

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR TACKLING ILLEGAL BIRD TRAPPING IN CYPRUS



INTRODUCTION

Large scale and non-selective illegal bird trapping, killing and trade of birds in Cyprus with the use of mist nets, limesticks and calling devices has become a chronic and persistent problem with hundreds of thousands of mostly migrant birds being killed every year to feed the local appetite for illegal *ambelopoulia* song bird “delicacies”. However many other bird species, including very rare and threatened species, are killed illegally. The majority of the birds killed are protected species, however also game species such as song thrushes (*Turdus spp.*) are affected negatively.

Despite the progress made in relation to the bird trapping levels that existed before the Cyprus accession to the EU, current trapping levels are still very high and unacceptable and in the last few years, since 2007, an increase of this trapping activity has been observed.

The key periods of trapping are during the main migration periods: mid-August – end November and mid-March to early May, as well as in the winter when song thrushes are, but not exclusively, the target species.

Moreover, the illegal money making business associated with the illegal trapping of wild birds in Cyprus is estimated to be in the order of a few million a year, while the adverse economic consequences are even more if one considers the impact on the tourism industry, as a number of potential tourists would not choose Cyprus as a tourist destination due to the bad image created. In addition to the criminal and economic aspects of this issue, the environmental and ecological impacts are also very significant, since many species of birds - at least 152 different species – are killed indiscriminately every year.

During the last few years there has been a major effort to tackle and to address the problem. Within this context the 1st European Conference against Illegal Bird Killing was organised in Larnaca (July 2011) by the Council of Europe (Bern Convention) and the Republic of Cyprus (Ministry of Interior - Game and Fauna Service). During this conference the ‘Larnaca Declaration’ was unanimously adopted, which highlighted amongst others a ‘zero tolerance’ on illegal bird trapping.

It is clear that a strategic approach is needed to tackle this complex problem at its root, with the active involvement of all stakeholders.

In 2013 two workshops were organised with funding from the MAVA Foundation (one on the 24-25th April and one on the 18th November) for the development of a Strategic Action Plan (StAP) for tackling illegal bird trapping in Cyprus until 2020. All the key stakeholders were invited and participated at the workshops including:

- Cyprus Game & Fauna Service (Ministry of Interior),
- Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit (Ministry of Justice & Public Order),
- Eastern Sovereign Base Area Police,
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- Ministry of Justice & Public Order,
- Department of Forests (Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment),
- Department of Environment (Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment),
- Environment Commissioner Office of Cyprus,
- Environment Department of the SBA Administration,
- Union of Cyprus Municipalities,
- Cyprus Tourism Organisation,
- Non-Governmental Organisations: BirdLife Cyprus, Cyprus Conservation Foundation *Terra Cypria*, Friends of The Earth of Cyprus, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus, Cyprus Hunting Federation (KOK-DAZ), and
- United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

From the two workshops that took place the participants identified the seven strategic focus areas of the Strategic Action Plan and identified targets and actions for each one of them. The seven strategic focus areas are:

	Page
1. Enforcement	4
2. Courts	5
3. Policy / Legislation	6
4. Awareness raising	7
5. Habitat management	8
6. Economic aspects, and	9
7. Monitoring & Coordination	10

The key overall targets of this StAP are the following:

- **Trapping activity levels:** Trapping activity reduced by 75% compared to 2012 baseline (as measured by the findings of BirdLife Cyprus and Committee Against Bird Slaughter survey work),
- **Elimination of the supply of *Ambelopoulia* at restaurants:** Elimination of the *Ambelopoulia* supply to restaurants by 2020,
- **Public awareness raising:** Raising public awareness levels with over 65% of public to consider illegal bird trapping as a serious problem that needs to be tackled (to be measured from opinion polls),
- **Court fines:** Average fine to be 1/3 of maximum penalty as stipulated by national legislation ≈5500 euro,
- **Habitat management:** Targeted habitat management in trapping hotspot areas e.g. removal of alien vegetation, particularly acacia plantations and removal of Syrian plum trees.

It is noted that the StAP has been developed and is in line with the commitments and obligations that arise from current existing laws in the Republic of Cyprus, the UK British Bases and the relevant EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), as well as the Bern Convention (for the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats).

