

CABS Cyprus Spring Bird Protection Camp 12 – 25 April 2011



Final Report



1. Introduction and overview

Bird trapping with limesticks and mist nets is widespread in Cyprus. During pre-nuptial migration the east coast of the island is above all affected, especially in the Famagusta Districts and the Eastern British Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) (see Para. 2). Although trapping has been banned for some considerable time, the use of limesticks in particular has increased continuously since the accession of Cyprus to the EU. The trade in protected birds and their sale in restaurants and butchers' shops has become a million Euro business. In January 2011, a parliamentary committee stated officially for the first time that bird trapping on Cyprus should be categorised as organised crime. The Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and its partner organisations have conducted bird protection camps (BPC) on Cyprus since 2001. This year's spring BPC on the Mediterranean island took place from 12 to 25 April 2011 in cooperation with Friends of the Earth (FoE) Cyprus.

During our operations in previous years CABS teams as rule removed illegal trapping equipment themselves as they received little or no support from the authorities. In Italy for example, cooperation between conservationists and the police has been close and successful for many years. This has not been the case on Cyprus in the past. Efforts have therefore been made over the past three years to establish and foster contacts with all responsible law enforcement agencies on Cyprus, and in particular to achieve much closer cooperation with the police.



Lesser Whitethroat on a limestick

The first really close cooperation with the authorities was planned for spring 2011. In preparatory talks with all affected HQs and units it was agreed that CABS teams would immediately report the majority of all trapping sites found to the authorities. The senior officers of the respective police units or districts gave assurances that they would do all in their power to arrest poachers at sites located by our teams, would seize all trapping equipment in a timely fashion, and deploy adequate personnel in the main trapping area. This would ensure not only the successful prosecution of offenders, but would also guarantee the safety of CABS volunteers in the field.

The result of this first attempt at very close cooperation is sobering. In almost all cases reported to them the authorities either took no action or conducted themselves in an unprofessional manner with little effort to adapt their tactics to the actual circumstances. An extensive effort by the law enforcement agencies to combat bird trapping does not take place. This leads us to believe that this is not wished for at political or policy level. The primarily reactive efforts of the police and the Game Fund result at best in a temporary disruption of bird trapping activity.

2. An overview of the main trapping area

In the relatively small trapping area around Paralimni in the south-east of the island poachers set out in spring and autumn between 9,000 to 10,000 limesticks in an area encompassing some 70 km². CABS have to date located 175 of the estimated 300 trapping sites in the area. Our teams have regularly checked these sites over a number of years so that in the meantime a comprehensive record of the daily and seasonal activities of the poachers has been compiled.

Bird trapping is less widespread in the considerably greater agricultural area to the west, between the villages of Sotira, Liopetri, Vrysoules, Agios Georgios and Agios Nikolaos. Here trapping takes place primarily in large fenced-in gardens and is therefore very difficult to monitor. Although we have less data on this area we estimate that some 3,000 limesticks are set out here in spring and autumn and, mainly in the latter season, some 400 mist nets.

In the British-administered Cape Pyla area bird trapping takes place primarily in autumn. The military training area is uninhabited and extensive areas have been specially planted with the Australian Blue-leaved Wattle *Acacia saligna* to attract birds on migration. On the area, only some 10 km² in size, some 300 mist nets are set out, a substantial number of which are equipped with electronic decoy devices.

Between the major cities of Larnaka and Limassol there is a further, somewhat isolated trapping area, around the villages of Agios Theodoros and Maroni. Bird trapping is above all widespread here in autumn, but on a smaller scale. Data on this trapping area is sparse, but we estimate some 150 mist nets and 3,000 limesticks.

3. Methodology

A total of 13 conservationists from Cyprus, Germany and Italy participated in the BPC. Three to four teams, each of two to five members, were deployed each day. Checks of trapping sites were conducted mainly by day, with particularly dangerous sites being visited at night. As a rule each team had a Greek-speaking member.

