3775 : BULWER'S PETREL *Bulweria bulwerii*: A NEW BREEDING SPECIES TO GRAN CANARIA (CANARY ISLANDS)

Le Pétrel de Bulwer Bulweria bulwerii *: une nouvelle espèce nicheuse sur l'île de la Grande Canarie (Îles Canaries).*

World breeding range of Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* comprises several subtropical islands of the Pacific and the Northeast Atlantic Oceans (CARBONERAS, 1992). In the latter area, the species is basically confined to the Macaronesia, where the Madeira archipelago holds the largest population (6000-8000 breeding pairs; MONTEIRO & ZINO, 1997), followed by the Canary Islands (1000 + pairs; HERNÁNDEZ *et al*., 1990), the Cape Verde Islands (c.100 pairs; HATZEVOET, 1995) and the Azores archipelago (50-70 pairs; MONTEIRO *et al*., 1999). In Europe the species is catalogued as SPEC 3 and considered Rare (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, 2004), while in Spain it is Endangered (RAMOS & TRUJILLO, 2004). Although a handful of works on Bulwer's Petrel have been published during the last years (e.g. NUNES & VICENTE, 1998; MOUGIN, 1999; NUNES, 2000; MOUGIN, 2002; MOUGIN & MOUGIN, 2002), most of these have been focused on particular issues of its breeding biology, whereas there is an overall lack of knowledge on other aspects of its biology, ecology and population dynamics, which are relevant to the conservation of this petrel.

The Canary Islands are a volcanic archipelago which is located 100 km off the north-west African coast (27º37'-29º25'N and 13º20'-18º19'W) and is comprised of seven major islands and several small islets and rocks. The existing information on Bulwer's Petrel is scarce for this archipelago, and basically refers to breeding numbers and distribution (MARTÍN & LORENZO, 2001). Its breeding has been documented for all the islands and some related rocks and islets, with the exceptions of Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria, where it was only suspected (MARTÍN & LORENZO, 2001). Gran Canaria Island is located in the middle of the archipelago, presenting an area of 1560 km^2 and a maximum altitude of 1950 m. Its coastline is predominantly rocky with boulder shore and cliffs up to 300 m. The vegetation and landscape are influenced by the northeastern trade winds, altitude, orientation and human activities. This is the most populated island of the archipelago, with more than 716000 inhabitants (MORALES & PÉREZ, 2000), most of them employing in agriculture and tourist activities.

FIG. 1– Fledging young of Bulwer's Petrel in the vicinity of its burrow. Playa de Veneguera area, Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, September 2005.

Jeune "volant" à proximité de son terrier à Playa de Veneguera, sur l'Île de la Grande Canarie en septembre 2005.

The unique information concerning the breeding of Bulwer's Petrel in Gran Canaria was the existence of a small colony near Playa de Mogán (SW coast) in the 1950s, which was destroyed by domestic cats, according to a local fisherman (HERNÁNDEZ *et al*., 1990). However, there exists indirect evidence suggesting the current breeding of this petrel in the island. Firstly, every year several recently fledging young are captured on the ground under artificial lights, all around the island but mainly in the south west coast (P. CALABUIG *pers. comm*.; *pers. obs*.). Secondly, a large extension of suitable breeding habitat (high basaltic cliffs with edges inaccessible to introduced predators and plentiful of crevices and fallen rocks) is available in this coastal sector. Accordingly, an important breeding population of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* occurs there.

During a three years study (2003-2005) on the breeding biology of Cory's Shearwater, in the proximities of Playa de Veneguera, Bulwer's Petrels (either prospectors or actual breeders) were often observed overflying a Cory's Shearwater colony near Playa de Veneguera (Mogán), between June and September. On 17 September 2005, at approximately 22:00 h, a near fledging chick was observed on the ground (FIG. 1), near a burrow that contained droppings and down inside. The bird moved into this burrow and it was observed again the following night just inside it at 23:00 h. The occupied burrow was around 10 cm tall at the entrance and more than 50 cm depth, and was located in a crevice in the middle of a big basaltic stone. After a careful inspection of other potential sites close-by, other two holes

containing signs of occupation were detected. The nests are situated in an accessible slope covered by some shrub species and basaltic rocks at about 200 m inland. The presence of introduced mammals such as rats (*Rattus norvegicus* and *R. rattus)* and Feral Cats *Felis catus*, and predation by these upon Cory's Shearwater chicks, have been confirmed less than 50 m apart from the Bulwer's Petrel burrow.

This is the first reliable breeding record of Bulwer's Petrel on Gran Canaria. The species was probably undetected during the last decades owing to its secretive breeding behaviour and the limited prospections carried out in either this or other zones that continue unexplored. We suggest, on the basis of potencial habitat (so far unseurveyed) and the number of fledgings (20-40 in some years) found stranded when they are attracted by artificial lights, that the actual breeding population of Bulwer's Petrel in Gran Canary could overpass the 100 pairs.

A detailed study on the real status and distribution of the species in the Canary Islands is needed to take precise conservation measures for this endangered and little known petrel. There is no information concerning the breeding of the species in Fuerteventura (MARTÍN & LORENZO, 2001), and the last global census covering the whole archipelago was performed more than fifteen years ago (HERNÁNDEZ *et al*., 1990). In the particular case of Gran Canaria, the prospections of other potential areas must be continued and the beginning of a monitoring program on the potential negative effects of introduced predators upon this small petrel is urgently needed.

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