



UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the autumn 2016 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 το φθινόπωρο 2016, ενώ παράλληλα κάνει και μια ανασκόπηση της κατάστασης που επικρατεί για αυτό το θέμα στο νησί. 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 και επίμονου οικολογικού προβλήματος.

Η ανάλυση των δεδομένων από την έρευνα πεδίου δείχνει ότι 21 χιλιόμετρα διαδρομών για δίκτυα ήταν ενεργά εντός της περιοχής της έρευνας πεδίου το φθινόπωρο 2016 – η έρευνα πεδίου καλύπτει περιοχές στη Λάρνακα – Αμμόχωστο και Άγιο Θεόδωρο - Μαρώνι. Με αυτά τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης εκτιμάται ότι πάνω από 1,7 εκατομμύρια πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός της περιοχής έρευνας πεδίου – εάν αυτή η εκτίμηση (1,7 εκατομμύρια πτηνά) διαχωριστεί σε επίπεδο επικρατείας με βάση τις καταγραφές παγίδευσης στο πεδίο, τότε πάνω από 326 000 πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας και περίπου 880 000 πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός των Βρετανικών Βάσεων Δεκέλειας. Η χρήση δικτύων για το φθινόπωρο 2016 ήταν κατά 25% χαμηλότερη σε σύγκριση με τα επίπεδα του έτους 2002 (όταν ξεκίνησε το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού) σύμφωνα με την ανάλυση που έγινε με το πρόγραμμα TRIM (για την ανάλυση χρησιμοποιήθηκε η προσέγγιση 'Linear trend model using the stepwise approach') – τα επίπεδα αυτά είναι χαμηλότερα εν σχέσει με τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης ρεκόρ που καταγράφηκαν το φθινόπωρο 2014, τα οποία ήταν κατά 13% ψηλότερα από το 2002 (έτος αναφοράς – baseline year).

Παρόλα αυτά, η χρήση δικτύων παραμένει σε πολύ ψηλότερα επίπεδα εν σχέσει με πριν μια δεκαετία (το 2006 τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης κατέγραψαν μια μείωση της τάξης του 80% εν σχέσει με το έτος 2002 σύμφωνα με το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου). Η εκτεταμένη παγίδευση με δίκτυα επιβεβαιώνεται περαιτέρω από τα στατιστικά στοιχεία πάταξης, όπου για τους μήνες Αύγουστο - Οκτώβριο 2016 πάνω από 850 δίκτυα κατασχέθηκαν από τις διωκτικές αρχές, ο υψηλότερος αριθμός δικτύων που κατασχέθηκε για τα τελευταία 6 χρόνια. Όσο για τα ξόβεργα (σημειώνεται ότι το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του Πτηνολογικού εστιάζει περισσότερο στον εντοπισμό παγίδευσης με δίκτυα αντί με ξόβεργα), κατασχέθηκαν συνολικά πάνω από 3,500 σύμφωνα με τα στοιχεία πάταξης των διωκτικών αρχών, κατά πλειοψηφία σε περιοχές της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας, καταδεικνύοντας έτσι πως συνεχίζεται ακόμα η εκτεταμένη χρήση των ξοβέργων.

Η μεγάλη κλίμακα της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο έχει επιβεβαιωθεί και σε ένα επιστημονικό άρθρο το οποίο δημοσιεύτηκε στο περιοδικό 'Bird Conservation International' (BirdLife International) το Μάρτιο 2016. Η Κύπρος ξεχώρισε ως μια από τις χειρότερες περιοχές για την παράνομη θανάτωση πουλιών κατά μήκος του μεταναστευτικού διαδρόμου μεταξύ της Αφρικής και της Ευρώπης στη λεκάνη της Μεσογείου. Η έκθεση επισημαίνει ότι *'...Στα τέλη της δεκαετίας του 1980, η Κύπρος είχε τη φήμη ότι στο νησί θανατώνονται τα περισσότερα πουλιά ανά κεφαλή από οποιαδήποτε άλλη Μεσογειακή χώρα (Magnin 1987) και τα στοιχεία υποδεικνύουν ότι αυτό μπορεί να ισχύει ακόμα'.* Στα ευρήματα αυτής της έρευνας η Κύπρος ήταν στην πρώτη (και χειρότερη) θέση με την υψηλότερη εκτίμηση του μέσου αριθμού των πτηνών που θανατώνονται κατά κεφαλήν, 196 πουλιά ανά 100 άτομα, ακολουθούμενη από το Λίβανο με 44 πουλιά ανά 100 άτομα.

Ως συμπέρασμα, οι καταγραφές πεδίου του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου Κύπρου, τα στοιχεία πάταξης των διωκτικών αρχών για το φθινόπωρο 2016 και το επιστημονικό άρθρο που δημοσιεύτηκε από το BirdLife International, όλα καταδεικνύουν την εκτεταμένη και μεγάλη κλίμακα της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών με δίχτυα και ξόβεργα στην Κύπρο, και υπογραμμίζουν την επείγουσα ανάγκη για ουσιαστική δράση προκειμένου να αντιμετωπιστεί αποτελεσματικά αυτό το επίμονο έγκλημα κατά της άγριας ζωής.

Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου αναγνωρίζει τις προσπάθειες πάταξης από τις τρεις αρμόδιες αρχές (Υπηρεσία Θήρας & Πανίδας, Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου και Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων). Κατά τη διάρκεια των μηνών Αύγουστο με Οκτώβριο 2016, η Υπηρεσία Θήρας & Πανίδας έκανε 32 καταγγελίες παράνομης παγίδευσης (συλλήψεις 35 ατόμων) και έκανε κατασχέσεις 195 δικτύων και 1291 ξοβέργων – αυτή η δράση πάταξης και τα αποτελέσματα είναι τα χαμηλότερα των τελευταίων 6 χρόνων της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας. Αντίθετα, το Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου είχε τα καλύτερα αποτελέσματα πάταξης των τελευταίων 6 χρόνων για την ίδια περίοδο, με 30 καταγγελίες (συλλήψεις 36 ατόμων) και έκανε κατασχέσεις 164 δικτύων και 1915 ξοβέργων. Όσον αφορά το Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, τα αποτελέσματα της πάταξης για την τριμηνία Αύγουστο με Οκτώβριο 2016 ήταν τα καλύτερα των τελευταίων 6 χρόνων, όπου έγιναν συλλήψεις 29 παγιδευτών και κατασχέσεις 496 δικτύων και 295 ξοβέργων. Κατά τη διάρκεια του φθινοπώρου 2016 το Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων έλαβε ειδική υποστήριξη για πάταξη από μέλη της Ομάδας Παρακολούθησης της RSPB, η οποία είχε ως αποτέλεσμα να γίνουν επιπλέον συλλήψεις. Παρόλες τις προσπάθειες πάταξης του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης εντός της Βρετανικής Βάσης Δεκέλειας παρέμειναν σε επίπεδα ρεκόρ το περασμένο φθινόπωρο, ενώ οι καταγραφές πεδίου δείχνουν την περιοχή Κάβο Πύλα ως τη χειρότερη περιοχή παγίδευσης με δίχτυα στην Κύπρο.

Δυστυχώς η πάταξη κατά των εστιατορίων που σερβίρουν *αμπελοπούλια* ήταν πολύ περιορισμένη και σχεδόν ανύπαρκτη τα τελευταία χρόνια. Επισημαίνεται ότι αυτά τα εστιατόρια βρίσκονται αποκλειστικά στη επικράτεια της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου δεν έχει λάβει οποιαδήποτε ενημέρωση ότι έχουν γίνει τυχόν καταγγελίες κατά εστιατορίων σχετικά με το παράνομο εμπόριο πτηνών από τις αρμόδιες διωκτικές αρχές της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας για το 2015 και το 2016 (για το 2014 είχε γίνει μόνο μια καταγγελία ενός εστιατορίου). Αυτή η αδράνεια είναι αδικαιολόγητη αφού τα εστιατόρια αποτελούν το κυριότερο οικονομικό κίνητρο αυτής της παράνομης δραστηριότητας. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου πιστεύει ότι η κατά πολύ μειωμένη διωκτική δράση κατά των εστιατορίων που παράνομα σερβίρουν *αμπελοπούλια* είναι αλληλένδετη με την έλλειψη πολιτικής βούλησης της Κυπριακής Κυβέρνησης για αποτελεσματική αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης και εμπορίας πουλιών.

Μια ξεκάθαρη ένδειξη αυτής της έλλειψης και της πίεσης από τους υποστηρικτές της παγίδευσης πουλιών είναι και ο προτεινόμενος τροποποιητικός νόμος του βασικού νόμου 152/2003 'Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πουλιών και Θηραμάτων Νόμος', ο οποίος κατατέθηκε από την Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας στη Κυπριακή Βουλή για συζήτηση και ψήφιση στα τέλη Ιουνίου 2016, χωρίς όμως να έχει γίνει δημόσια διαβούλευση με όλους τους κύριους ενδιαφερόμενους φορείς. Ο συγκεκριμένος τροποποιητικός συμπεριλάμβανε διάφορες προτάσεις που ουσιαστικά εισάγουν μια σειρά χαλαρώσεων και 'τρυπών' στο υφιστάμενο νομοθετικό πλαίσιο, και ο Πτηνολογικός έχει ασκήσει έντονη πολιτική πίεση για την αφαίρεση αυτών των καταστροφικών προτάσεων. Ο

τροποποιητικός νόμος αναμένεται να πάει για ψήφιση στην Ολομέλεια της Βουλής τον ερχόμενο μήνα. Ο Πτηνολογικός καλεί την Βουλή των Αντιπροσώπων όπως καταψηφίσει τον τροποποιητικό νόμο και την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση όπως ξεκινήσει άμεσα την εφαρμογή του Στρατηγικού Σχεδίου για την αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών, με την αφαίρεση του 'εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού', η οποία εκκρεμεί από το Μάιο 2015 όταν το Υπουργικό Συμβούλιο το ενέκρινε.

