



CABS & SPA AUTUMN 2024 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP IN CYPRUS



Picture 1: Blackcap caught on a limestick. CABS & SPA Autumn BPC 2024 (Photo: CABS).

Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)

1. INTRODUCTION

Each autumn since 2010, CABS & SPA coordinate a 'bird protection camp' in Cyprus to take action against illegal poaching of wild birds migrating over Cyprus. In this report, we present data collected during the 2024 autumn bird protection camp. In total, were found **132** active trapping sites, of which **53** contained limesticks, **67** with nets and **12** with both or unknown trapping methods. Across these sites, poachers used **1798** limesticks and **172 nets**, of which **1310** limesticks and **86** nets were seized during the operations by the enforcement authorities or collected when patrols were not available. The rest of the trapping paraphernalia could not be dismantled for various reasons. **48** poachers were caught and charged for illegal trapping.

In the next chapters we analyse the number of cases of illegal trapping recorded, divided by jurisdiction (Republic of Cyprus and Eastern Sovereign Base Area) and evaluate the response of the authorities to our reports. We also present our findings in relation to widespread illegal hunting and conclude with the final remarks.

2. DURATION, MONITORED AREAS, PARTICIPANTS OF THE CAMP

In 2024, CABS & SPA autumn bird protection camp lasted 84 days, starting from the 6th of September until the 28th of November. Activists from all over Europe took part in the bird protection camp: with 15 participants in total, coming from Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Slovenia. Divided into teams, they monitored the southeast of the island as it is the main hotspot of poaching, including Famagusta and Larnaca District within the Republic of Cyprus and the British Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBA).

3. TRAPPING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

During CABS & SPA autumn 2024 bird protection camp, 115 active trapping sites were recorded in the Republic of Cyprus. Of these, 53 contained limesticks, 52 contained nets and 10 contained both. The total number of traps used in the sites found active is 1,788 limesticks and 135 nets, of which 1,310 limesticks and 70 nets were seized during the operations. As in the other recent reports, these totals do not include the stored traps in possession of the poachers since game wardens and regular police officers do not perform premises searches, unlike the former Anti-Poaching Squad (APS), who used to routinely find extra traps and dead birds in the fridges.

From the 2024 data, the increase of trapping sites is notable, particularly with nets and the relative number of nets found. 2024 is the highest recorded number of trapping sites with nets. Usually, this trapping method is used by professional groups of poachers, who trap during the night and early morning with electronic callers to catch larger numbers of protected birds and willing to risk higher fines associated with the use of nets. The total number of nets reflects the daily findings in the field: several active sites were found every night in the main trapping areas as well in a new hotspot for trapping, the area north of Aradippou, where half a dozen new sites were confirmed this year. New trapping activity with nets is confirmed by the number of new trapping sites found: 26 of the 62 trapping sites with nets (42%) were discovered in 2024, most of them were likely active for the first time this year.

Picture 2: Birds being released from a net by CABS and wardens from the Game & Fauna Service. CABS & SPA Autumn BPC 2024 (Photo: CABS).



Table 1: Trapping activity recorded during CABS & SPA autumn bird protection camps 2012-2024 in the Republic of Cyprus.

Autumn Bird Protection Camp	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Active limesticks sites	65	111	80	66	105	90	71	60	65	73	59	52	53
Active net trapping sites	33	35	39	50	51	21	33	22	35	42	40	32	52
Unk or both methods sites	10	2	5	6	8	5	3	0	1	7	7	10	10
Total active sites	108	148	124	122	164	116	107	82	101	122	106	94	115
Limesticks found	-	-	-	-	-	3298	2560	1893	1916	2371	2321	2033	1788
Nets found	-	-	-	-	-	48	38	25	48	110	96	93	135

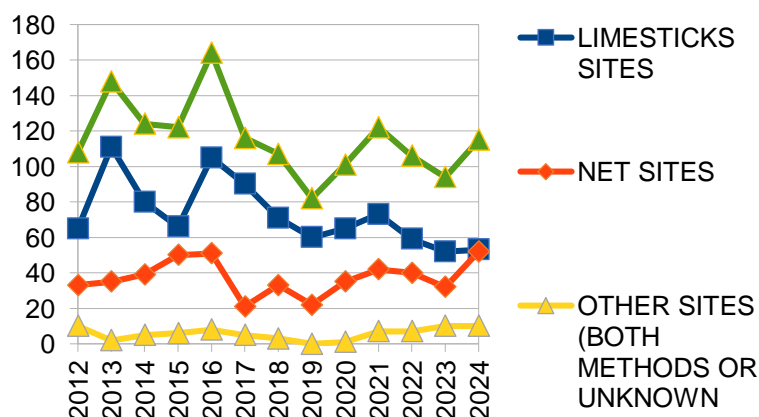


Figure 1: Trapping sites recorded during CABS & SPA Autumn Bird Protection Camps 2012-2024 in the Republic of Cyprus.

