



**Committee Against
Bird Slaughter - CABS**
Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.

Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt®
Foundation Pro Biodiversity®

Field Report:
CABS & SPA WINTER 2018-2019
BIRD PROTECTION CAMP CYPRUS
(4th December 2018 – 22nd February 2019)



Bonn/Bielefeld, December 2019

Photo on the cover: CABS activist rescuing song thrush from net during Winter 2018-2019
Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS)

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SUMMARY

In December 2018, January and February 2019, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and the Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA – Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt) conducted their 5th successive Winter Bird Protection Camp (BPC) in Cyprus. The Camp took place from 4th December 2018 – 20th February 2019.

14 activists from 10 different countries: Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, Malta, Switzerland, Slovenia and Hungary participated at the camp and monitored bird trapping activity in the south-eastern part of the island: Famagusta and Larnaca Districts within the Republic of Cyprus and in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) – British overseas territory in Cyprus.

During the camp, 105 trapping sites were found to be active. Number of active trapping sites is higher as previous winter, when 89 trapping sites were found to be active for the duration of Winter 2017-2018 Bird Protection Camp.

In total, 847 limesticks, 140 mist nets and 63 electronic callers were seized from active trapping sites and 679 protected wild birds belonging to 19 different species were rescued during the camp.

CABS activists cooperated with police officers from Cyprus Police, Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Police and with game wardens from Game and Fauna Service (GFS). They reported 98 cases of trapping to them during the camp and enforcement officers investigated 71 reported cases. They caught and prosecuted trappers for 7 cases reported by CABS activists (7 % of all reported cases). At the rest of investigated cases either trapping paraphernalia was seized or no evidences of trapping were found during the investigation.

In addition to high trapping activity, massive extent of illegal bird hunting was observed during the camp. We estimate that hundreds, and on some days, even more than thousand electronic callers, imitating song thrushes and skylarks, were used across south-eastern Cyprus by hunters in the mornings. Also frequently observed were the shootings of birds in the areas, where hunting is prohibited. As our teams were busy with monitoring trapping activities, we could spend only a limited amount of time to investigate and act against illegal hunting. We reported 16 cases of illegal hunting to enforcement officers during the camp and they were able to investigate only 5 of reported cases. All

investigated cases ended without enforcement actions as hunters switched off and hide portable electronic callers, when they saw enforcement officers approaching them.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cyprus lies on one of the key migratory routes that birds use during their journey between Europe and Africa, with around 100 million birds visiting the island every spring and autumn (Lederer 2016). Cyprus is also an important overwintering area for birds which migrate to Cyprus to avoid the harsh winter conditions in continental Europe.

Cyprus is one of the main hotspots of illegal bird killings in the Mediterranean. In 2018 CABS activists located 265 active trapping locations in the south-eastern part of the island, where the trapping is most intensive. Estimated 100 000 birds were trapped and killed on these locations (Debersek 2019).

Trapping is affecting more than 150 species of wild birds, of which 78 are threatened and listed on Annex 1 of the Birds Directive or listed in one of SPEC (Species of European Conservation Concern) categories (BirdLife Cyprus 2019).

CABS, with the support of SPA, organise bird protection camps in Cyprus three times per year: in spring, autumn and winter season, to prevent illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of migratory birds passing through Cyprus. During the camps CABS activists monitor bird trapping activities in the field and report active trapping sites to the competent authorities for immediate intervention. Besides monitoring of trapping activity, which is the main activity of bird protection camps, activists also investigate and report illegal bird shootings.

1.1 WINTER BIRD TRAPPING

Winter trapping season is the longest of all three trapping seasons (spring, autumn and winter trapping season): it starts already at the end of October, when first birds arrive to Cyprus to spend the winter on the island and lasts until end of February. Main targeted species is song thrush.

The most common method used to catch song thrushes is with mist nets and electronic callers, both used in the night time. Song thrushes are migrating over Cyprus in the nights and electronic callers lure them to stop the migration and land in the trees and bushes near active caller. Nets are set around these bushes and trees and thrushes get caught in

them. The method is very effective and up to hundred thrushes can be caught during strong migration of thrushes on a single trapping site.

Trapping with limesticks is also common in winter season.

2 WORKING METHODS

This winter, the 5th successive Winter Bird Protection Camp was organised by CABS & SPA in Cyprus. It took place from 4th December 2018 – 20th February 2019.