Our aim was to check all known trapping sites in the area of operations. As agreed with the authorities in the preparatory talks, sites with more than 100 limesticks or 3 mist nets, as well as all electronic decoy devices and fenced-in gardens with evidence of trapping were to be reported for action by the police Anti-Poaching-Squad (APS). Smaller trapping sites with 25 to 100 limesticks were to be reported to the wardens of the Game Fund. The CABS teams undertook the dismantling of less than 25 limesticks on public land or unfenced areas.



A Cuckoo in a mist net

If our teams were obviously seen by poachers in or near a trapping site the volunteers also dismantled limesticks and nets, as the site had been compromised and was no longer suitable for police or Game Fund action.

The police were informed several times daily about the location of our teams. As soon as a team had located an active site the responsible office or station were immediately informed by telephone. A log of contacts with the authorities was kept, so that a complete record of the reaction times and actions of the authorities is available. A short version of this log book is attached as annex to this report.

4. Results

During the almost two weeks of operations some 180 known or potential trapping sites were checked. At 85 sites 3,353 limesticks, 15 mist nets, 12 electronic decoy devices and 6 aviaries containing protected bird species were found.

On the basis of the procedure agreed in advance with the police some 2,662 limesticks were seized (2,145 by CABS teams and 517 by the police), 11 mist nets (CABS 2 / police 9) and 9 electronic decoy devices (CABS 3 / police 6).

The remaining 691 limesticks, 4 nets and 3 electronic decoys were dismantled by the poachers themselves because police reaction was too tardy and the illegal equipment had been removed before their appearance on the scene.

A total of 142 birds were found in the nets and on limesticks. Of these, 103 were released unscathed. Species included Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Pied, Collared and Spotted Flycatcher, Wryneck, Cuckoo and Masked Shrike.

Despite their assurances during the preparatory talks the law enforcement agencies made no attempt to catch poachers red-handed. Any form of evident effort by the authorities was noticeable at only a handful of trapping sites reported to them by CABS:

Altogether 34 trapping sites with 2,008 limesticks, 9 nets and 9 electronic decoys were reported to the police. At four sites ambushes were set but these were far from professional. Two poachers were apprehended. One of these got off with a warning (see Para. 8.1). The other was only caught because CABS members called the police to the site at the last minute (see Para. 8.2). Both the other ambushes were abandoned, one undoubtedly far too early (see Para 8.3).

At a total of 17 sites the reaction time by the authorities was so slow - more than 3 days as a rule - that police action was no longer possible. At 11 of the sites the poachers themselves removed their trapping equipment. At the other six sites police and CABS members together were at least able to dismantle the remaining traps. At about half the sites (21 from 43) reported by us we received no feedback from the authorities so that, after 8 days of apparent inaction by the police, CABS teams removed the still standing traps on the final two days of operations.

In comparison with previous years we found substantially more limesticks in 2011. There was a slight decline in mist-netting activity and little perceptible change in the number of electronic decoy devices found:

	2009	2010	2011
Limesticks	2.136	1.977	3.353
Mist nets	33	9	15
Electronic decoys	15	12	12

5. Assessment of the law enforcement effort

5.1 General

Three different agencies are available to combat poaching in the Republic of Cyprus: The Police Anti-Poaching-Squad (APS), the Game Fund and the local district police. In addition the British Sovereign Base Area is controlled by the SBA Police.

In order to properly assess the policing effort it must be made clear that bird trappers on Cyprus are guileless and brazen and do not conceal their activities as a rule. The poachers were present at 18 of the 85 trapping sites located by CABS and could have been effortlessly apprehended by a police officer or game warden.

5.2 Reaction times

A reaction time was recorded in only 16 of a total of 43 cases (37 %). The average reaction time was 70.8 hours, roughly 3 days. The quickest reaction was one hour by local police; the longest was 172 hours (7 days) by the Game Fund. In six cases (14 %) CABS teams were accompanied by an SBA police patrol so that reaction was immediate. In the remaining 21 cases (49 %) there was no reaction at all by the authorities.

