

INTRODUCTION

Shooting is extremely popular in Cyprus. According to C. Papamichael, Head of Game and Fauna Services, Ministry of Interior, some 40,000 shooting licenses were issued in 1986 (this will be close to the actual number of shooters as permit evasion is probably rare). The licence costs C£15 for the first year, extensions C£10 yearly. Guns cost from C£225 upwards, 25 cartridges C£2.25 (locally made) up to C£5 (imported). Air rifles are also commonly used. A minority of the hunters are organised in hunting associations; there are two hunting magazines in Greek. The hunting lobby is very powerful.

Shooting of protected species is a very serious problem in Cyprus. Among the 40,000 shooters, many have been reported to behave like 'cowboys' and shoot at anything that comes within range. The Akrotiri Salt Lake has a notorious reputation in this respect, and many protected species have been shot there. The Salt Lake is a Permanent Game Reserve, but due to the lack of a buffer zone around the lake, the actual protected area is delimited by the lake itself, i.e. when standing on the lake shore hunters do not break the law. During an Army Bird Watching Society (ABWS) expedition to Cyprus from 9-30 October 1980, one White Stork, one Grey Heron, two Eleonora's Falcons, two Kestrels, one Honey Buzzard and one unidentified falcon were found shot round the Akrotiri Salt Lake (11th report COS 1970). The Phassouri reedbeds, a very famous bird area just north of Akrotiri Salt Lake, was declared a Temporary Game Reserve for the first time in 1986. Prior to 1986, the Phassouri reedbeds were often the scene of intensive bird killing: "In 1982 ... on the first day of the autumn 'Turtle Dove' season, the reed beds at Phassouri were ringed by hunters who quickly shot out all the water and wader birds which had bred there" (Flint and Stewart 1983). The November 1985 newsletter of COS 1957 describes how four 'eagles', probably Ospreys, were seen fishing at Lymbia Dam on 2 November: two of them were shot later on the same day. In previous years the autumn shooting started about August 25th, but in 1985 it started on August 4th. This resulted in the killing of breeding birds which were still tending their second brood (P. Neophytou pers. comm.).

INVESTIGATIONS OF SHOOTING

In order to study the discipline of the hunters, some of the shooting areas were visited on 20 and 21 April 1986, after the opening of the spring shooting season on the 20th. Shooting areas around Larnaca Salt Lake, Kouklia, Timi and Maa were visited. On the day the season opened, thousands of people were out hunting, but they were not observed shooting outside the permitted areas. In the 17 days before the opening of the shooting season, no shot was heard. In autumn 1986, the shooting season started in some areas on 17 August and lasted, especially in coastal areas, until 30 September. After 30 September no shots were heard until the opening of the next shooting season on 9 November, except for some shots heard around Maroni on 2 October. Also in autumn and winter 1986, no instance of shooting outside permitted areas or in Game Reserves was detected. No information on shooters' behaviour in the Akrotiri Salt Lake could be obtained in 1986, as this area was closed for shooting from April 1986 onwards, due to the strained political situation (the peninsula is part of the British Sovereign Base Area).

In the course of the autumn shooting season, the following illegal activities were witnessed: shooting from cars, on 13 September near Pendakomo; shooting of Bee-eaters, observed twice near Pendakomo and once near Maroni (the Bee-eater was declared protected in 1984); shooting of small songbirds, observed once near Maroni (this is prohibited by the Council of Ministers Decision no. 25.261). Unprotected species seen shot by hunters were: Quail, Willow Warbler and Yellow Wagtail. During the shooting season that started on 9 November, a hunter near Kiti was seen with a recently shot Redshank (protected). In November, large numbers of shot Song Thrushes and some Blackbirds appeared in the markets. November and December is known as the 'heavy' shooting season, since the Chukar is allowed to be shot, and hunters were then often seen with Chukar on their belts. Other birds known to be shot in November and December were: Woodcock, Woodpigeon and Pigeon. Most shot birds were said to be eaten.

TRADE

Only in the 'heavy' shooting season (November and December) were shot birds seen on display in market stalls. At small stands besides the roads and at markets, the birds were often the prize connected with a game played with one metal ball and a series of figures on a board ('Bagatelle'). The following prices for birds sold were obtained from a stall in Nicosia: Chukar C£12, Woodcock C£3, Song Thrush C£1, Blackbird C£1. At a grocery in Nicosia, a bunch of 12 Song Thrushes cost C£10 and about eight pickled Song Thrushes in a jar cost C£10. Chukar and Black Francolin are the most famous game birds, but the Black Francolin has been "temporarily" protected since 1984. Restaurants serve Chukar, and it was likely that there was some trade in Chukar and other game birds.

