



**Committe Against
Bird Slaughter - CABS**

Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.

Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt[®]
Foundation Pro Biodiversity

Field Report:
Autumn 2013
Bird Protection Camp
20 September – 13 October 2013



Bonn / Bielefeld, Germany: Friday, 7 March 2014

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1 INTRODUCTION

The *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)* has conducted bird protection camps in the poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean region for more than 20 years. On Cyprus, CABS has been active on a small scale since 2001; but regular bird protection camps began in spring 2008, in cooperation with the *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA)*. In 2013, the 4th Autumn Bird Protection Camp was conducted over a period of three weeks, from 20 September to 13 October, in order to cover a longer period of post-nuptial migration.

Bird Protection Camps (BPCs – Περιοδείες Προστασίας Πουλιών in Greek) are major field surveys and anti-poaching campaigns organised during the two annual bird migration seasons and have two main objectives:

- The collection of data in order to evaluate the true impact of the massive use of non-selective trapping methods – such as limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys – on wild bird populations;
- The collection of data in relation to the strategies and efforts implemented by the Cyprus authorities (Game Fund, Cyprus Police, British SBAs Police) to tackle bird trapping;
- To locate and report as many illegal trapping installations as possible to the responsible law enforcement agencies, in order to arrest poachers red-handed, confiscate trapping paraphernalia and ensure a safe passage on migration for birds.

CABS is always seeking the cooperation and support of the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus (Cyprus Police and the Game Fund) and the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) Police, in order to help them combat illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds. Until spring 2013, BPCs were conducted with the full knowledge of, and in close cooperation with, all responsible public authorities and law enforcement agencies. In spring 2013, after the initial successful operations and a number of prosecutions in the main trapping area, trappers began to create political pressure in Paralimni. As a result, the cooperation between CABS and the competent law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus was temporarily suspended by the newly appointed Minister of Justice and Public Order. ^[1] Despite the efforts made by CABS to restore the joint operations and the positive statements made by the Minister of Justice and Public Order (MJPO) to again deploy a patrol of the Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) to assist volunteers, CABS did not receive any formal reply from the MJPO by the scheduled date of the Autumn BPC. By the end of the BPC, CABS teams had received the negative response of the Cyprus Police Headquarters and consequently they had not received any help at all by the responsible authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, whose attitude resembled a boycott of the field survey and anti-poaching campaign.

CABS and SPA consider this boycott to be part of a wider strategy of the responsible political authorities of the Republic of Cyprus to hinder anti-trapping operations and turn a blind eye to the trappers. Songbird poachers took advantage of this political choice of tolerance: trapping again reached extremely high levels, while trappers observed no fear of prosecution and demonstrated extreme violence towards anybody trying to disrupt trapping activities. Poachers were in control of the territory, with patrols roaming the countryside day and night. Electronic decoys were calling across the municipalities of Paralimni and Ayia Napa. With no police deployed on the ground against bird trapping, and only two Game Fund patrols to cover the 1,211.82 square Km of the two main hotspots of Famagusta and Larnaca districts, trappers enjoyed an almost complete impunity. Last but not least, the trappers' lobby is already in the process of being officially registered and recognized as an “*association demanding the legalization of traditional and sustainable [sic] hunting methods*”, such as limesticks. ^[2] Every step forward made in previous years to implement the zero tolerance policy was forgotten: this was “*Cyprus in Year Zero*”. There were also alarming signals from the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), where trapping was as widespread as usual. The lack of political will and the yielding to the demands of trappers was the common denominator both for the Republic of Cyprus and the ESBA.

2 AUTUMN 2013 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP DATA AND RESULTS

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

A total of 15 volunteers, from Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Hungary, England, Slovenia and Switzerland participated in the camp. Of these, most had previously participated in a CABS camp in Cyprus and had good knowledge of the area. Teams of three to five volunteers were formed enabling one to two teams per day / night to be deployed. In addition, CABS worked in coordination with Migratory Bird Conservation on Cyprus (MBCC) volunteers.

2.2 WORKING SCHEDULE

This BPC, lasting 23 working days, was the longest field survey and anti-poaching campaign conducted in autumn on Cyprus by CABS, covering an important part of peak autumn migration. Volunteers began work at 00:00 a.m. to locate trapping sites by following the sounds of electronic decoys, which usually start calling at midnight. The teams stopped working around 09:00 a.m. when many trapping sites are deactivated after the night and morning trapping. Random checks were carried out in the afternoon. Teams tried to call the Game Fund and the Cyprus Police for assistance in a few cases, but there was no satisfactory response. Thereafter, all trapping sites which were not in fenced-in properties were dismantled when deemed safe, for bird conservation and wildlife protection reasons. In the ESBA area, we only conducted two joint patrols with the Anti-Poaching Unit of the ESBA Police.

2.3 SITES CHECKED

Over the past five years, CABS (together with the other NGOs that are monitoring bird trapping – BirdLife Cyprus and MBCC) located and listed 768 trapping sites (118 new trapping sites were located during the autumn 2013 BPC). During the 23 days of the camp, the teams monitored 290 of these sites (38%). Many other sites which were particularly important were checked more than once on different dates and times of day.

Of the 290 sites checked, 176 were found to be active (60%), the rest had no signs of recent trapping (but could be in use on a random and sporadic basis). Considering that every 24 hours, 1,5 team was out in the field and that 19 sites were found active and/or dismantled more than once, on average each team located 5.6 active trapping sites every 24 hours. This rate is much higher than in spring (1.8). This is due to the fact that teams were not slowed down by the prosecution work of the police and that trapping is much more widespread in autumn than in spring. This rate could have been much higher, since many hotspots where trappers are organized in mafia-like structures were not checked for security reasons.

2.4 RESULTS

On the 176 active trapping sites, CABS teams located and dismantled 4,419 limesticks (plus some 300 seen, but left in fenced private properties), 60 mist nets and 85 electronic decoys. Furthermore, 51 electronic decoys were located exactly, but left on spot for security reasons. The Game Fund patrols responsible for the area were summoned 3 times with no intervention. The Game Fund Headquarters was called once for a site in the United Nations Buffer Zone (UNBZ) and the check was made few days later. The police stations were called 4 times for prosecutions in private fenced-in properties, but we received only one positive feedback.

3 AUTUMN TRAPPING PATTERNS, TIMES AND AREAS

In autumn, bird trapping is widespread in the whole of Cyprus. The area with the highest density of trapping sites is still the Famagusta District (from our observation the South-Eastern corner of the island represents an important

migration corridor for many bird species in autumn as well). The ESBA area turns into a wall of mist nets both in the Cape Pyla area and in Ayios Nikolaos. Less dense, but still present, are trapping sites in Aradipou and in the wider foothills and coastal area between Mazotos, Zygi, Kalavastos and Pano Lefkara (Larnaca district). No observations were made farther West or North yet. [3]

Trapping starts at night when tape lures are turned on, usually around midnight. On full moon nights, when bird migration is in full swing, trappers set out mist nets and limesticks in the darkness and usually wait in the car, collecting birds every hour. It is not unusual to catch 30 birds in few hours in one single net. Otherwise, traps are usually set out in the early morning hours. Only a minority of trapping sites are left active during the day after 9 a.m.

Tape lures are widespread in autumn and now a key factor to achieve huge hunting bags. Tape lures are mostly extremely loud and are set in the night to force migrating birds to interrupt the night migration and descend down into the trapping site. Some trappers use a different method which consists of the use of a loud tape lure to attract the migrating birds into the broad area, whereas a second lower tape lure is set in the early morning to lead resting and feeding birds straight to the traps. Where tape lures are in use the catching rate is much higher than under normal conditions. The fact that during the whole night migrating birds are forced to interrupt their migration and stop in the trapping area, makes this practice massive and of high impact.

4 ANALYSIS OF TRAPPERS' REACTIONS, POLICE RESPONSE AND POLITICAL FRAME: "CYPRUS IN YEAR ZERO"

4.1 CYPRUS IN YEAR ZERO

With the accession of Cyprus to the European Union (EU) in 2004, the Cypriot Government pledged its commitment to tackle songbird poaching, in order to ensure effective conservation and protection of wild birds, in accordance with both existing national legislation [N.51(I)/2003] [4] and the EU Birds Directive [2009/147/EC (codified version of 79/409/ECC)]. [5] As BirdLife Cyprus observes, "bird trapping in Cyprus became illegal in 1974, when legislation of hunting was introduced with Law 39/74, when a number of bird species were listed as protected, including water birds, birds of prey, endemic species, such as the Cyprus wheatear and the Cyprus warbler. In accordance with this law, the game species were the hare, the chukar and the black francolin and non-selective methods, such as mist nets, limesticks and traps were prohibited. Moreover, in 1988 Cyprus ratified the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, enlisting more bird species as protected, including also the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) for the first time. Blackcaps are the main target species of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and with this important legislative amendment blackcaps obtained a protected species status in Cyprus, in addition to the previous prohibition for the use of non-selective methods for the killing of birds". [6]

Nevertheless, the history of anti-trapping efforts in Cyprus presents the same pattern since the very beginning, with long periods of "laissez faire" activities interrupted by seasonal raids, followed by protests from the poachers' lobby and restoration of the tolerance. According to Magnin (1986), the first effort was made in **1985** when "after years of protests the Government of the Republic of Cyprus decided in December 1984 to improve the situation for migratory birds in Cyprus". In 1985, trappers using mist nets were prosecuted, but huge tolerance was shown towards limesticks trappers: "especially in the south-east of Cyprus, where the authorities proved to be completely complacent about applying the law concerning limesticks". [7] The situation became worse again in the following years, until the final procedure for the accession of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU, when the Government of the Republic of Cyprus committed itself to seriously combating songbird poaching. Indeed, according to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (2003), in **2002** levels of poaching were very low. [8] But in October 2002, trappers responded to the new wave of inspections and complaints, by returning as a form of protest, 7,000 vote ballots, stating that because of repression they were losing income for the missing sale of birds. [9] The government once again gave up, with trapping increasing exponentially in the following years, to the point that BirdLife Cyprus (2010) described it as an

environmental emergency. [10] The third wave of prosecutions against trappers was between autumn **2011** and spring 2013, after the Larnaca Declaration which claimed a “*zero tolerance policy against bird trapping*”. A better cooperation between NGOs and authorities (APS and Game Fund) lead to increased numbers of prosecutions and managed to finally target the main trapping hotspot of Eastern Famagusta. [11] In spring **2013**, bird trapping with both mist nets and limesticks was at its lowest level. However, trappers again claimed their right to trap; on 27 April, a group of 25-50 trappers gathered in the central square of Paralimni to demonstrate against anti-poaching activists and for the legalisation of limestick trapping. The following day, the Minister of Justice and Public Order withdrew the APS and interrupted the anti-poaching campaign. [12] Since then, the APS has not been systematically engaged in the effort to combat illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds.

Considering that the local police stations do not engage proactively in anti-trapping operations – and sometimes they even openly boycott cases reported by NGOs – **only two patrols of the Game Fund are responsible for tackling bird trapping on a daily base in the 1,211.82 square Km of the two main hotspots of the Republic of Cyprus, Famagusta and Larnaca districts, where around 1,100 trapping sites are estimated** (and 665 are recorded and monitored).

