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UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the spring 2015 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 συνεχόμενου και συστηματικού προγράμματος παρακολούθησης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου για την άνοιξη 2015, ενώ παράλληλα κάνει και μια ανασκόπηση της κατάστασης που επικρατεί για αυτό το θέμα στο νησί. 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.

Η ανάλυση των καταγραφών από την έρευνα πεδίου με το πρόγραμμα TRIM έδειξε μια μείωση της τάξης του 91% για την παγίδευση με δίκτυα για την άνοιξη 2015, σε σύγκριση με την άνοιξη 2007. Αυτή η τάση μειωμένων ανοιξιότικων επιπέδων παγίδευσης, σε σύγκριση με τα επίπεδα όταν ξεκίνησε η ανοιξιότικη παρακολούθηση της παγίδευσης, έχει παρατηρηθεί τα τελευταία χρόνια. **Τα επίπεδα αυτά είναι τα χαμηλότερα που καταγράφηκαν για την ανοιξιότικη περίοδο από το 2007, ένα πολύ ενθαρρυντικό αποτέλεσμα.** Εντούτοις, τα επίπεδα αυτά δεν μπορούν να δώσουν τη συνολική εικόνα της κατάστασης της παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο – χαμηλά επίπεδα παγίδευσης παρατηρήθηκαν και τις περιόδους άνοιξης 2012-2014, ενώ τις ίδιες χρονιές τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης που καταγράφηκαν στις κύριες περιόδους φθινοπωρινής παγίδευσης έδειξαν μια πολύ πιο ανησυχητική εικόνα. **Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου θα παραμείνει επιφυλακτικός μέχρι το ερχόμενο φθινόπωρο, το οποίο αποτελεί πιο αξιόπιστη ένδειξη της συνολικής κατάστασης της παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο.** Την ανάλυση των καταγραφών στο πρόγραμμα TRIM έκανε η RSPB (εταίρος του BirdLife International στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο).

Η διωκτική δράση της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας & Πανίδας, του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Κυπριακής Αστυνομίας και του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων ήταν περιορισμένη, σύμφωνα με την πληροφόρηση που είχαμε από τις καταγγελίες του Πτηνολογικού προς τις συγκεκριμένες αρχές. Παρόλο που τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης ήταν περιορισμένα, χαιρετίζουμε και αναγνωρίζουμε τη συνολική δράση πάταξης στο πεδίο από τις αρμόδιες αρχές, ειδικά της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου (η οποία έκανε αρκετές συλλήψεις παγιδευτών) και της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων (η οποία έκανε αρκετές κατασχέσεις εξοπλισμού για παγίδευση πουλιών).

Δυστυχώς αυτή η θετική εξέλιξη με τα χαμηλότερα επίπεδα ανοιξιότικης παγίδευσης για την Άνοιξη 2015 έχει ανατραπεί από την έγκριση του Στρατηγικού Σχεδίου για την αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών από την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση στις 13 Μαΐου 2015, το οποίο περιέχει και τον αποκαλούμενο 'εναλλακτικό σχεδιασμό'. Ο 'εναλλακτικός σχεδιασμός' δίνει τη δυνατότητα στην Κυπριακή κυβέρνηση να εξετάσει την 'επιλεκτική θήρευση μόνο αμπελοπουλιών, κατά παρέκκλιση', η οποία θα αποτελέσει μια καταστροφική εξέλιξη αν επιτραπεί. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου πιστεύει ότι η πρόθεση μέσω του 'εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού' είναι η νομιμοποίηση του κυνηγιού αμπελοπουλιών στην Κύπρο, και η μείωση της προσπάθειας πάταξης του φαινομένου, στα

πλαίσια πολιτικών σκοπιμοτήτων, και όχι για να τερματιστεί η παράνομη παγίδευση πουλιών.

Οι περιβαλλοντικές ΜΚΟ στην Κύπρο (Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου, Terra Cypria, Φίλοι της Γης Κύπρου, CABS and SPA Foundation) έχουν δημιουργήσει ένα ενιαίο μέτωπο για να σταματήσουν αυτή την παρέκκλιση από την αρχή αυτής της εξέλιξης. Αυτό το δίκτυο ήταν πολύ δραστήριο στην άσκηση πολιτικής πίεσης για την αφαίρεση αυτής της παρέκκλισης από το στρατηγικό σχέδιο και έχουμε εκφράσει την έντονη αντίθεσή μας στην συγκεκριμένη παρέκκλιση στα εθνικά ΜΜΕ και στην Κυπριακή Βουλή την Αντιπροσώπων, όπου συζητήθηκε το συγκεκριμένο θέμα την 1^η Ιουλίου 2015. Ελπίζουμε η Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή, από την οποία η Κυπριακή κυβέρνηση έχει ζητήσει τη γνωμάτευσή της για το θέμα του 'εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού', να δώσει μια ξεκάθαρη απάντηση όπου να δηλώνει ότι η χρήση παρεκκλίσεων για κυνήγι αμπελοπουλιών δεν είναι αποδεκτή.

Από την άλλη πλευρά υπήρξε μια πολύ θετική εξέλιξη στο πεδίο από τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων. Τον Ιούλιο 2015 η Διοίκηση συνέχισε με το πρόγραμμα αφαίρεσης ακακιών από τις κύριες περιοχές του Κάβο Πύλα όπου παρατηρούνται πολύ ψηλά επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα, μια δράση την οποία ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου χαιρέτισε και υποστήριξε. Πρόκειται για δράση ορόσημο η οποία καταδεικνύει ότι η Διοίκηση θέλει πραγματικά να αντιμετωπίσει την παράνομη παγίδευση πουλιών στη ρίζα του προβλήματος. Ο καθορισμός του Κάβο Πύλα ως Ειδική Ζώνη Διατήρησης (ΕΖΔ) είναι μια εξίσου πολύ σημαντική δράση και ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου συγχαίρει την Διοίκηση για την επίτευξη προόδου σε αυτό το θέμα.

Η πολιτική βούληση μεταξύ της Κυπριακής κυβέρνησης και της Διοίκησης της SBA είναι εντελώς αντικρουόμενη και στην μεγαλύτερη διάσταση που έχει παρατηρηθεί των τελευταίων χρόνων. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου κάνει έκκληση προς την Κυπριακή κυβέρνηση όπως αποσύρει τον 'εναλλακτικό σχεδιασμό' και να υιοθετήσει ένα στρατηγικό σχέδιο στη βάση της μηδενικής ανοχής, και προς τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων όπως ολοκληρώσει τη διαδικασία καθορισμού του Κάβο Πύλα ως ΕΖΔ και όπως εκπονήσει ένα μακροπρόθεσμο πρόγραμμα για την αφαίρεση ακακιών.

Η αναφορά χωρίζεται στα ακόλουθα κεφάλαια:

- Κεφάλαιο 1 παρουσιάζει μια σύνοψη της παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο, δίνει κάποια ιστορικά στοιχεία αυτής της δραστηριότητας, κάνει αναφορά στην εθνική νομοθεσία όσον αφορά την προστασία των πτηνών και παρουσιάζει την τρέχουσα κατάσταση,
- Κεφάλαιο 2 παρουσιάζει το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου,
- Κεφάλαιο 3 παρουσιάζει τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας πεδίου και την ανάλυση από το πρόγραμμα TRIM, τα στοιχεία από τις προσπάθειες πάταξης των αρμοδίων αρχών και το πολιτικό και κοινωνικό κλίμα που επικρατεί, και

- Κεφάλαιο 4 είναι η συζήτηση, όπου γίνεται μια σύνοψη της κατάστασης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών, τονίζονται οι λόγοι για τους οποίους ο 'εναλλακτικός σχεδιασμός' θα πρέπει να αφαιρεθεί από το στρατηγικό σχέδιο κατά της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών και γίνεται αναφορά στη διαδικασία καθορισμού του Κάβο Πύλα ως ΕΖΔ και της αφαίρεσης ακακιών από την περιοχή.

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

Summary

This report presents the latest findings of the on-going and systematic BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme on illegal bird trapping, relating to the spring 2015 season, while also providing an overview of the current climate regarding this issue on the island. 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.