LAW ENFORCEMENT REGARDING SHOOTING

The Wildlife Law should be enforced by the Police Anti-poaching Unit and Game Wardens. Woldhek (1980) stated that 'in practice they actually are active in this field from time to time'. Control of the shooting of protected species seemed hardly existent. However, the law regarding hunting dates and areas seemed to be quite well observed. It was not ascertained whether there was any regular control on bag limits.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that shooters do obey the regulations concerning hunting seasons and areas. However, shooting from cars and shooting of protected species may be a common practice. More detailed information is required, especially on the latter. Flint and Stewart (1983) presumed that every hunter shoots about 30 birds in a year. This number seems somewhat low and an estimated mean of 50 birds per hunter is probably more realistic. Considering the total number of shooters in Cyprus in 1986, the total numbers of birds legally killed will be around 2 million annually.

LAW 39 OF 1974, A SUMMARY

Law no. 39 of 1974 contains all the hunting regulations. It is presented in full in Appendix III. A brief summary is given below.

Paragraph 14(1): No game or wild bird shall be cooked, sold or served in any establishment and no name or any description whatsoever of game or wild bird shall appear on the bill of fare or any other list in connection with any establishment.

Paragraph 15(1): No person shall shoot, kill, take or pursue any game or wild bird by making use: (a) of search lights; (b) of shelter or any other luring practices; (c) of limesticks or of any other trap; (d) of any motor vehicle whatsoever; (e) of the method commonly known as 'pantima' or of any other method or practice having effect similar to that of 'pantima'. ('Pantima' is a 'driven-game' - author. See also Appendix III)

Paragraph 19 protects eggs, except those of Crows Corvidae and Sparrows Passeridae.

In three appendices, examples are given of the license for purchasing a shotgun, for shooting and for an airgun.

In Appendix IV the list of protected species is given: 'The following birds are protected and shooting, killing, chasing or catching them by any means is prohibited. Anyone breaking the law will be punished with up to one year imprisonment or a fine up to C£100, or both.'

Protected are:

- 1 - All the large wader and marsh birds such as Herons, Storks, Ibises, Spoonbills, Flamingoes, Cranes, Pelicans, Cormorants and Shags, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, except Geese and Ducks.
- 2 - Family Laridae and Sternidae i.e. the Gulls and Terns.
- 3 - All diurnal birds of prey such as Eagles, Hawks, Falcons and Vultures.
- 4 - Family Strigidae i.e. the Owls and Barn Owl Tyto alba.
- 5 - Wren Troglodytes troglodytes cypristes
- 6 - Dipper Cinclus cinclus olympicus
- 7 - Cyprus Wheatear Oenanthe leucomela cypriaca
- 8 - Great Tit Parus major aphrodite
- 9 - Coat Tit Parus ater cypristes
- 10 - Short-toed Treecreeper Certhia brachydactyla dorothea
- 11 - Crossbill Loxia curvirostra guillermardi
- 12 - Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs cypriotis
- 13 - Cyprus Warbler Sylvia melanothorax
- 14 - Black-bellied Sandgrouse Pterocles orientalis orientalis
- 15 - Hoopoe Upupa epops epops
- 16 - Golden Oriole Oriolus oriolus oriolus
- 17 - Kingfisher Alcedo atthis atthis

The Bee-eater Merops apiaster was declared protected in 1984 (M. Charalambides pers comm.).

Scientific names are meticulously copied from Law 39. The Dipper became extinct in 1945.

BAG LIMITS, HUNTING SEASONS AND GAME RESERVES

Bag limits

Bag limits are determined by the Minister. Normally the bag limits concern Chukar and Black Francolin. In 1986 shooting of the Black Francolin was prohibited and the bag limit was five Chukars per hunter per hunting trip.

Hunting Season

These are determined by the Minister and then published in the two hunting magazines. The hunting seasons are (approximately):

January-March: especially Song Thrushes and other Thrushes, and everything else except Chukar;

April (c. 20th)-May: spring shooting, especially Turtle Doves;

August-September: autumn shooting season;

November-December: especially Chukar, Geese and Ducks.