If we look at the following table, which compares the case of Cyprus with two other bird trapping and hunting hotspots of the Mediterranean region, the Province of Brescia in Italy and the island of Malta, we can easily observe that **the effort made by the Republic of Cyprus to tackle bird trapping with only one patrol on daily base for 606 sq. Km is simply ridiculous**. The Province of Brescia has one patrol in the field for each 81-98 sq. Km, and Malta has one for each 20 sq. Km. Both areas are still far away from efficiently tackling bird killing, but **the lack of implementation of the law for the protection of wild birds in Cyprus is more than blatant**.

LAND	SQUARE KILOMETERS	AUTHORITIES IN CHARGE	N° OF PATROLS	N° of SQUARE KILOMETERS/PATROL
Republic of Cyprus hotspots	1,211.82	➤ 2 Game Fund patrols	2	606
Brescia Province	4,700.36	➤ 30 province police officers of the “Nucleo ittico venatorio” (15 patrols) ➤ 23 Forest police stations (23 patrols) ➤ 5-10 patrols of the NOA (Anti Poaching Squad) ➤ 5-10 patrols of volunteer Game Wardens	48-58	81-98
Island of Malta	246	➤ 8 administrative law enforcement patrols ➤ About 4 army patrols	12	20

Table 1: Comparison of numbers of law enforcement patrols per sq. km in three different countries affected by bird killing and trapping

The lack of political will to tackle bird trapping has been openly shown by members of the Government in charge. The APS has been *progressively* dismantled and its officers devoted to other activities. Police stations in the hotspot areas have been instructed not to follow-up reports made by NGOs and investigate their complaints, with most notable examples being those in Famagusta district. Bird conservationists and environmental activists have been isolated, targeted and even criminalised for taking legal, peaceful and non-violent direct action in an effort to help the competent authorities to combat the problem. The MJPO has openly and repeatedly claimed that “*the action of CABS volunteers is not compatible with the laws of the Republic of Cyprus*”; at the same time he said nothing about a group of 25-50 trappers who gathered in the central square of Paralimni a year ago, entered the voting booths, seized the ballot boxes and threw them out into the street, during the elections for the DISY vice-presidency, at which local politicians and particularly representatives of the governing party pledged to put a stop to the joint operations between CABS and the Cyprus Police. Furthermore, the poaching lobby itself is organizing to be registered as a legal “association”, demanding the legalisation of trapping with limesticks. [13] The legislation on the use of tape lures has already been loosened [14] and a legislative proposal which has been pending for years aims to indirectly legitimize the use of limesticks and mist nets. [15] All efforts made in the last two years to act as a deterrent and move towards an efficient prosecution of offenders and implementation of a zero tolerance policy have been nullified.

4.2 TRENDS OF TRAPPING

This new policy has been communicated to trappers. The “Group for Reclamation of the Traditional Hunting with Limesticks”, formerly called “Friends of limesticks”, is indeed an unofficial pressure group linked with Parliamentarians and local authorities, which gathers together trappers from the south-east of Famagusta district. BPCs and the cooperation with authorities had achieved the goal of deterring trappers, progressively lowering the numbers of the traps set out. However, the “new wave of tolerance” has reversed this trend. The attitude of trappers was of people with more impunity.

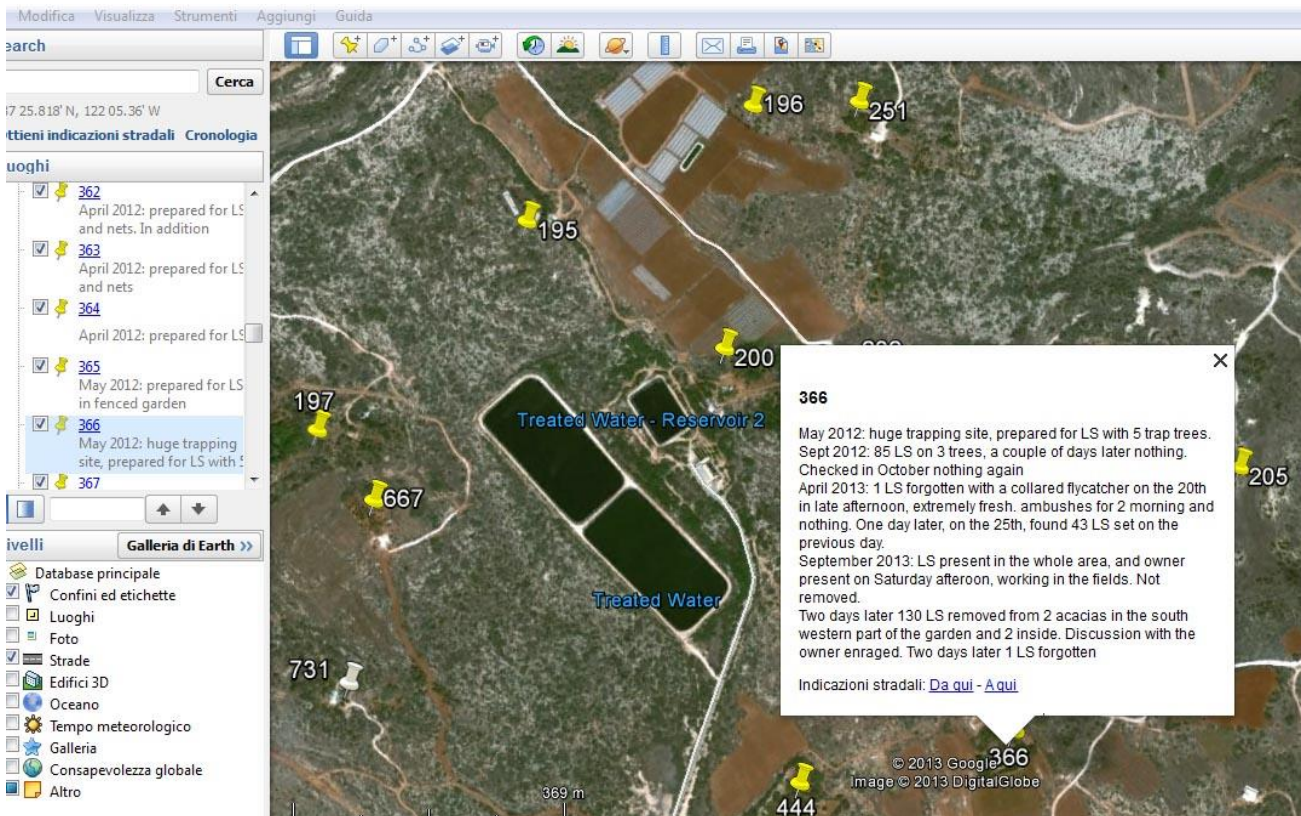


Figure 1: CABS trapping sites data base. Each trapping site has a record of any check, numbers of traps found, notes, etc. 768 trapping sites has been recorded and monitored so far

HIGHEST NUMBERS OF TRAPS: In CABS’ methodology, each trapping site is monitored every season and the number of traps found is recorded. Most of these sites had big numbers of traps in 2009 when BPCs started. The number of traps decreased because of the disturbance caused by CABS, but in autumn 2013 we recorded a new increase of traps set out for many trapping sites. Some examples:

site n° 133	Protaras, Paralimni	<u>Spring 2012</u> : 9 limesticks - <u>Spring 2013</u> : 7 limesticks - <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 40 limesticks
site n° 333	Kokkines, Ayia Napa	<u>Spring 2012</u> : 5 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : 49 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 188 limesticks
site n° 200	Ayia Napa reservoir	<u>Autumn 2010</u> : 20 limesticks and 1 net - <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 75 limesticks and tape lure
site n° 101	Sotira municipal forest	<u>Spring 2010</u> : 22 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2010</u> : 15 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : 15 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 50 limesticks
site n° 366	Ayia Napa reservoir	<u>Autumn 2012</u> : 85 limesticks – <u>Spring 2013</u> : 43 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 130 limesticks

Table 1: Trend in numbers of traps set out in different trapping sites in eastern Famagusta district

NEW ACTIVATION OF TRAPPING SITES NO LONGER IN USE: Many trapping sites were progressively abandoned by trappers, after the disturbance from CABS and later the joint work with APS. In autumn 2013, many trapping sites where we found no traps in the last few years were reactivated. Some examples:

site n° 305	Archangel's Gavril, Paralimni	<u>Spring 2012</u> : 40 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Spring 2013</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : decoy and limesticks
site n° 177	Archangel's Gavril, Paralimni	<u>Spring 2011</u> : 44 limesticks - <u>Autumn 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : nothing - <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 60 limesticks and decoy
site n° 229	Ayia Napa	<u>Autumn 2011</u> : 4 nets and decoy – <u>Spring 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Spring 2013</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 2 nets and decoy
site n° 129	Paralimni	<u>Spring 2011</u> : 74 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2011</u> : 165 limesticks – <u>Spring 2012</u> : 60 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Spring 2013</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 30 limesticks
site n° 175	Archangel's Gavril, Paralimni	<u>Autumn 2011</u> : 85 limesticks – <u>Autumn 2012</u> : nothing – <u>Spring 2013</u> : nothing – <u>Autumn 2013</u> : 85 limesticks

Table 2: New activation of in stand-by/abandoned trapping sites in eastern Famagusta district

SHIFT FROM RANDOM TRAPPING TO CONTINUOUS TRAPPING: As stated in our previous reports, after disturbance, trappers who used to trap 24h/24h during the whole season changed their strategy, in order to minimise the risk of losing their trapping paraphernalia or being caught red-handed. From continuous trapping many shifted to random trapping, morning trapping or only early morning trapping. In autumn 2013 we observed a change in this trend with more trapping sites left active during the whole day. A significant number of trapping sites could be raided during midday or in the afternoon, something which had become rare in the previous seasons.

REACTIVATION OF TRAPPING SITES AFTER RAIDS: After a trapping site is raided, we have generally recorded the time elapsed until the next reactivation to understand the deterrence effect of our operations. This time was extremely short in 2001 (1 day), became longer after systematic BPCs in 2009-2010 (1 week) and became even longer in 2011-2012, when trapping sites were not activated anymore during the BPC (hence our strategic choice to extend camps during the whole migration season). In autumn 2013, the reactivation time of a trapping site was again very short.

Site n° 471	South Liopetri	Net rides and decoy	Reactivation time: max. 2 days
Site n° 470	South Liopetri	Net rides and decoy	Reactivation time: max. 2 days
Site n° 695	Paralimni	100 limesticks and decoy	Reactivation time: max. 8 days
Site n° 200	Ayia Napa reservoir	80 limesticks and decoy	Reactivation time: 1 day
Site n° 251	Protaras, Paralimni	25 limesticks and decoy	Reactivation time: max. 2 days
Site n° 180	Archangel's Gavril, Paralimni	Decoy	Reactivation time: max. 5 days
Site n° 61	Kappari, Paralimni	70 limesticks	Reactivation time: max. 8 days
Site n° 685	Kalavassos	4 nets and decoy	Reactivation time: max. 3 days
Site n° 701	Psematismenos	5 nets and 2 decoys	Reactivation time: max. 3 days
Sites n° 279	Sotira municipal forest	40 limesticks and decoy	Reactivation time: 1 day
Sites n° 281	Sotira municipal forest	180 limesticks and 3 decoys	Reactivation time: 1 day

Table 4: Reactivation time for raided trapping sites in autumn 2013: the time is intended as the maximum elapsed between one check and the following one. Since it was not possible to conduct checks of the same sites every day the reactivation time can be much shorter.