A reaction time of three days is more than unsatisfactory - no reaction at all is simply unacceptable. If criminal offences are reported the authorities are required to take action in as short a time as possible. One should be able to expect a standard European police reaction time of 15 to 30 minutes.

At this stage it must be emphasised that in the years 2009 and 2010 the reaction times of the APS and Game Fund was also between one hour and a maximum of three days. The SBA police reacted promptly as a rule and arrived at the scene seldom longer than 20 minutes after being alerted.

One of the main differences between earlier observations and our experiences in spring 2011 is the number of cases reported by us to the authorities. In 2009 we reported 10 cases to the police and in 2010 only seven. In 2011, after complying with the request by the authorities to report all cases of poaching immediately, they appeared unable to cope with the workload.

5.3 Comments on the different units

Anti-Poaching Squad (APS)

The APS is the best trained and equipped law enforcement agency on the island. Although we agreed on close cooperation between CABS and the APS during the preparatory talks, and the presence of a patrol in our area of operations for the whole of the BPC was ordered by the Assistant Chief of Police, the unit was absent from our operational area for most of the time. Although we had daily telephone contact with the APS commander and supplied him with up-to-the-minute information on our activities, in the majority of cases reported we were advised to seek assistance from the local police or the Game Fund. The absence of an APS unit in the main trapping area meant that they were unable to react in a timely manner. The APS has a limited capacity with only ten officers. This implies that there are only four officers on duty and one patrol available at any one time. It has a wide range of tasks including combating the illegal shooting of Cyprus Moufflon in Troodos and Paphos Forests, the illegal hunting of the Brown Hare in nature reserves, as well as the illegal trapping of and trade in

wild birds, mainly in Larnaca and Famagusta districts. During the spring 2011 BPC, the APS had to concentrate on all three issues simultaneously. This resulted in their inability to provide the promised support to CABS in the field. This conflict should have been made clear earlier. Instead we were left with the impression that the APS officers were intentionally kept occupied with less pressing tasks during the peak of spring bird trapping and that the will to commit this unit effectively and professionally to bring bird trappers to justice is lacking higher in the chain of command.

Game Fund

The Game Fund wardens are very competent and possess a wealth of knowledge of bird trapping in general as well as information on local trapping sites. Because they have more available personnel they were in action much more frequently than the APS officers. Nonetheless the agreed cooperation turned out to be unsatisfactory.

The Game Fund has only one regional office and one patrol available in both Larnaca and Famagusta, the two districts where the problem of song bird poaching is most acute. Consequently, contact with the Game Fund office proved to be very difficult at times and the different telephone numbers were often not answered for hours at a time. The expected prompt reaction to our reports did not occur. Although we reported more than 40 trapping sites a patrol responded in only a few individual cases. Two of only three ambushes at sites reported by our teams were successful, although the officers concerned behaved in an unprofessional manner (see Paras. 8.1 and 8.2)

Game Fund officers were seldom prepared to leave their vehicle so that we were only able to point out trapping sites from the road. Most sites were several hundred metres distant so that it must have been clear to the officers concerned that it would be almost impossible to find the sites on the ground later. It also appeared, contrary to information given to us during the preparatory discussions, that it was not the task of the Game Fund to apprehend offenders. At the sites shown to them, the officers showed little interest in or enthusiasm for setting an ambush to catch bird trappers red-handed.

SBA Police

The SBA police, responsible for the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), have established a small specialist anti-poaching unit. The officers are very friendly and always easy to contact. This spring we had no opportunity to call them out in an emergency as very few trapping sites were found in the ESBA. Instead, on three nights, joint CABS/SBA patrols were carried out to locate electronic decoy devices and mist net sites.

