

Bird Crime in the UK Sovereign Base Areas, Cyprus

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1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Cyprus is a staging post for migrating birds of major international importance, with about 250million birds passing through the island twice per year. These birds are strictly protected by Cypriot and Sovereign Base Area (SBA) law.
- 1.2 Migrating birds are illegally trapped on Cyprus and eaten as a delicacy known as 'ambelopoulia'. In the late 1990s the best estimate is that 12-14million birds were being illegally killed each year. This astonishing total is now thought to be much reduced, but several million birds are still being illegally killed annually. Each bird currently earns the trapper about £2, making the trade worth many millions of pounds every year.
- 1.3 This illegal trade is now seen by the SBA Police as serious organised crime, as well as an international wildlife crime of the very first magnitude. It is being dealt with by the SBA Police as such.
- 1.4 The main single centre of illegal activity at present seems to be Cape Pyla, an area wholly contained within the Eastern SBA. The blatant nature of the organised illegal activity at this site needs to be seen to be believed. Despite real success by the SBA Police (whose performance in this regard would put any UK police force to shame) there remains a great deal to be done.
- 1.5 This whole issue has already caused the UK Government significant embarrassment at international level, and is very likely to do so again unless further steps are taken by the SBA Authorities. Further embarrassment would probably be very unwelcome given the extraordinarily sensitive nature of the political situation on the island.
- 1.6 Although the SBA Administration has an Action Plan it needs further development if it is to be fully effective. A Conservation Management Plan for the ESBA is urgently required, and future enforcement action should be based upon it. In our opinion it is entirely realistic to expect the virtual elimination of the bird trapping problem in the SBAs within three years. The tactics suggested would **not** require any significant expenditure by the SBA Authorities and could readily be carried out by resources already available to the SBAA.
- 1.7 There is an untapped opportunity to exploit eco-tourism in the SBAs. This should generate new tourist revenue for the Republic of Cyprus and enhance the reputation of the SBAs, without compromising the sensitive military assets. This could be an attractive prospect for the UK government in the current circumstances.
- 1.8 A number of recommendations are made.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the ESBA is needed as a matter of urgency (para 4.1.6).
- 2.2 BirdLife International should be asked to contribute to the Conservation Management Plan (para 4.1.7).
- 2.3 The UK Ministry of Defence Conservation Officer should be asked to ensure that military requirements are not compromised by the Conservation Management Plan (para 4.1.8).
- 2.4 The SBA Police should be fully involved in producing the enforcement section of the Conservation Management Plan (para 4.1.9).
- 2.5 The Conservation Management Plan should include a Control Strategy seeking to eliminate bird trapping within a stated timescale (para 4.1.13).
- 2.6 The SBAA should move quickly to increase penalties for bird trapping, in line with those already applying in the Republic of Cyprus (para 4.2.6).
- 2.7 In line with UK practice, every trapped bird should be subject of charge (para 4.2.7).
- 2.8 The SBA Authorities should seek to secure the imprisonment of suitable bird crime offenders (para 4.2.8).
- 2.9 The SBAA should consider the opportunities for eco-tourism in the SBAs (para 4.3.8).
- 2.10 The SBA Police should adopt the UK National Intelligence Model, with a dedicated database for targeting bird trappers (para 5.10).
- 2.11 The UK National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit should advise on setting up intelligence handling operations in the SBAs (para 5.11).
- 2.12 The SBA Police should adopt the IIMARCH standard for planning operations against bird trappers (para 5.12).
- 2.13 The Priority Action Team of the SBA Police should receive basic surveillance training (para 5.13).
- 2.14 The Priority Action Team should be issued with remote evidence gathering equipment (para 5.14).
- 2.15 The Priority Action Team should receive crime scene management training (para 5.17).
- 2.16 The SBA Police should make full use of existing search and seizure powers (para 5.18).
- 2.17 The SBA Police should seek to sign an operating Protocol with BirdLife International (para 5.19).
- 2.18 The SBA Police should formally task BirdLife International (para 5.20).
- 2.19 The SBA Police should commission a professional conservation statement from JNCC (para 5.21).
- 2.20 The SBA Police should consider a conspiracy investigation against bird trappers (para 5.25).
- 2.21 BirdLife International should be asked to provide bird handling and identification skills on behalf of the SBA Police (para 6.6).
- 2.22 BirdLife International should collaborate with the SBA Police to ensure that police operations are intelligence led and target hotspots (para 6.10).
- 2.23 BirdLife International should assist the SBA Police to develop an agreed Performance Indicator for illegal trapping (para 6.11).

