



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

Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt®
Foundation Pro Biodiversity

Field Report:

Autumn 2012

Bird Protection Camp Republic of Cyprus

26 September – 12 October 2012



Photo 1: Trapped Blackcaps in mist nets, Frenaros, Famagusta, Autumn 2012 Bird Protection Camp

Bonn / Bielefeld, Germany: Tuesday, 26 March 2013

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1. Introduction

The *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) – Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.* in German and *Επιτροπή Ενάντια στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών* in Greek – has conducted bird protection camps in the poaching hotspots of the Mediterranean region for more than 20 years. Currently, CABS is actively engaged in anti-poaching operations in many member states of the European Union (EU), in particular Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Malta and lately Cyprus. On Cyprus, CABS has been active on a small scale since 2001; but regular bird protection camps began in spring 2008.

Bird Protection Camps (BPCs – Περιοδείες Προστασίας Πουλιών in Greek) are major field surveys and anti-poaching campaigns organised during the two annual bird migration seasons with two main objectives:

- Collection of data in order to evaluate the true impact of the massive use of non-selective bird trapping and killing methods (hereinafter referred to as bird trapping) – such as limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys – on wild bird populations;
- Locating and reporting as many as possible illegal bird trapping installations to the responsible law enforcement agencies, in order to arrest poachers red-handed, confiscate trapping paraphernalia and ensure a safe passage on migration for birds.

BPCs are conducted with the full knowledge of and in close cooperation with all responsible public authorities and law enforcement agencies.

Trapping with limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys on Cyprus is widespread and blatant, which characterises the island as one the major hotspots for songbird trapping, killing and trading in the whole of Europe. Due to its location in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean, Cyprus is a crossroad between three continents and the island hosts millions of migrant birds during spring and autumn migration (see Map 1). Several hundreds of thousands of those birds are harvested annually by trappers using illegal and non-selective traps on a massive scale.



**Trapped Common Redstart on limestick,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



**Trapped Tree Pipit on limestick,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



Trapped Red-backed Shrike (juvenile) on limestick, Paralimni, Famagusta



Dead Kingfisher in mist net, Ayios Theodoros, Larnaca

Photos 2-5: Trapped and dead birds on limesticks and in mist nets. Autumn 2011 Bird Protection Camp



Map 1: Migratory routes of some wild bird species.

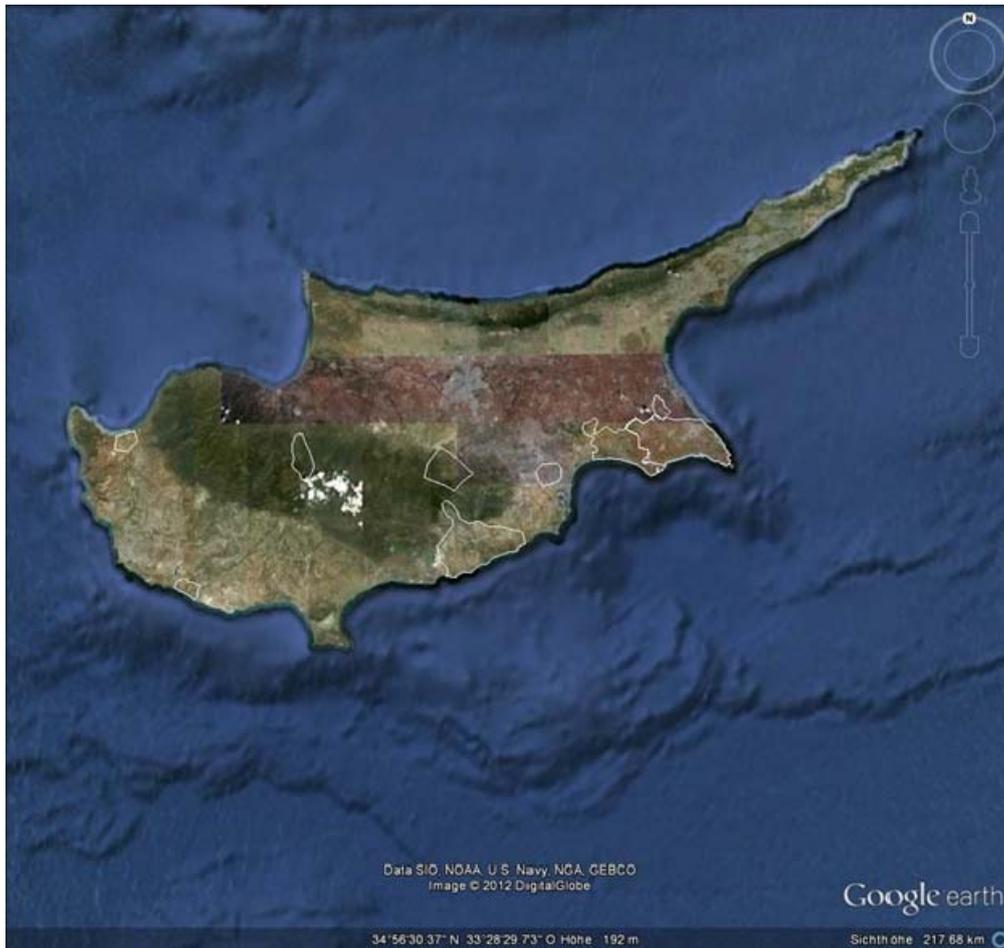
Source: Louis Kourtellarides (1997). *Breeding Birds of Cyprus*. Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Group & BirdLife Cyprus, p.23.

2. Background

Although Cyprus is considered a “*biodiversity hotspot area*” with a “*particularly rich bird fauna*”, almost one third (122/385) of the bird species found on the island are, to a lesser or greater extent, affected by the massive use of illegal and non-selective trapping and killing methods, such as limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys. Moreover, the population of more than half of the species affected is in decline to a lesser or greater extent (64/122), while many species also have a non-favourable conservation status (34/64). Apart from birds, trapping with limesticks affects several reptile species as well, not least three species of lizards and one snake species. [1]

According to both governmental and non-governmental data, there are five major bird trapping hotspots on Cyprus. [2] These are listed in Tab. 1 below:

Trapping hotspots	Trapping area	Trapping seasons	Prevalent trapping methods
1	Famagusta District (Xylophagou, Liopetri, Sotira, Ayia Napa and Cape Greco area, Paralimni and Protaras area, Deryneia, Frenaros, Vrysoules, Dasaki Achnas and Avgorou)	Spring, autumn and winter	Limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys
2	British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) in Dhekelia (Cape Pyla, Xylophagou, Xylotymbou, Ormideia, Pyla, Achna and Ayios Nikolaos)	Spring, autumn and winter	Mist nets and electronic decoys
3	South-west Larnaca District (Zygi, Maroni, Psematismenos, Kalavastos, Tochni, Choirokitia, Kato and Pano Lefkara, Skarinou, Ayios Theodoros, Kofinou, Alaminos, Anafotia and Mazotos)	Spring, autumn and winter	Limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys
4	South-west Larnaca town (Meneou, Kiti and Pervolia)	Autumn	Limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys
5	Other isolated areas (Aradipou in Larnaca district, Kakopetria and Lythrodontas in Nicosia district, Polis Chrysochous and Kouklia in Paphos district)	Autumn	Limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoys



Map 2: Bird trapping hotspots (boundaries in white) on Cyprus

With the accession of Cyprus to the EU in 2004, the Cypriot Government pledged its commitment to tackle bird poaching, in order to ensure effective protection of wild birds, in accordance with both existing national legislation [N.51(I)/2003] [3], and the EU Birds Directive [2009/147/EC (codified version of 79/409/ECC)] [4]. As BirdLife Cyprus observes, “bird trapping in Cyprus became illegal in 1974, when legislation of hunting was introduced with Law 39/74, when a number of bird species were listed as protected, including water birds, birds of prey, endemic species, such as the Cyprus wheatear and the Cyprus warbler. In accordance with this law, the game species were the hare, the chukar and the black francolin and non-selective methods, such as mist nets, limesticks and traps were prohibited. Moreover, in 1988 Cyprus ratified the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, enlisting more bird species as protected, including also the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) for the first time. Blackcaps are the main target species of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and with this important legislative amendment blackcaps obtained a protected species status in Cyprus, in addition to the previous prohibition for the use of non-selective methods for the killing of birds”. [5] Nevertheless, after an initial decline, song bird poaching has subsequently increased continuously and has now reached levels that are comparable to the situation prior to accession. Although the responsible authorities make a considerable effort to combat illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing, the situation is still largely out of control. [6]

Illegal song bird poaching attracts support from some elements of the population in the trapping hotspot areas, and from a small number of politicians, mainly Mayors and Members of Parliament (MPs) from Famagusta and Larnaca districts, as well as representatives of the Cyprus Hunting Federation (again mostly from Famagusta and Larnaca districts). In addition, there is a non-

registered and non-recognised “pressure group” that supports the legalisation of non-selective bird trapping and killing methods, in particular limesticks and electronic decoys (the so-called “Friends of Limesticks” or “Group for Reclaiming the Traditional Hunting with Limesticks”). [7]

