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18 Nov

Raptor Unit visits Brownies

Last Saturday, Vincent Robba, Head of the Raptor Rehabilitation Unit, paid another visit to the 11th Brownies at their camp on the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. Vincent was accompanied by one of the unit's locally captive-bred Harris hawks, which is primarily used for gull control and for educational purposes.

The Brownies were clearly thrilled to see and handle this elegant raptor and were interested to learn about birds of prey from a real expert. It is always a pleasure for GONHS to be able to entertain and educate children and the Brownies proved to be very inquisitive, an excellent quality for any aspiring naturalist.



10 Nov

Denis Vincent ARPS



It is with great sadness that we have to record the death on the 9th November of a very good friend of GONHS and of Gibraltar, Denis Vincent. Denis was a member of the Ipswich & District Photographic Society, and his first contact with Gibraltar was when he visited the Gibraltar Photographic Society in 1993, and arranged for a competition between these two organisations. As a very keen and accomplished natural history photographer, he subsequently made contact with, and became a member of GONHS. Denis and his wife Pauline visited Gibraltar every year since then with Denis committing himself to delivering a talk, illustrated with his excellent slides, on every visit, enriching us with his knowledge of the natural history of Suffolk and East Anglia. His photographs encompassed many aspects of natural history, but in particular birds, plants (especially orchids), butterflies, and dragonflies.

He was an open, friendly person, who easily made friends with anyone around, greeting everyone with a warm smile and a firm handshake. His last visit to Gibraltar was in 2005. We shall miss him. Our condolences go to Pauline and the rest of his family.

18 Oct

Shadow Portfolio

The Leader of the GSLP/Liberal Alliance Opposition, The Hon Joe Bossano, has appointed The Hon Fabian Picardo as responsible for shadowing the Environment. Fabian Picardo, who obtained the second highest number of votes for his Party after Mr Bossano at the recent General Election, shadowed Environment in the last Parliament also, and represented the Alliance at various debates on the Environment during the election campaign.

13 Oct

New Minister

The Hon Ernest Britto has been given responsibility for the Environment in the new government created by the winning Party in the General Elections held on 11 October, the Gibraltar Social Democrats (GSD). Ernest Britto was Minister for the Environment previously, having later moved to the Health Ministry for which he has had responsibility for several years. He is one of the most experienced Government Ministers and his portfolio will also include traffic and transport. It is likely that he will take a seat in the Development and Planning Commission, which will continue to be chaired by the Hon Joseph Holliday, who retains responsibility for Trade & Industry, Tourism and Development, among others. Former Environment minister, Jaime Netto, who showed great personal commitment to the Environment, has been moved to a new "family" Ministry.

The full responsibilities of the Hon Ernest Britto have been officially listed as follows:

Ministry of the Environment, Traffic & Transport

- Parking
- Roads
- Traffic
- Licensing & Vehicles
- Public Service Vehicles
- Public Transport
- Shipping and the Port
- The Cruise & Ferry Terminal
- The Airport
- Natural Environment
- Environmental Health
- Urban Renewal Schemes
- Beautification & Cleansing of public areas
- Refuse collection & disposal
- The Upper Rock
- Green Areas
- Sewage & Sewage Treatment
- Noise abatement
- Animal Welfare
- the administration of Government departments charged with the aforesaid.
- Technical Services Department

The Ministry presents a challenge, in view of public pressure to solve traffic circulation problems, and indications that Government policy is the creation of more parking and new roads, both of which are known to cause an increase in the use of vehicles. Another area which particularly interests GONHS is the implementation of the Upper Rock Management Plan, which is still pending, and which was in fact commissioned from GONHS by the Government during Mr Britto's previous tenure in the Environment role.

12 Oct

Brownies visit Wildlife Park

Last Friday, the Wildlife Park at the Alameda Botanic Gardens hosted a visit by the 11th Brownie Pack.

