

THE STORY OF
FONTANILLA

A NORTHERN BALD IBIS BORN IN CONIL DE LA FRONTERA



SCRIPT: IÑIGO SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA
DRAWINGS: GABRIEL DE LA RIVA PÉREZ
TRANSLATION: ELOY SERRANO AND KIRA SALVIA

G. de la Riva . 2016

THE STORY OF FONTANILLA

A Northern Bald ibis born in Conil. Script by Iñigo Sánchez and drawings by Gabriel de la Riva



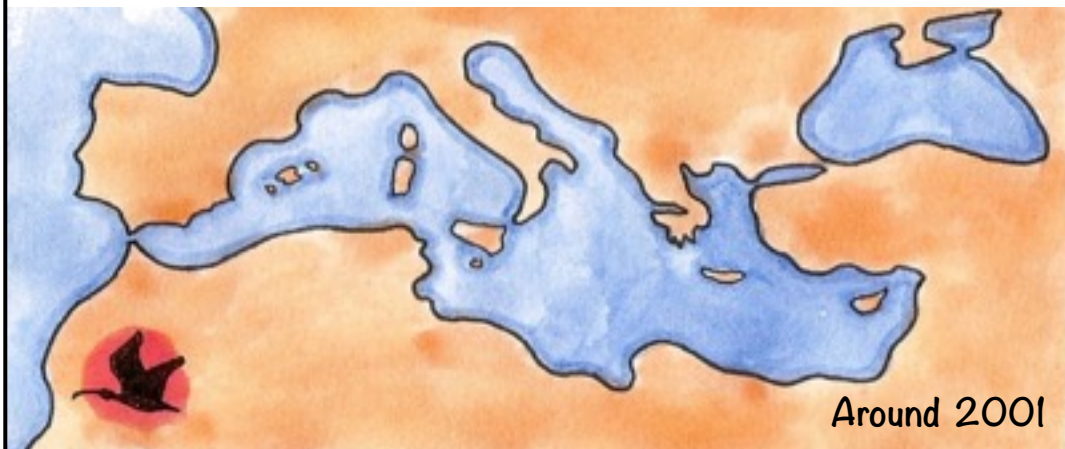
Hundreds of years ago we lived in Europe and North Africa. We were confused with the crows, and we were named in different ways...



Due to the cold periods at the end of the Middle Ages we retreated to the South in search of insects. Humans had perfected their weapons and hunted us to eat us. So we were disappearing, remaining only in the Middle East and Morocco.



At the end of the 20th century new threats appeared: very toxic insecticides and electricity cables. More of us disappeared until we were reduced to a single colony in the coast of Morocco.



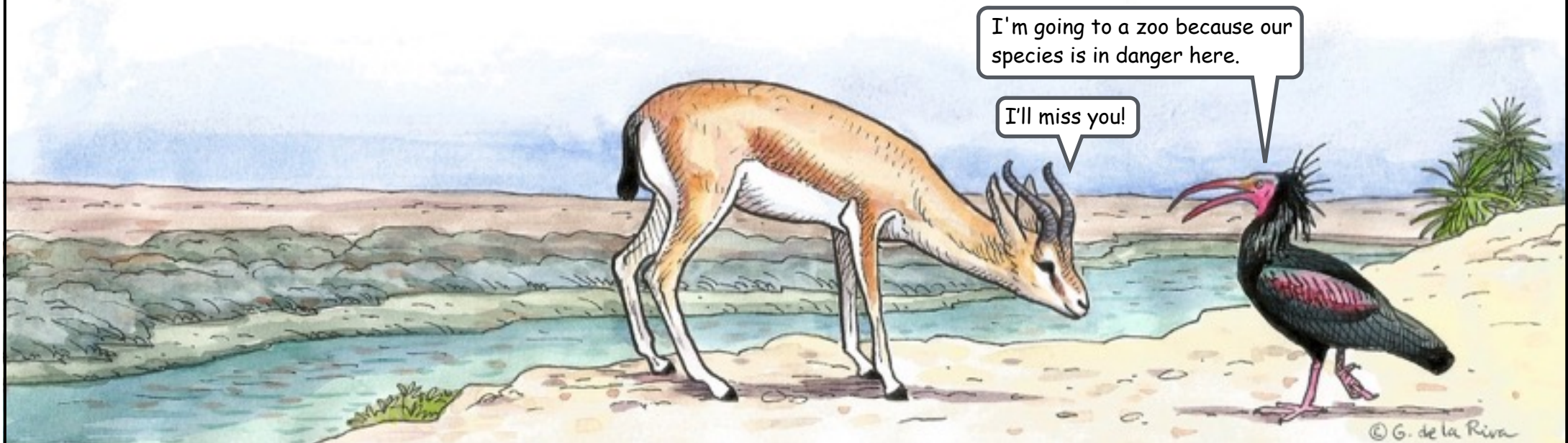
In some hundred years we went from being a common species to being one of the most threatened birds in the world. At the end of the 20th century, around 50 pairs remained in Morocco.