This support encourages the trappers, lends them a sense of security, and they therefore do not hesitate to set their traps not only on private property, but also on public land. They maintain that they have a traditional right to trap wild birds and behave very aggressively towards anyone who tries to prevent them doing so. The current level of fines is no real deterrent, because of the huge profits to be made from sale of the birds to restaurants and butchers’ shops. Trappers in some areas (Trapping Hotspots 1, 2 and 3) are now organised on mafia-like lines. [8]



Limestick factory in the National Park of Cape Greco, Famagusta



Set limesticks in a pruned tree in an orchard in the National Park of Cape Greco, Famagusta



Set limesticks in maquis area in Paralimni, Famagusta



Set limesticks in Acacia salina in Ayios Theodoros, Larnaca



Dead Bee-eater and Tawny Owl on limestick in Sotira, Famagusta



A pair of trapped Bee-eaters on limesticks in the Cape Greco National Park, Famagusta



**Trapped Bee-eater on limestick,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



**Trapped Blackcap on limestick,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



**Police officers and volunteers collecting
limesticks in Ayios Theodoros, Larnaca**



**Volunteers patrolling in the
Cape Greco National Park, Famagusta**



**Electronic decoys (tape recorder, car battery and sound machine) hidden in boxes in unfenced orchards,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



**Electronic decoy (MP3) hidden in maquis area,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



**Electronic decoy (MP3) hidden in Acacia salina,
Paralimni, Famagusta**



Set mist net, placed between two metal poles, Cape Pyla, British ESBA



Trapped Blackcap in mist net, Paralimni, Famagusta



Graveyards of wild birds on public land, Paralimni, Famagusta



Photos 6-23: Exposing bird trapping and killing fields in Cyprus. Autumn 2010 Bird Protection Camp



Dead birds, ready for sale in butchers shops and restaurants, Paralimni, Famagusta



Restaurant advertising bird delicacies, Ayios Theodoros, Larnaca



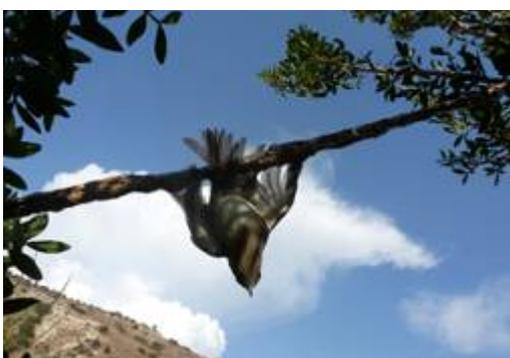
Restaurant serving bird delicacies, Paralimni, Famagusta

Photos 24-27: Exposing bird trading restaurants in Cyprus. Spring 2009 and Spring 2011 Bird Protection Camps

3. Bird trapping in autumn

According to data collated by both governmental authorities and environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 75% of bird trapping in autumn takes place in the Famagusta District, the British ESBA in Dhekelia and the south-west of Larnaca District (Trapping Hotspots 1, 2 and 3), while 25% takes place in the rest of the island, mostly in the south-west of Larnaca town and a few other isolated areas (Trapping Hotspots 4 and 5).

The season starts in mid-August and reaches its peak between the last week of September and the second week of October, slowly decreasing until the end of October. Targeted species are warblers of the genus “*Sylvia*” (known locally as “*ambelopoulia*”), the preferred target being the Blackcap, [9] as well as flycatchers, redstarts and nightingales. Later, in November and December, the targeted species are mainly thrushes of the genus “*Turdus*” (known locally as “*tzikles*”) and particularly the Song Thrush, [10] as well as robins and sparrows.



Trapped Blackcap on limestick,
Ayios Theodoros, Larnaca



Trapped Song Thrush in mist net,
Xylophagou - Ormideia, British ESBA in Dhekelia

Photo 28-29: Targeted species of illegal bird trapping – Autumn 2011 and Autumn 2012 Bird Protection Camps

4. CABS anti-poaching strategy

From 26th of September to 12th of October 2012, CABS in cooperation with the *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA) – Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt* in German and *Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας* in Greek – conducted its third Autumn BPC in the Republic of Cyprus and on the territory of the ESBA. As stated above (Chapter 1), the aim of these operations is to tackle illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing, primarily by helping the responsible law enforcement agencies to catch red-handed and prosecute bird trappers, and additionally by dismantling trapping paraphernalia and releasing trapped birds.

The results of the Autumn 2012 BPC were extremely interesting: thanks to the daily nine hour joint operations with the *Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) – Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας (ΚΠΛ)* in Greek – of the Cyprus Police *Emergency Response Unit (ERU) – Μηχανοκίνητη Ομάδα Άμεσης Δράσης (ΜΜΑΔ)* in Greek. The responsible law enforcement agencies succeeded in prosecuting 13 trappers as well as dismantling 4,503 limesticks, 100 mist nets and 64 electronic decoys. These results are considered a first but significant step towards stamping out illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing on Cyprus, especially during the major autumn bird migration season.

Autumn bird trapping in Cyprus is in full swing in September and October. Trappers are active in almost every corner of the island, not only in the Eastern Famagusta area, but also in the districts of Larnaca, Paphos and Nicosia. Bird trapping is particularly serious within the territory of the ESBA. The rate of autumn trapping cannot be compared with spring trapping, although spring trapping affects breeding birds: many more trappers are active in autumn, often organized in local gangs who guard their trapping territory in day and night shifts. In autumn trapping is also more professional with the aim of selling birds to restaurants. In addition, more people, mostly hunters and peasants, regularly trap birds for self consumption.

Due to the high risk of physical aggression and the almost complete control of the territory by trappers during the autumn trapping season, CABS volunteers could not effectively monitor illegal bird trapping during the last two autumn camps. The activities were confined to safer areas and oriented to disturb trapping more than to curb it and volunteers spent more time mapping trapping areas for future operations. In 2012, the joint operations with the APS enabled a different procedure to be employed and the information recorded in the previous years was passed to the APS to optimize their work.

In the following chapters, we present and analyse the temporal and spatial patterns of bird trapping detected in autumn 2012, our data and results, as well as highlighting a number of critical aspects and presenting our policy recommendations.

5. Autumn 2012 bird protection camp data and results

5.1. Participants: A total of 13 volunteers, from Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom participated in the camp. Of these, 11 had previously participated in CABS or *Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus* (MBCC) BPCs in Cyprus and had good knowledge of the area and of the problem. Teams of 3-5 were formed enabling 2-3 teams per day to be deployed.

5.2. Working schedule: This BPC, lasting 15 working days, was the longest field survey and anti-poaching campaign conducted on Cyprus during the bird migration season in autumn by CABS. Volunteers began work at 1.00 a.m. to locate electronic decoys and trapping paraphernalia for the APS – in particular limesticks, mist nets and electronic decoy. Rendezvous with the police officers took place at 5.00 a.m., when trappers start their activity and which therefore offers the best chance to catch them red-handed. Joint operations ended between 2.00 and 3.00 p.m.

5.3. Sites controlled: Over the past five years CABS has located and listed 492 trapping sites (83 new trapping sites were located during the Autumn 2012 BPC), mainly located between Cape Greco and Aradipou, with some 30 sites in the area of Ayios Theodoros and Maroni. During the 15 days of the camp, the teams were able to monitor 215 sites (44%). Many particularly important sites were checked more than once on different dates and times of day.

Of the 215 sites checked only 2 were obviously abandoned (less than 1%), 70 (32.5%) were inactive during the check but were still suitable for trapping, 137 (64%) had traps set or electronic decoys running and 7 (3%) had been in use a short time before with left-over limesticks, electronic decoys or fresh feathers on the ground. On average the two teams located 9.6 active trapping sites per day. This rate could have been much higher, but delays caused by the APS evidential and prosecution procedures often resulted in the loss of 3 to 6 working hours per day (see Chapter 11 – Paragraph 1).

5.4. Results: In the 144 active trapping sites, the responsible law enforcement agencies were able to dismantle 4,503 limesticks, 100 mist nets and 64 electronic decoys. An additional 52 mist nets and 46 electronic decoys were left on site by CABS volunteers, but were not subsequently found active when checked together with the responsible law enforcement agencies.

Tab. 2 shows the results of collected trapping paraphernalia during all the BPCs organized by CABS over the past five years on Cyprus. *The increasing numbers of traps recorded does not reflect an increase in trapping, but is due to the more extensive knowledge and coverage of the territory by CABS teams, as well as highlighting the importance – both in terms of security and effectiveness – of our closer cooperation with the responsible law enforcement agencies.*

Table 2: Findings of Bird Protection Camps on Cyprus: Spring 2008 – Autumn 2012				
Bird Protection Camp	Limesticks	Mist nets	Electronic decoys	Prosecuted trappers
Spring 2008	227	12	4	2
Spring 2009	2,136	33	15	1
Spring 2010	1,977	9	12	2
Autumn 2010	934	11	9	0
Spring 2011	3,353	15	12	2
Autumn 2011	4,014	21	24	1
Spring 2012	4,439	15	12	14
Autumn 2012	4,503	100	64	13
Total	21,493	216	152	35



APS officers confiscating mist nets and releasing birds, Frenaros, Famagusta



CABS volunteers and APS officers releasing birds, Paralimni, Famagusta

Photos 30-31: Stamping-out song bird poaching on Cyprus. Spring and Autumn 2012 Bird Protection Camps

Tab. 3 shows in detail all findings of the Autumn 2012 BPC, including not only confiscated trapping paraphernalia, but also trapping equipment that had been removed by poachers after the trapping

sites were located by CABS volunteers, and before being raided by the responsible law enforcement agencies.