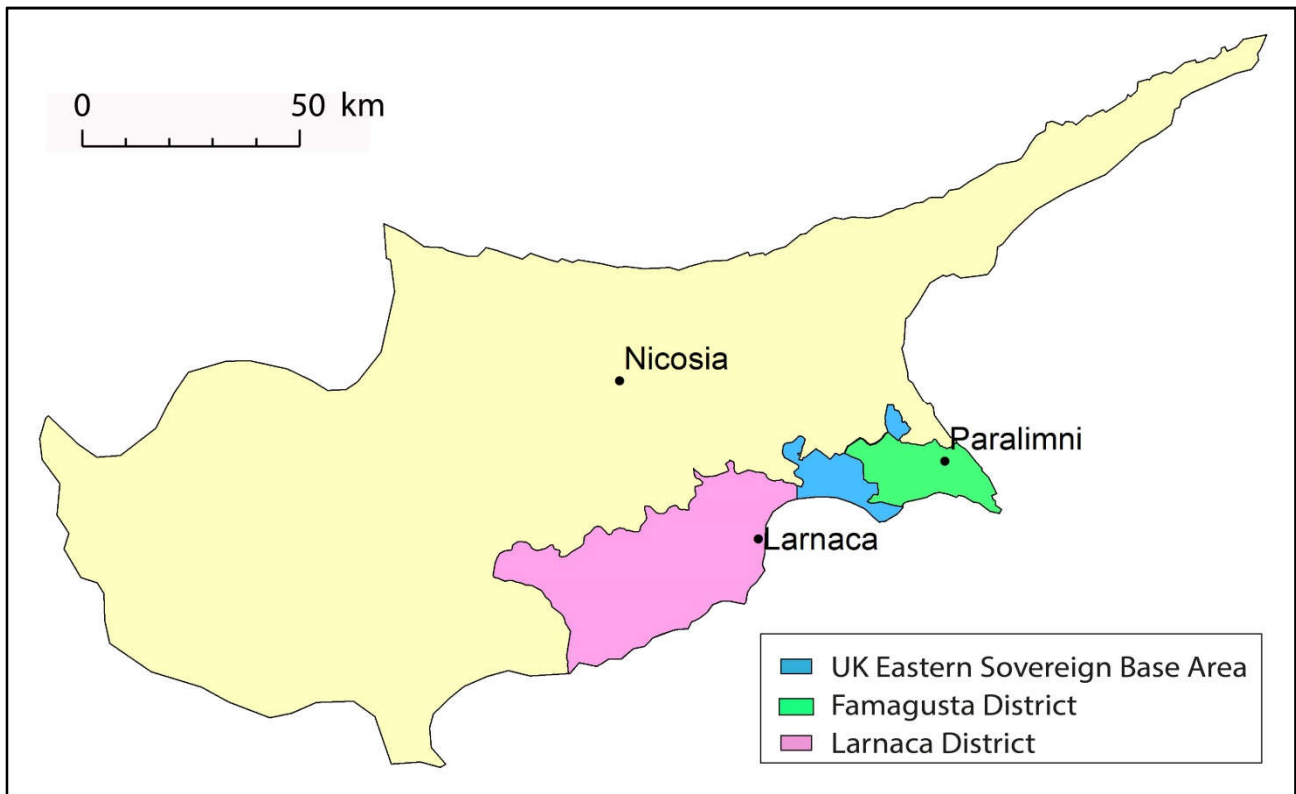
Altogether 14 activists participated at the camp. They were from 8 different countries: Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, Malta, Switzerland, Slovenia and Hungary. Ten activists already participated at Bird Protection Camps in Cyprus in the past, while 4 were new.

The camp participants searched for active trapping sites with set traps in the field and upon finding them, they reported them to the enforcement agencies for investigations and actions against trapping. As trapping takes place only for few hours on average, camp participants requested immediate response from enforcement officers in order to interrupt trapping activity in progress and also to confiscate trapping paraphernalia and to catch trappers.

Trapping sites considered as active are those with set traps (either limesticks or mist nets), as well as those with no traps present at the time of inspection but with evidence of recent trapping activity. For example, feathers on the ground at trapping sites or pieces of glue on branches indicate that the site was recently active. Furthermore, trapping sites with electronic caller in use, even if there are no traps set out at the time of inspection, are recorded as active. These callers are sometimes used solely in the night to attract birds to the trapping site and the traps are set later in the early morning.

The camp participants also investigated and reported cases of illegal bird hunting.

