



PRESS RELEASE

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Minister Cortes pays visit to new viewing platforms at Gorham's Cave Complex

Following from last week's World Heritage Advisory Forum meeting, Minister for Heritage, Dr John Cortes, who has responsibility for the Gorham's Cave Complex World Heritage Site, visited the new viewing platforms at Europa Advance Batteries. During his visit Dr Cortes was briefed on the works and progress towards completion, which is expected in March. Dr Cortes took the opportunity, given his interest in ornithology, to observe the flights into and out of the caves of the local Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii*) that are now in the process of breeding.

"This is the only known site where this rare subspecies now breeds on the Mediterranean mainland coastline of Iberia" said Dr Cortes. "It is one of the great advantages of protecting the site that it minimises disturbance and allows species such as this one to find a safe haven; the remains of these birds are known from the caves going back 100,000 years so we can truly say that we are observing nature and heritage at the same time." The viewing platform will be designed to accommodate large numbers of visitors, some with limited available time, while avoiding the damage that direct access to the site would cause. Visits to the caves themselves are currently organised under an experimental system which includes monitoring of the impact of such visits and numbers are limited to an annual quota. The viewing platform, in addition to providing spectacular views of the caves, also provides an impressive backdrop of the entire World Heritage Site all the way to the top of the Rock. It additionally offers views of the Strait of Gibraltar and the coastline of North Africa. During particular weather conditions at different times of the year it will also be a great observatory of bird and marine mammal migration, including the spectacular fin whales."