During the visit, they were shown around the park by Dr John Cortes, GONHS General Secretary and director of the gardens. The Brownies then presented Dr Cortes with a cheque for £100, which they had raised towards the upkeep of the animals in the park. Thank you girls!

At the end of a very enjoyable visit, EuroBirdwatch co-ordinator Albert Yome presented a copy of "Gibraltar: Nature's Mountain" to Sanya Chhugani, and a "Collins Bird Guide" to Stella Gafan.

Sanya and Stella were the winners of the GONHS Bird Quiz, which was held during last weekend's event.



07 Oct

EUROBIRDWATCH success



An estimated 300 people attended the main, Saturday morning events during EuroBirdwatch 2007 at the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens.

Activities included bird ringing - with a good selection of garden species being ringed, including Blue Tit, Blackbird, Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher. A most successful bird of prey display was organised by the GONHS Raptor Rehabilitation Unit, and there were walks, quizzes, and an open day at the Garden's Wildlife Park.

The Radio Gibraltar Roadshow was in attendance, running competitions and live interviews throughout the morning, with hosts Gerard Teuma and Davina Camilleri encouraging listeners to visit the event.

The afternoon at Europa Point Marine Observatory was fruitful too, with a good westward passage of seabirds, especially Gannets, Balearic Shearwaters and Sandwich Terns, being observed.



22 Sep

In Town Without My Car

GONHS has been supporting the In 'Town Without My Car' campaign over the past few months. Initiatives led by the ESG have included a 'Cycle to Work Week', 'Bus to Work Week' and this week was 'Walk to Work Week'. This morning, GONHS joined other members of the campaign at Casemates. Our contribution was to lead a Nature Walk from Casemates to Landport ditch and back via Market Place.

Although this was primarily an urban area, Leslie Linares and Keith Bensusan pointed out a variety of trees and other plants during walk. Also helping out were Albert Yome and Bob Wheeler, who together with Keith, pointed out the various birds seen or heard during the walk. Birds that nest locally included Sardinian Warbler, Blue Tit, House Sparrow, Blackbird, Spotless Starling and Pallid Swift. Migrants were also seen, including Common Redstart, Nightingale, Pied Flycatcher, Sparrowhawk and Black Kite.

A Two-tailed Pasha (butterfly) was for many the highlight of the walk, in which GONHS ably demonstrated the richness of fauna and flora in Gibraltar's urban areas.



GONHS at Casemates: left to right - Keith Bensusan, Bob Wheeler, John Cortes, Leslie Linares and Albert Yome

15 Sep

Clean Up The World



left to right: Keith Bensusan, Heath Watson and Stevie Shacaluga

GONHS once again joined the ESG and many other organisations and groups in this year's Clean Up The World. With a small, but dedicated group of volunteers, our team tackled Martin's Cave, up on Mediterranean Steps. This cave had previously been the home to a large colony of Schreiber's bats *Miniopterus schreibersii*. Sadly, following vandalism and littering of the cave and the setting of fires (and we are told, incredibly, of fireworks!) the bats left. We have removed many sacks of litter, including broken bottles, beer cans, wrappers and other items. However the bulk of the material at this site was discarded piping and cabling, which has been cut down to more manageable pieces using a grinder. Most of this scrap metal has not yet been removed and will be the task facing us in the weeks and months to come. If you were unable to make it today, please try and help us out next time. In the meantime we would like to thank Joanne McCarthy, Richard Durrell, John Balestrino, Jean Paul Latin, Mark Ainsworth, Heath Watson, Stevie Shacaluga and Keith Bensusan who together with Albert Yome formed our cleaning team. Let's not forget the sterling efforts of Bob Wheeler, who once again single-handedly manned the GONHS stand at the CUTW events at Casemates Square

Andrew Abrines from the Alameda Gardens was magnificent, making numerous trips all weekend. Thanks also to Wildlife (Gibraltar) Limited for the loan of their van.

