



UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the autumn 2017 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 2017, ενώ παράλληλα κάνει και μια ανασκόπηση της κατάστασης που επικρατεί για αυτό το θέμα στο νησί. Η αναφορά αυτή έχει ως κύριο στόχο τους αρμόδιους 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 6.5 χιλιόμετρα διαδρομών για δίκτυα ήταν ενεργά εντός της περιοχής της έρευνας πεδίου το φθινόπωρο 2017 – η έρευνα πεδίου καλύπτει περιοχές στη Λάρνακα – Αμμόχωστο και Άγιο Θεόδωρο – Μαρώνι και καλύπτει περιοχές σε δύο επικράτειες: εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας και εντός της Βρετανικής Βάσης Δεκέλειας. Με αυτά τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης εκτιμάται ότι σχεδόν 460 000 πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός της περιοχής έρευνας πεδίου. Εάν αυτή η εκτίμηση διαχωριστεί σε επίπεδο επικρατείας, τότε σχεδόν 43 000 πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας και περίπου 260 000 πτηνά μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν εντός των Βρετανικών Βάσεων Δεκέλειας – τα υπόλοιπα πτηνά εκτιμάται ότι θανατώθηκαν σε τετραγωνικά χιλιόμετρα που εμπίπτουν και στις δύο επικράτειες. Η χρήση δικτύων εντός της έρευνας πεδίου για το φθινόπωρο 2017 ήταν κατά 79% 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 από τα χαμηλότερα που καταγράφηκαν από την αρχή του προγράμματος παρακολούθησης, φτάνοντας τα ίδια χαμηλά επίπεδα πριν μια δεκαετία. Αυτό είναι ένα πολύ ενθαρρυντικό αποτέλεσμα για την κύρια περίοδο παγίδευσης του 2017.

Το φθινόπωρο 2017 έδειξε μια μείωση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίκτυα, μια πολύ θετική εξέλιξη, εντούτοις σε καμία περίπτωση δεν μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ότι το πρόβλημα της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών έχει επιλυθεί, αφού παρόμοια μείωση είχε καταγραφεί και στο παρελθόν. Πριν και αμέσως μετά την ένταξη της Κύπρου στην Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση είχε καταγραφεί μια σημαντική μείωση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης πουλιών ως αποτέλεσμα της αυξημένης πίεσης στο πεδίο εκείνη την περίοδο, λόγω της πίεσης της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης για αντιμετώπιση αυτού του προβλήματος. Παρόλα αυτά, μετά από μερικά χρόνια η προσέγγιση της μηδενικής ανοχής δεν εφαρμοζόταν και ως ακολούθως τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης αυξήθηκαν δραματικά. Επομένως, είναι απαραίτητο όπως τα θετικά αποτελέσματα του 2017 διατηρηθούν μέσω μιας συνεχόμενης διωκτικής δράσης σε όλα τα επίπεδα, ώστε να διασφαλιστεί ότι δεν θα υπάρξει χειροτέρευση και να οδηγηθούμε σε υψηλότερα επίπεδα παγίδευσης.

Ο Πτηνολογικός πιστεύει ότι τα θετικά αποτελέσματα του φθινοπώρου 2017 είναι κυρίως αποτέλεσμα της πιο αποτελεσματικής πίεσης στο πεδίο, λόγω των πολύ πιο αποτρεπτικών εξωδίκων στους παραβάτες καθώς και στοχευμένες επιχειρήσεις σε περιοχές όπου παρατηρείται μεγάλη κλίμακα παγίδευση (περιοχές με ακακίες). Αυτές οι προσπάθειες πρέπει να συνεχιστούν για να υπάρξει μια ουσιαστική μείωση και τερματισμός της παγίδευσης πουλιών. Ταυτόχρονα ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου θα συνεχίσει τις προσπάθειές του για τερματισμό της παγίδευσης,

συμπεριλαμβανομένης και της αυξανόμενης εστίασης του σε δράσεις ευαισθητοποίησης και εκπαίδευσης.

Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου αναγνωρίζει τις προσπάθειες πάταξης από τις τρεις αρμόδιες αρχές (Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, Υπηρεσία Θήρας & Πανίδας και Κλιμάκιο Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου). Τα αποτελέσματα της πάταξης των αρμοδίων αρχών έδειξαν λιγότερες συλλήψεις / διώξεις και λιγότερες κατασχέσεις διχτύων και ξοβέργων σε σύγκριση με τις προηγούμενες φθινοπωρινές περιόδους (για όλες τις αρμόδιες αρχές), κάτι το οποίο σε ένα βαθμό συμφωνεί και με τα μειωμένα επίπεδα παγίδευσης που καταγράφηκαν από τον Πτηνολογικό. Ωστόσο, η παράνομη παγίδευση πουλιών παραμένει ένα ευρέως διαδεδομένο πρόβλημα, τόσο με τη χρήση ξοβέργων όσο και διχτύων, και οι διωκτικές αρχές πρέπει να ενισχυθούν προκειμένου να επιτευχθεί ένας μακροπρόθεσμος τερματισμός του εγκλήματος κατά των άγριων πουλιών στην Κύπρο. Ιδιαίτερα ο ρόλος του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου, το οποίο τα τελευταία χρόνια αποτελούσε μια αποτελεσματική μονάδα πάταξης, πρέπει να ενισχυθεί και να διατηρηθεί, αντί να υπονομεύεται με οποιοδήποτε τρόπο. Όσο για τα εστιατόρια που παράνομα σερβίρουν *αμπελοπούλια*, τα οποία βρίσκονται εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας, για το 2017 υπήρξε αύξηση της πάταξης εναντίον τους σε σύγκριση με την πολύ περιορισμένη πάταξη των προηγούμενων χρόνων, μια θετική εξέλιξη.

Μια σειρά από άλλες εξελίξεις σχετικές με την παγίδευση έγιναν το 2017 εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας, κυρίως αρνητικές. Στα τέλη Ιουνίου 2017 ψηφίστηκε από την Κυπριακή Βουλή ο αμφιλεγόμενος τροποποιητικός νόμος για τον 'Νόμο Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πουλιών και Θηραμάτων'. Ο τροποποιητικός συμπεριλάμβανε μια σειρά από χαλαρώσεις - μια από τις σημαντικές αλλαγές σχετικά με την πάταξη στο πεδίο ήταν και η εισαγωγή της εξώδικης ρύθμισης για όλα τα αδικήματα, η οποία μέχρι τώρα είναι αποτελεσματική. Κατά την περίοδο Ιουλίου-Δεκεμβρίου 2017, οι αρμόδιες αρχές εφάρμοσαν την νέα πρόνοια και εξέδωσαν ψηλά, αποτρεπτικά εξώδικα χιλιάδων ευρώ, ένα όντως θετικό ξεκίνημα. Παρόλα αυτά, οι αντιδράσεις σε αυτά τα αποτρεπτικά εξώδικα ήταν έντονες. Διάφορα συμβάντα που έλαβαν χώρα ήταν οι διαμαρτυρίες από κυνηγετικές ομάδες και υποστηρικτές της παγίδευσης, η μείωση του προσωπικού του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου τον περασμένο Σεπτέμβριο και τα περιστατικά επιθέσεων κατά του προσωπικού των αρμοδίων αρχών. Συνάμα συνεχίζουν οι προσπάθειες στη Βουλή για χαλάρωση του σχετικού νόμου ενώ στη προεκλογική εκστρατεία του πρόσφατα επανεκλεγμένου Προέδρου δήλωσε τη δέσμευση του για υποστήριξη της νομιμοποίησης των ξοβέργων. Όλες αυτές οι εξελίξεις υπογραμμίζουν ότι υπάρχει μια συνεχόμενη προσπάθεια από τους υποστηρικτές της παγίδευσης και τις κυνηγετικές ομάδες, η οποία στοχεύει τους πολιτικούς και τα επίπεδα λήψης αποφάσεων, για αποδυνάμωση της προσπάθειας πάταξης της παγίδευσης και την ουσιαστική αποποινικοποίηση της παγίδευσης πουλιών, ειδικά με τη χρήση ξοβέργων. Το γεγονός ότι δεν έχει υπάρξει καμία πρόοδος στην εφαρμογή του Στρατηγικού Σχεδίου για την αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πτηνών, παρά την έγκρισή του από το Υπουργικό Συμβούλιο από το Μάιο 2015, αποτελεί σαφή ένδειξη της έλλειψης ουσιαστικής δέσμευσης για αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών.

