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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

A pioneering conservation project in the British Bases is completed

Nicosia, 19 May 2016

The completion of a two-year project to restore Akrotiri Marsh was marked by a celebratory inauguration event at the Akrotiri Marsh hide. The event took place with great success yesterday (18 May), highlighting the project's achievements. Locals from Akrotiri Community, birdwatchers, photographers and nature lovers celebrated together the completion of the pioneering project. Visitors had the opportunity to enjoy the Akrotiri Marsh and its new visitor infrastructure as well as witness the on-site release of a Long-legged Buzzard, rehabilitated by the Game and Fauna Service. Visitors also had the opportunity to learn about the project's achievements and the future of Akrotiri Marsh as well as the significance of Akrotiri Peninsula for wildlife.

Akrotiri Marsh is part of the Akrotiri wetland complex, the largest natural wetland system on the island. The Marsh has been unmanaged for the last 20 years, resulting in the overexpansion of reeds and the consequent loss of bird and plant diversity. The project "Akrotiri Marsh Restoration: a flagship wetland in the Bases" funded by the Darwin Initiative, started in April 2015 with the aim of restoring the biodiversity at this unique site. To achieve this, the project team, BirdLife Cyprus, Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), implemented on-site conservation actions centring on water management and sustainable cattle grazing, as well as awareness raising actions and created visitor infrastructure to enhance visitor experience.

BirdLife Cyprus' Director, Martin Hellicar stated: 'The completion of the project has been a very proud moment for all of us as well as a crucial step towards making this unique area of immense natural value thrive once again. We now have a sound foundation for the long-term preservation of this key area, home to an abundance of plant and animal species and a go-to site for many nature lovers. The collaboration between BirdLife partners and the Bases, together with support from the local community and Republic of Cyprus authorities, has been the key factor in the project's success.'

The Commander of British Forces Cyprus, Major General James Illingworth OBE stated: 'This project, alongside others such as the Akrotiri Environmental and Education Centre, highlights the importance we place on protecting and maintaining the outstanding natural environment found in the Bases. I hope that this pristine area will continue to retain this favourable conservation status, and that we are all able to encourage the maintenance of the infrastructure here. This should enable others to enjoy this Darwin project for many years to come.'

The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without the active involvement and support of dedicated people and bodies. The project team would like to

thank especially the Darwin Initiative for providing the funds to carry out this project and the Tasso Leventis Conservation Foundation for its financial support to BirdLife Cyprus. Thanks also go to all the collaborators, researchers, contractors, birdwatchers, photographers, graziers and basket makers who provided valuable information and feedback that has been helpful to the restoration and management efforts. We would also like to thank the Akrotiri Community and Council for embracing and supporting this Darwin project throughout its duration.

For more information on the project and the Akrotiri Marsh: www.akrotirimarsh.org

The 2-year project (April 2015 to March 2017) titled 'Akrotiri Marsh Restoration: a flagship wetland in the Cyprus SBAs' was funded by the Darwin Initiative through UK Government funding (Darwin Plus, the Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund).

Project partners:



Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre
Κέντρο Περιβαλλοντικής Εκπαίδευσης Ακροαττίου



Funded by:



ENDS

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Notes to editor:

1. **Akrotiri Marsh project:** BirdLife Cyprus together with the Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) implemented a series of key actions aiming to restore Akrotiri Marsh to a mosaic of habitats, similar to the state it was in some decades ago, and at the same time to increase socio-economic opportunities for the local community. This project has been fundamental to the conservation of this important site as it managed to initiate key conservation actions, bring together key stakeholders and engage the local community in these conservation efforts. Moreover, the Site Management Plan which was created within the framework of this project is a fundamental tool that competent authorities can use to continue conservation efforts following the project completion. On a larger scale, the project can set the example for other similar actions and efforts to follow in the Sovereign Base Areas, especially within Akrotiri Peninsula, one of the most important sites island wide for birds and biodiversity in general. More about the project and its actions: www.akrotirimarsh.org

Photo Captions:

1. BirdLife Cyprus' Council Chairman, Melis Charalambides, Chairman of the Akrotiri Community Council, Giorgos Stylianou, the Commander of British Forces Cyprus, Major

General James Illingworth OBE, and RSPB Head of Global Conservation, Martin Harper, cutting the ribbon and inaugurating the north hide of Akrotiri Marsh
© BirdLife Cyprus

2. Visitors enjoying birdwatching from the newly constructed hide at Akrotiri Marsh
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3. Marking the event a rehabilitated Long-legged Buzzard was released back into the wild
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