**Table 3:
Findings of Autumn 2012 Bird Protection Camp (27 September – 11 October)**

Republic of Cyprus			
Trapping equipment	Confiscated	Removed	Total
Limesticks	4,449 (99.42%)	26 (0.58%)	4,475
Mist nets	68 (93.15%)	5 (6.85%)	73
Decoys	44 (57.9%)	32 (42.1%)	76
Snap traps	1 (100%)	-	1
Cages with birds	2 with 30 (100%)	-	2 with 30
British Eastern Sovereign Base Area			
Trapping equipment	Confiscated	Removed	Total
Limesticks	54 (100%)	-	54
Mist nets	32 (40.5%)	47 (59.5%)	79
Decoys	20 (58.82%)	14 (41.18%)	34
United Nations Buffer Zone			
Trapping equipment	Confiscated	Removed	Total
Limesticks	-	-	-
Mist nets	-	-	-
Decoys	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2
Overall Results			
Trapping equipment	Confiscated	Removed	Total
Limesticks	4,503 (99.42%)	26 (0.58%)	4,529
Mist nets	100 (65.79%)	52 (34.21%)	152
Decoys	64 (58.18%)	46 (41.82%)	110
Snap traps	1 (100%)	-	1
Cages with birds	2 with 30 (100%)	-	2 with 30

6. Overview of bird trapping on Cyprus

Trapping in autumn is extremely widespread in Cyprus, both on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and in the ESBA. When moving in the countryside, signs of illegal bird poaching activities are blatant everywhere, on public land, in maquis areas, acacia plantations and private orchards, as well in gardens or on single isolated trees. Areas not considered suitable for limestick trapping, with only a couple of bushes, were used to set out mist nets and electronic decoys. People without their own orchard set limesticks on public land and even within state forests, national parks and protected areas. It is evident to anyone with eyes in their head that almost all countryside dwellers and residents of certain villages – whether hunters, farmers or village residents – are involved in the amateur or professional trapping of song birds during pre-nuptial migration.



Map 3: The CABS database with some 500 mapped trapping sites

6.1. Geographical trapping patterns: Trapping is carried out over virtually the whole of the Republic; in spring trapping with limesticks is heavily concentrated in Famagusta District. In autumn, the major trapping hotspot is the ESBA, in particular the south-western part of the area between Cape Pyla, Xylophagou, Xylymbou, Ormideia and Pyla, as well as the north-eastern area between Achna and Ayios Nikolaos. The territory of the ESBA hosts the greatest density of trapping installations including those with the largest quantity of trapping paraphernalia (up to 10-15 mist nets per site). The second most affected area is Famagusta District, including the communities and municipalities of Xylophagou, Liopetri, Sotira, Ayia Napa and Cape Greco area, Paralimni and Protaras area, Deryneia, Frenaros, Vrysoules, Dasaki Achnas and Avgorou. In addition large numbers of limesticks and mist nets are to be found in the valley of Ayios Theodoros and Maroni. We have no precise information for the autumn season, but bird trapping on a significant scale almost certainly takes place in Paphos District (mostly Kouklia and Polis Chrysochous) and Nicosia District (mostly Kakopetria in late autumn).

6.2. Trapping paraphernalia: The use of mist nets is preferred to limesticks, which are sometimes used to supplement the nets, and is widespread across the Republic. Limestick installations outnumber mist nets only in the valley between Ayios Theodoros and Maroni, as well as the triangle area between Sotira, Paralimni and Ayia Napa. Most noticeable in autumn is the wide scale use of electronic decoys, activated at midnight and left running until dawn. In the night, the density of blackcap callers exposes the concentration of bird trapping installations. The scale of the problem can be understood from the following example. In spring 2012, during a random night drive, it was possible to locate 1-2 tape lures. In autumn 2012, in the same area and at the same hour, it was possible to locate 15-20 electronic decoys. The use of audio devices to lure birds into trapping sites enhances significantly the effectiveness of morning trapping. Electronic decoys are also used commonly in spring, but only in the Famagusta District and in the morning hours in conjunction with limesticks, and nowadays rarely at night.

6.3. Trapping time patterns: In autumn, bird trapping takes place mainly in the early morning hours. This autumn we also have evidence of trappers collecting birds during the night. In a single net with an electronic decoy, 36 freshly trapped birds were found at 2.30 a.m. Later in the night we observed trappers killing birds caught in a second net. The presence of vehicles with sleeping trappers parked next to the sites indicates not only that the trapper is guarding his trapping site, but also that he retrieves the birds during the night so that more can be caught.

But the first morning hours are above all a 'must' for every trapper. The majority of birds are caught and killed between 5.30 and 7.00 a.m. and the mist nets are then dismantled. Limesticks must be left out longer, which is why it is easier to find them during the day. During the day both mist nets and limesticks are only normally left set out in fenced-in gardens.

As in spring, trappers do not trap every day in autumn, but many leave their installations prepared – sometimes even with electronic decoys calling – and return to trap randomly in line with their working hours, general availability and the intensity of migration. At weekends it is easier to find more active trapping installations than during the week.

6.4. Comparison with spring trapping: In 2012, for the first time during an autumn season, we were able to observe the extent of trapping in September and October. No reliable analysis can be made at this early stage in our investigations on the trend of autumn trapping over the years. Nevertheless, during the night and early morning hours, our two teams covered the whole area between Cape Greco west to Aradipou and observed the different degree of intensity of trapping within this area. The similarities and differences between spring and autumn trapping are underlined below.

- a) In autumn the size of the area where trapping is carried out is some 11 times greater than in spring (some 620 km² in autumn compared with some 56 km² in spring);
- b) the use of mist nets, rare in spring, is on a massive scale in autumn and permits rapid and effective catches;
- c) the massive use of electronic decoys is widespread throughout the whole area and particularly blatant at night;
- d) in Famagusta District, trapping hotspots combine mist nets with limesticks, whereas in spring only limesticks are used;
- e) professional bird trappers, often organised in local criminal gangs, are active and guard the trapping areas during the night.

7. Density of trapping and the reaction of trappers to disturbance and / or prosecution

7.1. Trapping in the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA): A decision was made to monitor trapping within the ESBA in autumn for the first time. Regular contact with the ESBA Administration and Police has been maintained over the past five years and the occasional joint operation was conducted. No prosecution resulted from these operations but trapping activity was disrupted as a result of the location and confiscation of trapping paraphernalia in cooperation with the ESBA Police.

According to our observations, trapping in the ESBA is irregular in spring, but increases massively in autumn, mainly in the south of the ESBA. Cape Pyla and its northern border have the highest concentration of active mist netting sites in the whole island. [11]

Since our planning meeting arranged with the ESBA Police had to be shifted from the first to the second week of the camp, we decided to monitor the ESBA at night without police escort, which had been our practice to date. The APS – who escorted us in territory of the Republic of Cyprus – is not allowed to act within the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Dhekelia and Akrotiri.

One team went out for three nights (30.9 – 02.10 – 03.10.2012) with the task of dismantling trapping paraphernalia in public or non-fenced lands (e.g. maquis areas and acacia plantations), whereas those in fenced-in properties and private gardens were left for further prosecution by the ESBA Police.

Some 35 active trapping sites were located (about 12 per night), always in very small rectangular areas. The density of electronic decoys was astonishing and confusing to the ear. In the southern part of the ESBA, and at almost every point that the team stopped the car, more than three electronic decoys could be heard calling from the surrounding areas. Trappers were out at night, patrolling the trapping sites with the cars parked in situ. Because of the potential danger of the situation, the team was only able to dismantle 54 limesticks, 32 mist nets and 20 electronic decoys on public or non-fenced land. An additional 14 electronic decoys, with at least 47 more mist nets, were left in place for further prosecution by the ESBA Police. In the ESBA, in only three nights, we located 52% of all mist nets found on the island during our camp.

The maps below show the density of mist netting in the most affected areas located by our teams within the ESBA:



Map 4:

Trapping sites located in the area East of Ormideia. In these 7 sites, 6 electronic decoys were located. In the 4 accessible trapping sites, CABS volunteers located 10 prepared net rides, 3 set mist nets and 54 limesticks.



Map 5:

Trapping sites located in the area between Xylophagou and Ormideia. In these 5 trapping sites, CABS volunteers located 9 electronic decoys with almost 20 loudspeakers, 24 set mist nets plus 13 prepared but inactive net rides.



Map 6:

Trapping sites in Cape Pyla. This density is even higher in Cape Pyla as a whole.

We located the sites due to the use of electronic decoys. Within each plot, 2 to 6 net rides were visible.

Because of confrontations with trappers during night operations (see Chapter 8 – Paragraphs 1-2), CABS operations were interrupted in the territory of the ESBA and the ESBA Police asked us not to operate in the area for the rest of the camp. Further monitoring in the northern part of the ESBA was therefore suspended.

Our conclusions after the first intensive research in the ESBA are the following:

- a) During autumn, the ESBA hosts the highest density recorded to date of active mist netting sites, concentrated in Cape Pyla and its northern border;
- b) huge trapping sites are located only a few metres from the main roads and can be easily detected from a vehicle on the highway;
- c) in small and medium-sized trapping sites, trappers leave mist nets set throughout the night with electronic decoys calling demonstrating a feeling of complete impunity;
- d) mist nets are also set out in some big trapping sites (six nets and more), but trappers watch over and patrol such areas. They do not hesitate to attack anyone approaching the site;
- e) trapping sites were found where mist nets were left out for 24 hours and electronic decoys were playing not only at night, but also during the morning and afternoon.

