

Gibraltar



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Steven Fuller/Foto Natura/FLPA

Gibraltar is an important site for migrating raptors, such as this Black Kite

General introduction

Gibraltar is a British Overseas Territory situated at the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula. It has its own legislative assembly, although the United Kingdom is responsible for Gibraltar's external affairs. Gibraltar has two Important Bird Areas (IBAs) (see the map on page 164 and the table on page 165), one of which (GI001) covers all 600 ha of the Rock of Gibraltar. The second IBA, the Strait

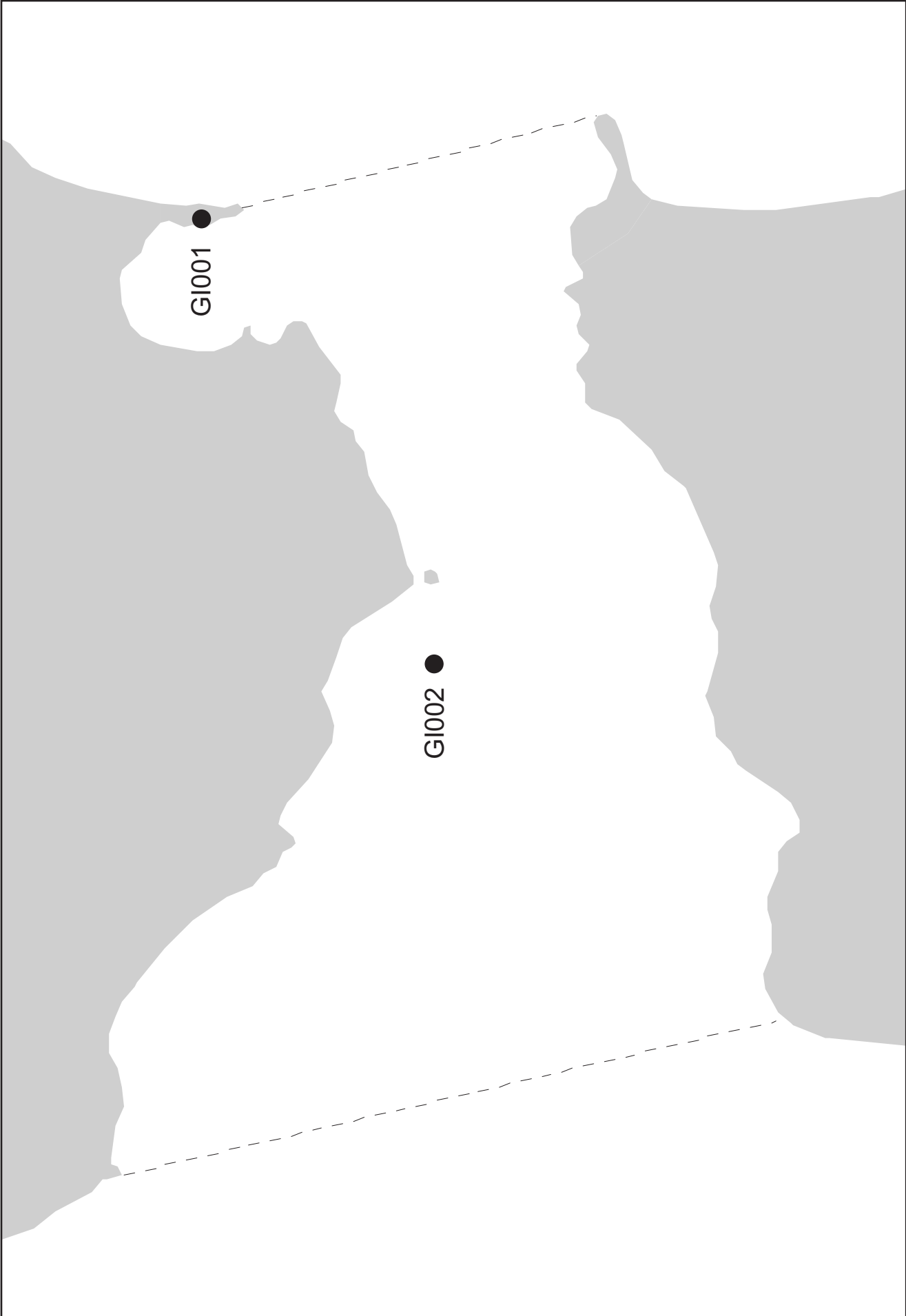
of Gibraltar (GI002), includes 30% of the UK territorial waters adjacent to Gibraltar, in addition to Spanish, Moroccan and international waters. The north and east sides of Gibraltar consist of high sea cliffs and sandy slopes, while the lower western slopes hold the main built-up areas. The IBAs have not altered in extent since the first inventory of European IBAs (Grimmett and Jones 1989).