Enquiries to [albert at gonhs.org](mailto:albert@gonhs.org) please. Photos of the event have been uploaded to our Clean Up The World (Event) on Facebook. www.facebook.com Search for 'GONHS' under 'Groups' You will then find our 'Events' after you join our 'Group'. Joining Facebook is free and very simple. Once you're at the site you only need to provide your email address and then provide a password of your own choice in order to join Facebook.

6 Aug

GONHS Raptor Unit in Gibraltar Chronicle

A recent Gibraltar Chronicle carried an article by journalist Brian Reyes on the GONHS Bird of Prey Unit. With the author's permission, the article is reproduced [here](#).



Photo: Johnny Bugeja

4 Aug

BARBARY MACAQUES:

VOX "Symbols of Shame" article rejected

VOX newspaper carried a cover [article](#) on Friday 3rd August which GONHS considers is a poorly researched, misrepresentation of facts which shows a lack of understanding of what is a complex situation. The problems of managing a wild population of animals in close contact with a dense human population are well known around the world and Gibraltar's situation is no exception. The conflicts between what is good for the animals and acceptable for humans need careful and sensitive management by those who know, and not in response to malicious comments from self-appointed experts.

Good summaries of many of the issues are given in two papers by Eric Shaw and John Cortes, in the recently published book, *The Barbary macaque: Biology, Management and Conservation* (Nottingham University Press 2006). In this statement GONHS will mainly address the points made in the article.

First it must be pointed out that the monkeys are not badly treated and that there is no question of any action leading anywhere to "RSPCA prosecutions". Indeed it is some of the actions by tourist operators that are in clear breach of Gibraltar law and regulations, and at least one is currently the subject of a formal complaint.

Most important is the allegation, which we take most seriously, that the ape management has recently come "under fire" from the IPPL (The International Primate Protection League). It has not. The IPPL website carries an "Action/News" report, which merely *quotes* a letter from a Gibraltar resident – the same one quoted in VOX – and makes reference to its statement of 2004. IPPL has NOT investigated this letter, and therefore has not added its own voice to it, as VOX would have its readers believe. As a reputable organisation, the IPPL would have contacted GONHS, as it did in 2004, before it made a public statement.

Also refuted is the figure of £140,000 allegedly given to GONHS for ape management. The true figure received by GONHS does not equal half that amount.

What GONHS welcomes is the acceptance in the article that taxi drivers "know that the apes should not be fed this way". The comment that "in the past most taxi drivers have stressed this to their customers" is likely to be true, but certainly not all do. GONHS has accumulated photographic evidence of illegal feeding by tourist operators on the Upper Rock, which, in the light of this article, it will now pass on to the Royal Gibraltar Police for action.



Feeding of the macaques is not permitted as it trains them to accost visitors, which often leads to bites, and encourages them to eat unhealthy foods.

The article then refers to monkeys eating rubbish. The monkey group which uses the rubbish dump on the east side as food is a splinter from one of the Upper Rock groups. A conscious decision was taken,

with Government consent NOT to cull these, because they were not causing problems to people. Ironically, they are very fit. This is a similar situation to grizzly bears raiding bins in North America, or dingoes in Australia, or even leopards taking domestic dogs in rubbish tips in India. Are the bears, dingoes and leopards, then, the subject of neglect? Of course not. They are opportunistic animals responding to the opportunity of rich pickings. The problem is neither on the part of the monkeys nor on the part of GONHS – the problem is that there is openly exposed rubbish. Most of the food these animals eat is natural, but they do take advantage of rubbish, as is to be expected. There would then be two possible solutions here – kill the animals or cover the rubbish. Which would Vox prefer?



A Barbary macaque feeding on the flowers of Acanthus mollis, one of the many wild species that form a major part of their diet.

