. The main purpose of the visit was to to expand GIBMANATUR, the collaborative project under Interreg IIIA Gibraltar-Morocco run jointly by the Society and the Institut Scientifique of the Universite Mohammed V Rabat-Agdal, to include laboratory work by the Barcelona Institute. This will look at the genetic relationships between plants on both sides of the Straits. The team was also able to carry out research in the Institute's Herbarium and later visited Barcelona Botanic Garden. The party from Gibraltar was made of of Dr John Cortes, GONHS General Secretary and Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Garden, Brian Lamb, Curator, and Leslie Linares, who heads the Botanical Section of GONHS.



Brian Lamb poses next to *Euphorbia lambii* in the Canary island section of Barcelona Botanic Garden

20 November

Gibraltar, Nature's Mountain Biodiversity Photo book published on 5th December 2006

This extraordinary book celebrates Gibraltar's large variety of plants and animals – its Biodiversity – in a collection of fascinating photographs by photographers from Gibraltar and the surrounding area. It is a unique opportunity to own and take home part of Gibraltar's natural history while helping to conserve it, as all proceed will go towards nature conservation.

The book makes a wonderful and exciting gift and will be on sale for £30. Order by e-mail to [gonhs at gonhs.org](mailto:gonhs@gonhs.org) .



Gibraltar, Nature's Mountain

Fernando Barrios

18 November

Brownies go Batty

On Friday 17 November 2006, GONHS and the Alameda Botanic Gardens hosted a visit by the 11th Brownie pack led by their Guider Angela Attias. A group of 15 brownies arrived at the Open Air Theatre on a cool, but clear night, which was welcome following several days of rain and which would have resulted in a 'no show' by the bats. "Lights, detector, action!" Almost on cue, shortly after sunset and the detector set to 55kHz, the first Soprano pipistrelle made its first appearance. Hawking over the pine trees around the theatre and suddenly banking to catch flying insects, this very small bat (weight about 5g) was the first bat ever seen by most of the girls. Getting the girls to listen quietly to the sounds being produced by the detector's small speaker was a sterner challenge, but in turn their enthusiasm paid off and all were able to listen to the calls through the detector. The human ear can only detect sounds up to 20kHz, so the ultrasound is transformed into a 'heterodyne' signal, which humans can interpret. Later in the evening several faster, larger bats, also echolocating in the 55kHz swooped over the Theatre pond to catch moths that had been attracted by the light. These were Schreiber's bats, which generally venture out later than pipistrelles. GONHS is delighted at the interest shown by the Brownies and continues to make efforts to involve children in the nature through efforts such as this and other events. We would like to thank Mrs Attias and the brownies themselves for what was an enjoyable evening for all of us. If you know of a group that is interested in nature and would like to have GONHS organise an activity, or deliver one of its talks on a wide variety of nature related subjects, please contact us on Tel.72639 or visit our [Contacts Page](#).



Albert Yome brandishing the bat detector

16 November

End of Year Events

As Gibraltar Biodiversity Year comes to an end there are still several events planned that will see the culmination of what has been a very busy year for the Society.

The photographic exhibition in combination with the Gibraltar Photographic Society, will open at the John Mackintosh Hall on Tuesday 5th December at 7pm, and all members are welcome. The exhibition will be open for a week from that date. At the same time we will be publishing all these stunning photographs in a book (which will make an excellent Christmas present!). These will be available on the night for a special price of £25 (usual retail price will be £30).

On Thursday 7th December, also at 7pm, we will be holding the Society's Annual General Meeting. The agenda items will be the presentation of a summary of accounts for the last financial year and the General Secretary's Annual Report. In keeping with our constitution, no elections to Council are necessary until next year.

There will also be a drinks evening on Saturday 2nd December at 7pm at *All's Well* in Casemates Square.

16 November

Tree Planting and Gibraltar Campion re-population

After the first heavy rains of the season the time was ripe for replanting projects. Seedlings of the Gibraltar Campion *Silene tomentosa* grown in Gibraltar Botanic Gardens were transferred to a suitable location high up on the Upper Rock. The site chosen, close to the summit of the Rock, is located on a north facing cliff just below O'Hara's Battery, where there is still the only surviving specimen in the wild, that was planted many years ago. The botanists Leslie Linares and Arthur Harper were accompanied by the members of the

Cliffs and Caves section of GONHS, Jean-Paul Latin and John Balestrino who carried out the precarious task of climbing down the vertical cliffs at the top of Mediterranean Steps, to plant the Campion in suitable ledges. This is the second year in which plants have been re-introduced back into the wild, the first on Windmill Hill, where several plants were planted on a rocky outcrop. It is hoped that, through these efforts, natural propagation will take place again and the species will maintain a viable wild population.



