

Turtle sanctuary opens doors to public

Bédar council put to shame as 'tortoise house' lies empty

By Emma Rundle

THE SUCCESS of an open day at an amphibian conservation centre in Tabernas last weekend has served to highlight the failure of similar council-run projects to get up and running.

More than 150 people were treated to an insight into the lives of rare tortoises at Arco amphibian and reptile conservation centre, a non-profit making association dedicated to preserving creatures in their natural habitat and the rescue of unwanted animals.

The project houses tortoises and reptiles found in Mediterranean climates, with a special focus on the tortuga mora (spur-thighed or Greek tortoise) - a protected species native to Almería province and found in only two other places in Spain.

The centre, founded in 2005 with private funding and staffed by volunteers, is providing an educational and environmental service to the public at a time when other projects of a similar nature but funded by the state are being shelved due to lack of funds.

Arco volunteer Sylvia Geldeard recently visited the 'Casa de Tortuga Mora' - supposedly a centre for tortoise conservation, constructed and inaugurated in Bédar in 2011 with more than 600,000 euros worth of regional government funding.

She said: "It was all beautifully laid out, but absolutely nobody there and not an animal in sight."

CA News spoke to Juan Antonio Soler, independent



Arco volunteer Sylvia Geldeard shows a tortoise to visitors at the recent open day

councillor on Bédar council at the time of the inauguration.

He said: "All the installations are there ready and waiting. The council says there is no money to run it, but the money already spent will be wasted if nothing happens."

He added that in his opinion the centre should be seen as an opportunity to provide local employment and attract tourists.

Mrs Geldeard said she could not understand why Bédar should be lucky enough to receive thousands of euros and then not use it for the benefit of the public.

She said: "It is a scandal really, when other places like Arco and Paws operate rescue services with no help from the government."

A similar story can be seen in Chirivel, where a wildlife park constructed with regional government funding has remained closed to the public since its completion in March last year, as reported in this paper at the time.

The Parque de Fauna Ibérica, costing more than 580,000 euros, was supposed to showcase some of Spain's most characteristic wild life, with management handed

over to a private company, but to date that has not happened.

CA News spoke to the park manager employed by the council this week, who confirmed that while anyone could turn up to visit the centre, there were only a few animals on display and the facility was not fully operational (the restaurant, for instance, remains closed).

Arco said it was looking for new members to support its work. Anyone interested or requiring more information should email arco.spain06@gmail.com.

British Criminals in Spain to feel force of UK's newest crime fighters

NEWS Staff Reporter

ORGANISED criminals who believe they can evade arrest by hiding in Spain will feel the full force of the UK's newest crime fighting agency when it goes live this month.

From this week, the National Crime Agency (NCA) will use more than 4,000 specialist crime

fighters to tackle some of the world's toughest and most organised criminals.

The new agency will also strengthen relations between law enforcement in the UK and Spain.

The NCA will build on its work with a range of agencies including the Spanish National Police, Guardia Civil and Spanish cus-

tomers to tackle threats, including economic crime, criminal finances and profits, organised immigration crime and emerging threats such as e-crime.

Of particular interest to both countries will be cocaine and cannabis entering the UK via Spain from Latin America and North and West Africa.

The new agency will also focus

nised crime groups in-country, share intelligence on joint threats and targets, and intercept people, property and money moving to and from the UK.

David Armond, Director of Border Policing Command for the NCA, said: "Tackling serious and organised crime goes way beyond the shores of the United Kingdom.

"Some of the biggest threats to