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The island of Cyprus lies under one of the major flight paths used by birds migrating between Africa and northern Europe. About 250 million birds use the island as a staging post every year.
- 3.2 The UK's two military bases on the island are under the control of the Sovereign Base Areas Administration (SBAA) which maintains its own criminal justice system, including a small police force of around 240 officers. This force, the SBA Police, is under the command of a Chief Constable.
- 3.3 Almost all migrating birds in Cyprus are strictly protected by law, both in the Republic of Cyprus and in the SBAs. However there is a long tradition in the Greek Cypriot community of catching migrating birds on lime sticks, to be eaten as a local delicacy known as 'ambelopoulia'. This activity, which is completely unlawful, has in recent years expanded dramatically with the use of modern technology in the form of very effective mist nets and electronic bird lures. The practice has become highly commercialised, to the extent that in the late 1990s about 12-14 million migrating birds were being illegally killed each year. This level of activity represents a conservation disaster of international importance for the whole of Europe.
- 3.4 It also represents a very significant economic crime. Although the number of birds killed each year seems to have declined substantially recently it is still likely that several million birds are being killed illegally every year. More effective enforcement has pushed up prices; each dead bird can be sold by the trapper at a price of approximately £2. This means that the entire illegal trade is still worth many millions of pounds, and represents organised crime on a very substantial scale.
- 3.5 The governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom have in the past received significant and justified criticism for their failure to enforce the law effectively. This has caused both governments some political embarrassment within European and adverse comment from the European Commission – of great relevance during the accession negotiations (Cyprus joins the EU on 01.05.04).
- 3.6 Although there are no reliable figures prior to a report by BirdLife International in 2002, all indications are that illegal activity has reduced in the last few years. It now seems that the level of trapping on the island in Autumn 2003 had increased compared with 2002 but was still significantly below levels seen two to three years previously.
- 3.7 A significant, and possibly growing, proportion of this activity is taking place within the Eastern SBA. This must be, and increasingly is, regarded by the SBA Authorities as serious organised crime as well as an international wildlife crime of the first importance. The potential for more, and more serious, criticism of the UK government is high if further enforcement action is not taken with the clear aim of eliminating illegal netting within the ESBA.
- 3.8 This report arises from a visit to the SBAs made by PC 3957 Henery (Northumbria Police), and Chief Constable Richard Brunstrom (Wildlife Crime Officer for ACPO) between 16 October and 20 October 2003 as guests of the SBA Police, and at the request of the Global Wildlife Division of the UK Department of Farming and Rural Affairs. This visit took place in the middle of the southerly autumn migration, and followed a visit made in 2001 by PC Henery which has already been reported.

4. SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS ADMINISTRATION

There are three main issues for the SBAA to consider, namely:

- 4.1 conservation
- 4.2 criminal justice
- 4.3 eco-tourism

Unfortunately due to time constraints we were unable to speak to SBAA officials other than the police, with the notable exception of the Conservation Officer.

