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# Bird Trapping in Cyprus - Autumn 2010

Report on the latest results of BirdLife International's continuing monitoring of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus

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## Παράνομη Παγίδευση, Φθινόπωρο 2010: -

### **Περίληψη συμπερασμάτων προγράμματος παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου**

1. Το καθιερωμένο, συστηματικό πρόγραμμα του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου για παρακολούθηση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών, συνεχίστηκε για 9<sup>ο</sup> συνεχόμενο Φθινόπωρο με καταγραφές πεδίου μεταξύ 31 Αύγουστου και 8 Νοέμβριου 2010. Όλα τα στοιχεία που συγκεντρώθηκαν από την εκπαιδευμένη ομάδα καταγραφής δόθηκαν αμέσως στις αρμόδιες αρχές.
2. Η εικόνα που προκύπτει από το φθινόπωρο του 2010 είναι μια εικόνα οικολογικής καταστροφής με την παγίδευση πουλιών σε επίπεδο χωρίς προηγούμενο κατά την τελευταία δεκαετία. Τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης παραμένουν ακόμη χαμηλότερο από ότι ήταν κατά τη δεκαετία του 1990, αλλά αυτό δεν μπορεί να κρύψει το γεγονός ότι βρισκόμαστε τώρα αντιμέτωποι με μια επείγουσα κατάσταση.
3. Η καταγραφές δείχνουν μια αύξηση 75% στη χρήση δικτύων και μια αύξηση 89% στην χρήση ξόβεργων, σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2009. Τα φθινοπωρινά επίπεδα παγίδευσης δείχνουν ανοδική τάση εδώ και τέσσερα χρόνια.
4. Τα υψηλότερα ποσοστά παγίδευσης εδώ και εννέα χρόνια αποτελούν σοβαρή αποτυχία εκ μέρους τόσο της Κύπρου όσο και της Βρετανίας (τα επίπεδα χρήσης δικτύων στις Βρετανικές Βάσεις Δεκέλειας ήταν πέντε φορές υψηλότερο από ό τι στη Δημοκρατία το Φθινόπωρο του 2010). Ως κράτη μέλη της ΕΕ, και οι δύο χώρες έχουν ξεκάθαρες υποχρεώσεις βάση της οδηγίας της ΕΕ για τα πτηνά (2009/147/ΕΚ, πρώην 79/409/ΕΟΚ) για την προστασία των πτηνών και ιδιαίτερα των αποδημητικών πτηνών.
5. Ο Πτηνολογικός εκτιμά ότι σφαγιάστηκαν 1.4 εκατομμύρια άγρια πουλιά το Φθινόπωρο του 2010 στην περιοχή της Ελεύθερης Αμμοχώστου και στη Λάρνακα, κάτι που αποτελεί οικολογική καταστροφή και καθόλα απαράδεκτη κατάσταση, ειδικά όταν λάβουμε υπόψη το μη επιλεκτικό χαρακτήρα της παγίδευσης. Οι παγιδευτές κερδίζουν εκατοντάδες χιλιάδες ευρώ από την παράνομη πώληση αμπελοπουλιών.
6. Η Κύπρος έχει ολισθήσει σοβαρά στην μάχη ενάντια στην παράνομη παγίδευση που διακινδυνεύει πολλά είδη με μη ευνοϊκό καθεστώς διατήρησης, κυρίως μεταναστευτικά.
7. Αυτή η κατάσταση πρέπει να αντιμετωπιστεί επείγοντως από τις κρατικές αρχές με την εκπόνηση συγκεκριμένου και στοχευμένου σχεδίου δράσης για άμεση αντιστροφή της κατάστασης.
8. Ένας βασικός τομέας προτεραιότητας για δράση πάταξης είναι τα εστιατόρια που συνεχίζουν να παρέχουν τα οικονομικά κίνητρα για την παγίδευση σερβίροντας αμπελοπούλια. Η σχετική έφοδος της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου σε Άγιο Θεόδωρο και Χοιροκοιτία στις 20 Οκτωβρίου αποτελεί μια καλή αρχή σε αυτή τη «μάχη».
9. Προτεραιότητα πρέπει επίσης να δοθεί στην αύξηση του δυναμικού των αρχών πάταξης και στην αλλαγή νοοτροπίας του κοινού σε σχέση με την παγίδευση και την κατανάλωση αποδημητικών και άλλων πουλιών. Η σαφή και ξεκάθαρη καταδίκη της παγίδευσης από Υπουργούς και άλλους υψηλά ισταμένους θα μπορούσε να αλλάξει πολλά όσο αφορά την δημόσια γνώμη αλλά και να ενθαρρύνει τα Δικαστήρια να επιβάλουν επιτέλους αποτρεπτικές ποινές για όσους καταδικάζονται για παράνομη παγίδευση ή προσφορά πουλιών, συμπεριλαμβανομένης και της ποινής φυλάκισης.

