



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

Stiftung  Pro Artenvielfalt®  
Foundation Pro Biodiversity®

# CABS & SPA WINTER 2021/2022 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP IN CYPRUS FIELD REPORT



Committee Against Bird Slaughter

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015 CABS & SPA have organized winter bird protection camps in Cyprus to investigate the illegal killing of birds. For winter 2021-22 the camp started on the 21st of December 2021 and ended on the 20th of February 2022, running for a total of 62 days. The small team was composed of five bird protection activists from Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Great Britain.

The activists monitored illegal bird killing in the south-eastern part of the island: in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts within the Republic of Cyprus and in the British Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia. In total the activists recorded **41** active trapping sites, of which 26 with nets, 14 with limesticks and 1 with an unknown method. They observed **265** limesticks and **70** nets, of which 183 limesticks and 47 nets were collected during the operations. Following the investigations and reports from CABS teams, **9** illegal trappers have been prosecuted and **20** electronic callers seized. **107** birds, including song thrush, robin, barn owl, blackcap, chiffchaff, blackbird and serin were saved from traps and released back into the wild.

It is important to note that winter trapping activity is strongly influenced by weather conditions and bird presence. It therefore has limited use in helping to understand broader trapping trends. The figures shown in the following tables help to monitor trapping activity but unlike autumn and spring trapping, do not reflect trends.

**Table 1: Bird trapping and illegal bird hunting paraphernalia seized during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2014/15 – 2021/22 in Cyprus**

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021*	2021/ 2022
Duration of field investigations (days)	10	22	35	63	79	77	-	62
Total n. of activists	8	8	27	14	14	12	-	5
Limesticks found	0	451	860	636	824	299	-	265
Mist nets found	124	222	523	213	138	25	-	70
Electronic callers found	12	60	73	65	62	10	-	20
Prosecutions for illegal trapping	3	5	16	6	6	3	-	9

\* CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp was not carried out in 2020/21 due to Covid restrictions

## 2. ILLEGAL TRAPPING

### 2.1. TRAPPING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

In winter 2021-22 in the Republic of Cyprus, CABS teams observed **263** limesticks and **56** nets in **35** sites, of which 183 limesticks and 35 nets were removed with or in some cases without the intervention of the enforcement authorities. Compared to the previous recorded year, with the exception of 2020-21 when winter camp was cancelled due to COVID restrictions, a small increase was recorded in the total number of trapping sites found active (from 32 in 2019-20 to 35 in 2021-22). This is also reflected in the percentage of sites found active out of those checked (from 21.2% to 22.3%).

**Table 2: Results of trapping investigations during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2016/17 – 2021/22 in the Republic of Cyprus**

<b>CABS &amp; SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp</b>	<b>2016/ 2017</b>	<b>2017/ 2018</b>	<b>2018/ 2019</b>	<b>2019/ 2020</b>	<b>2020/ 2021*</b>	<b>2021/ 2022</b>
Trapping sites inspected	88	81	148	151	-	<b>157</b>
Total active sites	56	38	70	32	-	<b>35</b>
-Active trapping sites with limesticks	17	18	33	15	-	<b>13</b>
-Active trapping sites with nets	39	20	37	16	-	<b>21</b>
-Active trapping sites with both / unknown	0	0	0	1	-	<b>1</b>
Percentage of sites found active	63.6%	46.9%	47.3%	21.2%	-	<b>22.3%</b>

\* CABS & SPA Winter 2020/2021 Bird Protection Camp was not carried out due to Covid restrictions

### 2.2. TRAPPING IN THE ESBA

In winter 2021/22 the CABS team was small and therefore concentrated on the illegalities in the Republic of Cyprus and could only occasionally investigate the situation within the British territory, providing a more limited representation of the overall situation. In winter 2021/22 in the ESBA, CABS activists found **6** trapping sites active, the majority being with nets. In total **14** nets and **2** limesticks were located, of which 12 nets were seized during police investigations.