The TRIM analysis of the survey data showed that mist netting activity for spring 2015 decreased by 91% compared to spring 2007, in line with the general pattern of recent years of lower spring trapping levels compared to when the spring monitoring began. **These are the lowest levels of spring trapping recorded since 2007, a very encouraging outcome indeed.** However these levels cannot be taken as a reliable barometer of the trapping situation in Cyprus – low trapping activity was observed during springs 2012 – 2014, only to be followed by very high trapping activity levels during the main autumn trapping seasons. **BirdLife Cyprus will remain cautious until the next autumn season, which is a far more reliable indicator of the overall bird trapping situation in Cyprus.** The TRIM analysis of the survey data was undertaken by RSPB (partner of BirdLife International in the UK).

The enforcement action of the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service, the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit and the SBA Police Anti-poaching unit was limited, based on the feedback provided to BirdLife Cyprus' reports to these agencies. Despite the low trapping activity, the overall enforcement action on the ground by the competent authorities, particularly the Cyprus Police (which succeeded in a number of arrests of trappers) and the SBA Police (which undertook a number of confiscations of trapping paraphernalia), is acknowledged.

It is very unfortunate that this positive, record-low spring trapping activity for Spring 2015 has been overturned by the approval of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping by the Cyprus government on the 13th May 2015, which included the so-called 'alternative plan'. This 'alternative plan' gives the possibility to the Cyprus government to explore 'selective hunting of ambelopoulia (Blackcaps only), under derogation', a catastrophic development if permitted. BirdLife Cyprus believes that the intention through the 'alternative plan' is to legalise blackcap hunting in Cyprus, and to reduce enforcement, purely for political reasons, rather than to stop illegal bird trapping.

Environmental NGOs in Cyprus (BirdLife Cyprus, Terra Cypria, FoE Cyprus, CABS and SPA Foundation) have formed a united front from the very start in order to fight this development. This network has been very busy campaigning for the withdrawal of this derogation from the strategic plan and we have expressed our strong opposition to this derogation in the national media and at the Cyprus Parliament, when this issue was discussed on 1st July 2015. We are hoping that the EU Commission, whose opinion the Cyprus government has asked on this 'alternative plan' issue, will give a clear answer rejecting the use of derogations for blackcap hunting.

On the other hand, a very positive development has been observed on the ground by the SBA Administration. In July 2015 the Administration continued with its acacia removal plan

in the core areas of the Cape Pyla trapping hotspot, which BirdLife Cyprus has welcomed and supported. This is a true milestone action showing that the Administration is serious about tackling illegal bird trapping at its root. The designation of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is also of crucial importance and BirdLife Cyprus congratulates the SBA Administration for making progress on this.

The political will between the Cyprus government and the SBA Administration has never been so conflicting in recent years. BirdLife Cyprus is calling upon the Cyprus government to withdraw the 'alternative plan' and to adopt a strategic plan on the basis of a zero tolerance approach, and upon the SBA Administration to complete the designation process of Cape Pyla as a SAC and to develop a long term plan for the removal of acacias.

The report is separated into the following sections:

- Section 1 provides an overview of the bird trapping in Cyprus, gives some historical background to this activity, makes reference to the national legislation regarding bird protection and presents the current situation,
- Section 2 describes the historical outline of the surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus,
- Section 3 presents the survey data from the monitoring programme and the analysis from the TRIM software, summarises the enforcement data of the competent authorities and gives an outline of the political and social attitudes regarding this issue, and
- Section 4 is the discussion, giving an overview of the illegal bird trapping situation, highlights the reasons why the 'alternative plan' must be withdrawn from the strategic plan against illegal bird trapping and makes reference to the SAC designation process of Cape Pyla and the acacia removal from the area.

All the running costs for the field work (fuel), as well as all the volunteer costs were covered by the Partner of BirdLife International in Germany, NABU, together with the Heinz Sielmann Foundation, while the RSPB 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 listed as threatened by the EU Birds Directive and / or BirdLife International¹. 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 play the songs 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 capture probability of birds from 3 to 13 times (Schaub M. et al, 1999) and that various species are attracted by song playback, including target species for the trappers such as Eurasian reed warblers, 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 within the trapping areas during night time, which are often heard easily from hundreds of metres away from each trapping site.

This report presents the latest survey results for spring 2015, when trappers are after migratory birds, with the main target species being blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and other migrant songbirds. Trapped birds are either served as expensive ambelopoulia ‘delicacies’ in local restaurants or are used and sold for home consumption.

¹ List of birds recorded trapped in mist nets and on limesticks (BirdLife Cyprus)
http://birdlifecyprus.org/upload/Consolidatedlistoftrappedbirds_.pdf

2. Surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus

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.

The monitoring is undertaken by visiting a random selection of sample squares (1 km²) during daytime hours, with a focus on detecting mist netting activity. Limesticks are recorded if they are found while searching for mist nets. The number of squares has been stratified to ensure a representative coverage of areas under SBA administration and the Republic of Cyprus. For more details on the methodology of BirdLife Cyprus read Appendix 1).

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 Anti-poaching unit. 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 the UK, for supporting the project financially since the beginning. Furthermore BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank NABU (partner of BirdLife International 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

Survey results

Field survey data

The field survey for spring 2015 was carried out in April and early May 2015 following the standard survey protocol. In total 40 squares were surveyed during this period and BirdLife Cyprus reported all trapping finds to the relevant enforcement authorities, either the SBA Police, the Game & Fauna Service or the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit, depending on the location of the finds.

A summary of the field data for spring 2015 is presented in Appendix 2. In total the findings of the survey included 190 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). Opportunistic checks outside the survey squares detected an additional 156 metres of active net rides and 4 mist nets *in situ* (either classified as Active Set Nets or Active Unset Nets²) (see Appendix 2).

The total length of active mist net rides within the 406 km² survey area (Larnaka - Famagusta and Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas) can be estimated at around 1.4 km (190 m x 301 / 40)³.

In terms of limesticks, BirdLife Cyprus detected none this past spring. However, it is noted here that BirdLife Cyprus does not focus its field survey on the detection of limesticks, as other organisations do. For example, during the spring 2015 bird protection camp of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), conducted between the 5th April to the 9th May, a total of 1,470 limesticks, 25 mist nets and 10 electronic decoy devices were located and confiscated in collaboration with the enforcement agencies (CABS report, August 2015). In addition another organisation, Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus (MBCC) during their spring 2015 survey from 31st March to 3rd May detected 90 limesticks and 1 mist net⁴. It is highlighted that nearly all the limesticks detected by CABS and MBCC were in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.

With the trapping finds of BirdLife Cyprus it is estimated that around 36,000 birds could have been killed within the survey area and around **48,000 could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus during spring 2015** (see Appendix 3 for details of the estimation).

² Active Set Net (ASN) is a net ride where the mist net is *in situ* and is set and ready for catching birds. Active Unset Net (AUN) is a net ride where the mist net is *in situ* but is furled i.e. the mist net is not stretched open for catching birds but lowered down.

³ There are 301.1 km² squares in the survey area that are classified as suitable for trapping activity (on the basis of vegetation characteristics) and 40 of these squares were surveyed in spring 2015.

⁴ Survey data provided on 6th August 2015 via email correspondence with MBCC representative.

Trends in spring netting activity using the TRIM software

The TRIM software has been used to undertake the long term trend analysis for the netting activity for the spring seasons. BirdLife Cyprus has been gathering field data in a systematic manner for over a decade as part of its surveillance programme, and hence makes it possible to use such programs for the analysis (it is noted that the analysis for the spring season starts from 2007 when BirdLife started to undertake full field surveys for this season). BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank the RSPB senior conservation scientist, Mr Simon Wotton, for his help and support in undertaking the TRIM trend analysis.

TRIM (TRends & Indices for Monitoring data) is a program for the analysis of time series of counts with missing observations. The program can be used to estimate indices and trends and to assess the effects of covariates on these indices and trends. TRIM analyses time series of counts, using Poisson regression and produces estimates of yearly indices and trends (Panneloek & van Strien 2005). If observations are missing, TRIM estimates the missing values on the basis of changes observed on plots that were monitored.