USE OF TAPE LURES: Tape lures make a trapping site visible for prosecution or raids: the electronic decoys can be heard from 50 meters up to 1.5 km depending on the volume and geographic obstacles. Trappers seemed to have become more careful in recent trapping seasons with fewer tape lures used, only for few hours and with low volume. In autumn 2013 this trend was again reversed. Tape lures were audible in the night from the middle of the towns of Paralimni, Ayia Napa, Vrysoules, and even from the police station of Xylophagou. Whilst driving around from 00:00 a.m. to 06:00 a.m. at least one decoy could be heard almost anywhere if the car stopped. CABS located a record number of 136 tape lures in three weeks and dismantled 85. It was impossible for any law enforcement agency not to become aware of the massive presence of decoys. The following map shows the exact presence and audibility of decoys on a daily basis (from 00:00 to 06:00 a.m.) in the eastern Famagusta area.

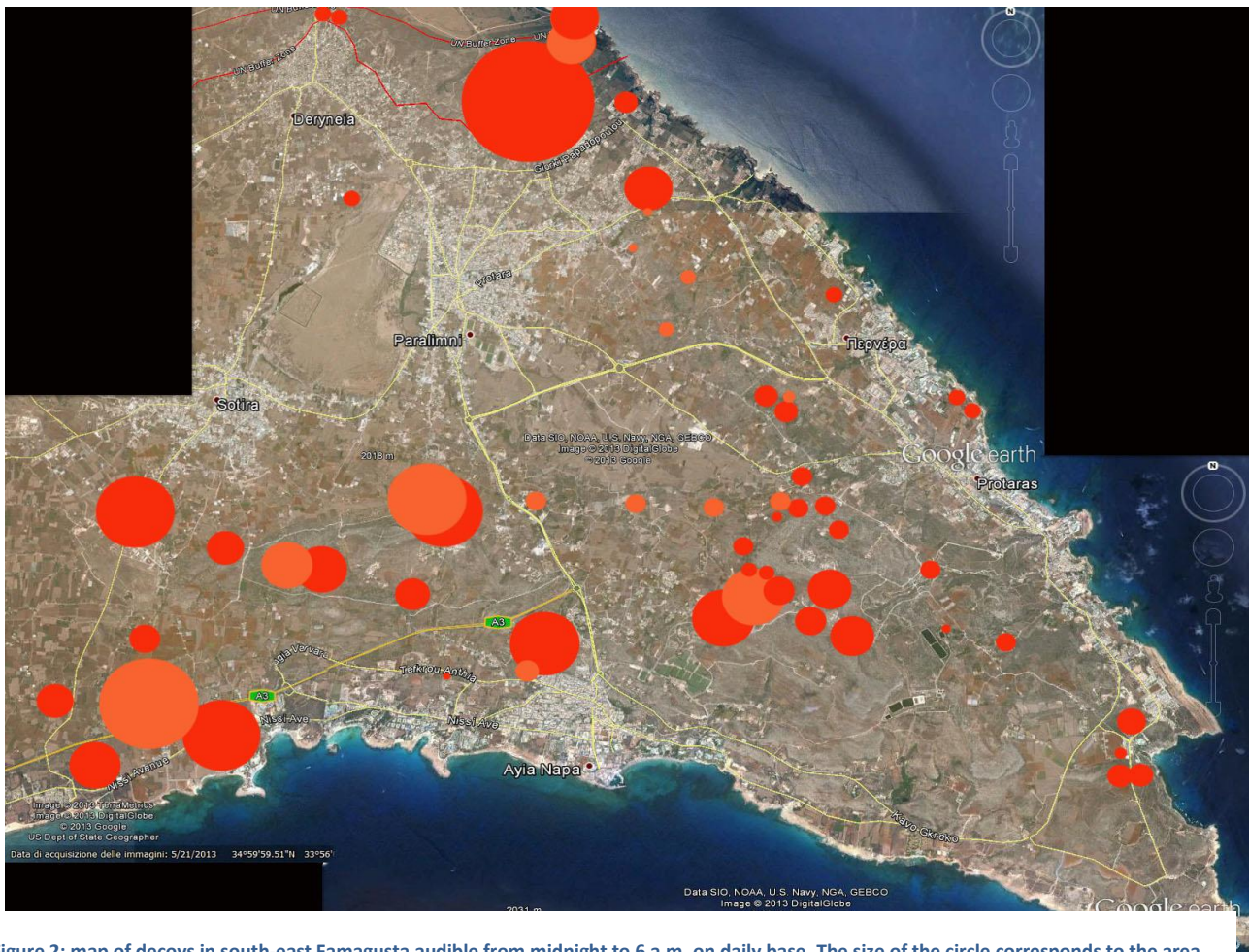


Figure 2: map of decoys in south-east Famagusta audible from midnight to 6 a.m. on daily base. The size of the circle corresponds to the area reached by the sound machine.

4.3 LAW ENFORCEMENT UNITS' RESPONSE

The cooperation between CABS and law enforcement agencies started in spring 2011, when, according to a scheduled plan agreed with the Game Fund, activists would locate trapping sites and report them to the Game Fund Headquarters. The result was very poor: out of the 34 cases reported only 1 case ended up with a prosecution. In addition, this case was only solved because 3 days after the first report activists found the trapping site active again and consistently called the patrol to the spot, until it arrived and caught trappers red-handed. [16] In spring 2012, the joint operations with the APS started with increasing success. Thanks to the mediation of the APS officers, the reaction time and availability of the district police divisions and local police stations was excellent (according to the normal police practice, policemen from local police stations are required for the prosecution of offenders and Game Fund wardens are required for the recognition of protected wild birds held in captivity). [17] After the withdrawal of the APS in spring 2013, the attitude of law enforcement officers - and most importantly the local police officers - changed drastically. As reported in our *Field Report: Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camp*, Paralimni police station openly boycotted our operations in the last week of our spring BPC. [18] This boycott was even worse during autumn 2013, when Paralimni police officers stated that *“they received orders not to attend calls from activists in relation to bird trapping issues”*. Despite the clear boycott of our work, we tried to engage both Game Fund and local police stations on different occasions, again with very poor results.

Ayia Napa Police Station: We engaged this local police station in two cases with no results:

- 1) On 26.09.2013, at 10:00 a.m., point 383, a trapping site where we heard and found tape lure and limesticks three and four days earlier, was active again. The owner of the house was present in the unfenced fruit orchard. We called the Ayia Napa Police Station, reported the illegal activity and agreed to meet in 10 minutes. After waiting for half an hour, we called again and found out that the police woman, who now answered the call, did not know anything about the case and told us just to wait longer. Fortunately, we met a traffic police officer and we asked him for help. He approached the garden with us, heard the tape lure and called the patrol, which this time arrived approximately 20 minutes later. The police patrol stopped in front of the house without undertaking any action and the owner showed up and asked the officer to stay in front of the house. The owner went back and a few minutes later the decoy stopped calling. In the meantime, the patrol approached the orchard with us, but stopped just outside, although that there was no fence, and waited to get the signature of the owner of the garden, before entering and searching in his garden. This took around 20 minutes, during which we observed at least three people walking around between the trees a few meters in front of us; in the end one of them was even cleaning his hands. As soon as the police had the signature of the garden's owner, they searched the garden and found tracks of trapping (a cut cable leading to a tree for the tape lure, tracks of limes everywhere and even a forgotten fresh limestick). But both policemen aggressively told us that the only evidence is this one limestick and this was not enough for prosecution. They left without any prosecution.
- 2) On 27.09.2013, at 06:20 a.m., we heard a decoy in a private garden and saw net poles and a man setting out limesticks on the trees. We called the Ayia Napa police at 06:30 a.m. and again we agreed to meet as soon as possible somewhere near the Sotira municipal forest. We waited one and a half hours. The police didn't show up or even called us back. We left 90 minutes later while the machine was still calling.

Paralimni Police Station: We engaged this local police station on three occasions with one prosecution:

- 1) On 24.09.2013, we went to the Paralimni Police Station to report trapping site n° 333 with a tape lure and about 200 limesticks, but the police officers told us that **they had received orders not to attend calls from volunteers in relation to bird trapping.** This order had probably been given in spring, but was only openly communicated to us in September (the same statement was made by police officers in Deryneia police station as well).
- 2) On 28.09.2013, we went back to trapping site n° 333 which was still active. We called the Paralimni Police Station from the spot, saying that the site was dangerous. The patrol came immediately *"for safety reasons"* and together we removed 188 limesticks and an electronic decoy. **The policemen told us that the only way they could attend our calls is for safety reasons, not for dismantling trapping sites. Limesticks were destroyed on the spot by the policemen to avoid being forced to make an official report at the station.**
- 3) On 12.10.2013, we found the fenced garden, n° 722, full of limesticks and a tape lure calling. We called the Paralimni Police Station and we were told that they have no patrol available. After 30 minutes, a police officer called back and said that a patrol is coming. The patrol intervened and later gave us a positive feedback, according to which the owner has been prosecuted, but we haven't been informed of the quantity of the trapping paraphernalia.

Zygi Police Station: We engaged this local police station in one case with an apparently good result, but no official feedback:

- 1) On 06.10.2013, we found limesticks and a sound machine calling from a fenced garden at 07:00 a.m. We called Zygi Police Station and a patrol arrived in a short time. We led the police officers to the fenced garden where the trapper was present. The police entered the garden and asked us to leave immediately. We called the station two days later, but nobody was able to tell us more about the case.

Game Fund: We engaged the Game Fund on four occasions and we had one response:

- 1) On 21.09.2013, we found a net in a fenced field (n° 592) and at 03:00 p.m. we called the Game Fund patrol and reported the place. They told us that they were busy, but they would come in a couple of hours. We gave them our telephone number to call us back as soon they were available, but we never received a call.
- 2) On 24.09.2013, we found a huge mist netting site (n° 670) with tape lures in the UNBZ. The site was reported to the Game Fund on the 28.09.2013, which sent a patrol to the spot few days later. After few weeks, we were informed that the poacher was prosecuted.
- 3) On 12.10.2013, at 09:00 a.m., we found a fenced garden with limesticks and tape lure calling (n° 722). We called the Game Fund patrol, who told us that they could only investigate the case the following day. Fortunately, a police patrol came and solved the case (see “Case 3: Paralimni Police Station”).
- 4) On 23.10.2013, at 03:00 a.m., we found two mist netting sites in Aradipou (n° 728 and 729) with tape lures calling and trappers sleeping on the spot. We called both patrols of the Game Fund in Larnaca and Famagusta districts. Both of them were far away investigating two other cases and suggested that we report the site to the Game Fund Headquarter for further action.

Conclusions: Even if CABS did not systematically engage the law enforcement agencies, but preferred to devote its volunteers to the disruption of active trapping sites to reduce the short-term impact of trapping on birds, the scenario in terms of law enforcement was clear: with no APS on the ground, no engagement at all of the local police stations and – in the best case scenario – two Game Fund patrols following all hunting and trapping cases in both Larnaca and Famagusta districts, trapping was actually undisturbed most of the time. We have to point out here that local police stations in Cyprus are seldom, if ever, proactive in prosecuting bird trapping, whereas it is now clear that those of eastern Famagusta have received clear orders to avoid prosecution or disturbance of trappers. The exception of case 3 with Paralimni Police Station does not leave much space for hope.