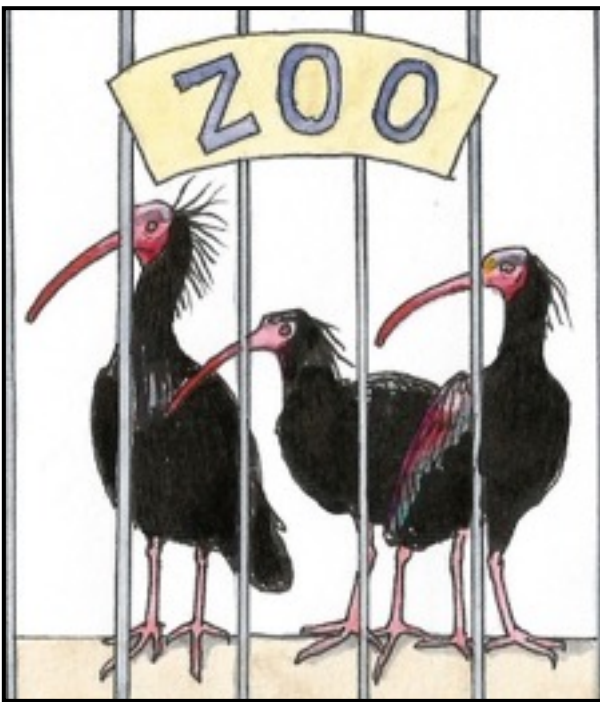


The **Souss-Massa** National Park was created in Morocco to protect our last breeding colonies. Many international organizations collaborated with Morocco for the protection of our species.



The **Souss-Massa** population has grown and now exceeds 100 pairs, but that is not enough to guarantee the future of our species. Our hopes for the future lay in our captive relatives.





In the middle of the 20th century several European zoos went to Morocco to get Northern Bald Ibis chicks and thus increase their exotic bird collections.

At that time our situation was not so bad. We were still breeding in many areas of Northern Africa and it was not even suspected that in a few years we would almost disappear.

Despite the boring lives of my captive relatives in the European zoos, they did not lack anything. They had no enemies, so their population increased rapidly.



