



**GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR**  
**MINISTRY FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE, SPORT & LEISURE**  
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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**MINISTER REYES SPEECH DELIVERED AT CALPE 2010**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

It is, once again, a great pleasure to welcome speakers and delegates to a Calpe Conference. This is, in fact, the fourteenth conference under the Calpe banner. For those of you who are first timers, I should explain that these conferences have been sponsored by the Government of Gibraltar since 1997 and they are aimed at bringing together experts in particular fields of history and natural history. We have tried to organise conferences along themes which are of relevance to Gibraltar. Perhaps the best known have been those relating to human prehistory which have become a regular feature of the calendar, the theme being covered every three years.

Why Calpe? I should explain that Gibraltar was the *Mons Calpe* to the Romans. This spectacular Rock, which I hope you will have the chance to explore, was the northern Pillar of Hercules and marked the end of the known world. It had traditionally been the gateway, beyond which one navigated at one's own peril, since the days of the Phoenicians in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC and the concept was retained into Roman times. But Calpe has been significant in many ways and was known to migratory birds long before any humans even came to this part of the world!

I am not an ornithologist but I am assured by those who are knowledgeable in this field that Gibraltar is a kind of homing point for tens of thousands of migratory birds that make the long journeys from Eurasia to Africa and back each year. I am also assured that, given the right wind conditions, you may be able to experience some of this spectacular migration while you are here.

The subject of the conference - Pleistocene Ecological Change and the Evolution of Bird Migration Systems – is therefore of particular relevance to Gibraltar. It is not just because you are at the bottleneck point on the western flyway of trans-Saharan migratory birds but also because here we have caves with a unique record of these birds going back over the last 100 thousand years. The number of species that have been excavated from Gorham's and other Gibraltar caves is staggering. I am told it is in excess of 145 species, which is remarkable.

The Gibraltar Museum team, headed by Clive Finlayson, has led these excavations over the last twenty years. I know that Clive is particularly keen to tell you much about these caves, which he feels have become internationally known for its Neanderthals - but less so for its diverse fossil record of other species. So here you

have a window into the bird world of the Pleistocene. I think that, with these remarks, I have justified why Gibraltar.

Why are we organising this event now? It all has to do with one of the great ornithologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century - the late Reginald Moreau. He pioneered the understanding of bird migration in the context of the past climatic and ecological history of the planet. Upon this subject he once wrote how:

***"in 1960...the revelation came to me of the overwhelming importance of the Pleistocene and also of how far advances had been made with the help of palynology and of the carbon 14 technique in defining the enormous ecological changes at all latitudes over the last few tens of thousands of years."***

That was 50 years ago and we felt that it was time to take stock of our state of knowledge and honour this man of such great vision.

The advances that have been made in fields that are relevant to this subject in the past 50 years have been enormous, but this is the first time that a multi-disciplinary conference has been organised that will assess Moreau's contribution and bring it up-to-date.

Here we will not only learn about the state of the art in terms of bird migration. We will also hear about Saharan mega-lakes, African climate change and how the vegetation cover has oscillated in response to climate change. We will also hear about the genetics behind migration, an area of study that has catapulted in recent decades and was not accessible to Moreau in his day.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not wish to prolong my opening speech any longer. I think that I have justified the why and the when and it is now for you to debate the subject. I said earlier that the human prehistory conferences have become a three-yearly tradition in the Calpe programme. Who knows, maybe today we are starting another tradition.

I hope to meet you all over the next few days in the social events that have been organised and, if time permits, I will visit you during the lectures. It only leaves me to thank Clive and his excellent Gibraltar Museum team for putting together this conference. I know that, as I speak, he is already putting together next year's conference and has a theme in mind also for 2012! But for now it is the evolution of bird migration.

It is with utmost pleasure that I formally open the Calpe 2010 conference.