In the course of two of these patrols several trapping sites were found. The officers unfortunately showed no interest in catching the offender by either setting an ambush or, where the poacher was present, to take suitable cautious measures to arrest him (see Para. 8.4).



Olivaceous Warbler on a limestick

Nevertheless the SBA police are otherwise a proactive unit which, within their comparatively small area of responsibility, apprehends between 30 and 40 poachers and seizes hundreds of mist nets and associated paraphernalia every year. Their operations are unfortunately mainly conducted towards the end of the trapping season so that the poachers' activities are

ultimately only disrupted after they have amassed enough illegal income from the trade in song birds to pay their fines many times over.

Local Police

The local police do not consider themselves responsible for illegal bird trapping. They constantly referred our teams to the APS, which however is mainly occupied with Moufflon poaching or the Game Fund. The latter proved not to be active in the majority of cases reported to them. Both the APS and the Game Fund counsel against involving the local police as the officers are likely to be too closely integrated with local traditions and the population.

The local police in the main trapping area (Paralimni) were therefore contacted in an emergency or where the safety of team members was threatened. In every case their performance was unsatisfactory:

In one case the local police were called out because a poacher had set out his mist net on the edge of the main road in a village, and neither the APS nor the Game Fund was available. The police claimed that they had no time to attend the incident and the poacher escaped.

On a separate occasion, as the other agencies had no time to attend, the local police were called out to a garden where limesticks were visibly set out and an electronic decoy was in operation. The very clumsy behaviour of the police officer, who also verbally threatened the conservationists, prevented the offender being prosecuted (see Para. 8.5).

At the conclusion of an operation a police patrol accompanied a CABS team dismantling limesticks and nets that the APS and Game Fund had not dealt with. The officers were friendly but were not willing to record the personal details of a poacher present on the site or to search his property for further trapping equipment.

5.4 Official statements by the government

According to official figures released by the Government of Cyprus, law enforcement agencies, in the time frame 2004 to 2010, have annually taken an average of 100 cases of illegal bird trapping to court, thereby prosecuting a total of 1,073 persons. According to the government's figures some 434 nets, 904 limesticks and 97 electronic decoy devices were seized annually in this period.

If these figures are correct the agencies concerned have done a gratifyingly good job, at least in the absence of our teams. It is puzzling therefore why this level of activity is not possible during the peak of bird migration in the main trapping area in spring 2011. Our observations of the practical work by the police and Game Fund in the field call the accuracy of these figures gravely into question.

In any event it was evident to us that the limestick problem is not taken seriously by the authorities. If the above figures released by the government are accurate,



Police officers confiscating illegal bird traps

then hundreds of officers of the three responsible law enforcement agencies have collected only some 900 limesticks in the six month long main trapping period. In comparison, as demonstrated this spring, 13 volunteer conservationists located more than 3,300 limesticks in only 12 days. This represents an obvious and admitted imbalance in effort by the authorities.

6. Security

The failure of the authorities to effectively combat bird trapping is evident in the behaviour of the poachers. Many trappers on Cyprus work professionally and have built up mafia-like structures. As they do not expect to face any meaningful repressive measures and at the same time run a brisk and profitable trade in the trapped birds, their readiness to resort to violence is high. Poachers elsewhere in Europe are cautious and always on the alert. Cypriot bird trappers on the other hand display a remarkable degree of self-confidence. Even when the offenders are surprised red-handed by CABS teams they do not withdraw, but become aggressive and make it clear that they reserve themselves the right to illegally trap song birds. They appear to lack any sense of wrongdoing.

The poachers run a network of probably paid guards who monitor the area of the trapping sites and alert the poachers of 'intruders' by radio and cell phone. In some cases the poachers or their assistants arrive at the site in 4 x 4s or on motorcycles within minutes of the appearance of the conservationists and behave aggressively towards them. CABS teams are frequently pursued for long distances by the trappers, even on public roads, and verbally abused and threatened. Professional trappers' sites are patrolled by armed guards, especially at night.