For logistical reasons every autumn operation varies in length, number of participants and modus operandi, in an effort to adjust to the available enforcement conditions. Therefore, in order to compare the results between years, we consider the percentage number of sites found active out of those checked.

The 2024 data confirms the trend of a steady increase of trapping in the Republic of Cyprus since 2019, with the number of trapping sites found active (**115**) being the highest of the last 6 years. The percentage of active sites out of the checked ones (**48,5**) is also the highest of the last 9 years

Table 2: Ratio between checked and active sites during the period 2012-2024 in the Republic of Cyprus.

Autumn Bird Protection Camp	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Duration of field investigations (days)	17	24	28	40	47	60	75	84	77	70	71	87	84
Total no. of activists	13	15	14	22	28	28	29	24	11	14	17	17	15
No of trapping sites checked	197	226	176	220	350	277	273	231	230	290	237	206	237
No. of trapping sites confirmed as active	109	148	124	122	164	116	107	82	101	122	106	94	115
Percentage of active sties	55.3	65.5	70.5	55.5	46.9	41.9	39.2	35.5	43.9	42.1	44.7	45.6	48,5

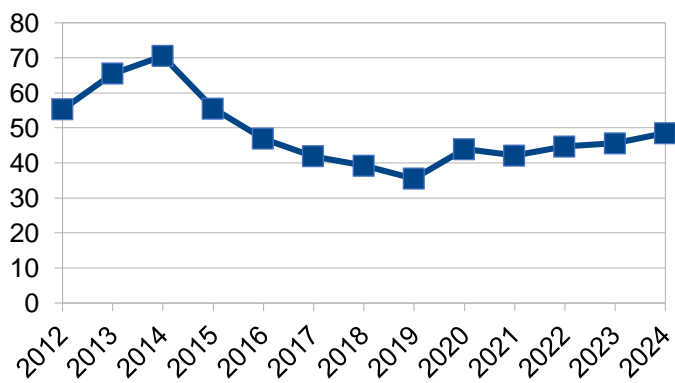


Figure 2: Trapping trend in the Republic of Cyprus based on the comparison between active and checked sites during autumn 2012-2024.

4. TRAPPING IN THE BRITISH EASTERN SOVEREIGN BASE AREA

In autumn 2024, the international teams found 15 active trapping sites with nets and 2 with both limesticks or nets or unknown method in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia. In total 37 nets and 10 limesticks were recorded, of which 16 nets were seized.

To note that the majority of CABS fieldwork is conducted in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and only marginal time is dedicated to investigations in the ESBA. The teams monitor the situation in the ESBA occasionally and mainly during the night to locate sites with nets of professional trappers. The findings therefore represent only a fraction of the true scale of trapping here. Likewise, it is not possible to calculate the percentage of the active sites out of the checked ones as for the Republic, as they would not reflect trends. However, the difference between the alarming 26 trapping sites found active during autumn 2023 and the 17 of this year is significant.

Table 3: Trapping activity recorded during CABS & SPA autumn bird protection camps 2012-2024 in the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Cyprus.

Autumn Bird Protection Camp	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Active trapping limesticks sites	3	0	2	4	7	5	1	2	7	4	0	1	0
Active net trapping sites	22	14	6	32	115	59	19	13	8	11	11	25	15
Unk or both methods sites	3	1	1	1	15	5	2	1	0	3	3	0	2
Total active sites	28	15	9	37	137	69	22	16	15	18	14	26	17
Limesticks	-	-	-	-	-	134	36	76	71	102	0	20	10
Nets	-	-	-	-	-	90	12	13	2	29	20	69	37

* Intensive monitoring of trapping in the ESBA only began in autumn 2016. Data from 2012-2015 are anecdotal and do not mirror the reality on the field.

5. EVALUATION OF THE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS IN THE REPUBLIC

5. 1 THE GAME AND FAUNA SERVICE

In the Republic, CABS mainly report the cases of wildlife crime to the Game and Fauna Service, especially since 2017/2019, when the former Anti-Poaching Squad of police was halved and subsequently dismantled. In recent years the cooperation has continued to improve and in 2024 the number of prosecutions reached 38. In most of the cases, CABS teams monitored the trapping sites, collected the evidence to identify and report the suspects and game wardens attended the sites in order to seize the illegal traps.

The evaluations do not consider the lack of patrols in the night – despite some improvement made in the shifts of the patrol, at times game wardens are still not available during the night.

In 18 cases, the response was inappropriate – the patrol did not perform a good operation – or the operation failed for no clear reason or only the trapping equipment was seized.

Table 4: Quality of the response by the Game and Fauna Service, autumn 2024.