4.1 CONSERVATION

- 4.1.1 We set out here a number of serious conservation issues which in our professional opinion need to be addressed and resolved by the SBAA before the SBA Police can be expected to be fully effective in controlling illegal trapping.
- 4.1.2 Following earlier criticism substantial progress has now been made by the SBAA. A full time Conservation Officer has been appointed and is based in the SBAA HQ at Episkopi in the Western SBA. Two Conservation Wardens have also been appointed in the WSBA very recently and much has been achieved to promote conservation in the WSBA including the production of a habitat survey and management plan.
- 4.1.3 There are two main conservation issues in the WSBA – control of shooting and protection of the sea turtle nesting beaches. Both issues are now under active management and the SBA police have been very successful in helping to protect the conservation interest – for instance about 1 million bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) passed through the WSBA in September 2003 almost without loss, with three arrests being made.
- 4.1.4 The situation in the Eastern SBA is much less satisfactory. No real progress has yet been made to evaluate the conservation status of the ESBA. There is no ecological survey, and consequently no management plan. This is most unfortunate as the biggest and most important conservation problem within the SBAs is illegal mist netting in the ESBA (this activity is almost unknown in the WSBA).
- 4.1.5 This lack of any form of conservation based management plan for the ESBA means that the SBA Police are operating without proper scientific context, leading to ongoing criticism from non-government organisations like BirdLife International, despite the fact that the SBA Police clearly do fully accept the strategic need to eradicate illegal netting.
- 4.1.6 We therefore **recommend**, as a matter of urgency, that the SBAA Conservation Officer commissions a Conservation Management Plan for the ESBA. This Plan needs, in the first instance, to concentrate on the Pyla Ranges with specific reference to the future of the acacia plantations used for illegal netting (see para 4.1.14). This Management Plan should make explicit the determination of the SBAA to eliminate illegal bird trapping from the territory of the ESBA within a specified timescale (we suggest three years). This Management Plan should be complete and in operation before the spring 2004 migration.
- 4.1.7 We further **recommend** that BirdLife International be invited, as a responsible organisation, to assist with the production of this Management Plan.
- 4.1.8 The UK Ministry of Defence employs a Conservation Officer. We **recommend** that he too be requested to visit the ESBA to assist with the Management Plan and to ensure that sensitive military requirements are fully considered within the Plan.

- 4.1.9 Enforcement action against bird trappers will probably continue to be a vital part of the Management Plan. We **recommend** that the SBA Police are therefore fully involved in the process of producing the Plan so that the level of enforcement proposed is realistically achievable and is properly reflected in the SBAA Policing Plan.
- 4.1.10 The ESBA Conservation Management Plan should in due course be further developed to cover issues such as the very unsightly fly-tipping which is an all too prevalent feature of the Cape Pyla area and which, if not controlled, will adversely affect the potential for sustainable eco-tourism within the ESBA (see section 4.3).
- 4.1.11 As already stated, illegal bird trapping is at present rife on Cape Pyla in the ESBA. It is no exaggeration to say, despite the apparent decline in recent years, that the activity is overt to the point of being a blatant affront to the SBAA. No objective visitor to Cape Pyla could possibly believe that the SBAA is yet really serious about stopping the illegal trapping – and hence the frustration exhibited by BirdLife. In our opinion the SBAA needs to move quickly to change this perception in order to safeguard its own credibility on the issue.
- 4.1.12 There appear to be three main control options:
- to remove the artificial acacia plantations
 - to prevent illegality by disruption
 - to arrest and prosecute offenders
- 4.1.13 Some or all of these may be viable or attractive; all require the underpinning Conservation Management Plan already discussed. We **recommend** that all options are fully considered and a comprehensive Control Strategy developed before the Spring 2004 migration commences.
- 4.1.14 Removing the acacia
Mist netting on Cape Pyla is carried out almost exclusively within artificial acacia plantations. The acacia has no known lawful economic purpose and is not native to the island; it seems to have been planted purely for the purpose of illegal trapping. Some of these plantations are contained in land rented from the SBAA while others are on common land.
- 4.1.15 Consideration will have to be given in the Management Plan, on conservation grounds, as to whether these acacia plantations should be allowed to continue. It would be a relatively simple matter to remove them, but even though they are not native they are now providing a very attractive habitat for migrating birds and it may be felt that they should be retained.
- 4.1.16 Acacia removal offers a swift and effective means of totally eliminating the trapping on common land on Cape Pyla. No prosecutions would be required but on past experience some adverse public reaction can be anticipated. Removal would probably be more difficult in legal terms on tenanted land and public reaction more significant.
- 4.1.17 Disruption
It would be quite possible to badly disrupt illegal activity by a range of methods. Irrigation systems could be removed where there is no authority for their use, tenancy agreements could be revoked given proof of illegal activity on the part of the tenant and equipment used for illegal activity could be routinely and comprehensively seized. The mist nets and bird calls are relatively expensive and their repeated seizure would cause significant economic loss to offenders. No prosecutions would be required, but again some adverse public reaction should be expected, especially if an attempt is made to revoke land tenancies.
- 4.1.18 Disruption, if it is to be successful, would require co-ordinated and sustained activity across a range of SBAA agencies, including the military. A key player would continue to be the SBA Police but they should not be expected to shoulder this burden alone. This option is more fully considered at paras 5.22-5.24.

