



PRESS RELEASE

Nicosia, 15 March 2017

### **Illegal bird trapping levels remain tragically high**

**With 2.3 million birds estimated to have been killed in Cyprus in autumn 2016, BirdLife Cyprus highlights the urgent need for action by both the Cyprus Government and the SBA Administration.**

The latest findings of the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme show that **21km of mist net rides were active during autumn 2016** within the survey area, which covers the Larnaka-Famagusta and the Ayios Theodoros-Maroni areas. Based on the data gathered systematically in the field, BirdLife Cyprus estimates that nearly **2.3 million birds could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus in autumn 2016**. Illegal bird trapping is a serious and persistent problem both in the Republic of Cyprus and the SBAs. In the Republic, the use of limesticks is widespread and there are restaurants illegally offering *ambelopoulia*, while in the SBAs there is extensive mist netting activity and widespread use of calling devices to draw in birds to their death.

The extensive and widespread use of mist nets is further verified by enforcement statistics, where for the months August to October 2016 more than **850 mist nets were confiscated by the competent authorities, the highest number confiscated in the last 6 years**. With regards to limesticks, more than 3,500 were confiscated by enforcement agencies.

This wildlife crime is taking place both in the Republic of Cyprus and the SBAs, making it very clear that a joint effort is necessary to address this persistent issue. In particular, within the Dhekelia SBA area, mist netting activity remained around record levels last autumn, with Cape Pyla recorded as the worst trapping location for mist nets in Cyprus. Furthermore, other developments highlight the lack of political will on the part of the Republic of Cyprus to take serious action to tackle this persistent problem. In addition to the inclusion of the 'alternative plan' to the Strategic Plan for the 'selective hunting of blackcaps by derogation' in 2015, the Game and Fauna Service has proposed a catastrophic law amendment, introducing a series of relaxations and loopholes in the existing legislative framework.

**Martin Hellicar, Director of BirdLife Cyprus**, stated: "The proposals included in the amendment would be *completely counterproductive* to anti poaching and illegal bird trapping efforts and we call the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament to vote against this bill. Just as the European Commission has done repeatedly, BirdLife Cyprus also calls the Cyprus Government to immediately start the implementation of the agreed Strategic Action Plan with the removal of the 'alternative plan' and to take serious action against restaurants illegally serving *ambelopoulia*."

**Jonathan Hall, Head of UK Overseas Territories Unit of the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK)**, stated: 'As well as the urgent need to deal with the restaurants which illegally serve *ambelopoulia* in the Republic of Cyprus, it is necessary to address the supply coming from the SBAs. The RSPB, as the largest nature conservation organisation in the UK, is calling on the UK Government to crack down

on this activity and end the illegal-killing of songbirds in Dhekelia. This is an issue about which British people care passionately, so we expect the UK Government to take firm action’.

A key measure to stopping industrial scale illegal bird trapping within the SBAs is the acacia clearance programme that the SBA Administration started in December 2014. Unfortunately, this was halted by large protests organised by the local pro-trapping community in October 2016. BirdLife Cyprus calls on the SBA Administration to continue with its acacia clearing programme in Cape Pyla in 2017, otherwise there is the risk of losing all the momentum and positive progress achieved, when 54 acres of acacias were cleared during the period December 2014 to January 2016.

BirdLife Cyprus is committed to continuing monitoring this persistent problem and taking serious action on different levels in order to tackle it and is calling all competent authorities to show consistent ‘zero tolerance’ against illegal bird trapping, as a matter of urgency.

## **ENDS**

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### **Notes to the editors**

1. BirdLife Cyprus is a registered, non-governmental, not for profit organisation (NGO) that dedicates itself to the conservation of wild birds and their habitats in Cyprus. It was formed in 2003 through the merge of the two Cyprus Ornithological Societies and now has offices in Strakka, Nicosia comprised by professional staff [www.birdlifecyprus.org](http://www.birdlifecyprus.org)
2. The report on illegal bird trapping for autumn 2016 can be found here: [http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents/files/Trapping-Reports/BirdLifeCyprus\\_Autumn2016\\_trapping\\_report\\_Final\\_for\\_public\\_use.pdf](http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents/files/Trapping-Reports/BirdLifeCyprus_Autumn2016_trapping_report_Final_for_public_use.pdf)
3. The enforcement efforts of all three competent authorities (Cyprus Game & Fauna Service, Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit and SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit) are acknowledged by BirdLife Cyprus. During the months August to October 2016, the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service Larnaca & Famagusta district, had 32 trapping cases (35 individuals arrested) and confiscated 195 mist nets and 1,291 limesticks – this is the lowest level of enforcement action and results for this agency in the last six years. In contrast, the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit had its best enforcement results of the last 6 years, with 30 trapping cases (36 individuals arrested), and 164 mist nets and 1,915 limesticks confiscated. With regards to the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit, for the same 3 month period, the enforcement results were also its best in the last 6 years, with 29 individuals arrested and 496 mist nets and 295 limesticks confiscated. During autumn 2016 the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit received specialist enforcement support from members of the RSPB Investigations Team. This led to a number of additional arrests.
4. More information about illegal bird trapping in Cyprus can be found here: [http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents//files/Trapping-PDFs/Ampelopoulia\\_Infographic\\_155-EN.pdf](http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents//files/Trapping-PDFs/Ampelopoulia_Infographic_155-EN.pdf)
5. The Strategic Action Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, as it was developed through the participatory workshops in 2013 and which was adopted by most stakeholders

in April 2014 can be found here: <http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents//files/Trapping-PDFs/STRATEGY BOOKLET FINAL %CE%95%CE%9D.pdf>

6. A scientific report, *The Killing*, by BirdLife International published in August 2015 reveals “25 million birds illegally slaughtered in the Mediterranean every year”. In this report the Famagusta area in Cyprus is shown to be the single worst area in the Mediterranean. The same report shows Cyprus in the first place with the highest number of killed birds per capita, at 196 birds per 100 people, followed by Lebanon at 44 birds per 100 people. The report can be found here: [http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28\\_low.pdf](http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/01-28_low.pdf)
7. Acacia is an invasive alien plant species in Cyprus, which has been planted in the SBAs by trappers for the creation of appropriate vegetation for trapping birds using mist nets. It displaces native species, thus destroying the natural habitat of the area in which it grows. This means that the acacia takes over the native vegetation, making it one of the biggest threats to the island’s nature and wildlife. A relevant Press Release by BirdLife Cyprus, supporting the acacia clearance undertaken by the SBA Administration can be viewed here: <http://birdlifecyprus.org/news-details/in-the-press/birdLife-cyprus-supports-the-acacia-removal-for-the-protection-of-cyprus%E2%80%99-nature-and-avifauna>