Οι εξελίξεις στις Βρετανικές Βάσεις δεν ήταν ούτε και αυτές θετικές. Η έντονη δέσμευση της Διοίκησης των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για τερματισμό της μεγάλης και εκτεταμένης κλίμακας της παράνομης παγίδευσης με δίχτυα και η εφαρμογή ενός προγράμματος αφαίρεσης ακακιών στην περιοχή του Κάβο Πύλα, μιας περιοχής όπου η παγίδευση με δίχτυα έχει φτάσει σε πολύ ψηλά επίπεδα (όπου 54 στρέμματα ακακιών αφαιρέθηκαν την περίοδο Δεκέμβριος 2014 - Ιανουάριος 2016), ήταν μια πολύ θετική εξέλιξη. Παρόλα αυτά, η προγραμματισμένη αφαίρεση ακακιών για το έτος 2016 δεν ολοκληρώθηκε λόγω της μεγάλης αντίστασης και των διαμαρτυριών της τοπικής κοινότητας Ξυλοφάγου, η οποία είναι υπέρ της παράνομης παγίδευσης – μόνο 7 στρέμματα ακακιών αφαιρέθηκαν το 2016. Αυτή η εξέλιξη έχει αποτελέσει ένα σημαντικό πισωγύρισμα στο πρόγραμμα αφαίρεσης ακακιών και για τους ντόπιους παγιδευτές αποτελεί μια νίκη. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου αναγνωρίζει τη δέσμευση της Διοίκησης των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για να σταματήσει η βιομηχανική κλίμακα παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών εντός της δικαιοδοσίας τους. Η έντονη αντίσταση της τοπικής κοινότητας, η οποία είναι υπέρ της παράνομης παγίδευσης, κατά του προγράμματος αφαίρεσης ακακιών αποδεικνύει ότι είναι ένα αποτελεσματικό μέτρο πάταξης το οποίο εφαρμόζεται από τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών. Ωστόσο, αυτή θα πρέπει να μετατραπεί και να ξανά-ξεκινήσει ουσιαστική δράση το 2017, ξεπερνώντας κάθε αντίσταση από την τοπική κοινότητα, η οποία είναι υπέρ της παράνομης παγίδευσης, με τη συνέχιση του προγράμματος αφαίρεσης ακακιών το οποίο είναι ζωτικής σημασίας. Αυτό αποτελεί προϋπόθεση για να υπάρξει το ενδεχόμενο σημαντικής μείωσης της παγίδευσης εντός της Βρετανικής Βάσης Δεκέλειας τα επόμενα χρόνια. Είναι πολύ πιθανόν ότι θα είναι αναγκαία η επιπρόσθετη ενδυνάμωση της διωκτικής δύναμης για να καταστεί δυνατή η συνέχιση των προσπαθειών αφαίρεσης ακακιών από τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων.

Καταληκτικά ο Πτηνολογικός τονίζει τις ακόλουθες δράσεις και μέτρα ως προτεραιότητες που πρέπει να υλοποιηθούν το 2017 και καλεί τους αρμόδιους στα κέντρα λήψης αποφάσεων όπως προχωρήσουν με την υλοποίησή τους:

- η Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση να αναλάβει **ουσιαστική διωκτική δράση κατά των εστιατορίων** που παράνομα σερβίρουν *αμπελοπούλια* (για αντιμετώπιση της ζήτησης),
- η Ολομέλεια της Βουλής να **καταψηφίσει τον τροποποιητικό νόμο** του βασικού 152/2003 'Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πτηνών και Θηραμάτων Νόμος', και
- η Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση να ξεκινήσει άμεσα με την **εφαρμογή του συμφωνημένου Στρατηγικού Σχεδίου** για αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών (με την αφαίρεση της παρέκκλισης του 'εναλλακτικού σχεδιασμού'), το οποίο εκκρεμεί από το Μάιο 2015, και
- η Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να συνεχίσει με το **πρόγραμμα αφαίρεσης ακακιών στο Κάβο Πύλα**, με επιπρόσθετη ενδυνάμωση της διωκτικής δύναμης εάν χρειαστεί (για αντιμετώπιση της προσφοράς). Επιπρόσθετα η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να

αντιμετωπίσει αποτελεσματικά την **εκτεταμένη χρήση ηχομιμητικών συσκευών κατά τη διάρκεια της νύχτας** εντός της επικράτειας της, και ειδικά στο Κάβο Πύλα.

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 και της πολιτικής βούλησης γύρω από το θέμα, ενώ γίνεται έκκληση προς την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση για άμεση εφαρμογή του Στρατηγικού Σχεδίου, προς την Κυπριακή Βουλή για καταψήφιση του τροποποιητικού νόμου και προς τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για τη συνέχιση του προγράμματος αφαίρεσης ακακιών.

Τα έξοδα για την εργασία πεδίου του Πτηνολογικού (καύσιμα αυτοκινήτου), καθώς και τα έξοδα των εκάστοτε εθελοντών, καλύφθηκαν από την οργάνωση NABU (BirdLife στη Γερμανία), ενώ το RSPB (BirdLife στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο) κάλυψε 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 autumn 2016 season, while also providing an overview of the current climate regarding this issue on the island. This report is aimed mainly at top decision makers and politicians, with the aim of informing, raising awareness and generating momentum for more effective action to tackle this chronic and persistent ecological problem.

The analysis of the survey data shows that 21 km of mist net rides were active during the autumn of 2016 within the survey area, which covers the Larnaka - Famagusta and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas. It is estimated that these trapping levels could have resulted in over 1.7 million birds killed within the survey area alone - if one were to split the potential death toll estimate between jurisdictions within the survey area (1.7 million birds) based on the trapping activity detected, then just over 326,000 birds would be the potential killed in the Republic and about 880,000 the potential birds killed in the Dhekelia SBA. Mist netting activity for autumn 2016 was 25% lower compared to 2002 (baseline) levels, based on analysis using TRIM software (the 'Linear trend model using the stepwise approach' was used for the analysis). This is lower than the record breaking levels recorded in autumn 2014, which were 13% above the 2002 baseline level.

However, mist netting activity remains at much higher levels than a decade ago (in 2006 the levels of trapping were 80% lower compared to the baseline year of 2002 as recorded by the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme). The extensive and widespread use of mist nets is further verified by enforcement statistics, where for the months August to October 2016 more than 850 mist nets were confiscated by the competent authorities, the highest number confiscated in the last 6 years. With regards to limesticks (it is noted that our systematic monitoring focuses primarily on detecting mist netting activity rather than limesticks), more than 3,500 in total were confiscated by enforcement agencies, mostly within the Republic, highlighting that extensive limestick use is still taking place.

The large scale of bird trapping in Cyprus has also been confirmed by a scientific paper that was published in the journal 'Bird Conservation International' (BirdLife International) in March 2016. Cyprus was identified as one of the key blackspots for illegal bird killing along the Africa-Eurasia bird migratory flyway across the Mediterranean. The report notes that *'...In the late 1980s, Cyprus had a reputation for killing more individual birds per capita than any other country in the Mediterranean (Magnin 1987) and our data indicates that this may remain the case'*. The findings of this study showed Cyprus ranking first (worst) in terms of bird killing, with the highest estimated mean number of birds killed per capita, 196 birds killed per 100 people, followed by Lebanon with 44 birds killed per 100 people.

In conclusion, the BirdLife Cyprus field survey data, the enforcement statistics for autumn 2016 and the published scientific paper of BirdLife International, all highlight the extensive and large scale of illegal bird trapping taking place in Cyprus with mist nets and limesticks, and point to the urgent need for serious action in order for this persistent wildlife crime to be tackled effectively.

The enforcement efforts of all three competent authorities (Cyprus Game & Fauna Service, Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit and SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit) are acknowledged by BirdLife Cyprus. During the months August to October 2016, the Cyprus Game & Fauna Service, had 32 trapping cases (35 individuals arrested) and confiscated 195 mist nets and 1,291 limesticks – this is the lowest level of

enforcement action and results for this agency in the last 6 years. In contrast, the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit had its best enforcement results of the last 6 years, with 30 trapping cases (36 individuals arrested), and 164 mist nets and 1,915 limesticks confiscated. With regards to the SBA Police Anti-poaching unit, for the same 3 month period, the enforcement results were also its best in the last 6 years, with 29 individuals arrested and 496 mist nets and 295 limesticks confiscated. During autumn 2016 the SBA Police Anti-poaching unit received specialist enforcement support from members of the RSPB Investigations Team. This led to a number of additional arrests. Despite the enforcement action of the SBA Police, mist netting activity within the Dhekelia SBA remained around record levels last autumn, with Cape Pyla recorded as the worst trapping location for mist nets in Cyprus.

Unfortunately, enforcement against restaurants serving *ambelopoulia* trapped bird “delicacies” has been very limited and nearly non-existent in the last few years; it is noted that these restaurants are exclusively found in the Republic. BirdLife Cyprus has not been informed of any restaurant prosecutions by the Republic enforcement agencies regarding illegal bird trade in either 2015 or 2016 (in 2014 only one restaurant was prosecuted). This inaction is indefensible as restaurants are the key economic driver of this illegal activity. BirdLife Cyprus believes that this much reduced enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants is influenced by the lack of political will within the Cyprus Government to tackle illegal bird trapping and trade with any kind of resolve.

A clear indication of this lack of will to tackle bird trapping and of the pressure being exerted by the pro-trapping lobby, is the proposed amendment to the Law 152/2003 on ‘The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species’. This proposed law change was submitted by the Game and Fauna Service to the Cyprus Parliament for discussion and voting in late June 2016, without public consultation with all key stakeholders. This amendment included various proposals that would essentially introduce a series of relaxations and loopholes to the existing legislative framework and BirdLife Cyprus has been lobbying strongly for the removal of these disastrous proposals; the vote on this law amendment is expected to take place at the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament in the next month or so. BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Cyprus Parliament to vote against this law amendment and to the Cyprus Government to start - as a matter of urgency - the implementation of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping, with the removal of the ‘alternative plan’, which has been pending since its approval by the Ministerial Council in May 2015.