4.4 MAFIA-LIKE ORGANIZATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST VOLUNTEERS

Monitoring observations and field surveys of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should not be intended as a form of guerrilla war between songbird poachers and bird conservationists. It should be seen much more as an input, a stimulus and a technical support that civil society can provide to the competent law enforcement agencies, in order to help them perform their duties, which are prescribed in the law, but not yet implemented for social, cultural, economic and / or political reasons. If the responsible authorities supported this process, as they did from autumn 2011 to spring 2013 in Cyprus, this severe wildlife crime could be progressively tackled without any backlash from the poachers’ lobby and any incidents of abuse and violence from the trappers in the field. Nevertheless, the new Government of the Republic of Cyprus has decided to boycott this process and has worked to marginalize and even criminalize the most active, insistent, persistent, exposed and vulnerable part of the civil society, represented by environmental NGOs, thus reversing a positive trend. Volunteers who had supported the police officers in the field in the last three seasons and openly exposed themselves in front of hundreds of bird trappers, criminal rings and mafia bosses, were suddenly and officially left alone in the field, targeted in the public sphere and even prosecuted for “*disrupting the work of the*”



Figure 3: CABS volunteer checks the slashed tires of the rental car in front of the Capo Greco national park sign

competent law enforcement agencies". This political isolation – which in the best case can only be called irresponsible – has been perfectly understood by songbird poachers, who showed an extremely high level of violence against CABS members and bird conservationists in the field. In addition, the financial crisis has given to them an extra motivation (and political excuse) to increase trapping. In autumn, efficient criminal rings of trappers could be encountered not only in the usual areas (Ayios Nikolaos and Cape Pyla in the ESBA, as well as Avgorou and Ayios Theodoros in the Republic of Cyprus), but in new areas like Cape Greco, Paralimni, Kalavassos and Kokkines area in Ayia Napa. These criminal rings included night surveillance shifts on trapping sites, patrols controlling the territory by car which stopped and quizzed anyone they met in the area at night, even in tourist places or on public roads. These poachers are not afraid to use violence in order to deter anyone from even approaching the area of the trapping site.

Only thanks to a perfect knowledge of the territory, and an extremely cautious approach, could the volunteers carry on the BPC without severe injuries or worse. In Annex A (pages 20-23), we record the worst incidents that took place during the Autumn 2013 BPC, to both CABS and MBCC volunteers. Annex A demonstrates the level of aggression, violence, impunity and violation of the law committed by trappers.

4.5 CONTACTS WITH THE RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES

After the suspension of the joint Spring 2013 BPC with the APS, the priority for CABS was to re-establish its cooperation with the Cyprus Police Headquarters and the APS in the field. After dozens of media reports, letters of protest and press releases by national and international environmental NGOs and even independent authorities (such as the Environment Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus, as well as the Directorate General for the Environment of the European Commission and Members of the European Parliament), which followed the withdrawal of the APS in spring 2013, the Minister of Justice and Public Order, Mr. Ionas Nicolaou, promised the restoration of cooperation between CABS and the Cyprus Police. Nevertheless, this rhetorical statement has never turned into a political decision, while the reasons that have been provided to us are at least contradictory.

In more detail:

On the **24th of July 2013**, CABS sent its field report for the Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camp to all competent authorities, including the MJPO and the Cyprus Police Headquarters, along with a letter with information on the dates and our recommendations for organising the forthcoming Autumn 2013 Bird Protection Camp. Regrettably, CABS and SPA received no response at all from the MJPO and / or the Cyprus Police Headquarters. [¹⁹]

On the **26th of July 2013**, CABS and SPA filed an official complaint to the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudswoman) of the Republic of Cyprus. The complaint, which is still under investigation by the Ombudswoman's Office, refers to unequal treatment, obstruction of ongoing police investigations, underpinning of the poachers' lobby and undermining of the rule of law, due to the forced suspension of the collaboration between CABS and the APS during the Spring 2013 BPC. [²⁰]



Figure 4: CABS volunteer shortly after the incident of aggression on the 1st of October 2013 in Sotira

On the **31st of July 2013**, CABS and SPA released a joint press statement through which we urged the responsible authorities, in particular the MJPO, to publicly meet their full legal obligations by demonstrating that the zero tolerance policy against trapping of wild birds in Cyprus is not just a symbolic political statement, but is a concrete, permanent and consistent effort by the competent law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus. [²¹]

On the **16th** of August 2013, we received a response letter from the Ombudswoman's office, according to which the content of our complaint is being assessed and we will be informed of the outcome of this assessment or of the result of the investigation of our case, when this is completed. [²²]

On the **10th of September 2013**, CABS sent a second letter to the MJPO requesting the provision of operational support, and specifically a police escort, during the Autumn 2013 Bird Protection Camp. In addition, CABS representatives phoned the office of the MJPO in order to confirm that the letter had been received and to ask for a response to the organization's request prior to the beginning of the field survey. This would allow CABS to configure the operating needs of the field survey, in collaboration with the APS. The office of the MJPO informed CABS that the letter has been received and that CABS' request would be considered during an operational meeting, which was scheduled during the following week, after which CABS would be informed. [²³]

On the **18th of September 2013**, CABS phoned the office of the MJPO to ask for a response to its request for the continuation of the cooperation with the APS. During the phone communication between representatives of CABS and the office of the MJPO, CABS was informed once again that its request would be considered during an operational meeting that was to be held between the representatives of the competent law enforcement agencies (Cyprus Police Headquarters and the APS) and the MJPO himself. During this phone call, the CABS and SPA Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus pointed out that if the meeting had not yet taken place it would potentially lead to a delay in the completion of the field survey, despite the fact that CABS had repeatedly informed the competent authorities nearly two months prior to the beginning of the autumn 2013 Bird Protection Camp. The CABS and SPA Policy Advisor was informed that the matter would be brought up to the MJPO and the ministry would inform CABS of any updates. Shortly afterwards, the CABS and SPA Policy Advisor received a further phone call from the office of the MJPO, asking him to attend a meeting with the competent Minister on the 26th of September, in order to discuss the content of CABS letters. The CABS and SPA Policy Advisor replied that he would be glad to have a face-to-face meeting with the Minister of Justice and Public Order, but the field survey was planned to start on the 21st of September. Consequently, there was the issue of what were we meant to do between the 21st and the 26th of September. We were then told that the dates of the field survey had not previously been registered and we were asked to expect a new phone call after a more direct solution had been found. Indeed, not long after, we received another phone call from the office of the MJPO, inviting us to a meeting on the 19th of September, instead of 26th of September. The CABS and SPA Policy Advisor replied positively, and the meeting was set for the 19th of September, at the office of the MJPO.

On the **19th of September 2013** the meeting took place and was attended by the MJPO, the Superintendent of the MJPO and the CABS / SPA Policy Advisor. During the meeting, the CABS / SPA representative submitted a third letter and a relevant memo which included two tables to the MJPO. The meeting lasted one hour. In summary, the issues raised by the MJPO were the following:

- *“The suspension of the Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camp was decided because there was such a tremendous reaction, that if it continued, we would have had casualties”*: The CABS / SPA Policy Advisor replied that a zero tolerance policy is required against the criminal gangs and the illegal bird trapping, exactly as it is prescribed in the Larnaca declaration, an outcome of the European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds, which was held in Larnaca, in July 2011.
- *“There is a tradition which we have to respect and we need to seriously and responsibly consider the possible solution of on-spot-fines for the offence of bird trapping with the use of limesticks or at least up to a certain quantity”*: The CABS / SPA Policy Advisor replied that, considering this within a legal framework, this is impossible, according to the

provisions of the Birds Directive and the provisions of the two relevant international conventions. He additionally pointed out that since 1973-4 the Republic of Cyprus has been trying to implement the relevant national legislation for the prohibition of the use of non-selective trapping methods in order to bring an end to this so-called “tradition” and any reference in respect of this “tradition” is an attempt to avoid enforcement.

• *“Priorities must be set so that the police go after the major trappers and not the traditional people who set 5-10 limesticks in order to catch birds to consume themselves”*: The CABS / SPA Policy Advisor replied that priorities already exist and this can already be cross-checked with the APS. Since the Autumn 2012 and the Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camps, priority was given and achieved by arresting the big and professional bird trappers red-handed, who already have serious criminal records and who also engage in serious forms of crime other than poaching, before going after the medium and small trappers. Additionally, implementation of the law cannot be selective and we assume that is apparent that without the existence of a massive network of small and amateur and medium and semi-professional trappers, amounting to several hundred, the large scale professional trappers, who can be counted on the fingers of one hand, would never be in such a strong position. He also mentioned that apart from the complaints filed against trappers, over the past few years our organisations have also lodged dozens of complaints against restaurateurs and major traders of protected wild birds, which lead to a series of successful investigations by the APS and the Game Fund.

• *“Activists enter private property and house yards, violating the rights of local residents”*: The CABS / SPA Policy Advisor replied that if there is any official complaint then it should be immediately investigated; he also made himself available to the competent authorities for clarification of any of these complaints. The two organizations also included a whole chapter in the most recent field report in which they extensively analysed the unsubstantiated nature of these accusations. Furthermore, he pointed out that if we really want to solve these problems, a police escort (and specifically APS patrols) should be provided to the volunteers of the two environmental non-governmental organisations, something that not only would ensure the personal safety of the participants, but will also ensure the legality of all actions and of course the immediate investigation of all recorded cases of poaching.

• *“Even with the escort of APS, the activists will continue their field survey on their own”*: The CABS / SPA Policy Advisor replied that the only reason the activists do not continuously have a police escort is the decreased operational capacity of the APS. For this exact reason, during the spring 2013 BPC, for which they were escorted by the APS between 05:00 and 13:00, they were also monitoring the bird trapping hotspots in their own cars across the main streets between 03:00 and 05:00. Due to this, they could hear and mark the electronic decoys so that they could lead the APS patrols to the active trapping points as soon as possible at 05:00. Without this strategy, the APS patrol cars would randomly drive around, losing valuable time from their predetermined shift. The success of this strategy can be easily seen from the quantitative data and the final results of the previous three field surveys.

• *“Nevertheless, problems are created when the locals see the activists wandering around during those hours”*: CABS' / SPA Policy Advisor replied that if this is the problem, then the ideal situation is to have a sufficient and continuous police escort which covers all hours of trapping. Further, under no circumstances is it illegal to drive a car along main roads.

• *“The whole police force cannot run after the game species and the activists”*: CABS' / SPA Policy Advisor replied that no one has said this and that no one referred to the whole of the police force and that the discussion only refers to the APS, whose main duty is to combat poaching.

• *“Why should activists be exclusively working in the Famagusta region?”* At this point, CABS' / SPA Policy Advisor referred to the relevant memo that was given to the MJPO, which includes a table with the five most important bird trapping hotspots in Cyprus. He then pointed out that, as shown in this table, the activists are covering all major areas of bird trapping, while beyond the territory of the British ESBA they also cover the whole Sector 4 of the UNBZ (between the Kappari area of the Paralimni Municipality and the area of Strovilia in the British ESBA). Focus and priority is given in the Famagusta district simply because that is the area with the highest rate of trapping.

•“What are the activists doing for the British SBAs and the area of the UNBZ?”: CABS’ / SPA Policy Advisor replied that there is already close collaboration with the British SBAs Administration and Police, as well as with the United Nations Police and the Game Fund for the provision of police patrols within the British ESBA and the UNBZ respectively.

