



## UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the winter 2015-16 findings of BirdLife Cyprus' continuing monitoring programme for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and providing an overview of the latest developments regarding the problem

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## Περίληψη

Η παρούσα αναφορά παρουσιάζει τα τελευταία ευρήματα του συνεχιζόμενου προγράμματος παρακολούθησης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου για τη χειμερινή περίοδο 2015-16. Επισημαίνεται ότι η αναφορά αυτή έχει ως κύριο στόχο τους υπεύθυνους στα κέντρα λήψης αποφάσεων και τους πολιτικούς, με σκοπό την ενημέρωση, την ευαισθητοποίηση και την κινητοποίηση για πιο αποτελεσματική δράση για αντιμετώπιση αυτού του χρόνιου οικολογικού προβλήματος, το οποίο έχει αυξηθεί δραματικά τα τελευταία χρόνια.

Σημειώνεται ότι για το χειμώνα 2015-16, ο Πτηνολογικός δεν έκανε πλήρη έρευνα πεδίου όπως περιγράφεται στο πρωτόκολλο του προγράμματος παρακολούθησης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών. Εντούτοις, για να έχει μια εικόνα της κατάστασης της χειμερινής παγίδευσης έγινε μια έρευνα ελέγχου σημείων όπου ένα δείγμα σημείων παγίδευσης ελέγχθηκαν για τυχόν παράνομη παγίδευση. Αυτή είναι η τρίτη συνεχόμενη χειμερινή έρευνα πεδίου όπου εφαρμόζεται αυτή η μέθοδος ελέγχου σημείων.

Συνολικά ελέγχθηκαν 73 τοποθεσίες-σημεία και από αυτά 15 σημεία καταγράφηκαν ως ενεργά για παγίδευση πουλιών. Τα ευρήματα της έρευνας κατέγραψαν 627 μέτρα ενεργών διαδρομών για δίκτυα (διαδρομές σε περιοχές με ακακίες ή άλλη βλάστηση π.χ. πορτοκαλεώνες, ελαιώνες, όπου βρέθηκαν δίκτυα ή ευρήματα ότι γίνεται παγίδευση), 15 δίκτυα επί τόπου, 10 ξόβεργα και 5 πουλιά που βρέθηκαν παγιδευμένα. Όλα τα σημεία παγίδευσης καταγγέλθηκαν στις αρμόδιες αρχές για περαιτέρω ενέργειες.

Παρόλο που δεν είναι δυνατόν να εξαχθούν οι τάσεις για τα χειμερινά επίπεδα παγίδευσης πουλιών, αφού δεν έγινε πλήρης έρευνα πεδίου όπως περιγράφεται στο πρωτόκολλο του προγράμματος παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού, τα ευρήματα των τελευταίων χειμερινών καταγραφών καταδεικνύουν ότι η χειμερινή παγίδευση με δίκτυα είναι εκτενής και καταδεικνύουν μια κατάσταση εκτός ελέγχου. Τα ευρήματα παγίδευσης για τη χειμερινή περίοδο 2015-16 ήταν χαμηλότερα από τις προηγούμενες 2 χειμερινές περιόδους (2013-14 και 2014-15), ένα σχετικά θετικό αποτέλεσμα. Ωστόσο, ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου πιστεύει ότι τα μειωμένα επίπεδα παγίδευσης που παρατηρήθηκαν δεν ήταν επειδή η χειμερινή παγίδευση για τσίχλες έχει περιοριστεί, αλλά κατά πάσα πιθανότητα λόγω του γεγονότος ότι ο αριθμός των τσίχλων που διαχειμάσαν στην Κύπρο ήταν χαμηλότερος σε σύγκριση με προηγούμενες χρονιές.

Εκτιμάται, συντηρητικά, ότι συνολικά πάνω από 2,3 εκατομμύρια πουλιά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν από την παράνομη παγίδευση σε ολόκληρη την Κύπρο για το έτος 2015, με βάση τις καταγραφές του Πτηνολογικού για την άνοιξη, φθινόπωρο και χειμώνα.