There are also developments within the areas controlled by the SBA Administration which have not been positive either. The strong commitment of the SBA Administration to stop industrial scale trapping with mist nets and the setting-up of an acacia removal programme in the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla (where 54 acres were removed from December 2014 to January 2016) was a very positive development. However, planned acacia removals in 2016 were not completed due to strong opposition and protests from the local pro-illegal trapping community of Xylofagou – only 7 acres of acacias were cleared in 2016. This is a major setback to the acacia removal programme and represents a victory in the eyes of local trappers. BirdLife Cyprus recognises the commitment of the SBAA to stop industrial scale illegal bird trapping within their jurisdiction; the strong opposition from the pro trapping community in relation to the acacia removal programme highlights that this is an effective enforcement measure applied by the SBA Administration towards countering illegal bird trapping. However this needs to be turned into renewed concrete action in 2017, by overcoming any opposition from the local pro-illegal trapping community and continuing with the vital acacia removal

programme. This has to happen if trapping activity is to be reduced significantly within the Dhekelia SBA area in the coming years. Further enforcement personnel will likely be needed to enable the SBAA to advance their acacia clearance efforts.

In conclusion BirdLife Cyprus stresses the following actions and measures as priorities that need to take place in 2017 and calls upon decision makers to prioritise their undertaking:

- the Cyprus Government to take **serious enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants** serving illegal *ambelopoulia* “delicacies” (to address the demand),
- the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament **to vote against the law amendment** to the Law 152/2003 on ‘The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species’, and
- the Cyprus Government to immediately start the **implementation of the agreed Strategic Plan** for tackling illegal bird trapping (with the removal of the ‘alternative plan’ derogation), which has been pending since May 2015, and
- the SBA Administration to continue with its **acacia removal programme in Cape Pyla**, with further enforcement personnel if necessary (to address the supply). Furthermore, the SBA Police to tackle effectively the **extensive night time use of electronic calling devices** within its jurisdiction, and particularly in Cape Pyla.

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, and
- 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 and the political will around this issue, while also calling for the urgent implementation of the Strategic Plan approved by the Cyprus Government, for the Cyprus Parliament to vote against the law amendment and for the SBA Administration to continue with its acacia removal programme in Cape Pyla.

All the running costs for the field work (car fuel), as well as all the volunteer costs were covered by NABU (BirdLife in Germany), while the RSPB (BirdLife in UK) covered salaries.

1. Overview of bird trapping in Cyprus

Trapping with non-selective methods (mist nets and limesticks) and the trade of wild birds have been prohibited since 1974 under Cyprus legislation, when the law 'Protection and Development of Game and Wild Birds Law of 1974 (39/1974)' was introduced¹. 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*), hence prohibiting the killing (hunting) and consumption of blackcaps (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. Survey records show that 155 bird species have been found trapped in mist nets or limesticks, of which 78 are species of conservation concern according to the EU Birds Directive and / or BirdLife International². 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 estimated this illegal business to be valued in the order of 15 million euros per year³.

Apart from the extensive use of non-selective methods for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, organised trappers nowadays use outlawed electronic calling devices that imitate the calls of migratory birds. These calling devices are normally activated during night-time, luring the birds into the trapping sites and hence increasing the illegal catch. Academic studies have shown that tape luring can increase the catch by 3 to 13 times (Schaub M. *etal*, 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. *etal*, 2008). These calling devices can often be heard easily from hundreds of metres away from each trapping site during night time, highlighting the extensive use of calling devices and their intensity within the trapping areas.

¹ The specific articles of Law 39/1974 that prohibited the trapping and trade of wild birds include: Article 10 ('prohibition of hunting etc. of certain bird species', without including the blackcap either in the protected or the game species), Article 14 ('prohibition of offering game or wild birds in restaurants etc.') and Article 15 ('prohibition of the use of light projectors, traps, luring methods, limesticks and flushing of birds).

² BirdLife Cyprus 'List of birds recorded trapped in mist nets and on limesticks'. http://birdlifecyprus.org/udata/contents//files/Trapping-PDFs/Consolidated_list_of_trapped_birds_EN_FINAL-155.pdf.

³ Game and Fauna Service (17th March 2010), Position paper presented at the Committee of Environment of the Cyprus House of Parliament during a discussion to change the legislation on the protection and management of wild birds and game species

Between September and October the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) made four night time visits to Cape Pyla to record electronic decoy activity – one of this visits was jointly done with BirdLife Cyprus. Though not surveying the entire area, the field teams recorded between 20 and c40 electronic calling devices on all visits. These findings confirm the blatant and widespread use of these devices.

This report presents the latest survey results for autumn 2016, 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 for home consumption.

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).

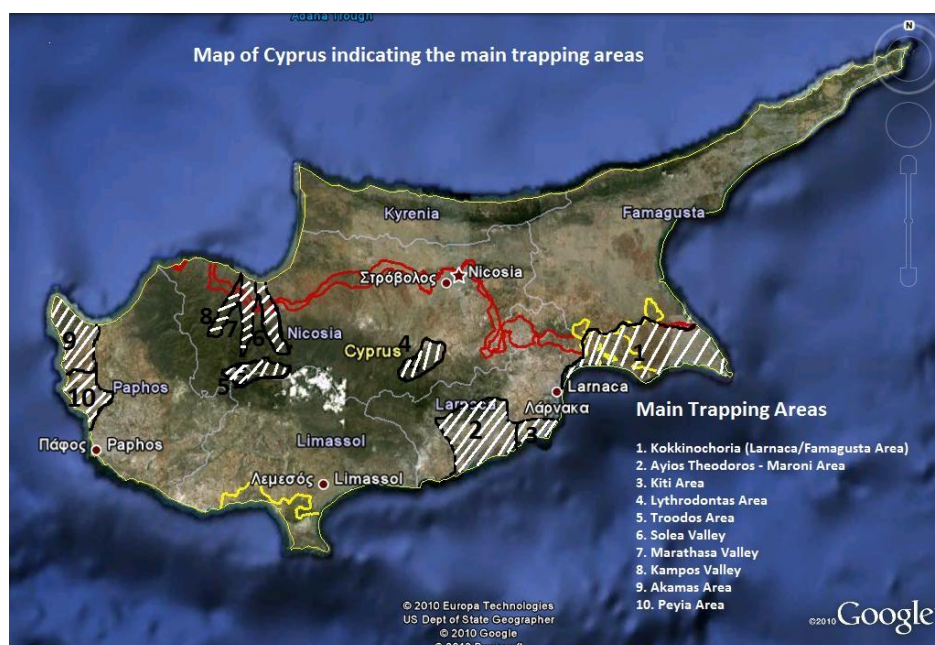


Figure 1 Map of Cyprus showing the main trapping areas

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 squares selected are 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. When trapping paraphernalia is detected, the BirdLife Cyprus team 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 express its particular thanks to the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) for supporting the project financially since the beginning in 2002. Furthermore BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank NABU (BirdLife in Germany) for their financial support since 2013 onwards. NABU covers the running costs and volunteer costs of the surveillance programme, whereas the RSPB covers related salaries. Finally BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank the 2 volunteers that have helped in the monitoring survey and the gathering of the field data.

3. Results

Survey results and data analysis

Field survey data

The field survey for autumn 2016 was carried out between September and October 2016 following the standard survey protocol. In total 57 squares were surveyed during this period and BirdLife Cyprus reported all trapping finds to the relevant enforcement authorities, either the SBA Police Anti-poaching Unit, or the Game & Fauna Service or the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit, depending on the location of the finds. Additional squares within the SBA area have been added to the sample since 2015, following the July 2015 workshop recommendation of independent science expert Alison Johnston (British Trust for Ornithology - BTO), to improve the precision of the trend within the SBA over time.

A summary of the survey data for autumn 2016 is presented in Appendix 2. In total the field team recorded 213 active net rides (these are 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), which sum up to a length of 3,973 metres of net rides used for mist netting, and 15 mist nets found *in situ* (either classified as Active Set Nets or Active Unset Nets⁴). Opportunistic checks outside the survey squares detected an additional 8 active net rides, which sum up to 162 metres of net rides (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 extrapolated at nearly **21 km** (3,973 m x 301 / 57)⁵.

In terms of limesticks, BirdLife Cyprus detected 93 limesticks this autumn (see Appendix 2). However, as already explained, BirdLife Cyprus does not focus its field survey on the detection of limesticks, as other organisations do. For example, during the autumn 2016 camp of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) / SPA Foundation which was undertaken from 7th September to 23th October, a total of 4,164 limesticks, 180 mist nets and 109 decoys were detected and/or seized (CABS, December 2016). It is highlighted that the majority of the limesticks detected by CABS / SPA Foundation were in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.

Based on the data gathered in the field this autumn, BirdLife Cyprus estimates that over **1.7 million birds could have been killed within the survey area** and nearly 2.3 million could have been killed across the whole of Cyprus⁶. It is noted that the estimated death toll does not take into consideration any net rides that have been classified as ‘Prepared’ (previously this net ride classification was also

⁴ 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 up for catching birds but lowered down.

⁵ There are 301.1 km² squares within the survey area that are classified as suitable for trapping activity (on the basis of vegetation characteristics) and 57 of these squares were surveyed in Autumn 2016. Out of these 301.1 km² squares, 236 squares are found in the Republic areas and 65 are found in the Dhekelia SBA.

⁶ The estimate also includes any bird trapping that takes place in the occupied parts of Cyprus, although trapping levels are relatively low based on information provided to BirdLife Cyprus by other organisations and our joint survey work in the occupied areas with the Turkish Cypriot bird protection society, KUSKOR, carried out in 2008. This is also the reason why the occupied areas are not presented as a main trapping area in Figure 1.

considered for the death toll estimation), following the recommendation included in the BTO assessment report (July 2015) to revise slightly the calculation⁷ (read Appendix 3 for more details).