Jean-Paul Latin planting the Gibraltar Campion



Leslie Linares looks on at John Balestrino's efforts

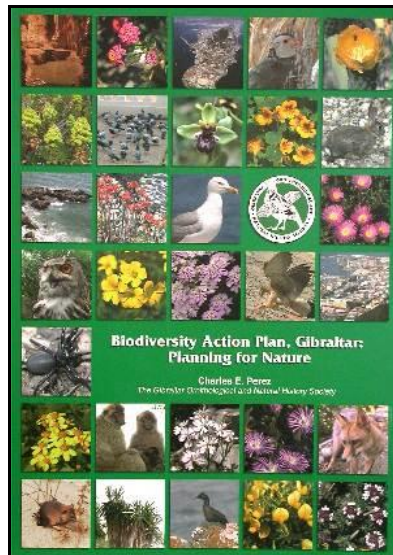
As part of the GONHS activities planned throughout the year November was identified as the ideal month in which to plant pine trees on the Upper Rock. A combination of twenty sapling Stone Pines *Pinus pinea* and Aleppo Pines *Pinus halepensis* were selected and on Saturday the 11th, a group of members of the society planted the trees along Martin's Path within the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. A number of trees of this species had been lost during the severe three year drought between 1995 and 1997, and the southern end of the Rock was the worst affected and lost most of its Pine trees.



Tree-planting team: A. Yome, J. Cortes, C. Perez, R. Wheeler and A. Abrines

31 October

Biodiversity Action Plan launched



GONHS launched its Biodiversity Action Plan *Planning for Nature*, at a news conference at the John Mackintosh Hall this morning, attended by developers, professionals, NGOs and representatives from some Government departments.

The presentation was made by the report's author, Charles Perez, who went through its history and its chapters and ended by reminding those present that we only get one chance at getting biodiversity conservation right.

The Action Plan included contributions also from Keith Bensusan, Leslie Linares, John Cortes, Eric Shaw, Alex Menez, Terence Ocaña, Darren Fa, Albert Yome and Arthur Harper. Funding for the work was provided under the Overseas Territories Environment Programme. It is an extensive, 192 page document that covers Gibraltar's international obligations, key species and habitats, and alien species.

It describes much of Gibraltar's key wildlife, analyses the threats faced, and provides solutions. It is intended as a resource to be used by planners, developers, the Ministry of Defence and Government departments with a view to ensuring biodiversity conservation in Gibraltar.

Copies of the *Biodiversity Action Plan, Gibraltar - Planning for Nature*, will be on sale at The Nature Shop, Casemates Square, Gibraltar and The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, priced £7.50.



Some of the guests at the launch



Charlie Perez presents the Action Plan with Leslie Linares

31 October

The Autumn Grape Hyacinth a new species of flowering plant for Gibraltar

A new flowering plant for Gibraltar was discovered yesterday growing in one of the flower beds of the Alameda Botanic Gardens. The plant, the **Autumn Grape Hyacinth** *Muscari parviflorum*, a wild flower, was found yesterday by the curator of the gardens Mr. Brian Lamb growing in a corner of the Tree Aloe bed and is composed of several plants tightly bunched as shown in the photographs. It was duly identified by the botanic members of the 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 Vasculare de Andalucia Occidental' by Valdes and is therefore also a new species for region. This plant is found in the Mediterranean area from Spain to Turkey and from Egypt to Algeria but is not mentioned from Morocco.



A section of the community of Autumn Grape Hyacinth found growing under the Tree Aloe in the Alameda Botanic gardens.



Detail of the flowers.