Η μεγάλη κλίμακα θανάτωσης αγρίων πουλιών στην Κύπρο επισημαίνεται και στην πρόσφατη επιστημονική μελέτη του BirdLife International με τίτλο 'The Killing' (Αύγουστος 2015), όπου τα αποτελέσματα κατέδειξαν την Κύπρο ως μια από τις χειρότερες περιοχές (blackspot) για την παράνομη θανάτωση πουλιών στη Μεσόγειο κατά μήκος του μεταναστευτικού διαδρόμου μεταξύ της Αφρικής και Ευρασίας. Σήμερα αυτή η παράνομη δραστηριότητα έχει

γίνει μια επικερδής επιχείρηση με οργανωμένους παγιδευτές που βγάζουν χιλιάδες ευρώ κάθε χρόνο.

Έχει περάσει πάνω από ένα έτος από τότε που το Υπουργικό Συμβούλιο ενέκρινε το 'Στρατηγικό Σχέδιο κατά της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο' το Μάιο 2015, όταν συμπεριλήφθηκε μονομερώς και ο αποκαλούμενος 'εναλλακτικός σχεδιασμός' για 'επιλεκτική θήρευση αμπελοπουλιών, κατά παρέκκλιση'. Κάνουμε έκκληση προς την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση για την αφαίρεση του 'εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού' από το Στρατηγικό Σχέδιο, όπως έχει ξεκάθαρα ζητήσει και η Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή σε αρκετές περιπτώσεις τον τελευταίο χρόνο, και να ξεκινήσει άμεσα η εφαρμογή του υπόλοιπου Σχεδίου, το οποίο εκκρεμεί από τις αρχές του 2014.

Τα έξοδα για την εργασία πεδίου του Πτηνολογικού (π.χ. καύσιμα), καθώς και τα έξοδα των εκάστοτε εθελοντών, καλύπτει η οργάνωση NABU (BirdLife στη Γερμανία), καθώς και το Ίδρυμα Heinz Sielmann, ενώ η RSPB (BirdLife στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο) καλύπτει τους μισθούς.

## Summary

This report presents the latest findings of the on-going BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme on illegal bird trapping, relating to the winter 2015-16 season. It is highlighted that this report is mainly aimed at top decision makers and politicians, with the aim of informing, raising awareness and generating momentum for more effective action to tackle this chronic ecological problem, which has grown dramatically in the last few years.

It is worth noting that for the winter 2015-16 BirdLife did not undertake a complete survey following its standard survey protocol. However in order to have an insight into the winter trapping situation a spot check exercise was undertaken, where a sample of previously recorded trapping sites were checked for bird trapping activity. This is the third consecutive winter survey during which such a spot check exercise is carried out.

Overall 73 locations were checked and out of these 15 sites were found active for bird trapping. The findings of the survey included a total of 627 metres of active net rides (cleared “runs” in acacia plantations or other habitats e.g. orchards, olive trees, either holding nets or where there was clear evidence of preparation for the setting and/or use of nets), 15 mist nets *in situ*, 10 limesticks and 5 birds found trapped. All the trapping finds were reported to the competent authorities to take action.

Although it is not possible to draw conclusions about the long term trends for winter trapping activity, since the standard monitoring protocol of BirdLife Cyprus was not followed, the findings of the last few winter seasons indicate that winter trapping with mist nets is widespread and signal an out of control situation. The trapping findings of the winter season 2015-16 were lower than the previous 2 winter seasons (2013-14 and 2014-15), a relatively positive outcome. However BirdLife Cyprus believes that the lower trapping activity observed is not because winter trapping for song thrushes has been restrained, but most likely due to the lower number of song thrushes wintering in Cyprus compared to previous years.

It is conservatively estimated that for the whole 2015 year more than 2.3 million birds could have been killed from illegal trapping across the whole of Cyprus, based on BirdLife Cyprus field data gathered for spring, autumn and winter seasons.

The large scale killing of wild birds taking place in Cyprus has also been concluded by the scientific study undertaken by BirdLife International titled ‘The Killing’ (August 2015), which identified Cyprus as a blackspot along the Africa-Eurasia bird migratory flyway in the Mediterranean sea. The fact is that nowadays this illegal activity has become a lucrative business with organized trappers making thousands of euros every year.

It has been more than a year since the Ministerial Council has approved the ‘Strategic Plan against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus’ in May 2015, which also introduced unilaterally the so called ‘alternative plan’ for the ‘selective hunting of ambelopoulia, under derogation’. We call upon the Cyprus Government to remove the ‘alternative plan’ from the Strategic Plan, as requested clearly by the EU Commission on a number of occasions during the past year, and to start immediately with the implementation of the rest of the Plan, which has been pending since early 2014.