7.2. Trapping in the Republic of Cyprus: Most of the time our teams were deployed in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, particularly in the Famagusta and Larnaca districts. As explained above, the density of limesticks trapping sites decreased in Famagusta from east to west, whereas the density of mist netting sites increased westwards. In the Larnaca area, both limesticks and mist nets were present. In the area around Liopetri and Avgorou, the density of mist netting sites was at its highest; every team was able to locate 5-7 trapping sites every night. Nonetheless, it cannot be compared to the far worse situation the ESBA.

The attitude of trappers was also different. The deterrent effect of a law enforcement agency can be measured in terms of the criminals' reaction to any form of control. On the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, we witnessed in many cases a defensive attitude by trappers on many occasions, demonstrating their fear of being caught red-handed or having their equipment confiscated. This is evident from the following typical examples:

- a) When the police approach a trapping site, the trapper runs away, abandoning all his trapping paraphernalia;
- b) after a trapping site is raided, it is usually not reactivated for at least a couple of weeks;
- c) in order to avoid detection and prosecution, trappers restrict their trapping hours to the optimal catch times in the early morning;
- d) trappers are often on site at night in order to switch off the electronic decoys when a vehicle approaches the area;
- e) to avoid seizure of mist nets and limesticks by the police during the night, they are rarely left out in open areas at night.

Trappers have clearly already learnt to fear prosecution by the Game Fund (GF) – *Ταμείο Θήρας* in Greek – and most particularly the APS, and react accordingly. In our “*Field Report Spring 2012 Bird Protection Camp*”, we observed that this power of deterrence is progressively watered down if local police officers simply issue a warning to trappers and abstain from prosecution. [12]

7.3. Conclusions: Illegal bird trapping in autumn is out of control in both the Republic of Cyprus and in the ESBA. It is impossible to effectively deter and/or control the hundreds of active trappers with only six to eight law enforcement patrols for the whole island, consisting of one for each district (Nicosia, Larnaca, Famagusta, Paphos and Limassol), plus the territory adjacent to the United Nations Buffer Zone (UNBF), as well as the two British SBAs of Dhekelia and Akrotiri.

Nonetheless, in our view, the Republic of Cyprus has taken some important steps forward in clamping down on illegal bird trapping on its territory. Trappers have reduced their hours of activity to avoid detection and are of late noticeably apprehensive and alarmed. This suggests that the small but steady numbers of prosecutions made in the past few years are having some effect, and that the presence of the APS and the GF provides a degree of deterrence. If more patrols and raids are conducted by the responsible law enforcement agencies dedicated to the stamping-out of poaching, it is realistic to believe that bird trapping can be effectively and permanently dealt with.

In the ESBA, the situation is much more serious and problematic. Trappers comment that having a plot of land in the ESBA is a “blessing for bird trapping”. The ESBA Police strategy is still far from effective in combating the high density of seasonal trapping. The simple fact that trapping sites can be located from the main road, that mist nets are set out all night and often all day long, that trappers are not afraid to attack anyone coming close to their trapping site, proves that trappers feel a great sense of security. There is not a single place in the ESBA where one can stop the car at night in autumn without hearing at least one electronic decoy calling. The seriousness of the situation is obvious to anyone who drives in the night through the ESBA.

The reasons for the extremely high concentration of trappers using mist nets in the ESBA are historical and manifold and have been addressed in previous reports. It is however clear from the extent of illegal trapping that the British authorities need to thoroughly review their strategies. Trapping is seasonal and the peaks are relatively easy to forecast. Locating of trapping sites, either by visual or aural means, is not difficult. Removal of trapping paraphernalia, if done regularly at

short intervals in season, is an important part of dealing with the problem; but it must be complemented by the only effective and sustainable deterrent – arrest and prosecution. The consistent short, sharp shock effect is required on a wide scale and at the height of the season. Some comments on the current strategy and procedures are discussed below:

- a) The allocation of only one or at most two police patrols (two to four police officers in total respectively) to tackle bird trapping displays a lack of priority and under-allocation of resources in respect of this severe social and environmental crime. [13]
- b) The ESBA Police no longer dismantle or disarm trapping sites where mist nets are not set (poles are not bent to render them useless) although this is a minor but effective method of disrupting trapping activity. This form of trapping site temporary neutralisation for obvious but inactive sites is a tactic used where applicable by CABS. If this practice of non-intervention is based on respect for private property it is misplaced and is ‘bending over backwards’ for the trappers. All those involved are quite clear of the illegal (and no plausible other) uses to which this paraphernalia is put. [14]
- c) Huge, professional and well-known trapping sites, reported by environmental NGOs every year, are not raided in good time at the start of the trapping season by the ESBA Police. As a result, some bird trappers may eventually be caught, but not at the peak of the migratory season when a large amount of trapping paraphernalia is in use. [15]
- d) “*Operation Freedom*”, i.e. the large scale collection of hundreds of items of trapping paraphernalia, done in cooperation with the British Army, is conducted either at the end of or late in the Blackcap trapping season (late autumn – early winter) and not at the start of migration or when it is in full swing (early or at least mid-autumn). The reasons for this (from a bird migration point of view) unfortunate timing are unclear. [16]

The trapping problem in the ESBA is large scale and essentially beyond the effective control of the responsible authorities. It is appreciated that the police force has other and important priorities. Nonetheless the extent of trapping presents an unacceptable social, political and environmental problem on a Cyprus, United Kingdom and European level. The impunity with which the trappers continue to break the law is an affront to the rule of law in each of these three instances. The solution can only be based on a threefold strategy: the political will to effectively tackle the problem, considerable seasonal reinforcement of dedicated human resources, and a consistent and effective police action by day and night throughout the trapping season accompanied by deterrent penalties for prosecuted offenders.

7.4. Trapping in the United Nations Buffer Zone: In autumn 2012, CABS initiated contacts with the United Nations (UN), responsible for surveillance in the Buffer Zone (BZ). CABS representatives met with military and police officers from the UN Station at Pyla. During the meeting, CABS explained the problem of trapping and its patterns and geography. The UN officers acknowledged the problem and stated that they have already been active against bird trapping, which is widespread in autumn within the UNBZ. Some offenders have been prosecuted in the past in cooperation with all responsible law enforcement agencies including the GF, the APS and the ESBA Police. Further cooperation is to be developed during future BPCs in autumn.

8. Data analysis of the anti-poaching operations by the law enforcement agencies

In our “*Field Report: Autumn 2011 Bird Protection Camp, 23 September – 2 October 2011*” and on the basis of the official press releases and other data issued by the Cyprus Police, the GF and ESBA Police, we have analysed the effort and strategies employed by the law enforcement agencies to tackle bird trapping in the second half of 2011. [17]

Unfortunately, the Cyprus Police and the GF have not published any systematic data in relation to anti-poaching operations conducted during the second half of 2012. The publishing of systematic data on anti-poaching operations conducted by the law enforcement agencies is considered to be the first and most important step towards developing and encouraging national communication efforts and strategies to promote dialogue and foster debate between relevant stakeholders – most importantly law enforcement agencies and environmental NGOs – and the wider public. In this context, CABS and SPA recommend that the APS and the GF establish systematic monitoring and reporting systems for illegal activities using standardised methods for data collection, on a common reporting format. The publication of data on anti-poaching operations by the APS and the GF will also support a shift of culture towards shared values respectful of nature and promote active stewardship. At the same time, they will streamline law enforcement and raise public awareness on song bird poaching. [18]

Both Republic of Cyprus law enforcement agencies, as well as the ESBA Police, have however provided BirdLife Cyprus with all their data on illegal bird trapping for the months of August, September and October, the main period for bird trapping in Cyprus, for the years 2011 and 2012. Tab. 4 summarises the enforcement data of the three competent authorities:

Table 4: Summary of illegal bird trapping statistics for the months of August, September and October 2011 and 2012 for the competent authorities						
	Game Fund **		Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police ***		British Eastern Sovereign Base Area Police ****	
Year	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012
Number of prosecutions	54	58	Not available	22	23	21
Trappers arrested	57	70	Not available	Non available	23	22
Number of mist nets *	204	311	Not available	116	361	275
Number of limesticks *	2,550	5,372	Not available	4,779	290	314

* The total number includes both trapping paraphernalia (mist nets and limesticks) collected as court evidence when an arrest takes place, as well as confiscation of material without prosecution.

** Data provided by the District Head Officer of Game Fund of the Larnaca & Famagusta District to BirdLife Cyprus (November 2012).

*** Data provided by the Head of the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad to BirdLife Cyprus (November 2012).

**** Data provided by Intelligence Analyst of British ESBA Police to BirdLife Cyprus (November 2012).

Source: BirdLife Cyprus, "Enforcement", in *BirdLife Cyprus Autumn 2012 Monitoring Report: Update on Illegal Bird Trapping Activity in Cyprus – Covering the Autumn 2012 findings of BirdLife Cyprus' continuing monitoring programme of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and providing an overview of the latest developments regarding the problem.* Nicosia, Cyprus: December 2012, pp. 15.

