

Field Report:
CABS & SPA WINTER 2019/2020
BIRD PROTECTION CAMP
CYPRUS
(2nd December 2019 – 16th February 2020)



Photo on the cover: Mist net with caught barn owl, found during CABS & SPA Winter 2019-2020 Bird Protection Camp in Cyprus (Photo: CABS)

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SUMMARY

Between December 2019 and February 2020, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and the Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA – Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt) conducted their 6th successive winter bird protection camp in Cyprus. The camp took place from 2nd December 2019 – 16th February 2020.

Twelve persons from 6 countries participated at the camp to monitor illegal bird trapping and bird hunting activity in the southern-eastern part of the island: in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts within Republic of Cyprus and in the British overseas territory on Cyprus, the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA).

During the camp, field investigations confirmed 55 cases of bird trapping activity across 40 individual trapping sites in south-eastern Cyprus. Immediate actions to stop trapping activity were taken by CABS & SPA members for 41 confirmed trapping cases. The team reported 31 cases of bird trapping to the enforcement agencies and 16 of these cases were investigated by enforcement officers. For 3 reported cases, individuals, involved in trapping were caught and prosecuted by enforcement officers.

A total of 25 mist nets, 299 limesticks and 10 electronic callers were removed from trapping sites found to be active during the camp by CABS & SPA teams. 86 wild birds, belonging to 11 different protected species, were rescued from traps and a further 17 wild birds were found dead in traps, found by our teams during the camp.

Field investigations, carried out during the camp, also confirmed 88 cases of illegal bird hunting activity on 55 individual hunting sites. For majority of the cases of illegal hunting confirmed during the camp, use of electronic callers to attract birds was detected.

Immediate actions to stop illegal hunting activity were taken by CABS & SPA for 82 cases of illegal hunting. 75 cases of illegal hunting were reported to the enforcement agencies and 42 of these cases were subsequently investigated by enforcement officers. For 11 reported cases, hunters, involved in illegal hunting were caught and prosecuted by enforcement officers. A total of 15 electronic callers, used for hunting, were confiscated during the camp.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cyprus lies on the eastern flyway, a key migratory route for wild birds during their journey between Europe and Africa, with around 100-150 million birds visiting the island each spring and autumn (Lederer 2016). Cyprus is also an important overwintering area for tens of millions of birds which migrate to Cyprus to avoid the harsh winter conditions in continental Europe.

However, birds passing through Cyprus are in great danger as the island is one of main hotspots for illegal bird killing in the Mediterranean (Brochet et al. 2016). In 2018, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA- Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt) members located 224 individual sites with confirmed bird trapping activity and 62 sites with confirmed illegal bird hunting activity in the south-eastern part of the island (Debersek 2019). As only part of Cyprus was investigated, it is logical to deduce that more than one thousand or even several thousand bird trapping sites and sites with illegal hunting activity were active across the island in the winter of 2019/2020.

Illegal trapping affects at least 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).

CABS, with the support from SPA, organises extensive field operations, called 'bird protection camps' to prevent illegal trapping, hunting and trade of migratory birds passing through Cyprus.

2 WORKING METHODS

This winter, the 6th successive Winter Bird Protection Camp was organised by CABS & SPA in Cyprus. It took place between 2nd December 2019 – 16th February 2020. A total of 4 full-time staff and 12 volunteers from Cyprus, Great Britain, Malta, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland participated during the camp. Eight volunteers had previous experience of participation at CABS & SPA bird protection camps in Cyprus, while 4 volunteers participated for the first time.

2.1 FIELD INVESTIGATIONS METHODS

Field investigations during the camp were carried out with the intention of locating active cases of illegal bird killings and stop them in shortest possible time. Priority was given to investigating areas with the highest density of illegal trapping and hunting activity recorded in previous years, known also as poaching 'hotspots.' Investigations were mostly carried out at night and during the mornings, when trapping and illegal hunting are in progress and therefore easiest to detect and to stop.

When trapping or illegal hunting activity was confirmed, it was immediately reported to the enforcement officers on duty by phone in order to get their support and attendance in shortest possible time. As each illegal bird killing incident usually lasts on average just a few hours, quick response from enforcement officers was vital to prevent and disrupt the killings and apprehend suspects. If enforcement officers were not available to attend and investigate the cases reported by the CABS & SPA team, the team members either took no action until intervention could be ensured at a later date or took immediate direct action on their own to stop and prevent further illegal bird killing.

Field investigations were carried out covertly, both to avoid confrontations with poachers and to prevent jeopardising the operations made by the enforcement officers at the reported sites.

Bird trapping activity is defined as *'any activity of using traps to catch birds.'* A case of bird trapping activity was counted for each individual occasion when CABS & SPA team members found set traps or evidences of recent, previously unknown trapping activity at the investigated trapping sites. Evidence of recent trapping activity includes fresh feathers on the ground at the trapping sites or remnants of glue on branches, as they indicate recent use of traps. Use of electronic bird callers at trapping sites, even if there are no traps set out at the time caller is used, is also recorded as an active trapping case. These callers are sometimes used solely during the night to attract birds to the site and the trappers subsequently set their traps in-situ in the early morning.

Illegal hunting activity is defined as *'any activity that doesn't comply with regulations for bird hunting in Cyprus, defined in the local Cypriot law - Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species (152(I)/2003) and in the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).'* The most common method of illegal hunting in Cyprus is hunting with electronic callers, which are used to lure birds within range of the hunters by playbacks of conspecific songs.

The shooting of protected bird species without the aid of electronic caller is also a common practice of illegal hunting in Cyprus.



Picture 1: CABS & SPA member with song thrush rescued from a mist net during Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS).

2.2 FIELD INVESTIGATIONS AREA

During the camp, CABS & SPA teams investigated bird trapping and illegal hunting activity in the south-eastern part of Cyprus: in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts within the Republic of Cyprus and in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), the British overseas territory on Cyprus (figure 1).

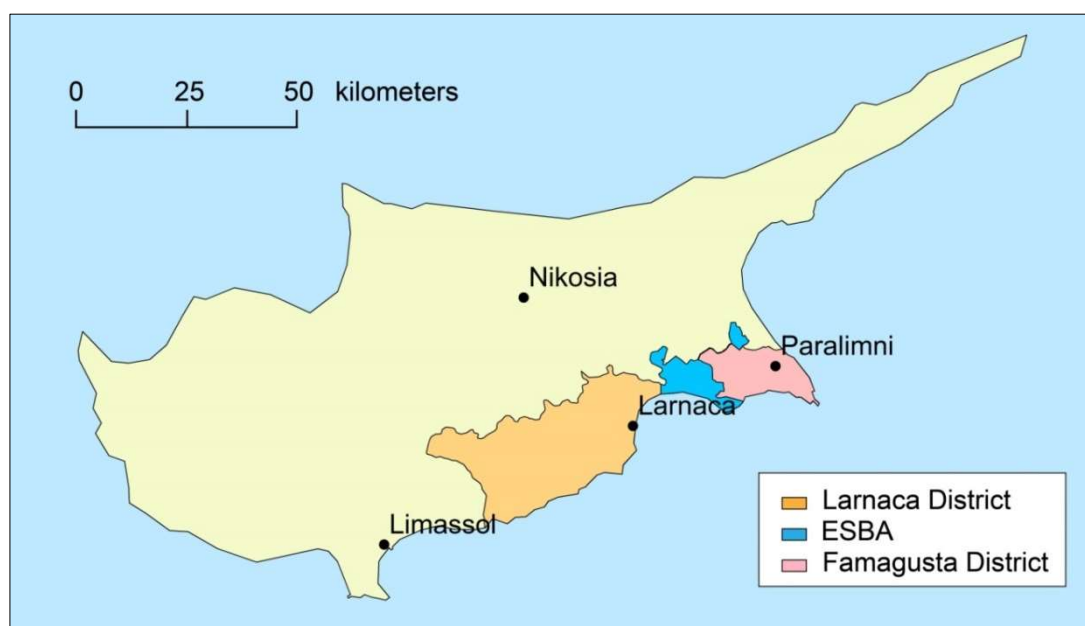


Figure 1: Cyprus and the areas investigated during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Beside the systematic investigations of illegal bird killings in south-eastern Cyprus, occasional spot-checks were also made in other parts of Cyprus, after CABS & SPA received credible intelligence regarding on-going illegal bird activity at specific locations.

3 RESULTS OF THE FIELD INVESTIGATIONS OF BIRD TRAPPING

3.1 BIRD TRAPPING ACTIVITY

Field investigations, carried out during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp, confirmed 55 cases of bird trapping activity across 40 trapping sites in south-eastern Cyprus (table 1, figure 2).