Όσον αφορά τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, τα τελευταία χρόνια η αυξανόμενη δέσμευσή της για αντιμετώπιση της παράνομης παγίδευσης πτηνών είναι εμφανής, έχοντας ως πρωταρχική προτεραιότητα τον τερματισμό της μεγάλης κλίμακας παγίδευσης εντός της Βρετανικής Βάσης Δεκέλειας. Η ανατροπή της ανοδικής τάσης της παγίδευσης εντός της Βρετανικής Βάσης Δεκέλειας

και η αξιοσημείωτη μείωση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης που καταγράφηκε το φθινόπωρο 2017 (ειδικά σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο 2016) είναι μια πολύ θετική εξέλιξη και τόσο η Διοίκηση όσο και η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων αξίζουν συγχαρητήρια για αυτά τα αποτελέσματα. Κατά το 2017, νέα μέτρα κατά της παγίδευσης πτηνών εφαρμοσθήκαν από τις Βρετανικές Βάσεις τα οποία περιλάμβαναν την αύξηση των ποινών εγγύησης για τους παραβάτες, απαγορευτικά μέτρα για καταδικασμένους παγιδευτές, την αγορά ενός μη επανδρωμένου αεροσκάφους για χρήση κατά της παράνομης παγίδευσης, την αύξηση του προσωπικού της αστυνομικής δύναμης για την πάταξη αυτού του προβλήματος, την αφαίρεση αρδευτικών συστημάτων από το Κάβο Πύλα και τη συνέχιση της κρυφής παρακολούθησης. Επιπλέον, το δικαστήριο των Βρετανικών Βάσεων Δεκέλειας επέβαλε πιο ψηλές ποινές το περασμένο έτος σε μια σειρά υποθέσεων που ξεκίνησαν από την επιτυχημένη κρυφή παρακολούθηση του φθινοπώρου 2016, μια συνεργασία μεταξύ του Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB - BirdLife στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο) και της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων. Δυστυχώς δεν υπήρξαν προσπάθειες συνέχισης για αφαίρεση ακακιών από το Κάβο Πύλα κατά τη διάρκεια του 2017, το οποίο παρέμεινε ως περιοχή με ψηλά επίπεδα παγίδευσης. Αυτή η παύση ακολούθησε μετά τις διαμαρτυρίες της τοπικής κοινότητας εναντίον του προγράμματος αφαίρεσης ακακιών τον Οκτώβριο 2016. Το πρόγραμμα αφαίρεσης ακακιών, το οποίο αποτελεί υποχρέωση που πηγάζει από τον καθορισμό του Κάβο Πύλα ως Ειδική Ζώνη Διατήρησης (ΕΖΔ), είναι ένα μέτρο που πρέπει να επαναξεκινήσει το 2018 προκειμένου να επιτευχθεί μακροχρόνια μείωση των επιπέδων και ο τερματισμός της παγίδευσης σε μεγάλη κλίμακα με δίχτυα εντός των Βρετανικών Βάσεων.