Based on the above data, the following general observations are of interest:

- **Game Fund:** As BirdLife Cyprus rightly observes, "it is clear that more cases have been reported, more trappers have been arrested and a large number of mist nets and limesticks have been confiscated for autumn 2012 compared to autumn 2011. This could be due to increased enforcement effort, increased trapping activity or a combination of both". [19] Moreover, it is clear that the GF "focuses its resources and effort more on prosecutions and arrests rather than on confiscations". [20] As we wrote in our "*Field Report: Autumn 2011 Bird Protection Camp, 23 September – 2 October 2011*", the GF plays a major role in the overall effort to eradicate bird trapping, both in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and in the British SBAs. Nevertheless, the GF Larnaca & Famagusta Regional Office can only effectively and permanently combat bird trapping in two districts – which include four of the five major, trapping hotspots on the island – if the personnel of its regional office is substantially reinforced. Moreover, consistent and high-profile political support must be provided to anti-poaching operations conducted by any law enforcement agency, especially in the major trapping hotspot of Famagusta and Larnaca districts. [21]
- **Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police:** As BirdLife Cyprus mentions, the enforcement data are only available for autumn 2012, so no clear analysis can be made. [22] Nevertheless, especially in relation to the anti-poaching operations of the APS and BirdLife Cyprus' analysis, we disagree fundamentally with the argument raised by BirdLife Cyprus, according to which the cooperation between CABS and the APS "has limited the capacity of this unit to focus and to undertake targeted raids on restaurants serving ambelopoulia or against 'big' trapping operations". [23] On the contrary, during our Autumn 2012 BPC, the APS was able to physically check all major trapping hotspot areas on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, at every level; from small and medium to 'big' and professional trappers (see Chapter 9, Chapter 10 – Paragraph 2 and Chapter 11 – Paragraph 1). As we wrote in our "*Field Report: Autumn 2011 Bird Protection Camp, 23 September – 2 October 2011*", the APS continues to play a major role in almost all large-scale anti-poaching operations against criminal networks of illegal bird trapping and ambelopoulia trade, with a moderate number of individual arrests and confiscated materials, due to its extremely limited operational capacity. With a strength of only 6-8 officers it cannot effectively cover the complete territory of the Republic of Cyprus and deal with all hunting and poaching activities, even with the support of the Game Fund. [24] This is the main reason for the relatively moderate number of individual arrests and confiscated materials.
- **British Eastern Sovereign Base Area Police:** As BirdLife Cyprus rightly observes, "the enforcement data show that a similar number of trappers have been arrested, a lower number of mist nets and a slightly higher number of limesticks confiscated for autumn 2012 compared to autumn 2011". Based on all existing data, derived from the British ESBA Police, BirdLife

Cyprus Monitoring Programme and CABS Autumn 2012 BPC, “it is clear that [...] enforcement efforts have not been sufficient to reverse the upward trend in mist net use and more resources need to be allocated towards this end by the SBAs Administration”. [25] CABS analysis dovetails with BirdLife Cyprus’ conclusion, that the ESBA Police “should prioritise and use more efficiently their resources in order to achieve a quicker response to any reported trapping sites”. [26]

In contrast to the responsible law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus, the GF and the APS, the ESBA Police, beginning in the second half of 2011, organises a policy meeting with all relevant stakeholders (“*Game and Wild Birds Meeting*”) every six months and sends the data of anti-poaching operations conducted in the territory of the ESBA to the participants on a monthly basis. CABS/SPA Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus attends these meetings. CABS and SPA welcome these initiatives undertaken by the ESBA Administration and Police and consider them to be a major step forward towards the improvement of the cooperation between the competent authorities and environmental NGOs.

Tab. 5 shows the total results of anti-poaching operations conducted by the ESBA Police between August and December 2012:

Table 5: Illegal Hunting / Bird Trapping Statistics of the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area Police in Dhekelia, 1 August – 31 December 2012						
Description	August	September	October	November	December	Grand Total
No of Cases	9	61	57	49	5	181
Detections						
Arrested - Bird Trapping	3	7	9	5	2	26
Reported - Bird Trapping	-	3	-	-	-	3
Arrested – Illegal Hunting	-	1	-	1	1	3
Reported – Illegal Hunting	-	-	-	-	-	0
Total	3	11	9	6	3	32
Seizures						
Mist nets	19	125	131	201	66	542
Limesticks	-	288	26	73	-	387
Shotguns	-	1	-	1	1	3
Cartridges	-	43	-	28	44	115
Wild Birds (Killed)	-	55	2	2	-	59
Hares (Killed)	-	-	2	-	-	2
Batteries	5	28	24	21	1	79
Loud Speakers	7	49	63	42	5	166
Cassettes/CD/USB	4	12	25	25	1	67
Tape Recorders/CD Player	5	29	31	26	1	84
Imitating Devices	-	-	-	1	1	2
Wires & Cables (meters)	140	775	3445	1395	100	5855
Poles	14	41	174	300	64	593
Timers	1	4	1	1	-	7
Pole stands	4	-	64	-	25	93
Destroyed Pole stands	-	-	76	266	-	342
Metal traps	-	-	-	-	-	0
Wild birds released	50	201	564	750	288	1969

Source: Intelligence Analyst of the BESBA Police (February 2013)

Based on the above data and those presented in our “*Field Report: Autumn 2011 Bird Protection Camp, 23 September – 2 October 2011*”, the following general observations in relation to the anti-poaching operations of the ESBA Police are of interest:

- a) In the period between August and December 2011, the ESBA Police dealt with 36 cases of bird trapping and illegal hunting. During the same period in 2012 they dealt with 181 poaching cases;
- b) In the period between August and December 2011, the ESBA Police prosecuted 37 bird trappers and 5 illegal hunters. During the same period in 2012 they prosecuted 29 bird trappers and 3 illegal hunters;
- c) In the period between August and December 2011, the ESBA Police confiscated 195 mist nets, 196 limesticks and 29 electronic decoys. During the same period in 2012 they confiscated 542 mist nets, 387 limesticks and 86 electronic decoys. [27]

These data demonstrate that in 2012 the results achieved by the ESBA Police anti-poaching operations significantly increased in comparison to 2011. Nevertheless, CABS and SPA urge the ESBA Police to adopt the following operational strategies in order to improve further its efforts to effectively and permanently tackle illegal bird trapping during the major trapping season in autumn:

- a) Employ a minimum of three police patrols and six police officers on a daily basis on anti-trapping activities, from mid-September to late-October;
- b) Plan regular night patrolling to locate and dismantle mist-netting sites;
- c) Conduct joint operations with the APS and the GF, in order to put more pressure on trappers by using search-warrants for both their gardens and premises;
- d) Conduct an “Operation Freedom” once a week, starting from mid-September and running to late October;
- e) Concentrate primarily on large and dangerous trapping sites, especially those that are regularly reported by environmental NGOs.

Furthermore, CABS and SPA recommend to the ESBA Administration and Police the control and eradication of plantations of non-native (alien) invasive species of *Acacia saligna* in the area of Cape Pyla, which is recommended as an “*Important Bird Area*” (IBA) by BirdLife Cyprus and is expected to be included in the revised Cyprus IBA Inventory to be published in 2013. [28] At the same time the SBA Administration is also examining the possibility of designating the area a “*Special Area of Conservation*” (SAC). Apart from the fact that this tree species is planted and irrigated solely to serve the purpose of bird trapping, this alien invasive species is a threat to ecosystems, habitats and other plant species in protected areas. According to the “*Fourth National Report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*”, which was prepared and submitted by the Environment Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, on September 2010, “*Acacia saligna* pose considerable risk to the natural species and ecosystems and thus, an eradication project of *Acacia saligna* has been initiated in two Natura 2000 sites by the Government of Cyprus”. [29] CABS and SPA believe that the same policy could be adopted and implemented in the case of Cape Pyla in the ESBA, in cooperation between the Environment Department of the SBA Administration, the Environment Department and the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of the Republic of Cyprus. This policy would be also in line with the fifth target to combat invasive alien species of the new biodiversity strategy adopted by the European Commission, which aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and improve the state of Europe’s species, habitats, ecosystems and the services they provide over the next decade, while stepping up the EU’s contribution to averting global biodiversity loss until 2020. [30]

Last but not least, the SBA Administration should impose cross compliance penalties without a conviction to farmers who are in receipt of per hectare payments under the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and “are obliged to comply with cross compliance regulations and requirements, including obligations under the Birds Directive to keep their plots clear of any illegal bird trapping activity / equipment”. As survey data from both BirdLife Cyprus Monitoring Programme and CABS BPCs indicate “a significant part of illegal bird trapping takes place in agricultural plots, hence the Cyprus Agricultural Payments Organisation” (CAPO) – Κυπριακός Οργανισμός Αγροτικών Πληρωμών (ΚΟΑΠ) in Greek – “has been cooperating with the GF to identify such agricultural plots and penalize the recipients for failing to meet cross compliance requirements. To date, almost 100 CAP payments recipients have been penalised in the Republic of Cyprus in 2012, providing an additional enforcement tool that gives the correct message of ‘zero tolerance’ on illegal bird trapping”. [31]

9. Aggression by bird trappers and criminal gangs

Although security has been greatly improved for CABS volunteers, thanks to the cooperation with the Cyprus Police Headquarters and the APS, there were four incidents of aggression during our autumn 2012 field survey. These incidents demonstrate that trappers are indeed criminals and well-organized as a local mafia, prepared to break the law and use violence against anyone disrupting their lucrative illegal business.