Due to the small number of people participating at the camp, field investigations were limited to the main trapping and illegal hunting hotspots in Cyprus: Famagusta District, Larnaca District and the British overseas territory on Cyprus, the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), (picture 1).



Picture 1: Cyprus and the areas monitored during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

3 RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS AND ACTIONS AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING

3.1 MONITORING OF BIRD TRAPPING ACTIVITY

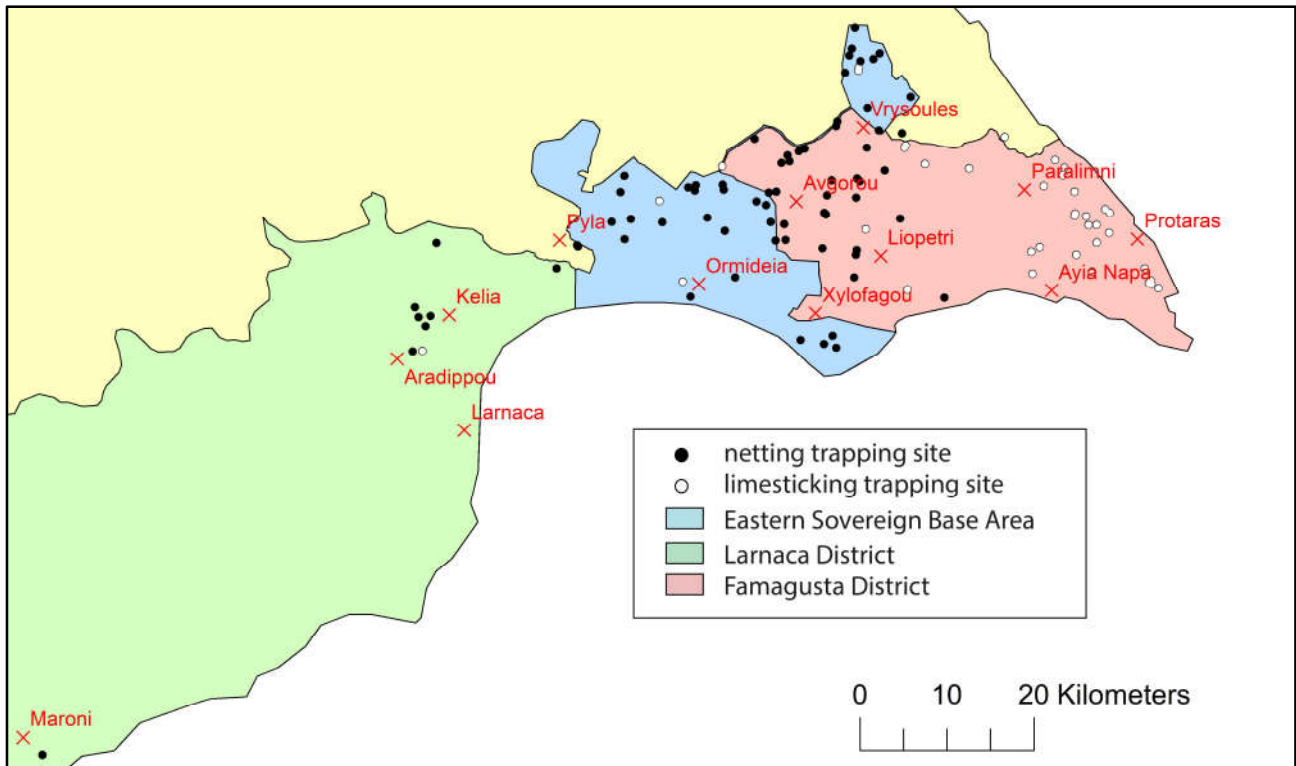
3.1.1 OVERALL RESULTS

In winter season 2018-2019, CABS and SPA organised the longest camp ever organised in winter seasons, lasting 79 days in total. The long duration of the camp made it possible to cover the most of the winter trapping season, which lasts from end of October until end of February.

CABS teams investigated 192 bird trapping sites in south-eastern Cyprus during the camp. Of the 192 sites, 105 were found to be active, either set traps were found, active electronic callers were found or we found evidences of recent trapping, such as feathers on the ground (table 1, picture 2).