If one were to split the potential death toll estimate between jurisdictions within the survey area (1.7 million birds) based on the trapping activity detected, then just over 326,000 birds would be the potential killed in the Republic and about 880,000 the potential killed in the Dhekelia SBA⁸ - the 'Joint' squares are not accounted for in these death estimates at the jurisdiction level. Note however, that the limestick toll is not fully accounted for in this estimate (as the methodology of BirdLife Cyprus focuses more on detecting mist netting activity), which would make the potential kill in the Republic higher. The total estimate of birds killed is derived using field-gathered data in combination with expert judgement for some variables (such as the number of birds caught per net) that are too dangerous to measure in the field.

Trends in autumn mist netting activity

BirdLife Cyprus is undertaking the trend analysis using the TRIM program. The organisation has been gathering field data in a systematic manner since 2002 as part of its surveillance programme and hence makes it possible to use such programs for the analysis. BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank the RSPB senior conservation scientist, Simon Wotton, for his guidance 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 (Pannekoek & 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 121 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 then showing changes up or down in subsequent years relative to this value of 100.

⁷ BirdLife Cyprus organised a workshop with title 'Methodology of surveying illegal bird trapping in Cyprus' in July 2015 (read relevant [e-news article](#)). Independent science experts from the British Trust Ornithology (BTO) were invited to review the monitoring methodology of BirdLife Cyprus and to provide a report of their assessment and recommendations.

⁸ From the 3,973 metres of active net rides detected within the survey area, 703 metres were in the Republic of Cyprus (from the 33 squares surveyed), 3,198 metres were in the SBAs (from the 20 squares surveyed) and 72 metres were in 4 'Joint' squares surveyed. For the calculated death estimates at a jurisdiction level, the trapping finds (excluding the 'Prepared' rides) in each jurisdiction are extrapolated to the total number of squares that are classified as suitable for trapping activity (see footnote 5 above).

The TRIM program was used to analyse the survey data and to produce trends in autumn bird trapping from 2002 to 2016. The metres of net rides that are recorded as active⁹ for bird trapping with mist nets within each survey square are used as the response variable, with autocorrelation and overdispersion accounted for as well. The TRIM changepoint model is used with a changepoint in every year (which returns the same result as a fully time-dependent model)¹⁰ (for more details on TRIM approaches read Appendix 4). The TRIM program is a good way of analysing these data and will produce a model of the change in bird trapping activity (with mist nets) between a base year (i.e. 2002) and each subsequent year of sampling.

A key conclusion from the BTO assessment report on the monitoring methodology of BirdLife Cyprus⁷ is how net rides are classified by different observers: *‘It is important to note that even if there are some differences in how certain rides would be categorised by different observers, the trend relies on consistency over time. For this reason, even if there are differences in categorisation between observers, providing that the same observer consistently applies the criteria for classifying rides over time, the trend for illegal bird trapping activity will not be compromised’*. For more details on net categorisation read Appendix 1.

Figure 2 shows the trapping activity levels since 2002 across a sample size of 121 squares within the survey area, with 95% confidence limits. Additional square coverage has been included in the last few years, particularly within the SBA, following a recommendation in the BTO assessment report (July 2015)⁷ to increase the sample size within this stratum (i.e. the SBA). A stratified random sample of 57 of the 121 squares was surveyed in Autumn 2016.

It is important to highlight that the additional squares surveyed have slightly expanded the total square coverage to 121 (compared to 104 squares previously), hence the TRIM program has imputed missing values for these extra squares as well. As a result, if one were to compare the index values presented in Figure 2 below with the trend analysis results reported in the previous autumn trapping reports¹¹, the index values may vary for the previous autumn seasons (i.e. for Autumn 2015 and earlier).

⁹ This includes all 4 categories of net ride classification: P – Prepared, ANN – Active No Net, AUN – Active Unset Net and ASN – Active Set Net. Read Appendix 1 for details on net ride classification.

¹⁰ This is a linear trend model using the stepwise approach and with all years selected as changepoints.

¹¹ BirdLife Cyprus trapping reports can be found [here](#).

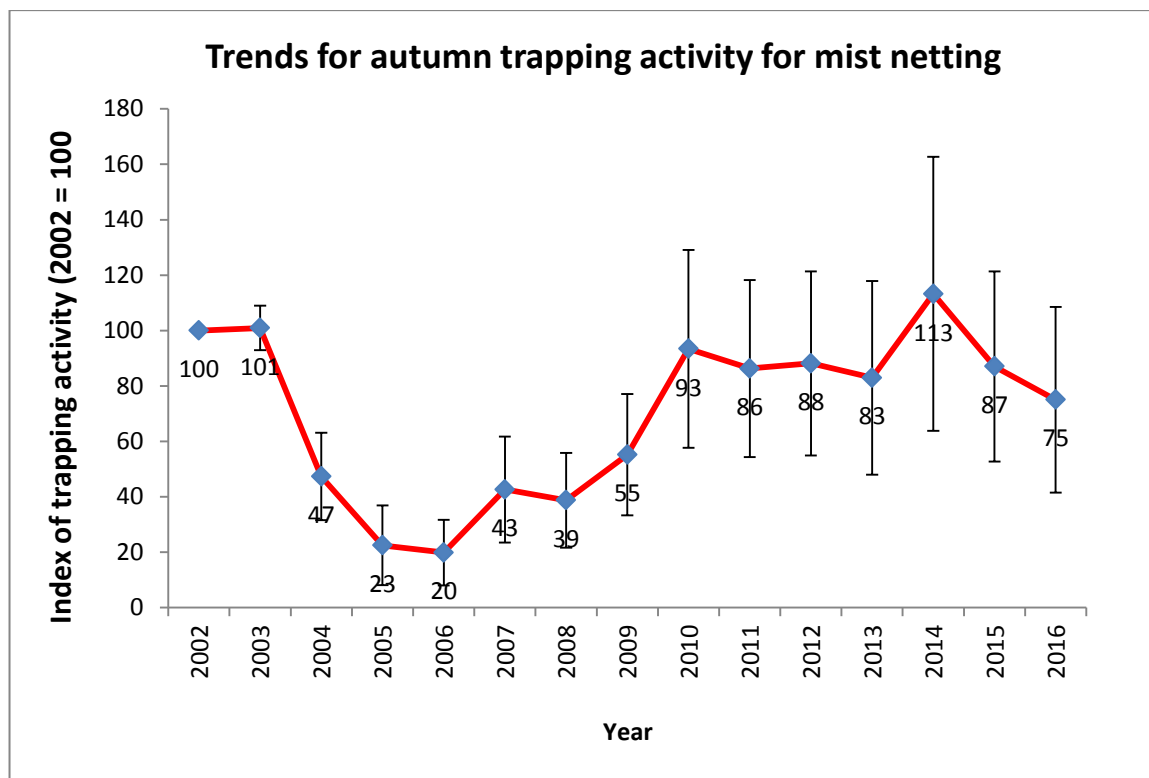


Figure 2 Trends for autumn bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets

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

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Significance
All squares	1.049	0.0143	0.0280	Moderate increase (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 there is no trend. Hence value 1.049 calculated above indicates an overall increase of around 5% per year in mist netting activity.

Mist netting activity for autumn 2016 is lower than the baseline year of 2002 (**25% lower for autumn 2016 compared to 2002**: index value is 75 for autumn 2016). As shown in the graph above, trapping activity for last autumn also continued to drop compared to the record breaking levels of autumn 2014, an encouraging outcome.

Figure 3 summarises autumn mist netting activity under different jurisdictions applying the same 'Linear trend model using the stepwise approach' in the TRIM program – **with all years initially selected as changepoints in the TRIM analysis (note that for the SBA analysis, TRIM would not run with the year 2003 as a changepoint)**. The sample of 121 squares surveyed at various seasons during the surveillance programme includes 80 squares within the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), 33 within the Eastern Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA) and 8 squares that cover areas in both jurisdictions (referred to as 'Joint' squares, including one that covers the SBA and UN buffer). For autumn 2016, the breakdown of the squares randomly selected and surveyed at a jurisdiction level were as follows:

- 33 squares within the Republic of Cyprus,

- 20 squares within the Dhekelia SBA, and
- 4 'Joint' squares.

It is noted that the number of squares covered within the Dhekelia SBA has expanded in the last 2 years compared to previous autumn seasons (13 squares in 2014; 12 squares in 2013). This was undertaken following the methodology workshop organised by BirdLife Cyprus (read relevant [e-news article](#)) and BTO science experts provided a concise report of their assessment and recommendations regarding the BirdLife Cyprus monitoring programme. **The BTO report highlighted that the methodology and the analysis undertaken by BirdLife Cyprus is robust and valid for the development of trapping activity trends.** One of the few recommendations was '*...In order to calculate trends within the ESBA that have a reasonable precision, the number of survey squares sampled within the ESBA will need to be increased. A suggested minimum number of survey squares would be 20 or 30*'. Hence this recommendation has been adopted for autumn 2015 and 2016 seasons. The BTO were of the opinion that the number of survey squares in the Republic of Cyprus was adequate and did not need to be correspondingly increased given that it was already over 20 (their recommended minimum).

For the analysis shown in Figure 3 the 8 'Joint' squares that are part of the total sample of 121 squares have not been included. It is worth highlighting again that the slightly expanded total square coverage to 121 (compared to 104 squares prior to Autumn 2014) would explain the differences in index values between the graph below and the trend analysis results per jurisdiction reported in the Autumn 2015 trapping report¹², particularly for the SBA trend analysis as extra squares have been surveyed within this stratum in the last 2 years. Despite these apparent differences in index values between the Autumn 2015 trapping report and the figure below, particularly for the SBA, the statistical analysis as reported in Table 2 below shows that there is *strong increase* (significance level) and a yearly increase of 15% (multiplicative trend value 1.1523) in the trend for mist netting activity within the SBA; very similar statistical results were reported for the trend analysis for the SBA in the Autumn 2015 trapping report¹².

