



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara*
UK Overseas Territory: Gibraltar**

Predominantly a North African species, Gibraltar is the only mainland European location for a self sustaining wild population. (They are found also on offshore islands, in the Canaries and Sardinia).

It is unclear whether the birds were imported during the Moorish occupation of the Rock, brought over by the British in the mid -1700s as part of a consignment of 'game from Barbary' or if the population is indigenous. Possibly the answer lies with a combination of all three. Fossil remains of *Alectoris* partridges dating from the late Pleistocene epoch (1.6 to 0.01 million years ago) have been found on the Rock, but it is possible that these birds were ancestors of the Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*, which is common in Spain but not found in Gibraltar.

Around 200 years ago, Barbary Partridges were abundant in Gibraltar. However, numbers were seriously reduced, to the point that perhaps only 30 pairs remained. This was due to predation, disturbances, illegal catching of young and heavy predation by feral cats, as well as loss of open vegetation due to the growth of dense scrub which denies the birds their preferred low scrub for nesting and open ground for foraging.

Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) and HM Government of Gibraltar's (HMGOG) Department of the Environment and Climate Change started a programme, clearing of habitat, dealing with introduced predators, and then a restocking project. Eggs or chicks from Morocco were hatched, reared and released, and some were kept to breed in captivity. Thus, more eggs were hatched and reared in captivity for further releases.

All released birds were marked with wing-tags or leg-rings, to allow better monitoring. These birds have taken to the new habitat, and are now breeding widely over the Rock, in some cases paired with some of the local birds.

This work will continue, as a good example of something that the NGO and the Government can combine their complementary skills and resources, also bringing in wide public support. It is hoped that this programme will lead to restoring the Barbary Partridge population of 200 years ago.



Barbary Partridges in Gibraltar: above: adult in the wild, © Andrew Dobson; below: chicks reared as part of a restocking programme © H.M. Government of Gibraltar / Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society.