Table 1: Results of monitoring bird trapping activity during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

No. of trapping sites checked	192
No. of active trapping sites found	105
No. of active mistnetting trapping sites found	68
No. of active limesticking trapping sites found	37



Picture 2: Distribution of trapping sites, found to be active during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

3.1.2 COMPARISON OF TRAPPING ACTIVITY RECORDED AT WINTER BIRD PROTECTION CAMPS (2014-2015 TO 2018-2019)

The first winter camp, organised by CABS & SPA in Cyprus, ran for 10 days in January and February 2015. Since then winter camps gradually became longer to extend the monitoring of winter trapping season.

As winter bird protection camps have different lengths and different number of activists participating at them each year, a direct comparison of active trapping sites found per winter camp, is not the best to compare trapping activity between years. To evaluate trapping trend over years, number of active sites found per day and per participant, are compared (table 2).

Table 2: Results of field investigations at Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014-2019

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Duration of camp (days)	10	22	35	63	79
No. of participants	8	8	27	14	14
No. of active trapping sites found	44	92	186	80	105
No. of active sites found per day and per participant	0.550	0.523	0.197	0.091	0.095
Trapping trend (%)	/	-5.0	-62.3	-53.9	4.7

This winter we found the second highest number of active sites at winter camps with 105 sites. The number of active trapping sites found per day of the camp and per participant was 0.095 or 4.7 % more than the previous winter.

3.1.3 TRAPPING ACTIVITY OVER THE DURATION OF THE CAMP

In total, we have detected trapping activity 144 times on 105 different trapping sites during the camp. Trapping activity, presented with number of active trapping sites found per each week of the camp, peaked two times during the camp; first peak occurred in the middle of December 2018 and the second, more intense peak, occurred in the middle of January 2019 (table 3, figure 1).

Table 3: Detected trapping activity from first until last week of Winter2018-2019 BPC

Week	03.12. -	10.12. -	17.12. -	24.12. -	31.12. -	07.01. -	14.01. -	21.01. -	28.01. -
	09.12.	16.12.	23.12.	30.12.	06.01.	13.01.	20.01.	27.01.	03.02.
No. of active sites found	8	12	14	11	4	23	22	20	16
Week	04.02. -	11.02. -	18.02. -						
	10.02.	17.02.	24.02.						
No. of active sites found	7	0	4						

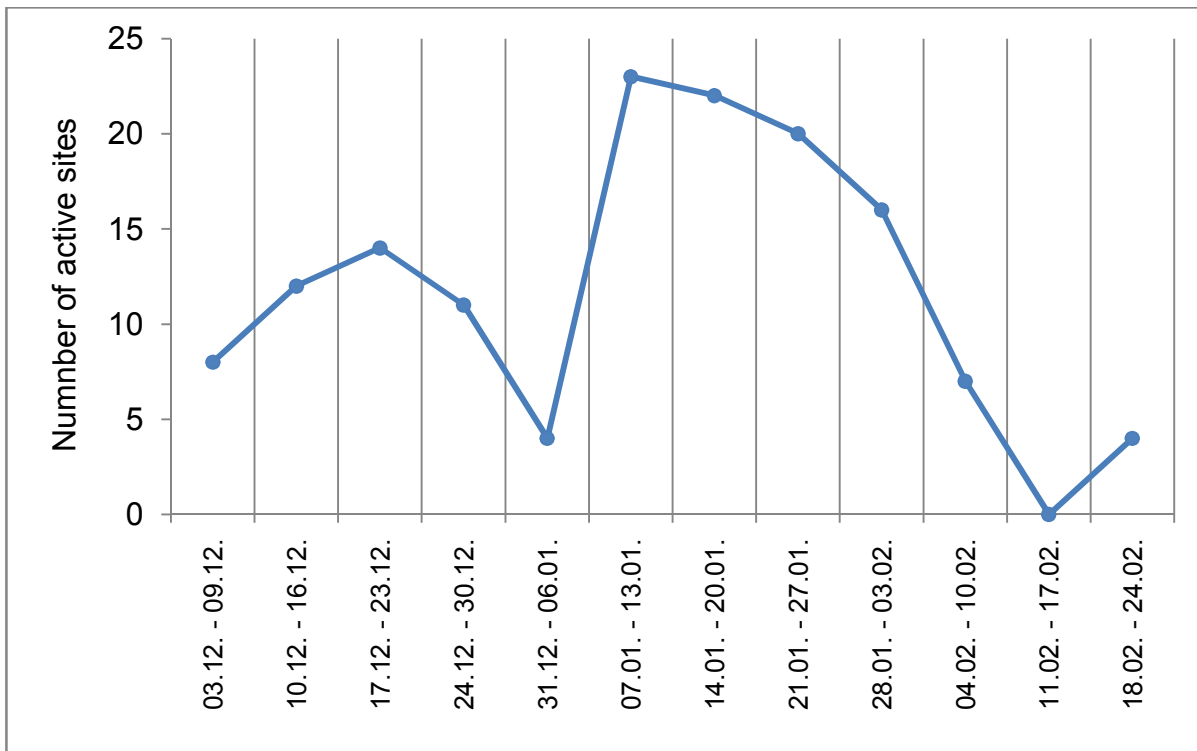


Figure 2: Total number of active trapping sites found per each week of the Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