In other words, TRIM enables us to use the data from all the trapping survey squares ever surveyed under the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme during the spring period, in total 104 squares, even though these squares were not all covered each spring season. The programme 'fills in' missing values for squares that were not covered in a particular year on the basis of the general trend derived from the data as a whole. The TRIM software (freely available from <http://www.ebcc.info/trim.html>) is very widely used for analysis of field data from ecological or biological studies. It works as an index, setting the first year of a time series of data the value of 100 (in this case year 2007) and then showing changes up or down in subsequent years relative to this value of 100.

The trends for spring mist netting activity from the TRIM analysis are shown in the figures below. It is highlighted that the TRIM program has various model approaches that one can use to undertake an analysis. For this analysis the 'Linear trend model using the stepwise approach' and with all years selected as changepoints has been applied, upon the recommendation of RSPB senior conservation scientist Mr Simon Wotton (for details on TRIM approaches read Appendix 4). Figure 2 shows the trapping activity levels - it is noted that a stratified random sample of 40 of the 104 squares were surveyed for spring 2015.

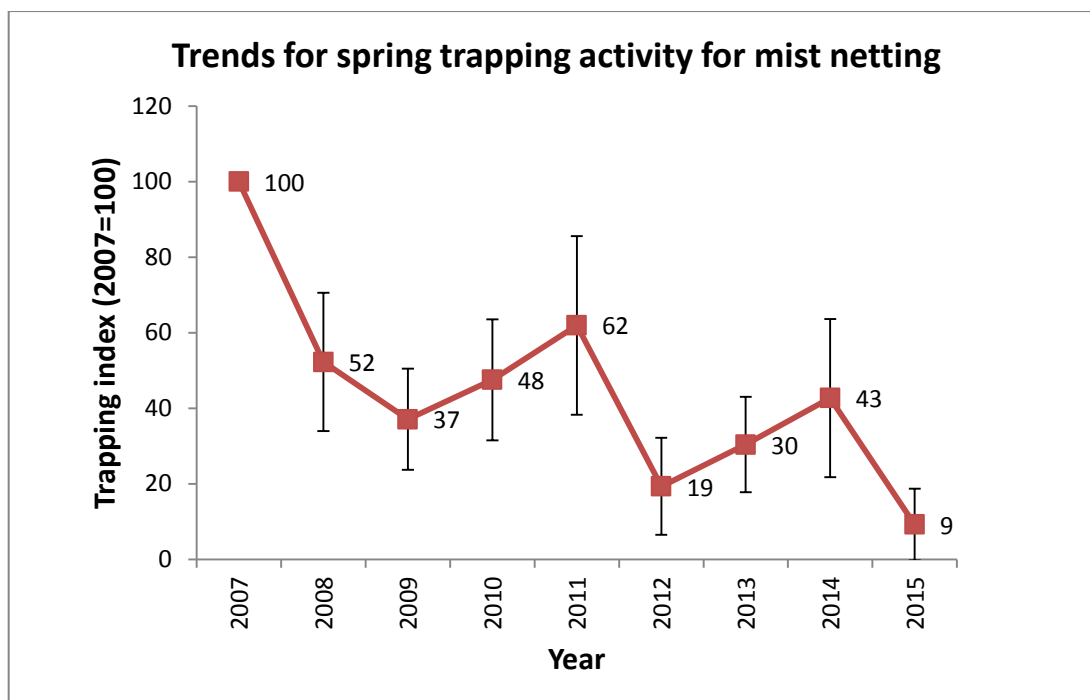


Figure 2 Trends for spring bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets since 2007 across 104 squares – TRIM analysis

Table 1 Statistics for trend for spring trapping levels based on Figure 2

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Significance
All squares	0.8265	0.0394	0.07722	Steep decline ($p < 0.01$)

Note 1: The multiplicative trend reflects the changes in terms of the average percentage change per year i.e. if the trend is equal to 1 then the trend is stable. Hence value 0.83 calculated above indicates an overall decrease of 17% per year in mist netting activity.

As it is shown in the graph above, trapping activity for spring 2015 showed the lowest levels of bird trapping activity since the start of the surveillance programme, a very positive finding, thus reversing a possible resurgence in trapping observed in the previous years (2012-2014). Mist netting activity for spring 2015 decreased by 91% compared to spring 2007 (index value of 100) and in comparison to the findings of last year's spring 2014, trapping activity decreased by 78% (by comparing index points difference from 43 to 9). Overall the pattern of low spring trapping observed in recent spring seasons has been maintained.

The sample of 104 squares includes 80 squares within the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), 19 within the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA) and 5 squares that cover areas in both jurisdictions (referred to as 'Joint' squares). In spring 2015, 29 squares within the Republic of Cyprus, 8 squares within the SBA and 3 'Joint' squares were covered. **Due to the small sample size for the SBA, it is not considered suitable to undertake analysis in TRIM that**

will generate a trapping index with reasonable precision for this stratum without a wide margin of error involved. For this reason jurisdiction analysis has not been undertaken for spring 2015.

It is highlighted that spring season data can represent a ‘false dawn’. Over the last few years spring seasons have shown an encouraging decrease in trapping, only to be followed by very high trapping activity levels for the main autumn trapping season - a similar pattern was recorded for springs 2012, 2013 and 2014. **The spring 2015 results are very encouraging indeed, with the lowest levels recorded for spring trapping since 2007. However these levels cannot be taken as a reliable barometer of the trapping situation in Cyprus and we must wait for the autumn 2015 season to reliably assess the state of play.**

Enforcement

There are 3 competent authorities that are responsible for enforcement against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus: the Game & Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit that are responsible for areas controlled under the Republic of Cyprus, and the SBA Police Anti-Poaching unit responsible for areas within the UK sovereign base areas. The resources of the above-mentioned enforcement bodies are as follows:

- Game & Fauna Service, the responsible body for the implementation of the Birds Directive, has about 90 wardens in total across the whole of island. The Larnaca & Famagusta district, where most of the bird trapping takes place in Cyprus and where the survey area of BirdLife Cyprus is focused, has in total 20 game wardens.
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit has 9 officers⁵.
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit is a team of 5 officers to cover the Eastern Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area.

Table 2 summarises the number of reports that BirdLife Cyprus provided to the competent authorities regarding active trapping sites and the overall feedback given by the competent authorities. It is noted that the information presented in the table below refers to active trapping sites as recorded by the survey team (this includes all net codes, P, ANN, AUN and ASN – see Appendix 1 for net classification - and sites where limesticks were found) and were reported to the competent authorities for further action.

⁵ From the latest information received in July 2015.

Table 2 Summary of trapping reports provided to competent authorities from BirdLife Cyprus during Spring 2015

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta	SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit	Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit⁵
Number of reports	2 ⁴	10 ⁴	4
Prosecutions / Arrests	<i>No feedback provided</i>	0	0
Confiscations ¹	<i>No feedback provided</i>	3	0
Clearance ² / Nothing ³	<i>No feedback provided</i>	6 / 1	0 / 4

N/R – Not relevant; N/A – Not available

Note 1: Confiscations of mist nets, limesticks and/or calling devices.

Note 2: Clearance refers to collection of trapping paraphernalia such as pole bases, poles, loudspeakers, wires etc.

Note 3: 'Nothing' refers to reports where the competent authority checked the trapping location but reported it inactive (no nets or limesticks were found) upon its visit, hence no prosecution or confiscation took place, or no feedback was provided.

Note 4: One location was reported to both the Game Service and the SBA Police for a joint operation.

With regards to the Game and Fauna Service (Larnaca & Famagusta district), 2 trapping locations were reported, but no feedback has been provided to BirdLife Cyprus to this date and it is therefore assumed that no prosecutions or confiscations took place.

With regards to the Dhekelia SBA Police Anti-poaching unit, in total 10 trapping locations were reported, resulting in 3 confiscations (for mist nets) and 6 locations were cleared off the trapping paraphernalia present.

As for the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching police unit, 4 trapping locations were reported to this enforcement agency. This agency checked 3 of these locations (for 1 location no feedback was provided) but did not report any confiscation or clearance taking place.