(Information about the hunting season from P. Neophytou COS 1970).

Game Reserves and hunting dates

For each season a map is published in the hunting magazines, in which areas are indicated where shooting is allowed. The Permanent and Temporary Game Reserves are also indicated. The Permanent Game Reserves include, among other areas, a great part of the Paphos Forest (north-west of the Troodos Mountains). Temporary Game Reserves are numerous and are slightly changed after a few years. In the Game Reserves (Permanent and Temporary) shooting is prohibited the whole year. In Figure 6 the Permanent Game Reserves are indicated in black and the Temporary Game Reserves in grey.

On the maps as published in the hunting magazines the days on which hunting is allowed are also indicated. Figure 7 gives the map as it was published for the spring shooting season 1986. Indicated are the areas in which shooting is allowed every day and those in which shooting is allowed only on Sundays and Wednesdays, in the season 20 April-11 May 1986.

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DECISION NO. 25.261 OF DECEMBER 1984

As a result of years of protest against the annual massacre of birds in Cyprus, the following announcement was published in the government Gazette of 29 December 1984:

Decision number 25.261 of 13.12.84.

The Council of Ministers have decided to approve:

- (a) the enforcement of the provisions of Law No.39 of 1974, concerning the Protection and Development of Game and Wild Birds, which prohibits the use of nets and limesticks for the capture of game and wild birds, including 'ambelopoulia';
- (b) the banning of the importation of nets and limesticks into Cyprus;
- (c) the ratification of the Berne Convention, without exempting Cyprus from the provisions of the Convention which refer to the protection of 'ambelopoulia' and Bee-eaters; and
- (d) the banning of shooting of 'ambelopoulia' with shotguns.

(Source: 'Earthlines' 14, 1985)