¹² See Figure 3 in Section 3. Results, p 18 of BirdLife Cyprus [Autumn 2015](#) trapping report (March 2016).

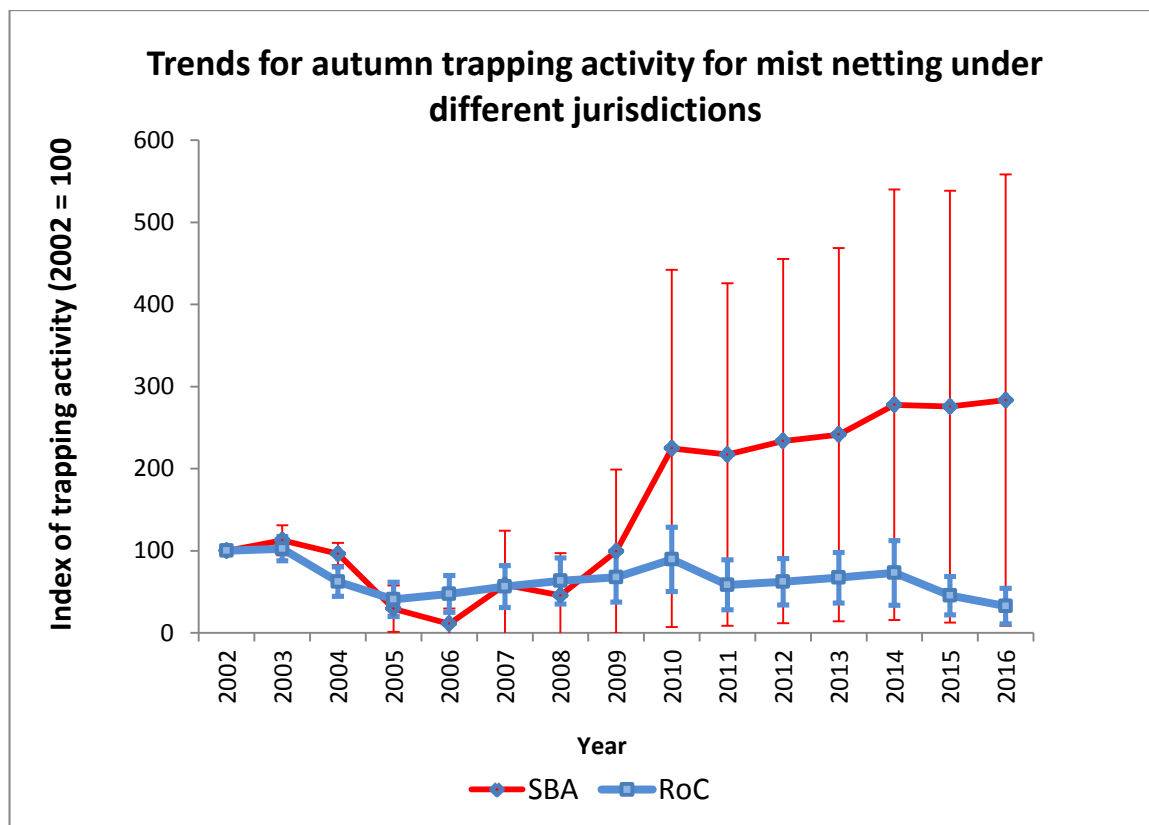


Figure 3 Trends for trapping activity for mist netting within the Republic of Cyprus and within the UK Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area.

Table 2 Statistics for trends for autumn trapping activity levels based on Figure 3

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Significance
RoC squares	0.9693	0.0162	0.0318	Uncertain
SBA squares	1.1523	0.0397	0.0778	Strong increase (p<0.01)

At a jurisdiction level, the trapping activity trends indicate that:

- For the Republic areas, autumn 2016 mist netting activity (index value 33) was lower by 28% compared to autumn 2015 (index value 45). **In comparison to 2002 the levels were lower by 67% for autumn 2016**, reaching the low mist netting levels recorded a decade ago in 2005, an encouraging outcome. **However it must be noted that these lower levels are not statistically significant as shown by the TRIM analysis ('uncertain' significance).**
 - For the 33 squares covered within the Republic, the range of counts was from 0 to 270 metres of active net rides, while no trapping at all was recorded in 23 squares. The average within the Republic was 21.3 metres of active net rides per square surveyed (703 metres / 33 squares surveyed within the Republic = 21.3).

- For the SBA areas, autumn 2016 mist netting activity remained around the highest levels since the start of the monitoring programme in 2002 (index value of 283), maintaining the very high trapping activity levels of the last few years. **In comparison to 2002 the levels were 183% higher for autumn 2016, the highest ever recorded.**
 - As seen in Figure 3 the confidence limits for the SBA trend are noticeably wide. This is due to the following factors: the relatively small sample size (20 squares surveyed in Autumn 2016), the large number of zero counts (11 out of the 20 squares surveyed recorded no trapping activity at all) and the wide range of counts (from 0 to 1,216 metres of active net rides). It is anticipated that the new larger sample size in the SBA will only start to have an impact on the confidence limits after a few more years.
 - It is noted that the two highest counts for mist netting activity were recorded in squares located in Cape Pyla area, with 1,216 and 783 metres of active net rides. These values are much higher than the average per square, 160 metres of active net rides per square (3,198 metres / 20 squares surveyed within the SBAs = 160), highlighting that Cape Pyla is a hotspot for mist netting activity.

Overall it is clear from Figure 3 that mist netting activity has increased dramatically within the Dhekelia SBA since 2010 and for the last three autumn seasons record breaking levels have been reached – **from the statistical analysis of TRIM these higher levels are statistically significant ('strong increase' significance)**. These levels are much higher compared to the Republic, a pattern that has held in recent years, primarily due to the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla and its peripheral areas, which has become the worst mist netting hotspot in Cyprus (based on the field data of BirdLife Cyprus).

As for the Republic the situation is better regarding mist netting activity in comparison to the SBAs, and in Autumn 2016 mist netting levels were the lowest recorded during the past decade, an encouraging outcome. However the ongoing discussion at the Cyprus Parliament regarding the law amendment (read more in the following section of *Social and political attitudes*), and the continued inaction by the Cyprus Government regarding the implementation of the Strategic Plan against illegal bird trapping are extremely worrying and could reverse this positive result in the coming years.

Furthermore the Republic areas are a real hotspot for limestick use, as confirmed by the survey data of other environmental NGOs (CABS, December 2016 report¹³) and the enforcement data provided by the competent authorities (see section *Enforcement*). In addition, the main economic incentive of organised trappers i.e. the restaurants serving *ambelopoulia*, are found exclusively in the Republic, hence the Cyprus authorities have a major role to play in clamping down on the supply – demand business chain.

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

¹³ During CABS field camp a total of 4,164 limesticks were detected and seized (CABS, December 2016 [report](#))

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 game 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 about 20 game wardens,
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit had 7 officers for the autumn trapping period (September to October), and
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit was comprised of 11 officers to cover the Eastern Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area during the autumn trapping period (September to October). BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank the SBA Administration and SBA Police APU team for its willingness and support in undertaking joint field monitoring of illegal bird trapping with the BirdLife Cyprus team.

Table 3 summarises the enforcement data of the 3 competent authorities regarding illegal bird trapping for the months of August, September and October, the main period for bird trapping in Cyprus, for years 2011 - 2016.

Table 3 Summary of illegal bird trapping statistics of the competent authorities for the months of August, September and October for years 2011 - 2016

	Game & Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta district ²						Dhekelia SBA Police Anti- Poaching Unit ³						Cyprus Police Anti- Poaching Unit ⁴					
<i>Years</i>	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No of cases	54	58	76	57	49	32	23	21	22	28	17	29	N/A	22	N/A	27	25	30
No of trappers arrested	57	70	78	64	54	35	23	22	22	30	17	29	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	28	36
No of mist nets¹	204	311	287	235	230	195	361	275	227	184	181	496	N/A	116	N/A	116	121	164
No of limesticks¹	2,550	5,372	3,830	1,577	1,740	1,291	290	314	516	256	234	295	N/A	4,799	N/A	3,950	3,359	1,915

N/A: Not available

Note 1: The total number includes both trapping paraphernalia (mist nets and limesticks) collected as court evidence when an arrest takes place and from confiscations.

Note 2: Data provided from Game & Fauna Larnaca & Famagusta district officer (December 2016).

Note 3: Data provided from Intelligence analyst of Dhekelia SBA Police (January 2017).

Note 4: Data provided from Head of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit via telephone on 9th February 2016.