30 October

ESG present a film on Global Climate Change

The Environmental Safety Group are to present the film 'An **Inconvenient** truth A Global **Warning**' on the catastrophic effects of Global warming and climate change at the John Mackintosh Hall on Wednesday 8th November showing at 06:30pm and 09:30pm. Tickets are priced at £4:00 and can be obtained in advance at the Nature Shop 1st floor of Casemates or on the night.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY GROUP PRESENTS

an inconvenient truth

A GLOBAL WARNING

By far the most terrifying film you will ever see

"Powerful, intelligent and surprisingly entertaining, Gore presents a compelling case. You'll believe a film can change the world"
Empire Magazine 5/5

"Essential viewing"
The Times

"A fascinating film"
The Guardian

"You HAVE to see this film"
The Sun

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Event Produced by the Environmental Safety Group

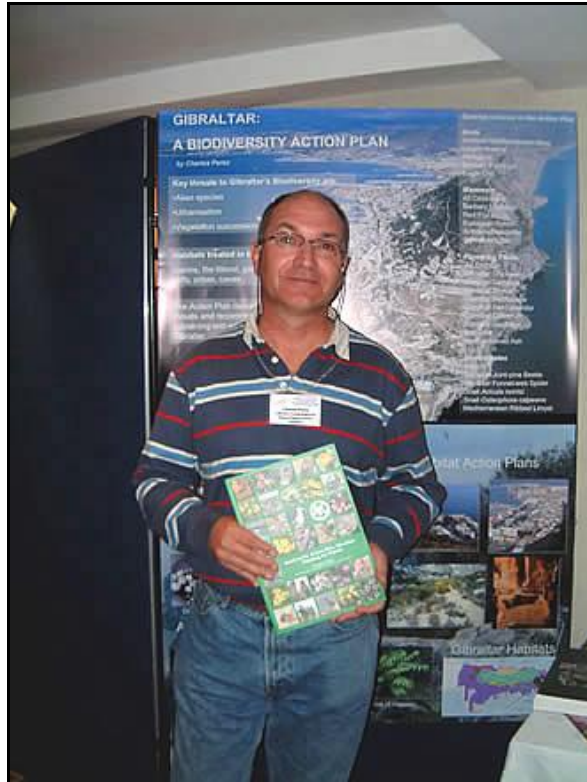
© 2006 Environmental Safety Group. All rights reserved. This is a promotional poster for the film 'An Inconvenient Truth'.

17 October

Biodiversity Action Plan Launch

The '*Gibraltar Biodiversity Action Plan, Planning for Nature*', prepared by GONHS Biodiversity Officer Charles Perez a part of the Gibraltar Biodiversity Project which was funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, will be launched at a Press Presentation on Tuesday 31st October 2006. A preview for GONHS Members will be held at the Cottage in the Botanic Gardens at 7.30pm on Monday 30th October.

A UK preview was held at the L'Horizon Hotel in Jersey, during the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Conference *Biodiversity That Matters* (6th - 12th October 2006).



Charlie Perez at L'Horizon Hotel in Jersey
with the Gibraltar Biodiversity Action Plan

29 September

Bat Evening Success

Twenty-one people took part in last night's inaugural Bat Evening at the Alameda Botanic Gardens. After meeting at 8pm we moved to the Open Air Theatre where some of the stage lights were used to provide some illumination and to attract moths. With participants sat down as if to watch one of the regularly held shows, we waited for the onset of darkness and the bats. Yet it was two Peregrines calling overhead in what appeared to be a territorial dispute (irony not lost) that provided the opening scene. The two Ravens also made low passes over the Theatre before the bat detector picked up the first echolocation calls. The bat detector had been set to 55KHz, thereby "listening out" for the Soprano pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*. These were seen and heard frequently thereafter and we took turns to hold the detector, pointing it at passing bats to obtain a stronger signal. We later rest the frequency to 45KHz in order to "listen" for the other likely pipistrelle, the Common pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. After picking up several calls, which could have been on the lower range of *P. pygmaeus* a further strong call was received on that frequency, which we believe confirmed a new species for Gibraltar, namely the Common pipistrelle. Later, large bats were seen flying faster and more directly over the pond. These were echolocating at 55KHz too, though with a different pulse, indicating that these were Schreiber's bats, *Miniopterus schreibersii*. An enjoyable evening was had by all and there was even talk of establishing a bat group within GONHS. Going batty.

25 September

Man arrested for ape shooting

A man has been arrested for allegedly shooting [Pixie](#), Gibraltar's oldest Barbary macaque. He is facing charges under the Nature Protection Ordinance and various firearms offences. The man appeared in the Gibraltar Magistrates' Court this morning, and the case has been adjourned to 8th November.