Overall the number of reports provided to the enforcement agencies highlight that the illegal bird trapping activity was quite limited and at low levels during spring 2015, as shown in Figure 2. These findings agree with the general conclusions of the CABS spring 2015 field report (August 2015) of low spring trapping activity. Despite the low trapping activity, the overall enforcement action on the ground by the competent authorities, particularly the Cyprus Police and the SBA Police, is acknowledged – as reported by the recent CABS report (August 2015) '*...During joint field operations with police units, 17 poachers were caught and prosecuted for illegal bird trapping, 3 persons were verbally warned and at 15 trapping sites confiscation of illegal trapping paraphernalia was made. In total, 1400 limesticks and 25 mist nets were seized. The number of confiscated limesticks and mist nets is the lowest ever recorded. Despite the low amount of seized traps, the number of prosecutions made by the competent anti-poaching agencies is record high*'.

However these encouragingly very low levels were succeeded by a very negative development with the approval of the 'alternative plan' by the Cyprus government (read details in next section).

Social and political attitudes

The issue of illegal bird trapping has been covered very extensively by the media in the last few months because a) of the approval of the Strategic Action Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping by the Ministerial Council of the Cyprus government on the 13th May 2015, with the inclusion of the so-called 'alternative plan', and b) of the acacia clearance in Cape Pyla that was undertaken by the SBA Administration in July 2015. **These two developments are entirely conflicting, the former being a clear indication of tolerance towards bird trapping by the Cyprus government, whereas the second highlights that the SBA Administration is serious about enforcing a 'zero tolerance' approach on the ground.** This difference in the political will between the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and the SBAA has never been so conflicting in recent years.

Development of the StAP and the approval of the 'alternative plan' by the Cyprus government – a clear sign of tolerance towards bird trapping

BirdLife Cyprus has been advocating for the adoption of a Strategic Action Plan (StAP) against illegal bird trapping for last few years, following the adoption of the 'Larnaca Declaration'⁶ in the 1st Pan-european Conference against Illegal Bird Killing (Council of Europe, Larnaca, July 2011). The declaration was approved by all participants unanimously and was based on the principle of 'zero tolerance', and the conference was co-organised by the Council of Europe and the Cyprus Game and Fauna Service.

The 'Larnaca Declaration' was a milestone decision in order for BirdLife Cyprus to start its effort to prepare a strategy against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus. It had become clear to BirdLife Cyprus, after our 10-year experience in campaigning and field monitoring on this issue, that the serious and persistent problem of illegal bird trapping could not be addressed only through enforcement actions, but needed a suite of measures under different areas and with all the key stakeholders involved.

BirdLife Cyprus led the initiative for the development of a StAP by organising 2 workshops in 2013 (24-25th April and 18th November 2013), inviting all the key stakeholders (enforcement agencies, government departments, environmental NGOs) to discuss the context and actions that such a strategy should include to address illegal bird trapping, on the basis of a zero tolerance approach. The initiative continued into 2014 when BirdLife Cyprus compiled all the

⁶ 'Larnaca Declaration', 7th July 2011.

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2765488&SecMode=1&DocId=1806244&Usage=2>

feedback and comments received from the consultation process and sent a final StAP document in April 2014 for adoption to the stakeholders involved, including the Cyprus government. It is important to highlight that during this democratic, transparent, participatory and integrated consultation the issue of a 'derogation for hunting ambelopoulia' was never brought up for discussion by any stakeholder.

Within the next few months (i.e. from April 2014) the following adopted the StAP, as was discussed during 2013-14: the Environment Commissioner Office of Cyprus, the Administration of the British Sovereign Base Areas, the Department of Forests, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, the Commission Against Bird Slaughter, the Foundation Pro Biodiversity, the RSPB (partner of BirdLife International in the UK) and the Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus. However the Cyprus government, namely the Ministry of Interior / Game and Fauna Service and the Ministry of Justice and Public Order / Cyprus Police, did not provide any official reply on this matter, and hence BirdLife Cyprus continued its lobbying towards these two ministries.

BirdLife Cyprus had a meeting with the Ministry of Justice and Public Order (MoJ) and the Cyprus Police on the 16th December 2014, when it was mentioned that both the MoJ and Cyprus Police are supportive of the StAP, and their comments will be sent in the following months. In February 2015 the MoJ sent comments but they only referred to 'wording changes', especially in the Annex to the StAP, and not to the core elements of the StAP and more importantly there were no comments or mention of any 'derogation for hunting ambelopoulia'.

The only stakeholder that had not provided any official reply regarding the StAP adoption for nearly a year was the Ministry of Interior. The Minister of Interior, Mr Sokratis Hasikos, and the Head of the Game and Fauna Service finally met with BirdLife Cyprus on 18th March 2015. During this meeting the Minister informed BirdLife Cyprus that he intended to take the StAP for approval to the Ministerial Council, but with an 'alternative plan' incorporated that would include the possibility to explore 'selective hunting of ambelopoulia only, under derogation'. BirdLife Cyprus was clearly surprised at the meeting since such an option had not been discussed ever before and expressed its strong opposition to such a plan. We immediately responded in writing and on 19th March 2015 we sent a letter to the Minister, copying the Head of the Game and Fauna Service and the Commissioner of Administration (Ombudsman) in Cyprus, outlining all the reasons why we believed this 'alternative plan' should be withdrawn. BirdLife Cyprus did not receive any reply or information, and on 14th May 2015 we were informed through an announcement of the Ministry of Interior in the press that the StAP had been approved with the 'alternative plan' included⁷.

⁷ Ministry of Interior announcement for approval of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal trapping of wild birds, 14th May 2015.
<http://www.pio.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/965DEA62D16DDF7AC2257E45003D3CA9?Opendocument>

This development is a serious setback to any progress made against illegal bird trapping and we strongly believe that this strategic plan would basically lead the way for the legalization of ambelopoulia hunting, instead of aiming to eliminate this phenomenon. Nearly a year after waiting and lobbying for the adoption of a Strategic Action Plan (StAP) on the basis of a zero tolerance approach against wildlife crime, as discussed and agreed upon during 2013-2014 with all the stakeholders during the development of a StAP, the Ministry of Interior and the Game and Fauna Service proceeded unilaterally, without any transparency and accountability, to the submission of this destructive Strategic Plan, with the 'alternative plan' included to the Ministerial Council for approval, without fully briefing the Council regarding the compatibility of the plan with the EU acquis.

Realising the severity of this disastrous development, the environmental organizations BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation *Terra Cypria*, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and the Foundation for the Protection of Biodiversity (Foundation Pro Biodiversity - SPA) formed a network in order to fight it as a united front. The network has been very active lobbying and campaigning for the withdrawal of this derogation, including:

- 15th May 2015 - A joint Press Release published in [Greek](#) and [English](#) with title '*Environmental organisations condemn the "alternative plan" introduced in the Strategic Plan to tackle illegal trapping of birds and its approval by the Council of Ministers on 13 May 2015*'.
- 25th May 2015 – A joint position paper in [Greek](#) and [English](#) with title '*Strategic Plan for tackling illegal trapping of wild birds (2016-2020)*', summarising the reasons why BirdLife Cyprus and the other environmental NGOs condemn the 'alternative plan' approved, and call upon the Ministerial Council to remove this derogation and to adopt the StAP as was discussed by all the stakeholders during 2013-14.
- 1st July 2015 – The 'alternative plan' for the 'selective hunting of blackcaps under derogation' was discussed at the Environmental Committee at the Parliament of Cyprus (read the relevant e-news [article](#) of July 2015). BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), the Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA) and the Federation of Environmental Organisations of Cyprus were invited to attend and they expressed their strong opposition to the 'alternative plan' and the need for the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) to adopt a StAP on the principle of zero tolerance. A joint position paper against this derogation was submitted to the Parliament by the network of NGOs. During the discussion at the Parliament, the Minister of Interior mentioned that the Cyprus government had already sent the approved Strategic Plan, including the 'alternative plan' for the 'selective hunting of blackcaps under derogation', to the European Commission for its opinion. The Minister stated clearly that the Cyprus government would adhere to the response it will receive from the Commission on this matter.
- July 2015 – A revised position paper in [Greek](#) and [English](#) is published following the discussion on the 1st July that took place at the Environmental Committee at the Parliament of Cyprus, providing further reasons and evidence why this derogation must be withdrawn. **The reasons why this derogation must be withdrawn include**

scientific, legal, strategic, tactical, violation of good administration and the consultation process, misinformation of the public opinion on this issue etc.