## Report Summary

1. BirdLife Cyprus's monitoring of illegal bird trapping activities continued into the 9<sup>th</sup> year with data gathered systematically in the field (31<sup>st</sup> August – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2010) by a trained team of surveyors. All evidence of trapping was passed to the relevant enforcement authorities.
2. The picture emerging from autumn 2010 is one of a bird trapping disaster on a scale unseen since BirdLife's monitoring work began almost 10 years ago. Trapping levels may still be lower than in the 1990s, but this cannot hide the fact that we are now faced with a conservation emergency in Cyprus.
3. A 75% increase in mist net use and an 89% increase in limestick setting compared to autumn 2009 are simply unacceptable. Autumn trapping levels have been on a general upward trend for four years now.
4. A nine-year high in mist netting activity represents a serious failure on the part of both Cyprus and the UK (mist netting levels were five times higher in the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area than in Republic areas). As EU Member States, both have obligations under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC, ex 79/409/EEC) to protect birds, and migrant birds in particular.
5. The estimated toll of around 1.4 million birds within the Famagusta and Larnaca districts represents an ecological disaster, especially when the non-selective nature of trapping is taken into account. Trappers are making hundreds of thousands of Euros by selling blackcaps and other birds to be served up as illegal, expensive *ambelopoulia* delicacies.
6. Cyprus has now lost serious ground in the battle against bird trapping, an illegal and indiscriminate practice that threatens many bird species of conservation concern, migrants especially.
7. This situation must be addressed, with urgency and through the state authorities drawing up targeted action plans and allocating additional resources to reversing this situation.
8. A priority area for enforcement action remains the restaurants providing the economic impetus for trapping by buying and serving *ambelopoulia*. The Cyprus Police operation of October 20<sup>th</sup> represents a good *start* in this battle.
9. Priority must also be given to increasing enforcement resources on the ground and changing public attitudes to trapping and eating *ambelopoulia*. Clear condemnations of trapping from Ministers and other key decision-makers and opinion-formers could go a long way towards achieving a shift in public attitude. Such statements could also serve to impress upon judges the seriousness of trapping offences, leading to the imposition of deterrent penalties for those convicted, including jail sentences.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Bird trapping in Cyprus is an indiscriminate and illegal practice that threatens many bird species of conservation priority for the EU. The trappers are mainly after migrant Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and other small songbirds for home consumption or to be served as expensive *ambelopoulia* delicacies in local restaurants. Many 'non-target' birds are known to die in the mist nets and on the limesticks trappers use. Among these are shrikes, owls, flycatchers and the endemic Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* and Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*. In all, some 122 species<sup>1</sup> are known to be vulnerable to trapping and 57 of these are either listed in Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC, former 79/409/EEC) or classified as Species of European Conservation Concern (SPECs) by BirdLife International, or both.

Most of the affected species are migrants using Cyprus as a stop-over or wintering site during migration between Europe and the Middle East and Africa. Trapping activity is concentrated in the autumn season, when the largest numbers of birds pass through the Island. Autumn migrants are also more attractive to trappers because they carry more fat reserves in preparation for their trans-Mediterranean flight to Africa. Trappers are however also active during the spring and winter seasons. Financial gain is the main motivation for illegal trapping and determined poachers can make thousands of Euros a year by selling *ambelopoulia* for home or restaurant consumption.

Mist nets can generally catch many more birds than limesticks, though experienced limestick users, with expert knowledge of how to prune trees or bushes for optimum placement of the glue sticks, can probably catch as many birds as a mist net users. The catch is significantly increased by the now widespread use of tape lures, which draw migrants into areas set with nets or sticks. Mist net use became widespread in the 1980s, while the extensive use of tape lures began in the 1990s. Nets are often erected in established plantations of citrus, olives, figs or other fruit trees. In other cases, however, large areas of land have been planted with non-native acacia bushes specifically in order to create good bird trapping habitat. Cape Pyla, in the Eastern British Sovereign Base area (ESBA), is the most obvious example of extensive habitat management for trapping.

Though bird trapping has been illegal in Cyprus for over 30 years, the practice was widespread and largely blatant prior to a clampdown by authorities in the new millennium.

Trapping has become increasingly covert in recent years in response to increased enforcement. It is generally acknowledged that the remaining trappers are a hard-core of well-organised and often ruthless criminals.

In the autumn of 2002, concerns about the conservation impact of bird trapping in Cyprus led the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the RSPB, BirdLife in the UK) and BirdLife Cyprus (BirdLife in Cyprus) to launch a groundbreaking joint project to monitor the illegal activity. Monitoring has subsequently been carried out every spring and autumn season, and since 2007 in winter as well. The target is to produce accurate reports on this issue and arrive at reliable estimates, relative to previous seasons, of levels of illegal trapping.

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<sup>1</sup> See Magnin's 1986 report to the ICBP.