The meeting ended with the question raised by CABS’ / SPA Policy Advisor as to whether there would be a continuation of the collaboration between the APS and CABS. The reply given by the MJPO was that “*the issue will be further examined and that we will be informed accordingly*”. Additionally, the MJPO stated that “*the power of the APS is greatly reduced at the moment as it has undertaken additional duties, with the most important being the control of the UNBZ in order to tackle the illegal entry of undocumented migrants and refugees into the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, a growing problem due to the situation in Syria*”. At this point, CABS’ / SPA Policy Advisor replied by saying that two years ago the APS had an operational capacity of ten (10) police officers, while now it only has five (5) police officers, something that it should be taken into account when delegating the unit new tasks. The Minister replied that “*we are not talking about what is ideal, but what is realistic*”. [24]

On the **20th of September 2013** CABS sent relevant emails to inform the embassies of the countries of origin of the participants to the BPC (British High Commission and the Embassies of Germany, Italy and Switzerland), as well as to the Ombudswoman and to the European Commission. [25]

As we have been informed, on the same day the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Cyprus sent a letter to the MJPO, while on the **23rd of September**, the Directorate B on Natural Habitat of the European Commission sent another letter requesting clarification in regard to the discontinuation of the cooperation in the field between the competent law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus and CABS. [26]

Additionally, on the **21st of September 2013**, CABS’ and SPA Policy Advisor sent informative emails to five Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus, including the Presidents of the Parliamentary Committees on the Environment and Internal Affairs, the Deputy President of the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment and the Environment Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus. [27]

On the **24th of September 2013**, a Member of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament sent a letter to the MJPO and submitted a question to the European Commission at the European Parliament. The MEP had



Figure 5: Barn Owl caught in limesticks in a trapping site near Kalavassos

taken part in the Spring 2012 BPC in the Republic of Cyprus for a few days, as well as attending a press conference jointly organized by the environmental organizations CABS, SPA and Friends of the Earth Cyprus on the “*zero tolerance policy against illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds*”. [28]

On the **25th of September 2013**, the Environment Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus sent a letter to the MJPO, asking for the provision of operational support and specifically a police escort to CABS volunteers during the Autumn 2013 BPC. [29] On the same day, CABS and SPA sent an update letter to the European Commission. [30]

On the **27th of September 2013**, CABS and SPA sent another letter to the Chief, the Assistant Chief of Support, the Commander of the Urgent Response Unit and the Head of the APS of the Cyprus Police, the subject of which was the

provision of operational support and specifically a police escort during the autumn 2013 BPC. [31] On the same day, CABS received a letter from the European Commission, through which we were informed that the Commission considers the effective monitoring and policing of illegal trapping activities on the ground as a key element of enforcement efforts undertaken in Cyprus. On the basis of the information we provided, the Directorate General for the Environment expressed to the Cypriot authorities its strong concerns about the matter and urged them to ensure that anti-poaching activities will continue receiving the necessary support, especially in view of the autumn migration period. [32]

On the **1st of October 2013**, CABS' / SPA Policy Advisor was informed that since the 21st of September, and until the 1st of October, the MJPO had been assuring the Deputy President of the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment of the Republic of Cyprus on a daily basis that he would personally give orders for the continuation of the cooperation of the APS with CABS, but there had been no such directive from the MJPO to the Cyprus Police Headquarters and the APS. [33]

On the **2nd of October 2013**, CABS and SPA sent another update letter to the Directorate B on Natural Habitat of the Environment of the European Commission, as well as to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention. [34]

It has to be noted that on the **2nd of October 2013**, the Press Office of the Cyprus Police Headquarters released a police bulletin on the attack that resulted in serious physical injury to CABS members (see Chapter 4.4., "*Table 4: Most significant incidents of aggression and violence against the volunteers of CABS and MBCC – 01.10.2013, CABS, Sotira*"). The Cyprus Police Bulletin stated that all 6 persons – including 4 CABS members – who were engaged in the incident had been charged and will be prosecuted, while Deryneia Police Station continues the investigation of the case. [35]

Indeed, on the **3rd of October 2013**, the four CABS members, as well as one of the two other persons engaged in the incident, had appeared at the Famagusta District Court and were prosecuted for different reasons. CABS members were charged for: 1) Trespassing onto private property with attempt to commit crime, 2) Malicious damage of private property and 3) Attack against property owners. **(On the 5th March 2014 the trial ended with all charges against CABS members dropped and the complainant pleading guilty to bird trapping. He paid 7,000 € compensation to CABS members for bodily injuries).** [36]

On the **7th of October 2013**, following the last letter that CABS and SPA sent to the Cyprus Police Headquarters on the 27th of September, a meeting eventually took place at the Cyprus Police Headquarters. This meeting was attended by the Assistant Chief of Support of the Cyprus Police, the Head of the Cyprus Police APS and the CABS / SPA Policy Advisor. The meeting lasted half an hour and it resulted in the decision that the Cyprus Police Headquarters, and particularly the APS, are not able to support CABS and SPA in the field during their Autumn 2013 BPC, due to the lack of financial and human resources. [37]

The next day, on the **8th of October 2013**, 5 days before the end of the camp, CABS received an official communication



Figure 6: Thrushes released from mist nets by CABS volunteers

from the Cyprus Police Headquarters stating that due to the reduction of the personnel of the Cyprus Police, as well as the financial shortcomings, it was not possible to have the escort of the Cyprus Police during the Autumn 2013 BPC. Nevertheless, the Assistant Chief of Support expressed his respect for the work that our organization is doing, but stressed out that during the BPC, volunteers should follow the Laws of the Republic of Cyprus. In cases where any illegal activity is located, CABS members should not enter into private properties, but call the responsible local police stations to investigate the matter. [38]

Following these developments, on the **11th of October 2013**, two game wardens arrested and prosecuted two CABS members for releasing protected wild birds that were trapped in mist nets in a trapping site that the patrol of the Game Fund was monitoring in Avgorou. The two members of CABS were charged by the Xylophagou Police Station for disrupting the investigations of the competent law enforcement agencies, and particularly the Game Fund, in the field.^[39]

On the **13th of January 2014**, the Environment Commissioner of the European Union answered the question submitted by a MEP. The Environment Commissioner stated, on behalf of the European Commission, that *“the Commission was informed of the intentions of the Cyprus authorities to reduce or discontinue their cooperation with organisations fighting illegal bird trapping during this year's autumn migration period. The Commission considers the cooperation of authorities such as the Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police with organisations fighting illegal bird trapping on the ground as a key element of enforcement efforts in Cyprus. It therefore raised the matter with the Cypriot authorities, urging them to ensure that anti-poaching activities will continue receiving the necessary support. The Commission will continue monitoring closely measures taken in Cyprus to combat illegal trapping. It will consider further action on the matter, after receiving and assessing the autumn 2013 trapping data, taking also into account the information provided by the Honorable Member, as well as the national strategy of Cyprus for combating illegal bird trapping to be drawn up by the end of 2013”*.^[40]

On the **31st of January 2014**, CABS and SPA sent a new letter to the Cyprus Police Headquarters, with information on the dates and our recommendations, requesting cooperation and support during the forthcoming Spring 2014 BPC. Regrettably until today, **5th of March 2014**, CABS and SPA haven't received any response at all by the Cyprus Police Headquarters.^[41]

On the **4th of February 2014**, the MJPO replied to the Member of the European Parliament and stated that *“the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is determined to tackle illegal bird trapping and it will continue to implement a zero tolerance policy. Cyprus Police and the Game Fund, as the responsible authorities for implementing the relative laws for the protection of wild birds, will continue to conduct anti-trapping operations. The continuance of the cooperation between the activists and the Cyprus Police APS is considered as necessary. Nevertheless, this cooperation should be fully compatible with the laws of the Republic of Cyprus. In September, we had a meeting with representatives of CABS during which we agreed on the form of our cooperation. I am convinced that their assistance will contribute to the combating of illegal bird trapping”*.^[42]

On the **6th of February 2014**, CABS and SPA released another press statement in which they welcomed the answer of the Commission and said that the cooperation of their volunteers with the Cyprus Police APS, as well as the Game Fund, was particularly successful from autumn 2011 to spring 2013 and paid off with an increasing number of poachers being reported and prosecuted. However, since the end of spring 2013, anti-poaching camps were characterised by a U-turn by the Cypriot authorities, who have withdrawn their support and obstructed the volunteers, despite the latter reporting numerous cases of illegal trapping and repeated acts of violence against them. Since then, requests for cooperation and assistance by CABS to the Cyprus Police Headquarters, district police divisions, and local police stations were systematically rejected or ignored.^[43]

On the **28th of February 2014**, CABS and SPA wrote once again to the Member of the European Parliament and stated that the statement of the MJPO, according to which *“in September he had a meeting with representatives of CABS, during which we agreed on the form of our cooperation”* is totally untrue. CABS and SPA also assured the MEP that during this meeting not only we did not agree on any kind of cooperation between us, but in contrast the MJPO assured us that he would reply to us as soon as possible, in relation to our request for cooperation with the Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police, but that he never did. In contrast, the only response that we have received was from the Cyprus Police Headquarters, which stated that we couldn't have operational support in the field due to the reduction of the personnel and the financial shortcomings of the Cyprus Police.^[44]

In conclusion, as the Cyprus Mail wrote in an editorial article just after the release of the previous *“Field Report: Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camp”*, the responsible authorities of the Republic of Cyprus are taking a *“dubious stance, based*

on the misguided belief that it could keep both sides happy – conservationists and poachers – when this is practically impossible. There is no middle way for issues in which there is right and wrong. The use of mist nets and limesticks to trap hundreds of thousands of birds is against the law and should be stopped. However, the authorities seem to believe that by occasionally enforcing the law and taking a few poachers to court every year the state was fulfilling its conventional obligations. This allowed it to argue that it was enforcing the law, but could not catch all the law-breakers. While this argument would be valid with regard to burglaries and arson attacks, it cannot hold sway in relation to bird poaching, which takes place in specific parts of the country and at specific times of the years everyone is aware of. If the authorities genuinely wanted to stop bird-poaching they could have done so, but the truth is that they do not want to alienate the law-breakers who, with their families account for many votes in the Famagusta district. [...] Poachers have strong support from the political parties, which had tried in the past to reduce the punishment for poaching, because of the many votes they represent. **Populism it appears is stronger than the rule of law. But rather than taking this ambiguous stance of occasionally enforcing the law and occasionally pandering to the law-breakers, the authorities should take a decision and stick to it, because they are fooling nobody. In fact, there are broader implications to this stand. It sends out the message that rule of law is a negotiable principle and that the authorities are willing to turn a blind eye to some forms of law-breaking**". [45]

5 THE UNITED NATIONS POLICE

After a successful joint operation between CABS, the Game Fund and the UN Police in spring 2013, CABS strengthened its cooperation with the UN Police to tackle bird trapping in the Buffer Zone. The CABS and SPA Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus was invited three times to the training workshops for new UN police officers in order to present to them the context and parameters of songbird poaching in Cyprus and help them to combat this severe wildlife crime in the UNBZ. When the BPC began, we were informed that if the Government of the Republic of Cyprus did not support our BPC, then the UN Police could not support our field survey in the UNBZ either, in order to avoid any diplomatic problem, since their policies and actions must be in line with the respective laws and policies of the Republic of Cyprus. The UN Police therefore denied any form of support in the UNBZ without the cooperation of the Cyprus Police and / or the Game Fund. Despite the presence of many tape lures audible and a huge mist net trapping site (which was later reported to the Game Fund), volunteers could not properly check that area.