In spring 2010 a CABS team was assaulted by four poachers and two Italian conservationists were treated in hospital for their injuries. In order to avoid a repetition of such incidents, additional security measures were initiated in 2011. The size of the teams was increased from an average of three to four or five members and the location of the teams was regularly reported to the police in order to enable a more rapid reaction in case of trouble.

In terms of security cooperation with the authorities was also only moderately successful. A close escort of our teams was provided only in the ESBA; in the Republic the volunteers, as in previous years, were left to cope for themselves. On only a single day did the Game Fund agree to deploy a patrol close to the CABS teams in a particularly sensitive and dangerous area, in order to come to the latter's assistance in an emergency. On this occasion there were fortunately no incidents. Later, when the team arranged a rendezvous with the Game Fund patrol, it turned out that the latter were in the field on foot some 10 km further south. In an emergency they would have required more than 15 minutes to reach the scene.



Common Redstart is freed from a limestick

It became clear that the presence of an embedded police officer would be the only effective way to ensure the safety of the teams.

The following three incidents in spring 2011 demonstrate the danger that the volunteer bird conservationists face on a daily basis:

6.1 Vrysoules, 21.04.2011

At around 3.00 am a CABS team found three mist nets and an active electronic decoy. The professionally run trapping site was left untouched for action by the police. The next day the team again checked the site at 11.00 pm at night and found a police vehicle parked only 100 m distant. Although the electronic decoy could be heard clearly, the police officers showed no reaction and drove off. Half a minute after the CABS team parked their rental vehicle near the site another vehicle appeared and blocked their way. In a hair-raising manoeuvre the driver of the CABS vehicle managed to escape before an incident occurred. On 23.04 a Game Fund patrol was led to the site and the mist nets and electronic decoy were dismantled. Two minutes later 9 outraged men in three 4 x 4s and on a quad arrived at the scene. They calmed down somewhat in the presence of the Game Fund officers but threatened one of the conservationists. The officers took no action.

6.2 Sotira, 18.04.2011

On the afternoon of 18.04 three CABS team members, in the company of a German TV team (RTL), were on their way to a copse where limesticks had been found the previous year. On public land they were obstructed by a man armed with a cudgel. He claimed they were on his private property. He verbally abused and threatened the conservationists. As the group made to leave the area a 4 x 4 appeared. The conservationists and TV crew had to jump aside to avoid being run over. The driver of the vehicle attempted without success to pull one of the conservationists into his vehicle. At this stage two more men appeared to bring the total of assumed poachers to four. They prevented the CABS team from leaving, threatened to call up more friends, and demanded that the film crew hand over their material. Although one of the CABS members managed to call the police they were obstructed by the aggressive men for a further 45 minutes. When the police finally arrived the officers did not at first intervene in the ugly incident, but took down the particulars of other CABS members standing a few hundred metres distant. Fortunately the police eventually took action to deescalate the situation.

6.3 Kampos, 17.04. and 21.04.2011

In Kampos near Agia Napa two incidents occurred in the same place. On 17.04 a group of youths on mopeds and quads threatened and verbally abused a CABS team. One of the youths tore the head off an already dead song bird and threw it at the feet of the conservationists. The team managed to get away in their vehicle but were pursued until they reached a busy main road.

On 21.04 a CABS team observed a group of youths who, despite the hunting ban, were setting out limesticks. As the youths noticed the CABS team they tried to block the path of the rental car, abused and threatened the team members, and pursued them on motorcycles as far as the main road.



CABS team member dismantling a mist net.

Several days later conservationists from the MBCC (see Para. 10) were attacked in the same place and their rental car was damaged by the aggressors.

7. Amateur and professional bird trappers

The Cypriot authorities widely view bird trapping with limesticks as a peccadillo. From an arbitrary figure of 100 limesticks or 3 mist nets upwards offenders are categorised as 'professionals' and attract more attention from the law enforcement agencies. CABS is critical of this categorisation for a number of reasons.