## **1.2. Autumn 2010 surveillance**

The autumn 2010 Cyprus bird trapping surveillance project began on 31<sup>st</sup> August and ended on 8<sup>th</sup> November (inclusive). Two trained observers carried out field investigations aimed at monitoring illegal bird trapping activity.

The monitoring is concentrated in the two main trapping areas on the Island, the SE corner of the island: covering Paralimni, Ayia Napa, Cape Greco and Cape Pyla in the Famagusta and Eastern Larnaca Districts, and the Ayios Theodoros and Maroni valleys west of Larnaca.

The project was, as in previous seasons, undertaken with the close co-operation of the authorities in the Republic of Cyprus (the Cyprus Game Fund Service and the Cyprus Police) and the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) - the SBA Police. On finding trapping evidence, the observers immediately contacted the relevant enforcement authorities. The observers never confronted suspected trappers and never removed trapping paraphernalia.

## **2. Field Survey Methods**

### **2.1. Survey area and sampling strategy**

The surveillance project began in 2002 with coverage of 60 sample squares (each 1x1 km) chosen at random from within a 261 km<sup>2</sup> study area, which covered most of the Famagusta/E Larnaca area and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni area.

In 2005, the monitoring became more targeted, homing in on habitat suitable for trapping. Each 1 km square within the study area was classified as either a 'possible bird trapping area' or 'unlikely bird trapping area' based solely on the presence or absence of vegetation suitable for setting of limesticks or nets. Surveillance subsequently took place in "possible" squares only. Some 44 of the original 60 sample squares were 'possible bird trapping area' squares under the new classification. These 44 squares were kept, with another 16 new squares chosen randomly to bring the total sample to 60 again.

In 2007, the survey area was expanded to cover 295 km<sup>2</sup> for Famagusta/E Larnaca area and 111 km<sup>2</sup> for Ayios Theodoros – Maroni area (406 km<sup>2</sup> in total) after preliminary surveys in autumn 2006 found evidence of extensive trapping on the margins of the original survey areas. The sample size was expanded to 100 squares (40 new squares were randomly chosen) to allow for this extension of the survey areas.

The random selection of sample squares is stratified to ensure representative coverage of areas under SBA, Republic and "joint" jurisdictions.

Of the 436 1 km squares<sup>2</sup> in the expanded survey area, 301 are classified as 'possible bird trapping area' squares. The 100 sample squares covered every autumn since 2007 thus represent just under 33% of the total suitable trapping area within the study sites.

This report looks at field data from the 100 sample squares covered since 2007 to identify short-term trends and then uses data from the sub-sample of 44 squares covered every year since 2002 to identify longer-term trends.

## **2.2. Survey Methods**

Surveying consisted of systematically searching for evidence of illegal trapping activity in the 100 randomly selected 1km squares. The time taken to survey each square was recorded, as were weather patterns and the presence or absence of large numbers of migrant birds.

For safety reasons (avoidance of possible confrontation with trappers) the observers did not go out in the field at dawn, which is the main period of trapping activity, but carried out surveys between 09:00 and 17:00. Each sample square was surveyed only once each season, partly for safety reasons (minimising the risk of the observers becoming known to trappers) and partly because repeat sampling of each square has no particular value when it comes to analysis of the gathered data.

Opportunistic observations were conducted near to the edge of survey squares where there was a higher probability of trapping.

### **2.2.1. Mist nets**

The aim of the survey team was to record all direct and indirect evidence of mist net and tape lure use. To achieve this, all habitat patches suitable for the setting of mist nets (i.e. all areas with bushes and/or trees) within each sample square were searched.

The observers focus on identifying 'active net rides' – cleared corridors within vegetation prepared for the setting of nets due to the change of the trapping habits of determined trappers. Trappers rarely leave nets standing long after dawn. An experienced observer with the knowledge of trapping habits and methods of trappers can easily identify prepared and active net rides, even in the absence of nets.

The codes used for the various categories of mist net rides and for tape lure use are given below, as are the codes used for recording the type of habitat where trapping activity is detected.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that not all 1 km squares within the survey areas contain a km<sup>2</sup> of land, as many are located along the coast and cover expanses of sea. Therefore, the number of 1 km squares is higher than the total survey area in km<sup>2</sup>.

## Key to survey codes used in field

| <u>Net code</u>                  | <u>Habitat code</u> | <u>Tape lure code</u>                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| O – old ride                     | A – acacia          | C – citrus                                      |
| P – ride recently prepared       | E – eucalyptus      | F – fig   |
| ANN – active no nets present     | J – mulberry        | O – olive                                       |
| AUN – active unset net present   | M – maquis          | P – pomegranate                                 |
| ASN – active set net present     | K – Carob           | Cy - cypress                                    |
| IUN – inactive unset net present |                     | P – tale lure present, playing                  |
|                                  |                     | L – loudspeakers present                        |
|                                  |                     | Y – tape lure present, not playing              |
|                                  |                     | U – unknown                                     |
|                                  |                     | W – electrical wires associated with tape lures |
|                                  |                     | B – car battery present                         |

### 2.2.2. Limesticks

While the main effort of observers was to locate evidence of mist netting, all evidence of limestick activity was also recorded. Limesticks are much harder to locate in the field than mist nets and are often set in different habitat to mist nets. In addition, incidental evidence for limestick use is hard to detect (though trees pruned to hold limesticks are readily identifiable). It is impractical to search entire 1 km sample squares for limesticks due to the time consuming nature of the task. The protocol was therefore for the observers to look out for limesticks while concentrating on surveying for mist netting activity.