Καταληκτικά ο Πτηνολογικός τονίζει τις ακόλουθες δράσεις και μέτρα ως προτεραιότητες που πρέπει να υλοποιηθούν το 2018 και καλεί τους αρμόδιους στα κέντρα λήψης αποφάσεων όπως προχωρήσουν με την υλοποίησή τους:

- η Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση να **ενισχύσει και να υποστηρίξει τις αρμόδιες αρχές**, συμπεριλαμβανομένου και του Κλιμακίου Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου, ούτως ώστε να συνεχίσουν να εφαρμόζουν τον νόμο στο μέγιστο και **να συνεχίσουν να εκδίδουν αποτρεπτικά εξώδικα**, όπως επίσης να υπάρξει **αυξανόμενη και συστηματική διωκτική δράση κατά των εστιατορίων** που παράνομα σερβίρουν *αμπελοπούλια* (για αντιμετώπιση της ζήτησης),
- η Κυπριακή Βουλή να επανεξετάσει τον τροποποιητικό νόμο 'Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πτηνών και Θηραμάτων Νόμος' που ψηφίστηκε τον Ιούνιο 2017, και να **αποσύρει τη δυνατότητα κατανάλωσης θηράματος σε εστιατόρια, καθώς και την πρόνοια για πολύ χαμηλά πρόστιμα για την κατοχή και χρήση ξοβέργων**. Ο Πτηνολογικός Σύνδεσμος Κύπρου θεωρεί ότι οι πρόνοιες αυτές παραβιάζουν την Οδηγία για τα Πτηνά (2009/147/ΕΚ),
- η Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση να ξεκινήσει άμεσα με την **εφαρμογή του 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 τις αυξανόμενες προσπάθειες πάταξης (συμπεριλαμβανομένης της συνεργασίας με την ομάδα εξιχνίασης της RSPB) και να επαναξεκινήσει το **πρόγραμμα αφαίρεσης ακακιών στο Κάβο Πύλα**, ενώ παράλληλα να συνεχίσει με την αφαίρεση αρδευτικών συστημάτων και να προχωρήσει στην εκπόνηση ενός

σχεδίου διαχείρισης του οικοτόπου για τη μακροπρόθεσμη εξάλειψη της ξενικής ακακίας από την περιοχή.

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 και εισηγήσεις, όπου γίνεται μια σύνοψη της κατάστασης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών, ενώ επίσης παρέχονται συστάσεις προς την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση και τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων.

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 2017 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 6.5km of mist net rides were active during the autumn of 2017 within the survey area, which covers the Larnaka - Famagusta and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas. The survey area encompasses two jurisdictional areas: the Republic of Cyprus and the UK territory of the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA). It is estimated that these trapping levels could have resulted in nearly 460,000 birds killed within the survey area alone. The potential death toll estimate between the two different jurisdictions within the survey area suggests that nearly 43,000 birds would be the potential number killed in the Republic and about 260,000 birds the potential number killed in the Dhekelia SBA – the rest of the birds potentially killed were in 'Joint' squares. Mist netting activity for autumn 2017 was 79% lower compared to 2002 (baseline) levels within the survey area, based on analysis using TRIM software (the 'Linear trend model using the stepwise approach' was used for the analysis). This is one of the lowest trapping levels recorded since the start of the surveillance programme, on a par with the lower levels of a decade ago. This is a very encouraging outcome for the main 2017 trapping season.

Autumn 2017 showed a decrease in trapping levels with mist nets, which is a very welcome development, but in no way can it be assumed that the problem of illegal bird trapping has been solved as similar reductions have been recorded in the past. Prior to and just after Cyprus joining the European Union (EU) a significant decrease in bird trapping was recorded due to increased enforcement effort on the ground, resulting, at the time, from behind-the-scenes pressure from the EU to tackle this problem. However, a few years later the zero tolerance approach was no longer applied, and subsequently trapping levels increased dramatically. It is therefore vital that the positive results of 2017 be built upon and 'nailed down' through ongoing enforcement action at all levels, to ensure no slide back to higher trapping levels.