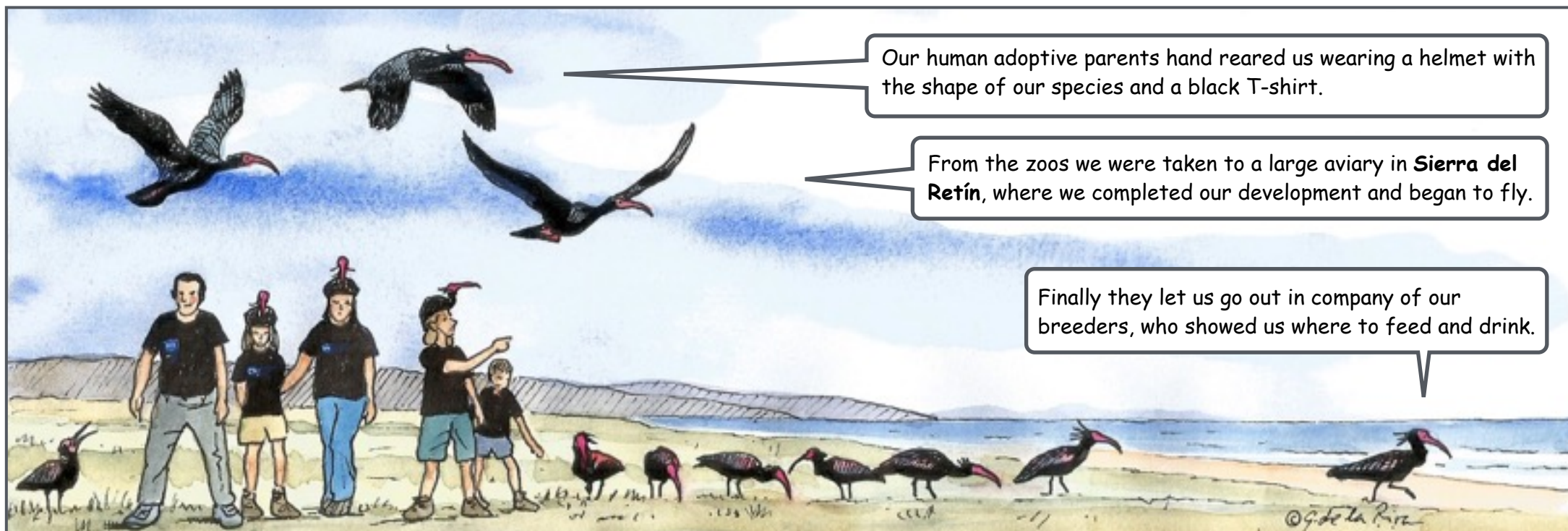
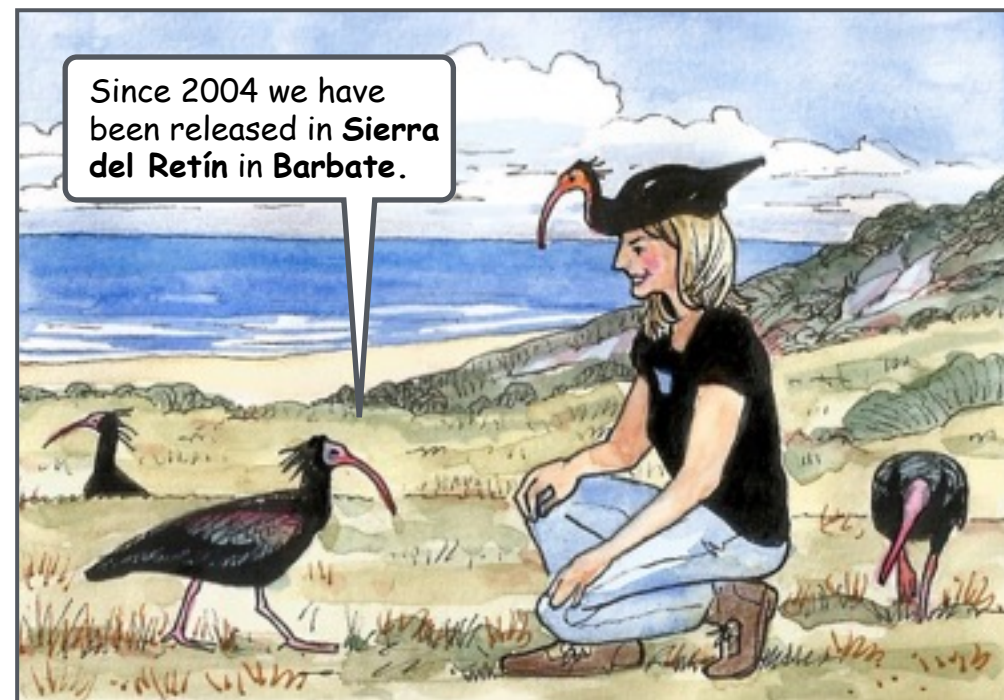
The zoos realized the importance of coordinating themselves to breed more of us and raise us successfully, to the point that there are now more than 1000 ibises in captivity.

That is why zoos tried several times to return some of my relatives to nature, but after many generations of an easy life, they had forgotten how to live in the wild and ended up dying.



Northern Bald Ibis Project

Proyecto Eremita is a joint plan of Zoobotánico de Jerez (Jerez Zoo) and the Department of Environment of the Junta de Andalucía. It took place on the coasts of the region of La Janda, an area very similar to that in Morocco where our last wild relatives lived. Northern Bald ibises born at **Jerez Zoo** and in other European zoos were used.