Table 1: Results of the field investigations of bird trapping during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp in Cyprus.

Duration of field investigations (days)	77
Total no. of participants conducting field investigations	12
No. of trapping sites checked	195
No. of trapping sites found to be active	40
No. of all cases of trapping activity confirmed on trapping sites found to be active	55

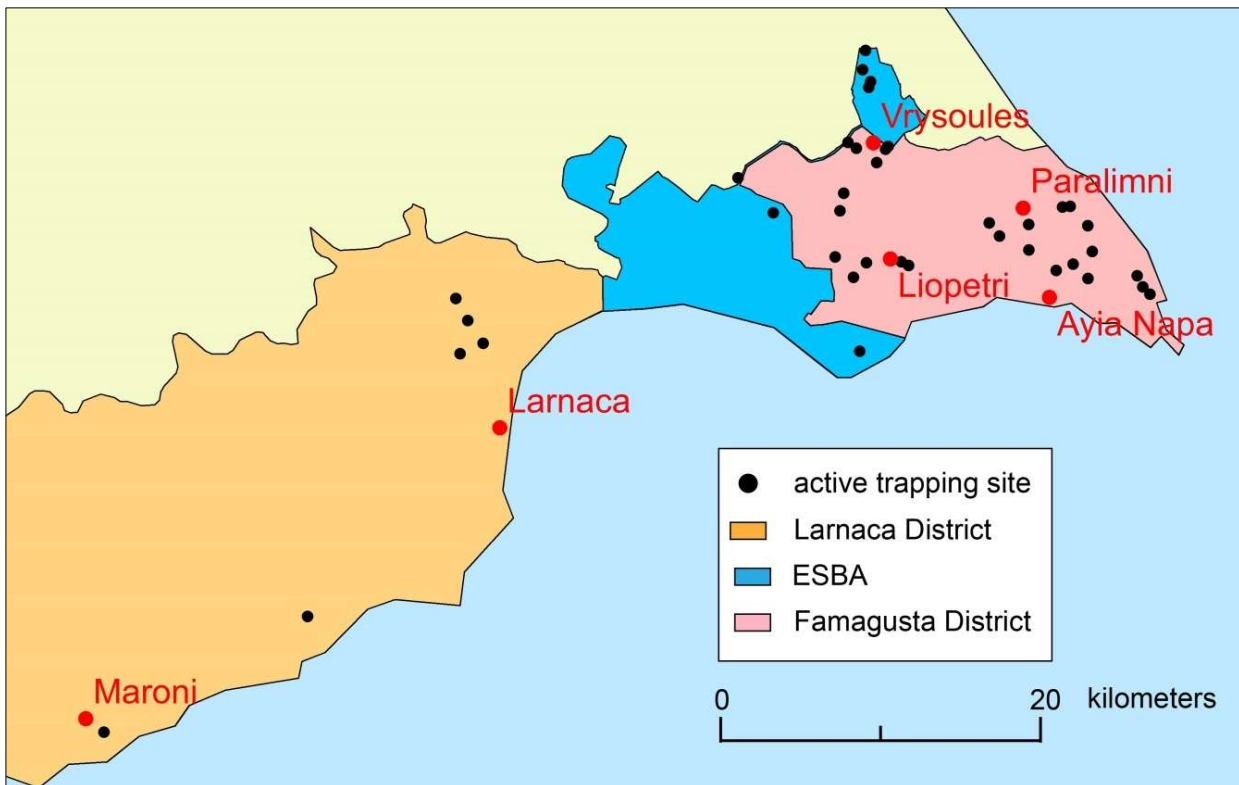


Figure 2: Distribution of active trapping sites, found during CABS & SPA winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Density of illegal bird trapping activity confirmed during the camp, was most concentrated in Famagusta District.

3.1.1 TREND OF WINTER TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN SOUTH-EASTERN CYPRUS FOR PERIOD 2014-2020

A total of 40 active trapping sites were found during the camp, this is the lowest total number of active trapping sites on record during CABS & SPA winter Bird Protection Camps (table 2). As the number of suspected trapping sites is different for each CABS & SPA winter camp, a direct comparison between total numbers of active sites found per camp is not an effective method to determine overall trends of winter trapping activity for period 2014-2020 in the south-eastern Cyprus. Therefore, to determine trapping trends it is more effective to compare the percentage of active trapping sites from all site inspections based on historical and recent intelligence (table 2, figure 3).

Table 2: Comparison of results of bird trapping field investigations, carried out at CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
Duration of field investigations (days)	10	22	35	63	79	77
Total no. of volunteers conducting field investigations	8	8	27	14	14	12
No. of all trapping sites checked	109	93	219	130	187	195
No. of trapping sites found to be active	42	83	183	78	99	40
Percentage of checked trapping sites, found to be active	38.5	89.2	83.6	60.0	52.9	20.5

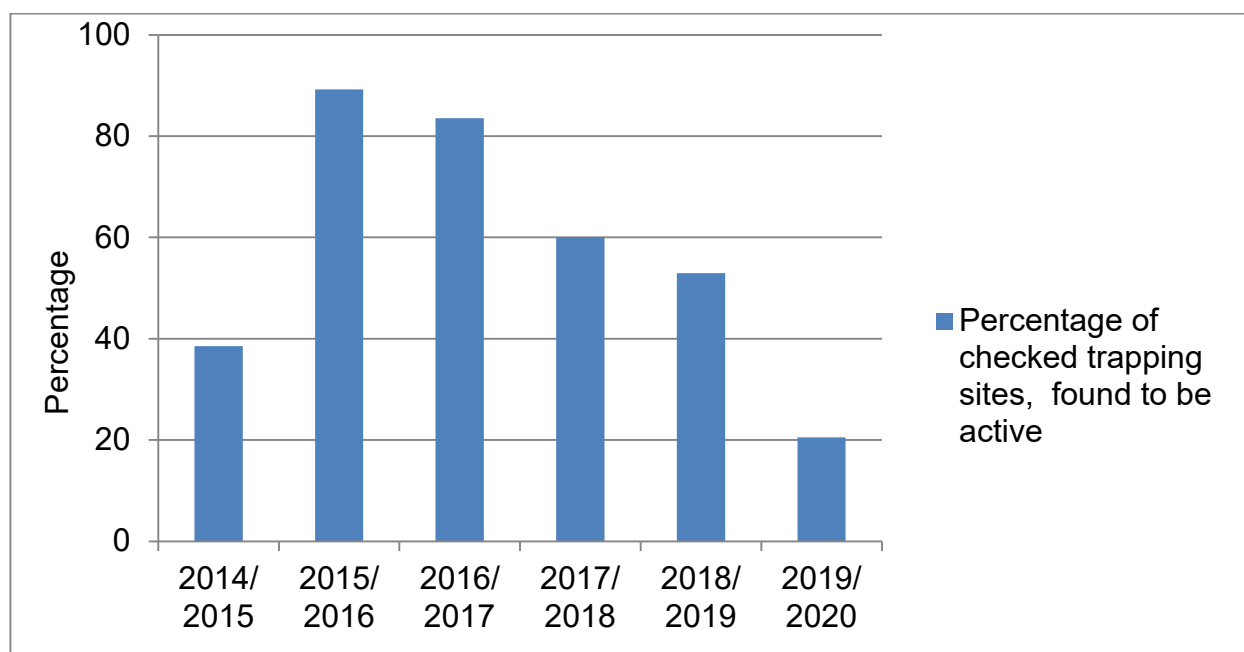


Figure 3: Percentages of checked trapping sites, found to be active during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

The percentage of confirmed active trapping sites from all suspected sites which were inspected is 20.5 % - the lowest ever for CABS & SPA winter camps and significantly lower than winter 2018/19.

A very low percentage of confirmed active trapping sites, from all sites inspected was also recorded during the first CABS & SPA winter camp, carried out in winter 2014/2015. In this case, the low percentage was not necessarily reflective of low trapping activity, but rather the lack of recorded intelligence regarding winter trapping activity. As CABS & SPA teams

were not familiar with winter active trapping methods in Cyprus during the first winter camp, they mostly checked known trapping sites recorded during spring and/or autumn season. None of these sites were found to be active.

3.1.2 TRAPPING ACTIVITY OVER THE DURATION OF THE CAMP

Trapping activity across 40 individual active trapping sites, found this this winter, was confirmed on 55 occasions, meaning that on average, each site was found to be active 1.38 times. Table 4 and figure 4 present number of confirmed cases of trapping activity for each week of the camp.