6 THE BRITISH EASTERN SOVEREIGN BASE AREA



Figure 7: CABS volunteer holding two Scops Owls, while a second volunteer frees a Chiffchaff. Scops Owl is a common prey in mist nets and limesticks, where they are lured by the trapped passerines. Trappers indiscriminately kill all birds caught in mist nets. A large number of scops owls are killed every year in mist nets and limesticks. CABS volunteers freed a total of 7 scops owls among the almost 300 birds released from traps

As suggested in our previous report, in July 2013 we asked the ESBA police, which is apparently keen to cooperate with NGOs, to arrange joint night operations in the ESBA every second night from 01:00 a.m. to 09:00 a.m. during the autumn BPC for a total of 12 operations. Our plan was made considering our previous experience in autumn 2012 which showed widespread, blatant trapping with mist nets and tape lures present day and night in the ESBA territory. [46] We considered that an 8 hour night shift when tape lures easily lead to the active trapping sites would allow tackling trapping through the combination of confiscation and prosecution. This is exactly the strategy suggested by the UK Wildlife Crime Unit in a report from 2003.

Considering that tape lures run in the night and trappers catch birds during the first half hour of light in particular, we suggested in our proposal that we should use the night hours to locate the most number of trapping sites and dismantle all of them but one or two to leave for a prosecution in the first hours of the morning. We considered that 4-5 trapping sites could be targeted every night. If we take into account that at least 134 trapping sites are known by the environmental NGOs and that the whole ESBA area (130 sq. km) could host around 200/250 trapping sites, the goal to disrupt activity in $12 \times 5 = 60$ trapping sites was both an affordable and worthy achievement.

The ESBA police replied positively to our request but, due to other scheduled activities (e.g. media work, follow-up of other monitoring reports, internal plans and other police priorities), they had to decrease the number of operations from 12 down to 6. During a meeting held in Dhekelia on the 23rd of September 2013, the Chief Inspector and the Sergeant in charge told our team that the main condition for this joint work was that we would not make any operation without the presence of the police. CABS accepted this condition for safety reasons. Unfortunately, we also found out that the scheduled plan was impossible because of the police shifts and that joint operations could only be carried in the morning hours, in the best case scenario from 04:30 a.m. to 06-09:00 a.m. In addition, the ESBA Police had its pre-planned operations and list of main targets; therefore, some trapping sites could not be approached during joint operations and their location could not be told in advance, with the risk we would lead the police to areas where no disruption could take place, thus wasting time. Eventually, we went out together on two occasions: during the first one, the ESBA patrol was split into two teams and managed to dismantle 2 trapping sites (one per team). During the second occasion, we managed to dismantle 3 trapping sites in 2 hours. No prosecution could take place because trappers either shut down the tape lures in the night when the police car drove into the trapping site, or ran away when they saw the cars coming. After these two experiences, CABS decided to interrupt the joint operations for two reasons:

- 1) Our presence was of no help to the ESBA police: the condition which ESBA set did not allow us to help in the planning and thus optimization of the time and results: the time given for joint operation was too short (2-3 hours instead of the planned 7-8), we could not select sites proficiently alternating confiscations and prosecutions, because some sites had to be left for “next operations” and we could not be told in advance which ones. We were driving directly to the trapping sites with the cars resulting in the trappers seeing us and stopping their activity. We realised that the ESBA police did not give any credit to these joint operations to improve the unit’s effectiveness, but rather their attitude was more of appeasing us with some action.
- 2) Our informants (ex-trappers) in the ESBA area told us that the agreed date of joint operations with the ESBA police were soon known by trappers in the hotspots of Cape Pyla area, who stopped the activity for that night/day.

Even though CABS refuses to accept these testimonies, there is a lot to be explained. CABS accepts the fact that the ESBA police wants to work in total autonomy on bird trapping, independently selecting their targets and the date for the ambush. CABS agrees that the ESBA police has its own strategy and schedule and we take note of the fact that the ESBA police accepts contribution from NGOs only when it is about written reports of active trapping sites or accompanying the ESBA patrol in their action. On the other hand, CABS would like to stress that **the strategy chosen by the ESBA police does not work at all**: as they admit themselves, trapping is as widespread and resilient as usual. **The cooperation offered by the ESBA police is a mere chimera: so far they have not accepted any interference nor any change in their methodology from NGOs.**

CABS’ experience in the ESBA area is too short to make an in-depth analysis of trapping trends (which has been done by BirdLife Cyprus), but the following observations can be made:

- 1) In autumn 2013, the ESBA area was again controlled by professional gangs of trappers massively using mist nets and tape lures. These trappers are highly organized with patrols sleeping on the spot and driving around to spot intruders. An average trapping site has 6 nets and big ones 12-16 nets. According to our informants, 12 nets plus tape lure in a trapping site can catch 500-800 passerines in a good day.

- 2) In autumn 2013, the worst area for trapping was again Cape Pyla with two major hotspots: the so called Pyrgos where 13 groups of trappers trap and the Quarry, with around 10 trapping sites. The area south of the main road Xylophagou-Ormideia is another important area for trapping. The third one is Ayios Nikolaos.
- 3) **The ESBA police do not go for prosecutions in the hard core area in Pyrgos and the Quarry**, where trapping occurs mostly undisturbed. In the feedback provided by the ESBA to BirdLife Cyprus concerning trapping sites reported by the NGO, it is impossible not to note that the percentage of cases which ended up with prosecutions are high outside the Pyrgos and Quarry area, whereas only one prosecution has been made within this area. It seems that the ESBA police prefer to only confiscate or disturb activity here, not to really combat it.
- 4) The ESBA police officially state that trapping is their priority issue during the autumn season. For this priority issue they deploy **one single patrol with 4 policemen who start working at 4.30 a.m. in the best case scenario, when active trapping sites can be easily located from 00.00 a.m. until 6.00 a.m.** These four people have to confront gangs of trappers, organized mafia-like, and keep more than 200 trapping sites in the whole area under control.

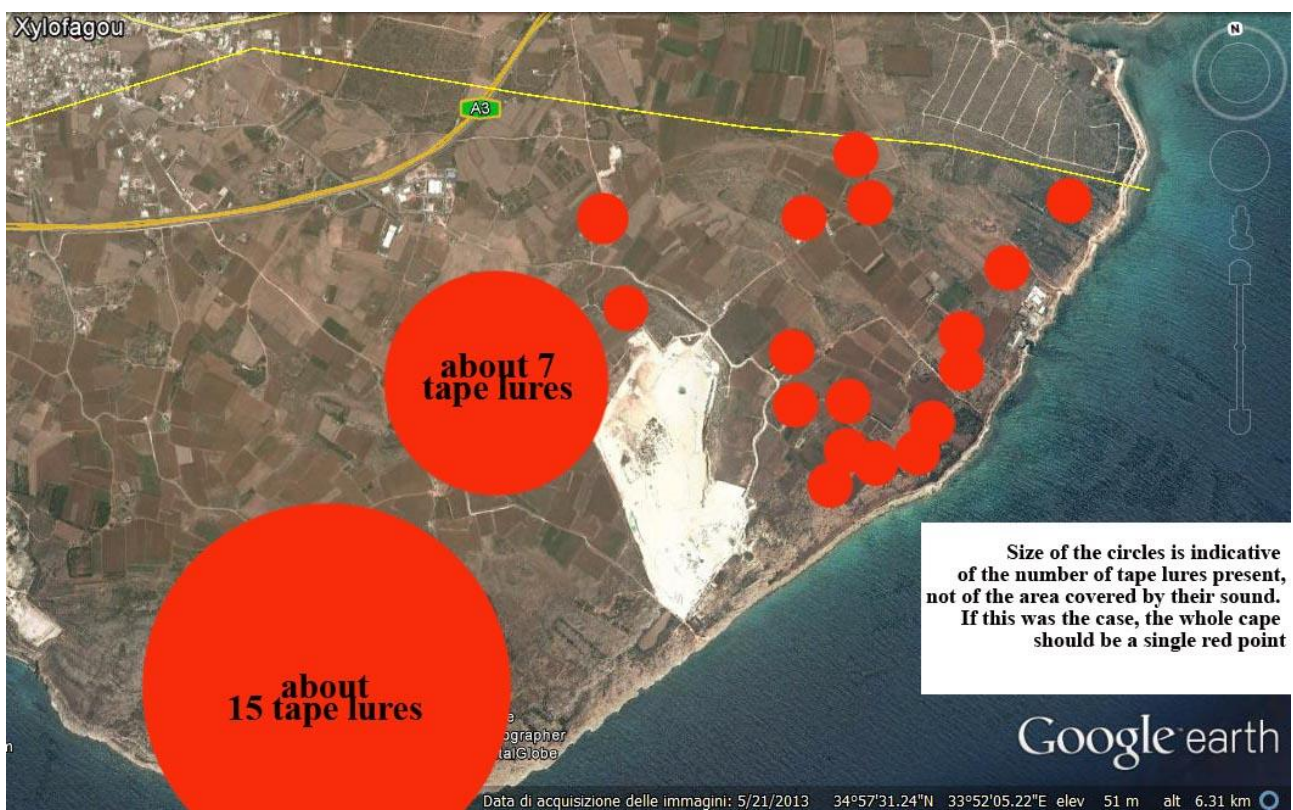


Figure 8: Map of decoys located by a CABS team during a night drive through the central and eastern section of Cape Pyla. The two big circles identify the two major hotspots with the highest concentration of netting sites: the Pyrgos (about 13 trapping sites) and the Quarry (about 10 trapping sites).

Our conclusion is that the ESBA Administration and Police are not willing to combat songbird poaching, but only “to cut branches” and to undertake some actions which are “accepted” by trappers on one side, because they do not really affect their business, and to show the public that something is done on the other side. Due to the limited area (130 sq. km) and that most of the trapping sites are known and easily detectable, it would be relatively easy to deploy effective strategies, as stated by a UK Wildlife Crime Officer in 2003. Nevertheless, the vast majority of these strategies are not implemented by the ESBA police, who year after year insist on following the same methodology that failed to bring actual results on the ground for so many years. As the Co-Chair of the UK Partnership Against Wildlife Crime stated a decade ago, “the blatant nature of the organised illegal activity at this site needs to be seen to be believed. Despite real success by the SBA Police (whose performance in this regard would put any UK police force to shame) there remains a great deal to be done”. [47]

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

CABS and SPA recognise that the problem of illegal killing and trade has cultural roots in some areas of Cyprus, both in the territory of the Republic (Larnaca and Famagusta districts) and in the ESBA area. Nevertheless, **the massive killing and consuming of protected bird species is not practiced by the majority of the population. In contrast, under the political pressure of the poaching lobby and particular criminal rings, this problem is framed as related to the “preferences and demands” of the vast majority of the population and particularly those rural communities which are historically settled on a major bird migratory route.** [⁴⁸]

In this framework, the Governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the British Administration of the SBAs have adopted and implemented a policy of tolerance alternated with sporadic short periods of appropriate action. In our view the lack of political will against specific private interests (economic, social and / or political) is the main reason why within four whole decades – from 1974 to 2004 – this severe wildlife crime and blatant environmental atrocity has not been tackled systematically, effectively and permanently on the island. [⁴⁹]

Our experience from other European countries in the Mediterranean region, like Italy and Malta, and the same experience that we gained in Cyprus from autumn 2011 to spring 2013 shows that these trapping practices and poaching habits can be progressively changed, if the process is continuously pushed forward by the civil society and fully supported by the responsible public authorities.

We were always aware that the engagement of a single APS patrol was in no case a strong response to the still massive amount of trapping, mainly in autumn. Nevertheless, this was a first step that sent the right message to the poachers' lobby and the associated criminal rings. After 6 years of BPCs, CABS and SPA observed a progressive change of attitude in trappers. Some of them progressively abandoned or lowered their impact. It was not expected that trapping would stop in a few years, but a good process was made towards a significant reduction of trapping and hopefully a slow, but stable social and political change.