Almost every trapper has a distinctive individual seasonal and daily trapping pattern. The number of limesticks or mist nets set out by poachers therefore fluctuates greatly. A 'professional' site with 120 limesticks active in the morning can consist of only 20 limesticks in the evening. The professionalism of the offender can therefore not be determined by the number of limesticks present.

In addition, accurate conclusion on the trapping rate and the number of birds actually caught cannot be inferred from the exact number of limesticks set out. A poorly situated trapping site with 100 limesticks catches fewer birds than a well-positioned site with only half the number of limesticks.

Quite independent of these reflections, the putative 'amateurs' set out a clear majority of traps. In spring 2011 90 % of all trapping sites found by us had to be categorised as non-professional for action by the law enforcement agencies as they contained less than 100 limesticks. Nonetheless these sites contained 74.6 % of all limesticks found!



If the authorities do not react the conservationists have to remove the traps

If the authorities continue on the whole to categorise professional sites using the current benchmark, only a quarter of limesticks set out are affected. As a result, the vast majority of trappers categorised as amateurs, but who set out three quarters of the traps, get off scot-free under this system. The widespread bird trapping on Cyprus cannot be combated effectively in this way.

8. Noteworthy incidents

The five cases described below, out of a total of 84 incidents, are typical and portray vividly the current situation on Cyprus:

8.1 Agias Trias, 13.04 - 17.04.2011 (organisation concerned - Game Fund)

On 13.04 a CABS team found 40 limesticks in an unfenced garden. As the trapper had seen our team they dismantled the traps. On the following day (14.04) the man had again set out 40 limesticks. The Game Fund were alerted immediately, set an ambush for the poacher on the morning of 16.04, and caught the man red-handed attending his traps. The poacher was not charged however but, as an 'amateur', received a verbal warning only.

On the same evening (16.04) a CABS team again checked the garden and found 57 limesticks. On the following day (17.04) the number had increased to 84. As the Game Fund could not be contacted the limesticks were dismantled - for the third time in five days!

8.2 Agios Anargyoi: 13. – 15.04.2011 (organisation concerned - Game Fund)

On 13.04, at about 6.00 pm, a CABS team observed a man and a woman collecting birds from limesticks. A 4 x 4 vehicle was parked nearby. Later the conservationists counted 100 limesticks at the site - a 'professional' installation. This information, together with the registration number of the vehicle, was passed to the Game Fund. On 14.04 the officers reported that they had laid an ambush but no one had appeared. They had left the limesticks in place and would mount another ambush. On the same evening at about 6.00 pm a CABS team again visited the site and observed the same vehicle at the site and the same man checking his traps. There was no sign of the Game Fund. They were contacted immediately and appeared 30 minutes later and caught the man red-handed. The 100 limesticks were seized.

The CABS team had provided the Game Fund with the precise location of the site, the vehicle registration number, as well as the exact time that the poacher could be expected to appear. Why the officers did not use this perfect opportunity to be at the right place at the right time is inexplicable.

8.3 Agias Mamas, 16.04 - 24.04.2011 (organisation concerned - Anti-Poaching-Squad, APS)

On 16.04 a CABS team found 180 limesticks at one of the largest trapping sites known to us. As the poacher operates professionally, and is regarded as one of the most notorious criminals in the complete trapping area, the APS were informed. On the next day (17.04) two officers were led to the site at dawn to set an ambush for the poacher. After three hours the officers broke off the ambush on the grounds that the poacher would no longer appear. They dismantled the 180 limesticks. Six days later (24.04) another CABS team checked the site and found 171 limesticks!

It was to be expected that the APS officers would wait the whole day at this significant site and, in the event that the offender did not appear, to set an ambush in the following day. The officers undoubtedly broke off the ambush too early and, without any real reason, missed an excellent opportunity to catch one of the most professional trappers in the complete region.