Table 4: Number of confirmed cases of trapping activity recorded per week of CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Week	02.12. - 08.12.	09.12. - 15.12.	16.12. - 22.12.	23.12. - 29.12.	30.12. - 05.01.	06.01. - 12.01.
No. of trapping activity cases	4	2	4	3	9	10
Week	13.01. - 19.01.	20.01. - 26.01.	27.01. - 02.02.	03.02. - 09.02.	10.02. - 16.02.	
No. of trapping activity cases	10	1	5	4	3	

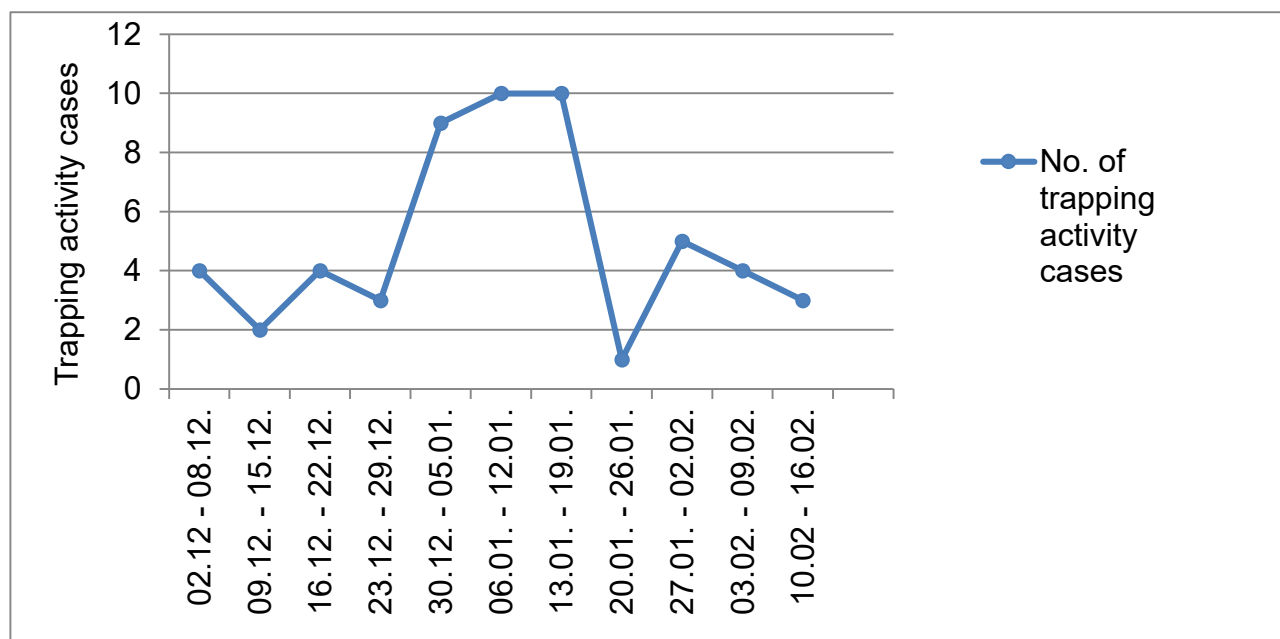


Figure 4: Number of confirmed cases of trapping activity recorded per week of CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Trapping activity, presented with the number of confirmed cases of trapping activity per week, peaked between 30.12.2019 and 19.01.2020.

Winter trapping activity in south-eastern Cyprus is closely correlated with the intensity of the nocturnal migration of the main targeted species, Song Thrushes. To catch the migrating thrushes, trappers set out traps during the night and activate electronic callers, emitting recorded thrush calls to lure these birds into the traps.

Thrushes migrate to Cyprus in waves, with each wave responding to the drop of the temperature in the continental Europe and Asia to a certain threshold, causing the depletion of their main source of food, insects and winter berries. This winter, the nocturnal migration of Song Thrushes was less intensive than previous winters (personal observation). However, it was noticeable that the peak of migration coincided with the peak of trapping activity, detected during the camp – mid January 2020.

3.1.3 ACTIVITY OF THE TRAPPING SITES WHERE PROSECUTIONS FOR TRAPPING WERE MADE IN THE PAST

CABS & SPA teams frequently confirm active trapping at known sites where trappers have been caught and prosecuted in the past. This winter team members checked 42 trapping sites with known previous prosecutions for trapping and 8 of them were found to be active (table 5).

Table 5: Activity of trapping sites with previous prosecutions, checked during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of sites with previous prosecutions checked	42
No. of sites with previous prosecutions found to be active (reactivated prosecuted site)	8
Percentage of reactivated prosecuted sites	19.0

Table 6: Comparison of the activity of trapping sites with previous prosecutions during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 - 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of sites with known previous prosecutions checked	5	8	27	14	26	42
No. of previously prosecuted sites found to be active (reactivated prosecuted sites)	3	8	21	5	7	8
Percentage of reactivated prosecuted sites	60.0	100.0	77.8	35.7	26.9	19.0

The percentage of checked trapping sites with previous prosecutions, that were found to be active this winter, was the lowest for CABS & SPA winter camps with 19.0 %.

3.1.4 TRAPPING ACTIVITY PER REGIONS

The areas monitored during the camp are part of two separate 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.

3.1.4.1 TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Out of 195 trapping sites, checked during the camp, majority of them, 151, were checked in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts, two of the six districts within the Republic of Cyprus. 31 of sites inspected were found to be active (table 7, figure 5).

Table 7: Results of bird trapping field investigations in Republic of Cyprus during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of all trapping sites checked	151
No. of trapping sites found to be active	31

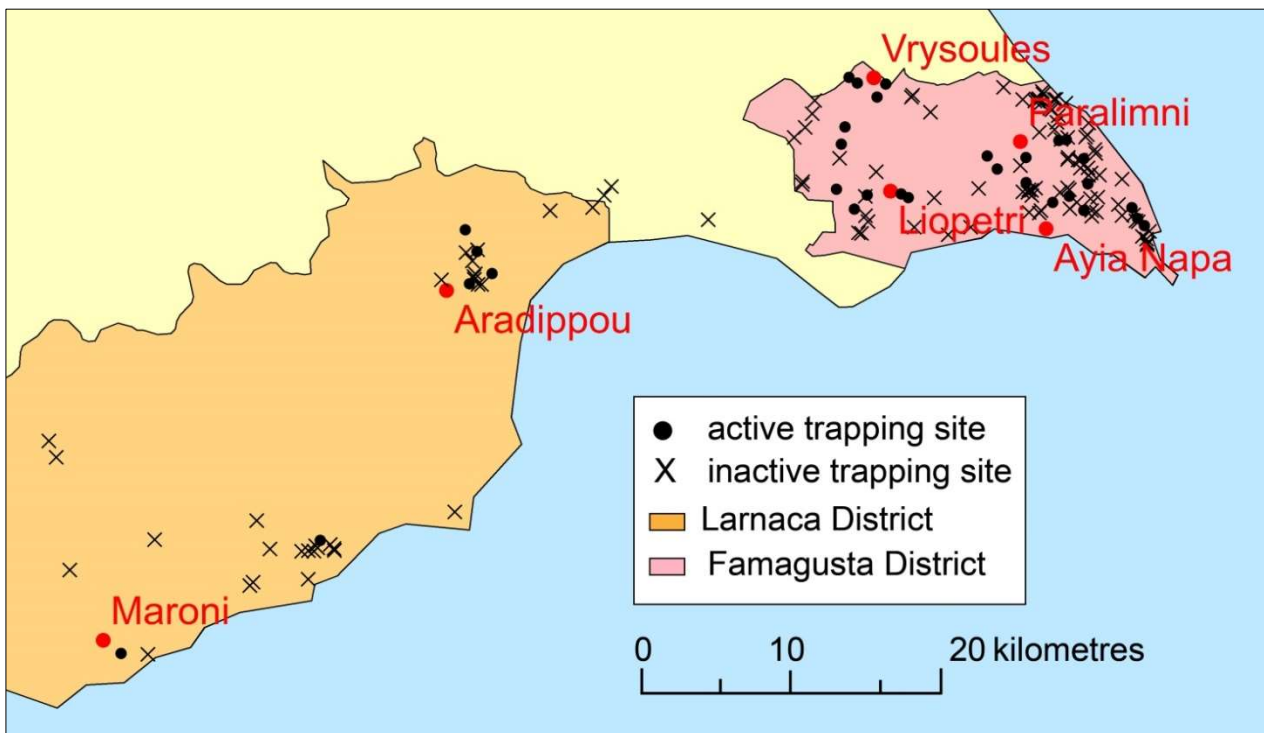


Figure 5: Distribution and activity of trapping sites, checked in the Republic of Cyprus during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Trapping activity, confirmed during the camp, was concentrated in Famagusta District, especially in the eastern part of the district.