- Game & Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta district: The enforcement data for autumn 2016 show the lowest number of cases and trappers arrested in the last 6 years for this agency. The lower enforcement action from the Game & Fauna Service could be explained, to some extent, to the findings of BirdLife Cyprus i.e. the low mist netting activity levels recorded for Autumn 2016 within the Republic of Cyprus (see Figure 3). However, the drop in the number of cases is quite significant – especially when compared with the record enforcement results of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit - to be solely justified by this factor. BirdLife Cyprus acknowledges the enforcement action against mist netting activity of the Game & Fauna Service, particularly if one were to consider the limited resources available. However, the very low number of limesticks confiscated is particularly disappointing, especially if one were to consider that the majority of limesticks are found within the Republic controlled areas (based on CABS findings that worked closely with the Cyprus Police APU). Both mist nets and limesticks are illegal due to their non-selective nature and a zero tolerance approach must be applied for both.
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) – Dhekelia Sovereign Base: The enforcement data indicate an increase in the number of cases and trappers arrested for Autumn 2016 in comparison to the previous autumn season, reaching similar enforcement levels as in Autumn 2014 (and the highest number of cases on record). The number of mist nets confiscated was significantly much higher than any other autumn season during the last 6 years. Moreover the SBA Police confiscated a total of 113 electronic calling devices during the 3 month period August to October. The efforts of the SBA Police, including the clearance operations that have been undertaken with support by military personnel, are acknowledged. The SBA Police undertook joint field monitoring with both BirdLife Cyprus and with CABS / SPA Foundation organisations. Also, during the autumn 2016 the SBA Police Anti-poaching unit received specialist enforcement support from members of the RSPB Investigations Team. This led to a number of additional arrests. Overall, enforcement action of the SBA Police for the autumn 2016 migration period was the highest for the last 6 years, an encouraging result following the strengthening of this unit to 11 officers and indicating an overall improvement in the operational capability (especially as last autumn 2015 the lowest number of cases was recorded). However mist netting activity remained around record breaking levels for autumn 2016 (see Figure 3), primarily because of Cape Pyla trapping hotspot, where in the 2 squares surveyed within that area just over 100 rides for setting up mist nets were recorded, summing up to 2km of active net rides. The intensity and extensive scale of mist netting activity in Cape Pyla is unprecedented in recent years and the SBA Administration and Police, with additional enforcement support, need to focus resources and effort on this area in order to be effective at significantly reducing mist netting activity within their jurisdiction in the next few years. The large scale night time use of electronic calling devices noted by CABS and BirdLife Cyprus also needs to be urgently addressed. A targeted program of removal of these devices at a number of points during the trapping season would disrupt trapping activity and reduce bird catching rates.

- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit: During the Autumn 2016 trapping season this enforcement agency worked closely with the CABS / SPA Foundation organisations¹⁴. The results of this agency indicate the highest enforcement action in the Larnaca and Famagusta districts for Autumn 2016 of the last 6 years, both in terms of the number of trapping cases and of mist nets confiscated (sadly with regards to limesticks, it was the lowest number of confiscated ones). BirdLife Cyprus acknowledges the consistent effort of this agency against illegal bird trapping, which has improved its operational capability and effectiveness on the ground year on year, despite the very limited resources available. The results also highlight that its resources are overstretched and more resources are needed to enable further enforcement on the ground.

From the enforcement data provided by the 3 agencies, it is clear that illegal bird trapping is taking place on an industrial scale, with the number of confiscated mist nets exceeding 850 – the highest number of mist nets confiscated in the last 6 years - and confiscated limesticks in the order of thousands (over 3,500). These numbers highlight the extensive scale of the problem of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and that enforcement agencies need to be significantly strengthened in order for decisive action against this illegal activity is to be achieved.

Table 4 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. 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 ride classification - and sites where limesticks were found) and were reported to the competent authorities for further action.

¹⁴ During the CABS Autumn 2016 camp (7th September – 23rd October 2016), the Cyprus Police APU worked jointly with them for 18 days resulting in 20 trapping cases, and 77 mist nets, 654 limesticks and 18 electronic calling devices confiscated (CABS, December 2016 report, p14).

Table 4 Summary of trapping reports provided to competent authorities from BirdLife Cyprus during Autumn 2016

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta					SBA Anti-Poaching Police Unit					Cyprus Police Anti- Poaching Unit				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of reports	50	43	33 ⁴	23	21	52	38	40	51	34	none	3	13 ⁴	12 ⁶	8
Cases / Arrests	17 (34%)	19 (44%)	8 ⁴ (24%)	11 (48%) ⁵	10 (48%)	9 (17%)	8 (21%)	6 (15%)	4 (8%)	5 (15%)	N/R	1 (33%)	2 (15%) ⁴	1 (8%)	2 (25%)
Confiscations¹	10 (20%)	8 (19%)	11 (33%)	None	1 (5%)	22 (42%)	18 (47%)	5 (15%)	10 (20%)	14 (41%)	N/R	N/A	N/A	2 (17%)	0 (0%)
Clearance² / Nothing³	23 (46%)	16 (37%)	14 (42%)	12 (52%)	10 (48%)	21 (40%)	12 (32%)	29 (70%)	37 (72%)	15 (44%)	N/R	N/A	N/A	9 (75%)	6 (75%)

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: Two sites were reported to both the Game Service and the Cyprus Police (Autumn 2014) – both reports resulted in prosecutions and they are accounted for in the statistics of both enforcement agencies shown above. The feedback for these two sites was provided from the Game & Fauna Service and is used to calculate the % value for the Cyprus Police.

Note 5: Two of the BirdLife Cyprus' reports that resulted in prosecutions were for illegal shooting of bee-eaters.

Note 6: The feedback for the reported sites to the Cyprus Police APU for Autumn 2015 was provided by CABS, which worked closely with this enforcement agency during the season.

The above table highlights that the cooperation and information exchange between the Game & Fauna Service and BirdLife Cyprus has been quite successful for Autumn 2016, with 48% of the reports resulting in prosecutions, which is commendable. In numbers, 10 arrests took place for Autumn 2016 from BirdLife reports, a similar outcome as last autumn. It is noticeable that in the last 2 years essentially no confiscations took place (except for one in Autumn 2016), in contradiction to previous autumn seasons. The response rate to BirdLife Cyprus reports (based on the feedback provided by the Game and Fauna Service) ranged from 10 days to more than a month – the average was 20 days. This response rate is particularly slow and needs to be further improved in order for the enforcement action to be more effective on the ground.

With regards to the Dhekelia SBA Police Anti-poaching Unit, about 56% of the BirdLife Cyprus reports resulted in prosecutions (15% - 5 in total) or confiscations (41% - 14 in total) for Autumn 2016. This total success rate is one of the highest in recent years, and the increased effort of the SBA Police is acknowledged. The response time of the SBA Police unit (based on the feedback provided) ranged from 1 day to more than a month – the average was 20 days. For a number of trapping sites reported by BirdLife Cyprus, action by the SBA Police was taken in mid – November, when the autumn migration and trapping period was finished (and the winter trapping season beginning). The response rate still needs to be much improved, in combination with the strengthening of resources of the SBA Police during September & October, and enforcement action should be focused around this period and in hotspot areas such as Cape Pyla, if a significant decrease in the autumn trapping activity levels is to be achieved within the SBA. From the data provided from CABS / SPA Foundation (CABS, December 2016 report, p.15), during the 11 days of joint operations between the two organisations, there were 5 arrests and 13 confiscations as a result of their cooperation.

As for the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit, BirdLife Cyprus reported 8 cases where illegal bird trapping activity was detected. From the feedback received with regards to these reports, 25% (2 reports) resulted in arrests, while for the remaining 75% (6 in total) of the reports there was no tangible result. This suggests that resources for this unit are particularly stretched, as it has the lowest number of officers out of the 3 enforcement agencies and for the last few years this enforcement agency has been working closely with CABS / SPA Foundation during their survey camps (it is noted that the results of this cooperation have been quite successful). The response time of this agency (based on the feedback provided) ranged from a few days to one month - the average was 19 days. From the data provided from CABS / SPA Foundation (CABS, December 2016 report, p.14), during the 18 days of joint operations between the two organisations, there were 20 arrests and 5 confiscations as a result of their cooperation.

In general it is highlighted that BirdLife Cyprus considers that enforcement efforts and priorities of all three competent authorities should focus on making arrests / prosecutions rather than confiscations, since a court conviction and sentence is a much more deterrent measure than a confiscation.

Illegal bird trapping has become a wildlife crime driven by demand-supply, with the trading of trapped birds in lawbreaking restaurants being the key economic driver for organised trappers, who, it is generally acknowledged, make thousands of euros illegal profit every year. The restaurants selling *ambelopoulia* are exclusively within the Republic; however **enforcement action against lawbreaking restaurants by the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police has been very limited, if any, in**

the last few years, as seen in Table 5. For the years 2015 - 2016 BirdLife Cyprus did not receive any information that any restaurants were prosecuted (or checked). This is very alarming and worrying indeed, and enforcement action against restaurants needs to be prioritised by the Cyprus competent authorities if the illegal trade of trapped birds in restaurants is to be stopped. This very specific ask was also raised in the last Package Meeting in February 2016 between the European Commission and the Republic of Cyprus, when the following was noted:

“Illegal Bird Trapping (Pilot)

Both parties agree that this remains a significant issue. The Commission raised the necessity for more decisive action (especially to reduce bird offer in restaurants and consumption) and reiterated the demand to see the hunting derogation option being removed from the Strategic Action Plan.”¹⁵

Table 5 Summary of restaurant checks and prosecutions in Cyprus

	2010 ¹	2011 ¹	2012 ¹	2013 ¹	2014 ²
Restaurant checks	20	31	18	7	14
Restaurant prosecutions	13	15	8	3	1

Note 1: Data source for years 2010-2013: Ombudswoman report dated 27/5/2014

(http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/index_new/index_new?OpenForm).

Note 2: Data source: Reply from Ministry of Interior to question of Member of the Parliament Mr Perdikes (question dated 15/6/2015, ref no 23.06.010.04.629) regarding restaurant prosecutions by the Game and Fauna Service for year 2014

(http://www2.parliament.cy/parliamentgr/008_02/by_name/gioryo_perdiki.htm).

Social and political attitudes

Overview for year 2016

The issue of illegal bird trapping has been covered very extensively by the media during 2016, with unfortunate developments taking place both in the Republic (e.g. ongoing law amendment discussion at the Cyprus Parliament) and in the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Areas (e.g. local protests against acacia removal in Cape Pyla). The issue was even covered by the BBC with an [article](#) in the Science and Environment section with the title ‘UK police tackle Cyprus bird poachers’, published on 4th October 2016. This feature described the large scale illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, particularly within the SBAs, and what the SBA Police is doing to tackle it. Moreover, well-known anti-illegal bird killing campaigner Chris Packham and his film crew visited Cyprus in late September / early October 2016 and witnessed the widespread illegal bird trapping taking place - a short cover [story](#) was broadcasted on the 1st October 2016 regarding his visit.

