



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
Ministry for Health & Environment
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Has Mr Netto produced the most incoherent and poorly researched statement yet put out by the GSD Opposition?

Opposition Environment spokesman Jaime Netto has taken leave of his senses. His latest rant about partridges is the most incoherent and poorly researched statement yet put out by the GSD Opposition.

Even the heading, "Indiscriminate cutting of trees" is incorrect. There is nothing indiscriminate about it. Full consultation was carried out with all parties and the programme was embarked upon as part of the Government's ongoing programme to conserve the Barbary partridge population on the Rock. Partridges require open habitat to feed and nest and the loss of this habitat due to the developing scrub in the past needs to be tackled. This is a programme that Mr Netto now wants stopped, with his calling for an immediate halt to the project, despite his repeated protestations in parliament and the media wanting Government to take action to support the partridges. This apparent U-turn would be nonsensical if it were comprehensible. Mr Netto accuses the Government of 'rushing', as if he didn't know the full range of expertise in the subject located in the very heart of the Ministry for the Environment and assuming as he usually does that if he doesn't personally know that something is happening in the Environment Department, then it isn't. Moreover, he seems to think that someone should have asked him permission to carry out the works. He seems to have forgotten that he is no longer the Minister.

This type of habitat management work does not require planning permission. In fact, on a much much smaller scale it used to be carried out by the previous administration. And the new Environmental Protection (Trees) Act, as he would know had he read it properly when he supported it in Parliament last month, specifically makes an exception for authorised works within the Nature Reserve. The GSD never told the public anything that it was doing or planned to do, so his criticism on this count is full of the usual hypocrisy. But it also betrays an ignorance of the basic principles of wildlife management. The introduction of Barbary partridges, as of any species into a natural situation, is a complex and delicate operation very susceptible to disturbance and possible vandalism. Whenever such projects are carried out anywhere in the world, the release locations are always treated very discreetly in order not to attract the attention of

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those who might, deliberately or out of curiosity, disturb the birds at a sensitive time.

Mr Netto has just blown the totally justified cautious approach out of the window and so placed the very project at risk. More careful thought, an attempt at understanding the issues, or even private consultation with the Minister would have avoided his rash comments and would have served his now-beloved Barbary partridges better.