At the beginning many of our relatives could not adapt to life in the wild or had bad luck and died by natural causes or by human causes.

However, some were luckier and started to breed. The first pairs reproduced in **2008**, in the **Tajo de Barbate**.



The first Bald Ibis colony settled in **La Barca de Vejer** in **2011**, a place where humans did not expect us to choose for breeding, so close to their homes.

I am **Trafalgar**, the first Bald Ibis born in the wild in Spain for several hundred years.



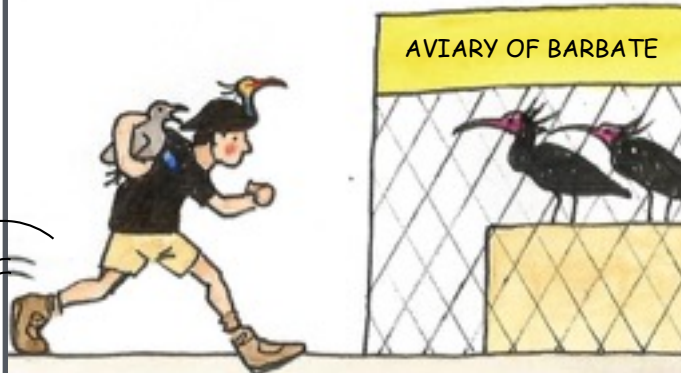
But the Bald ibises always liked to live close to humans, because where there are people, our natural enemies do not dare to approach.



There were four nests occupied. In one of them my father **Calimero** was born. He had a disease that produced yellowish plaques in his mouth and made it very difficult for him to eat.



The **Bald ibis Project** staff noticed that and took him to a nest in the Aviary of Barbate.

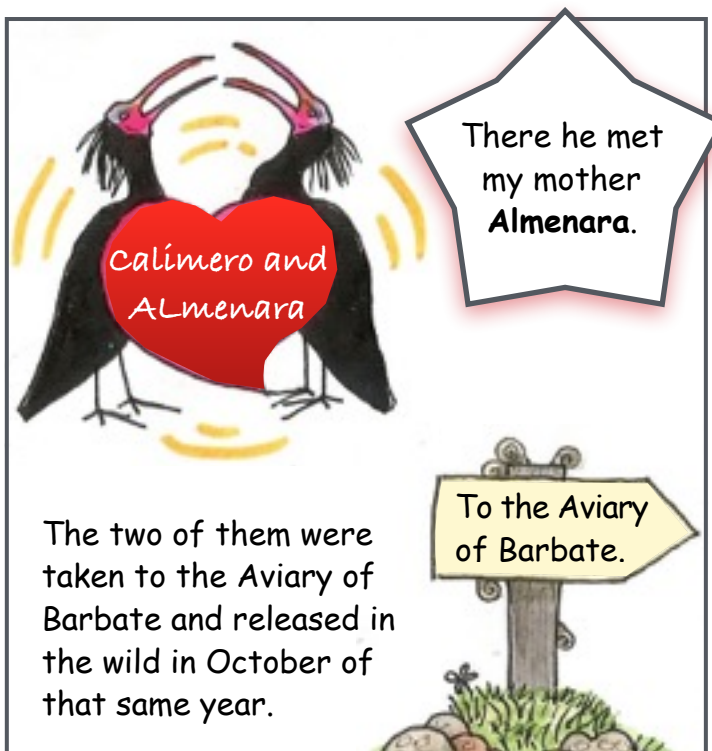


I am **Calimero** and I have been thrown out of the nest!

You have also been rejected. I'll take you to the **Jerez Zoo**.



In the **Jerez Zoo**, **Calimero** was under vet care and recovered.



The two of them were taken to the Aviary of Barbate and released in the wild in October of that same year.



My father did not waste his second chance and turned out to be a savvy ibis who became a magnificent adult. His favourite places to eat are the **golf courses of Chiclana**.

Because they are watered all year round there are a lot of insects. Furthermore it is easy to push your beak into the softened soil in search of food. **Almenara** also frequented the golf courses, in addition to Barbate and La Barca de Vejer.