**Table 3: Results of trapping investigations during Winter CABS & SPA Bird Protection Camps (2016/17 – 2021/22) in the ESBA**

<b>CABS &amp; SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp</b>	<b>2016/ 2017</b>	<b>2017/ 2018</b>	<b>2018/ 2019</b>	<b>2019/ 2020</b>	<b>2020/ 2021</b>	<b>2021/ 2022</b>
Trapping sites inspected	132	44	40	39	-	13
Total active sites	125	37	35	7	-	6
-Active trapping sites with limesticks	1	0	4	1	-	1
-Active trapping sites with nets	124	37	31	6	-	5
-Active trapping sites with both/ unknown	0	0	0	0	-	0



**Photo 1: CABS activist freeing a song thrush caught in a net found during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021/22 in Cyprus**

### 3. EVALUATION OF THE ENFORCEMENT

#### 3.1. ENFORCEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

In the Republic of Cyprus, CABS teams report their findings to the wardens of the Game and Fauna Service. If and when wardens are unavailable, reports are made to the local police stations.

Out of the **20** reported cases of illegal trapping, the good response of the wardens led to **7** prosecutions and **2** confiscations, whereas **2** operations failed. For the other 10 cases, no patrol was available. It is important to highlight the disparity of availability of patrols in different parts of the day. Cases with nets, a method used mainly in the night in winter, ended with the prosecution of only 3 out of 15 reported cases. Cases with limesticks, which are set and reported during the day, are instead usually investigated quickly by the wardens and 4 out of 5 cases ended with a successful prosecution.

In a total of **7** cases and in the absence of game wardens, the activists asked for the support of the local police, with a positive response in **4** cases (1 prosecution and 3 confiscation) and a negative response in **3** (non-availability).

**Table 4: Quality of the responses of Game and Fauna Service and Cyprus Police to reported cases of trapping**

Action	Game wardens	Police
Prosecutions	7	1
Patrol non available	10*	3
Operation failed	1	0
Only confiscation	2	3
TOTAL REPORTED CASES	20	7

\* 8 of 10 are cases of night trapping with nets. Patrols may be available in the morning, after trapping ended



**Photo 2: Trapping site with two set nets found during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021/2022 in Cyprus (Photo: CABS).**

### 3.2. ENFORCEMENT IN THE ESBA

In the ESBA, CABS activists reported **4** trapping cases to the special unit of the police. The patrol was always available but the investigations led to only **one** prosecution and **one** confiscation, whereas **2** operations failed.

**Table 5: Quality of the responses of ESBA police to reported cases of trapping**

Action	ESBA police
Prosecutions	1
Patrol non available	0
Operation failed	2
Only confiscation	1
TOTAL REPORTED CASES	4



**Photo 3: CABS activist showing a site with illegal hunting activity to SBA Police officers during Winter CABS & SPA Bird Protection Camp 2021/22 in Cyprus (Photo: CABS)**

## 4. ILLEGAL HUNTING

In winter the main illegalities related to hunting with the use of electronic callers to attract song thrushes and skylarks, and shooting activity in areas where hunting is not allowed. The use of electronic devices in particular is widespread, including weeks with a lower presence of thrushes. During spot checks, CABS teams recorded **114** cases of illegal hunting, of which **83** could be directly reported to the authorities. The investigations and reports of CABS teams and the successful cooperation with the enforcement bodies, led to the prosecution of **23 illegal hunters**, the highest number of prosecutions compared to previous winters. During the operations **29** electronic callers were seized.

**Table 6: Illegal hunting activity recorded at CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camps 2017/18-2021/22 in Cyprus**

<b>CABS &amp; SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp</b>	<b>2017/ 2018</b>	<b>2018/ 2019</b>	<b>2019/ 2020</b>	<b>2020/ 2021</b>	<b>2021/ 2022</b>
Total cases of illegal hunting recorded	28	25	88	-	114
<i>-cases of hunting with illegal electronic caller for song thrush</i>	25	18	83	-	106
<i>-cases of hunting with illegal electronic caller for skylark</i>	1	3	4	-	2
<i>-cases of hunting in prohibited areas</i>	0	3	1	-	5*
<i>-cases of hunting with other illegalities</i>	2	1	0	-	1
Cases of illegal hunting reported	25	18	75	-	83
Prosecutions	2	0	11	-	23
Illegal callers seized	7	1	15	-	29
Percentage of cases prosecuted out of reported	8%	0%	14.7%	-	27.7%

\* 2 out of 5 in protected areas with forbidden electronic caller for song thrushes

**Table 7: Cases of illegal hunting reported to and investigated by enforcement agencies during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021/22**