3.1.4 ACTIVITY OF THE TRAPPING SITES WITH PREVIOUS PROSECUTIONS

During field investigations we regularly observed trapping activity at the sites, where trappers were caught and prosecuted in the past. This winter we checked 25 trapping sites with previous prosecutions and 7 (28 %) of them were found to be active again.

3.1.5 TRAPPING ACTIVITY PER JURIDISTCTIONS

The areas monitored during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp belong to two jurisdictions: Famagusta District and Larnaca District are part of Republic of Cyprus, while the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) is one of two British overseas territories on Cyprus.

3.1.5.1 TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

In total, 70 trapping sites were found to be active in Republic of Cyprus during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp (table 4).

Table 4: Results of monitoring bird trapping activity in Republic of Cyprus during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

No. of active trapping sites found	70
No. of active mistnetting trapping sites found	37
No. of active limesticking trapping sites found	33

Table 5: Results of bird trapping investigations in Republic of Cyprus during Winter BPCs (2016-2017 to 2018-2019)

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Duration of camp (days)	35	63	79
No. of participants	27	14	14
No. of active trapping sites found	56	38	70
No. of active mistnetting trapping sites found	39	20	37
No. of active limesticking trapping sites found	17	18	33
No. of active trapping sites found per day and per participant	0.059	0.043	0.063
Trapping activity trend (%)	/	-27.3	46.9

This winter we found almost twice as much active trapping sites, as we did the previous winter. The trapping activity trend, calculated from comparison of number of active sites found per day and per camp participant, shows a 46.9 % increase of trapping activity within the monitored area of Republic of Cyprus this winter in comparison to previous winter.

3.1.5.2 TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN UK EASTERN SOVEREIGN BASE AREA

The UK Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) is one of two British Overseas Territories on the island of Cyprus. This winter we found 35 active trapping sites in the ESBA (table 6).

Table 6: Results of monitoring bird trapping activity in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

No. of active trapping sites found	35
No. of active mistnetting trapping sites found	31
No. of active limesticking trapping sites found	4

Table 7: Results of bird trapping investigations in Eastern Sovereign Base Area during Winter BPCs (2016-2017 to 2018-2019)

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2016- 2017	2017- 2018	2018- 2019
Duration of camp (days)	35	63	79
No. of participants	27	14	14
No. of active trapping sites found	125	37	35
No. of active mistnetting trapping sites found	124	37	31
No. of active limesticking trapping sites found	1	0	4
No. of active trapping sites found per day and per participant	0.132	0.042	0.032
Trapping activity trend (%)	/	-68.3	-24.6

In winter season 2017-2018 we observed strong reduction of the trapping activity in the ESBA in comparison with winter season 2016-2017. The declining trend continued this winter, as 24.6 % less active trapping sites were found per day of the camp and per participant in comparison with previous winter.

3.2 SEIZED TRAPPING PARAPHERNALIA

3.2.1 TOTAL NUMBER OF SEIZED TRAPS

Altogether 140 mist nets, 847 limesticks, 63 electronic callers and 134 net poles were found and seized from trapping sites, found to be active by CABS activists, during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp. Trapping paraphernalia was seized by police officers, game wardens and CABS activists.

Table 8: Trapping paraphernalia seized during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

No. of seized mist nets	140
No. of seized limesticks	847
No. of seized el. callers	63
No. of seized mist net poles	134

3.2.2 SEIZED TRAPPING PARAPHERNALIA AT WINTER BIRD PROTECTION CAMPS 2014-2015 TO 2018-2019

Although Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp was the longest winter camp so far and consequently there were more days to search for traps in previous years, the number of seized nets was the lowest at the winter camps in the last 4 years (table 8, figure 3).