All the running costs for the field work (e.g. fuel), as well as all the volunteer costs were covered by NABU (BirdLife in Germany), together with the Heinz Sielmann Foundation, while the RSPB (BirdLife in UK) covers salaries.

## 1. Overview of bird trapping in Cyprus

Bird trapping in Cyprus has been illegal since 1974, when legislation on hunting was introduced with Law 39/74 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, adopting a long list of birds as protected, including the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) (blackcaps are the main target species of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus). With Cyprus joining the EU, EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC, formerly 79/409/EEC) was transposed into Cyprus Law N. 152(I)/2003, prohibiting anew the use of non-selective methods including mist nets, limesticks and calling devices, as well as the possession of trapping equipment, trapped birds and the trading and eating of trapped birds.

Historically, trapped birds – mostly Blackcaps - were a food supplement for the mostly poor island inhabitants living off the land. The practice of bird trapping in Cyprus has been recorded in historical documents from the Middle Ages and even earlier times. Trapping as practiced in Cyprus today bears no relation to the ‘traditional’ or historical situation.

Nowadays, bird trapping in Cyprus is widespread and extensive, contributing to the large scale killing of hundreds of thousands of migratory and wintering birds, and survey records show that 153 bird species have been found trapped in mist nets or limesticks, of which 78 are species of European conservation concern according to BirdLife International<sup>1</sup>. This is a clear indication of the non-selective nature of these methods. This illegal activity has become a profitable business which is controlled to a large extent by the ‘big’ trappers who are also involved in organised crime, and the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service (2010) estimated this illegal business to be valued in the order of 15 million euros per year.

Apart from the extensive use of non-selective methods for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, organised trappers nowadays use calling devices that have imitating calls of migratory birds. These calling devices are normally played during night-time, luring the birds into the trapping sites and hence increasing the catch for each trapper. Academic studies have shown that tape luring can increase the probability of birds being caught from 3 to 13 times (Schaub M. et al, 1999). Additionally, they have shown that the simultaneous playing of songs of two species can attract other related species also, e.g. researchers when playing Eurasian Reed Warbler and Pied Flycatcher, also trapped, sedge warblers, garden warblers, blackcaps and grasshopper warblers (Mukhin A. et al, 2008). The field report for Autumn 2013 of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS, March 2014, pages 7 & 18) highlighted the extensive use of calling devices and their intensity (in terms of loudness) within the trapping areas during night time, as these are often heard easily from hundreds of metres away from each trapping site.

This report presents the latest results for winter 2015-16 survey. It should be noted that during winter trappers operating illegally are targeting mainly the wintering song thrushes (*Turdus philomelos*), in contrast to spring and autumn seasons when the main target species are Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and other migrant songbirds. Trapped birds are either served as

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<sup>1</sup> List of birds recorded trapped in mist nets and on limesticks (BirdLife Cyprus)  
[http://birdlifecyprus.org/upload/Consolidatedlistoftrappedbirds\\_.pdf](http://birdlifecyprus.org/upload/Consolidatedlistoftrappedbirds_.pdf)

expensive *ambelopoulia* 'delicacies' in local restaurants or are sold and used for home consumption.

## 2. BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme

BirdLife Cyprus is a non-profit NGO working for the protection and conservation of birds, their habitats and wider biodiversity, and is the Partner of BirdLife International in Cyprus. With support from the RSPB (BirdLife partner in the UK), BirdLife Cyprus has undertaken a systematic surveillance programme of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus since autumn 2002, providing a long record of trapping activity and giving the NGO a very good measure of expertise on the issue. The surveillance programme follows a 'Bird Trapping Monitoring Protocol' that was developed by BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB, in consultation with the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service and the British Sovereign Base Area (SBA) police at the start of the programme. Figure 1 shows a map where bird trapping takes place in Cyprus; monitoring is concentrated in the two areas (numbered 1 and 2) where extensive trapping takes place:

1. Kokkinochoria area (Eastern Larnaca/Famagusta area) – this area also includes the Dhekelia Eastern Sovereign Base (ESBA) area), and
2. Ayios Theodoros and Maroni area (Western Larnaca).