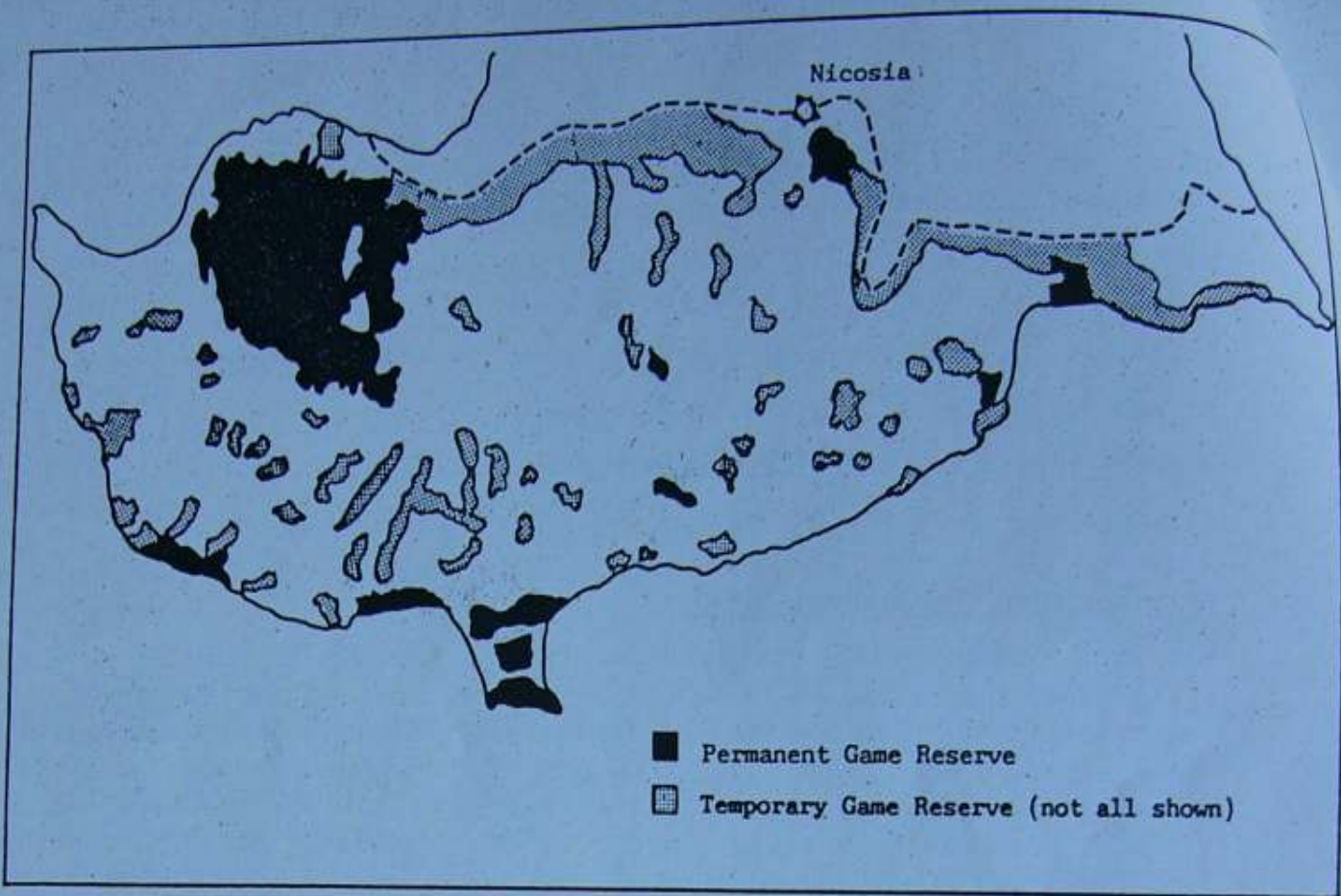


Figure 6: Permanent and Temporary Game reserves in the Republic of Cyprus.