The monkeys are fed very good quality food in quantities recommended by experts. This has been verified and publicly confirmed by officials of the Ministry for The Environment who carried out a survey of the feeding. The fact that some is left uneaten is proof that there is enough. Their main source of food is in fact leaves, roots, bulbs, etc., which they find in the wild, just as is the case in North Africa. Indeed it would not be necessary to feed them at all. Certainly after the apes have been feeding the sites look untidy, but sadly they have not yet learnt to use the toilet or to tidy up after them. If the sites are photographed after the have finished feeding, they will of course look untidy. The sites are cleaned daily and disinfected regularly. Indeed, food would be scattered over a wider area within the scrub of the Upper Rock where any surplus would decompose naturally. They are fed on roadsides in order to allow tourist operators to take their clients there!

We agree with the writer that the “apes” would benefit from investment in the areas where they are fed and from having the right, properly inducted people on site. These could not only carry out spot cleans throughout the day, but also act as guides, interpreting the monkeys’ behaviour accurately to tourists and ensuring that they were not fed by visitors or operators, and not encouraged into cars or onto people’s shoulders – very often the real cause of bites. However, GONHS did this on a voluntary basis several years ago and had to stop following threats and aggression from some tourist operators, who did not like our volunteers pointing out the facts to the tourists.



The sites are thoroughly cleaned every day and clean water and high quality, fresh food is provided - the monkeys, though, are not very tidy eaters!

It is ironic indeed that the article both condemns culling and praises the former military management of the apes, when in those days culling was carried out much more regularly than today and using methods which were arguably less humane. In addition, the standard of veterinary care that is now provided by the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic is far superior to that provided in the past by the MOD. All the monkeys are now registered and their condition monitored, and information (including names) is kept on a large database to a much greater detail than ever before

There is an allegation in the article that the Chief Minister mentioned to Mr Francis Gonzales, in the street that he would "get rid of GONHS". Clearly GONHS dismisses this suggestion, as no Government Minister or official would make such a comment about any of its contractors to a third person. GONHS maintains an excellent working relationship with the Ministry for the Environment which has on many occasions recently confirmed this publicly (see for example the report in the [Gibraltar Chronicle](#) on 27 March 2007).

Finally, GONHS must point out that relations between the Society and the Taxi Association have been, and continue to be excellent and that we have worked closely together in the past and will continue to do so. In no way should the comments and actions of some taxi drivers be taken as representative of the whole of the profession nor of their Association.

2 Aug

INSIGHT on trees

The August issue of Insight magazine carries an excellent article by Jonathan Scott on trees, subtitled "Gibraltar's Green Allies", to coincide with the Year of the Tree.

It highlights the importance of trees particularly in urban areas and calls for more to be planted in Gibraltar, and for the introduction of "green roofs". The article extensively quotes John Cortes, GONHS General Secretary and Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens.

The full [article](#) can be read on the Insight website.

9 June

Mediterranean Steps

Works are nearing completion at Mediterranean Steps. The project came about as a result from an interested benefactor to GONHS, coincidentally following shortly after the Society had completed its Upper Rock Management Plan, which included recommendations for this once-popular footpath. The Society took it upon itself the bringing together of the key players, always with the support of the Bonita Trust, which is financing the work. This included the eventual contractor, Nuttall, and the Ministry for the Environment, which has provided co-ordination and site supervision. GONHS has continued to be closely involved, regularly monitoring works to ensure that there is no destruction of important vegetation or disturbance to wildlife, such as Peregrine Falcons, Blue Rock Thrushes and Schreiber's Bats.



The upper part of Mediterranean Steps (L.Linares/GONHS)

GONHS is very pleased with the way the works have been carried out. The project has been an example of how work can be carried out in protected areas with sensitive fauna and flora, without having a negative impact. Steps and walls have been repaired using natural materials, paths widened with important plants protected, and railings have been placed in the more dangerous areas, but always without making the path look non-natural. Interpretation signs, designed by GONHS as part of an EU-Gibraltar Government project, will be placed along the path.