STRATEGIC FOCUS 1: ENFORCEMENT

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to intensify the law enforcement efforts of the competent authorities in order to reduce this illegal activity. In order to achieve this it is necessary to make better use of the existing personnel, recruitment, further training and strengthening of the staff resources that are dealing with bird trapping and more direct involvement of the local police stations. At the same time it is necessary to apply fully the cross-compliance regulations and provisions, to make better use of forensic science and to have the involvement of the customs authorities with regards to imports of mist nets and calling devices. The aim is to achieve a significant increase in confiscations of trapping equipment and prosecutions of individuals, both with regards to illegal bird trapping and to the supply at the restaurants. Finally it is important to develop a better information exchange system between the competent authorities via international networks.

Targets for 2020

- **Trapping levels:** Reduction of bird trapping by 75% in comparison to 2012 (using the field data of the monitoring programmes of BirdLife Cyprus and the Committee Against Bird Slaughter).
- **Elimination of the supply of *Ambelopoulia* to restaurants:** Elimination of the *Ambelopoulia* supply to restaurants by 2020.

Stakeholders

- Ministry of Justice & Public Order
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment
- Cyprus Interpol branch
- Game and Fauna Service
- Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit
- Local police stations
- SBA Administration
- SBA Police Anti-poaching unit
- Cyprus Agricultural Payments Organisation
- Custom Officers
- Environmental NGOs
- United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus



Confiscation of birds for illegal trade - Game and Fauna Service



Offering of *ambelopoulia* in a restaurant

STRATEGIC FOCUS 2: COURTS



Confiscation of birds for illegal trade - Game and Fauna Service



Scops owl trapped in a mist net, endemic subspecies - BirdLife Cyprus

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to increase the average sentencing imposed by the courts regarding illegal bird trapping so that the penalties act as a deterrent. In order to achieve this it is necessary to fast track the prosecution procedures so that cases end up in court earlier and to raise awareness of the judiciary with respect to wildlife crime and to biodiversity in general.

Targets for 2020

- **Court sentencing:** Significant increase of the average court penalty imposed to 5500 euros compared to 850 euros that is currently.

Stakeholders

- Ministry of Justice & Public Order
- Judges
- Attorneys / lawyers / Office of the General Attorney of the Republic
- Game and Fauna Service
- Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit
- Veterinary Services
- Public Health Services
- SBA Administration
- SBA Police Anti-poaching unit
- Environmental NGOs
- Cyprus Bar Association
- EU Commission judge seminars
- Bern Convention Secretariat
- Media channels

STRATEGIC FOCUS 3: POLICY / LEGISLATION

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to promote and to adopt a 'zero tolerance' policy against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and to have national laws that will strengthen this approach. A further objective would be that political parties, the Cyprus Hunting Federation and other organized groups state clearly their opposition against this problem and the development of a 'No wildlife served here' branding certificate to expose at restaurants. A further objective is the creation of many and different network alliances for solving this problem, as well as exploring opportunities for funding the equipment and the use of Forensics.

Targets for 2020

- **'Zero tolerance' implementation:** Implementation of a 'zero tolerance' approach as part of a political commitment of the state and the strengthening of the legislative framework towards this direction.

Stakeholders

- Ministry of Justice & Public Order
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment
- Attorneys / Lawyers
- Department of Environment
- Game and Fauna Service
- Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit
- Public Health Services
- Veterinary Services
- Cyprus Tourism Organisation
- SBA Administration
- Ministry of Defence of UK Government
- SBA Police Anti-poaching unit
- SBA Environment Department
- Environmental NGOs



1st European Conference against illegal bird killing, Larnaca, 2011 - Bern Convention

STRATEGIC FOCUS 4: AWARENESS RAISING

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to raise awareness to the general public with regards to illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and to inform of the true extent of the problem as a serious wildlife crime, instead of today's perception that it is an issue of not such importance. It is important to undertake a long running campaign with the involvement of stakeholders, which will include also a media strategy to promote the problem via multiple media tools e.g. advertising, internet, billboards, radio spots, documentaries, as well as relevant information material. The main aim of the campaign will be to change the existing public opinion of a traditional practice to the understanding of the importance of bird protection and the promotion of birdwatching as an alternative tourism product for Cyprus. The objective is for the Media to also change through time their stance on this issue with the inclusion and promotion of anti-trapping at more regular intervals in the media.

At the same time a comprehensive educational package must be developed to be taught at schools which would highlight the importance of biodiversity and the need for bird protection, and the teachers should be trained in order to be able to teach it. The aim is that this package is incorporated into the school curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Targets for 2020

- **Change of public perception:** target is that 65% of the general public considers trapping as a serious problem by 2020.
- **Wildlife protection:** Establish / embed the need for wildlife protection across the general public.