**Figure 1** Map of Cyprus showing the main trapping areas

Although trapping is also an issue in other areas of Cyprus, the survey efforts focus on these two main areas due to resource limitations and because they hold the highest trapping activity.

It is worth noting that BirdLife Cyprus did not undertake a complete field survey for the winter 2015-16 season as described in its monitoring protocol<sup>2</sup>, but rather a spot check exercise. This is the third consecutive winter season that BirdLife Cyprus has undertaken this simpler survey

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding the surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus, read the latest Autumn 2014 trapping report.

<http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/upload/Trapping%20Reports/Autumn2014TrappingReport.pdf>.

method, primarily due to limited resources. This method involves undertaking spot checks at trapping sites, randomly selected and stratified to ensure a representative coverage of areas under the SBA administration and the Republic of Cyprus, in order to get an overall picture of winter trapping.

The project is undertaken in close co-operation with the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus (the Game & Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit) and the SBA Police. When trapping paraphernalia is found, the BirdLife Cyprus team immediately contacts the relevant enforcement authorities. It should be noted that the BirdLife Cyprus observers never confront suspected trappers and never remove trapping paraphernalia.

BirdLife Cyprus would like to note its particular thanks to the RSPB (BirdLife in UK) for supporting the project financially since the beginning. Furthermore BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank NABU (BirdLife in Germany) and the Heinz Sielmann Foundation for their financial support from 2013 onwards. NABU and the Heinz Sielmann Foundation cover the running costs and volunteer costs of the surveillance programme, whereas the RSPB covers salaries.

### 3. Results & Conclusions

- Field survey: the winter 2015-16 spot check survey of trapping sites was carried out during January and early February 2016, for 6 days in total. As mentioned previously, BirdLife Cyprus did not undertake a complete survey following the standard survey protocol for this season, in order to focus its resources more on awareness raising and other campaigning activities. However in order to have an insight of the winter trapping situation a spot check exercise was undertaken, checking about 25% of the trapping sites where in the past mist netting activity had been detected<sup>3</sup>. The sites were randomly selected for this exercise in order to cover both the Republic of Cyprus (covering both Ayios Theodoros & Maroni and East Larnaca & Famagusta areas) and the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA). All trapping locations were reported to the relevant enforcement authorities, either the SBA Police Anti-poaching unit, the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service or the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit, depending on the location of the finds.
- Summary of field data: In total 73 locations were checked, 44 within the Republic of Cyprus and 29 within the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA) – out of these **15 active trapping sites** were detected. The findings of the spot check exercise included **627 metres of active net rides** (cleared “runs” in acacia plantations or other habitats e.g. orchards, olive trees, either holding nets or where there was clear evidence of preparation for the setting and/or use of nets), **15 mist nets found *in situ*** (12 classified as Active Set Nets and 3 as Active Unset Nets), **10 limesticks and 5 birds found trapped**.
- Winter trapping activity: It is not possible to use the field data to draw any long term trends for winter trapping activity, since the standard monitoring protocol has not been followed for the last three winter seasons i.e. 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16. Table 1 summarises the field data for the winter surveys that BirdLife Cyprus has undertaken since 2007, when winter monitoring begun. **Even though trends cannot be drawn, the survey findings of the last few winter seasons highlight that mist netting trapping for song thrushes is at very high levels, indicating an out of control situation.** The trapping findings of the winter season 2015-16 were lower than the previous 2 winter seasons (see Table 1 - it is highlighted though that the number of locations checked for winter 2015-16 was slightly lower than previous seasons).

The survey findings from the CABS winter 2015-16 camp (February 2016)<sup>4</sup> clearly highlight that winter trapping has increased dramatically in the last few years, concluding that *‘During the camp we observed large scale illegal bird trapping with 96 active trapping sites found in 22 days. Altogether, 222 mist nets, 451 limesticks and 60 electronic bird callers were found on them’*.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that sites where limesticks were detected for bird trapping in the past were excluded from the winter spot check exercise. This was done in order to select a sample of likely active trapping locations, since trapping with limesticks is mainly done during spring and autumn periods.

<sup>4</sup> CABS Winter 2015-16 report available [here](#).