### 3. Autumn 2010 Results

A full break-down of all the data recorded in the field is given in appendix I.

Overall, some 60% the 100 survey squares contained evidence of trapping activity in autumn 2010 (13% higher than in autumn 2009).

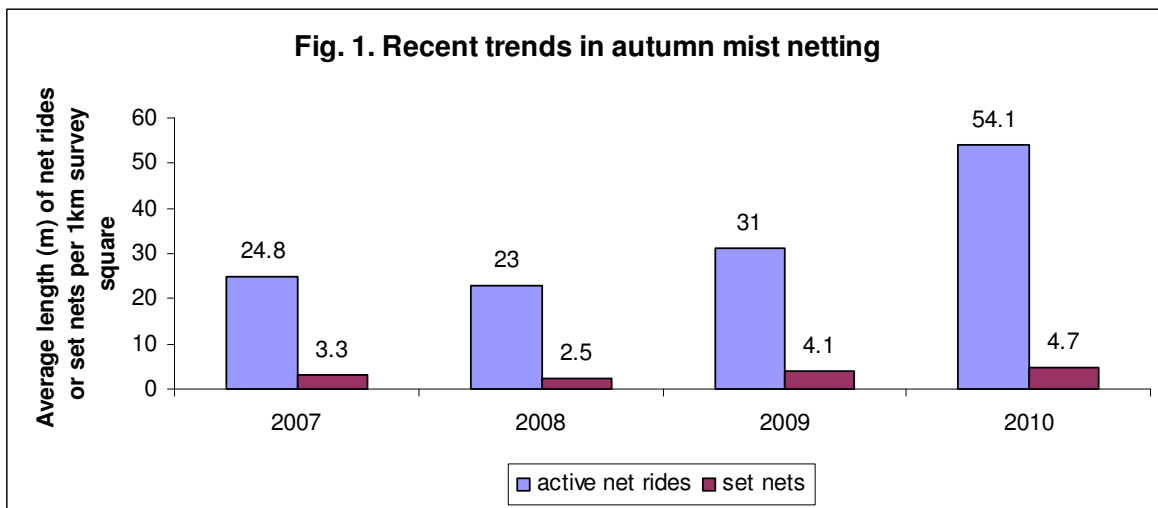
#### 3.1. Mist nets

The survey team located a total of 5,407 metres of active net rides - a 75% increase on the autumn of 2009, when just over 3,000 metres were located. This included 677 metres of *in situ* nets (34 nets in total) – a 66% increase on autumn 2009, when 22 nets were found.

The increase identified in autumn 2010 is particularly alarming considering that the comparison is with the autumn 2009 data, which in itself represented a significant rise (of 35%) compared to autumn 2008 data.

The sharp increase in set nets in autumn 2010 suggests a reduced fear of enforcement action. A further 260 metres of active net ride were located during opportunistic searches beyond the survey squares.

The recent trend in average detected levels of autumn mist netting is shown below **Figure 1**. Note the large increase in mist netting from 2009 to 2010.



Scaling up the total active net ride finds (5,407 m) on the basis of the proportion of 'possible' trapping squares that were surveyed (33% - see under 'survey area' above), suggests that over 16 km of net rides were active within the survey area as a whole during autumn 2010.



This 16 km of prepared net ride could hold 1,333 12-metre nets, each capable of catching an average of 20 birds a day<sup>3</sup>. If we take the autumn trapping season to be 60 days long (a conservative estimate) and assume that prepared (P) rides (26.7% of the total located) were active only every other day and active net rides (ANN, ASN and AUN - see under net codes on page 6) every day, then we can estimate that 1,386,400 birds were caught in nets in the study areas during the autumn of 2010.