While still only for those with a certain level of fitness, Mediterranean Steps will very soon once again offer an opportunity for visitors to enjoy nature and spectacular views.

Below: One of the interpretation boards



5 June

GONHS and World Environment Day

GONHS participated in World Environment Day with a number of activities. On Saturday 2 June an Outing was held to Sierra de Las Nieves Biosphere Reserve. This proved very enjoyable, with a good turn-out and a successful climb to the summit at Torrecilla (1909m) followed by a cooling walk through *Abies pinsapo* woodland.

At the same time, GONHS was manning a stand at the Environment Trade Fair at Casemates Square, an event organised by the Ministry for the Environment. This stand, as did the Fair, attracted a good number of people who were given information on the Society and its work. GONHS featured in a half-hour programme on the Trade Fair screened on GBC Television several days later. The theme of World Environment Day this year was Global Climate Change, and a number of businesses exhibited new technologies, including solar power and hybrid cars. Other environmental NGOs were present, namely the Helping Hand Trust, the Environmental Safety Group and Friends of the Earth Gibraltar.



GONHS being interviewed by GBC for a special World Environment Day programme

On World Environment Day itself, Tuesday 5th June, GONHS had two speakers at the Seminar held at the John Mackintosh Hall as part of the Ministry's activities. In the morning session, Dr John Cortes gave an energetic presentation to schoolchildren, aimed at helping them understand the probable effect of climate change globally and in Gibraltar. In the afternoon, Prof David Matthey also of Royal Holloway, University of London, presented some of the results of the co-operative project between the College and GONHS which aims at relating cave chemistry and climate. A great deal of new work is being done in this project, which is in receipt of a NERC grant and is leading the world in this type of research.

11 May

Barbary Macaque Book launched



John Cortes, Eric Shaw, the Hon Jaime Netto, Nobby Sene and Jutta Keuster

A new scientific book on the Barbary macaque, entitled *The Barbary macaque: Biology, Management and Conservation*, published by [Nottingham University Press](#), was given its Gibraltar presentation on 10th May at [The Nature Shop](#) in Casemates Square by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Jaime Netto. The book is edited by Prof J K Hodges, of the German Primate Centre, and Dr John Cortes, GONHS General Secretary. It contains updated papers from the Calpe 2003 Conference, held in Gibraltar, on the Barbary macaque. This was organised by GONHS, the German Primate Centre and the Institut Scientifique of the University of Rabat-Agdal, as part of GIBMANATUR, a Gibraltar Government-European Union co-funded Interreg IIIA Gibraltar-Morocco project

It is the first significant text on the species in over 25 years and contains the results of work in Gibraltar, Morocco and elsewhere, with reference to the relationship of *Macaca sylvanus* with the Asian species on macaque.

The book contains chapters by Gibraltar-based researchers Dr Eric Shaw, who heads the GONHS Barbary macaque team in Gibraltar, Dr Cortes, Mark Pizarro of the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic, who is responsible for the veterinary care of the Gibraltar macaques, and Norbert Sene, of the Department of Pathology of the Gibraltar Health Authority. Also present in Gibraltar was the author of another of the chapters, Dr Jutta Keuster from Germany.

During the presentation the Minister for the Environment stressed the importance of understanding the biology of the monkeys as a way of co-existing with them in Gibraltar and looked forward to future research on the species in Gibraltar continuing to assist the management work done by GONHS.

The book is on sale in Gibraltar at The Nature Shop.



Some of the many guests who attended the launch

20 April

Nature Protection Laws Amended

On 18 April the Gibraltar Parliament, approved the introduction of new nature protection laws, one of several legislative Acts passed during a short Parliamentary session. The Nature Protection (Amendment) Act 2007 strengthens existing legislation.

One of the most important changes it introduces, required by the EU Birds Directive, is a new provision to protect the nests or nest sites of certain birds outside the nesting season.