The survey findings indicate that mist netting for the winter season 2015-16 was taking place both in the SBAs and the Republic (read below); however trapping activity recorded by BirdLife Cyprus for winter 2015-16 was less than previous years. BirdLife Cyprus believes that the lower trapping activity observed is not because winter trapping for song thrushes has been restrained, but most likely due to the lower number of song thrushes wintering in Cyprus compared to previous years, because of the mild winter in Europe (according to BirdLife Cyprus' bird records / sightings and other bird experts).

- The low number of wintering song thrushes is also evident in the 'Hunting bag statistics' questionnaire that the Cyprus Game and Fauna Service carried out for the hunting season 2015-2016 (published in May 2016), which showed a decrease of the order of 50% with regards to the total hunting bag of song thrushes from legal hunting<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 1 Summary of winter field data of mist netting activity**

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Total squares surveyed</b>	44	44	81	53	39	38	87 <sup>1</sup>	90 <sup>1</sup>	73 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total active net rides (m)</b>	497	804	3830	936	616	384	1067	1415	627
<b>Mist nets <i>in situ</i> (no)</b>	22	3	31	11	34	14	53	48	15

*Note 1: This is the number of locations checked (and not number of squares surveyed).*

At a first glance if one were to compare the survey findings for Winter 2015-16 of BirdLife Cyprus and of CABS, it would appear that they are contradictory (BirdLife showed lower trapping activity, CABS showed higher trapping activity). However the findings are not contradictory, in fact they are supportive of each other as explained below:

- The monitoring methodologies of BirdLife Cyprus and CABS are entirely different. While BirdLife Cyprus' methodology is based on a randomly selected, stratified and systematic approach, the CABS' methodology focuses on locating active trapping sites in order to directly report them to the enforcement agencies. Hence, the BirdLife Cyprus monitoring winter methodology selects a sample of locations to check in order to determine the overall winter trapping activity situation, whereas the CABS methodology focuses on detecting all of (or as much as possible) winter trapping activity.
- The field survey duration of BirdLife Cyprus was 6 days with a two-person team, while the camp of CABS was longer (22 days) and involved more resources (8 people participated in total<sup>4</sup>).
- Winter mist netting trapping sites are normally bigger in size (i.e. more nets are set) compared to spring and autumn trapping pattern, as trappers try to maximize their catch of song thrushes moving about during day time for feeding (compared to spring

<sup>5</sup> The total number of song thrushes legally shot was 2,749,144 and 1,382,584 for the hunting periods 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 respectively.

and autumn trapping that takes place primarily in the early morning hours, when trappers would set fewer mist nets but more concentrated in order to maximize their catch of songbirds migrating in a group, especially with the use of calling devices). This winter pattern is also evident from the CABS survey data which included 222 mist nets located at 96 active trapping sites, a shocking finding.

- Trapping under different jurisdictions for winter 2015-16:
  - For Republic areas, a total of 117 metres of active net rides and 7 mist nets in situ were detected after checking 44 locations.
  - For the SBA areas, a total 510 metres of active net rides and 8 mist nets in situ were detected after checking 29 locations.
  
- Enforcement:

BirdLife Cyprus reported to the competent authorities all the active trapping sites located during the survey, namely the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service, the Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit or the SBA Police anti-poaching unit:

  - Game & Fauna Service feedback: 5 locations were reported to this enforcement agency. However no feedback was provided to BirdLife Cyprus as to what action was taken by the Game & Fauna Service, therefore it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of this agency regarding our trapping reports.
  - Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit feedback: 2 locations were reported to this enforcement agency. However no feedback was provided to BirdLife Cyprus as to what action was taken by the Cyprus Police, therefore it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of this agency regarding our trapping reports.
    - According to the CABS Winter 2015-16 report<sup>4</sup>, the Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit worked jointly with the CABS team for 6 days, resulting in 2 prosecutions and 16 confiscations (in total 67 mist nets and 18 calling devices were confiscated). Overall, 18 out of the 56 active trapping sites reported by CABS were investigated by the Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit (32% of reported sites were investigated).
  - SBA Police anti-poaching unit feedback: a total of 12 locations were reported to this enforcement agency. Confiscations of mist nets took place at 6 locations (a total of 22 mist nets were confiscated by the SBA Police), confiscations of trapping paraphernalia (e.g. pole bases and poles) took place at 5 locations, while at 1 location no activity was recorded.
    - According to the CABS Winter 2015-16 report<sup>4</sup>, the SBA Police anti-poaching unit worked jointly with the CABS team for 9 days, resulting in 3 prosecutions and 20 confiscations (in total 88 mist nets, 37 limesticks and 20 calling devices were confiscated). Overall 24 out of the 40 active trapping sites reported by CABS were investigated by the SBA Police anti-poaching unit (60% of reported sites were investigated).