Over the last few months this network has had meetings with various political parties, members of the parliament and other decision makers, presenting our joint position paper and our key arguments against this 'alternative plan'. Our campaigning has reached out to the general public and to the media, as we have been invited to various TV and radio shows and have given interviews to newspapers and magazines, where we had the opportunity to voice out our strong opposition to this derogation (see Appendix 5 for a shortlist of the media coverage on this issue). BirdLife Cyprus strongly believes that the intention through the 'alternative plan' is to legalise blackcap hunting in Cyprus, and to reduce enforcement, purely for political reasons, rather than to stop illegal bird trapping.

The Cyprus Government has sent the Strategic Action Plan to the Commission for approval. We hope that the European Commission will send a clear and unambiguous message to the Cyprus Government that this derogation does not meet the Birds Directive criteria and cannot be permitted. We are fully supportive of a strategic action plan on the basis of a zero tolerance, but clearly such a derogation for 'selective hunting of ambelopoulia' cannot be part of a strategy that would seriously aim to tackle this chronic problem.

Acacia clearance in Cape Pyla by the Administration of the SBA – a clear sign of zero tolerance towards bird trapping

BirdLife Cyprus has been calling on the SBA Administration for the last few years to tackle effectively the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla by undertaking acacia clearance. BirdLife Cyprus has stressed all along that urgently clearing acacia from Cape Pyla is an essential step, if the SBA Administration is serious about tackling the problem of illegal bird trapping within its jurisdiction. Cape Pyla has been highlighted as a mist netting hotspot for a number of years, based on the field data gathered from the BirdLife Cyprus monitoring protocol⁸ and other organisations⁹.

Cape Pyla, which is found within the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area, has been managed for many years by trappers, planting and irrigating acacias to create suitable habitat for attracting and trapping illegally migratory birds, mainly with the use of mist nets. It has turned into a mist netting hotspot where industrial scale trapping takes place. Acacia removal will not only deter trapping activity from taking place (since the habitat where mist nets are set is removed) but it will also serve as a key conservation action for restoring the habitat by removing an invasive, alien species such as the acacia (*Acacia saligna*) and it will also put an end to the illegal use of water for watering the acacias. Hence, it is a win-win situation for migratory birds, habitat restoration and natural resources.

⁸ BirdLife Cyprus report, Autumn 2014 (March 2015), p 16.

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

⁹ CABS report, Autumn 2013 (March 2014), p 18.

[http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2014/03/Cyprus%20Field%20Report%20Autumn%202013%20\(en\).pdf](http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2014/03/Cyprus%20Field%20Report%20Autumn%202013%20(en).pdf).

As reported in the Autumn 2014 BirdLife Cyprus (March 2015)⁸ the SBA Administration undertook an acacia clearance operation in December 2014 at the outskirts of Cape Pyla, which BirdLife Cyprus welcomed and supported¹⁰ and called upon the Administration to continue with this action. In a milestone action against illegal bird trapping, the SBA Administration continued with its acacia removal plan in July 2015, this time in the core areas of Cape Pyla trapping hotspot. This action has been great news as it highlights that the SBA Administration is serious about tackling illegal bird trapping at its root and that a zero tolerance policy is starting to be implemented on the ground (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

The reactions from the local residents of the nearby village of Xylofagou have been many, but fortunately the SBA Administration continued and completed the acacia clearance in July 2015 as planned. Clearly there are a lot more acacia patches in Cape Pyla where trapping takes place and BirdLife would support the SBA Administration to continue the acacia removal over the next few years, as part of the ongoing designation process of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation and the need to have a habitat restoration plan in place.

This truly deterrent action towards illegal bird trapping has been well timed prior to the beginning of the autumn 2015 migration period, the main trapping period in Cyprus which starts from early September to end of October. We call upon the SBA Administration to continue with its zero tolerance approach during the next autumn season, in order to reverse the very high trapping activity levels recorded last autumn 2014⁸.



Figure 3 Area cleared of acacias in Cape Pyla – visible acacia patches in the background © Guy Shorrock (RSPB)

¹⁰ December 2014 e-news article with title 'Trapping report and Acacia Removal in Cape Pyla'.
http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/en/news-666-Trapping_report_and_Acacia_Removal_in_Cape_Pyla.html



Figure 4 Trapping paraphernalia, pole bases, left standing in a cleared acacia patch © Nick Moran (BTO)

4. Discussion

Illegal bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets and limesticks continued during spring 2015, as shown by the survey data from the systematic surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus and other data sources (e.g. survey data of other environmental NGOs). The overall pattern of spring monitoring in recent years has shown illegal bird trapping activity levels to be lower than in the past – this spring the lowest levels of bird trapping activity were recorded, with a decrease of 91% compared to spring 2007, a very encouraging finding. However spring trapping cannot be taken as a reliable barometer of the trapping situation in Cyprus – as with previous spring seasons of low trapping activity (2012-2014), they were followed by very high trapping levels during the main autumn trapping seasons. BirdLife Cyprus will remain cautious until the next autumn 2015 which will provide a far better picture of the overall trapping situation in Cyprus.

It is very unfortunate that this positive, record low trapping activity recorded has been overshadowed by the approval of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping by the Cyprus government on the 13th May 2015, which included the so-called ‘alternative plan’. This ‘alternative plan’ would give the possibility to the Cyprus government to explore ‘selective hunting of ambelopoulia (only Blackcaps), under derogation’, a catastrophic development if permitted. BirdLife Cyprus strongly believes that the intention through the ‘alternative plan’ is to legalise blackcap hunting in Cyprus, and to reduce enforcement, purely for political reasons, rather than to stop illegal bird trapping.

BirdLife Cyprus and other environmental NGOs, namely the Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria, Friends of the Earth Cyprus, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and the Foundation for the Protection of Biodiversity (Foundation Pro Biodiversity - SPA) formed a network in order to fight this development. The network has been very busy campaigning for the withdrawal of this derogation from the strategic plan (having meetings with various decision makers etc.). Representatives of the NGOs have been invited to several TV and radio shows where they have expressed a strong opposition to this derogation, and have called for the adoption of a strategic plan on the basis of zero tolerance, as discussed by all the stakeholders during the development of the strategic action plan to tackle illegal bird trapping in 2013-14, an initiative led by BirdLife Cyprus.

On the 1st July 2015 the Strategic Plan and the ‘alternative plan’ were discussed at the Environmental Committee at the Parliament of Cyprus. Representatives of the network of environmental NGOs attended this discussion and expressed their strong disagreement to this derogation, while at the same time submitted a joint position paper detailing the reasons why we are against this derogation. At the discussion the Minister of Interior mentioned that the strategic plan with the ‘alternative plan’ has been sent to the EU Commission for its opinion, and that the Cyprus government would respect and would adhere to the response it will receive from the Commission on this matter. We are hoping that the Commission will give a clear and unambiguous answer to the Cyprus government rejecting the use of derogations for blackcap hunting.

On the other hand, a very positive approach has been observed on the ground by the SBA Administration. In July 2015 the Administration continued with its acacia removal plan in the core areas of the Cape Pyla trapping hotspot, a true milestone showing that the Administration is serious about tackling illegal bird trapping at its root. BirdLife Cyprus welcomed and supported this second phase of acacia removal (the first one took place in December 2014), which was completed as planned despite the reactions from the local pro-trapping groups. The progress for the designation of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (the consultation process closed in July 2015) is also a very encouraging and positive step, and is of critical importance for the drawing of a management plan that would include habitat restoration measures and consequently further acacia removal from Cape Pyla.

