



**Committe Against
Bird Slaughter - CABS**

Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.


Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt[®]
Foundation Pro Biodiversity[®]

Field Report:
Spring 2015
Bird Protection Camp,
Cyprus
5 April – 10 May 2015



Bonn / Bielefeld, Germany: August 2015

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Cover photo: Wryneck caught on a limestick in Paralimni, April 2015 (Andrea Rutigliano / CABS & SPA)



1 SUMMARY

In April and May 2015, the *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)* and the *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA – Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt)* conducted their 8th Spring *Bird Protection Camp (BPC)* in Cyprus. The camp started on the 5th of April and ended on the 10th of May. **During the camp, 249 trapping sites were checked. 51 trapping sites (20.3%) were found active with set traps for illegal bird trapping or recently active**, with evidences of recent trapping activity (e.g. birds' feathers or blood on the ground, lime on the trees, etc.). The percentage of active trapping sites is the lowest ever detected during spring season. This is in line with the decreasing trend observed in the last spring seasons, since the start of the BPCs, and markedly since the cooperation between CABS/SPA and the Cyprus Police strengthened.

Field work was conducted once again in spring 2015 in cooperation with the competent law enforcement agencies. During the camp, we worked together with the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) for 23 days and with the Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) of the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) for 7 days. **During joint field operations with police units, 17 poachers were caught and prosecuted for illegal bird trapping, 3 persons were verbally warned and at 15 trapping sites confiscation of illegal trapping paraphernalia was made. In total, 1400 limesticks and 25 mist nets were seized.** The number of confiscated limesticks and mist nets is the lowest ever recorded. Despite the low amount of seized traps, the number of prosecutions made by the competent anti-poaching agencies is record high.

The cooperation with both the Cyprus Police APS and the APU of the British ESBA Police was adequate, although the APS showed a significantly higher success rate than the APU. During joint fieldwork we visited all the trapping sites reported by us and the safety of our volunteers was well ensured in the territories of both the Republic of Cyprus and the British ESBA. The overall scenario is positive. Even if spring trapping is less professional and more amateur-like, and therefore easier to tackle, the methodology implemented on the field by Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) and the competent law enforcement agencies clearly works. Trappers feel the pressure and minimize or abort their illegal activity. **By only doubling the patrols in the field during the main autumn and winter seasons, the same methodology would bring exceptional results in clamping down bird trapping in Cyprus.**

Despite these positive trends and remarkable results of field work, the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus are once again trying to reverse the progress made in the past few years, which was primarily a result of their cooperation with ENGOS. CABS and SPA consider as particularly alarming, the fact that after two whole years of consultation on the formulation of the "*Strategic Plan for Tackling Illegal Trapping of Wild Birds in Cyprus*", the Ministry of Interior decided to submit a totally different "*Strategic Plan*" to the Council of Ministers. As a result, **on the 13 May 2015, the Council of Ministers adopted an unacceptable version of the "*Strategic Plan*", which includes the so-called "*Alternative Planning*" for the legalization with a derogation, of selective hunting (with air guns, flobert rifles and slingshots) of a protected species, *Sylvia atricapilla* (*Blackcaps* in English and *Ambelopoulia* in Greek). This decision by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is undoubtedly a major step backwards, which demonstrates that the competent authorities (particularly the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service) haven't been honestly committed to the adoption and seriously engaged to the implementation of a '*zero tolerance*' policy against illegal trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds in Cyprus.**



2 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the 8th Spring BPC was organised by CABS and SPA in Cyprus. It started on the 5th of April and ended on the 10th of May.

CABS and SPA are organizing BPC's in spring, autumn and winter seasons to prevent illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of migratory birds passing through Cyprus. According to the latest two reports from Birdlife Cyprus, it is estimated that up to 265,000 birds have been killed in spring 2014 [¹] and around 2 million birds have been killed in autumn 2014 in Cyprus [²].

BPCs have three main objectives:

- To locate and report as many illegal trapping installations as possible to the competent law enforcement agencies, in order to arrest poachers red-handed, confiscate trapping paraphernalia and ensure a safe passage on migration for birds;
- To collect data and 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 and species;
- To collect data and assess the strategies and efforts implemented by the competent law enforcement agencies to tackle illegal bird trapping, killing and trade in Cyprus.

CABS and SPA are always seeking for the cooperation and support of the competent authorities and law enforcement agencies to assist them in combating illegal bird trapping, killing and trade.

3 SPRING 2015 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP METHODOLOGY

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

A total of 11 people from Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary and Switzerland participated in the camp. Most of them had previously participated in a BPC in Cyprus and had good knowledge of the area.

3.2 WORKING SCHEDULE AND AREAS

Joint fieldwork with the competent law enforcement agencies was done mainly during morning hours, when the trapping activity in spring is most intensive.

Operations with the Cyprus Police APS were concentrated in Famagusta District (Figure 1). In spring, this area accounts for more than 95% of illegal bird trapping in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus. Two days were spent for fieldwork in Larnaca District, but no trapping sites were found active. No trapping activity was detected either in the day spent in Nicosia District.

With the APU of the British ESBA Police we monitored most of the known trapping areas within the territory of its jurisdiction. Trapping activity was scattered and non-systematic, like it is in autumn and winter, and was detected only in three areas: south of Ormidia, in the Northern part of Cape Pyla and around the village of Ayios Nikolaos.

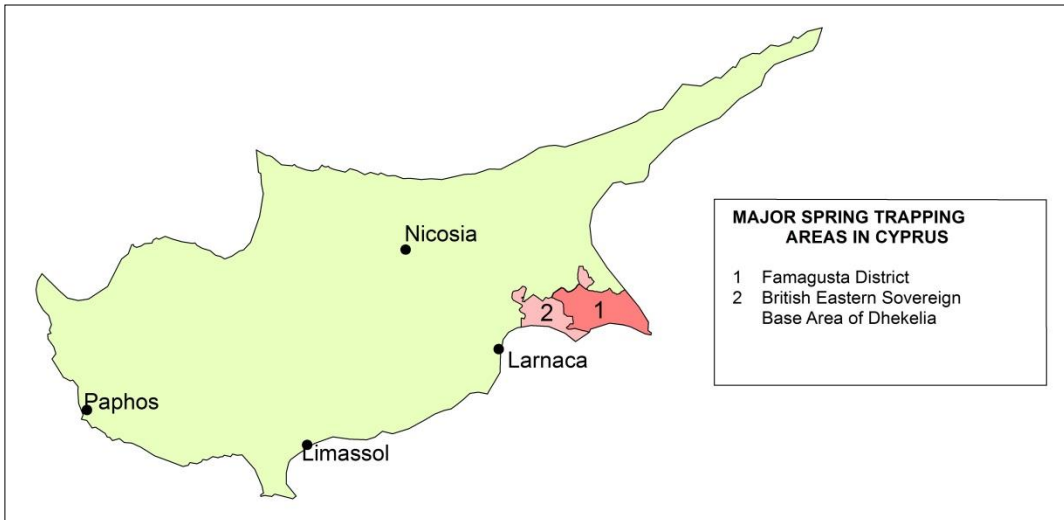


Figure 1: Main areas for spring bird trapping in Cyprus

4 RESULTS OF SPRING 2015 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP

4.1 MONITORING OF TRAPPING ACTIVITY

Over the past seven years, from spring 2008 to spring 2015, CABS and SPA (together with the other environmental NGOs that are monitoring illegal bird trapping in the field, namely BirdLife Cyprus and Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus – MBCC) located and listed 1031 trapping sites.