4.1.19 Arrest and prosecution

This is the main control strategy currently in use. It has been effective, but not yet fully so. More, and more sophisticated, activity from the SBA Police will be required if this option is to be pursued.

4.1.20 In our professional opinion it is likely that this could be fully effective with only a moderate increase in activity and a very small outlay for additional simple equipment.

4.1.21 This option would require a robust prosecution stance from the SBA Police and the SBAA Attorney General which is more fully considered in Section 4.2 dealing with criminal justice.

4.2 CRIMINAL JUSTICE

4.2.1 The criminal law within the SBAs has to be, as a matter of both policy and pragmatism, fully aligned with the current law in the Republic of Cyprus. Unfortunately we discovered that this is not the case at present. The present situation runs the risk of the UK authorities being subject to criticism by the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

4.2.2 The law in relation to bird crime within the SBAs is contained within *The Game and Wild Birds (Protection and Development) Ordinance 1974*, as amended. A nearly identical measure is in force in the Republic.

4.2.3 Section 14(1) states: *no person shall shoot, kill, take or pursue any game or wild bird by making use of – (a) mist-nets, lime-sticks...or any other trap or means of luring.* Punishment is set by Section 14(2) at two years imprisonment or a fine of £1500, or both; the term of imprisonment triggers police powers of arrest without warrant. Police powers in the SBA and the Republic are broadly similar, albeit slightly stronger in the SBAs.

4.2.4 We were pleasantly surprised to discover during our visit (by talking ourselves to a member of the Republic's 'Game Fund') that the government of the Republic of Cyprus had very recently increased the relevant penalties in the Republic to three years imprisonment and a fine of £10 000 per offence. This represents a significant strengthening of the law, and according to the Game Fund, a clear determination on the behalf of the government of the Republic. The Game Fund has been instructed to control mist netting by enforcing the law rigorously.

4.2.5 We were very disturbed to find however, both that the SBA Police, even at senior level, were not aware of this change and also that no attempt had apparently yet been made to enact a similar strengthening of the law by the SBAA, despite the change having been proposed in the Republic some three years ago. A very likely outcome, until the situation is rectified, is that determined trappers will concentrate even more on the SBAs as the risk to their liberty and livelihood will be less there than in the Republic.

4.2.6 We therefore **recommend** that the SBAA move quickly to enact the higher penalties within the jurisdiction of the SBAA as a matter of urgency, and certainly before the beginning of the spring migration 2004.

4.2.7 Current police practice in the UK, with very similar law, is to charge each each bird caught or killed as a separate offence. In the SBAs current practice is to lay one charge only for each species, thus dramatically downgrading the charges heard by a Court. The law in the SBAs seems quite clear (each bird is a separate offence) and we therefore **recommend** that in future every bird is charged as such.