The political will between the Cyprus government and the SBA Administration has never been so conflicting and contradictory in recent years, the former showing tolerance towards illegal bird trapping and approving a strategic plan that includes the possibility for 'selective hunting of blackcaps, under derogation' and in practice attempting to legalise it, whereas the latter showing true zero tolerance on the ground against bird trapping with the continuation of acacia removal in Cape Pyla and the designation of the area as a SAC. BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Cyprus government to withdraw the 'alternative plan' and to adopt a strategic plan on the basis of a zero tolerance approach, and the SBA Administration to continue with the completion of the designation of Cape Pyla as a SAC and to develop a long term plan for the removal of acacias.

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Appendix 1

Methodology of the trapping surveillance programme

Survey area and sampling strategy

The surveillance project began in 2002 with the coverage of 60 sample squares (each 1x1 km) chosen at random from within a 261 km² study area, which covered most of the Famagusta/Eastern Larnaca area and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni area.

In 2005, the monitoring became more targeted, focusing 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 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.

Then, in 2007, the survey area was expanded to cover 295 km² for Famagusta/Eastern Larnaca area and 111 km² for Ayios Theodoros – Maroni area, bringing the total survey area to 406 km². This was done after preliminary surveys in autumn 2006 found evidence of extensive trapping on the margins of the original (261 km²) survey area. The sample size was expanded to 100 squares (40 new squares were randomly chosen) to allow for this extension of the survey area. Out of the 406 1 km² squares of the expanded survey area, 301 have been classified as 'possible bird trapping area' squares.

The random selection of sample squares is stratified to ensure representative coverage of areas under SBA, Republic of Cyprus and "Joint" jurisdiction (squares where the two jurisdictions meet). In terms of the analysis of the survey data BirdLife Cyprus is using the TRIM (TRends & Indices for Monitoring data) programme, which enables the analysis of time series of counts with missing observations. The program can be used to estimate indices and trends and to assess the effects of covariates on these indices and trends. TRIM analyses time series of counts, using Poisson regression and produces estimates of yearly indices and trends (Pannekoek & van Strien 2005)¹¹. If observations are missing, TRIM estimates the missing values on the basis of changes observed on plots that were monitored.

In other words, TRIM enables us to use the data from all the trapping survey squares ever surveyed under the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme during the spring period, in total 104 squares, even though these squares were not all covered each spring season. The programme 'fills in' missing values for squares that were not covered in a particular year on the basis of the general trend derived from the data as a whole. The TRIM software (freely available from <http://www.ebcc.info/trim.html>) is very widely used for analysis of field data from ecological or biological studies. It works as an index, setting the first year of a time series of data the value of 100 (in this case year 2002) and showing up or down changes in subsequent years relative to this value of 100

Surveying for trapping activity

Surveying consists of a two-man team systematically searching for evidence of illegal trapping activity in the randomly selected one by one kilometre squares. The time taken to

¹¹ Pannekoek, J. & van Strien, A. 2005. TRIM 3 Manual (TRends & Indices for Monitoring data). Statistics Netherlands

survey each square is recorded, as are weather patterns and the presence or absence of large numbers of migrant birds.

For safety reasons (avoidance of possible confrontation with trappers) the BC observers do not go out in the field at dawn, which is the main period of trapping activity, but carry out surveys between 09:00 and 17:00. Each sample square is 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 collected data. Opportunistic observations are also made in the surroundings of squares where mist netting is suspected. Trapping activity includes:

- mist netting activity, which is the main focus of the surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus. This is calculated using the total length of active net rides recorded within the survey area; and
- limesticks, using the total number of active limesticks found within the survey area.

Mist nets

The two observers carry out a thorough search of all habitat patches suitable for the setting of mist nets (i.e. all areas with bushes and/or trees) within each sample square. The observers record all direct and indirect evidence of mist net and tape lure use and of net ride preparation and use (e.g. cleared corridors within vegetation for putting up nets, presence of pole bases). The codes used for the various categories of mist netting activity and tape lure use are given below, as are the codes used for recording the type of habitat where trapping activity is detected. The surveyors note cases where they come across enclosed (fenced) areas that they cannot see into at all, or cannot see into well enough to survey fully.

Box 1 Key to survey codes used for the field		
<u>Net code</u>	<u>Habitat code</u>	<u>Tape lure code</u>
O – old ride	A – acacia	P – tale lure present, playing
P – ride recently prepared	C – citrus	L – loudspeakers present
ANN – active no nets present	E – eucalyptus	Y – tape lure present, not playing
AUN – active unset net present	F – fig	U – unknown
ASN – active set net present	J – mulberry	W – electrical wires associated with tape lures
IUN – inactive unset net present	O – olive	B – car battery present
	M – maquis	
	P – pomegranate	
	K – carob	
	Cy – cypress	
	L – lentisk	
	S – syrian plum	

The main net classifications are described below:

- Prepared (P): A net ride that is clearly ready to be used but there is no evidence e.g. bird feathers, blood stains, thrown pebbles, to suggest illegal activity was taking place the previous night / morning (see Figure 4),

- Active No Net (ANN): A net ride that from the evidence found e.g. bird feathers, blood stains, thrown pebbles, indicates that illegal activity was taking place the previous night / morning but no net is present (see Figure 5),
- Active Unset Net present (AUN): A net ride where the trapper has left the mist net on the poles but it is furled i.e. the mist net is not stretched up for catching birds but lowered down (or the net is placed e.g. under a tree) (see Figure 6), and
- Active Set Net present (ASN): A net ride where the trapper has left the mist net set on the poles and it is ready for catching birds (see Figure 7).



Figure 5: Prepared (P) net ride



Figure 6: Active No Net ride (ANN) with poles, bases, feathers & signs of trampling in an olive grove



Figure 7: Active Unset Net present (AUN) in an olive grove



Figure 8: Active Set Net present (ASN) –corridors in orchards are often used for mist netting

Limesticks

While the main effort of the observers is to locate evidence of mist netting, all evidence of limestick activity is also recorded. Limesticks are much harder to locate in the field than mist nets and are often set in a 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 km² sample squares for limesticks due to the time consuming nature of the task. The protocol is therefore for the observers to look out for limesticks while concentrating on surveying for mist netting activity.

Appendix 2

Survey data for spring 2015

Confidential data – provided upon request

Appendix 3

Estimation of numbers of birds caught during spring 2015

The following key assumptions are applied for the estimation of the birds killed:

- 12 metres is the assumed average length for a mist net
- 20 birds are caught per 12-m net per day (Magnin, 1986)
- 0.5 birds are caught per limestick per day
- 60 days is the duration of the trapping period for spring and autumn seasons
- 50% scaling factor – applied for springs to account for a lower number of migrating birds passing via Cyprus compared to the autumn
- 301 are the possible bird trapping squares within the survey area as identified from the surveillance programme in 2007 (the random sample of squares surveyed by BirdLife Cyprus is taken from these 301 squares)
- 75% of illegal trapping activity for all of Cyprus takes place within the survey area (based on input from enforcement authorities and other experts)
- For P (prepared) nets it is assumed that they are active every other day while for ANN (Active No Nets), ASN (Active Set Nets) and AUN (Active Unset Nets) nets it is assumed that they are active every day during the trapping season

Using the above assumptions the bird death toll is estimated as follows for autumn:

For nets = $[(\text{Total length of P category net rides}/2) + (\text{Total length of ANN+AUN+ASN rides})] /$
 $(\text{average length of a net}) \times (20 \text{ birds per net per day}) \times (\text{total number of 'possible bird$
 $\text{trapping area' squares} / \text{number of squares surveyed}) \times (\text{length of trapping season in days}) \times$
 $(50\% \text{ scaling factor} - \text{for lower no of birds in spring})$
 $= [(190/2) + 0 + 0 + 0] / (12) \times (20) \times (301/40) \times (60) \times (50\%)$
 $= \mathbf{35,744 \text{ birds}}$ could have been caught within the survey area in **mist nets**.

For limesticks = $(\text{Total number of limesticks found}) \times (0.5 \text{ birds per limestick per day}) \times (\text{total}$
 $\text{number of 'possible bird trapping area' squares} / \text{number of squares surveyed}) \times (\text{length of}$
 $\text{trapping season in days}) \times (50\% \text{ scaling factor} - \text{for lower no of birds in spring})$
 $= \text{None were detected.}$

Assuming that the survey area accounts for 75% of the trapping activity in Cyprus, the bird death toll across Cyprus is:

$= 35,744 / 75\%$

$= \mathbf{47,658}$ could have been killed in nets across all Cyprus during spring 2015.