During Spring 2015 BPC, both with independent investigation and during joint operations with the Cyprus Police APS and the APU of the British ESBA Police, CABS and SPA teams monitored 249 trapping sites. Of the 249 sites checked, 51 sites were found active i.e. with traps or with signs of recent trapping, such as bird blood and feathers on the ground or lime on the trees. Considering the camp duration of 28 days, we found almost 2 (1.8) active trapping sites per day.

Out of 51 active trapping sites, 7 sites were new, with no records of trapping in the past, and 44 sites were already found active in previous seasons. As they are active again, we conventionally call them “reactivated sites” (Figure 2).

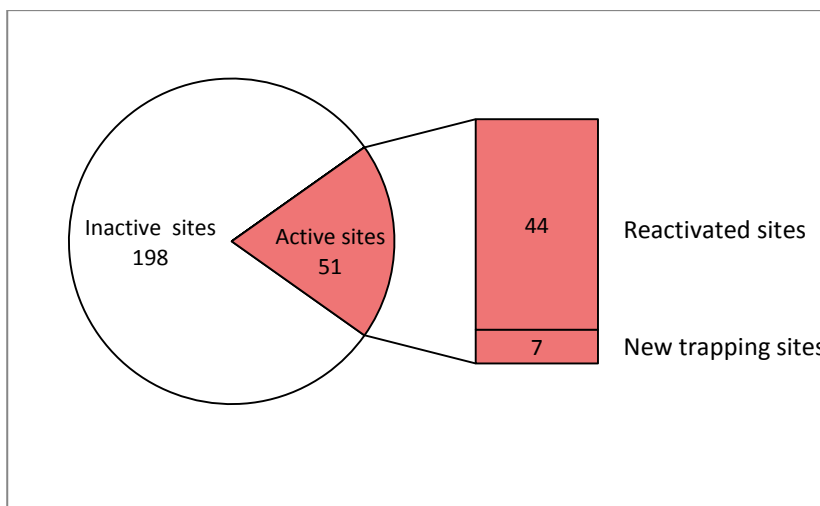


Figure 2: Activity of trapping sites monitored during Spring 2015 BPC (N=249)

Table 1: Comparison of trapping activity detected within last five Spring BPCs

Spring season	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Duration of Bird Protection Camp (days)	13	25	27	23	29
No of sites checked	122	238	267	311	249
No. of active trapping sites found	78	120	111	102	51
Percentage of active trapping sites	63.9	50.4	41.6	32.8	20.5

Table 1 shows steady decrease of spring trapping activity since 2011. In 2011, more than every second site was found active (63.9 %). In the following springs we observed decrease in trapping activity with record low in this spring, when 20.5 percent of all trapping sites was found active. The decrease is also presented with graph (Figure 2).

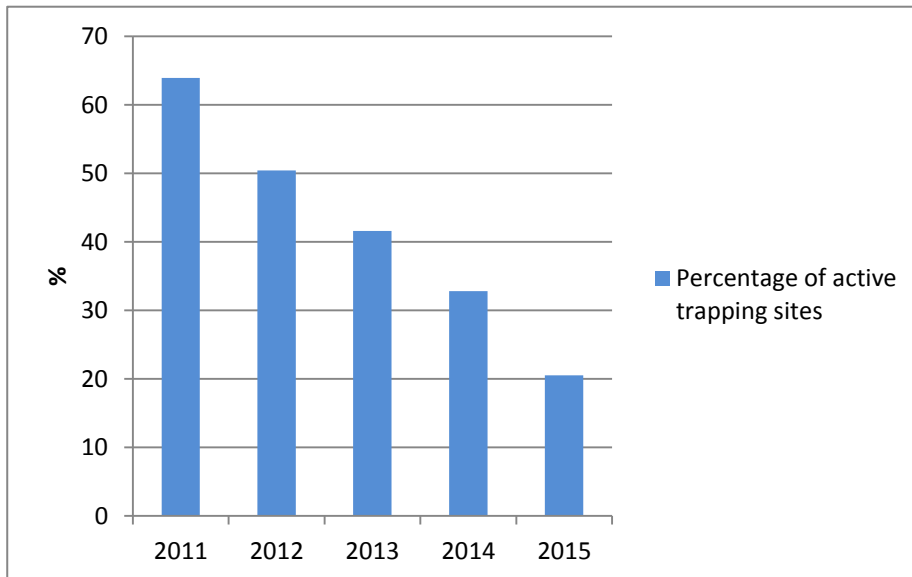


Figure 3: Percentage of active trapping sites found during Spring BPCs since 2011

4.2 OVERALL RESULTS

From 6th of April until 9th of May, CABS and SPA members worked in cooperation with the APS officers of the Cyprus Police and with the APU officers of the British ESBA Police.

In the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, we worked for 23 days / 138 hours (6 hours per day) in the field with the Cyprus Police APS. The results of our joint work with the Cyprus Police APS are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Detailed results of the joint work with the Cyprus Police APS

Monitoring of trapping sites	
Number of working days in the field with the APS	23
No. of trapping sites checked	90
Active trapping sites found	34
Active sites with prosecution of trappers	15
Active sites with confiscation of trapping paraphernalia only	15
Seized trapping paraphernalia	
Limesticks	1312
Mist nets	13
CD, USB and MP3 players	8
Car batteries	5
Loud speakers	6
Net poles	2

In the territory of the British ESBA, we worked for 7 days / 28 hours (4 hours per day) in the field with the APU of the British Police. The results of our joint fieldwork with the APU of the British ESBA Police are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Detailed results of the joint work with the APU of the British ESBA Police

Monitoring of trapping sites	
Number of working days in the field with the APU	7
No. of trapping sites checked	15
Active trapping sites found	5
Active sites with prosecution of trappers	2
Active sites with confiscation of trapping paraphernalia only	3
Seized trapping paraphernalia	
Limesticks	158
Mist nets	12
CD, USB and MP3 players	2
Car batteries	0
Loud speakers	4
Net poles	79

The overall results with combined figures from our joint work with the Cyprus Police APS and the APU of the British ESBA Police are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Overall results from joint operations with police units in Spring 2015

Number of prosecutions	17
Number of seized limesticks	1470
Number of seized mist nets	25

In Figure 3 we compared number of seized traps from this spring with number of seized traps in previous Spring BPCs.