Picture 3: Limesticks seized from trapping site in Protaras during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS)

Table 8: Trapping paraphernalia seized during Winter Bird Protection Camps (2014-2015 to 2018-2019)

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Duration of the camp (days)	10	22	35	63	79
No. of seized limesticks	0	451	901	636	847
No. of seized mist nets	124	222	523	213	140
No. of seized el. callers	33	60	73	58	63

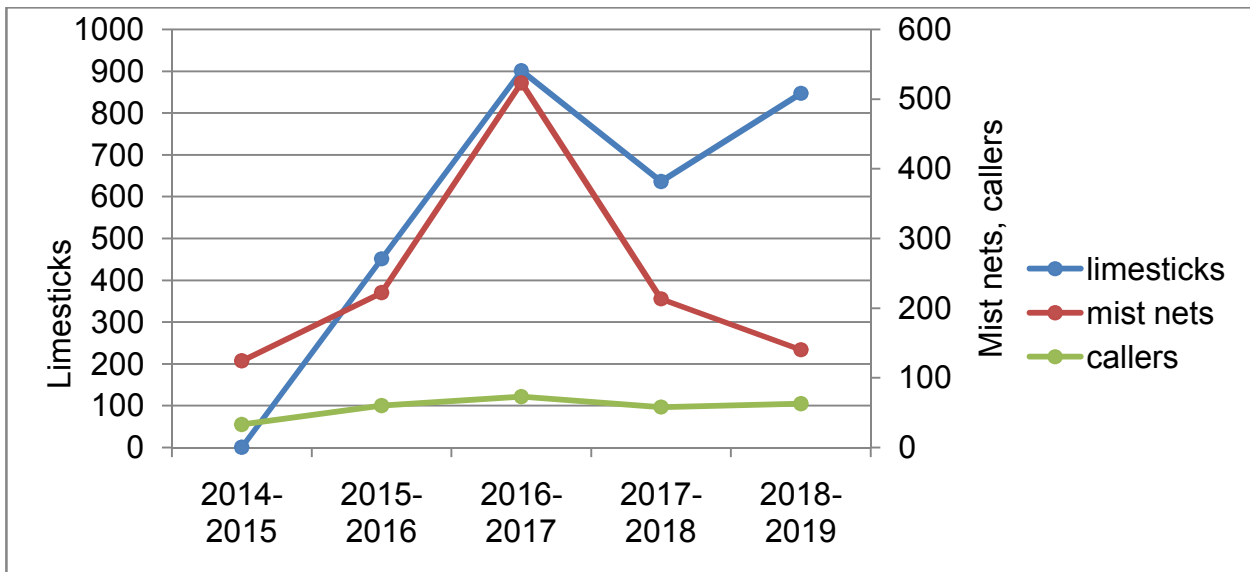


Figure 3: Seized limesticks, mist nets and electronic callers during Winter Bird Protection Camps (2014-2015 to 2018-2019)

3.3 COOPERATION WITH ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

3.3.1 OVERALL RESULTS

During the camp we reported active trapping sites to the enforcement agencies, responsible to tackle illegal bird killings in Republic of Cyprus: the Game and Fauna Service (GFS) and the Cyprus Police and to the enforcement agency operating in the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area: the Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Police.

In total we reported 98 trapping cases and 71 of them were investigated by the enforcement officers. 7 investigations ended with catching and prosecuting individuals involved in illegal bird trapping (table 9). This means that prosecutions for trapping were made only at 10 % of all cases, reported by CABS activists, while at the remaining 90 % of reported cases, trappers got away unpunished.

Table 9: Results of cooperation with law enforcement units during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

	Game and Fauna Service	Cyprus Police	SBA Police	All
No. of cases reported by CABS activists	36	23	39	98
No. of cases investigated by officers	17	15	39	71
Percentage of investigated sites	47.2	65.2	100.0	72.4
No. of cases where ambush was made to catch trappers	4	1	3	8
No. of cases with prosecution of trappers	2	2	3	7
No. of cases with confiscation of trapping paraphernalia	12	8	29	49
No. of cases where nothing was found by enforcement officers	3	5	7	13
Seized trapping paraphernalia				
Limesticks	256	30	31	317
Nets	12	21	68	101
Electronic callers	4	9	29	42

This winter, the highest number of trapping cases was reported to SBA Police. Of all enforcement agencies, we have cooperated with this winter, GFS was the least responsive, as their officers investigated only 47.2 % of cases, reported by CABS activists.