Unfortunately, the political choice of the present Government of the Republic of Cyprus has reversed this process, giving rise again to uncertainty of the predicaments of the law, uneasiness for law enforcement agents, violence from the trappers' side and great vulnerability – not to say real danger – for bird conservationists. The policy of non-cooperation with civil society organisations that is adopted and implemented by the Minister of Justice and Public Order is just the tip of the iceberg. The abusive statements by certain politicians coming from the districts of Larnaca and Famagusta, as well as the systematic efforts to change the national legislation in violation of EU directives and international conventions, are also indicative of the lack of political will to combat the problem. [⁵⁰] The same goes for the continuous efforts to marginalize environmental groups and criminalize bird conservationists who are taking legal, peaceful and non-violent direct action to help the competent law enforcement agencies combat this wildlife crime. [⁵¹]

In Annex B (pages 24-25), we include three recent public statements that have been made either during or just after the Autumn 2013 BPC. These statements clearly demonstrate the way that politicians of the governing party conceive the wildlife crime of songbird poaching. In Cyprus, not only has songbird poaching always been tolerated, but it was actually accepted and supported by politicians, who either in the best case consider songbirds as a “traditional delicacy” or in the worst are treating the poaching lobby as a “vote tank”. In either case, **the responsible political authorities of the Republic of Cyprus have repeatedly failed to understand what is really at stake in terms of wildlife conservation and biodiversity protection.** [⁵²]

CABS and SPA are convinced that the Republic of Cyprus has been blatantly infringing the Bird Directive, since efforts made by the responsible authorities to tackle this phenomenon have been extremely weak, inappropriate and did not show any continuity over the years. A comparison between the law enforcement efforts made by Cyprus with those made in countries like Italy and Malta, which have similar problems, show the inadequacy and flaws of the law enforcement system deployed in the Republic of Cyprus and the ESBA in relation to bird trapping. **If no change**

occurs immediately, the launch of an infringement procedure against the Republic of Cyprus should be seriously taken into account by the European Commission.

Nevertheless, we would like to once again raise, on the base of our BPC experiences, some concrete recommendations which, if taken in account, would help the responsible authorities to efficiently tackle bird trapping:

- Both the Republic of Cyprus and the British SBAs Police have already created a police unit dedicated to combating poaching in general and bird trapping in particular (the Anti-Poaching Unit of the ESBA Police and the APS of the Cyprus Police, as well as the Game Fund which is in a better position to act in cooperation with them in both territories). Nevertheless, police officers – as game wardens – should receive **continuous special training to develop skills, knowledge and tactics on combating wildlife crime.**
- In this framework, there should be an implementation in the field of an adequate **number of patrols on a daily basis during trapping seasons** only for confiscation and prosecution. Officers can be recruited from different police units, but must be trained and equipped properly by the anti-poaching officers and the game wardens. Furthermore, they should be focused and dedicated on anti-poaching operations, without further obligations that would not allow them to execute their main duties. Our suggestion is as follows:

AREA	Famagusta (Republic of Cyprus)	British Eastern Sovereign Base Area	Larnaca (Republic of Cyprus)
Spring (end March / mid May)	3 patrols	2 patrols	1 patrol
Autumn (September / mid November)	6 patrols	4 patrols	2 patrols
Winter (mid November / end February)	6 patrols	4 patrols	2 patrols

Table 5: Adequate number of patrols on a daily basis during trapping seasons

- **Shifts and availability must cover the main trapping times according to the seasons:**
 - From 04:00 a.m. to 07:00 p.m. in spring (during migration),
 - From 00:00 a.m. to 07:00 p.m. in autumn (during migration) and
 - From 00:00 a.m. to 07:00 p.m. in winter.
- **The zero tolerance policy must be restored by every law enforcement agency.** Small and medium trappers, who are the majority, do cause a big damage to wild bird species and populations. In addition, they allow big trappers to remain unperceived. They are also more likely to stop trapping when caught red-handed, whereas big trappers, who make a big profit, must be prosecuted more times in the same season.
- **Law enforcement units have to deal with songbird poaching as with any other serious offence:** fenced or even unfenced properties cannot hinder the action of the law enforcement agents. **When there is the evidence (set limesticks and mist nets) or strong suspicion (a tape lure calling) of illegal activity,** the police agent must be in the position to enter the orchard / garden (not the private house, without a search warrant) to interrupt the crime and prosecute the offender and / or the owner who is responsible for the property. Until now, the concept of a dwelling house was extended not only to huts and premises, but also to fenced and even unfenced orchards, which makes investigation work impossible for police agents.
- **The average fines and penalties imposed by the Courts must be increased,** considering that trapping can be constrained only if the fine is high enough to deter, i.e. to nullify the income produced by the criminal act.
- **In the ESBA area of Cape Pyla the eradication of artificial acacia plantations created exclusively for bird trapping must be implemented.**
- **Settling down a permanent garrison** of the British army with 3-4 patrols from 00:00 to 9:00 a.m., moving in different sectors of Cape Pyla on a daily basis during September and October to deter trappers, **in the form of police intelligence.**

ANNEX A: MOST SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE VOLUNTEERS OF CABS AND MBCC IN AUTUMN 2013

21.09.2013 CABS	Cape Greco National Forest Park	At 00:00 a.m., while driving on a gravel road down to the coast west from Cape Greco, where there was a netting site, we observed a quad following us. We reversed the car because the road immediately turns into bad conditions, and we met the quad, whose driver wrote down the number plates of the rented car that we were driving. Later, we received a telephone call from the rental company, saying that the military section of Cape Greco has called because our car was seen driving within the military area and we will be questioned and possibly arrested. We found it extremely strange since the road we were driving was a public gravel road in the National Forest Park of Cape Greco, as well as part of the pan-European nature route "E4".
21.09.2013 CABS	Cape Greco National Forest Park	At 01:00 a.m., we left the car unattended in the parking lot in front of the Cape Greco National Forest Park. While we were walking through the bushes, we heard a car stopping there. When we returned half an hour later, we found two tyres slashed with a knife.
24.09.2013 CABS	Paralimni	At 01:00 a.m., one team went by foot and only one person stayed in the car to watch over it. Ten minutes later, a person approached holding a knife in his hand. The volunteer in the car showed his presence and the person immediately turned and left.
24.09.2013 CABS	Kokkines, Ayia Napa	At 02:00 p.m., three volunteers reached an orchard full with limesticks and a tape lure. While they were taking photos and video, a car suddenly drove through the orchard and a person got off and started yelling madly. The volunteers left immediately, while the person chased after them first on foot and then by car. A second car arrived at the spot and together they started patrolling the gravel roads and footpaths around the trapping site, trying to locate the three volunteers who kept hiding for one hour.
28.09.2013 CABS	Ayios Theodoros	At 01:00 a.m., as soon as we drove through the village, our rental car was detected and followed by a sports car which blinded us with dazzling headlights. It tried to overtake and drive beside our car, roaring the engine. The poacher opened the window and shouted abuse. He then overtook and broke abruptly in front of us cutting up the road. He stopped his car across the two lanes, blocking the road B1. We had to reverse and drive back. He kept on stalking us and tried to chase our car into the opposite lane, in an effort to make us collide with a car driving in the opposite direction. Eventually, we were able to leave the area from the highway.
30.09.2013 CABS	Sotira	At 03:00 a.m., a team went by foot and only one person stayed in the car to watch over it. About 30 minutes later, two people approached the car and one of them was holding a knife on his hand. The volunteer in the car started the engine and left the area.
01.10.2013 CABS	Sotira	At around 09:00 a.m., four CABS members located approximately 60 limesticks in an open and non-fenced maquis area near the Sotira Municipal Forest. While they were collecting the limesticks from the bushes, an old man arrived by foot and started shouting abuse against them. Instead of hiding or running away, CABS members kindly advised the old man that limesticks are illegal and have a great impact on populations and species of protected wild birds. Nevertheless, the old man started calling another person to come. Suddenly, a young man appeared at the spot on foot, holding a long wooden cudgel. The old man then pulled out a penknife and both men started running towards CABS members. The four bird conservationists started running away, but the young man caught one of them by the hair and started punching and beating him with the cudgel. Two CABS members tried to help their colleague, but they were also badly

		<p>beaten up by the young man with the cudgel. As a result, one CABS member received serious injuries to his left eye and foot and another one had slight bruises to his hands. CABS' Field Investigations Officer received serious injuries to his ear (perforated ear drum) and to his back. In addition, the two poachers stole the digital camera and mobile phone of CABS' Field Investigations Officer and also smashed his glasses. The incident took place between 09:00 and 09:30. From 09:30 to 10:00, the CABS members returned to their car, which was parked one to two kilometers away, and then they drove back to their hotel where they received first aid from their colleagues. From 10:30 to 13:30, they were treated in the Famagusta Regional Hospital and then, from 13:30 to 16:30, they went to Larnaca Regional Hospital, where the CABS Investigation Officer was examined for possible damage to his hearing. From 17:00 until 23:00, they filed an official complaint and gave testimonies to the police in Deryneia Police Station. At the same time, the police officers informed the CABS members that the poachers had gone to Deryneia Police Station immediately after the assault incident and filed an official complaint against CABS members for trespassing on their private property, damaging their plantations and attacking them. The case was taken to the Famagusta Regional Court. <u>On 5th March 2014 all charges against CABS members were dropped by the complainants and activists were compensated in an extrajudicial agreement with 7,000 € for body harm, while the aggressor pleaded guilty of trapping.</u></p>
04.10.2013 CABS	Kalavastos / Zygi	<p>At 05:00 a.m., while a group of volunteers was searching for decoys by foot, the driver of CABS' car parked his car near a roundabout. Almost immediately, a poachers' patrol arrived and forced him to drive away. The poacher followed the car down to the highway, overtook it and then took the first exit. At 06:00 a.m. the group called the driver to come and pick them up. The CABS member had to drive through the roundabout again. The car was immediately spotted by the poachers' patrol, which followed and stalked our car, while threatening the driver with dazzling headlights and revving the engine. Our car tried to drive into the Zygi Police Station, whose gate was closed. Thereafter, our driver managed to park the car just beside Zygi Police Station and informed the rest of the group's members about the incident. The CABS volunteer also called the Zygi Police Station and explained the situation. After staying there for one hour, he managed to return and pick up the rest of the team.</p>
04.10.2013 CABS	Zygi Fishing Shelter	<p>At 01:00 a.m., our car was parked in the parking lot of the fishing shelter, while CABS members were releasing some birds that still had net mesh around their bodies. A trappers' patrol drove by twice, detected our car, then approached and parked just beside us. Poachers got off their car and asked who we are and what we are doing. We immediately hid the birds and said we were tourists. They went back to their car and stayed there for 10 minutes, when another patrol came. They got out and mobbed us until we are forced to leave the area.</p>
05.10.2013 CABS	Sotira	<p>At 11:00 a.m., our group saw a trapper in an open garden. The man started yelling for help. In a minute, cars gathered and surrounded the group, which was forced to hide in the acacia bushes. They had to wait there one hour with cars driving around on gravel roads to locate them. A second group with CABS volunteers came with a local police patrol and helped them leave the area.</p>
05.10.2013 MBCC	Protaras	<p>At 02:00 a.m., MBCC volunteers stopped their car on the Paralimni – Protaras highway due to a problem with the gears. A car drove by and then suddenly stopped and drove back, stopping right in front of MBCC car. The young driver got out of the car and started yelling to MBCC volunteers, walking all around their car and shouting at them to immediately open the door. The man seemed drunk and totally out of control. MBCC members' called the Paralimni Police Station, which sent a patrol in a short time. The</p>