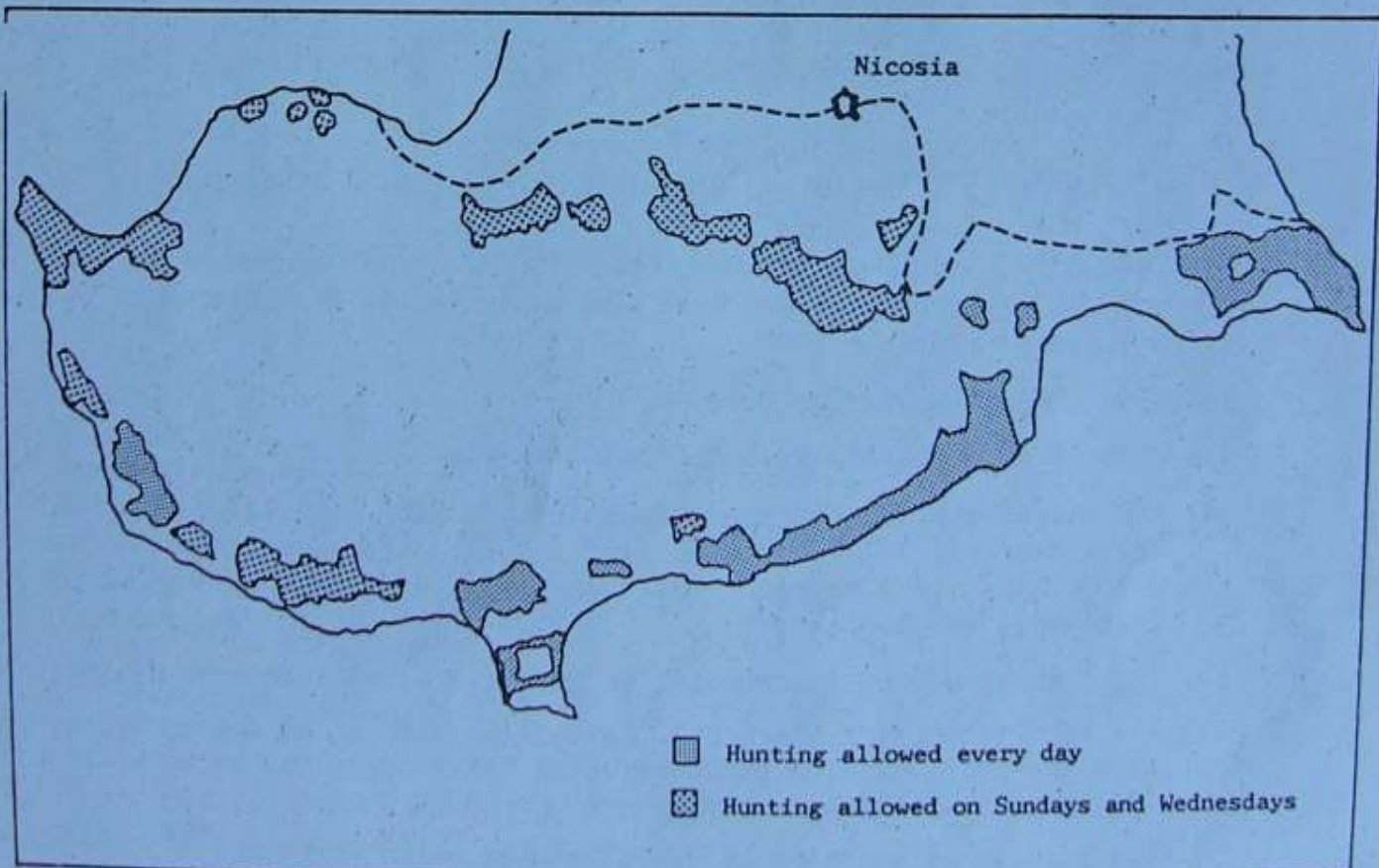


Figure 7. Spring shooting map of the Republic of Cyprus 1986.

Liming and netting

Catching of migratory birds by mistnets has greatly decreased after 1985, but instances of netting could still easily be found in 1986 and it is important that the police continue prosecuting people who use mistnets. The use of limesticks is widespread, though the authorities obviously turn a blind eye to this practice as no attempt is made to stop or deter limers. The illegal use of limesticks would decline rapidly and substantially if the police would enforce the law. The selling of jars with ambelopoulia, the serving of ambelopoulia in restaurants, the selling of limesticks, mistnets and other catching equipment should be prosecuted. It is important that the situation regarding bird catching is monitored annually by a local or international observer who reports to all concerned conservation societies and the authorities.

If the Cyprus Government is not willing to enforce the law regarding the use of limesticks, international and national conservationists should consider a limited tourist boycott in the most notorious liming region of Paralimni/Protoras. Wildlife tourism to Cyprus can only develop significantly after the blatant massacre of migratory birds has ceased.

Shooting

Shooting in spring should be prohibited. The killing of spring migrants is especially harmful as these birds have survived the travel to and from their wintering quarters and they form the year's breeding stock. In 1984 even the Hunting Advisory Committee (HAC) came out against the spring shooting season. The HAC advises the government on open and close seasons, and which species should receive protection. Cyprus should follow the example of Greece where spring shooting was banned during 1986.

In 1986, the autumn shooting season started on 17 August and in 1985 as early as 4 August, instead of the end of August. This led to the killing of many breeding birds which were still rearing their second brood. Step by step extension of the hunting seasons must be stopped, and the autumn shooting season should not open before the end of August.

The following points were discussed and approved by the Cyprus Hunters' Federation:

1. Before the initial issue of a shooting licence, the applicant should pass a test which consists of:
 - (a) a species' recognition test
 - (b) a test in which the applicant's knowledge of hunting areas and periods is examined;
2. To encourage more discipline among hunters, it is recommended that it should become obligatory for every hunter to join a hunting association. The hunting association would then exercise some degree of supervision over their members. The association subscription could be included in the licence fee.

3. The present system of control over hunting (e.g. bag limits, seasons, species, etc.) is unsatisfactory since the Game Protection Unit of the Cyprus Police is inadequately staffed for the task of enforcing the regulations. It is therefore recommended that all eighty game wardens should be appointed by the Minister of the Interior according to the provisions of the game and wild birds law 39/1974, section 24, and section 44, 2(c) and 2(d).

Berne Convention

In contrast to the Ministers' Decision 25.261 of December 1984, the Berne Convention has thus far not been presented to the house of representatives for implementation into law, and is therefore not yet ratified. This further delay in ratification undermines the credibility of the Cyprus Governments' commitment to conservation, so ICBP strongly urges completion of the necessary procedures as soon as possible.

Education

From discussions with primary and secondary school teachers it appears that at present there is a serious shortage of educational material concerning bird conservation. The Ministry of Education is encouraged to develop curriculum material on conservation and to establish proper supporting programmes. Simultaneously, educational programmes could be introduced in information centres as for example at the Akrotiri Salt Lake, the proposed Akamas National Park and at Athalassa. Such centres should display information on habitats, vegetation and birdlife etc., and at the same time provide the opportunity for the observation of nature at close range. These information centres should highlight the national heritage and beauty of Cyprus. A positive spin-off would be the consequential encouragement of wildlife tourism.