Appendix 4

TRIM model description

TRIM (TRends & Indices for Monitoring data) is a program for the analysis of time series of counts with missing observations. The program can be used to estimate indices and trends and to assess the effects of covariates on these indices and trends. TRIM analyses time series of counts, using Poisson regression and produces estimates of yearly indices and trends (Panneloek & van Strien 2005). If observations are missing, TRIM estimates the missing values on the basis of changes observed on plots that were monitored.

In other words, TRIM enables us to use the data from all the trapping survey squares ever surveyed under the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme during the autumn period, in total 104 squares, even though these squares were not all covered each autumn season. The programme 'fills in' missing values for squares that were not covered in a particular year on the basis of the general trend derived from the data as a whole. The TRIM software (freely available from <http://www.ebcc.info/trim.html>) is very widely used for analysis of field data from ecological or biological studies. It works as an index, setting the first year of a time series of data the value of 100 (in this case year 2002) and showing up or down changes in subsequent years relative to this value of 100.

TRIM program allows the user to select various models to undertake the analysis: a) Model 1: No time-effects, b) Model 2: Linear (switching) trend, and c) Model 3: Effects for each time-point. **For the analysis presented in this report BirdLife Cyprus has selected Model 2, following the advice of RSPB senior conservation scientist Mr Simon Wotton.** Below is an explanation of why.

Which model should one use: the time-effects model or the linear trend model? (Panneloek & van Strien 2005)

The time effects model (= year effects model in case the time points are years) estimates parameters for each separate year and should be chosen if one wants to assess indices for each year. The linear trend model should be chosen if one is interested in testing whether a trend has happened across a number of years, by selecting one or more years as changepoints. The linear trend model should also be chosen when the data are too sparse to run the time effects model. Using the linear trend model also allows testing trends before and after particular changepoints. Options are (1) to test trends before and after a priori selected changepoints or **(2) to let TRIM search for the substantial changepoints by using the stepwise procedure.** If all years are selected as changepoints, the linear trend model is equivalent to the time effects model (although it results in a description in terms of trend slope parameters rather than time point parameters). Note that the linear trend model also produces indices for each year, but not necessarily based on yearly parameters as in the time effects model. Instead of yearly parameters, the linear trend uses the trend across a number of years to approximate the indices.

BirdLife Cyprus has used the 'Linear trend model by using the stepwise procedure and with all years selected as changepoints' for the trend analysis presented in this report, following the recommendation of RSPB senior conservation scientist Mr Simon Wotton.

The linear trend model can be run without any changepoints selected. Thereby it imputes missing counts based on the trend over the whole period studied. Be careful in using the model without any changepoints; the resulting indices might be unrealistic (this is the key point why this approach was not recommended and all years were selected as changepoints).

Appendix 5

Shortlist of media coverage on the Strategic Plan and the ‘alternative plan’

TV

1. Δελτίο ειδήσεων. Mega 15/5/15. Δήλωση: Νάταλη Στυλιανού, Λειτουργός ΜΜΕ, Πτηνολογικός
News broadcast. Mega 15/5/15. Quote: Natalie Stylianou, Media Officer, BirdLife Cyprus
2. Ενημέρωση τώρα. Mega 18/5/15. Προσκεκλημένοι: Κλαίρη Παπάζογλου, Εκτελεστική Δ/ντρια Πτηνολογικού, και Ευγένιος Χαμπουλλάς, Βουλευτής και υποστηρικτής «εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού»
Enimerosi tora. Mega 18/5/15. Invited speakers: Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director, and Evgenios Hamboullas, MP and ‘alternative plan’ supporter
3. Από μέρα σε μέρα. ΡΙΚ1 18/5/15. Προσκεκλημένοι: Κλείτος Παπαστυλιανού, Επιστημονικός Συνεργάτης Εναντία στη Λαθροθηρία Πουλιών στην Κύπρο Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) & Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA), Ευγένιος Χαμπουλλάς, Βουλευτής και υποστηρικτής «εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού»
Apo mera se mera. CYBC1 18/5/15. Invited speakers: Klitos Papastylianou, Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) & Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA), and Evgenios Hamboullas, MP and ‘alternative plan’ supporter
4. Από μέρα σε μέρα. ΡΙΚ1 14/7/15. Προσκεκλημένη: Νάταλη Στυλιανού, Λειτουργός ΜΜΕ, Πτηνολογικός.
Apo mera se mera. CYBC1 14/7/15. Invited speaker: Natalie Stylianou, Media Officer, BirdLife Cyprus

Radios

1. Τάσος Τρύφωνος-Χριστιάνα Αρτεμίου. Love FM 15/5/15. Τηλεφωνική παρέμβαση: Νάταλη Στυλιανού, Λειτουργός ΜΜΕ, Πτηνολογικός.
Tassos Tryfonos-Christiana Artemiou. Love FM 15/5/15. Telephone intervention: Natalie Stylianou, Media Officer, BirdLife Cyprus
2. Πρωινό Δρομολόγιο. Τρίτο πρόγραμμα ΡΙΚ 18/5/15. Τηλεφωνική συνέντευξη: Κλαίρη Παπάζογλου, Εκτελεστική Δ/ντρια Πτηνολογικού, και Ευγένιος Χαμπουλλάς, Βουλευτής και υποστηρικτής «εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού»
Proino Dromologio. Third programme CYBC 18/5/15. Telephone interview: Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director, and Evgenios Hamboullas, MP and ‘alternative plan’ supporter
3. Πρωινή έκδοση. Ράδιο Άστρα 18/5/15. Τηλεφωνική συνέντευξη: Κλαίρη Παπάζογλου, Εκτελεστική Δ/ντρια Πτηνολογικού, και Ευγένιος Χαμπουλλάς, Βουλευτής και υποστηρικτής «εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού»
Proini ekdosi. Radio Astra 18/5/15. Telephone interview: Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director, and Evgenios Hamboullas, MP and ‘alternative plan’ supporter

4. Tothemaonline.com 19/5/15. Προσκεκλημένος: Ευγένιος Χαμπουλλάς, Βουλευτής και υποστηρικτής «εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού». Τηλεφωνική παρέμβαση: Κλείτος Παπαστυλιανού, Επιστημονικός Συνεργάτης Ενάντια στη Λαθροθηρία Πουλιών στην Κύπρο Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) & Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA) Tothemaonline.com 19/5/15. Invited speaker: Evgenios Hamboullas, MP and 'alternative plan' supporter. Telephone intervention: Klitos Papastylianou, Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) & Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA)
5. Η φάρμα των ζώων. Ράδιο Άστρα 21/5/15. Προσκεκλημένη: Νάταλη Στυλιανού, Λειτουργός ΜΜΕ, Πτηνολογικός Ι farma ton zoon. Radio Astra 21/5/15. Invited speaker: Natalie Stylianou, Media Officer, BirdLife Cyprus
6. Δελτίο Θυέλλης. 107,6 25/5/15. Τηλεφωνική συνέντευξη: Κλαίρη Παπάζογλου, Εκτελεστική Δ/ντρια Πτηνολογικού Δελτίο Thyellis. 107,6 25/5/15. Telephone Interview: Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director

Articles that quote BirdLife Cyprus

1. Περιβαλλοντικοί οργανισμοί καταδικάζουν απόφαση του Υπουργικού Συμβουλίου 15/5/15
<http://www.skalatimes.com/2015/05/15/%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%B2%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%AF-%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%AF-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC/>
2. Ανοίγει ο δρόμος νομιμοποίησης του κυνηγιού αμπελοπουλιών – Θύελλα αντιδράσεων από περιβαλλοντικές οργανώσεις. 16/5/15 <http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/eidiseis-perivallon/51/257144/anoigei-o-dromos-nomimopoiisis-tou-kynigiu-ampelopoulion>
3. Όλα όσα πρέπει να ξέρεις για το κυνήγι των αμπελοπουλιών [που έρχεται σύντομα] 17/5/15 <http://city.sigmalive.com/article/10932/ola-osa-prepei-na-xereis-gia-kynigi-ton-ampelopoylion-poy-erhetai-syntoma>
4. «Πόλεμος» για τα αμπελοπούλια. 20/5/15
<http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/233802/quotpolemosquot-gia-ta-ampelopoulia>
5. BirdLife Cyprus slams government plans to allow bird trapping 15/5/15
<http://www.cyprusexpat.co.uk/blog/read/id:5908/bird-life-cyprus-slams-government-plans-to-allow-bird-trapping>
6. Deceived by the government. Cyprus Mail 16/5/15 p3