Ornithological importance

Gibraltar is particularly important as a bottleneck site for migratory species (criteria A4iv). Given the right wind conditions, the majority of raptors that migrate to Africa across the Strait of Gibraltar (an estimated 250,000 birds) could pass over the Rock in a season. These include the European Honey-buzzard, Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Montagu's Harrier and the Booted Eagle. The slopes of the Rock also serve as a staging site for large numbers of passerine and near-passerine migrants. The following species occur regularly on migration: the

Eleonora's Falcon, Red-necked Nightjar, Black-eared Wheatear, Iberian Chiffchaff, Spectacled Warbler and the Subalpine Warbler. Most migratory western European species can occur at Gibraltar during the northward or southward migration periods (Cortes 1996). Scrub habitat on the Rock provides shelter for many of these birds and for substantial numbers of wintering Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, European Robins and Black Redstarts.

A total of 23 species of European conservation concern



(SPECs) occur regularly in Gibraltar (Tucker and Heath 1994). Two species of global conservation concern occur regularly: the Lesser Kestrel nests on the north face of the Rock and occurs on passage, and the Audouin's Gull occurs during the winter and on passage. The Rock is the only breeding site of the Barbary Partridge in mainland Europe. Up to 200,000 seabirds migrate between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, passing through the Strait (criteria A4ii). Of those that do not, the following pass through on a regular basis: the Sooty Shearwater, the Great Shearwater and the Northern Gannet (up to 10,000 birds in a season) (Finlayson and Cortes 1984). These waters also support several thousand seabirds in winter, including Northern Gannets, Black-headed Gulls, Yellow-legged Gulls and Razorbills.

Habitats

The woodland that once covered the limestone of the Rock has been progressively removed, with regeneration being prevented by grazing goats. Following removal of the goats, maquis has become the dominant vegetation type on Gibraltar, and its species composition remains unique in the region. About 600 species of flowering plants have been recorded and important fruit-bearing shrubs of the maquis include *Olea europaea*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Osyris quadripartita*, *Rhamnus alaternus* and *Asparagus albus*. The eastern sea cliffs ascend to about 250 m, with windblown sands supporting an open garrigue-type vegetation (matorral). Open vegetation also exists on the southern stony terraces, while matorral and patches of woodland occur on the gentler western slopes. Of those species that meet IBA criteria, only the Barbary Partridge relies solely on these

terrestrial habitats. Other species of passerines and near-passerines rely on the matorral when wintering or stopping over while on migration. The majority of raptors and marine species overfly or bypass the Rock itself, with little feeding effort. Wintering Audouin's Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Yellow-legged Gulls feed in the territorial waters, with the latter also feeding in terrestrial habitats.

Impact on IBAs: land use and threats

The lower slopes of the Rock of Gibraltar are largely built up, with approximately 40% of the land area in urban use. Of the remainder, 20% is military land held by the Ministry of Defence, and used as aerial farms for telecommunications purposes and/or for military training, and 40% is designated as a nature reserve. Sections of the remaining areas of vegetated land are under threat from commercial and industrial development, although this pressure has been reduced over the last decade as a result of reclamation of land from the sea. No agricultural activities take place on the Rock. The Strait of Gibraltar is a major route for passenger, military and commercial vessels, including oil tankers. Inshore waters are used by recreational boats, and support extensive Spanish and Moroccan fisheries. Activities include conch raking, longlining and the use of drift nets, which carry with them a threat to seabirds. Such methods are banned from the part of the Strait under Gibraltar's jurisdiction, although political pressure may threaten the continuing protected status of these waters. Recreational boats can cause disturbance to birds inshore, especially in winter, but there is no evidence that migrating birds are adversely affected.