BirdLife Cyprus believes that the positive results of autumn 2017 are primarily the result of more effective enforcement on the ground, backed up by much more deterrent sentencing for offenders and operations targeting trapping habitat (acacia plantations) in key trapping hot-spots. These efforts must continue if the corner is to be truly turned on the trapping issue. BirdLife Cyprus will at the same time continue its efforts to build support for an end to trapping, including a continuation of the NGO's growing focus on awareness-raising and education.

The enforcement efforts of all three competent authorities (the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit, Cyprus Game & Fauna Service and Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit) are fully acknowledged by BirdLife Cyprus. Enforcement results showed fewer arrests / prosecutions and fewer confiscated mist nets and limesticks compared to previous autumn periods (for all competent authorities), which would agree to an extent with the reduced trapping activity recorded by BirdLife Cyprus. However, illegal bird trapping is still a widespread problem, both with limesticks and mist nets, and enforcement agencies need to be strengthened in order to achieve a long term halt to this wildlife bird crime in Cyprus. In

particular, the role of the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, which developed into a very effective unit in the last few years, must be supported and maintained rather than undermined in any way. Regarding the law breaking restaurants serving *ambelopoulia*, which are in the Republic of Cyprus, during 2017 there was increased enforcement action in comparison to the very limited enforcement action of previous years, an encouraging sign.

There was a series of other developments on the trapping front during 2017 within the Republic of Cyprus, predominantly negative. In late June 2017, the controversial law amendment to the Law on 'The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species' was approved by the Cyprus Parliament. The amendment included a series of relaxations, but one major and so far effective change regarding enforcement on the ground was the introduction of on-the-spot fines for all offences. During the period July to December 2017, competent authorities applied the new provision and issued high, deterrent fines of the order of thousands of euros, a positive start indeed. However, the reaction to this enforcement has been intense. Protests from hunting and pro-trapping groups took place, resources of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit last September have been reduced and incidents of attacks on the personnel of competent authorities have occurred. Moreover, the Cypriot Parliament is continuing its efforts to weaken the relevant law, while the recently re-elected President's included in his campaign the pre-election pledge to support the legalisation of limesticks. These are all developments that highlight that there is a continuous effort by the pro trapping and hunting groups, targeting the political and decision making levels, to weaken the anti-trapping effort and effectively decriminalise bird trapping, particularly with the use of limesticks. The fact that there has been no progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping, despite its approval by the Council of Ministers in May 2015, is a clear indication of a lack of commitment to seriously tackle illegal bird trapping.

Regarding the SBA Administration, its increased commitment to tackling illegal bird trapping has been apparent in the last few years, with halting industrial scale trapping within the Dhekelia SBA set as a top priority. The reversing of the upward trapping trend within the Dhekelia SBA and the noticeable reduction recorded in trapping levels during autumn 2017 (particularly when compared to autumn 2016) is a very positive development and both the SBA Administration and Police are to be congratulated for these results. During 2017, new anti-trapping measures were explored by the SBAA including the increase of bail levels for offenders, exclusion orders for convicted trappers, the buying of a drone to use for enforcement against trapping activity, an increase of police resources within the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit, the removal of irrigation paraphernalia in Cape Pyla and the continuation of covert surveillance. Furthermore, higher court sentences were imposed by the Dhekelia SBA Court last year, following a series of cases initiated from the successful covert surveillance work during autumn 2016, a collaboration between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB - BirdLife in the UK) and SBA Police. On the negative side, there was no continuation to the efforts on acacia removal from Cape Pyla during 2017, which still remained a trapping hotspot. The hiatus in this vital effort followed the October 2016 protests from the local community against acacia cutting. The acacia removal programme, which is also a responsibility deriving from the designation of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), is a measure that must restart in 2018 in order to secure a long lasting decrease and an end to industrial scale of mist netting within the SBAs.