From time to time the ibises turned off their usual route to visit the beautiful beach of **Castilnovo in Conil**. In the spring of **2014** my parents that were three years old, the age when we start breeding, decided to take a chance and settle in the tower. They were accompanied by two other youngsters, a male born at **Jerez Zoo**, and a female named **Loira** born at **Doue la Fontaine Zoo** in **France**.



The two pairs found accommodation in the old windows of the tower and laid their eggs almost at the same time. I had two brothers, but my parents were inexperienced and the food was not enough for all of us.



So I was the only survivor among my brothers. Shortly after, the other pair had two chicks; perhaps because **Loira** was a year older than my mother and had more experience. The previous spring she tried to breed with a different male in **La Barca de Vejer**, but she did not managed to rear the nestlings.



I am **Fontanilla**
and I was born
on May 1st, 2014

In the middle of June they put a ladder up to my nest, they picked me up and put me in a cloth bag. I thought my days were over. They looked at me, photographed me, and put two rings on me: a metal ring and a plastic ring with the inscription **K1V**.



In a few minutes I was back in my nest but, to my surprise, I was not alone, they had left another chick of my same age, a male with a **K1U** ring born at **Jerez Zoo**. From that moment he became part of the family. We began to exercise our wings in the nest and we leaned out over the wall being able to see the sea for the first time.



Soon we would be flying through the meadow and enjoying the first outings from our nest, but we always returned to the tower where our parents fed us. Once we could control our flight, we started to go with our parents to the golf courses of **Chiclana**, where there was plenty of food.



One cold January morning, while I was feeding on mole-crickets in the golf course, I suddenly felt a strong blow to my right side, followed by an intense pain.



My wing and my leg had been hit hard by a golf ball. The people of the **Proyecto Eremita** (Bald Ibis Project), who are always looking after us, picked me up and took me to the **Jerez Zoo**, where my father had also been treated. If I'd do my bit, with the help of the vets I would recover.



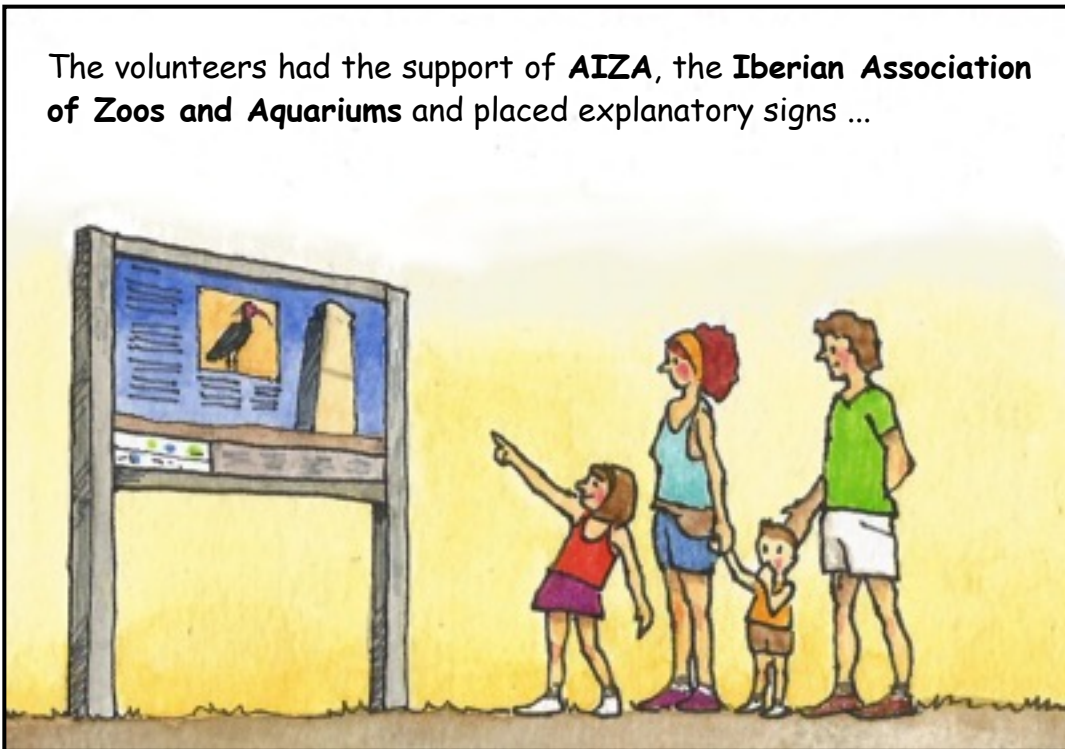
Volunteers of the **Sociedad Gaditana de Historia Natural** and of the **Jerez Zoo** monitored us closely so that nothing would happen to us.