8.4 Agios Nikolaos, 21.04.2011 (organisation concerned - SBA Police)

At 4.00 am in the morning, in the course of a joint CABS/SBA police night patrol in the ESBA, a professional trapping site with 4 nets and an active electronic decoy device was located. The SBA officers were downright friendly and cooperative but declined to set an ambush to catch the offender red-handed. Both teams therefore began to free the birds trapped in the nets. Shortly afterwards a vehicle pulled up to the trapping site. The poacher had obviously noticed the activity in his olive grove. Instead of using the opportunity to try to arrest the poacher, the officers became nervous and told the conservationists to break off the action to free the birds. Instead they



Wryneck released from a limestick. In the background the sticky traps are laid out to dry.

instructed the CABS team to seize the nets with the still trapped birds and leave the site as soon as possible. The police and the CABS team beat an almost hasty retreat. On the way back to the police station the police and CABS vehicles were followed by the poacher for almost 15 minutes, until they arrived at the safety of the police compound!

8.5 Protaras, 16.04.2011 (organisation concerned - local police)

On 16.04 a CABS team found 24 limesticks and an electronic decoy set out in a fenced-in property. As neither the APS nor the Game Fund had time to assist the local police from Paralimni station were called out. A mobile patrol arrived within a short space of time. While the CABS team explained the situation to the police the poacher appeared and, before the eyes of the police, began to dismantle the still functioning decoy. The officer did not react even though this took place only 15 m distant. Instead the officer was unfriendly and sent the conservationists away so that he could (allegedly) investigate the matter.

Shortly afterwards it became apparent that the officer had found only 5 of the limesticks and no electronic decoy. After complaining by telephone about his behaviour to his superior officer the CABS team were advised to make a written complaint at the station. The unfriendly officer was waiting for them on arrival and refused to register their complaint. He began to shout, used threatening words to the CABS members, and sent them out of the station. The team again called his superior officer who called the officer on the phone and ordered him take down the complaint. Instead of doing this he stormed out of the station shouting. One of his colleagues then registered the complaint. One hour later the unfriendly officer returned, threatened to "knock the block off" one of the conservationists and flung the 5 seized limesticks against the police station wall. When the complaint was finally taken down in writing the officers refused to hand over a copy.

9. Recommendations for the future effort by the authorities

If the authorities intend to effectively combat bird trapping on Cyprus in future they must act much more professionally and with more commitment, time and energy than in the past. Our experiences from the many and varied contacts in spring 2011 can be summed up in the following important recommendations:

- ✓ Reinforcing the operational capacity of law enforcement agencies. The two most important anti-poaching law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus are severely understaffed (see relevant entries under Para 5. above). It is essential that increased political and administrative support is given to all responsible law enforcement agencies. This includes a stated recognition of the severity of the bird trapping problem at the highest level and a concomitant increase in personnel to cope with all poaching-related tasks at the peak of illegal activities (especially in spring and autumn).
- ✓ Embedded police officers. In future at least one police officer should be embedded with the volunteer conservationist teams. This will not only guarantee the security of the volunteers, but will increase the chances of catching bird poachers red-handed (see Para 5.1).
- ✓ Ambushes require the highest priority. The authorities must ensure that bird trappers are caught in the act and prosecuted. Because of the different daily activity pattern of individual trappers the ambush must be set immediately - the same day - that the trapping site is found.
- ✓ Plain clothes officers. Police officers on anti-poaching duties should wear plain clothes and use unmarked vehicles.