The enforcement efforts of the Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit and the SBA Police anti-poaching unit are acknowledged. However it is clear that enforcement efforts by the competent authorities are not sufficient compared to the large scale of winter

trapping activity taking place in the last few years. Moreover enforcement effort is more focused towards the confiscation of trapping paraphernalia, rather than prosecution (based on the data presented in the CABS Winter 2015-16 report<sup>4</sup>) which is a more deterrent measure and approach. Unfortunately no enforcement efforts against illegal bird trapping were reported to BirdLife Cyprus from the Game & Fauna Service during the winter season, despite the fact that in the last few years large scale winter trapping for song thrushes is taking place.

- Death estimate for the whole year 2015:
  - During spring 2015 it was estimated that around 48,000 birds could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus (BirdLife Cyprus, October 2015 [report](#)).
  - During autumn 2015 it was estimated that over 2.2 million birds could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus (BirdLife Cyprus, March 2016 [report](#)).
  - Considering the levels of winter 2015-16 mist netting activity recorded by BirdLife Cyprus (see Table 1) and the levels reported in the CABS report<sup>4</sup>, but the relatively low number of wintering song thrushes (which is the target species for winter trapping) during 2015-16 winter season, **it is conservatively estimated that more than 2.3 million birds could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus in 2015.**

## Conclusions

BirdLife Cyprus undertook a spot check exercise during January and February 2016 for a period of 6 days in total, checking in total 73 locations. These locations were randomly selected from the complete list of trapping sites where in the past mist netting activity has been detected. Out of these locations, 15 active trapping sites were recorded and the findings included 627 metres of active net rides, 15 mist nets *in situ* and 10 limesticks.

**Despite the fact that trends cannot be drawn, the findings of the last few winter seasons indicate that winter trapping with mist nets is widespread and signal an out of control situation.** The trapping findings of the winter season 2015-16 were lower than the previous 2 winter seasons (2013-14 and 2014-15), a positive outcome. However BirdLife Cyprus believes that the reduced trapping activity observed is not because winter trapping for song thrushes has been restrained, but most likely due to the lower number of song thrushes wintering in Cyprus compared to previous years, because of the mild winter. The very low number of wintering song thrushes is also supported from the 'Hunting bag statistics' questionnaire carried out by the Cyprus Game and Fauna Service (May 2016)<sup>5</sup>.

**It is conservatively estimated that for the whole year 2015 (spring, autumn and winter seasons) more than 2.3 million birds could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus.** The large scale killing of wild birds taking place in Cyprus has also been concluded by the scientific study undertaken by BirdLife International titled '[The Killing](#)' (August 2015), which identified Cyprus as a blackspot along the Africa-Eurasia bird migratory flyway in the Mediterranean sea.

The enforcement efforts during winter 2015-16 of the Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit and the SBA Police anti-poaching unit are acknowledged, whereas the enforcement from the Game

and Fauna Service was sadly very limited (to our knowledge no enforcement was reported to BirdLife Cyprus from the Game & Fauna Service). From the enforcement data of Cyprus Police and SBA Police, it appears that enforcement effort is more focused towards the confiscation of trapping paraphernalia, rather than prosecution. **BirdLife Cyprus believes that an approach focusing more on prosecutions needs to be applied as it acts in a more deterrent way against this illegal activity.**

It has been more than a year since the Ministerial Council has approved the 'Strategic Plan against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus' in May 2015, which also introduced unilaterally the so called 'alternative plan' for the 'selective hunting of ambelopoulia, under derogation'. **We call upon the Cyprus Government to remove the 'alternative plan' from the Strategic Plan, as clearly requested by the EU Commission on a number of occasions<sup>6</sup>, and to start immediately with the implementation of the rest of the plan, which has been pending since early 2014.**

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<sup>6</sup> Enews [article](#) of BirdLife Cyprus with title 'EU Commission's reply is final – NO to the 'alternative plan' (January 2016).

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## **Appendix 1**

**Survey data for winter 2015-16**

**Evidence of illegal bird trapping activity from the spot check exercise**

Confidential information – provided upon request