The total number of trapping sites, confirmed as active in the Republic of Cyprus during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020, are fluctuating between years (table 8). To detect a trend of winter trapping activity in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts of Republic of Cyprus for the period 2014 – 2020, it is more effective to compare the percentages of confirmed active trapping sites out of all suspected trapping sites which were inspected, rather than simply the total numbers of confirmed active trapping sites (table 8, figure 6).

Table 8: Comparison of results of field investigations, carried out at CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020 in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts of Republic of Cyprus.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of all trapping sites inspected	53	55	88	81	148	151
No. of trapping sites confirmed as active	19	49	59	36	69	31
Percentage of checked trapping sites confirmed as active	35.8	89.1	67.0	44.4	46.6	20.5

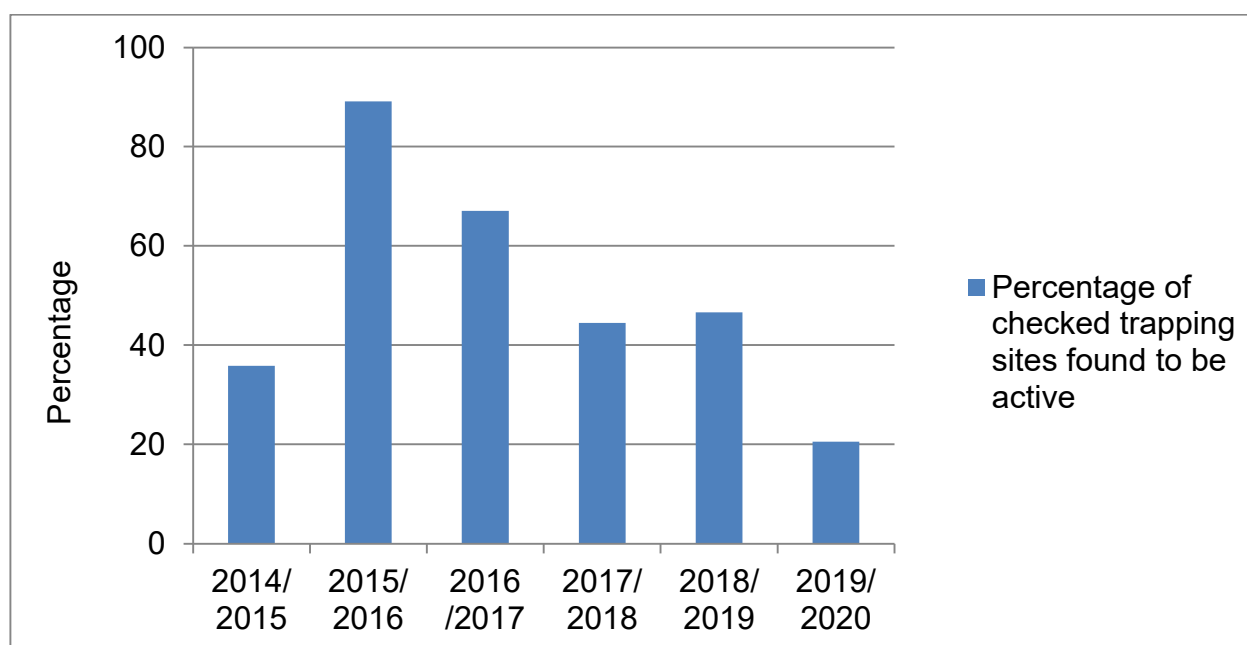


Figure 6: Percentages of checked trapping sites found to be active during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020 in Republic of Cyprus.

The percentages of inspected sites that are confirmed as active, has declined since the winter 2015/2016, indicating a trend of slow but steady decrease in winter trapping activity in Republic of Cyprus for the period winter 2015/2016 – winter 2019/2020.

3.1.4.2 TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN THE EASTERN SOVEREIGN BASE AREA ON CYPRUS

The British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) or Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia, as it is also known, is one of two territories on the island of Cyprus under British jurisdiction. The other British territory in Cyprus is the Western Sovereign Base Area. The bases were

retained by Great Britain primarily for military purposes, but they are also home to more than 10,000 Cypriots. The ESBA is well known for the historic massive levels of illegal bird trapping, especially the southern part of the base, Cape Pyla, which is the most notorious trapping area in whole of Cyprus.

This winter, CABS & SPA teams inspected 39 historical trapping sites in the ESBA and 7 of them were confirmed as active (table 9, figure 7).

Table 9: Results of bird trapping field investigations in the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area on Cyprus during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of all trapping sites checked	39
No. of active trapping sites found	7

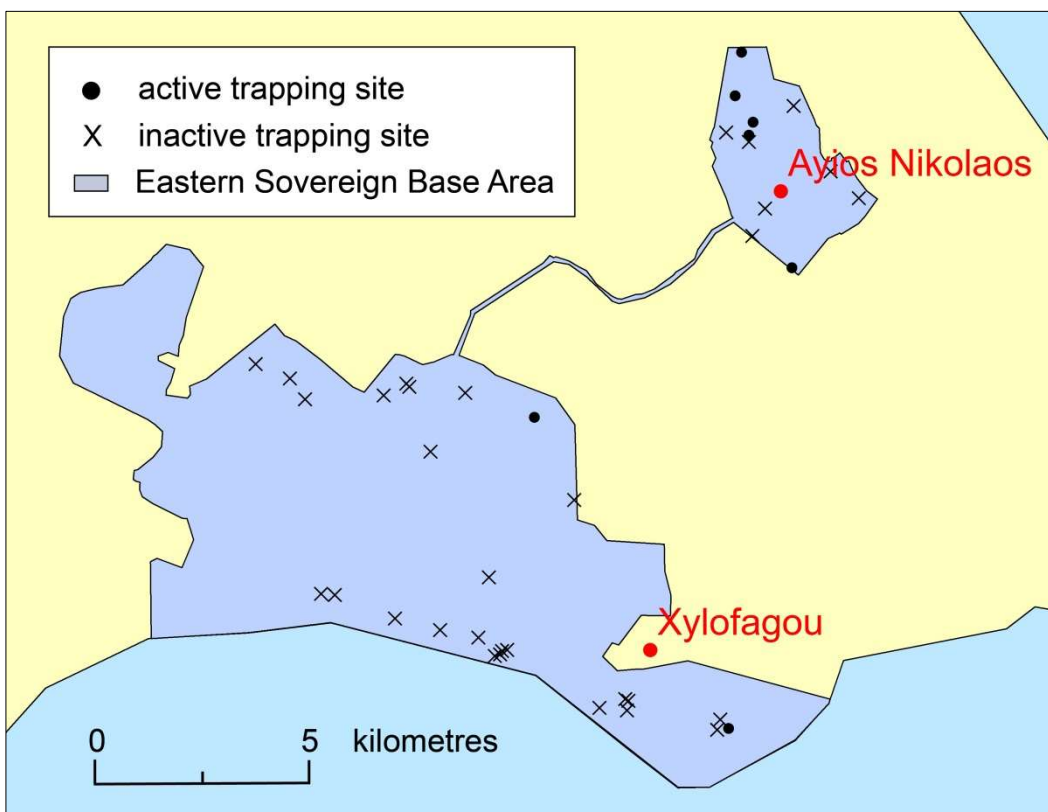


Figure 7: Distribution and activity of trapping sites checked in the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Table 10: Comparison of results of bird trapping field investigations in the ESBA, carried out during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of all trapping sites checked	52	39	132	44	40	39
No. of trapping sites confirmed as active	23	34	124	37	31	7
Percentage of checked trapping sites confirmed as active	44.2	87.2	93.9	84.1	77.5	17.9

CABS & SPA Winter 2016/2017 Bird Protection Camp stands out from other winter camps in the period 2014 - 2020 by the large number of trapping sites, confirmed to be active in the ESBA. This result does not reflect a significant increase of trapping activity in winter 2016/2017 in comparison with previous winters, but rather the increased extent of field investigations, carried out by CABS & SPA teams within the ESBA.

During winters 2014/2015 and 2015/2016, the extent of field investigations in the ESBA was significantly less than the subsequent winters and therefore, the number of trapping sites, confirmed as active by CABS & SPA teams in the ESBA, presents only a small percentage of the true scale of active sites in the ESBA. Trapping was very intensive in the ESBA also during that period.