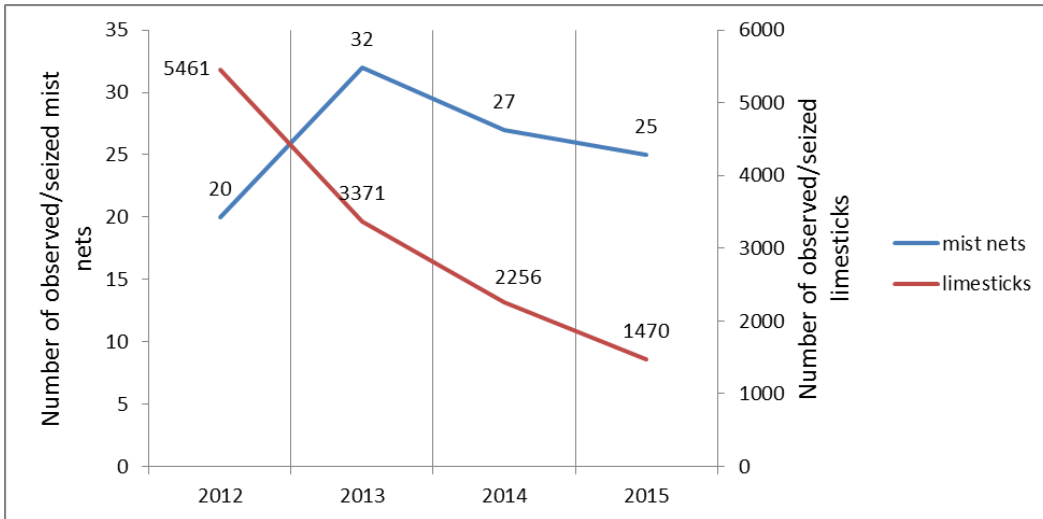


Figure 4: Seized limesticks and mist nets by the competent law enforcement agencies during spring BPCs between 2012 and 2015

It is evident from the graph that the number of seized traps has been decreasing since spring 2012, when we first conducted a joint fieldwork with the competent police units. The decrease in use of limesticks is most apparent. This spring we found almost 4,000 limesticks less than three years ago.

4.2.1 COOPERATION WITH THE CYPRUS POLICE APS

One of the main reasons for low trapping activity observed this spring is the successful cooperation between CABS/SPA and the Cyprus Police APS. CABS and SPA started joint operations with the Cyprus Police APS in spring 2012. The 11 prosecutions made for illegal bird trapping in that season had a significant impact on the law enforcement effort on the ground, since spring trapping with limesticks was not considered as a priority and the Cyprus Police APS did not actually tackle it until then. In the next years we continued with effective joint field operations. Figure 4 shows number of arrests made by APS officers during spring BPCs.

Table 5: Number of prosecutions made by APS officers during Spring BPCs, between 2012 and 2015

Spring season	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of sites with prosecutions	11	14	15	15

This spring, the APS officers of the Cyprus Police matched the record made in spring 2014 with 15 arrests. If we consider that trapping activity and the number of set traps this spring was

considerably lower in comparison with previous years, and that trappers were extremely cautious when they were trapping (by renouncing the use of electronic decoys at night, trapping only for few hours every 7-10 days and in well-hidden trapping sites), the result in number of prosecutions stands out even more.

This result is the outcome of a significant improvement of the coordination and cooperation between the APS officers and CABS / SPA volunteers on the one hand and the professional law enforcement strategy employed in the field by the APS officers on the other. The former has been achieved after spending hundreds of hours together during the past three years and adopting a mutually agreed modus operandi in the field, aiming to maximize the chances of arresting red-handed bird trappers and minimising the risk of spoiling cases of prosecution. The latter is the result of a continuous process of evaluation and improvement of the strategy employed by CABS volunteers and the APS officers of the Cyprus Police, who have gained experience, know-how and self-confidence in combating this severe form of wildlife crime and poaching activity. This has led to successful and well-organized ambushes at trapping sites and detailed investigation of trapping cases, including the search – either with the owner’s authorization or with a search warrant – of the private properties where trapping paraphernalia and dead birds are usually stored. The experience gathered by CABS in Northern Italy shows that the deterrence effect is complete and the illegal practice is made non-rewarding only when the competent law enforcement agencies, based on the evidences of a crime, search the trapper’s property and seize traps and birds.

4.2.2 COOPERATION WITH THE APU OF THE BRITISH ESBA POLICE

In spring 2015, we proposed to the APU of the British ESBA Police the adoption and implementation of the modus operandi that we have developed with the Cyprus Police APS during the past three years. In this framework, we agreed with the British ESBA Police to work together for 7 days of joint operations, during which we detected 5 active trapping sites plus a prepared one. This resulted in 2 prosecutions made by the APU. Although this is a very low number, it has to be taken into consideration the respective low level of illegal bird trapping activity in the territory of the British ESBA in spring trapping season. Moreover, this is an improvement, if compared with number of arrests made by the APU in spring 2013 and 2014 (Table 6).

Table 6: Number of prosecutions made by the APU of the British ESBA Police during spring seasons between 2013 and 2015 (Official Data of the British ESBA Police)

Spring season	2013	2014	2015
No. of prosecutions	1	1	2

We must stress out though that both prosecutions made by the APU of the British ESBA Police took place in fenced properties where, once detected by CABS volunteers, there was no chance for the trappers to escape prosecution. The additional 3 ambushes jointly organized on trapping sites in open areas were not successful.

The skills, knowledge, experience and performance of both scouting volunteers and police units are tested in the success rate of prosecutions in open areas, where the trappers have to be caught red-handed. This means that both scouting volunteers and police officers have to detect, approach and hide by the trapping site without being seen.

In spring 2015, the Cyprus Police APS had 13 cases in unfenced properties, 8 of which (61.5%) resulted in prosecutions, i.e. the police managed to catch the trapper *in flagrante* (in the act of committing an offence) or to disclose the place under his responsibility where he stashed the evidences (i.e. illegal traps or dead birds). The APU of the British ESBA Police on the contrary had zero prosecutions in unfenced properties (0%), which shows that mistakes were made by both scouting volunteers and / or police officers.