- **Tuesday, 02.10.12, 4.30 - 6.30 a.m., West-north Xylotymbou, ESBA:** A CABS team located a non-fenced orchard with an active electronic decoy calling. The poachers were guarding the orchard from the greenhouses nearby and stalked the volunteers in three pick-up trucks from the moment they saw them approaching their trapping site by vehicle. They forced them to leave the area and then followed them, along main roads and the motorway, as far as Larnaca International Airport where, due to the presence of Cyprus Police, they turned back and left. On Wednesday, 03.10/2012, CABS volunteers showed the trapping site to four ESBA police officers, who confiscated 1 electronic decoy and 3 mist nets.
- **Wednesday, 03.10.12, 1.30 - 3.30 a.m., East Ormideia, ESBA:** Three CABS volunteers parked their vehicle on the paved road near the highway. The poachers appeared from the south searching for the CABS team with spotlights. The poachers fired four shots from a shotgun at the team. The CABS volunteers returned to their vehicle and drove to the ESBA Police Station in Dhekelia to formally report the incident. Shortly thereafter the CABS team, escorted by four ESBA police officers, went to the unfenced olive grove to show the officers the huge trapping installation, where a large number of active mist nets and electronic calling devices had been located. Three of the ESBA police officers left for a nearby location after hearing a shot. The CABS volunteers and a single ESBA police officer remained at the trapping installation. While they were collecting trapping paraphernalia, two volunteers were attacked by two poachers who struck them repeatedly with two long metal poles used to secure mist nets. The two poachers left the scene in a pick-up truck that was parked in an adjacent field. The two volunteers were treated for their injuries in the British Medical Centre in Dhekelia and later in Paralimni Hospital. They subsequently filed an official complaint with the ESBA Police and the next day two suspects were arrested. The ESBA police officers confiscated 4 electronic decoys (specifically, 4 tape recorders, 1 car battery and 8 loud speakers) and 3 mist nets, and 14 prepared net rides were located.



Ο Νίκος Πογιατζής σχολιάζει την επικαιρότητα

English Translation => Image 1: "Rebellion! Indignados took the guns and riot" / Image 2: "For a bonus salary? For unemployment benefits? For welfare pensions?" / Image 3: "For ambeloupolia" (Flag: "Limesticks or Death")

Photo 32: Cartoon by Nicos Poyiatzis, "O Phileleftheros" ("The Liberal"), Wednesday, 17 October 2012, pp. 44

- **Thursday, 04.10.12, 4.30 - 5.30 a.m., Ayia Napa, Republic of Cyprus:** Before departing on monitoring duties, at around 5.15 a.m., the CABS teams found that the tyres of their two rental vehicles, parked in their hotel car park in Ayia Napa, had been slashed by person or persons unknown. The incident was reported to the Ayia Napa Police Station and the APS.



One of eight slashed tyres of the two rental vehicles



A rental car badly damaged by poachers

Photos 33-34: Exposing the aggression of bird trappers on Cyprus. Autumn 2012 Bird Protection Camp

- **Friday, 05.10.12, 4.30 - 5.30 a.m., West Deryneia, Republic of Cyprus:** A CABS team parked their vehicle in front of a house with lit windows to check an electronic decoy calling in the surrounding area. In the vicinity they located an active electronic decoy calling within a fenced orchard and two set mist nets in an adjacent open maquis area. The volunteers dismantled and removed the two mist nets, but when they returned to their vehicle after 40 minutes, they found the rear window, the front window and one of the two side windows smashed with large rocks. The team drove the damaged vehicle to Deryneia Police Station and filed a complaint against unknown person/s, and also made statements concerning the dismantling of the two mist nets. Subsequently, they returned to the trapping installation to show the exact location to the local police patrol, but the electronic decoy had been removed. On their way back to Deryneia Police Station, the CABS volunteers and the local police patrol located another large trapping installation with one electronic decoy and 153 limesticks only a few hundred metres distant.

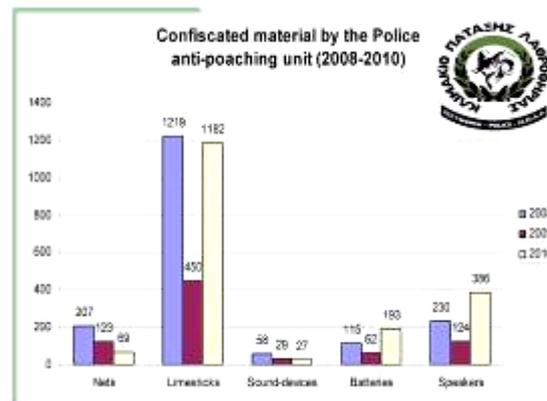
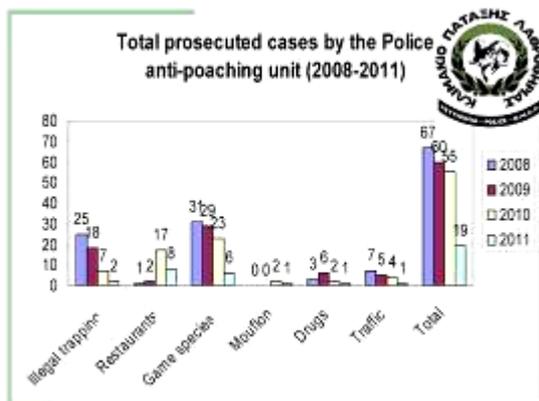
10. Evaluation of the cooperation with the Anti-Poaching Squad

As in spring 2012, the cooperation with the APS proved to be a great success for both CABS and the Cyprus Police. CABS was able to extend its monitoring area to include trapping sites too dangerous for independent action. When accompanied by the police the security of the teams was guaranteed.

The combination of CABS ornithological and local knowledge, combined with the professionalism and legal powers of the APS, enabled the latter to achieve outstanding results in the fight against wildlife crime in the Larnaca and Famagusta Districts.

During our Spring 2012 BPC, conducted between 14th of April and 5th of May, 4,439 limesticks, 15 mist nets and 9 electronic decoy devices were located and confiscated and 14 poachers were caught red-handed and referred for prosecution by the officers of the APS. During our Autumn 2012 BPC, conducted between 27th of September and 11th of October, approximately 4,449 limesticks, 68 mist nets and 44 electronic decoy devices were located and confiscated on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus alone, and a further 13 poachers were caught red-handed and referred for prosecution by the officers of the APS, in cooperation with the responsible district police divisions and local police stations.

According to the data presented by the GF at the “*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*”, organized in Larnaca by the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Secretariat of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats in July 2011, [32] the APS of the Cyprus Police prosecuted 25 bird trappers in 2008, 18 in 2009 and 7 in 2010. The unit also confiscated 207 mist nets and 1,219 limesticks in 2008, 123 mist nets and 450 limesticks in 2009 and 69 mist nets and 1,182 limesticks in 2010. [33]



Diagrams 1-2: Total prosecuted cases and confiscated material by the APS of the Cyprus Police.

Source: Game Fund, *Illegal Killing of Birds in Cyprus: A National Perspective*, Presentation at the “*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*”. Larnaca, Cyprus: 6-8 July 2011, pp. 14-15.

As a result of our cooperation with the APS during the two BPCs that we conducted in Cyprus in spring and autumn 2012, 27 bird trappers were prosecuted and 83 mist nets and 8,888 limesticks were confiscated. Our cooperation with the Cyprus Police Headquarters and the APS undoubtedly reaps its rewards. Within only five weeks – the total length of the two CABS bird protection camps in 2012 – the APS arrested red-handed more bird trappers than in any other year. In addition the

APS confiscated a significant number of mist nets, equal to 1/5 of the total number of mist nets confiscated between 2008 and 2010.

Tab. 6 clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of our cooperation with the APS:

Table 6: A Comparative Analysis of the Operational Results of the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad			
Year	Prosecutions	Mistnets seized	Limesticks seized
2008	25	207	1,219
2009	18	123	450
2010	7	69	1,182
2012 *	27	83	8,888

* The results from joint operations with CABS only.

11. Critical aspects

The massive scale of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing, especially in autumn, is nothing less than a severe environmental crime. Hundreds of thousands of protected wild birds are slaughtered annually during a 45 day period to be sold or for home consumption, causing irreversible damage to the biological diversity and natural heritage of all European citizens. Neither the Republic of Cyprus nor the British SBA authorities have deployed an adequate task force to date to tackle effectively this disturbing phenomenon.

Nevertheless, by devoting one to two patrols of the APS – and a patrol of the GF when an APS patrol was not available – as escort to our BPC teams during the peak migration periods and in the areas most affected, the Republic of Cyprus has shown its willingness to significantly improve its law enforcement effort in this field. The ESBA Police, despite its promises of greater commitment, has not achieved any tangible success against widespread illegal trapping in its area of responsibility. The ESBA trapping hotspot gives the impression of being a lawless zone in respect of bird trapping.