The first extensive field investigations regarding winter trapping in the ESBA, was carried out during winter camp 2016/2017 and revealed the true scale of trapping activity in the ESBA with 124 trapping sites confirmed as active. During the following winter 2017/2018, CABS & SPA investigations revealed a significant decline in trapping activity within the ESBA, with 37 trapping sites confirmed as active in the ESBA. As oppose to the results of the investigations prior to the winter 2016/2017, the low number of active sites located within the ESBA in winter 2017/2018, presents the actual decline of trapping activity as field investigations were made consistently throughout the whole winter trapping season and they covered the whole territory of the ESBA.

During CABS & SPA Winter 2018/2019 Bird Protection Camp, we observed a further reduction in the number of active trapping sites in the ESBA. The low trapping activity, observed the previous winter in the ESBA, was further reduced with only 7 active trapping sites, found within the ESBA by CABS & SPA teams during the whole camp.

The trend of winter trapping activity within the ESBA during the period 2014-2020 can be estimated with comparison of the percentages of all checked sites confirmed as active per winter camp (table 10, figure 8).

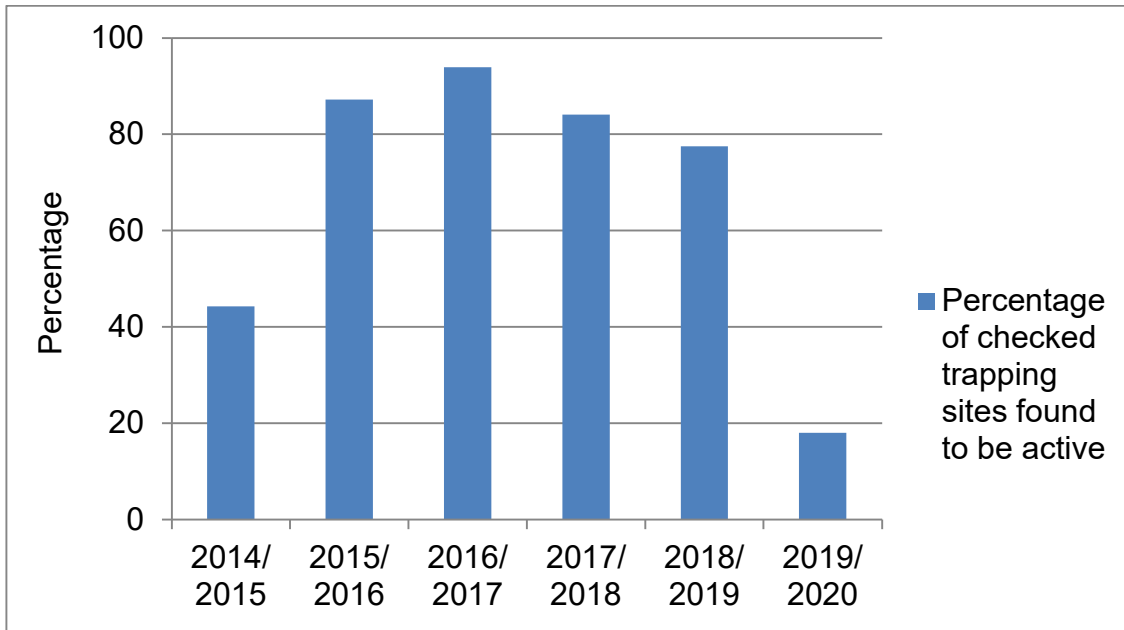


Figure 8: Percentages of checked trapping sites found to be active at CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020 in the ESBA.

The trapping trend shows a moderate decline of winter trapping activity for the period winter 2016/2017 – winter 2018/2019; and a significant decline of trapping activity in the last winter, as less than 20% of checked trapping sites were found to be active.

3.2 METHOD(S) OF TRAPPING AT SITES CONFIRMED AS ACTIVE DURING THE CAMP

Table 11: Method(s) of trapping at sites confirmed as active during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

	Republic of Cyprus	ESBA	North Cyprus	All regions
No. of trapping sites confirmed as active	32	7	1	40
No. of trapping sites with limesticks used for trapping	15	1	0	16
No. of trapping sites with mist nets used for trapping	16	6	1	23
No. of trapping sites with unknown or both types of traps used	1	0	0	1
Average no. of limesticks used at trapping sites, confirmed as active	30.3	13.7	0	25.3
Average no. of nets used at trapping sites confirmed as active	1.9	2	4	2.1
No. of all trapping sites with electronic callers used for trapping	19	5	1	25
Percentage of liming trapping sites with electronic caller used for trapping	33.3	0.0	/	31.3
Percentage of netting trapping sites with electronic caller used for trapping	81.3	83.3	100.0	82.6

Trapping with nets was the dominant method of trapping at active sites during the camp. Nets are favoured by trappers during winter season, because they are mostly targeting Song Thrushes, which are more effectively caught with nets than with limesticks.

Trapping of Song Thrushes most commonly takes place during the night, when the thrushes are migrating across Cyprus. In order to lure migrating thrushes into the nets, electronic callers, repeatedly emitting Song Thrush calls, are placed beside set nets. During the nights with strong migration of thrushes, dozens of these birds can be caught in a single net with this method of trapping (picture 2).



Picture 2: Large number of Song Thrushes, trapped in a mist net, found during CABS & SPA Winter 2018/2019 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS).

Table 12: Comparison of trapping methods used at active sites during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of confirmed active trapping sites	42	84	183	78	100	40
Average no. of times trapping sites were found active	1.29	1.35	1.57	1.64	1.40	1.35
No. of active trapping sites with limesticks used for trapping	1	11	8	16	37	16
No. of active trapping sites with mist nets used for trapping	41	71	169	62	72	23
Average no. of limesticks used at active trapping sites	/	44	51.1	42.9	30	25.3
Average no. of nets used at active trapping sites	3.6	3.59	3.58	3.09	2.42	2.1
Percentage of active tr. sites with electronic callers used for trapping	0.83	0.85	0.91	0.79	0.67	0.63

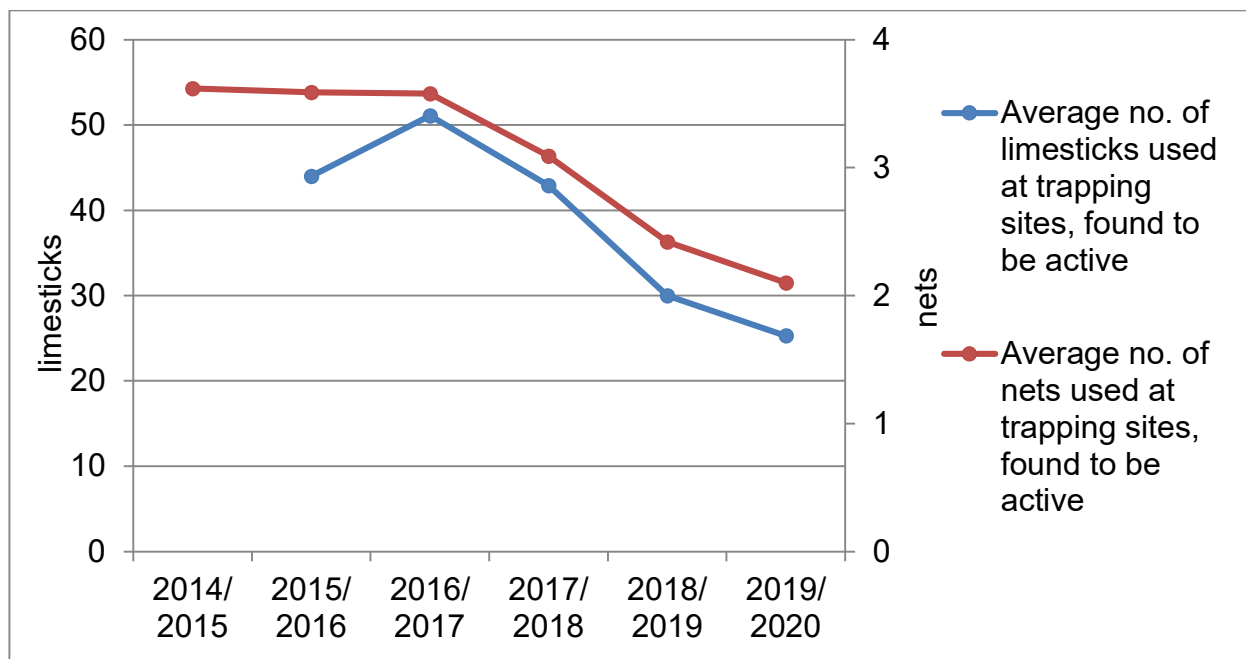


Figure 9: Average number of limesticks and nets used at active trapping sites during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

The average number of limesticks and nets, used at trapping sites, confirmed as active during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020, is steadily declining since the first camp, organised by CABS & SPA during the winter 2014/2015.