This data reveals that tackling illegal bird trapping in the British ESBA – where this activity is professional, large-scale and well-organized, as it is evident by the use of spotters, trappers' patrols and an intelligent control system – requires a more sophisticated and effective approach, even during the minor spring trapping season. It is well-known that the cars of CABS volunteers and / or the patrols of the APU of the British ESBA Police are spotted very easily, as soon as they approach the roads leading to the major trapping areas (i.e. Cape Pyla and Ayios Nikolaos).



Picture 1: An officer of the Cyprus Police APS removes limesticks from a trapping site near Paralimni, in April 2015 (Photo: Andrea Rutigliano / CABS & SPA)

4.3 EFFECT OF PROSECUTIONS ON THE REACTIVATION OF TRAPPING SITES

As we presented in Chapter 4.1, we found 51 active trapping sites this spring. The majority of them (44) was already found active in the past, so they can be classified as reactivated trapping sites.

The reactivation of trapping sites is a common practice by bird trappers. The same trapping sites have been found active many times, even after police patrols have checked and / or raided them (i.e. confiscated trapping paraphernalia and prosecuted songbird poachers). Especially those trapping sites, where the police patrols only confiscated trapping paraphernalia, are almost all used again by bird trappers.

The most efficient way to stop people from trapping again is to catch them red-handed and prosecute them. But often even a prosecution is not sufficient to hinder people from trapping. As illegal trapping proves to be a highly profitable activity, often trappers need to be arrested and prosecuted more than once.

In this chapter we analyse the effect of prosecutions on the reactivated trapping sites. This spring we visited 37 trapping sites with known records of prosecution for illegal bird trapping in the past (Figure 5).

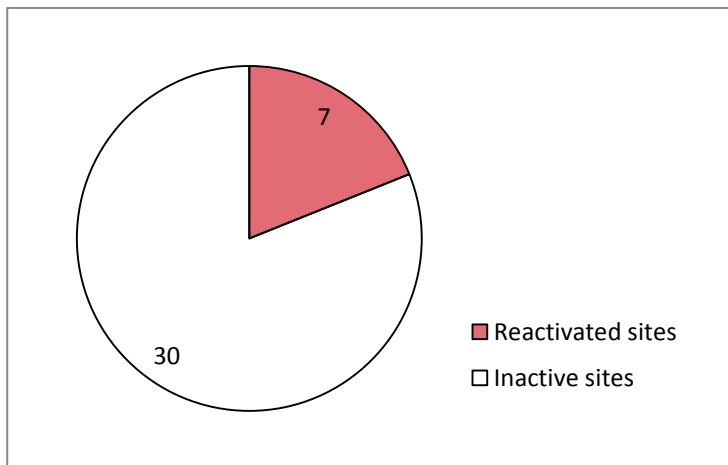


Figure 5: Trapping activity of sites with previous prosecutions monitored this spring (N=37)

7 out of 37 prosecuted sites (19%) were active again. The percentage of reactivated prosecuted sites is thus smaller than in spring 2013 and considerably smaller than the percentage observed in spring 2014 (Table 6).

Table 6: Reactivated prosecuted sites found during Spring BPCs between 2013 and 2015

Spring season	2013	2014	2015
No. of sites with previous prosecutions checked	19	26	37
No. of reactivated prosecuted sites found	5	11	7
Percentage of reactivated prosecuted sites	26.3	42.3	18.9

The systematic presence of CABS and SPA volunteers in the field, with the daily escort of the Cyprus Police APS, as well as the APU of the British ESBA Police was also a deterrent on the use of tape lures, which boost and maximise the catching rate of a trapping site, but make it visible to



scouting teams and law enforcement agencies. In the territory of the Republic of Cyprus we only detected 10 tape lures, whereas in 2013 we found 16. In addition only 5 out of these 8 were playing in the night (and one of them was observed playing only every 10th night).

We believe that the reduction of reactivated trapping sites, the decrease in the use of tape lures and the fact that most of trapping sites are activated on a random base (whereas in previous years it was a common practice to leave limesticks set all day long), are the long overdue results of the pressure put on bird trappers especially by the Cyprus Police APS in the last 4 spring seasons. In addition, it should be highlighted that in spring 2015, CABS and SPA had for the first time the continuous support of the Cyprus Police for 4 BPCs within a year (in spring and autumn 2014 and in winter and spring 2015). This development is extremely important as it has demonstrated the adoption and implementation of a zero tolerance policy against illegal bird trapping, killing and trade by the Cyprus Police APS [3].

5 LEGAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

BirdLife Cyprus is advocating for the adoption of a “*Strategic Action Plan for Tackling Illegal Bird Trapping in Cyprus*” (StAP) for several years. The reason for that is because through a long experience on this issue it finally became clear that the serious and persistent problem of illegal bird trapping could not be addressed only through law enforcement actions, but needed a suite of measures under different areas.

On 24 and 25 April 2013, BirdLife Cyprus invited all stakeholders, including the competent authorities and law enforcement agencies, as well as representatives from the civil society (ENGOS and Cyprus Hunting Federation) and the scientific community (expert ornithologists) to a first two-day workshop in order to discuss the issue of illegal bird trapping and the draft of a StAP. A second workshop followed with the collection of comments, amendments and recommendations from all stakeholders. The Final StAP was eventually sent to all stakeholders for adoption in April 2014.

After one year of waiting for a response, the Minister of Interior, Mr Socrates Hasicos, and the Head of the Game & Fauna Service, met with BirdLife Cyprus on 18 March 2015. During the meeting, Mr Hasicos informed BirdLife Cyprus that he intended to take the StAP for approval to the Council of Ministers, but with a so-called ‘*Alternative Planning*’ included. BirdLife Cyprus was surprised at the meeting since something like this had not been even raised and discussed ever before and expressed its strong opposition to such a plan.

On 14th of May 2015, ENGOS found out through an announcement of the Ministry of Interior that was published by the press that the StAP had been approved, including the so-called ‘*Alternative Planning*’, which “*allows for the issuing of hunting licences for Blackcaps under derogation, according to article 9.1.c of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)*”. **CABS and SPA together with all other ENGOS are strongly opposed to this so-called ‘Alternative Planning’ that was included in the ‘Strategic Plan’, mainly because it will not solve the problem of illegal bird trapping, but in contrast it will make this phenomenon much more difficult to control and tackle. For a more detailed analysis of the reasons why we oppose the ‘Alternative Planning’, see Annex I.**

It should also be noted here that this so-called ‘*Alternative Planning*’ was particularly welcomed by a Member of the Parliament (MP), Mr Evgenios Hampoullas, who is a Representative of the Famagusta constituency, under the banner of the governing party of Democratic Rally, since 3



November 2014. In the past few months, Mr Hampoullas, proclaimed himself the defender of the songbird poachers' lobby in the major trapping hotspot of Famagusta district.