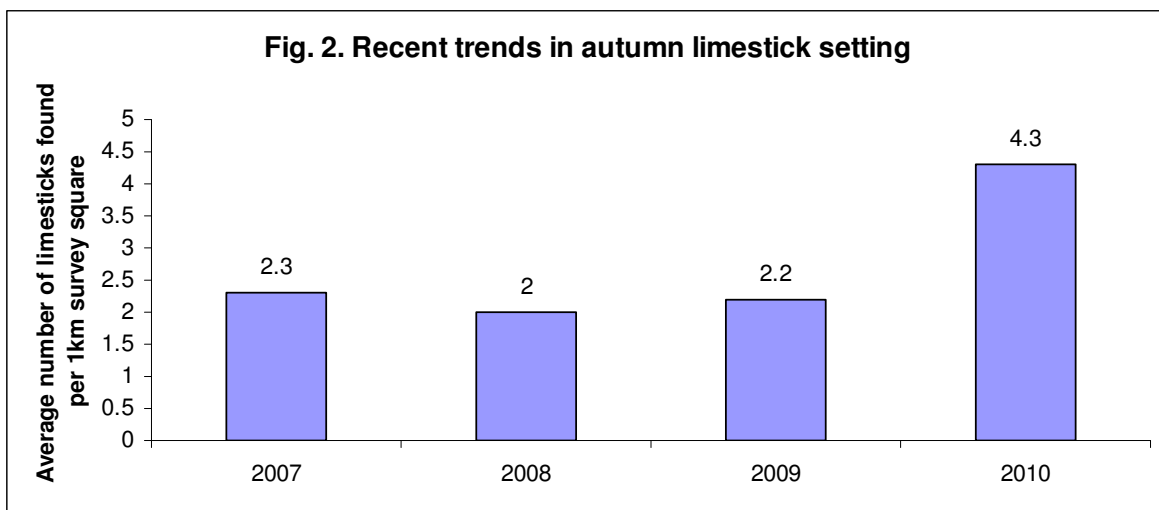
**An estimated 16 km of net rides were active in the Famagusta & Larnaca areas in autumn 2010, leading to the killing of an estimated 1,386,000 birds.**

This toll is only an estimate and includes a number of assumptions, but the numbers of birds killed is plainly unsustainable and unacceptable, especially when one considers that trapping is by no means restricted to the study areas.

### 3.2. Limesticks

A total of 426 limesticks were located in the field in autumn 2010 – a massive (89%) increase compared to autumn 2009. In addition to this, clear evidence of limestick-making or of trees having been prepared to take sticks was found in 10 survey squares. An additional 25 limesticks were located during opportunistic searches beyond the survey squares. The BirdLife surveillance effort does not focus on finding limesticks and so our limestick count is invariably an underestimate. Other observers active in the field, working with more of a focus on finding limesticks, reported far more widespread use of limesticks in autumn 2010. For example, a joint CABS/FoE team searching in broadly the same areas as BirdLife, reported finding 934 limesticks between 26<sup>th</sup> September and 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2010 (according to relevant CABS/FoE press release).

**Figure 2** (below) shows the recent trend in levels of autumn limestick use. There was a significant jump in limestick use in 2010.



<sup>3</sup> See Magnin’s 1986 report to the ICBP

### 3.3. Tape lures

Tape lure use was much more in evidence than in previous autumn surveys, with lures found in operation in three squares and clear indications of lure use found in another two squares.

### 3.4. Fenced areas

Contrary to the pattern detected in recent years, 76% of active set nets were located out of fenced areas whereas fenced areas only accounted for 24% of active set net rides. Notably, almost all *in situ* set nets (26 of the 34 located: 76%) were also found in unfenced areas. For limesticks the pattern was the same, nearly all finds (99%) being made in unfenced areas.

**It is worth noting that 39 fenced areas within the 100 survey squares could *not* be fully checked by the BirdLife survey team, which does not enter such enclosures. Some 22 of these enclosures could not be checked at all. This is a likely serious source of underestimate of trapping levels, as it is generally accepted that trapping is increasingly carried out in enclosed areas.**

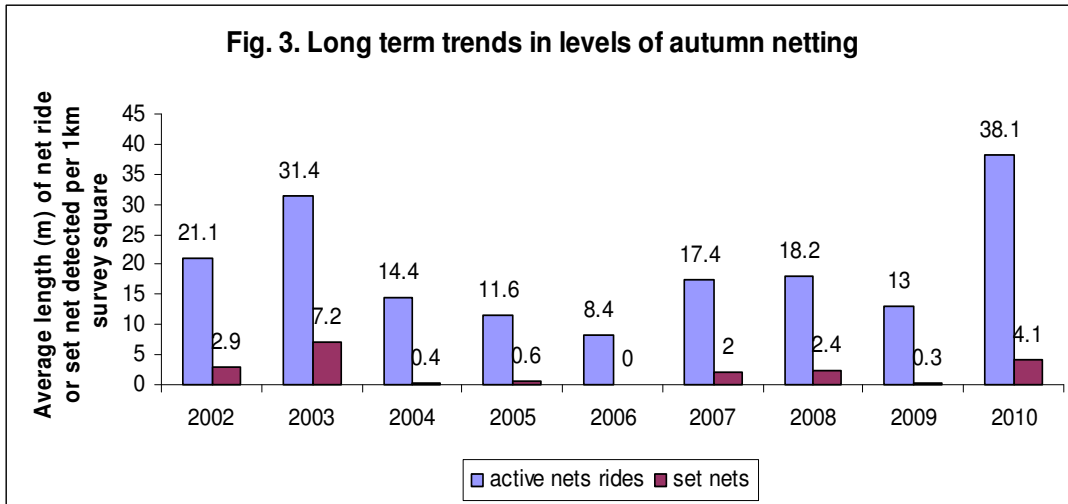
The BirdLife field team again faced several aggressive encounters from suspected trappers during their work (see appendix I for details). In fact, such encounters were increased compared to previous seasons and trappers were often reported to confront not just the BirdLife survey team but simple birdwatchers too, the usual challenge being something along the lines of “get off our patch!” In general, survey squares could often not be searched fully because of aggressive behavior from suspected trappers or, more frequently, simply because there were too many people present in the survey squares. This hampered the survey effort.