21 September

Robert Wheeler Photographic Exhibition

Bob Wheeler, one of the the most active GONHS volunteers, will be holding an exhibition of photographs at the Garrison Library, Gibraltar, from Wednesday 4th October to Friday 13th October, open during weekdays between 10am and 6pm. It will contain a selection of natural history and landscapes as well as "then and now" shots of Gibraltar.

17 September

Clean up the World: Scrap Metal Wins

On Saturday, 16th September, as part of Clean up the World (co-ordinated locally by the Environmental Safety Group) GONHS volunteers worked hard all day to clear litter from various sites along the Upper Rock. To this end they were joined by members of staff of the Ministry for the Environment, including Environment Minister Jaime Netto, Chief Technical Officer Michael Gil and Principal Secretary Albert Bruzon, as well as by two teams of volunteers from the public. Areas cleaned included the approaches to Lower St Michael's Cave, Martin's Path, Mediterranean Road, Spur Battery Road and Spur Battery, New Queen's Road and the environs of the Cable Car top station. GONHS Caves & Cliffs Section removed accretions from within Lower St Michael's Cave. The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens supported the effort with equipment and use of two pick-up vans.



Volunteers from GONHS, the Ministry for the Environment and the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens collecting litter.

There were ten trips to the collection point by well-filled vans, of which six consisted mainly of scrap metal. Some of this was clearly decades old, but there were clear signs of more recent dumping of electrical fittings and appliances such as refrigerators, by unscrupulous contractors near lower St Michael's and the Cable Car.

This was part of a Gibraltar-wide effort by different groups and organisations, and itself part the the global Clean up the World Weekend.



The GONHS Caves & Cliffs vehicle
on its way to the collection point

2 September

Biodiversity Photographic Exhibition

Over 600 photographs were submitted by over twenty photographers from Gibraltar and Spain, from which a difficult process has led to the selection of 200 for the exhibition, which is now being prepared and will be held towards the end of the year.

4 August

Seal in the Bay of Gibraltar

A seal has been seen in Gibraltar waters. The animal was first reported on the 28th July by a Spanish birdwatcher who saw what he thought was a seal submerging off the cliffs just north of Europa Point. The seal did not reappear and the sighting remained unconfirmed. A week later, on the 3rd August the Dolphin tour boat 'Dolphin Adventure' sighted the seal just off the North Mole between the bunkering ship and the Spanish Mole. All on board had good views of the animal and comparison to reference books suggested the seal's identity as a Mediterranean Monk seal, although this is being confirmed using photographs taken at the time. The seal was seen once again on 6th August.

This may be the first confirmed sighting of the Mediterranean Monk Seal *Monachus monachus* in Gibraltar waters, although there was another report about 20 years ago by a diver. The Mediterranean monk seal is listed as critically endangered by IUCN (The World Conservation Union). This species is also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Extremely sensitive to human disturbance, today the Mediterranean monk seal numbers between 300- 500 animals, which are mainly found around the Black Sea and the Adriatic coasts and islands of Croatia. The nearest populations to Gibraltar are possibly in isolated points on the Atlantic coast of Morocco.

If it turns out to be another species of seal, then it will have had to have come from the North Atlantic, making the record interesting in other ways!

23 July

Ruppell's Vulture at Gibraltar

A Ruppell's Vulture was seen at 15:45hrs on the 23rd July 2006. This is the first record of this species in Gibraltar. The vulture was seen approaching from the west, presumably having arrived across the Strait of Gibraltar with the favourable westerly winds that day. It flew over the heads of a couple of observers who happened to be in the area at the time. The vulture flew onto the balcony of the Europa Point lighthouse where it stayed for a few minutes allowing close scrutiny by observers K. Bensusan and T. Jesty that led to the confirmation that the bird was a Ruppell's Vulture. Other observers arrived at the scene to photograph the bird that then flew to an adjacent building close to the main road and attracted the interest of passers-by. The Ruppell's Vulture remained on the roof all night and then transferred to the roof of the Shrine close by. At mid-day it flew north over town and soared over the northern end of the Rock where it remained over Rock Gun, chased by Yellow-legged Gulls. It was last seen there at 14:45hrs.