General about StAP, 'alternative plan' and illegal trapping

1. Απόφαση Υπουργικού Συμβουλίου – Ψάχνουν παραθυράκι για θήρευση αμπελοπουλιών. 14/5/15 <http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/top-stories/885/256766/psachnoun-parathyraki-gia-thirefsi-ampelopoulion>
2. Σχέδιο κατά της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών 14/5/15
<http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/schedio-kata-tis-paranomis-pagidefsis-poulion/>

3. Κόντρα Χαμπουλλά – Τρύφωνος για τα αμπελοπούλια... με φόντο τα Κοκκινοχώρια 15/5/15 <http://neammochostos.com/ei-champoullas-ke-t-trifonos-kontraristikan-sto-aera-gia-ta-ampelopoulia/>
4. Άγρια κόντρα στο αέρα για τα αμπελοπούλια 15/5/15 <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/index.php?pageaction=k&modid=1&artid=206961&show=Y>
5. Επιτρέπεται το κυνήγι. Πολίτης 16/5/15 σελ 1 & 34
6. Ανοίγει ο δρόμος νομιμοποίησης του κυνηγιού των αμπελοπουλιών. Φιλελεύθερος 16/5/15 σελ 24
7. Διαβάστε ποια θα είναι τα αποτελέσματα νομιμοποίησης του κυνηγιού αμπελοπουλιών 16/5/15 <http://neammochostos.com/diavaste-pia-tha-ine-ta-apotelesmata-nomimopiisis-tou-kinigiou-ampelopoulion/>
8. Η μάχη του Ευγένιου Χαμπουλλά. Πολίτης 17/5/15 σελ 20
9. Αεροβόλο φλομπέρ και σφεντόνες. Πολίτης 17/5/15 σελ 1 & 20
10. Μπήκε μπροστά ο Χαμπουλλάς 19/5/15 <http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/eidiseis-paraskinio/40/257475/mpike-brosta-o-champoullas>
11. Θα πατάξει τη λαθροθηρία το κυνήγι αμπελοπουλιών ισχυρίστηκε ο Χαμπουλλάς (Βίντεο) 20/5/15 <http://www.tothemaonline.com/filozooi/2015/05/20/ampelopoulia/>
12. Ενάντια στη στρατηγική για τα άγρια πτηνά η ΟΠΟΚ 22/5/15 http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/enantia-sti-stratigiki-gia-ta-agria-ptina-i-opok/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+dialogoscy+%28%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%B3%CE%BF%CF%82%29
13. Ομοσπονδία Περιβαλλοντικών Οργανώσεων. Καταδικάζει τις χαλαρώσεις για κυνήγι πτηνών 23/5/15 <http://offsite.com.cy/katadikazi-tis-chalarosis-gia-kinigi-ptinon/>
14. Τα αμπελοπούλια έχουν ισχυρή ψήφο. Σημερινή 23/5/15 σελ 8
15. Τα αμπελοπούλια του κ. Χαμπουλλά. Πολίτης 23/5/15 σελ 12
16. Τα αμπελοπούλια είναι ψευδαίσθηση. Η καθημερινή 24/5/15 σελ 12 <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/index.php?pageaction=k&modid=1&artid=207760>
17. Συνέντευξη Ευγένιου Χαμπουλλά στο «ΝΑ»: «Είναι σαφές, επιτρέπεται η θήρευση του αμπελοπουλιού κατά παρέκκλιση». 31/5/15 <http://neammochostos.com/sinentefxi-evgeniou-champoula-sto-na-ine-safes-epitrepete-i-thirefsi-tou-ampelopoulou-kata-pareklisi/>
18. Τα μασάνε για... αμπελοπούλια για λόγους βρώσης και ψήφων! Πολίτης 1/6/15 σελ 1&6
19. Ήξεις αφίξεις οι τοποθετήσεις κομμάτων – Καίνε οι 11 βουλευτικές έδρες. Τα μασάνε για αμπελοπούλια 2/6/15 <http://www.politis-news.com/cgi-bin/hweb?-A=293893&-V=articles>
20. Θέλουν αμπελοπούλια οι βουλευτές. 2/6/15 http://www.sotiranews.com/2015/06/blog-post_9.html?m=1
21. Πολυφωνία που βολεύει. 3/6/15 <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/index.php?pageaction=k&modid=1&artid=208858>
22. Εκτός «κόκκινου καταλόγου» της Ευρώπης τα αμπελοπούλια! 7/6/15 <http://apokalipsi.com/site/?p=7572>
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25. Στην Κομισιόν η απόφαση για υπό όρους θήρευση αμπελοπουλιών 1/7/15
<http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/245911/stin-komision-i-apofasi-gia-ypo-orous-thirefsi-ampelopoulion>
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<http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/ampelopoulia-me-to-zori-theloun-i-sinagermiki/>
27. Αναμένεται έγκριση Κομισιόν για υπό όρους θήρευση αμπελοπουλιών 1/7/15
<http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/koinonia-eidiseis/160/264913/anamenetai-egkrisi-komision-gia-ypo-orous-thirefsi-ampelopoulion>
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<http://www.cna.org.cy/webnews.asp?a=242fa1d4197842ebb602cb602123a514>
29. Ο Χάσικος και επιτροπάτα. Φιλελεύθερος 2/7/15 σελ 7 <http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/eidiseis-paraskinio/40/265061/chasikos-kai-epitropata>
30. Στην Κομισιόν ο τελικός λόγος για το κυνήγι αμπελοπουλιών. Φιλελεύθερος 2/7/15 σελ 18
31. Στα ξόβεργα του λαϊκισμού οι Συναγερμικοί βουλευτές. Χαραυγή 2/7/15 σελ 12
32. Μελετάται η υπό όρους θήρευση αμπελοπουλιών. Αλήθεια 2/7/15 σελ 39
33. Αμπελοπούλια με... φλομπέρ, αεροβόλο και σφενδόνα. 2/7/15
<http://neammochostos.com/ampelopoulia-me-flomper-aerovolo-ke-sdendona/>
34. Ευγένιος ο τρομερός 2/7/15 <http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/evgenios-o-tromeros/>
35. Κυνήγι αμπελοπουλιών; #Not_in_my_name 14/7/15
<http://www.sigmalive.com/simerini/analiseis/249181/kynigi-ampelopoulion-notinmyname>
36. Όχι στη λαθροθηρία, ναι στα δέντρα... 14/7/15
<http://www.sigmalive.com/simerini/news/249272/oxi-sti-lathrothiria-nai-sta-dentra>
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<http://www.cna.org.cy/webnewsEN.asp?a=d72b49d58d93434ab57ccba99d1376d9>
38. Govt. proposes 'selective' hunting of songbirds. Cyprus Mail 14/5/15 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/05/14/govt-proposes-selective-trapping-of-songbirds/>
39. Our View: Proposed changes to bird hunting is about catching votes, not saving ambelopoulia. Cyprus Mail 19/5/15 p13 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/05/19/our-view-proposed-changes-to-bird-hunting-all-about-votes/>
40. A gastronomical crime. Cyprus Mail 24/5/15 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/05/24/a-gastronomical-crime/>
41. Environment chairman calls for bird hunting plan to be tabled at parliament. 2/6/15
<http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/06/02/environment-chairman-calls-for-bird-hunting-plan-to-be-tabled-at-parliament/>
42. Environment chairman calls for bird hunting plan to be tabled at House. Cyprus Mail 3/6/15 p 5
43. Concerns raised over selective hunting proposal. Cyprus Mail 2/7/15 p3 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/07/02/concerns-raised-over-selective-hunting-proposal/>