**Overall, the field evidence shows a sharp rise in trapping activity in autumn 2010.**

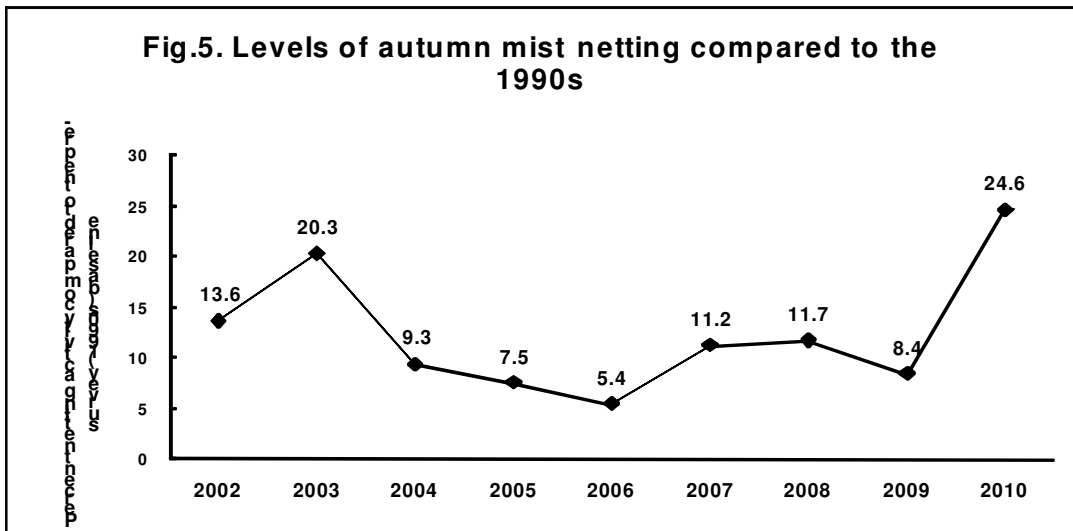
### 3.5. Long-term trends in trapping activity

This section examines the longer-term trends in trapping, using the smaller sub-sample of data taken from the 44 repeatedly surveyed squares. The full data sample of 100 squares is statistically more reliable when looking at recent trends (Figures 1 and 2 in above section), but the data from the 44 squares provide a good overall indication of the trends since monitoring began in 2002 (Figures 3, 4 below).

The long-term averages trend (see below, **Figure 3**) shows mist netting activity in autumn 2010 was the highest ever recorded in the 10-year BirdLife monitoring programme.



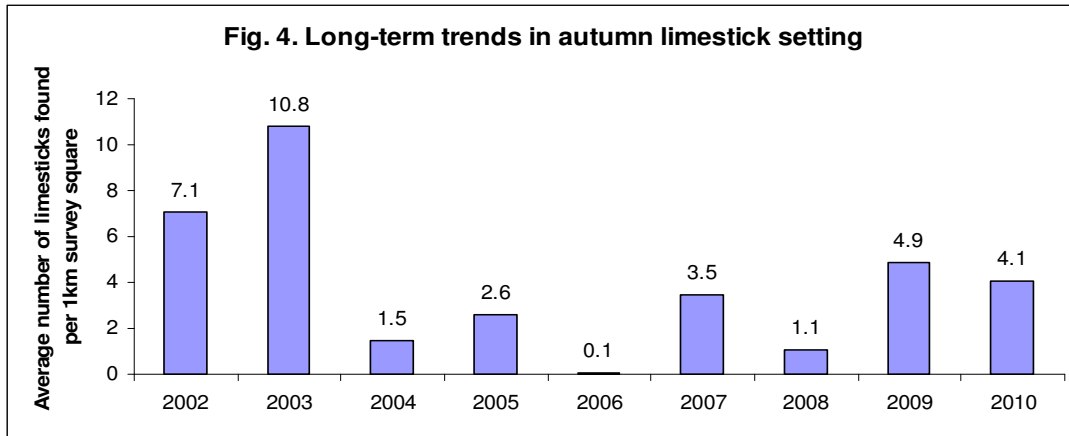
**Figure 5** (below) shows how levels of mist netting over the nine-year survey period have varied compared to pre-survey (1990s) levels. The data is taken from the 44 repeatedly surveyed squares, for which a baseline (1990s) netting level is derived from the total of active and inactive (old) net runs detected within these squares in the first (autumn 2002) survey, which was 6,817 metres of net ride. The level of mist netting recorded in the field in autumn 2010 was almost 25% of the 1990s baseline level (or 75% lower than in the 1990s, when, it should be stressed, anti-trapping enforcement was very lax and trapping a near “free-for-all”).