On 19 March 2015, Mr Hampoullas put forward a Parliamentary Question, through which he asked the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Socrates Hasicos, to inform the House of Representatives, whether the '*Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the Conservation of Wild Birds (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)*' enables the hunting of a protected species of migratory birds (*Sylvia atricapilla* / *Blackcap*) with selective methods.

On 19 May 2015, the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus answered the Parliamentary Question of Mr Hampoullas, by stating that according to the provisions of both the '*Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (2009/14/EC)*' and the '*Law on the Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species [N. 152(I)/2003]*', Blackcaps are not listed as huntable species, however it is possible to grant a special license for hunting Blackcaps, through a derogation from the provisions of the European and Cypriot legislation, under strict terms and conditions.

On 13 May 2015, the Minister of Interior submitted the '*Strategic Plan for Combating Illegal Bird Trapping in Cyprus (2016-2020)*' to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus. Based on the initiative of Mr Hampoullas, this document includes the so-called '*Alternative Planning*', which foresees the possibility of hunting a protected species of migratory birds through a derogation [4].

In a recent discussion of the '*Strategic Plan*' and the so-called '*Alternative Planning*', during a session of the Standing Committee on Environment of the House of Representatives, on 1 July 2015, Mr Hampoullas "*warned*" our organisations that "*groups of people will be watching them and guarding the trapping areas, from August onward*". According to Mr Hampoullas, these people "*will halt the mercenaries who call themselves environmentalists*" [5]. We firmly believe that this statement made by Mr Hampoullas is an act of intimidation and repression of environmental activism, while incites to acts of violence and illegality. We also believe that this statement turns against the competent law enforcement agencies and most importantly the Cyprus Police APS, which escorts CABS volunteers during the BPCs held every spring, autumn and winter migration season.

In addition, since May, Mr Hampoullas is falsely accusing our organisations and personnel, by repeatedly claiming that we are "*mercenaries who call themselves environmentalists*" and aim to "*tarnish the reputation of Cyprus abroad*". Moreover, Mr Hampoullas is seriously undermining the efforts of the competent law enforcement agencies and environmental organizations to promote and strengthen public awareness, sensitization and education on the problem of illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trading of wild birds in Cyprus [6], by arguing that "*no matter how many laws will be voted, these will never be successfully implemented*" and "*the only way to persuade Cypriots not to hunt and eat songbirds is to change their DNA*" [7].

The fact that a politician, who has been strongly supporting the '*Alternative Planning*' as a way to tackle illegal bird trapping, is standing up for the trapping lobby, clearly shows what is the real aim of the '*Alternative Planning*'.



6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Republic of Cyprus: As stated in our previous reports, *“the history of law enforcement efforts in the Republic of Cyprus is characterized by long periods of ‘laissez faire’ activities, interrupted by seasonal raids, followed by protests from the poachers’ lobby and restoration of the tolerance by the competent authorities”* [8]. Once again we are witnessing this strategy being implemented by the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, namely the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service. The decreasing trend of illegal bird trapping observed in spring seasons during the past few years, as a result of the persistent and effective cooperation in the field between ENGOs and the competent law enforcement agencies, most importantly the Cyprus Police APS, have triggered once again the backlash of bird trappers and local politicians, who support illegal bird trapping, killing and trade. Unfortunately, this time the pressure put by the trappers’ lobby and local politicians, resulted to the negation of the ‘zero tolerance’ policy against illegal trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds, through the inclusion of the so-called ‘Alternative Planning’ in the ‘Strategic Plan for Combating Illegal Trapping of Wild Birds in Cyprus, 2016-2020’.

Instead of strengthening and escalating the ongoing process of combating this severe form of wildlife crime, through the adoption and implementation of a ‘Strategic Plan’, which would gradually lead to the elimination of illegal bird trapping, the Cypriot Government is planning to legalize the shooting of blackcaps. Without going into discussion here on the legal, social, political, technical and operational problematic aspects of this derogation, we sound the alarm on the fact that the competent authorities (particularly the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service) are sending the wrong message to the trappers’ and hunters’ lobby, in fact backing up their demand for the killing and consumption of a protected species. Furthermore, the persistent underestimation of the Cyprus Police APS, the only law enforcement agency which has managed so far to really deter bird trappers on the ground is demonstrating the lack of the appropriate political will to tackle the problem and to again loosen the ties of bird trapping.

CABS and SPA are calling the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus to:

- **Increase the operational capacity of the Cyprus Police APS, by doubling its staff. 2 independent patrols on a daily base – meaning a total of 14-16 experienced officers – are the absolute minimum required. These officers must be specifically trained to work on combating songbird poaching and wildlife crime, while they should also constitute a long-term permanent staff of the Cyprus Police APS.**
- **Require that all law enforcement agencies keep an average number of prosecutions every year to avoid huge fluctuations in the law enforcement efforts, mainly dependent on political will and administrative decisions rather than real change in trapping trends.**
- **Require that the competent law enforcement agencies – the Cyprus Police APS and the Game & Fauna Service – regularly publish their results, in order for third parts to evaluate their efforts.**
- **Immediately adopt and implement the ‘Strategic Plan for Tackling Illegal Trapping of Wild Birds in Cyprus, 2016-2020’, which was agreed between 2013 and 2014 by all stakeholders, without any ‘Alternative Planning’ aiming to the legalization of hunting / shooting of protected wild birds [9].**
- **Increase the average fines and penalties imposed by the Courts in order for them to be a deterrent.**



- **Develop national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects for changing attitudes to the consumption of ambelopoulia and the ecological impact of illegal, non-selective and large-scale bird trapping, killing and trade.**

British ESBA: Spring trapping season is not the main season in the British ESBA, therefore the joint work in the field with the APU of the British Police was more of a blueprint for future cooperation. The methodology used in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus by the Cyprus Police APS seems to be fruitful also in the case of the British ESBA, since the scouting work of the volunteers can help the police officers to save time and know in advance which sites to approach and what to expect there. The fact that all ambushes failed (i.e. either the APU officers or the scouting volunteers were spotted) was another interesting development to observe, which should help the competent law enforcement agencies and scouting volunteers to correctly assess the level of surveillance of the territory implemented by trappers' groups and to overcome this obstacle.

Under the present conditions and without the adoption and implementation of a more intelligent approach to the problem, anyone can easily observe that it will be impossible to tackle illegal bird trapping in the British ESBA during the main autumn and winter seasons.