4.2.8 Experience in the UK has recently shown very clearly that imprisonment is a very real disincentive to wildlife crime offenders. It was the unanimous view of all law enforcement officials that we talked to that mist netting would decline rapidly and dramatically as soon as an offender had been sentenced to imprisonment. We fully concur. We therefore **recommend** that the SBAA and SBA Police seek to secure such an exemplary sentence at the earliest possible opportunity. We set out in Section 5 a range of suggestions that we think could help achieve this.

4.3 ECO-TOURISM

4.3.1 The very sensitive nature of the military facilities in the SBAs might at first sight seem to preclude any tourist activities. The SBAA is also discouraged from allowing large-scale development by the agreement establishing the SBAs.

4.3.2 However we believe that sustainable eco-tourism is entirely achievable in parts of the SBAs without compromising their military purpose and to the mutual benefit of the UK Government and the Republic of Cyprus.

4.3.3 The main eco-tourist interest in the SBAs is clearly the annual bird migrations, but it is not restricted merely to this. The SBAs contain a range of interesting habitats and species which would, if properly marketed in conjunction with the Cyprus Tourist Board, be very attractive.

4.3.4 Clearly any detailed discussion of this concept is far outside our remit and the scope of this report, but we mention it because of the clear potential which is largely predicated upon the elimination of illegal bird trapping. It is within our knowledge that some part of the wildlife community in the UK is actively discouraging visits to Cyprus precisely because of the persecution of migratory birds. This is having an adverse impact on the economy of the island.

4.3.5 As examples we suggest that enthusiasts would be prepared to pay to see resident Eleonora's falcons (*Falco eleonora*) and griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) on the sea cliffs at Episkopi (possibly the best place in Europe to see vultures), the turtle beaches and salt lake at Akrotiri, and the birds and wildflowers on the ranges at Cape Pyla.

4.3.6 All of these could be sustainably exploited with almost no investment cost (a visitor centre near the Fasouri marshes is already planned) by allowing day visitors to visit from the Republic, probably on controlled and guided tours. As an example a cheap facility that would reap dividends would be a cliff top viewing platform at Episkopi in the area of Sophie's View which would allow spectacular observations of the vultures. The RSPB have significant expertise in this sort of sensitive development in the UK.

4.3.7 There is a problem throughout Cyprus over illegal dumping of rubbish. This is a health and safety hazard and extremely unsightly. It is rather surprising to see such activity in the SBAs, and we suggest that the Conservation Management Plans for SBAs should contain suggestions on how this problem can be better controlled as it is likely to detract from tourist experiences.

4.3.8 We therefore **recommend** that the SBAA, in partnership with the government of the Republic of Cyprus, considers whether and how the very considerable wildlife interest of the SBAs could be sustainably exploited to their mutual benefit. Such a programme would inevitably place more pressure on bird netters to cease their illegal activities while benefiting the economy of the island as a whole. Eco-tourism is booming on other Mediterranean islands.