Notwithstanding the above, three critical aspects must be addressed in relation to anti-poaching operations conducted on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus by the responsible law enforcement agencies:

11.1. Fenced-in properties: The effectiveness of prosecutions is impeded by the problem of fenced-in properties. When traps are detected within a fenced property, the police officer is required to call the local police station in order to find out the name and phone number of the property owner from the chairman of the local council. A local police patrol then has to be deployed and the property owner (if he can be located) is required to appear and remain on site during police investigations. The owner is identified and summoned to attend, usually within 30-60 minutes. If the chairman of the local council is not willing to cooperate (either because he is afraid or because he is trying to protect bird trappers, although it is his duty to cooperate with police officers in such instances), or the owner of the private property is not found (either because he does not answer the phone or remains hidden in the house), the police must either wait, or

leave the location with the traps still set. On several occasions the APS patrol and CABS volunteers had to wait up to 4 to 6 hours for the owner to arrive, if he turned up at all which was seldom the case. If the property owner is warned by neighbours that a police patrol is present at his house or orchard, he simply refuses to answer the phone thereby avoiding prosecution. If the police patrol leaves the location, the owner cannot be subsequently prosecuted unless the evidence is still present when he is charged by the police. In 100% of the cases where the owner does not appear and the police decided to leave and return later, the traps disappear within a couple of hours. This commonly used strategy by trappers to escape prosecution is extremely effective. Trappers who trap birds illegally in fenced-in properties systematically avoid prosecution in this way, unless they happen to be present and visible at the very moment of the arrival of the police patrol. For this reason a great many bird trappers fence in their gardens, and are to all extent and purpose exempt from prosecution, as without a lengthy, time-consuming procedure it is almost impossible for the law enforcement agencies to catch them red-handed. In the past 5 years, 50% of the orchards in the Famagusta area have been fenced to provide de facto immunity for trappers. The Cyprus Police Headquarters, in cooperation with the District Police Divisions and local Police Stations, are urged put more pressure on the councils of local communities and municipalities to cooperate with the responsible anti-poaching authorities, and to review their time-consuming procedures in such cases, in order to facilitate anti-poaching investigations and prosecutions.



An increasing number of trappers fence in their trapping installations to achieve de facto immunity - as here in Cape Greco National Park, Famagusta



Bird slaughter at a holiday resort – Blackcap on a limestick with a tourist hotel in the background, Ayia Napa, Famagusta

Photos 35-36: Exposing bird trapping and killing fields in Cyprus. Spring 2012 Bird Protection Camp

11.2. Ambushes: Another impediment to prosecuting bird trappers is that many of them trap on open land and in unfenced orchards. Consequently, unless they are caught red-handed setting the traps or harvesting the birds, they can easily claim that someone else has placed the traps and thereby avoid prosecution. In such cases the preferred strategy in order to optimise the results of the APS would be to schedule shift duties in order to implement the tactic ‘close observation of trapping sites’, i.e. identify an active trapping site and keep it under constant observation until the trapper arrives, in order to catch him red-handed. This tactic would secure the prosecution, and would ultimately have a more lasting effect on trapping than simply the confiscation of trapping paraphernalia. Unfortunately, this practice – which is successfully used by the GF in Cyprus and by other anti-poaching units in the EU – has not yet been implemented by the APS, mainly due to its limited operational capacity of only 6 to 8 police officers. This method can however be successfully conducted by a three man patrol, a driver who conceals and guards the vehicle and two officers who lie in wait for the trapper. Employment of the tactic ‘close observation of trapping sites’ would facilitate the arrest of professional trappers who set out large numbers of limesticks and mist nets in open areas and unfenced orchards.

11.3. Fines: The investigation and prosecution work of the APS and GF is unfortunately undermined by the courts, which tend to impose very low penalties on poachers, often the minimum permissible fine. The perception by many Cypriots in respect of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing is not that of a severe environmental crime and ecological atrocity, but a so-called ‘traditional hunting practice’ which is unjustly persecuted. Consequently, the responsible law enforcement agencies abandon many prosecutions if they believe the case is too weak to hold up in court. One loophole – literally – is the case of trappers in fenced-in gardens who cut a hole in their fence and claim that someone else has been sneaking in and setting traps. With the Cypriot sometimes almost obsessive concern for respect of private property hardly a plausible argument. In this case the implementation of the principle of ‘vicarious liability’, where the landowner in other countries is responsible to a greater or lesser degree for what occurs on his land, some form of sanction would be possible. In many such cases the law enforcement agencies do not go ahead with the prosecution as it is likely to be thrown out by the judge. It should be noted that the penalties can in theory be severe. According to the “*Law on the Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species of 2003*”, offences related to the illegal trapping, killing, possessing of and / or trading in of wild birds can be punished with very strict penalties of up to 17,000 Euros fine and / or 3 years imprisonment (see Tab. 7 below). However, according to data gathered by the GF, and presented recently during the “*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*”, the average fines imposed by the courts in the Republic of Cyprus do not exceed 100-600 Euros for a single offence and the penalty of imprisonment, particularly in relation to big professional trappers with criminal records, who are making thousands of Euros per year by supplying the black market of restaurants and butchers, is never imposed (see Tab. 7 below). [34] In addition, the fines imposed on restaurants serving ambelopoulia comes nowhere near the profits they make through the illegal trade in protected wild birds. For example, the highest fine imposed until now on a restaurant owner who illegally served ambelopoulia was €10,000. [35] Although this may seem a severe fine, if we take into account the fact that the APS found 2,515 ambelopoulia in the refrigerators of this restaurant in October 2010, and calculate that the selling price of this quantity approaches €12,575 (2,515 ambelopoulia divided in dozens per plate multiplied by €60 which is the lowest price per plate), then it is more than obvious that even the highest fines imposed for illegal trade in ambelopoulia are far from being a deterrent. Finally, as BirdLife Cyprus correctly observes, “to this date no restaurant licence has been revoked from a restaurateur convicted for illegally offering trapped birds”, although that the GF “has estimated that the illegal bird trapping ‘business’ is of the order of 15 million Euros per year”! Untaxed of course. [36]

Typical trapping / poaching case

The legislation is very strict (Probably the stricter in Europe).

		Legislation	Fine
1st Accusation	Pursuing of wildlife	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
2nd Accusation	Trapping / killing	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
3rd Accusation	Possession	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
4th Accusation	Use of illegal methods	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
5th Accusation	Use of sound-device	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
6th Accusation	Protected Species	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
7th Accusation	Game reserve area	Up to 17,000	100 - 600
		119,000 euros and / or 3 years of prison	

Table 7: Typical Trapping / Poaching Case: Accusations, Legislation and Fines.

Source: Game Fund, *Illegal Killing of Birds in Cyprus: A National Perspective*, Presentation at the “*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*”. Larnaca, Cyprus: 6-8 July 2011, pp. 19.

12. Policy recommendations

On 17 January 2013, the three largest environmental NGOs on Cyprus (BirdLife Cyprus, Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria and Friends of the Earth Cyprus) took the initiative to contact the three major presidential candidates of the Republic of Cyprus, in order to establish their positions on the major environmental issues that the new President and his Ministers will have to face. The presidential candidates had the opportunity to express their positions and commitment to actions under seven modules relating to environmental protection and sustainable development, one of which concerned the problem of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing. [37] Specifically, the fourth out of seven questions raised by the three national environmental NGOs was: *“To what extent are you willing to tackle the problem of illegal bird trapping and illegal trade of wild birds in the Republic of Cyprus, which impacts on the biodiversity of our island?”* [38]

The newly elected President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, stated: *“We recognize that the illegal trapping of protected wild birds has a negative impact on the biodiversity of our island, especially due to the use of equipment for mass catching of birds that it is not selective with regard to the species of the wild birds trapped (and as a result they are killed indiscriminately), as well as the widespread use of illegal electronic sound machines. In order to reduce this problem, we will strictly implement the relative legislation through more frequent investigations and by strengthening the responsible anti-poaching law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, we will promote environmental education and public awareness projects to inform and sensitise the public on the impact of illegal bird trapping, with the aim of reducing the demand for the consumption of wild birds”.* [39]

CABS and SPA consider that the above position of the newly elected President of the Republic of Cyprus is in line with the core recommendations of the *“European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds”* and specifically the *“Larnaca Declaration”*, according to which a zero tolerance policy towards illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing includes, inter alia: *“i) The need to strengthen enforcement at each stage of the bird crime chain through appropriate targeting, scientific and technical support and cooperation; ii) The need to recognize the significance of the illegal taking and trade of birds as a risk to the achievement and maintenance of favourable status of bird populations and a damage to the conservations actions undertaken by the Parties with adverse impacts on the conservation, legal hunting, agriculture and tourism sectors; and iii) The need to develop, finance and support national communication strategies promoting dialogue between relevant stakeholders and the wider public”.* [40]

Following both the *“Larnaca Declaration”* and the *“Recommendation No.155 (2011) on the Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade of Wild Birds”*, [41] which were submitted and adopted during the *“31st Meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention”* held in Strasburg, from 29 November – 2 December 2011, CABS and SPA recommend the following:

12.1. Strengthening and reinforcement of law enforcement agencies: Despite the increasing efforts made by the responsible law enforcement agencies in 2012 (especially by the Cyprus Police Headquarters, the APS and the GF), CABS and SPA repeat their appeal to the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Ministry of Interior to improve the effectiveness of the responsible law enforcement agencies, by increasing their operational capacity and providing them with consistent

and high-profile political support for their anti-poaching operations. The APS of the Cyprus Police has only 6-8 officers and is responsible for the whole territory of the Republic of Cyprus. The GF has some 90 permanent and seasonal officers in all 4 of its regional offices (Nicosia / Limassol / Paphos / Larnaca & Famagusta), 17 of which are located in the GF Larnaca & Famagusta Regional Office. This infers that the APS has only one patrol on duty at any one time for the whole of the Republic of Cyprus, and the GF has only two patrols on each shift in Larnaca and Famagusta districts. At the same time, the APS officers and GF wardens are responsible for handling all hunting and poaching activities, from the protection of habitats and the management of wildlife to the illegal killing of and trade in game and protected wildlife species. CABS and SPA consider the reinforcement of the APS and the GF as the most important step to be taken in order to strengthen law enforcement at each stage of the bird crime chain, as well as appropriate targeting, scientific and technical support and cooperation to the responsible law enforcement agencies. In this context, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Cyprus Police Headquarters should deploy a minimum of 3 APS patrols on a daily basis on anti-trapping activities from early-September to late October. This would allow to the APS to implement the practice of “close observation of trapping sites”, in order to maximise the arrest numbers of trappers by catching them red-handed in the early morning hours. In addition, the Ministry of Interior should also deploy a minimum of 4 GF patrols on a daily basis on anti-trapping activities in Larnaca and Famagusta districts. Finally, the ESBA Police, which has an anti-poaching unit consisting of only 4 officers, should employ a minimum of 3 police patrols and 6 police officers on a daily basis on anti-trapping activities during peak bird migration periods, at the same time conducting “Operation Freedom” on a weekly basis in the ESBA, from mid-September to late October.

12.2. An increase in penalties imposed for bird trapping: CABS and SPA urge the judicial authorities to critically review the scale of penalties imposed for poaching, and to implement more rigidly existing national legislation to assist in stamping out this serious environmental criminal activity and ensure that environmental justice is meted out. This could be promoted through training seminars for judges, co-organised by the Ornithological Committee of the Directorate General (DG) for Environment of the European Commission (EC), the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), the European Centre for Judges and Lawyers (ECJL) and the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE), in cooperation with the Law Office of the Republic of Cyprus, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Ministry of Interior, as well as the British SBAs Administration and Court. In line with the recommendations of the responsible law enforcement agencies and other environmental NGOs, CABS and SPA also recommend that the responsible judicial authorities ensure that the Cypriot courts significantly increase the penalties imposed for bird trapping in order to effectively and sustainably eradicate the serious environmental crime of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing on Cyprus. Although that the legislation of the Republic of Cyprus foresees sufficiently strict penalties, the responsible ministerial and judicial authorities should undertake all necessary initiatives to sensitise judges on the severe impact illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing has on bird fauna and biological diversity, in order to facilitate the imposition of higher fines and deterrent penalties. As the *“Recommendation No.155 (2011) on the Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade of Wild Birds”* states in relation to the institutional aspects of the problem, the competent authorities should: “strengthen the capacity, human resources, competencies and the level of cooperation between the relevant enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as to make the best use of available budgetary resources to effectively prevent and punish wildlife / bird crimes where internal judicial processes allow, and encourage the creation of special units of judges and prosecutors, provided with specialist training on combating wildlife / bird crime, and ensure all relevant cases are assigned to them”. [42]

12.3. Developing national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects: Changing attitudes to the consumption of ambelopoulia could go a long way towards curbing illegal bird trapping. However, there are currently no (and never have been) national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects aiming at changing attitudes on this issue. Apart from the efforts of environmental NGOs (CABS and SPA, BirdLife Cyprus, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria and MBCC), the loudest “voices” heard in the public debate on the problem are politicians from the major trapping areas (Larnaca and Famagusta), speaking out in support of this serious criminal activity and environmental atrocity. All relevant state authorities – including the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, and the Ministry of Interior – generally display no interest in the prospect of changing public attitudes to ambelopoulia eating, and do little or nothing to promote all necessary public communication, awareness and education strategies needed to tackle the problem at its roots. Furthermore, the competent authorities must provide consistent and high-profile political support for large-scale anti-poaching operations, in order to counter-balance the ill-founded arguments raised by the proponents of illegal, non-selective and massive bird trapping, killing and trade. Unfortunately, although the mass media in Cyprus extensively and positively covered our Autumn 2012 BPC, [43] and BirdLife Cyprus launched a quite successful public awareness campaign in parallel, [44] two out of the three main candidates for the presidential elections held in February 2013, openly supported song bird poaching and publicly stated that they would, if elected, try to legalise bird trapping in Cyprus! [45] Indeed, “this sort of statement sends a contradictory message to the pledged ‘zero tolerance’ approach that was agreed by the Cyprus government at the Bern Convention on illegal bird killing [...] and is counterproductive to the enforcement efforts made by the competent authorities”. [46] This is clearly reflected in the media reports that followed these official political statements, either those that supported song bird poaching [47] or those that sharply criticised any political attempt to change existing national legislation, EU directives and international treaties. [48] Apart from the public statements made by some presidential candidates, the lack of political will to tackle the problem is also demonstrated by the fact that a recent amendment of the national legislation [152(I)/2003] “is allowing offenders who are in possession of or use bird calling devices when hunting to get away with an on-the-spot fine, rather than face a court conviction and risk getting a criminal record if convicted”. [49] Once again, this amendment was proposed by MPs from Larnaca and Famagusta districts and was supported by the Cyprus Hunters Association. Lastly, as BirdLife Cyprus also reported some months ago, “the issue of cross compliance penalties for bird trapping farmers was discussed in the Parliamentary Agriculture Committee, in early November 2012. The discussion was essentially an attempt by a group of MPs from the Famagusta area to block the implementation of the cross compliance penalties, which have caused an outcry in the known bird trapping areas”. [50] In this context, CABS and SPA urge the President of the Republic of Cyprus to demonstrate the appropriate political will, by transforming his pre-electoral position on illegal bird trapping (as stated to the three largest environmental NGOs in Cyprus) into a real, consistent and effective zero-tolerance policy against song bird poaching. [51] CABS and SPA are ready and able, in terms of both knowledge and experience, to take on well-targeted national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects (including the publication of press releases, leaflets, posters and handbooks, as well as the production of advertisements, documentaries and other audio-vision material), in order to change public attitudes on this issue and contribute, as far as they can, towards the elimination of the demand for protected wild birds for consumption, in cooperation with the responsible ministries and competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus.

13. Abbreviations

APS	Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police / Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας (ΚΠΛ) της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου
BPC	Bird Protection Camp / Περιοδεία Προστασίας Πουλιών
CABS	Committee Against Bird Slaughter / Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. / Επιτροπή Εναντία στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy of the European Union
CAPO	Cyprus Agriculture Payments Organisation / Κυπριακός Οργανισμός Αγροτικών Πληρωμών (ΚΟΑΠ)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity of the United Nations
CoE	Council of Europe
DG	Directorate General
EC	European Commission
ECJL	European Centre for Judges and Lawyers
EIPA	European Institute of Public Administration
ERU	Emergency Response Unit of the Cyprus Police / Μηχανοκίνητη Ομάδα Άμεσης Δράσης (ΜΜΑΔ) της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου
ESBA	Eastern Sovereign Base Area in Dhekelia
EU	European Union
EUFJE	European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment
GF	Game Fund / Ταμείο Θήρας
IBA	Important Bird Area
MBCC	Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus
MP	Member of the Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SBA s	Sovereign Base Areas in Dhekelia and Akrotiri
SPA	Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt / Foundation Pro Biodiversity / Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας
UN	United Nations
UNBZ	United Nations Buffer Zone

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The *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)* – *Comitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V* in German and *Επιτροπή Ενάντια στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών* in Greek – is an international activist and operational bird protection society, with its head office in Bonn in the Federal Republic of Germany. The society was founded in 1975 in Berlin and since then intervenes in particular where bird trappers, poachers and animal traders commit offences against current nature protection legislation in the European Union. The society is always concerned to harmonise closely its activities with the responsible police, forest or customs authorities. In addition, through initiatives at the parliamentary or judicial level, CABS attempt to achieve improvements in the policy and legal guidelines for wildlife, nature and species protection. Currently, the society has 485 members and 11,300 donors throughout the European Union.

CABS is a registered “*Society*” (Registration Number: VR 7095 – Date of Recognition as a Nature Protection Organization: 03.03.1989) by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany. Registration as a charity in the United Kingdom under new EU legislation is currently in progress.

CABS is also a “*Full Member*” of *Deutscher Naturschutzring* (German Nature Conservation Organisation, DNR: www.dnr.de), *Deutscher Tierschutzbund* (German Animal Protection Association, DTB: www.tierschutzbund.de) and the *European Federation Against Hunting (EFAH)*: www.efah.net).

**Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS): www.komitee.de/en/homepage
*Extending Our Frontiers – Birds Have No Boundaries!***



The *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA)* – *Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt* in German and *Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας* in Greek – concerns itself with the conservation of endangered wildlife species and species diversity. It defines its role as patrons of wildlife, with the statutory obligation to care for all aspects of the natural world in Germany and Europe.

SPA is an officially recognized “*Foundation*” (Date of Recognition: 26.11.2008) under the German civil law code and is registered with the German Tax authorities (Tax Registration Number: 305/5981/1222) and the Foundation Council of the State of North Rhine Westphalia, Germany.

Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA): www.stiftung-pro-artenvielfalt.org