Conservation infrastructure and Protected Area system

The table below summarises the national and international protection status of the two IBAs in Gibraltar.

National protection

The Nature Protection Ordinance (1991) effectively protects all wildlife throughout the Territory and waters of Gibraltar, and includes all species of bird. The Ordinance also provides for the declaration of nature reserves, and this led to the Upper Rock being declared a Nature Reserve in 1993. The Marine Reserve, which extends to all British territorial waters around Gibraltar, was created in 1996. This confers legal protection, although full implementation of the regulation is still pending.

The Protected Areas, both marine and terrestrial, belong to the British Crown, but are under the jurisdiction either of the Government of Gibraltar or the Ministry of Defence.

International protection

Several international conventions have been ratified by the UK Government on behalf of Gibraltar (see the table at the top of page 166). EU Directives and Regulations, including the EC Birds Directive, also apply to the Territory. Parts of both IBAs (GI001 and GI002) have been proposed as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive and as Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) under the EC Habitats Directive.

Protection status of Important Bird Areas in Gibraltar

IBA code	International name	Nature reserve	National	Marine reserve
GI001	Rock of Gibraltar	X		
GI002	Strait of Gibraltar			X
Total number of IBAs		1		1

Note: A cross indicates that an IBA overlaps with a Protected Area (to any extent).

International legislation and initiatives that are relevant to site conservation in Gibraltar

Global	
Biodiversity Convention	X
Ramsar Convention	X
Bonn Convention	X
World Heritage Convention	X
MAB Programme	
Pan-European	
Bern Convention	
Regional	
EC Birds Directive	X
EC Habitats Directive	X
Barcelona Convention	

X Convention ratified/initiative supported

Conservation

Bird migration has been monitored in Gibraltar since the 1960s (Cortes 1996). Monitoring work has included direct observation of raptor and seabird migration, and both direct observation and ringing of passerines and near-passerines (20,321 birds were ringed between 1991 and 1997).

Inadequate management of the habitats on the Upper Rock has led to vegetation succession, resulting in a progressive decline in species of more open ground (for example, the Barbary Partridge and the Sardinian Warbler). Management initiatives are consequently being planned in order to resolve the problem (Perez and Bensusan 2005).

Overview of the inventory
Analytical methods

Difficulties in deciding which figures to present for migratory species arose due to the large yearly fluctuations in numbers caused by varying wind conditions. Minimum and maximum figures given in the species tables are therefore based on averages of seasonal minima and maxima recorded between 1967 and 1997 by observers at the Strait of Gibraltar Bird Observatory (SGBO). Some of these records have been published (Bernis 1980, Cortes *et al.* 1980, Finlayson 1991, Finlayson and Cortes 1984, 1987, Garcia 1973, SEO 1998, SGBO Reports 1988–1996, Telleria 1981), while other Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS)/SGBO records are as yet unpublished. (GONHS is the BirdLife International Partner in Gibraltar.)

Observations for the Strait as a whole are not possible due to

its width. Many more birds may occur than can be estimated from observations made purely from Gibraltar's territorial waters, which extend for 3 miles from Europa Point into the north-east corner of the Strait. Comparable data for seabirds from Spain and Morocco are not available, while recent records for soaring birds are available only from Spain for 1997.

The figures given in the footnotes to the species tables for the Strait as a whole are therefore estimates (based upon Bernis 1980, GONHS records (unpublished), SEO 1998, SGBO Reports 1988–1996). In exceptional weather conditions it would theoretically be possible for the bulk of these birds to cross the Strait at Gibraltar. All the information on threats and land use are current at the time of writing (November 2005). The EU has not assigned a Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques (NUTS) code for Gibraltar.