- ✓ More caution in the field. In the field officers should move quietly and use fieldcraft. Loud conversations, slamming of vehicle doors, driving right up to trapping sites and careless use of lights at night are to be avoided.
- ✓ More movement on foot. Officers should be less dependent on vehicles and move on foot in the field. Most trapping sites can not be approached by vehicle unseen.
- ✓ Regular checks. Three to four police patrols should be on duty throughout the complete trapping season and cover the whole of the main trapping area. This applies especially to the Cape Greco and Paralimni areas for the Republic and Cape Pyla for the ESBA.
- ✓ More attention to limesticks. The setting of limesticks must no longer be tolerated or treated as a peccadillo by the law enforcement agencies. A higher priority must be given to combating this trapping method.
- ✓ Loss of licence. Hunters who are caught using mist nets or limesticks should lose their hunting licence.
- ✓ Stricter fines and penalties. Existing levels of fines are inadequate to deter a bird trapping establishment with an annual turnover of millions of Euros per year. Financial penalties must be considerably increased for all forms of bird trapping. Prison sentences should be imposed on persistent - recidivist - offenders.
- ✓ Activity during the whole trapping season. Anti-poaching activity must begin with the start of the trapping season and not, as at present, primarily at the end of the season when the disruption to the poachers is minimal.
- ✓ Eradication of acacia plantations. The Australian Blue-leaved Wattle *Acacia saligna* planted by bird trappers with its elaborate irrigation system must be completely eradicated.

10. Partner organisations

In the framework of our current operations on Cyprus we are in contact with the following partner organisations:

Friends of the Earth (FoE) Cyprus

FoE Cyprus is our most important partner on Cyprus. They are included in the planning and reporting of operations and participate in our activities in the field. Members of FoE Cyprus attend all meetings and discussions with law enforcement agencies and ministries and support our campaigns and operations with their language capability and local knowledge. In cooperation with FoE Cyprus we issue press releases, conduct protest campaigns and together we draw the attention of the authorities to current bird conservation problems.

Terra Cypria

As one of the central, widely respected and influential conservation organisations on Cyprus, Terra Cypria is an important partner who promotes the acceptability of our work on the island and is always available to provide us with advice. Terra Cypria is working to raise public awareness on the socio-economic impacts of illegal bird trapping to the economy and especially the tourist sector. Moreover, Terra Cypria provides legal and political support to the work of actively engaged organisations on the field, such as CABS, FoE Cyprus and BirdLife Cyprus.

BirdLife Cyprus

BirdLife Cyprus is kept regularly informed on CABS campaigns and operations. We not only exchange data on trapping sites, but also share information on current developments and new information.

BirdLife Cyprus conducts a monitoring programme on illegal bird trapping during spring, autumn and winter. Although there are some differences in methodology and approach between our organisations, we would welcome the possibility of closer cooperation.

Migratory Bird Conservation in Cyprus (MBCC)

We maintain regular contact with the MBCC, who operate primarily in the Cape Greco, Ayia Napa and Paralimni areas. We exchange information on trapping sites and the activity of the authorities and assist with the recruiting of volunteers. Ms. Edith Loosli, the head of MBCC, has the longest experience and knowledge of bird trapping on Cyprus and is therefore one of our most important points of contact among conservation organisations working on Cyprus.

11. Perspectives for future operations

CABS, together with its partner organisation FoE Cyprus, will again conduct BPC on Cyprus in autumn 2011 and spring 2012. As close cooperation with the responsible authorities is, in our experience, the only promising route to success in the campaign to seriously combat poaching, we will continue to pursue this course.

This year has shown that the Cypriot authorities are ready to cooperate with us. There is however an obvious gap between this declared readiness and the actual commitment and effectiveness of the different Cypriot law enforcement agencies in the field. The officers involved clearly possess the necessary knowledge and professionalism and are definitely competent to effectively combat the illegal bird trapping problem. In our estimation, despite assurances to the contrary, the political will to implement a consistent and effective law enforcement policy against the trapping of protected bird species is still lacking. It is now up to the responsible ministries to stand up and be counted.

Andrea Rutigliano, Alexander Heyd
Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.
Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), 2011
Klitos Papastylianou
Friends of Earth Cyprus (FoE), 2011

English translation - David Conlin, CABS