5. SBA POLICE

- 5.1 The SBA Police comprises some 240 officers. Force HQ is at Episkopi in the WSBA. Each of the two SBAs has a police Division; that in the ESBA has about 130 officers under the command of a Chief Superintendent based at Dhekelia.
- 5.2 A full understanding of bird crime in the SBA Police seems to be universal – literally every officer to whom we spoke was aware of the importance of the issue to the SBAA and the Republic of Cyprus, and stated their determination to tackle it with real enthusiasm. We believe this impressive level of knowledge of, and determination to deal with, wildlife crime to be unique amongst UK police forces. Significant leadership has clearly been necessary to achieve this.
- 5.3 The ESBA Division has a small Priority Action Team (PAT) under the command of a Sergeant which specialises, in the migratory seasons, in disrupting bird trapping activity. This team displays an extraordinary level of commitment which reflects real credit on them.
- 5.4 The PAT has had some significant successes in recent years in dealing with bird crime offenders. Two main tactics have been employed hitherto – seizing of nets and proactive arrest of offenders. Police figures indicate a dramatic decrease in illegal activity to about 10% of previous levels (measured by number of mist nets seized), while anecdotal evidence suggests that the fear of arrest has caused some offenders to give up their illegal activity.
- 5.5 The standard operating procedure currently used by the PAT when seeking to make an arrest is to approach an operational trapping site under cover of darkness, secrete themselves within the plantation or orchard within a few metres of the nets and await the arrival of the trappers, usually at first light. An arrest is made once birds have actually been scared into the nets in order to maximise the chance of securing a conviction later.
- 5.6 These tactics carry a high risk of failure. Given the nature of the terrain it is very difficult to hide quietly and successfully and premature discovery by the offenders has occurred. However this method is forced upon the team for two reasons: firstly, the very rough nature of the land surface prevents safe rapid movement, especially in the dark and secondly, the PAT's lack of modern remote surveillance equipment. These two problems have undoubtedly reduced the effectiveness of the PAT in their attempts to arrest offenders – especially the so-called “hard core” of determined trappers.
- 5.7 As a direct result the SBA Police has often resorted to disruption tactics, mainly the seizing of trapping paraphernalia such as nets and bird lures. Such tactics can be highly effective if carried out in a comprehensive manner, as the equipment seized is very expensive to replace.
- 5.8 Some offenders are clearly well organised. We found simple but very effective and astoundingly overt counter-surveillance procedures in use on the Pyla Ranges (ironically making use of new British Army observation posts) which have hitherto largely defeated attempts to arrest the worst offenders and which will lead the SBA Police into disrepute if not overcome.
- 5.9 It is clear that if the SBA Police is to eliminate bird netting on the Ranges it will have to change tactics. In our opinion this is relatively easy to achieve at low cost.
- 5.10 Intelligence gathering by the SBA Police is relatively unstructured by modern standards in the UK. This has led to ad hoc offender targeting and in our view, a high risk of ineffective operations. We **recommend** that the SBA Police immediately adopts the UK National Intelligence Model and its associated intelligence handling systems, and that it is used with a dedicated database specifically to counter bird trappers.

- 5.11 We **recommend** that a member of the National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit (a part of the UK National Criminal Intelligence Service) be invited to visit the ESBA to assist in setting up a formal intelligence gathering system.
- 5.12 We **recommend** that the SBA Police adopts the standard IIMARCH system to plan for operations against bird trappers. This will inject some additional rigor into the planning and execution of bird trapping operations and will reinforce the message that the force regards these offences as serious ones that deserve the full scope of modern police methods deployed against them. Formalising planning in this way will however increase the risk of leaks, and standard Operations Security planning will be required to counter this.
- 5.13 We **recommend** that the PAT be given basic surveillance training. Full CROPS training is not necessary at this stage, but may become so if offenders do not cease their activities and instead become more sophisticated. Lack of these basic skills is hampering their effectiveness at present.
- 5.14 We **recommend** that the PAT be issued with binoculars, night-sights and evidence gathering video equipment suitable for both day and night operation. Very little equipment is needed, and it is not particularly expensive. Issue of this equipment is absolutely vital to enable the Team to use a wider choice of tactics; failure to take this step will seriously restrict the operational effectiveness of the PAT.
- 5.15 This equipment will have two distinct benefits. Firstly, it will ensure that the Courts can see the full horror of the massacre that it being carried out on UK territory. Secondly it will enable a revolution in police tactics that will be difficult for offenders to counter.
- 5.16 In particular this will enable officers to gather evidence and intelligence safely, remotely and covertly, with greatly reduced risk of compromise and with an attendant increase in the range of enforcement options available. Use of this equipment is the single most important change that will enable the SBA Police to achieve the elimination of illegal trapping. We would be pleased to advise further on detailed operational tactics if asked.
- 5.17 We **recommend** that PAT members be given crime scene management training to ensure that all available evidence is collected and made available to a subsequent Court so that the Court can be made fully aware of the seriousness of the charges.
- 5.18 We are aware of the sensitivity surrounding police search and seizure powers on the island, especially given the fact that SBA Police powers are slightly more robust than those available in the Republic, but nevertheless we **recommend** that the SBA Police make fuller use of their existing powers of search and seizure to ensure that all possible evidence is secured and presented to a Court. This is not always the case at present.
- 5.19 We **recommend** that the SBA Police negotiate and sign, at senior level, an Operating Protocol between the SBA Police and BirdLife International. The intention of such a Protocol would be to enable the Police and BirdLife to routinely collaborate operationally by making unambiguous the relationship between the two organisations while ensuring the complete integrity of the criminal justice process. This method of creating and maintaining a relationship between police and conservation organisations has become a norm in the UK, to mutual benefit.
- 5.20 We **recommend** that BirdLife be tasked by the SBA Police through the proposed Protocol to provide operational bird identification and handling skills on behalf of the SBA Police. This will have the dual benefits of enhancing police operational effectiveness at no cost to the police while ensuring that BirdLife feels fully involved in tackling the problem rather than being frustratingly forced to the sidelines. This proposal will do much to build and retain trust and reduce the potential for conflict between the two organisations.