3.3.2 COMPARISON OF ENFORCEMENT RESULTS MADE DURING WINTER BIRD PROTECTION CAMPS 2016-2017 TO 2018-2019

Table 10: Comparison of enforcement results for cases, reported by CABS activists at Winter Bird Protection Camps 2016-2017 to 2018-2019

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2016- 2017	2017- 2018	2018- 2019
No. of trapping cases reported by CABS & SPA members	31	92	98
INVESTIGATIONS			
No. of cases investigated by all enforcement units	30	82	71
Percentage of investigated cases (for all reported cases)	96.8	89.1	72.4
No. of cases investigated by Game and Fauna Service	3	15	17
No. of cases investigated by Cyprus Police	12	13	15
No. of cases investigated by SBA Police	15	54	39
PROSECUTIONS			
No. of prosecutions made by all enforcement units	17	6	7
Percentage of prosecutions (for all reported sites)	54.8	6.5	7.1
No. of prosecutions made by Game and Fauna Service	3	4	2
No. of prosecutions made by Cyprus Police	9	1	2
No. of prosecutions made by SBA Police	5	1	3

The number of the trapping cases, reported to the enforcement agencies during winter 2018-2019 is, with 98, highest for the last three winter camps. Despite the high number of reported cases, number of prosecutions, achieved for the reported cases is the second lowest in the last 3 years with 7.



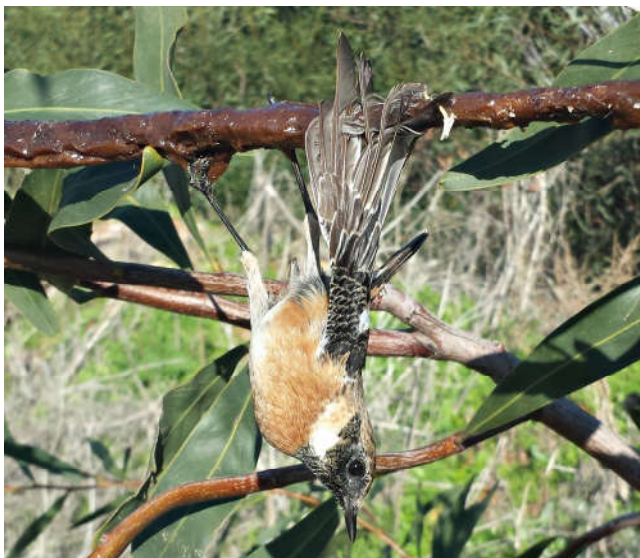
Picture 4: SBA Police officer rescuing song thrush from net reported by CABS activists during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS)

3.4 BIRDS FOUND DURING FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

In total, 619 protected wild birds, belonging to 13 different species, were rescued from traps and further 59 wild birds were found dead in the traps during the camp. 58 illegally kept birds were rescued from aviary (table 11). CABS activists also found common buzzard on the ground, unable to fly. It showed signs of poisoning. The bird was captured, rehabilitated and released couple of weeks later.

Table 11: Rescued birds and birds found dead during Winter 2018-2019 BPC

		No. of birds rescued from traps	No. of birds found dead in traps	No. of birds rescued from aviary	No. of poisoned birds rescued
1	Song thrush	394	14	6	
2	Blackcap	8	1	2	
3	Robin	7	1	1	
4	Chiffchaff	3			
5	Black redstart	2			
6	Blackbird	2			
7	Cyprus warbler	1			
8	House sparrow	1			
9	Sardinian warbler	1			
10	Chaffinch	1		6	
11	Stonechat	1			
12	Starling	1			
13	Spectacled warbler	1			
14	Wood pigeon			10	
15	Turtle dove			3	
16	Laughing dove			10	
17	Common buzzard				1
	Unidentified birds	196	43	20	
	Total	619	59	58	1



Picture 5: Stonechat and starling, 2 out of 619 birds rescued from traps during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS)

4 RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS AND ACTIONS AGAINST ILLEGAL BIRD HUNTING

The extent of illegal bird hunting in winter season is massive in Cyprus. As CABS teams were busy with monitoring of illegal trapping during this winter, they have spent only a small amount of time to investigate illegal hunting. Their occasional morning investigations of hunting revealed massive use of electronic callers imitating song thrushes and skylarks.

From our observations in the field, we estimate that up to several hundred electronic callers, were used daily in the Famagusta District of Republic of Cyprus this winter.

Use of electronic callers is prohibited by EU Birds Directive as it greatly increases the chances of killing birds by attracting them in the shooting range. Studies have shown that luring bird with callers can increase the catch by 3 to 13 times (Savva, G.A. 2016, Schaub M. et al, 1999).