Thanks to increased enforcement, mist net use remains much lower than it was in the trapping ‘heydays’ of the 1990s, when millions of birds were being killed every year. But the recent upsurge (evident in both figure 5 and figure 1) means autumn mist netting levels hit a high in 2010 not seen for almost a decade.

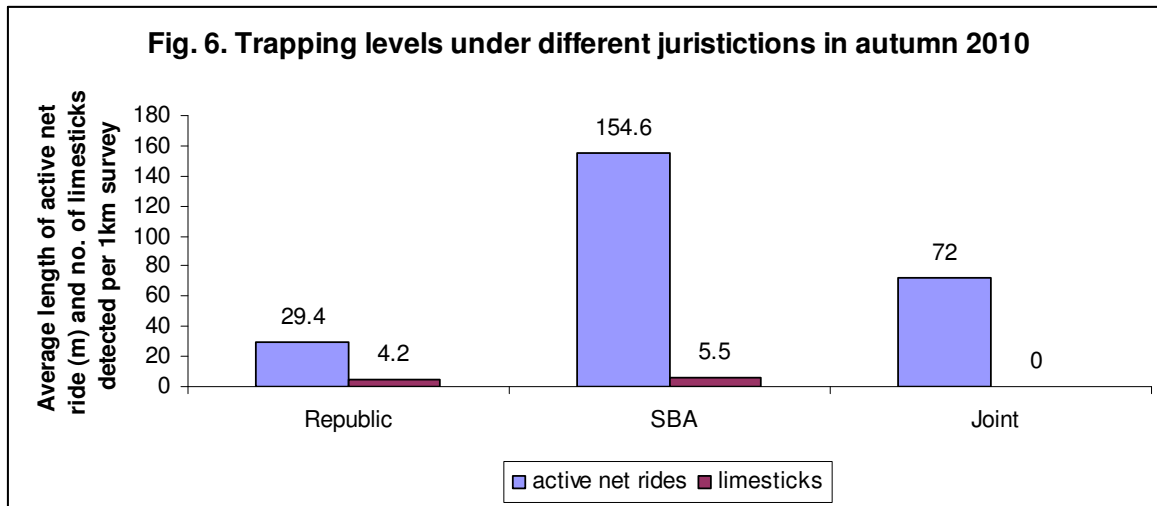
**Autumn mist netting activity hit a 9-year high in 2010.**

A 1990s baseline for limestick use is not available, so the equivalent of figure 5 cannot be reproduced for this. Though limestick use has clearly dropped since the 1990s, there is, again, an upsurge in evidence now. **Figure 4** (below), shows how autumn limestick use has varied over the period 2002-10. Levels are apparently reduced compared to 2002-3, but show a general upward trend since 2007.



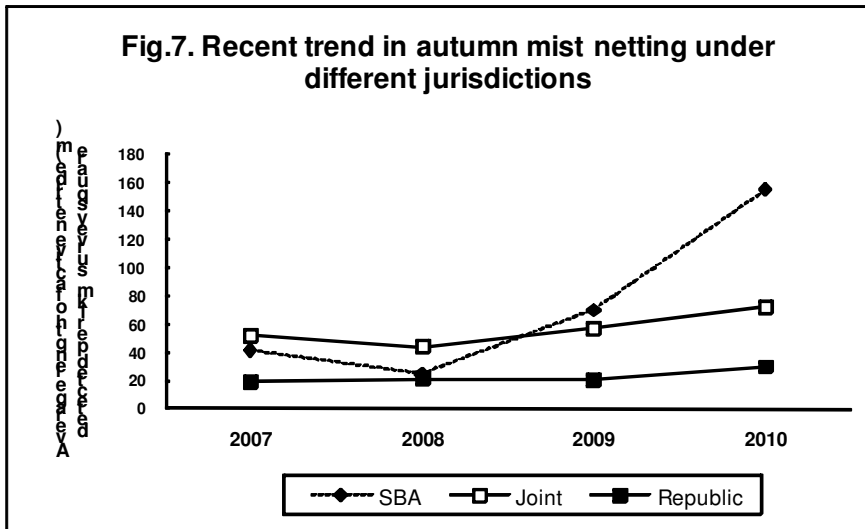
### 3.6. Trapping levels under different jurisdictions

**Figure 6** (below) shows (using data from all 100 survey squares) trapping levels under different jurisdictions and in areas where the Republic and SBA jurisdictions meet (“joint” areas). Mist net use is notably high in ‘joint’ areas and alarmingly so in SBA areas.



**Recorded netting activity in the Dhekelia SBA areas was five times higher than in Republic areas during the autumn of 2010.**

**Figure 7** (next page) shows the recent trends in mist netting under different jurisdictions. The trend has been an upward one in all areas, with a notable increase in SBA areas in 2010.