- 5.21 We **recommend** that the SBA Police commissions a full statement from a reputable conservation agency (we recommend the UK government's Joint Nature Conservation Committee which has a specific remit covering UK overseas territories; their advice is free) setting out the full international conservation effect of the illegal trapping of migratory birds. This statement should become an integral part of every future prosecution and will have the effect of demonstrating to the Judge the true seriousness of the crime being committed. Such statements have recently been used to secure prison sentences for wildlife offences in the UK for the first time; they are clearly very influential in raising the Court's perception of the offences from the level of poaching to that of international crime.
- 5.22 As already mentioned there are two main enforcement options available: disruption or arrest and prosecution. The Conservation Management Plan will have to consider both of these; they are not mutually exclusive.
- 5.23 Disruption can also be used as a successful enforcement measure. In the particular circumstances pertaining at Cape Pyla it would involve the organised and sustained removal of illegal irrigation equipment, the regular and repeated seizure of all equipment used to trap birds (specifically including mist net pole bases and poles as well as the nets themselves). The objective should be to remove all the (substantial) infrastructure used for mist netting, and to keep it removed. Regular targeted uniform patrols and stop checks would also be necessary.
- 5.24 Many but not all of these tactics are already in use but more organisation would result in better outcomes. To be successful more personnel would be required; removal of the irrigation systems for instance would require Army assistance due to the scale of the task.
- 5.25 We **recommend** that consideration should also be given to investigating what amounts to illegal use of water to irrigate the acacia plantations. Since the acacia has no economic worth in itself its watering must constitute an act preparatory to the commission of a crime. Under UK law we would consider an investigation into a form of conspiracy, especially given the very great economic benefits the offenders are gaining – we presume that similar provisions exist in the law of the SBAs. Given the enormous profits to be made, in our opinion this amounts to serious organised crime, and could be investigated as such, given proper intelligence handling. Such an approach would represent a totally different type of investigation but it might be extremely worthwhile and would make explicit the fact that this activity is indeed regarded by the SBA Police as more than mere poaching.