In total, we investigated 21 cases of illegal hunting this winter (table 12).

Table 12: Results of investigations for illegal hunting cases reported by CABS activists during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp

OVERALL	
No. of all illegal hunting cases observed by CABS activists	21
No. of cases of hunting with electronic caller	19
No. of cases of hunting in prohibited area	6
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS	
No. of cases reported to Game and Fauna Service	13
No. of cases investigated by Game and Fauna Service	2
No. of investigated cases with zero results (hunters removed callers before officers could find them)	2
ESBA	
No. of cases reported to SBA Police	3
No. of cases investigated by SBA Police	3
No. of investigated cases with zero results (hunters removed callers before officers could find them)	3

The response of Game and Fauna Service wardens for illegal hunting cases, reported by CABS activists, was very poor. They investigated only 2 out of 13 reported cases. For the

remaining 11 reported cases, they were, similar as for more than half of the reported trapping cases, busy somewhere else and unable to respond to our reports.



Picture 5: Song thrush, shot illegally in front of the CABS activists during Winter 2018-2019 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS)

5 CONCLUSIONS

There are two sides of the story, when describing trapping and illegal hunting activity and the actions to prevent it, in the south-eastern Cyprus this winter.

An improvement was observed for second consecutive winter in the ESBA. Less active trapping sites and less set mist nets were found by CABS activists this winter in comparison with the previous winter.

SBA Police continues to execute resolute actions against poaching. These actions follow their ambitious action plan to eradicate bird trapping in the ESBA. In the last two years SBA Police substantially increased their presence on the ground with regular patrols of all poaching hotspots within the ESBA. Community Action Team (CAT), special unit of SBA Police, responsible to tackle bird trapping, was patrolling the whole ESBA territory regularly in the nights, when trapping activity was highest, this winter. Patrols were made also by the soldiers from Dhekelia military base.

SBA Police officers also recognised the importance of close cooperation with CABS activists, who were conducting extensive investigations of poaching every day and night in the ESBA. They immediately investigated all 39 trapping cases, reported by CABS activists this winter.

In Republic of Cyprus we observed a different situation. This winter we found almost twice as much active trapping sites as we did the previous winter.

Most worrying was the absence of game warden patrols in the Famagusta District, the district, where trapping and illegal hunting activity is the highest in the Republic of Cyprus. During December it was almost impossible to get game wardens patrol for trapping cases found in Famagusta District. We have reported 16 cases of bird trapping in December to game wardens and they were able to come and investigate only 2 of these cases.

In total, only 17 out of 36 cases, reported to game wardens, were investigated by them. For the rest of the reported cases, game wardens were not available for investigation as they were busy with other duties. As it was also hard to get the support from officers of Cyprus Police to make investigations of trapping cases, most of these cases were not investigated at all and trappers got away unpunished.

Number of prosecutions, made for trapping cases reported by CABS activists this winter, was low as only 7 cases out of 98 reported cases ended with prosecution. All enforcement units, responsible to tackle trapping: SBA Police, Game and Fauna Service and Cyprus Police, most improve their efficiency, when it comes to catching trappers as prosecutions with included penalties are the best deterrent of trapping activity.

The extent of illegal hunting, observed this winter was massive. Especially in Famagusta District, where hundreds of electronic callers were used every morning for illegal hunting of song thrushes and skylarks.

Similar as it was the case for bird trapping, there was poor response from game wardens for reported cases of illegal hunting. Game wardens investigated only 2 out of 13 reported cases. Both investigated cases ended with no results as hunters simply switched off and hidden small, portable electronic callers, when they saw game wardens approaching. Consequently, game wardens didn't find them. In many cases, hunters simply switched on the callers as soon as wardens left and continued to hunt illegally.

Considering the extent of bird trapping and illegal hunting in the Famagusta District, there should be at least one patrol with game wardens patrolling this district every night and morning in the winter season. Especially illegal hunting is totally out of control and regular patrols are needed to deal with this issue.

Enforcement officers should put more efforts in catching and prosecuting bird trappers and hunters. This winter officers made prosecutions only at 7 out of 111 reported cases of trapping and illegal hunting. For 3 reported cases, trappers using limesticks, were caught and for 3 reported cases, trappers using nets were caught. In one case, owner with protected birds in his aviary was prosecuted. Not a single hunter, reported by us for using electronic caller, was caught and prosecuted.

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