Sites of global conservation importance

IBA code	Site name	A1	A2	A4i	A4ii	A4iv
GI001	Rock of Gibraltar	X				X
GI002	Strait of Gibraltar	X		X	X	

Site accounts

GI001: Rock of Gibraltar

Ref number	GI001
Admin region	Gibraltar
Coordinates	36°17'N 5°21'W
Area	600 ha
Altitude	0–396 m
IBA categories (details below)	A1, A4iv
Status	Nature Reserve (part)

Site description

The Rock of Gibraltar is dominated by a dense cover of maquis and garrigue, including many important fruit-bearing shrubs that support large passerine populations on passage and during the winter.

Habitats: scrub (40%; sclerophyllous scrub/garrigue/maquis), rocky areas (20%; sea cliff/rocky shore; rock stacks/islets), artificial landscape (40%; other urban/industrial areas).

Land use: military (20%), nature reserve (40%), urban/industrial/transport (40%).

Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species.

Gibraltar is a well-known migratory bottleneck site for birds of prey, with an estimated 250,000 raptors crossing the Strait in a season. If the winds are right then most of

these pass over Gibraltar, and numbers may in fact be higher. It is also a stop-over site for passerines and near-passerines, with a rapid turnover of birds on passage during both northward and southward migration.

Protection status

National: high.

International: none.

45 ha of IBA covered by nature reserve (Upper Rock, 45 ha).

Conservation issues/threats

Consequences of animal/plant introductions, industrialisation/urbanisation, natural events. A number of military sites are designated as conservation areas. A total of 182 ha of the Rock of Gibraltar are proposed as a SPA under the EC Birds Directive, and as a SAC under the EC Habitats Directive.

Key species

Criteria	Key species	Pop min	Pop max
A1	Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i>	4	100
A4iv	European Honey-buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	5,000	50,000
A4iv	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	5,000	12,000
A4iv	Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	25	250
A4iv	Short-toed Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	101	250
A4iv	Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>	101	1,000
A4iv	Booted Eagle <i>Hieraeetus pennatus</i>	251	2,500

Site accounts

GI002: Strait of Gibraltar

Ref number	GI002
Admin region	Gibraltar
Coordinates	36°02'N 5°40'W
Area	–
Altitude	0 m
IBA categories (details below)	A1, A4i, A4ii
Status	Marine Reserve (part)

Site description

Habitats: marine areas (100%; open sea; sea inlet/coastal features).

Land use: fisheries/aquaculture, tourism/recreation, urban/industrial/transport.

The Strait of Gibraltar is defined here as the sea area demarcated in the west by a straight line joining Cape Trafalgar on the European coast with Cape Spartel on the North African coast, and in the east by a straight line joining the Rock of Gibraltar on the European coast to Ceuta (enclave of Spain) on the North African coast. It includes international waters and waters under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, Spain and Morocco, and is 9 miles (15 km) wide at its narrowest point.

Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species.

Hundreds of thousands of birds that migrate between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic over the sea pass through the Strait of Gibraltar, including highly significant numbers of Cory's Shearwaters, Audouin's Gulls and Atlantic Puffins.

Protection status

National: partial.

International: none.

Conservation issues/threats

Aquaculture/fisheries, other.

Heavy commercial shipping traffic carries with it the threat of major oil spills ('other threat', above). A total of 2,600 ha of the territorial waters of the United Kingdom are proposed as a SPA under the EC Birds Directive, and as a SAC under the EC Habitats Directive. Commercial fishing is prohibited in these territorial waters, and protection is afforded to cetaceans, turtles, birds and other marine life.

Key species

Criteria	Key species	Pop min	Pop max
A1, A4i	Audouin's Gull <i>Larus audouinii</i>	51	10,000
A4i	Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	1,001	10,000
A4i	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>	1,001	25,000
A4ii	Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	10,000	100,000
A4ii	Balearic Shearwater <i>Puffinus mauritanicus</i>	1,001	10,000
A4ii	Razorbill <i>Alca torda</i>	1,001	10,000

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Further reading

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