		<p>police officer talked to the man and told him to leave, while they were mentioning the name of CABS. The police officer told the MBCC volunteers to drive home and that he would escort them, but the man kept following right behind the police patrol. The MBCC volunteers stopped the car in front of the Paramount Hotel in Protaras and they left on foot. Shortly afterwards, they noticed that 3 tyres had been slashed. MBCC members again called the Paralimni Police Station, but they said that they could not come and do anything about the damage.</p>
06.10.2013 MBCC	Paralimni	<p>At 11:00 a.m., MBCC volunteers left their car parked near a gravel road in the area of Archangel's Gavril in Paralimni and left on foot to monitor the area. When they came back 3 hours later, they found all five tyres slashed. They called the Paralimni Police Station and a police officer came to report the damage.</p>
07.10.2013 CABS	Kalavassos	<p>At 04:00 a.m., as soon as a mist netting site was located through a tape lure that was calling, a poachers' patrol arrived and started driving around and searching for the team. Eventually, poachers detected the number plates of CABS' rental car, which was parked in a gas station near the trapping site. The car was then followed and stalked down to the highway to Limassol for 10 km. After the car was parked in another gas station, the poachers' patrol left the area.</p>
11.10.2013 MBCC	Paralimni	<p>At 06:00 a.m., MBCC volunteers heard two tape lures calling from a garden. They stopped the car on a side road and walked on foot to detect the exact position of the tape lure. The trapper detected them and chased them back to the main road. When they were back at their car, MBCC found the 4 tyres of their car slashed again.</p>
24.10.2013 MBCC	Sotira Municipal Forest	<p>At 03:30 a.m., MBCC volunteers were driving slowly around Sotira municipal forest listening for tape lures. A black car overtook them and 15 minutes later a motorbike without number plates appeared behind their car. The driver was wearing a balaclava and while he was overtaking MBCC volunteers, he kicked their car three times and drove fast down to the highway.</p>

ANNEX B: THREE RECENT STATEMENTS DEMONSTRATING THE WAY THAT POLITICIANS CONCEIVE THE WILDLIFE CRIME OF SONGBIRD POACHING

1. On the 7th of October 2013, a Member of Parliament (MP), Mr Andreas (Rikkos) Mappourides, was invited onto a TV show to talk about corruption and immunity. The MP is the Vice Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs. Before being elected he was a public prosecutor and senior lawyer at the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic of Cyprus. This is the discussion that he had with the journalist, as it was broadcasted:
 - Journalist: *"I want to ask you a question and then move immediately to telephone calls, which are already too many. Mr Mappourides do you have immunity?"*
 - MP: *"Yes, for everything I say in the Parliament, yes."*
 - Journalist: *"Only for what you say in the Parliament?"*
 - MP: *"Yes."*
 - Journalist: *"What about the things that you do outside the Parliament?"*
 - MP: ***"Do you mean when I am eating ambelopoulia?" [blackcaps are called ambelopoulia in Cyprus]***
 - Journalist: ***(Laughter)***
 - MP: *(Laughter) "No, I have not."*
 - Journalist: *(Laughter) "Do you eat ambelopoulia?"*
 - MP: *(Laughter) "Of course I am."*
 - Journalist: *(Laughter) "Do you eat ambelopoulia?"*
 - MP: *(Laughter) "Yes, of course. But I do not have immunity. (Laughter) What do you mean by asking me if I have immunity? Why? What do you want to say?"*
 - Journalist: ***(Laughter) "What do you mean by saying that you are eating ambelopoulia? Ambelopoulia are prohibited!"***
 - MP: ***"I know that. The whole Cyprus eats ambelopoulia, the whole Cyprus is acting illegally in this area."***
 - Journalist: ***(Laughter)***
 - MP: *"In all areas. See for example..."*
 - Journalist: *(Laughter)*
 - MP: *(Laughter) "At least the others are abusing public money. Well, let me see... What do you mean if I have immunity?"*
 - Journalist: *(Laughing) "Yes." (Laughter) "I have to say that I am stunned." (Laughter)*
 - MP: *"Sure." (Laughter) "Just tell me in order to understand what do you mean by asking me if I have immunity? Why do you ask me?"*
 - Journalist: *"I mean... because we hear about immunity, the immunity of politicians is discussed. (Laughter) What exactly is covered and what is not covered by immunity?"*
 - MP: *"Ok, look..."*
 - Journalist: ***"So, ambelopoulia are covered or not covered by immunity?"***
 - MP: ***"No, no. Normally they are not covered by immunity."***
 - Journalist: ***"I see. Normally though?"***
 - MP: ***"Yes, because... Look, you do not eat ambelopoulia provocatively in restaurants or public spaces... you can eat them when you find them... at home, or with your friends."***
 - Journalist: ***"Yes..." (Laughter)***
 - MP: *"The story is that immunity and now I am talking seriously..."*
 - Journalist: *"Yes..." (Laughter)*
 - MP: *"Beyond the joke with eating them home, immunity is a way to protect the freedom of political expression of a Member of the Parliament when something is discussed in the Parliament related to several issues, because if you are afraid to speak, as everything you say will probably be considered as a slander or misinformation and you would have to face several lawsuits."*
 - Journalist: ***"Yes, Mr Mappourides, we will pass immediately to the phone calls. But you know what will happen right now? Whoever caught eating ambelopoulia will tell them that Mappourides said on live on television that he eats ambelopoulia. Go to catch him and then come to catch me." (Laughter)***
 - MP: ***"Yes, look. The fact is that Malta for example or other countries have tried and succeeded to get an exception. We disagree with the idea of catching them with mist nets as many people are doing here, but an overall prohibition is still something that should be addressed."***
 - Journalist: *"I see." [53]*

2. On the 28th of October 2013, a former MP of the governing party of DISY, Mr Christos Pourgourides, wrote an article in the newspaper “*Politis*” (“*Citizen*”), about a new law on exploitation of coastal areas and tourist beaches that had just been voted on, and according to him “*is a law that provides outrageous and unaccepted beneficial treatment to some businessmen*”. The article states:
“The protagonists were always the MPs of the Famaqusta district. These MPs are coming from all parties. They are the same MPs who repeatedly submitted proposals to the Plenary and the Committees of the Parliament to facilitate the ‘pleasing to God’ work of songbird poachers. The voting of this unethical law proves that corruption and populism in Cyprus are like incurable diseases”. [54]
3. On the 16th of November 2013, the CYBC reported on the death of the former President of the Republic of Cyprus and founder of the governing party of DISY, Mr Glafkos Klerides. According to the reportage:
- Journalist: “*One of the strong friendships of Glafkos Klerides that dates back to 1976, when he founded DISY, is that with S... F... from Kiti*”.
 - Man interviewed: “**When he was coming to my place, he wanted birds, ambelopoulia, to cook for him roasted. But I was saying to him that ‘Mr. President, ambelopoulia are prohibited!’ He would reply to me that ‘it is prohibited to catch them, not eat them!’ We were making jokes and we were laughing**”. [...]
 - Woman interviewed: “*He was coming and we were sitting in the hall and we were drinking coffee. He was coming often and he was calling to say that he is coming and he was coming*”.
 - Journalist: “*Can you tell us something about these photographs here? For example, what about this one that we can see here? Is this taken at your home?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “*Yes, sure, this is taken at our home, where C... is sitting right now. This is C...*”.
[The photo is showing Glafkos Klerides, sitting at a table with a man and a young girl, C..., who is the daughter of the interviewed couple, with a plate of ambelopoulia].
 - Journalist: “*What about the other photos? Do you remember something about them?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “*Yes, I remember the other photos as well*”.
 - Journalist: “*What about this one, with the ministers? Is this taken at your home as well?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “*Then, he didn’t came with them, in this gathering showed on these two photographs*”.
 [The photo is showing two former ministers at a gathering at the home of the interviewed couple. The first one is Manolis Christophides, former Minister of Health (1993-1997), Government Spokesman (1997-1998) and Presidential Commissioner (1998-2003). The other one is Nikos Koshis, former Minister of Justice and Public Order (1997-2002)]. [...]
 - Journalist: “*As I can see, you were making parties?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “*Yes, of course, we had tables from here to there*”.
 - Journalist: “*What did he prefer to cook for him?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “**He liked very much...**”
 - Journalist: “**Ambelopoulia...**”
 - Woman interviewed: “**Yes...**”
 - Journalist: “**(Laughter)**”
 - Woman interviewed: “**Yes. He liked them too much.**”
 - Journalist: “**Ambelopoulia? When it was still allowed to eat them?**”
[According to the reportage, Glafkos Klerides met these people in 1976 and the colourful photos are definitely taken more recently. The use of non-selective and large-scale trapping methods – such as limesticks and mist nets – was prohibited in the Republic of Cyprus since 1974, while blackcaps are listed as a protected species since 1988. This implies that the last statement of the journalist is totally invalid and should be conceived as an effort to cover up what the reportage has just revealed].
 - Woman interviewed: “*Yes. We were all sitting at the tables. Manolis, who is now diseased, when he was coming...*”
 - Journalist: “*Do you mean Christophides?*”
 - Woman interviewed: “*Yes, Christophides. When he was coming, he was going directly all straight towards the kitchen and he was saying ‘I will go at the best place’. We were cooking plenty of food. The kitchen was full and he was going directly at the kitchen. **The tables were full... with meat balls, all kind of food, ambelopoulia. And anyone could take a plate and have a seat to eat**”*. [55]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- ² “Chapter 4.4: Political Support and Underpinning of the Poachers’ Lobby”, in Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) & Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA), *Field Report: Spring 2013 Bird Protection Camp, 5 April – 5 May 2013*. Bonn and Bielefeld, Germany: Monday, 22/07/2013, pages 10-14. Access via: http://www.stiftung-pro-artenvielfalt.org/seiten/projekte/Zypern_Vogelschutzcamp-Report_Fruehjahr_2013.pdf
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**Committee Against
Bird Slaughter**

The *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)* – *Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V* in German and *Επιτροπή Ενάντια στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών* in Greek – is an international activist and operational bird protection society, with its head office in Bonn in the Federal Republic of Germany. The society was founded in 1975 in Berlin and since then intervenes in particular where bird trappers, poachers and animal traders commit offences against current nature protection legislation in the European Union. The society is always concerned to harmonise its activities closely with the responsible police, forest or customs authorities. In addition, through initiatives at the parliamentary or judicial level, CABS attempt to achieve improvements in the policy and legal guidelines for wildlife, nature and species protection. Currently, the society has 485 members and 11,300 donors throughout the European Union.

CABS is a registered “*Society*” (Registration Number: VR 7095 – Date of Recognition as a Nature Protection Organization: 03.03.1989) by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany. Registration as a charity in the United Kingdom under new EU legislation is currently in progress.

Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS): www.komitee.de/en/homepage

Extending Our Frontiers – Birds Have No Boundaries!



The *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA)* – *Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt* in German and *Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας* in Greek – concerns itself with the conservation of endangered wildlife species and species diversity. It defines its role as patrons of wildlife, with the statutory obligation to care for all aspects of the natural world in Germany and Europe.

SPA is an officially recognized “*Foundation*” (Date of Recognition: 26.11.2008) under the German civil law code and is registered with the German Tax authorities (Tax Registration Number: 305/5981/1222) and the Foundation Council of the State of North Rhine Westphalia, Germany.

Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA): www.stiftung-pro-artenvielfalt.org