Ruppell's Vulture has been recorded frequently in the Tarifa area in late summer and autumn in the past few years, with at least seven different individuals in August/September 2005. One tired individual was also caught on arrival across the Strait at Tarifa on the 26/05/2003, confirming the arrival of these birds from Africa; a recent phenomenon. (*Rare Birds in Spain*. [Recent Reports: June 2003](#))



Ruppell's Vulture

T. Jesty/GONHS

[Ruppell's Vulture Photo Gallery:](#)

5 June

Online Rarities Submission Form

A rarities form based on the Association of European Rarities Committees' form has been adopted and attached to the Rarities Panel page for ease of use. The form can be filled in online and can then be saved and should be Emailed to [records at gonhs.org](mailto:records@gonhs.org). A list of birds not requiring a description is found in the Rarities Panel page. Relevant field notes, sketches and photos can be scanned and sent to the above address or mailed to GONHS P.O. Box 843 Gibraltar. The form can be uploaded from [here](#).

8 June 2006

Environmental Talk

The next talk organised by GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), the last in the spring series, will be held next Tuesday 13th June at 8.30pm at the John Mackintosh Hall.

It will be given by Janet Howitt, of the Environmental Safety Group (ESG) and will have the title of *The role of the Community in Environmental Management*. All are welcome.

11 May 2006

A Talk on the Upper Rock

Keith Bensusan, Co-ordinator of the Society's Invertebrate Section, and co-author of the Upper Rock Guide and the Upper Rock Management Plan, will be giving a talk next Tuesday 16th May at 8.30pm at the John Mackintosh Hall entitled "A walk on the Upper Rock". Keith will be taking his audience through an illustrated walk through the paths and habitats of the Upper Rock, interpreting their plants and animals, and painting a vivid picture of the natural riches of Gibraltar's first nature reserve.

It is one of the many events that are being organised in connection with Gibraltar Biodiversity Year 2006.

Keith's knowledge and experience are a guarantee that this talk is one not to be missed.

23 April 2006

Earth Day Events

Earth Day was marked in Gibraltar on 22nd April by GONHS, the Environmental Safety Group (ESG) and Friends of the Earth (Gibraltar). The three organisations manned display stands between them at Casemates Square and John Mackintosh Square on Saturday from 10am to 1.30pm. GONHS concentrated its display on Gibraltar's Biodiversity. The stands attracted strong interest from the general public, who availed themselves of GONHS publications and display material. Most importantly, several new members signed up to GONHS, whilst many others took membership forms away to complete.

The organisations have called on the day being marked by declaring it an Exhaust Free Day and call on everyone not to use vehicles for that day.

Upper Rock Guide Launched

GONHS has launched a new Guide to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, as part of a European Regional Development Fund Project co-funded by the EU and the Gibraltar Government. It is primarily a guide to the natural history of the nature reserve but also includes reference to structures of cultural heritage interest. Compiled by Charles Perez and Keith Bensusan, it includes photographs by Leslie Linares and Eric Shaw as well as the authors, and illustrations of butterflies and special flowers by Christian Hook. Plans of three of the main paths on the Upper Rock have been designed by Dylan Rocca.

Copies of the Guide will be circulated free of charge to GONHS members and to tour operators and tourist sites and are available at The Nature Shop on Casemates or at the Botanic Gardens.

The guide is available as a PDF  document.

31 January 2006

Bird Flu: Reply to GSPCA

In statements to the Gibraltar media, published in [Panorama](#) and the [Gibraltar Chronicle](#), and carried in GBC News, Iain Caine, An Inspector with the Gibraltar Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, criticised the decision of Government, on the advice of the Avian Flu Committee, to cull feral pigeons. Mr Caine claimed there had been a lack of consultation and scientific evidence to warrant such a cull. GONHS and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic have responded to the criticisms by way of a letter sent to both Panorama and to the Gibraltar Chronicle. The text of these letters is given below:

Dear Sir

Contrary to the impression given by Iain Caine of GSPCA, the decision to cull the feral population of domestic pigeons in Gibraltar was not taken without the benefit of scientific or technical advice.

GONHS (The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic (GVC) fully support Government's initiative to cull feral pigeons. Indeed, both were represented at the meeting of the Avian Flu Committee where the decision to cull was taken on our advice.