Educational school visit - BirdLife Cyprus

Stakeholders

- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Department of Forests
- Department of Environment
- Game & Fauna Service
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit
- Environment Commissioner Office of Cyprus
- Cyprus Tourism Organisation
- Local authorities / municipalities
- Decision makers / politicians
- SBA Administration
- SBA Police Anti-poaching unit
- Environmental NGOs
- Cyprus Hunting Association
- Local hunting associations
- Environmental education centres
- Local schools
- Law consultants
- Media channels and media consultants
- Wildlife tour operators

STRATEGIC FOCUS 5: HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to undertake habitat management of areas that are important for the migration of birds and for their high flora value and which currently have been extensively managed for bird trapping e.g. Cape Pyla, Cape Greco. The management should include the removal of invasive alien species from these areas e.g. acacias, Syrian plums, and the correct use of irrigation water by the identification and licensing or closing of non-licensed boreholes for irrigation e.g. for acacias at Cape Pyla. Use of funding tools for the removal of alien species and habitat restoration. Designation of Cape Pyla area as a Special Area of Conservation.

Targets for 2020

- **Acacia removal from public land:** Reduce the acacia plantations on public land by 80% in Cape Pyla and Cape Greco.
- **Correct water use for irrigation:** Licensing or closing of all unlicensed irrigation systems on public land in Cape Pyla and Cape Greco.

Stakeholders

- Water Development Department
- Department of Forests
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Environment
- Ministry of Defence of UK Government
- SBA Administration
- SBA Police Anti-poaching unit
- SBA Environment Department
- Local communities
- Environmental NGOs
- Competent state authority responsible for relevant funds



LIFE project for the management and restoration of Oroklini Lake - BirdLife Cyprus



Mist net in acacias - BirdLife Cyprus

STRATEGIC FOCUS 6: ECONOMIC ASPECTS

The target for 2014 - 2020 is to assess the economic costs of illegal bird trapping and the potential of birdwatching as an alternative tourism product in terms of the possible income that could bring to the country, with the promotion and implementation of specialized agrotourism programmes from the CTO to interested farmers and landowners.

Targets for 2020

- **Alternative tourism - birdwatching:** Promotion and increase in the arrival of birdwatching tourists with the involvement of local communities.

Stakeholders

- Cyprus Tourist Organization
- Environmental NGOs
- Farmers / Landowners
- Wildlife tour operators
- Tourist Organizations in other countries that specialise in alternative tourism packages
- Local communities
- Competent state authority responsible for relevant funds



Birdwatching - BirdLife Cyprus



Birdwatching - BirdLife Cyprus

STRATEGIC FOCUS 7: MONITORING AND COORDINATION



Stakeholder meeting - BirdLife Cyprus



*Blackcap on limestick -
BirdLife Cyprus*

The Monitoring and Coordination (M&C) of the StAP will be undertaken by an adhoc Committee, which is established with the adoption of this document, and in which various stakeholders will participate (law enforcement agencies, other government departments and environmental NGOs). The M&C will be achieved by the activities undertaken on the ground as well as other specific actions that will be undertaken from Working Groups that will be formed by the Committee in order to achieve a better cooperation, information exchange, creation of a joint database and assessment and promotion of the targets of this Strategy. The Committee will convene a maximum of twice a year while for any specific issues that arise the working groups will be responsible for resolving, coordinating and evaluating them. The Committee has the right to invite experts and other stakeholders depending on the issue for discussion.

Targets for 2020

- **Monitoring of the implementation of the StAP:** Regular monitoring of its implementation and reporting to the relevant organisations, creation of a common template for the reporting of trapping incidents and the enforcement action taken, as well as the reviewing of actions.

Proposed Committee Members:

- Game and Fauna Service
- Cyprus Police
- SBA Police
- United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)
- Department of Forests
- Department of Environment
- CTO
- Environment Commissioner Office of Cyprus
- Cyprus Hunting Federation
- BirdLife Cyprus
- CABS & Foundation Pro Biodiversity

The following stakeholders were involved in the development and consultation process of the StAP



Πτηνολογικός
Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου

BirdLife
Cyprus



April 2015

BirdLife Cyprus

Office address: Strakka, Archbishop Makarios Avenue, Kato Deftera, Nicosia 2340, Cyprus

Postal address: PO Box 12026, 2340, Nicosia, Cyprus.

Tel: +357 22-455072

Fax: +357 22-455073

Email address: birdlifecyprus@birdlifecyprus.org.cy

Website: www.birdlifecyprus.org

Society reg. no: 4



www.facebook.com/BirdLifeCyprus



www.twitter.com/birdlifecyprus

Printed with funding from the RSPB