Overview of the situation in the Republic of Cyprus

In late June 2016 the Game and Fauna Service brought to the Cyprus Parliament for discussion and voting a law amendment to the Law 152/2003 on ‘The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species’, without undertaking a proper public consultation with any key stakeholder, except for

¹⁵ Minutes of the Package Meeting related to the bird trapping were provided to BirdLife Cyprus from the Legal Department of the European Commission on the 8th July 2016.

the Cyprus Hunting Federation. This law amendment included various proposals which BirdLife Cyprus considers would essentially introduce a series of relaxations and loopholes to the existing legislative framework. BirdLife Cyprus followed closely the discussion at parliamentary committee level regarding this amendment and lobbied for the removal of all the negative (relaxation) proposals, in cooperation with other environmental organisations. The vote on this amendment is expected to take place at the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament in March 2017. This development is another clear indication of the lack of political will to tackle illegal bird trapping and poaching in Cyprus, the lack of any actual 'zero tolerance' approach and the pressure from the pro-trapping lobby to 'legalise' bird trapping and to relax the existing legislation. Moreover, there has been no progress on the implementation of the agreed Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping, despite its approval from the Ministerial Council in May 2015.

Overview of the situation in the Eastern Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area

In the last 2 years the SBA Administration has taken a series of new steps and measures to stop industrial scale trapping within the Dhekelia SBA, including the setting up and the start of an acacia removal programme in the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla. During the period December 2014 to January 2016, a total of 54 acres were cleared of acacia, a milestone action that BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB welcomed and supported publicly. A significant proportion of the prime trapping area was also designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the SBAA thereby giving themselves a legal duty to remove the invasive acacia. However planned acacia removal for 2016 was faced with direct and strong opposition from the local pro-trapping community of Xylofagou, culminating in on-site protests, and sadly not much acacia cutting was completed by the SBA Administration - only 7 acres of acacias were cleared in 2016. Whilst this shows that the acacia removal is deeply opposed by the trappers for its effectiveness, this is nonetheless a major setback to the acacia removal programme and, in the eyes of local trappers, a victory which risks emboldening them further. The Xylofagou trappers have been planting acacias for mist netting for many years on Cape Pyla and have turned this area into the worst trapping location in Cyprus (based on the field data of BirdLife Cyprus monitoring survey).

Developments in the Republic of Cyprus

The developments in the Republic of Cyprus regarding the (absence of) political will to tackle illegal bird trapping in a determined and strategic approach, have been worsening in the last few years. It is evident that there is much pressure from the pro-trapping lobby to 'legalise' bird trapping by relaxing or introducing loopholes to the existing legislation. In 2015, the Ministerial Council of the Cyprus government approved the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping, agreed by all stakeholders. However, the Ministerial Council unilaterally included a so-called 'alternative plan' for the 'selective hunting of *ambelopoulia*, under derogation' (for more details read the Autumn 2015 [report](#) of BirdLife Cyprus, March 2016). This was a major setback for the implementation of a 'zero tolerance' approach agreed by all stakeholders - in fact the 'alternative plan' resulted in the opposite message being heard i.e. that bird trapping / hunting would be allowed under a derogation. Fortunately the European

Commission categorically stated that such a derogation **cannot** be granted under European legislation¹⁶.

Following this, and as stated above, in 2016, the Cyprus Government and in particular the Game and Fauna Service prepared a law amendment to the Law 152/2003 on 'The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species' and brought it to the Cyprus Parliament in late June for discussion and voting, without any prior public consultation with any stakeholder except for the Cyprus Hunting Federation. The proposals of the Game Service in this law amendment included the following, amongst others:

- on-the-spot fine regulation for all offences,
- the issuing of written warnings for specific offences,
- the improvement of protection measures for habitats and SPAs,
- the possibility to use air rifles for hunting,
- the introduction of falconry,
- the legalisation of the use of artificial decoys as bird models and mechanical calling devices for hunting, and
- hunters to be permitted to take their game to restaurants and to consume it there, a move that would effectively 'legalise' the offer of game in restaurants, as it will be impossible for law enforcement agencies to check the origin of the birds on offer or whether the birds are 'take-in' or on sale .

BirdLife Cyprus believes that all these proposals, with the single exception of the improvement of protection measures for habitats and SPAs, would amount to a series of relaxations and loopholes in the existing legislative framework without achieving any updating and modernisation of the Main law. These proposals would be disastrous for the sustainable management of game and the conservation of wild birds, and counter-productive with regards to better combating of poaching and illegal bird trapping in Cyprus. BirdLife Cyprus has followed closely the developments and discussions around this topic and has expressed its serious concerns and strong opposition to these proposals during the discussions held at the Environment Committee of the Cyprus Parliament on [29 June 2016](#), on [13 July 2016](#) and on [21 September 2016](#), when position papers were submitted with key arguments why these proposals are in breach of the Birds Directive and/or introduce relaxations to the existing legislation (read relevant [June](#), [July](#) and [September](#) 2016 e-news articles). As already stated, the amendment is expected to go for voting at the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament in March 2017.

In the last Package Meeting between the Cyprus Government and a delegation from the European Commission in February 2016, the Commission stressed the following regarding the issue of illegal bird trapping *'Both parties agree that this remains a significant issue. The Commission raised the necessity for more decisive action (especially to reduce bird offer in restaurants and consumption) and reiterated the demand to see the hunting derogation option being removed from the Strategic Action Plan'*. It is very clear that the Commission is concerned about the trapping situation in Cyprus and what is expecting from the Cyprus Government, in other words more decisive action to tackle illegal bird

¹⁶ Read relevant e-news [article](#) (BirdLife Cyprus, January 2016) regarding Commission's negative reply on the 'alternative plan'

trapping. And yet the Government has not shown any intention of removing the 'alternative plan' from the Strategic Plan or to undertake any serious enforcement on restaurants.

It is important to mention here the recent referral of France to the Court of Justice by the European Commission (on the 8th December 2016¹⁷) for failing to address continued violations of the legislation on the conservation of wild birds. This highlights that wildlife crime is considered a serious crime by the Commission and that all Member States have the obligation to ensure that all provisions of the Birds Directive are respected. In France, illegal trapping of Ortolan buntings (*Emberiza hortulana*), a migratory bird with declining numbers in Europe, has continued despite earlier commitments by the French authorities and numerous calls by the Commission to France to take decisive action against this activity. As stated in the press release of the European Commission: *"These activities in France jeopardise the conservation efforts undertaken by other Member States. Therefore, to urge France to correctly enforce the Birds Directive on the ground, the Commission is taking this matter to the Court of Justice of the EU"*.

Parallels can be drawn between France and Cyprus, as both countries have been failing - for years - to take the necessary measures against illegal bird killing. BirdLife Cyprus believes that the proposed law amendment, if passed by the Cyprus Parliament, would be disastrous for the sustainable management of game and the conservation of wild birds, and counterproductive with regards to better combating of poaching and illegal bird trapping in Cyprus. Such a law change could cause the Republic further "headaches" with the European Commission (as has happened recently with France and in the past with Spain¹⁸) and BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Cyprus Parliament to vote against this amendment law.

Developments in the Eastern (Dhekelia) Sovereign Base Area

In the last 2 years, the SBA Administration has shown its commitment to stopping industrial scale trapping within the Dhekelia SBA, and a series of key steps have been undertaken including the designation of Cape Pyla as the equivalent of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the setting-up of an acacia removal programme on Cape Pyla, the strengthening of the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit and support from the military for clearance operations in Cape Pyla. This top-level commitment is fully acknowledged and applauded by BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB.

On the downside, this commitment to take action against illegal bird trapping has been faced with strong and direct opposition from the pro-illegal trapping lobby. In particular, the local community of Xylofagou has organised a number of protests to stop the removal of acacia trees in Cape Pyla (an invasive alien species that has been planted solely to create a suitable habitat for trapping with mist nets):

- In July 2016 numerous residents of the local community of Xylofagou organised a protest in the military firing range of Cape Pyla to stop the cutting of acacia trees, arguing that the SBA Administration is cutting down the local forest (see Figure 4). Sadly this protest was supported

¹⁷ Read relevant [Press Release](#) of the European Commission.

¹⁸ Read [Case C-79/03](#) of European Commission vs Kingdom of Spain (9th December 2004), when Spain was convicted for permitting the use of limesticks as traditional practice for the trapping of song thrush species in the Valencia region.

and attended by various Members of the Cyprus Parliament. As a response to this, a [joint Press Release](#) by the environmental organisations was prepared and sent to the media on 21 July 2016, highlighting the support of these organisations for the acacia removal programme of the relevant SBA Administration efforts. The PR was well covered in the media, however the political pressure fuelled by the local reactions also appeared to be strong.

- In October 2016 (20th) about 150 soldiers were brought in to cut acacias trees that have been planted in the military firing range of Cape Pyla. Xylofagou residents again held a protest, with 80-100 vehicles blocking the military trucks, bringing a halt to the acacia clearance work (see Figure 5).



Figure 4 Protest at Cape Pyla against the removal of acacia trees, an invasive alien species, in July 2016



Figure 5 Protest at Cape Pyla with local residents blocking UK military army tracks in October 2016

The media coverage of these protests, and in particular around the October incident, was intense, and BirdLife Cyprus was invited to a number of radio and TV shows to discuss the acacia removal programme and the illegal bird trapping problem in general (see Appendix 5 for media coverage).

It is very unfortunate that the SBAA's acacia removals for 2016 did not materialise as planned and only 7 acres of acacias were cleared last year. This is a major setback to the acacia removal programme and represents a victory in the eyes of local trappers. The strong opposition from the pro trapping community in relation to the acacia removal programme highlights that this is an effective enforcement measure applied by the SBA Administration towards countering illegal bird trapping. BirdLife Cyprus hopes that the SBA Administration will continue with this measure in Cape Pyla in 2017, after the setback in 2016, and will overcome the strong opposition of the local community, whose only interest is in safeguarding what they consider to be their trapping "rights" on Cape Pyla. Further enforcement personnel may be required to enable the necessary policing effort to occur and the acacia to be safely cleared.