### 3.7. Interactions with enforcement authorities

Presented in appendix II is a log of the BirdLife survey team's interactions with the enforcement authorities, prepared by the field team leader. As already noted, all 'finds' of trapping equipment are reported to the Republic of SBA authorities by the field team.

The log shows how cooperation with the SBA Police and Game Fund improved and grew as the season progressed and resulted in seizures of trapping paraphernalia and even arrests of suspected trappers (see entries in appendix II for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September and 7<sup>th</sup> October). However, the log also records some failures on the part of the authorities: some of the information passed on by the BirdLife field team was not immediately followed-up by the authorities.

### 3.8. Cyprus Police action against restaurants serving *ambelopoulia*

In the context of enforcement, it is relevant to note the **Cyprus Police anti-trapping raid on the villages of Ayios Theodoros and Choirokitia on 20 October 2010**. The raid targeted the illegal sale of *ambelopoulia* in restaurants in the villages and included searches of the homes of restaurant owners. More than 4000 stored blackcaps and other protected birds were confiscated, as well as nets, calling machines and limesticks, and a number of arrests made, though some of these related to the violent reaction to the police operation from village residents, rather than to trapping *per se*.

The 20 October operation was the first coordinated action against restaurants illegally serving trapped birds since 2005, and comes after consistent lobbying pressure for such action from BirdLife Cyprus. The raid's extensive finds of trapped birds illustrated the extent of the restaurant problem, especially in well-known trapping 'heartlands' such as Ayios Theodoros and Choirokitia. The raid drew a very negative reaction from the village community leaders, a section of MPs known for their pro-trapping sentiments and sections of the media (though the general response from the media was positive). BirdLife Cyprus urges the Cyprus Police to ignore the reactions of the pro-trapping lobby and extend such necessary actions to other restaurants known to be regularly serving trapped bird "delicacies".

## 4. Conclusions & Recommendations

*Autumn 2010 was a bird trapping disaster on a scale unseen since BirdLife's monitoring work began almost 10 years ago.* Trapping levels may still be lower than in the 1990s, but this cannot hide the fact that we are now faced with a conservation emergency in Cyprus.

**A 75% increase in mist net use and an 89% increase in limestick setting compared to autumn 2009 are unacceptable** (especially considering that autumn 2009 levels represented a significant increase on 2008 levels). Autumn trapping levels have been on a general upward trend for four years now and the nine-year high in mist netting activity recorded in autumn 2010 represents a serious failure, on the part of both Cyprus and the UK (mist netting levels were five times higher in the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area than in Republic areas). As EU Member States, both have obligations under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC, ex 79/409/EEC) to protect birds, and migrant birds in particular.

The estimated toll of around 1.4 million birds within the Famagusta and Larnaca districts represents an ecological disaster, especially when the non-selective nature of trapping is taken into account.

This situation must be addressed, with urgency and through the state authorities drawing up targeted action plans and allocating additional resources to reversing this situation. BirdLife accepts that it may be impossible to completely stamp out bird trapping in Cyprus in the near future (what with public demand for “forbidden” *ambelopoulia* delicacies remaining strong), but we believe a target of reducing trapping levels to 2-3% of 1990s levels is feasible<sup>4</sup> (instead of the unacceptable 25% that it is today), given the necessary political commitment.

A priority area for enforcement action remains the restaurants providing the economic impetus for trapping by buying and serving *ambelopoulia*. The Cyprus Police operation of 20 October represents a good *start* in this battle. But if the raids on Ayios Theodoros and Choirokitia are not followed up with similar operations in other areas (and repeat raids in the same areas) then it is our belief that the trapping fraternity will be *encouraged* rather than discouraged by the October Police action. This because the negative reaction to the restaurant raids was so strong from some quarters (the “usual suspects” among the island’s MPs, journalists and community leaders) that if the Police now shy away from further action, the trappers and offending restaurateurs will feel they have “won” the battle against enforcement and have increased “license” to continue with their illegalities.

Priority must also be given to increasing enforcement resources on the ground and changing public attitudes to trapping and to eating *ambelopoulia*. Clear condemnations of trapping – with a focus on its ecological impact and the fact that the ‘market’ is dominated by criminal gangs – from Ministers and other key decision-makers and opinion-formers could go a long way towards achieving a shift in public attitude. Such statements could also serve to impress upon judges the seriousness of trapping offences, leading to the imposition of deterrent penalties for those convicted, including jail sentences.

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<sup>4</sup> The 5% (of 1990s levels) mark was almost reached in autumn 2006

The BirdLife monitoring effort must continue, for there is no sign of an immediate end to this persistent and intractable conservation problem. Beyond this, an even greater focus must now be put on lobbying and publicity actions by BirdLife, with the focus on changing public attitudes to *ambelopoulia*-eating and thus denting the demand for trapped birds.