	<b>Game and Fauna Service</b>	<b>Cyprus Police</b>	<b>SBA Police</b>	<b>All</b>
Cases of illegal hunting reported to the authorities	64	3	16	83
Investigated cases of illegal hunting	40	3	11	54
Percentage of cases investigated	62.5%	100%	68.8%	65.1%
Prosecutions	15	2	6	23
Success rate (percentage of prosecutions out of reported cases)	23.4%	66.7%	37.5%	27.7%



**Photo 4: SBA Police officer with electronic caller seized during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021/2022 in Cyprus (Photo: CABS)**



## 5. VIOLENCE OF PROFESSIONAL TRAPPERS. THE “AKAS” CASE

### TIMELINE OF A DANGEROUS CLASH WITH a NOTORIOUS TRAPPING GANG

24/12/2021

01:00 - CABS team has located a big trapping installation with 6 set nets and a loud electronic caller near Zygi in Larnaca District. As Game and Fauna Service officers were not available at 01:00, the team went to Zygi Police station and reported the active trapping site. Police patrol was available and they went together to the active trapping site.

01:30 - CABS activists and police officers arrived together to the trapping site. The activists spotted a trapper with a face mask by one of set nets. When spotted, the trapper ran away while CABS activists followed him.

02:00 - Police officer caught up with the activists and the masked trapper they were pursuing, and the officer ordered the trapper to stop. The trapper disobeyed the order and went to the nearby parking lot where a person was waiting for him. We have immediately recognized that person as the leader of the notorious trapping gang from Maroni. Gang leader grabbed the police officer and shook him violently. Then he punched one of the CABS activists and threatened the others. Then he left together with masked trapper in his car. They went to the trapping site, where the masked trapper went into the car parked by the nets and they both left, each in his own car.



**Photo 5: Notorious trapper holding and threatening police officer in Zygi on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December (Photo: CABS)**

03:00 - Police officers and CABS activists rescued the birds caught in the nets at the trapping site and seized 6 nets and 2 electronic callers. The trapping paraphernalia was brought to police station in Zygi and the activists give their statements.

Later that day both persons involved in the incident were identified and called to the police station. The masked trapper was charged for trapping while the gang leader was charged for assault on CABS activist<sup>1</sup>.

08/01/2022

A video of the incident that occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December was published online. The video is showing the aggression of a trapping gang leader towards police officer and CABS activists.

09/01/2022

CABS car is damaged by an explosive device which was placed on a windshield of the car where it exploded.<sup>2</sup>

The person who set the explosive device could not be identified by the police. Though suspects fall on the gang of Maroni, as the incident occurred only the day after the publishing of the video of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December and as in that occasion CABS activists were indeed threatened with death.



**Photo 6: CABS & SPA car damaged by an explosive device placed on windshield (Photo: CABS)**

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1 <https://www.komitee.de/de/aktuelles/presse-meldungen/2021/notorious-bird-trapper-man-handles-police-officer-and-assaults-cabs-member/>

2 <https://www.komitee.de/de/aktuelles/presse-meldungen/2022/bird-protection-volunteers-car-severely-damaged-by-illegal-pyrotechnic-device-cabs/>

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

During CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021-22, the activists assisted the enforcement officers in the process of identifying and catching the illegal trappers and hunters in all **32** reported cases that ended with a prosecution. 32 is the highest number of prosecutions achieved during a winter camp and is a sign of the good cooperation with the enforcement bodies both in the ESBA and in the Republic of Cyprus.

Analyzing the yearly data can give some indication of the poaching trend, but the situation is complex as the presence of target birds is not regular on the island in winter but depends on the weather on the mainland. The findings indicate clearly though that the main method used especially by professional trappers is the net. Nets are set out in the night and birds attracted with electronic callers; before sunlight the installations are dismantled and caught birds killed. The possibility to address the poaching problem, as well as the safety of international volunteers, is therefore heavily dependent on the availability of enforcement patrols in the night, which is minimal. While there is no regular nighttime patrol available in the Republic of Cyprus, trappers are free to massacre wintering song thrush and other species caught as bycatch such as owls.

In recent years CABS teams have given greater attention to illegal hunting as it increasingly appears to be common and widespread. The use of illegal electronic callers in particular has long been tolerated by the authorities in the whole south-east of the island and the situation is out of control: on every hunting day it is possible to hear dozens of callers. Despite the challenges, CABS efforts and the cooperation with game wardens and SBA police continues to be successful, with increasing prosecutions every year.



**Photo 7: CABS activist with a barn owl rescued from a net found during CABS & SPA Winter Bird Protection Camp 2021/2022 in Cyprus**