4 RESULTS OF ACTIONS, TAKEN AGAINST THE TRAPPING CASES CONFIRMED DURING THE CAMP

4.1 OVERALL RESULTS

During the camp, CABS & SPA teams confirmed 55 cases of trapping activity across 40 individual trapping sites. Immediate actions to stop trapping activity were taken against 41 confirmed cases of trapping activity. Actions were taken either by enforcement officers to whom we reported the cases, or by CABS & SPA teams on their own.

Altogether, 299 limesticks, 25 nets and 10 electronic callers were found and seized from the active trapping sites found by CABS & SPA teams during the camp. At 3 trapping cases, reported by CABS & SPA teams, individuals involved in trapping, were caught and prosecuted by enforcement officers (table 13).

Table 13: Overall results of actions, taken by CABS & SPA teams against the trapping cases confirmed during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of all confirmed cases of trapping activity	55
No. of all confirmed cases of trapping activity, where actions were taken	41
No. of confirmed cases of trapping activity, where actions against trapping activity were taken by enforcement officers	17
No. of confirmed cases of trapping activity, where actions against trapping activity were taken by CABS & SPA teams	24
No. of seized limesticks	299
No. of seized nets	25
No. of seized electronic callers	10
No. of prosecutions for trapping made	3

Table 14: Comparison of the results of actions, taken against the confirmed trapping cases during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
Duration of field investigations (days)	10	22	35	63	79	77
Total no. of participants conducting field investigations	8	8	27	14	14	12
No. of confirmed trapping cases	53	111	287	128	140	55
No. of trapping cases with actions against trapping activity taken	31	79	158	108	115	41
No. of seized limesticks	0	451	860	636	824	299
No. of seized mist nets	142	222	523	213	138	25
No. of seized el. callers	12	60	73	65	62	10
No. of prosecutions for trapping made	3	5	16	6	6	3

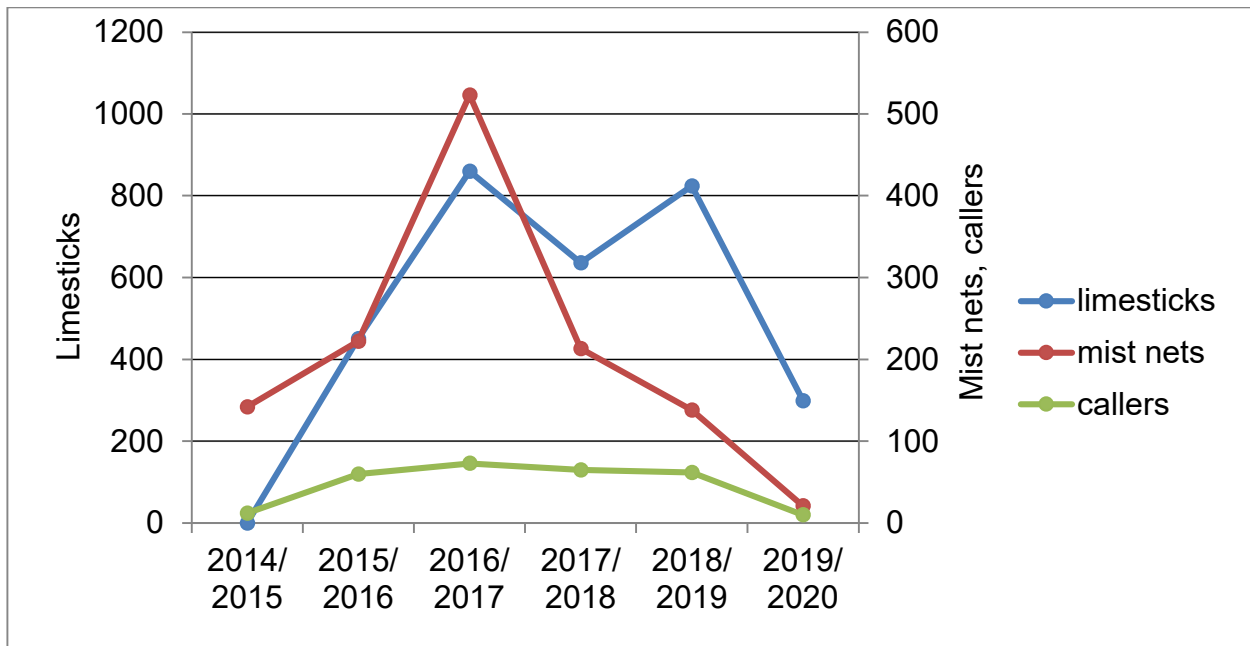


Figure 11: Seized limesticks, mist nets and electronic callers, used for trapping, during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

With different camp duration of CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps and different number of participants at the winter camps, the total numbers of seized traps per winter camp are not directly comparable between years. This is especially true for the comparisons between the first two and the last three winter camps in the period 2014/2015 to 2019/2020, as they had significantly different duration of field investigations.

As the last three CABS & SPA winter camps had similar duration and similar numbers of participation, we can directly compare the total numbers of seized traps for these three camps. The total numbers of limesticks, mist nets and electronic callers for trapping, seized during the camp this winter, were the lowest for the last three winter camps. Record low seizure of trapping paraphernalia coincides with the lowest trapping activity, recorded this winter with only 55 cases of trapping activity confirmed during 77 days of field investigations.

4.2 RESULTS OF ACTIONS, TAKEN BY ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AGAINST THE TRAPPING CASES REPORTED BY CABS & SPA TEAMS

During the camp, CABS & SPA teams reported trapping activity cases to the relevant enforcement agencies, responsible with regulation and enforcement against illegal bird killing in Republic of Cyprus, in British Eastern Sovereign Base Area and in the Northern Cyprus. These agencies are Game and Fauna Service and Cyprus Police in Republic of Cyprus, Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Police for ESBA and Northern Cyprus Police plus Northern Cyprus Army for Northern Cyprus.

In total, we reported 31 cases of trapping activity to the enforcement officers and 17 cases were subsequently investigated by them. Investigations resulted in 3 prosecutions of individuals involved in illegal bird trapping (table 15).

Table 15: Results of actions taken by enforcement agencies against the trapping cases reported by CABS & SPA teams during winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

	Game and Fauna Service	Cyprus Police	SBA Police	North Cyprus Army	All
No. of trapping cases reported by CABS & SPA teams	15	4	8	4	31
No. of reported cases that were not investigated by officers	8	1	2	3	14
No. of reported cases investigated by officers	7	3	6	1	17
No. of investigated cases resulting in prosecution of trappers	2	1	0	0	3
No. of investigated cases resulting in confiscation of trapping paraphernalia	3	2	5	1	11
No. of investigated cases ending with no trapping activity found by enforcement officers	2	0	1	0	3

Table 16: Comparison of the results of actions, taken by enforcement agencies against the trapping cases, reported by CABS & SPA teams during winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/2015 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of trapping cases confirmed by CABS & SPA teams	53	111	287	128	140	55
No. of trapping cases reported to the enforcement agencies	19	61	32	96	93	31
INVESTIGATIONS						
No. of reported cases investigated by enforcement officers	16	46	30	84	68	17
Percentage of investigated sites (for all reported sites)	84.2	75.4	93.8	87.5	73.1	54.8
No. of cases investigated by Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad	11	19	12	9	10	/*
No. of cases investigated by Cyprus Police regular units	0	0	0	5	4	3
No. of cases investigated by Game and Fauna Service	0	0	3	15	16	7
No. of cases investigated by SBA Police	5	27	15	54	38	6
No. of cases investigated by Northern Cyprus Police/Army	0	0	0	1	0	1
PROSECUTIONS						
No. of all prosecutions made at reported sites	3	5	16	6	6	3
Percentage of prosecutions (for all reported sites)	15.8	8.2	50.0	6.3	6.5	9.7
No. of prosecutions made by Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad	3	2	8	1	2	/*
No. of prosecutions made by Cyprus Police regular units	0	0	0	0	0	1
No. of prosecutions made by Game & Fauna Service	0	0	3	4	2	2
No. of prosecutions made by SBA Police	0	3	5	1	2	0
No. of prosecutions made by Northern Cyprus Police/Army	0	0	0	0	0	0

* Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) was dismantled in November 2019

With 31 reported cases, this is the second lowest number of cases reported during CABS & SPA winter bird protection camps. The low number of reported cases is correlated with the low trapping activity, detected by CABS & SPA teams this winter.

Enforcement agencies investigated 54.8% of the reported cases, which is the lowest percentage of reported cases, being investigated during CABS & SPA winter bird protection camps. The percentage of investigated cases, that have resulted in prosecution of trappers - 9.7 % - was slightly higher than was achieved during the previous two winter camps.