Volunteers are important because some people do not know how essential it is to be quiet for breeding to be successful. My parents loved **Castilnovo**, so they went back the following spring to breed again, although there were many annoyances, like the noisy paramotors flying around the tower, or excessively noisy visitors.



The volunteers had the support of **AIZA**, the **Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquariums** and placed explanatory signs ...



... and they went to the schools so that **Conil** children got to know us and respect us.



At the end of February, once I had recovered, I was taken to **Castilnovo**.



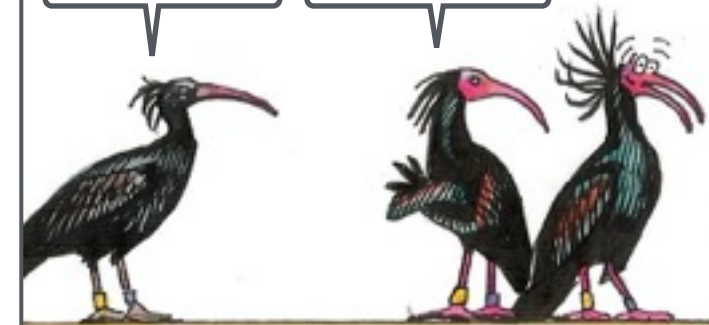
There, there was a group of students from the school Los **Bateles**, the Mayor of **Conil**, other authorities, and a giant ibis with human look called "**Peluki**". At last they let me go and I could enjoy freedom.



Mummy, Daddy, I'm back!

What is this about **Loira**?

WOW !!!



When I arrived to the tower, my parents did not pay any attention to me because they were absorbed in their things, I think they wanted to breed. My mother was angry because my father was attentive to the French **Loira**.

What a tragedy!



Loira

Loira's partner suffered the same accident as me, with the misfortune that the ball killed him. Because ibises do not breed every year with the same partner, my father questioned whether to pair with her or not.

I'd better go to **Chiclana** and leave my parents alone.



My parents reconciled and bred again in the same nest. **Loira**, the widow, went to **La Barca de Vejer** in search of a new partner, although there were no males available.

My mother laid four eggs, but one of them rolled out and cooled. The other three hatched, but my youngest sibling died. The other two grew up rapidly.

Everything was going well until my father brought a skein of fishing line to the nest.



The nylon turned out to be a trap. My little sister's leg hooked up with the line and almost cut off her circulation and tendons. A few days later they went up to ring them and released her from the nylon.



My oldest brother was named **Bateles** with the ring **K3M**, and my sister was called **Aiza**.

The injuries on **Aiza's** leg got infected. It hurt and she jumped out of the nest too soon. The volunteers took her to the zoo to treat the wounds.

They caught her before any dog or human could do any harm, but unfortunately the injuries on her leg were so serious that she gradually got worse and finally died.



My brother **Bateles** was more fortunate and reached the stage of flying. A few days later he appeared in **Chiclana** accompanied by my parents.

He was the proud survivor of the second generation of the Conil ibises; those of **2015**.



In 2016 **Almenara** and **Calimero**, **Fontanilla's** parents, tried to breed for the third consecutive year. They laid four eggs in their nest at the tower of **Castilnovo**, and three of them hatched. Unfortunately all ibis chicks died in the tower, in addition to those of other species such as jackdaws.

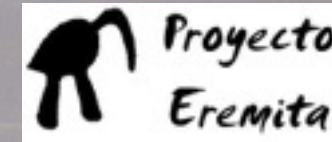
They were probably infected by the bites of numerous mites and ticks.



The bad fortune of 2016 must be accepted as part of a natural process. Parasites and diseases are part of the life cycle and have their function. Someday, maybe next year or the next, I hope to find a good male who wants to form a family with me in **Castilnovo**.

I can't think of a better place to rear my chicks!





G. de la Riva 2016