

## COMUNICADO

### ***Gobierno de Gibraltar: Ministerio de Salud y Medio Ambiente***

## **El Gobierno de Gibraltar manifiesta su postura sobre la perdiz moruna**

### **Resumen del comunicado**

Gibraltar, 28 de octubre de 2013

La Oposición pone de manifiesto en un comunicado de prensa plagado de imprecisiones su desconocimiento del medio ambiente en Gibraltar, concretamente en lo referente a la perdiz moruna. El Ministro de Medio Ambiente —el Dr. John Cortés— es un biólogo conservacionista de prestigio, comprometido con esta especie que se halla en peligro en el Peñón. Esta situación es achacable a la inacción del Gobierno anterior, pese al informe de gestión que ellos mismos encargaron en 2005 a la Sociedad de Ornitología e Historia Natural de Gibraltar (Ornithological and Natural History Society, GONHS)<sup>1</sup> y al Plan de Acción para la Biodiversidad de Gibraltar (2006). Entre las imprecisiones destacan dos: no se trata de una especie autóctona, puesto que procede del norte de África y, en lo que va de año, no se han contabilizado únicamente “siete ejemplares”, sino que se trata de un dato parcial extraído de uno de los días de la campaña invernal de recuento de aves.

En la última sesión parlamentaria, la Oposición formuló preguntas muy concretas de difícil respuesta y dio por sentado la ausencia de medidas. Sin embargo, en los últimos dos años se ha ampliado el hábitat de esta especie y está previsto que se aborde la cuestión de la depredación y la creación de nuevas zonas protegidas. El Ministro y su gabinete se han reunido con el Alto Comisionado de Aguas y Bosques de Marruecos para estudiar la reintroducción de nuevos ejemplares. Todo ello se suma a las medidas adoptadas para la protección del medio terrestre natural, como la creación de una Zona de Conservación del Peñón de Gibraltar, además de velar por las buenas prácticas de las actividades en las zonas protegidas. Por ello, la declaración del GSD deja al descubierto su total desconocimiento del asunto.

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<sup>1</sup> La Sociedad de Ornitología e Historia Natural de Gibraltar es una organización no gubernamental que se dedica al estudio y la conservación del medio natural en el Peñón y en la región del Estrecho de Gibraltar: <http://www.gonhs.org/>

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

No. 757/2013

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> October 2013

### **HMGOG STATES POSITION ON BARBARY PARTRIDGE**

In the latest Opposition press release, Jaime Netto has shown a complete lack of understanding and a worrying lack of knowledge of ecology and Gibraltar's natural history. It is near impossible to comprehend how a Member of Parliament with an environmental portfolio could have got his facts so wrong and interpreted the Minister's statement so incorrectly.

As Jaime Netto well knows, having worked together with him for many years, Minister for the Environment Dr John Cortes is a highly respected and internationally known conservation biologist committed, among many other things to achieving the survival of the Barbary Partridge in Gibraltar.

Dr Cortes openly confirmed that the species is in trouble in Gibraltar. This had been predicted years ago repeatedly and is due to a total lack of action, including absence of habitat management over the past decade and a half. Concerns were expressed over the years and systematically ignored. The situation we are in now is therefore the result of this inaction. Indeed, in 2005 the Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) produced a management plan commissioned by the then Government which described necessary action. The report was not acted upon, nor published, until the present Government did so in early 2012. This also illustrates the hypocrisy of the Opposition's earlier statement on the publication of reports. A year later in 2006, GONHS published the Gibraltar Biodiversity Action Plan, again with a section on the Barbary Partridge. Again, this was ignored.

Natural systems are complex and years of ecosystem degeneration cannot be countered in months or even a few years. Nature can take time to re-establish the balance. This was explained at length by Dr Cortes in Parliament earlier this month, but clearly no-one in the Opposition understood the science. Instead, they hit back, opening themselves to great embarrassment.

The first major inaccuracy in the Opposition's statement is in its very title, where it refers to the Barbary partridge as an 'indigenous' species. It is not. It is native to north Africa and is likely to have been introduced to the Rock in the early days of British Gibraltar.

The second, more important one is the statement that 'only 7 birds' have been recorded so far in 2013. This is not so, nor was this ever said. The reference to seven birds was to the number counted on one particular day during this year's Winter Bird Count in January. The Barbary Partridge is a secretive species. Therefore the full population

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will never be seen on one day. Seven will only have been a proportion of the total population.

The questions in the latest session of Parliament, regarding for example, number of chicks hatched, were very specific and asked details which anyone with any knowledge of ecology would know would be impossible to obtain at all, especially without creating disturbance to the very birds we are trying to protect.

Mr Netto seems to assume that just because he doesn't know what is going on, nothing is. During the past two years, work has concentrated on creation of more habitat for the partridges. These birds depend on open ground for feeding, and the vegetation of the Upper Rock had grown denser and denser through the years. As has already been seen, vegetation thinning on the Upper Rock has been carried out in 2012 and 2013. This has included a significant increase in the size of one of the major firebreaks. The timing of firebreak clearing has also been adjusted to ensure less disturbance to partridges, which will have been a problem in the past. Preparations are in hand to deal with predation and to create further 'partridge areas', details of which will be published in due course.

In addition, the Minister and officials has met with the High Commissioner of the "Eaux et Forets" department in Rabat and a source of new birds for re-introduction has been identified. No such steps were ever taken by the previous administration.

HM Government of Gibraltar has worked very hard over the past two years in protecting the natural terrestrial environment. It was this Government that created the Special Area of Conservation of the Rock of Gibraltar under EU law, it has increased consultation on all fronts related to natural history, and is taking the lead in ensuring that all activities in protected areas are consistent with good environmental practice. On other fronts, for example, it has supported work to enhance the population of the lesser kestrel, an internationally threatened species, in Gibraltar.

The GSD statement was more than just an attempted hit at the Minister and the Government. It exposed an intrinsic lack of knowledge, expertise and technical know-how among opposition parliamentarians which is embarrassing for Gibraltar. The Opposition would serve itself and Gibraltar better if it kept quiet when it does not know what it is talking about.

Dr Cortes commented "I can hardly believe they issued such a statement. I worked with several different Ministers for the Environment during the time of the GSD administration, and none of them, certainly not Mr Netto, ever asked me how the partridges were doing. We will work hard to help them, but if the population has decreased too far to allow it to recover despite our best efforts, it will have been totally due to inaction during their time. And I will not let them forget it."

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