Picture 3: SBA Police officer confiscating mist net, found by CABS & SPA teams during winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS).

4.3 RESCUED BIRDS AND BIRDS FOUND DEAD IN TRAPS

In total, 86 protected wild birds, belonging to 11 different species, were rescued from traps, found by CABS & SPA teams during the camp (table 17). Birds were rescued either directly by our team members or by the enforcement officers during the investigations of the trapping sites, reported by us.

Rescued birds were released immediately or were released after a short rehabilitation period. 17 birds were found dead in traps.

Table 17: Rescued birds and birds found dead during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

		No. of birds rescued from traps	No. of birds found dead in traps
1	Song thrush (<i>Turdus philomelos</i>)	47	11
2	Blackcap (<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>)	9	1
3	Chiffchaff (<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>)	4	0
4	Robin (<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>)	3	1
5	Sardinian warbler (<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>)	3	0
6	Barn owl (<i>Tyto alba</i>)	2	0
7	Magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>)	2	0
8	Hawfinch (<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>)	1	0
9	Black redstart (<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>)	0	1
10	Great tit (<i>Parus major</i>)	0	1
11	Chukar (<i>Alectoris chukar</i>)	0	1
	Unidentified	15	1
	Total	86	17



Picture 4: Sardinian warbler, found caught on a limestick during CABS & SPA winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS).



Picture 5: Hawfinch, rescued from limestick during CABS & SPA winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp (Photo: CABS).

5 RESULTS OF THE FIELD INVESTIGATIONS OF ILLEGAL BIRD HUNTING

Beside 55 cases of bird trapping activity, field investigations, carried out during CABS & SPA Winter 2019-2020 Bird Protection Camp, confirmed 88 cases of illegal bird hunting activity across 55 individual hunting sites in south-eastern Cyprus (table 18, figure 12).

Table 18: Results of the investigations of illegal bird hunting during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of hunting sites with illegal hunting activity	55
No. of all cases of illegal hunting confirmed on investigated hunting sites	88
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded Song Thrush calls	83
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded Skylark calls	4
No. of confirmed cases of hunting in the area, where hunting is prohibited	1

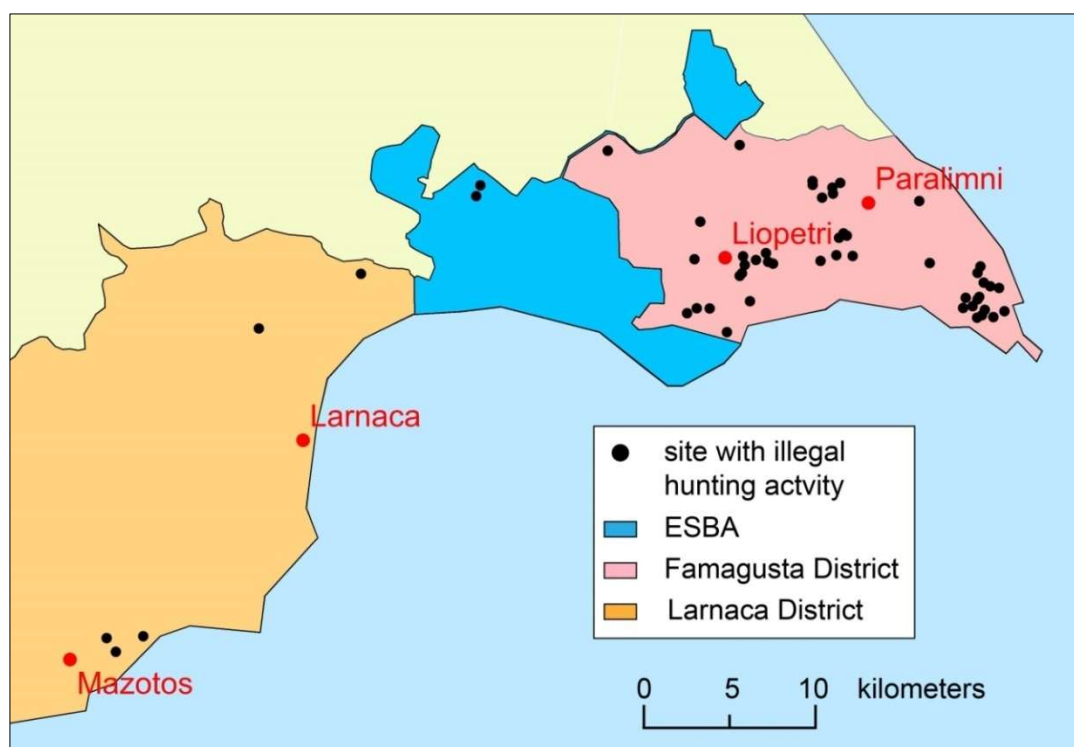


Figure 12: Distribution of the hunting sites with illegal hunting activity confirmed on them during CABS & SPA winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

Most of the illegal bird hunting cases, confirmed during the camp, were located in Famagusta District. Field investigations revealed widespread use of electronic callers for hunting. The use of electronic callers, emitting recorded Song Thrush calls in the mornings, was especially significant. These callers are mostly used at dawn and in the early mornings, the period of the day, when Song Thrushes are most active and therefore easiest to attract with a caller.

In total, CABS & SPA teams investigated 87 cases of hunting with callers emitting recorded bird calls, but these cases do not include all the callers we have heard during the morning patrols; they include only the callers we had time to precisely locate and to take actions against. As our team resource was limited and also busy with investigations of illegal bird trapping, we were only able to investigate a small percentage of the total cases of illegal bird hunting taking place in south-eastern Cyprus this winter.

Table 19: Results of the field investigations of illegal bird hunting during CABS & SPA Winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp per region.

	Famagusta District	Larnaca District	ESBA	All
No. of all cases of illegal hunting	75	6	7	88
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with el. caller emitting recorded song thrush calls	69	5	7	83
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with el. caller emitting recorded skylark calls	2	2	0	4
No. of confirmed cases of hunting in the area, where hunting is prohibited	1	0	0	1

Table 20: Comparison of the results of field investigations of illegal bird hunting, carried out during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2017/2018 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of hunting sites with illegal hunting activity found	25	18	55
No. of all cases of illegal hunting confirmed on investigated hunting sites	28	25	88
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded Song Thrush calls	25	18	83
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded Skylark calls	1	3	4
No. of confirmed cases of hunting with electronic caller emitting recorded Quail calls	2	1	0
No. of confirmed cases of hunting within a protected area, where hunting is prohibited	0	3	1

Number of cases of illegal hunting, confirmed by CABS & SPA teams this winter is substantially higher than in the previous two winters. The steep rise in the number of confirmed cases of illegal bird hunting is not the result of the increase of illegal hunting activity in south-eastern Cyprus in the last year, as illegal hunting was more or less equally massive during the last three winters; it is the result of increase in the extent of illegal bird hunting investigations, made by CABS & SPA teams. As the prevalence of illegal bird trapping activity was lower this winter (in comparison with previous winters) CABS & SPA teams could invest more time into the investigations of illegal bird hunting.

6 RESULTS OF ACTIONS, TAKEN AGAINST THE CASES OF ILLEGAL BIRD HUNTING ACTIVITY CONFIRMED DURING THE CAMP

6.1 OVERALL RESULTS

Table 21: Overall results of actions taken against the cases of illegal hunting activity confirmed during CABS & SPA winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

No. of confirmed cases of illegal hunting activity	88
No of all confirmed cases with actions taken against illegal hunting activity	82
No. of confirmed cases with actions taken against illegal hunting activity by enforcement officers	42
No. of confirmed cases with actions taken against illegal hunting activity by CABS & SPA teams	40
No. of confirmed cases with no actions taken against illegal hunting activity	6
No. of electronic callers, used for hunting, confiscated	15
No. of prosecutions for illegal hunting	11

Immediate actions to stop illegal hunting activity were taken in 82 out of 88 cases of illegal hunting activity, confirmed during the camp. They were taken either by enforcement officers following reports from CABS & SPA teams or directly under our own initiative.

Actions against illegal hunting, taken during the camp included: reporting illegal hunting activity to the enforcement officers on duty, meeting and escorting enforcement officers to the sites, where illegal hunting activity was confirmed, investigation of the sites with illegal hunting activity, inspection of hunters and their cars for evidences of illegal hunting, confiscation of electronic callers used for hunting, prosecutions of hunters involved in illegal hunting activity and other actions.

Table 22: Comparison of the results of actions, taken against the cases of illegal hunting activity confirmed during CABS & SPA winter Bird Protection Camps 2017/2018 – 2019/2020.