CABS and SPA ask for:

- **An increase of the operational capacity of the APU of the British ESBA Police with at least 4 independent patrols, responsible only for disrupting illegal bird trapping and prosecuting songbird poachers, on a daily base, especially during autumn and winter seasons.**
- **Require that the APU of the British ESBA Police keeps an average number of prosecutions every year to avoid huge fluctuations in the law enforcement efforts, mainly dependent on political will and administrative decisions rather than real change in trapping trends.**
- **Organize joint patrols and anti-trapping operations in the so-called 'grey zones' - the border areas between the territories of the British ESBA and the Republic of Cyprus – between the British ESBA Police, the Cyprus Police APS and the Game & Fauna Service.**
- **Conduct clearance operations once every couple of weeks between late-August and late-October, in Cape Pyla and Ayios Nikolaos.**
- **Last but not least, the overall eradication of invasive alien species and particularly the artificial acacia groves in the 'Special Area of Conservation' of Cape Pyla (For a more detailed analysis and recent developments, see Annex II).**



ANNEX I - THE 'STRATEGIC PLAN' AND THE 'ALTERNATIVE PLANNING'

CABS and SPA, in collaboration with local ENGOs – namely BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria and Friends of the Earth Cyprus – are strongly opposed to the so-called '*Alternative Planning*' that was included in the '*Strategic Plan for Tackling Illegal Trapping of Wild Birds (2016-2020)*' at the last moment, by the Ministry of Interior and which was approved by the Council of Ministers, on the 13th May 2015 [¹⁰]. The adopted '*Strategic Plan*', which includes the possibility to issue a derogation for '*selective hunting of ambelopoulia only*' is essentially opening the way for the legalization of ambelopoulia hunting, instead of aiming to eliminate this phenomenon.

ENGOs are strongly opposed to this so-called '*Alternative Planning*' that was included in the '*Strategic Plan*', firstly, because it will not solve the problem of illegal bird trapping despite claims to the opposite, and secondly, because the derogation requested is not permitted under the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).

Below we summarise the reasons why we are against the so-called '*Alternative Planning*' that was included in the adopted '*Strategic Plan*':

- 1. Zero tolerance against wildlife crime:** The approved '*Strategic Plan*' is not based on the principle of zero tolerance, as agreed unanimously in the '*Larnaca Declaration*', at the '*1st European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*' (Council of Europe, Larnaca, July 2011), by all participants, including the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service. We wonder how it is possible for a '*Strategic Plan*' that proclaims to aim to combat an illegal activity, to include the possibility to issue a derogation that will essentially legalise this phenomenon.
- 2. Relaxation of the existing strict legislation:** This derogation will not be a deterrent against illegal trappers and will not improve the implementation of the law, instead it will be another '*loophole*' in the national legislation that will worsen the current dramatic situation of illegal bird trapping. Hence the illegal trapping of ambelopoulia will continue and at the same time the hunting of ambelopoulia will be permitted.
- 3. '*The legal and selective hunting of ambelopoulia*' will not solve the problem of the illegal and non-selective trapping and trade of ambelopoulia:** The legal hunting of Song Thrushes is a tangible example that supports this argument. Although the Song Thrush is a game species, this has not acted as a deterrent against the illegal trapping of Song Thrushes with mist nets during the winter season. On the contrary, this particular problem during the winter period reaches nearly similar levels to the problem of illegal trapping of ambelopoulia during the autumn migratory period, according to data from the anti-poaching enforcement agencies. The environmental organisations often receive reports from hunters regarding the out of control situation of mist netting of Song Thrushes.
- 4. Lack of specific timetables and targets for a gradual reduction and complete elimination of the problem:** The approved '*Strategic Plan*' does not include the initially agreed three stages of planning and implementation (short, medium and long term planning, with an implementation timeframe of 2015-16, 2017-18 and 2019-20, respectively). Even worse, the quantitative targets for the gradual reduction and the complete combatting of the problem have also been



removed and the provision for *'selective hunting of ambelopoulia only, under derogation'* has been added.

5. **Article 9 of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC):** According to this article, derogations may be granted for specific reasons, amongst which c) *'to permit, under strictly supervised conditions and on a selective basis, the capture, keeping or other judicious use of certain birds in small numbers'*. We believe that the derogation that has been included in the approved *'Strategic Plan'* for *'selective hunting of ambelopoulia only'* (i.e. under Article 9.1 (c) of the Birds Directive) would not be accepted by the European Commission for the following reasons:
 - According to the *'Guidance document on hunting under Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds - The Birds Directive'* of 2008, in order for a derogation to be granted under 9.1 (c), the first provision that must be met is that of *'no other satisfactory solution'*. The killing of blackcaps with shotguns and air rifle is considered by the Ministry as a solution to the problem of bird trapping. Now, we cannot see how it can be argued that the *'only alternative'* available in order to combat poaching is to legalize the hunting.
 - Moreover, according to the Guidance document on hunting, the only reasons for which a derogation for recreational hunting may be granted, are related to huntable species listed in Annex II of the Birds Directive. The blackcap is not a huntable species and is not listed in Annex II.
 - Finally, other Member States have been condemned by the European Court of Justice for permitting the hunting non- huntable species under derogation (e.g. Italy).
6. **Tradition is not a justification for a derogation:** In the *'Strategic Plan'* approved by the Council of Ministers in May, it is mentioned that the derogation *'should be assessed...due to the particularities of Cyprus and the traditional character that trapping and consumption of blackcaps in Cyprus has developed through the centuries'*. According to the case law of the European Court of Justice and in particular Case C-79/03 (9th December 2004) European Commission versus Spain, the claim and the justification that a method of hunting is a traditional practice is not a valid reason for a derogation. In this specific court case, Spain tried to legalise the use of parany (limesticks) in the province of Valencia, a hunting method similar to limesticks, with the justification that it is a traditional hunting method. The Court condemned Spain and in the concluding report it was explicitly explained that the fact that a method may be a tradition does not mean that it can be accepted as a reason for a derogation.
7. **No *'tradition'* under any circumstance could justify the *'legalisation of hunting of ambelopoulia with selective methods, under a derogation'*:** As has happened in the past with other *'traditions'* that were directly against fundamental rights and / or social groups (e.g. practices and perceptions related to gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination), in a similar manner in this case *'the continuation of a tradition'* cannot justify any form of tolerance towards poaching and wildlife crime. Moreover, the air rifle, flobert shotgun or any other modern rifle and shotgun are not *'traditional hunting methods'*, as proclaimed by the supporters of the *'Alternative Planning'*. In essence, under the pretext of traditional hunting method, what is proposed is the killing of ambelopoulia with modern methods with the consumption of ambelopoulia being the sole purpose. Hence, when a person is caught for the possession and consumption of ambelopoulia it will claim that the birds were killed with the use of flobert, air rifle etc. and in practice it will be impossible to enforce the law.