	Positive response	Negative response/operation
Prosecution	38	
Patrol not available		0
Inappropriate response*		1
Operation failed**		10
Only confiscation***		7
TOTALS	38	18

* cases of late arrival to the site, not appropriate search of the trapper's equipment resulting in no evidence gathered, short ambushes, poorly performed ambushes, no action taken against offender...

** cases where the ambush fails for no clear reason nor responsibility. Traps can be not found or seized.

***No attempt done to perform any action aimed at identifying the offender, but only traps are dismantled

5.2 THE CYPRUS POLICE

In the absence of the game wardens patrol, when the teams collected enough evidence to report the suspects, they may also refer to the local police. Local police response was overall good, and the police patrols attended the trapping sites reported. 4 cases ended in a prosecution and one case with the confiscation of the trapping paraphernalia.

In relation to professional trapping gangs, we need to note that although the Anti-Poaching Unit of Police was reinstated in 2023, but with no results against illegal bird trapping. Three of the biggest trapping sites known in Cyprus have been reported once again to the APS,

following a protocol which was outlined by the previous Minister of Justice during an official joint meeting in 2022, but the outcome was poor, to say the least.

On the 1st of October CABS wrote to the Minister of Justice to ask for a feedback on the previous cases of professional trappers reported by CABS, receiving no reply.

Later, the Akas site in Maroni was personally reported in the GFS office on the 3rd of October, then again via phone on the 10/10/24. Every time we officially reported the trapping activity to our contact person, Petros Anayotos (GFS) and then directly to Sergeant Kelepetschis from the Anti-Poaching Unit.

One single operation took place on the 20th of October (17 days after our first report), in the afternoon, when there is no direct trapping activity and – like every year - the usual minimum fine for two nets was given to the trapper. Obviously, no birds and no decoys could ever be found.

Trikkis site in Aplanda was personally reported on the 3rd of October to the GFS, then on the 10/10/24 to Sergeant Kelepetschis and Petros Anayotos, on the 15/10/24 to Michalis Antoniou (GFS), then again on the 17/10/24 and on the 22/10/24 to Sergeant Kelepetschis and Petros Anayotos.

The operation finally took place on the 30/10/24, 27 days after our first report, in the afternoon, when there is no trapping activity and no nets, and no birds were found.

The site in Liopetri was reported first on the 3/10/24 and then on weekly base to both GFS and the police and it was the only case properly dealt with thanks to the engagement of the GFS who arranged a joint ambush on the 17/10/24, 14 days after our report. The case resulted with catching one of the offenders in-situ.

Table 5: Quality of the response by the Cyprus Police, autumn 2024.

	Positive response	Negative response/operation
Prosecution	4	
Patrol not available/no action		0
Inappropriate response*		2****
Operation failed**		0
Only confiscation***		1
TOTALS	4	3

* cases of late arrival to the site, not appropriate search of the trapper's equipment resulting in no evidence being collected, short ambushes, poorly performed ambushes, no action taken against offender... ** cases where the ambush fails for no clear reason nor responsibility. Traps can be not found or seized. ***No attempt done to perform any enforcement action aimed at identifying the offender, but only traps are dismantled.

****cases reported to APS

5.3 ESBA POLICE

Within the ESBA, CABS teams report the cases of wildlife crime to the special unit of the Sovereign Base Area Police – the Crime Action Team or ‘CAT’ team, and when the patrol is not available to the local police stations. The table refers to both enforcement bodies. The cooperation with SBA police is good and the joint operations can be very successful. 2 operations that followed CABS report to CAT team were successful and 4 poachers were reported. In the other cases police only seized the traps, was not available, didn't perform long ambushes or the operation failed.

Table 6: Quality of the response by the ESBA Police, autumn 2024.

	Positive response	Negative response/operation
Prosecution	2 (cases, 4 poachers)	
Patrol non available		1
Inappropriate response*		1
Operation failed**		1
Only confiscation***		2
TOTALS	2	5

* cases of late arrival to the site, not appropriate search of the trapper's equipment resulting in no evidence collected, short ambushes, poorly performed ambushes, no action taken against offender...

** cases where the ambush fails for no clear reason nor responsibility. Traps can be not found or seized.

***No attempt done to perform any action aimed at identifying the offender, but only traps are dismantled

Picture 3: Birds being released from a net by CABS and Cyprus Police. CABS & SPA Autumn BPC 2024 (Photo: CABS).

6. CABS & SPA PARTICIPATION IN THE OVERALL ENFORCEMENT RESULTS AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING

BirdLife Cyprus reports that in the period from August to end of October 2024, Game Wardens of Larnaca and Famagusta Districts, Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit and Anti-Poaching Unit of ESBA Police secured 48 prosecutions related to bird trapping¹.