4. Discussion

Based on BirdLife Cyprus's systematic monitoring, illegal bird trapping activity with mist nets decreased during the autumn 2016 period compared to 2015 and 2014 autumn seasons; however it remained at very high levels compared to the low activity levels recorded during and right after the accession of Cyprus into the EU (see Figure 2). Mist netting activity for autumn 2016 showed a 25% decrease compared to the baseline year of 2002 (index value is 75 for autumn 2016), a positive outcome. However, these levels are much higher than a decade ago (lowest index value recorded from the surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus was 20 in 2006, a decrease of 80% compared to baseline year 2002). At a jurisdiction level, mist netting activity for the Republic showed a decrease of 67% for autumn 2016 compared to 2002, while for the SBA an increase of 183% for autumn 2016 compared to 2002 was recorded. The year-on-year increase in mist netting levels within the Dhekelia SBA since 2010 has continued and remained around record levels in autumn 2016, highlighting that the Dhekelia SBA has become a mist netting hotspot, with Cape Pyla being the worst trapping location with mist nets in Cyprus. Enforcement data from the 3 agencies for August to October 2016 (see Table 3) indicate that illegal bird trapping is taking place on an industrial scale, with the number of confiscated mist nets exceeding 850 (the highest ever number of mist nets confiscated) and confiscated limesticks in the order of thousands (exceeding 3,500).

The industrial scale of bird trapping in Cyprus has also been confirmed by a scientific paper that was published in the journal 'Bird Conservation International' (BirdLife International, March 2016). Cyprus was identified as one of the key blackspots for illegal bird killing along the Africa-Eurasia bird migratory flyway across the Mediterranean. The paper stated that: *'...In the late 1980s, Cyprus had a reputation for killing more individual birds per capita than any other country in the Mediterranean (Magnin 1987) and our data indicates that this may remain the case'*. The findings of this study showed Cyprus ranking first (worst) with the highest estimated mean number of birds killed per capita, 196 birds killed per 100 people, followed by Lebanon with 44 birds killed per 100 people. The findings of this paper have generated a lot of media coverage regarding illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, both at national and international level, including an article from the very high profile BBC published in October 2016, which covered the scale of the problem.

Overall, the BirdLife Cyprus field data, the enforcement statistics for autumn 2016 and the published scientific paper of BirdLife International, all highlight the extensive scale of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and point to the urgent need for serious action if this wildlife crime is to be tackled effectively. And yet the current political attitude of the Republic of Cyprus is far removed from adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach; this is evident from the amendment to the Law 152/2003 on 'The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species', which was submitted by the Game and Fauna Service to the Cyprus Parliament in June 2016. This law amendment includes various proposals that would essentially introduce a series of relaxations and loopholes to the existing legislative framework. BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Cyprus Parliament to vote against this amendment and to the Cyprus Government to immediately start the implementation of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping, agreed by all stakeholders and pending since May 2015, when it was approved by the Ministerial Council. The continuing lack of effective and determined action against law-breaking restaurants serving illegal *ambelopoulia* "delicacies" (most of which are well-

known) is a major sticking point and one the Cyprus government needs to address with immediate effect.

Moreover, there are developments within the areas controlled by the SBA Administration which have not been positive either. Despite the strong commitment of the SBA Administration to stop industrial scale trapping with mist nets and the setting-up of an acacia removal programme in the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla (where 54 acres had been removed from December 2014 to January 2016), any planned acacia removals in 2016 were blocked by strong opposition and protests from the local pro trapping community of Xylofagou – only 7 acres of acacias were cleared in 2016. This is a major setback to the acacia removal programme and a victory in the eyes of local trappers. BirdLife Cyprus recognises the commitment of the SBAA to stop industrial scale bird trapping within their jurisdiction; the strong opposition from the pro trapping community in relation to the acacia removal programme highlights that this is an effective enforcement measure applied by the SBA Administration towards countering illegal bird trapping. However, this needs to be turned into renewed concrete action in 2017, by overcoming any opposition from the local pro trapping community and continuing with the acacia removal programme, if trapping activity is to be reduced significantly within the Dhekelia SBA area in the following few years.

Recommendations

In conclusion BirdLife Cyprus stresses the following actions and measures as priorities that need to take place in 2017 and calls upon decision makers to prioritise their undertaking:

- the Cyprus Government to take **serious enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants** serving illegal *ambelopoulia* “delicacies” (to address the demand),
- the plenary of the Cyprus Parliament **to vote against the law amendment** to the Law 152/2003 on ‘The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species’, and
- the Cyprus Government to immediately start the **implementation of the agreed Strategic Plan** for tackling illegal bird trapping (with the removal of the ‘alternative plan’ derogation), which has been pending since May 2015, and
- the SBA Administration to continue with its **acacia removal programme in Cape Pyla**, with further enforcement personnel if necessary (to address the supply). Furthermore, the SBA Police to tackle effectively the **extensive night time use of electronic calling devices** within its jurisdiction, and particularly in Cape Pyla.

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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 (read more about TRIM in Appendix 4).

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 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 ride 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 6: Prepared (P) net ride



Figure 7: Active No Net ride (ANN) with poles, bases, feathers & signs of trampling in an olive grove



Figure 8: Active Unset Net present (AUN) in an olive grove



Figure 9: 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 autumn 2016

Evidence of illegal bird trapping activity within survey squares

Confidential information – provided upon request

Evidence of illegal bird trapping activity outside survey squares

Confidential information – provided upon request

Appendix 3

Estimation of numbers of birds caught during autumn 2016

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 spring estimates 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)
- Net ride categories 'ANN' (Active No Nets), 'ASN' (Active Set Nets) and 'AUN' (Active Unset Nets) nets are assumed that they are active every day during the trapping season (read Appendix 1 for details on net ride classification).
 - Note: Net ride category 'P' (Prepared) is not taken into account for the estimation of numbers of birds killed anymore, following the recommendation of BTO science experts (BTO report, July 2015) to revise slightly the equation.

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

For nets = [(Total length of ANN+AUN+ASN rides)] / (average length of a net) x (20 birds per net per day) x (total number of 'possible bird trapping area' squares / number of squares surveyed) x (length of trapping season in days)

$$= [(2,898 + 135 + 180) / (12) \times (20) \times (301/57) \times (60)]$$

= **1,696,689** could have been caught within the survey area in **mist nets**.

For limesticks = (Total number of limesticks found) x (0.5 birds per limestick per day) x (total number of 'possible bird trapping area' squares / number of squares surveyed) x (length of trapping season in days)

$$= 93 \times 0.5 \times (301/57) \times 60$$

= **14,733** birds caught within the survey area on **limesticks**

In total 1,711,423 birds could have been killed in mist nets and on limesticks within the survey area during autumn 2016. Assuming that the survey area accounts for 75% of the trapping activity in Cyprus, the bird death toll across Cyprus is:

$$= 1,711,423 / 75\%$$

= **2,281,897 birds could have been killed in nets and on limesticks across all Cyprus during autumn 2016.**

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 related to illegal bird trapping for autumn 2016

The list covers newspaper articles, radio and TV coverage for autumn 2016, focusing on September and October.

Radio & TV:

- Sigma Mesimeri kai kati – Hunting law amendment / Sigma Μεσημέρι και κάτι – Τροποποιητικός νόμος περί κυνηγίου 28/9/16
- BBC News at Six – British Bases tackle bird hunting in Cyprus 4/10/16
- CYBC Apo mera se mera – Illegal bird killing in Cyprus following BBC reportage / PIK1 – Από μέρα σε μέρα – παράνομη παγίδευση στην Κύπρο με αφορμή το ρεπορτάζ του BBC 6/10/16
- 107.6 Politis – Illegal bird killing in Cyprus following BBC reportage / 107,6 Πολίτης -παράνομη παγίδευση στην Κύπρο με αφορμή το ρεπορτάζ του BBC 6/10/16
- Simga Mesimeri kai kati – Acacia removal at SBAs / Sigma Μεσημέρι και κάτι – Αφαίρεση ακακιών στις ΒΒ 21/10/16
- CYBC Apo mera se mera – Acacia removal at SBAs / PIK1 Από μέρα σε μέρα – Αφαίρεση ακακιών στις ΒΒ 21/10/16
- 107.6 Politis – Acacia removal at SBAs / 107,6 Πολίτης – Αφαίρεση ακακιών στις ΒΒ 21/10/16

Newspapers:

- 2016-09-07 ΚΟΥΙΖ ΠΟΙΟΣ ΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΣ ΕΠΙΔΙΔΟΤΑΝ ΣΕ ΛΑΘΡΟΘΗΡΙΑ -ΧΑΡΑΥΓΗ-Σ4
- 2016-09-09 SBA POLICE PREPARE FOR BIRD TRAPPERS-CYPRUS WEEKLY-Σ71
- ΚΥΠΕ-Δύο πρόσωπα στο Φρέναρος κατηγορήθηκαν γραπτώς για καταδίωξη άγριων πτηνών με παράνομα μέσα
<http://www.cna.org.cy/webnews.asp?a=bcf4f4bcfc79451c85b1f9f0bb76b383&window=new> 10/09/2016
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- 2016-09-26 ΚΥΝΗΓΟΥΣΕ ΜΕ ΞΟΒΕΡΓΑ-ΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ-Σ28
- 2016-09-26 Η ΛΑΘΡΟΘΗΡΙΑ ΚΑΛΑ ΚΡΑΤΕΙ-ΦΙΛΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΣ-Σ1 ΚΑΙ 16
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- 2016-10-07 ROACHER HUNT-CYPRUS WEEKLY-Σ1 ΚΑΙ 21
- 2016-10-07 ΠΟΥ ΤΑ ΑΜΠΕΛΟΠΟΥΛΙΑ ΣΤ ΑΓΡΙΝΑ ΤΖΙ ΕΜΕΙΣ ΚΑΛΩΣ ΣΑΣ ΗΒΡΑΜΕΝ-ΓΝΩΜΗ-Σ6
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