- 8. Article 13 of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC):** This article further provides further arguments why this derogation cannot be permitted for legal / historical reasons as well. According to this article, the implementation of the Directive, including also its derogations, by a Member State, cannot lead to the deterioration of the conservation status of wild bird species, in comparison to the status that existed prior to the transposition of the EU Directive into national legislation. Therefore taking into account that both trapping with non-selective methods and trade, and the killing / hunting with selective methods and the consumption of ambelopoulia have been prohibited under the legislation of the Republic of Cyprus since 1974 and 1988 respectively (i.e. fifteen years prior to the transposition of the Directive into national law), this derogation cannot be approved.
- Under the Cyprus legislation, trapping and trade of wild birds was prohibited since 1974 under the Articles 10 (*'prohibition of hunting etc. of certain bird species'*, without including the blackcap either in the protected or the game species), 14 (*'prohibition of offering game or wild birds in restaurants etc.'*) and 15 (*'prohibition of the use of light projectors, traps, luring methods, limesticks and flushing of birds'*) of the 'Protection and Development of Game and Wild Birds Law of 1974 (39/1974)'.
 - In 1988, the Cyprus Government ratified the *'Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats'*, which had already signed since 1979. Blackcaps (ambelopoulia) are listed in 'Annex II' of the 'Strictly Protected Fauna Species – Birds' of the 'Law on the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats of 1988 (24/1988)'.
 - In 2003, in order to be in compliance with the EU acquis and in particular the *'Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30th November 2009 on the Conservation of Wild Birds (previously Directive 79/409/EEC of 2nd April 1979)'*, the House of Representatives voted for the *'Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Law N.152 (I)/2003 (which has been subsequently amended by the N.151(I)/2006, N.5(I)/2009, N.129(I)/2012 and N. 104(I)/2014)'*. Therefore trapping and trade of wild birds were prohibited 30 years before the EU Birds Directive was transposed into Cyprus law, while the killing (hunting) and consumption (possession) of Blackcaps were prohibited exactly 15 years prior to the harmonization of the Cyprus law with the EU environmental acquis.
- 9. Violation of the public consultation process and the principles of legality, good governance and the rule of law:** The initiative for the development of a *'Strategic Action Plan (StAP) for Tackling Illegal Bird Trapping in Cyprus'* started in 2013 and continued in 2014, through workshops organized by BirdLife Cyprus, where all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service, participated and discussed the content of a StAP. During this democratic, transparent, participatory and integrated consultation the issue of a 'derogation for hunting ambelopoulia' was never brought up for discussion by any stakeholder. However, the Ministry of Interior and the Game & Fauna Service proceeded unilaterally and in an authoritarian manner, without any transparency and accountability, to the submission of this destructive *'Strategic Plan'*, which includes the so-called *'Alternative Planning'* to the Council of Ministers for approval, without fully briefing the Cabinet regarding the compatibility of the *'Strategic Plan'* with the EU acquis.
- 10. The StAP that was discussed and agreed by all the stakeholders during 2013-2014,** and which does not include the so-called *'Alternative Planning'*, has been approved by the Office of the Environment Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus, the Administration and the Police of the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs), the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Forest



Department of the Republic of Cyprus, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), as well as all national and international ENGOs (including BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, the Federation of Environmental Organisations of Cyprus, CABS, SPA, RSPB and MBCC).

11. Public opinion on illegal bird trapping: During the last decade several opinion polls have been carried out regarding the issue of illegal trapping of ambelopoulia. Among other things, the findings from these polls reject fully the unsubstantiated claim that *'90% of the public in Cyprus eats ambelopoulia'*. Furthermore, the findings of all these polls indicate that the supporters of trapping misinform the public, particularly with regards to the *'wide acceptance'* of the public opinion to continue the trapping of ambelopoulia as part of *'Cyprus tradition'*. Specifically:

- **According to an opinion poll of BirdLife Cyprus, that was conducted by the RAI Consultants Public Ltd company between 22 - 26 August 2005 (total sample 568 people) and 27 August – 3 September 2008 (total sample 557 people), using the methodology of random multistage stratified sampling and gathering the data via telephone interviews from the RAI Consultants Public Ltd call centre:**
 - On the statement *'The trapping of ambelopoulia is part of our culture and we must be able to hunt them freely*: In 2005, the results showed that 57% disagree, 18% have no opinion or don't know and only 24% agree with regards to the above statement. In 2008 the results showed that 58% disagree, 16% have no opinion or don't know and only 26% agree with regards to the above statement.
 - On the statement *'Ambelopoulia are tasty and we must be able to hunt them freely*: In 2005, the results showed that 54% disagree, 25% have no opinion or don't know and only 21% agree with regards to the above statement. In 2008 the results showed that 53% disagree, 24% have no opinion or don't know and only 22% agree with regards to the above statement.
 - On the statement *'The hunting of ambelopoulia creates a bad reputation on the people of Cyprus in Europe and must be stopped*: In 2005, the results showed that only 32% disagree, 16% have no opinion or don't know and 52% agree with regards to the above statement. In 2008 the results showed that only 28% disagree, 16% have no opinion or don't know and 56% agree with regards to the above statement
- **According to another opinion poll of the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria for the project *'BioForLife'*, that was conducted by the RAI Consultants Public Ltd company using the methodology of random multistage stratified sampling by carrying out telephone interviews from the RAI Consultants Public Ltd call centre in **November 2012, November 2013 and January 2015:**
 - At the question *'How often do you eat ambelopoulia*: On average during the period 2012-2015, 85-86% of the participants answered that *'I never eat ambelopoulia'*, 9-10% *'I eat one (1) time per year'*, only 4-5% *'I eat two to five (2-5) times per year'* and 1% *'I eat often, more than ten (10) per year'*.
 - Finally, the qualitative elements of this opinion poll highlight and prove that the eating of ambelopoulia is mostly a privilege of men and of older age groups in the Larnaca and Famagusta districts.**

It is clear from the above opinion polls that the majority of the public opinion is against the illegal trapping of ambelopoulia and hence the claim of the supporters for *'the legalisation of hunting of ambelopoulia under a derogation'*, but also of the competent authorities (i.e. Game & Fauna Service), that *'90% of the public in Cyprus eats ambelopoulia'* is refuted.



Based on the above, ENGOs strongly oppose the inclusion of this provision for *'selective hunting of ambelopoulia only, under derogation'*, in the *'Strategic Plan'* and stress that the problem of illegal trapping of wild birds is a very serious and persistent ecological problem that needs to be tackled seriously under a *'Strategic Plan'*, that is based on the principle of zero tolerance. ENGOs call upon the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus to withdraw the *'Strategic Plan'* in its current form and to adopt the *'Strategic Action Plan'* that was discussed and developed with all the competent authorities and all the stakeholders during 2013-2014, which is based on the principle of zero tolerance and does not include any derogations for the legalisation of this illegal and deplorable practice. CABS and SPA also note that the approval of the final version of the *'Strategic Plan'* is pending by the Directorate General for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, which can reject the so-called *'Alternative Planning'* and launch a formal infringement procedure against the Republic of Cyprus for failing to comply with EU law.