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of confirmed cases of illegal hunting activity	28	25	88
No. of all confirmed cases with actions taken against illegal hunting activity	18	13	82
No. of electronic callers, used for hunting, confiscated	7	0	15
No. of prosecutions for illegal hunting made	2	0	11

The direct result of many actions, taken by CABS & SPA teams against illegal hunting this winter marks a significant increase in the number of prosecutions made for illegal hunting in comparison with the previous two winters.

6.2 RESULTS OF ACTIONS, TAKEN BY ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AGAINST THE CASES OF ILLEGAL HUNTING REPORTED BY CABS & SPA TEAMS

Cases of illegal bird hunting, confirmed during the camp, were reported to the Game & Fauna Service, the statutory agency responsible to investigate and act against illegal bird killings in Republic of Cyprus, and to the SBA Police, who are responsible for protection of wild birds in the British Eastern Sovereign Areas on Cyprus. In total, CABS & SPA teams reported 75 cases of illegal hunting activity to the enforcement officers and 40 incidents were investigated by them (table 23).

Table 23: Results of actions, taken by enforcement agencies against the illegal hunting cases, reported by CABS & SPA teams during 2019/2020 winter Bird Protection Camp.

	Game and Fauna Service	SBA Police	All
No. of illegal hunting activity cases reported by CABS & SPA teams	68	7	75
No. of illegal hunting cases investigated by officers	40	2	42
Percentage of reported cases being investigated	58.8	28.6	56.0
No. of cases resulting in prosecution of hunters for illegal hunting	11	0	11
No. of cases resulting in confiscation of el. callers	1	0	1
No. of cases resulting in officers checking hunters and their cars but nothing was found	12	0	12
No. of cases ending with officers arriving at the reported sites where illegal hunting activity had already ended	16	2	18

75 out of 88 cases of illegal hunting, confirmed during the camp, were reported to the relevant enforcement agencies. The high percentage of reported cases shows that CABS & SPA teams invested a lot of time in reporting detected illegal hunting activity in south-eastern Cyprus. Unfortunately, enforcement officers were not available to investigate almost half of the reported cases. Table 24 lists the reasons for the unavailability of the officers to investigate the cases reported by CABS & SPA teams.

Table 24: Reasons for the unavailability of enforcement officers to investigate the cases, reported by CABS & SPA teams during winter 2019/2020 Bird Protection Camp.

	No. of cases
Officers were busy with investigating other cases of illegal hunting	15
No patrol was available for investigation of reported cases in Famagusta District (all patrols were in Larnaca District)	8
Officers were busy with checking hunting dogs	2
Other reasons for unavailability of the officers	8

Table 25: Comparison of the results of actions, taken by enforcement agencies against the illegal hunting cases, reported by CABS & SPA teams during winter Bird Protection Camps 2017/2018 – 2019/2020

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
No. of illegal hunting activity cases reported by CABS & SPA teams	25	18	75
No. of illegal hunting cases investigated by officers	16	7	42
Percentage of reported cases being investigated	64.0	38.9	56.0
No. of sites with prosecution of hunters	2	0	11
Seized electronic callers	7	1	15

Our first field investigations of illegal bird hunting, carried out during CABS & SPA winter Bird Protection Camps, were made during the winter camp 2017/2018. The investigations resulted in the 2 prosecutions for 2 cases of illegal hunting, reported to the authorities and a total of 7 electronic callers, used for hunting, were seized.

The following winter, trapping activity in south-eastern Cyprus was high and CABS & SPA teams were busy with investigations and actions against illegal bird trapping.

Consequently, extent of the investigations of illegal bird hunting during winter 2018/2019 was less than the previous year and less actions against illegal hunting were taken as the previous winter. The results of actions were poor as no prosecution for illegal hunting was made and only 1 electronic caller was seized.

This winter, the combination of low trapping activity, allowing extensive investigations of illegal hunting and the skills gained from cooperation with enforcement officers in previous two winters, resulted in many actions, taken by the enforcement officers for the cases of illegal hunting reported by CABS & SPA teams.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The decision to start organising winter bird protection camps in Cyprus was made, when several CABS & SPA members witnessed massive trapping activity during their short stay in south-eastern Cyprus in January 2014. Their investigations revealed that winter bird trapping is more widespread than thought and also highly tolerated by the authorities.

During the first few winter bird protection camps, organised by CABS & SPA, our teams observed massive levels of trapping activity in south-eastern Cyprus. Set nets and electronic callers, used to attract thrushes into the nets, were found everywhere CABS & SPA teams conducted field investigations during the night. The situation seemed hopeless for thrushes, overwintering in Cyprus but the situation slowly started to improve after hundreds of actions, taken against trapping activity by CABS & SPA teams. Most of the actions were confiscations of nets used for trapping. CABS & SPA teams observed the first signs of improvement during the winter camp 2017/2018, when less trapping sites were found to be active than the previous winter 2016/2017. One of the reasons for the decline in trapping activity was the introduction of higher penalties for trapping with nets in Republic of Cyprus in autumn 2017.

The following winter, 2018/2019, CABS & SPA teams observed a slight increase of the trapping activity in south-eastern Cyprus, but the increase didn't last for long as CABS & SPA teams recorded a strong decline of trapping activity this winter with only 40 trapping sites found to be active during the camp. If we compare this number with the highest number of trapping sites, found to be active during the winter camps, which was 186 for winter camp 2016/2017, we can declare an important victory in the fight against winter bird trapping in just the last three years.

Another indicator of the decline of winter trapping activity in the south-eastern Cyprus is the average number of traps found at known trapping sites, investigated during the winter camps. Both, the average number of limesticks and the average number of mist nets used at trapping sites, found to be active by CABS & SPA teams is steadily decreasing since the winter 2016/2017. While CABS & SPA teams found 4 set nets on average per trapping site at first three winter camps, this number dropped to 2 set nets found on average per trapping site during this winter.

The strong decline of trapping recorded both in Republic of Cyprus and in the British Eastern Sovereign Area on Cyprus this winter is not entirely correlated with the enforcement actions against trapping, taken in in previous winters. Winter trapping of

thrushes also depends on the availability of these birds in Cyprus. When winters are mild, there are less thrushes migrating to Cyprus, as they find sufficient food in the continental Europe. With fewer thrushes on the island, there is less trapping taking place.

This winter was exceptionally mild in most of Europe and one of the reasons for low trapping activity due to low numbers of thrushes migrating to Cyprus. This is also evident from the survey of hunting bag statistics for hunting season 2019-2020 in Cyprus, published by Game and Fauna Service in May 2020 (Game and Fauna Service 2020). According to the survey, the number of thrushes (*Turdus* sp.), shot by hunters in hunting season 2019-2020 was 997,541 shot thrushes - the lowest for the period 2013-2020. Record low total number of shot thrushes is indicating that there were fewer Song Thrushes wintering in Cyprus this winter as in the previous years.

Investigations of illegal bird hunting in south-eastern Cyprus revealed widespread use of electronic callers used to attract song thrushes. The use of callers was mostly concentrated in the Famagusta District of Republic of Cyprus.

Although there were fewer thrushes overwintering in Cyprus this winter than in previous years, this did not deter illegal hunting activity as much as it did deter illegal bird trapping. The use of electronic callers to attract thrushes was as widespread as it was in the previous two winters. This can be explained with limited enforcement control over illegal hunting in the south-eastern Cyprus. According to our experiences from cooperation with Game and Fauna Service officers this winter, on average, only 1 patrol of Game and Fauna Service officers covered the whole Famagusta District for the investigations of bird trapping and illegal hunting. With several hundred cases of illegal hunting estimated to be occurring every day in Famagusta District this winter, one patrol was clearly not enough to effectively monitor hunting activity in the district.

Lack of fear by hunters to be caught for using electronic callers was evident at the beginning of the camp, when the use of callers was very common on certain hunting sites and only after actions against illegal hunting were taken at these sites, could we observe a reduction in the number of callers used. The reduction in the use of callers was most obvious at the sites, where the prosecutions for illegal hunting were made during the camp.

We also observed a significant drop in the use of electronic callers over the course of the camp, thanks to the close cooperation between CABS & SPA teams and the officers from Game and Fauna Service. GFS officers responded to the majority of the cases of bird

hunting with callers, reported by CABS & SPA teams and taken proper enforcement actions, aiming at catching and prosecuting hunters, involved in illegal hunting. As a result, 11 prosecutions of hunters, hunting illegally, were made by GFS officers this winter. This is an absolute record for CABS & SPA bird protection camps regarding illegal hunting and a great step forward in preventing massive use of callers for hunting.

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