Independently of any threat of avian flu, feral pigeons are known to harbour up to 40 diseases that can be passed on to humans. In fact, research has shown that feral pigeons carry significantly more diseases that are harmful to humans than rats, and surely no-one would hesitate to approve a cull of these. Pigeons also damage structures, including buildings, with their droppings. They frequently nest in balconies, on window sills and under gutters with droppings and feathers easily entering people's homes. Additionally they negatively affect truly wild species of birds by taking over their nest sites and potentially spreading diseases to them also.

On the question of avian flu, it is true that pigeons are not yet considered a reservoir of the H5N1 virus in western Europe. However, there are published reports that in 2002 hundreds of dead pigeons in Thailand were found to have H5N1. Therefore, the potential is there. If this potential were realised in Gibraltar in the future and action had not yet been taken, there would be no time to do so.

In the absence of significant numbers of poultry in Gibraltar, there is no doubt whatsoever that the birds in most intimate contact with humans are the domestic feral pigeons, which feed in the streets, attend outdoor tables at restaurants, and nest and roost in buildings. Indeed, GBC's news footage last week clearly showed a young child picking up a piece of bread put out for pigeons and eating it. If any bird is likely to pass any disease to humans in Gibraltar it is undoubtedly the feral pigeon, much more so even than the yellow-legged gull, a species which is already culled here.

There are probably close on 2000 feral pigeons in Gibraltar, and, if left unchecked, the numbers will continue to rise significantly.

Culls have been successful elsewhere if they have gone hand in hand with a prohibition of feeding so that their numbers cannot increase again.

We are not dealing with a totally wild bird, but with one that is ultimately an escaped domestic bird that relies almost exclusively on humans for its survival and reproduction. In large cities, there is a huge reservoir of pigeons in the surrounding areas from which re-colonisation can occur. Because of the size of Gibraltar, and the relative isolation of our pigeon population, we have the ability, if combining culling with the stopping of feeding, to drastically reduce numbers.

This is not only desirable but the most responsible course of action that can be taken at this time.

We can understand the RSPCA and GSPCA being concerned that the culled pigeons do not suffer cruelty. They can be assured that the methods that will be employed will not involve poisoning and will be humane. Neither GONHS nor the GVC would be supporting these efforts if we felt that there was any cruelty involved or if we did not feel that the measure was fully justified.

Yours sincerely

John Cortes, General Secretary, The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society

Mark Pizarro, Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic

18 January 2006

Bird Flu: Reply to MEP

GONHS, through its General Secretary, and in a letter to the Gibraltar Chronicle, has replied to comments made to the Gibraltar media by Conservative MEP Neil Parish on Avian Influenza. The letter is reproduced below:

*The Editor
The Gibraltar Chronicle*

Dear Sir

MEP Neil Parish's recent comments on bird flu, reported on GBC News were misleading, inaccurate, and irresponsible in that they could create concern among members of the public, which would be unjustified at this stage.

Contrary to what Mr Parish suggested, there is virtually no possibility of the virus arriving in Gibraltar or southern Spain from Turkey. With very few exceptions, migratory patterns in the Mediterranean are north-south or south-north, and no birds currently in Turkey can be expected to move directly west to our region.

As for affected birds (mainly ducks) returning north in the spring, any arriving in the area would have most likely been wintering in western Africa, from where there have been no reports of bird flu virus H5N1.

It is much more likely that birds from Turkey will meet birds that migrate through southern Spain in their northern breeding grounds this summer, so that if there are going to be any infections from that source in our area they would most likely occur in the autumn.

While the issue is a complex one, and the situation is constantly developing, it must be remembered that there is as yet no evidence of any human contracting the virus from a wild bird. Only people working and/or living in close contact with sick or dead poultry have contracted the disease. Wild birds affected will often die quickly and will in any case not generally be in a fit enough condition to migrate.

While it is possible that the bird flu virus will appear in our region, this would most likely be in Spain, where there are concentrations of ducks and geese not found in Gibraltar.

In any case, unless the virus does alter to become transmissible from human to human, the chances of contracting the disease as part of our day-to-day activities will be very remote.

Yours faithfully

*Dr John Cortes
General Secretary
The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society*

15 January 2006

Winter Bird Count Postponed

The 2006 [Winter Bird Count](#) planned for 14 January has been postponed, due to the weather to Saturday 21st January. Anyone wishing to take part should contact [Keith Bensusan](#) on 54001111.