The listed birds are the Shags that nest near Gorham's Cave, the Lesser Kestrels that nest on the North face, and the Eagle Owl. The law will now prevent any activity in areas where these species nest that may prejudice nesting, even if the nest sites are not occupied. Until this Amendment was passed, nest sites could be disturbed, interfered with or destroyed outside the nesting season.

GONHS was consulted by the Ministry for the Environment during the drafting of the amendment.

29 March

Biodiversity Action Plan praised in Business Magazine

B2B Magazine, "The Voice of Gibraltar Business" has praised the work of GONHS and in particular the Biodiversity Action Plan as the highlight of 2006 from an environmental point of view.

The magazine, regarded as one of the main mouthpieces of the Business Community in Gibraltar, states:

"In this respect, it is perhaps fitting that one of the most significant tangible steps taken last year came from GONHS, which has campaigned on behalf of the environment for many years.

GONHS has prepared a ground-breaking Biodiversity Action Plan for Gibraltar, a weighty and well-researched report entitled "Planning for Nature".

The document contains information on Gibraltar's flora and fauna and presents this within the context of the international conservation obligations. It is a solid foundation, a detailed blueprint on which to build.

GONHS hopes the document will serve as a tool for planners and developers by highlighting areas and species that need to be safeguarded.

The report, prepared by Charles Perez, was launched in the presence of a large number of local developers, surveyors, architects, NGOs and representatives from government departments."

The article also extensively quotes the Minister for the Environment, Jaime Netto, and Paul Young, who is pioneering environmental technology in Gibraltar.

This come at a time when the business community is clearly taking a greater interest in and assuming greater responsibility for matters relating to the environment. At this crucial time in Gibraltar's history, and with the importance of global environmental issues, it is a welcome change, and engaging more closely with businesses is a challenge that GONHS needs to take up in order to further its aims.

The full article is on the [B2B website](#).

1 March

Falcons on the Airfield

The Gibraltar Chronicle of 28 February 2007 carried a report about a bird strike at Gibraltar airport and commented that "bird strikes... were substantially reduced when falconry was used for an experimental period". This prompted the following letter which was published in the Gibraltar Chronicle of 1 March.

Dear Sir

Today's Chronicle reported on a bird strike that affected an Iberia flight, and correctly commented that falconry had been used as a trial some years ago.

The trial was carried out in 2001 by members of the GONHS Bird of Prey Unit. It followed an approach from GONHS to the Government, in view of the evidence from airports such as J F Kennedy in New York and Oporto in Portugal where falconry has been very successful in keeping gulls away from airfields. Government immediately agreed to the trial and financed the purchase of three hybrid falcons which were trained to fly at gulls and, with the full co-operation of both Government and Terminal Management, were used at the airfield before flights for a period of six months, to great effect.

In view of this, proposals were being prepared for a permanent falconry unit at the airfield. However, the RAF objected, following advice from their consultants, on the grounds that there was not enough evidence that the trial had been successful. GONHS disagreed, but the matter was never resolved.

In November last year, soon after the announcement of an agreement affecting the airport, we wrote to Terminal Management and the Government stating that "this might be a good moment to once again consider the use of falconry at Gibraltar airport, in view of the proposed increase in flights and consequently in danger of bird strikes."

We continue to successfully fly bird of prey at gulls as part of our gull cull programme, particularly in built-up areas where shooting is not possible. We hope that the RAF will reconsider its position, as we are still available to offer such a service.

Yours faithfully

John Cortes

General Secretary

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society

10 January

Biodiversity feature in *Insight Magazine*

The monthly *Insight* magazine has featured biodiversity prominently in its January 2007 issue. The cover photograph is of a Great Cormorant taken by Harry van Gils, and the feature includes a selection of pictures used in the Biodiversity Photographic Exhibition in December and published in *Gibraltar, Nature's Mountain*. The article is very supporting of the Society's work in particular its promotion of biodiversity conservation.