ANNEX II - THE ERADICATION OF INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES (ARTIFICIAL ACACIA GROVES) IN THE 'SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION' OF CAPE PYLA IN THE BRITISH ESBA

CABS and SPA support the policy of eradication of artificial plantations of the invasive alien species acacia (*Acacia Saligna*) in the area of Cape Pyla, within the territory of the British ESBA [11] for the following reasons:

1. Acacia is a **fast-growing plant** as it develops rapidly. At the same time, it can adjust to several types of ground and it is drought-resistant. Moreover, its roots spread very fast and are firmly fixed to the ground. As a result, once settled, it is very difficult to eradicate. Acacia is classified in the category of **invasive alien species** and has **unfavourable effects on biodiversity and the ecosystems** as it occupies large areas of land, which could be covered with endemic flora species, whilst not allowing the development of other indigenous species in the area where it grows.
2. Invasive alien species, including acacia, **contribute towards a dramatic change of the ecosystem and have a significant effect on the flora and biodiversity of Cape Pyla**, which is in the process of being designated as a '*Special Area of Conservation*'.
3. The measure of uprooting artificial plantations of the invasive alien species acacia is **part of the Management Plan of the 'Special Area of Conservation' of Cape Pyla**, which was placed on public consultation, where all the stakeholders involved (competent authorities, local communities and environmental organisations) took part.
4. Up until fifteen years ago, the area was **not "forest land" but "rocky land" with low bush vegetation, consisting primarily of endemic plants**, such as mastic trees (lentisks), Phoenician junipers and wild olive trees.



Figure 6: Comparison shots taken from Google Earth Map in 2003 and 2012 (Source: Environment Department, British SBAs Administration)

5. Artificial plantations of acacia, especially during the early stages of their development, **require vast amounts of water and are in fact being watered by an illegal, though dense, system of unlicensed boreholes** which has been created in the area over the last few years.

6. Artificial plantations of acacia **have absolutely no purpose as they cannot be used in farming** (e.g. crop consumption or animal feed production).
7. The only use of artificial plantations of acacia, and even more so in the area of Cape Pyla, is the **creation of trapping sites and killing fields of wild birds**, which consist entirely of mist nets and electronic tape lures. Due to the quantitative and qualitative features of the problem of illegal bird trapping observed in the territory of the British ESBA, we are essentially talking about an **“industrial-scale”, mass slaughter of migratory birds**.



Picture 2: Acacia artificial plantation with nets for bird trapping and an illegal irrigation system(Photo: BirdLife Cyprus)

8. Artificial plantations of acacia **should be replaced as practically feasible by endemic flora species** occurring in the habitat in question, whilst **no indigenous plant species (e.g. lentisks, Phoencian junipers, wild olive trees) have been removed**.
9. **A series of international, legally-binding recommendations and declarations** address the problem of the spread of invasive alien species and suggest **a number of measures to deal with it, such as identifying and mapping the areas where the problem is more intense and the species that tend to expand quicker**, including acacia. Moreover, they propose the **control and uprooting of invasive alien species, as well as adapting and implementing special policies for wildlife conservation and environment protection, in order to restrict their tendency to expand in important areas and prevent their introduction and/ or further expansion**. Among others, the legislation includes the following:
 - Article 11, paragraph 2.b of the *Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats*;
 - *Recommendation No. 99 (2003) on the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats*;
 - *Recommendation No. 128 (2007) on the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats*;
 - *Decision VI/23 (2006) of the 6th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), on Invasive Alien Species that Threaten Ecosystems, Habitats and / or Species*;



- *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* with its 20 headline Aichi targets for 2020 and in particular Target 9 devoted to invasive alien species of the 10th Conference of the Parties of the UNCBD (2010);
 - *Target 5, EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, endorsed by the Council of the EU in June 2011;*
 - *Recommendation No. 166 (2013) on the European Code of Conduct on Hunting and Invasive Alien Species of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats;*
 - *Regulation (EU) No.1143 (2014) of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species.*
10. The policy of uprooting invasive alien species, and mainly artificial plantations of acacia in Special Areas of Conservation of the “Natura 2000” European Network is **one of the measures that the Forestry Department and the Environment Department of the Republic of Cyprus have been implementing for about ten years, in accordance with the above legal framework, with Cape Greco National Forest Park** being the most typical example. The most recent example of a Special Area of Conservation where acacias were uprooted is **Oroklini Lake** [¹²], and a few months ago, **Ayia Napa Municipality** uprooted the acacias at the locations of **Melissi and Glyko Nero**, close to Cape Greco National Forest Park in order to replace them with oleanders [¹³].
11. **The Environment Department of the British SBAs Administration collaborated with the Forests Department of the Republic of Cyprus and followed the “Guidelines for Controlling Invasive Alien Species in Natural Ecosystems in Cyprus: Strategy – Techniques”**, prepared in December 2013, on behalf of the Forests Department, by Dr. Jean-Marc Dufour-Dror [¹⁴].
12. The issue of managing habitats in general and the measure of uprooting invasive alien species in particular are contained in the **‘Strategic Plan for Tackling Illegal Trapping of Wild Birds in Cyprus, 2016-2020’**. According to the draft ‘Strategic Plan’ which is the product of an integrated and democratic procedure of public consultation with the involvement of all the stakeholders (competent authorities, environmental organisations, specialised scientists and the hunting federation), the target for 2014-2020 is to properly manage habitats with a high floristic value that are important for the migration of birds which, have been shaped and are currently being used extensively for illegal bird trapping (e.g. Cape Pyla and Cape Greco). The management of habitats must include: **a) the removal of invasive alien species from the said areas, b) the rational use of water by identifying non-licensed irrigation sources and either licensing them or closing them down, c) the use of funds to remove invasive alien species and d) the designation of Cape Pyla area as Special Area of Conservation** [¹⁵].

CABS and SPA believe that any reactions and protests against the uprooting of artificial plantations of the alien invasive species of acacia in the area of Cape Pyla are not made towards the right direction of conserving and protecting ecosystems, biodiversity and bird life. From an ecological – environmental point of view, the well-targeted eradication of artificial acacia plantations in Cape Pyla is an action that combines the policies and strategies of ecosystem management (conservation of major ecological services, like diversity and endemism), water conservation (restoration of natural resources through sustainable irrigation and use of water) and bird conservation (elimination of threats to wild bird species and populations).



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