¹ BirdLife Cyprus, UPDATE on illegal trapping activity in Cyprus, February 2025: [BirdLife-Cyprus Autumn 2024 Trapping report Final for-publication.pdf](#)

In the eastern districts of the Republic, CABS investigations allowed the prosecution of 80% of the totals secured by Game Wardens. In the ESBA CABS supported the CAT team in the operation and prosecution of 57% of all the trappers caught.

The recently re-established Anti-Poaching unit of Cyprus Police prosecuted only one bird poacher, after the continuous report of CABS teams, as in the previous chapter.

Overall, enforcement agencies secured 48 prosecutions in SE Cyprus in September and October and CABS assisted them with 37 of them, 77 % of all prosecutions. For these cases CABS assistance was not only in finding active trapping cases but also gathering evidence needed to secure prosecutions.

Table 7: Prosecutions for bird trapping in the period August-October 2024

	GAME WARDENS	APS	ESBA CAT
Total number of prosecutions ²	40	1	7
Number of prosecutions secured with CABS assistance	32	1	4
Percentage of prosecutions secured with CABS assistance out of totals	80%	100%	57%



² Ibid

7. ILLEGAL HUNTING

Blackcaps are the main target of trappers but are also in the crosshair of hundreds of illegal hunters, together with bee-eaters, pipits, spanish sparrows and other protected species. At the same time, huntable species are attracted by hunters in front of their shotguns with forbidden electronic decoys that dramatically increase their kill rate.

Illegal hunting is extremely widespread and mostly entirely unchallenged. CABS teams dedicate most of the time to investigate illegal trapping sites and only have marginal resources for cases of illegal shooting. Authorities are rarely pro-active against illegal hunting. Here below we report the cases recorded - only those investigated and located. For these reasons, the figures do not reflect the magnitude of the problem.

In autumn 2024, 120 cases of illegal hunting were investigated by the activists and 27 hunters were prosecuted for shooting protected species and/or using an illegal decoy, following CABS reports to the authorities.

Table 8: Cases of illegal hunting dealt with by CABS volunteers in autumn 2024

	REPUBLIC	ESBA	TOTAL
Hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded quail calls	18	5	23
Hunting of protected bird species with electronic caller emitting recorded blackcap call	17	0	17
Hunting of protected bird species	16	1	17
Hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded song thrush calls	33	4	37
Hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded skylark calls	17	8	25
Hunting in a protected area	0	1	1
TOTAL CASES	101	19	120
NUMBER OF PROSECUTIONS	22	5	27

Picture 4. Plucked remains of sparrows and other songbirds illegal shot. CABS & SPA Autumn BPC 2023
(Photo: CABS).



8. DISCUSSION

- Illegal trapping is rampant and is now clearly showing signs of increase in the Republic, in particular with nets, which are used mostly by professional trappers. The situation seems to have slightly improved in the ESBA.
- In the Republic, in Famagusta and Larnaca districts, the enforcement is disproportionate and insufficient. We acknowledge some steps have been made in the right direction by the GFS, who have changed the night schedule - for some weeks at least - to make patrols in the position to properly organise ambushes and catch trappers in-situ. Some newly appointed wardens are more proactive in the attempts to catch trappers, but the increase in trapping trends proves that these changes are still insufficient to act as a deterrent, considering the high number of trappers and illegal hunters active every day in these Districts.
- APS has been finally reinstated, but it remains impotent in combating wild bird poaching. They do not accept timely reports of illegal activity and **even in the face of dangerous and professional trappers, they are often slow to attend with results that they do not act as deterrent.**
- Whilst there is no deterrent in the form of enforcement for professional trappers with nets, there is also no deterrent for the amateur trappers that use limesticks. The sanctions for the use of limesticks and for catching and killing the 14 most targeted protected species (including blackcaps and the other species served in the ambelopoulia dish) have been unreasonably reduced from 2000 to 200 euros in 2017

and 2020 in the Republic. As a result, also trapping with limesticks continues to be widespread.

- Illegal hunting is widespread: protected species are systematically shot in huge numbers; callers play every night and day switching from quail and blackcap songs in September and mid-October to song thrush and skylark songs from mid-October to November. Beside activists, we have again witnessed no attempts by the authorities to challenge illegal hunting in any possible way, apart from occasionally removing some quail decoys at night. Often, we realise that the Game Wardens are not willing to prosecute these crimes and consider them as a part of the local hunting culture. On many occasions we were told that they wouldn't assist us in case we wanted to catch hunters with callers or Spanish sparrow hunters in-situ.
- The situation has improved in the ESBA since 2023, when resources were taken away from antipoaching duties. As a result of better enforcement and good arrests, the trend seems positive in 2024, although CABS didn't focus in the ESBA, given the high level of trapping in the Republic. We hope the police commitment will be the same in 2025 and the trend will continue to decline.

Picture 5. Robin freed from glue trap. CABS & SPA Autumn BPC 2024 (Photo: CABS).



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