6. **BIRDLIFE CYPRUS**

- 6.1 BirdLife International is a charity represented in Cyprus by BirdLife Cyprus and in the UK by the RSPB (although the responsibility is shared between the RSPB and BirdLife Cyprus within the SBAAs). BirdLife International has been deploying a small number of staff on the island to monitor the extent of the illegal trapping for several years and has published its findings. The 2003 results will be published in due course.
- 6.2 BirdLife Cyprus has very recently hired its first full-time employee who has the task of promoting the conservation of birds on the island their remit extends to both the SBAs and the territory of the Republic of Cyprus attempts the responsibility is shared with the RSPB in the SBAAs.
- 6.3 BirdLife Cyprus has been extremely critical of the efforts of the SBAA and SBAP to control illegal trapping in the ESBA. There is no doubt that this criticism has been justified in the past, and to some extent it still is, from their point of view.
- 6.4 However the way they have handled this criticism is counterproductive. BirdLife Cyprus is perceived within the SBA Police, at all levels, to be “quick to criticise and slow to praise”. We agree. This perception has caused and is continuing to cause a poor relationship between the SBA Police and BirdLife which is unhelpful. We have advised BirdLife, separately, to change their approach to one likely to be better received by the Police.
- 6.5 BirdLife International has a great deal to offer the SBA Police that would increase the operational effectiveness of the Police. We repeat our **recommendation** made in the previous section that BirdLife negotiates and signs, (on behalf of its Cypriot and UK partners), with the SBA Police, a joint working protocol with the intention of removing any ambiguity in the relationship between the two organisations.
- 6.6 As part of this Protocol we **recommend** that BirdLife be asked by the SBA Police to provide bird identification and bird handling skills to the SBA Police. This will enable better evidence gathering and reduced suffering for the birds, and enhance the operational capability of the SBA Police at no cost. This arrangement is a commonplace one in the UK between police forces and non-governmental organisations like the RSPB. It works very well in the UK to the mutual benefit of both organisations; there is no reason why it should not do so in the SBAs as well.
- 6.7 Once a Protocol has been signed it will be possible, as a routine, to organise efficient and effective joint operations between SBA Police and BirdLife with a clear and appropriate division of labour and a much more positive attitude on both sides. In our view this is an objective worth reaching.
- 6.8 BirdLife International has been monitoring trapping activity in the SBAs and Republic of Cyprus since 2002. Standard scientific methodology has been employed using randomised grid squares for assessment. The current assessment is that trapping is down dramatically compared with earlier years but has increased slightly when compared with 2002.
- 6.9 However, and most unfortunately, the Cape Pyla area was entirely missed out of the 2002 survey. In retrospect this was a serious error as it now seems that it is one of the main, if not the main, centres of illegal activity on the island. BirdLife’s 2003 survey, yet to be published, will cover this area, and set a much needed baseline for the future.
- 6.10 We **recommend** that BirdLife International collaborates fully with the SBA Police in future by sharing its trapping intelligence to ensure that police enforcement activity is based upon up to date intelligence and thus that hotspots are properly targeted.

6.11 We **recommend** that BirdLife International collaborates fully with the SBA Police in future to develop an agreed police performance indicator of illegal trapping activity. The best indicator is probably the measured length of active trapping runs (lime sticks are much less common in the SBAs), as used in the BirdLife surveys.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 All the available evidence suggests that illegal bird trapping on Cyprus has been much reduced in recent years; however it still continues at an unacceptably high level and the potential to embarrass the UK authorities is still high.
- 7.2 There is some evidence that improved enforcement, based in part indirectly upon EU accession has played a role in reducing the problem. The commitment of the SBA Police to tackling this issue is now second to none, and this should be more widely recognised – much of the criticism they are still receiving is unfair. However police tactics need to evolve if illegal trapping is to be eliminated in the SBAs – which we believe to be an achievable aim.
- 7.3 In our opinion the situation can be dramatically improved *without* large resource implications but strategy and tactics will both have to change if this improvement is to be achieved. In particular conservation and enforcement activity needs to be strongly underpinned by a formal Conservation Management Plan, and enforcement options need to be broadened and strengthened with the aim of seeking imprisonment for the most serious offences.