In conclusion, BirdLife Cyprus stresses the following actions and measures as priorities that need to take place in 2018 and calls upon decision makers to prioritise their undertaking:

- the Cyprus Government to **strengthen and to support the competent authorities**, including the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit, in order to continue to enforce the law to its full extent and **to continue issuing deterrent on-the-spot fines**, as well as **increased and consistent enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants** serving illegal *ambelopoulia* “delicacies” (to address demand),
- the Cyprus Parliament to revisit the amendment to the “Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species” law voted in June 2017, in order to **withdraw the possibility for game consumption in restaurants, as well as the provision for very low fines for limestick possession and use**. BirdLife Cyprus considers that these provisions are in breach of the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).
- the Cyprus Government to immediately start the **implementation of the 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 enhanced enforcement efforts (including cooperation with the RSPB Investigations team) and restart its **acacia removal programme in Cape Pyla**, while continuing with the removal of the associated irrigation systems and moving to draw up a **habitat management plan for the long-term eradication of invasive acacia on the Cape**.

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, while also providing recommendations to the Cyprus Government and the SBA Administration.

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 82 are listed as conservation priority species under the EU Birds Directive and/or by 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. 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 (Savva, G.A. 2016, Schaub M. *et al*, 1999) and that various species are attracted by song playback, including target species for the trappers such as Eurasian reed warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), Sedge warblers (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), Garden warblers (*Sylvia borin*), Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and Grasshopper warblers (*Locustella naevia*) (Mukhin A. *et al*, 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' found [here](#).

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

This report presents the latest survey results for autumn 2017, when trappers are after migratory birds, with the main target species being blackcaps 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 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.

Regarding the analysis of the field data, BirdLife Cyprus uses the TRIM (TREnds & Indices for Monitoring data) program for trend analysis. The organisation has been gathering field data in a systematic manner since 2002 as part of its surveillance programme, which 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 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 (Panneelock & 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 129 squares, even though these squares were not all covered every 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 (in this case year 2002) the value of 100 and then showing changes up or down in subsequent years relative to this value of 100.

3. Results

Survey results and data analysis

Field survey data

The field survey for autumn 2017 was carried out between September and October 2017 following the standard survey protocol. In total 60 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 2017 is presented in Appendix 2. In total the field team recorded 66 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 1,286 metres of net rides used for mist netting, and 6 mist nets found *in situ* (either classified as Active Set Nets or Active Unset Nets⁴).

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 **6.5 km** (1,286 m x 301 / 60)⁵.

In terms of limesticks, BirdLife Cyprus detected 56 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 2017 camp of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) / SPA Foundation which was undertaken from 27th August to 29th October, a total of 3,432 limesticks, 145 mist nets and 108 electronic bird callers were detected and seized (CABS, March 2018). It is highlighted that the majority of the limesticks detected by CABS / SPA Foundation were in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus – the CABS findings with regards to limesticks highlight that limestick use is still widespread and at similarly high levels as previous autumn seasons.

Based on the data gathered in the field this autumn, BirdLife Cyprus estimates that nearly **460,000 birds could have been killed within the survey area** and about 610,000 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 considered

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 60 of these squares were surveyed in Autumn 2017. 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.

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 (460,000 birds) between jurisdictions within the survey area based on the trapping activity detected, then nearly 43,000 birds would be the potential number killed in the Republic and about 260,000 the potential number 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

The TRIM program was used to analyse the survey data and to produce trends in autumn bird trapping from 2002 to 2017. 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 model¹⁰ (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 regarding possible observer bias deriving from 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.

It is also noted that the BirdLife Cyprus monitoring methodology is different from the non-systematic field surveys undertaken by other organisations such as the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), which are targeted at known trapping areas and are not controlled for survey effort. Therefore the findings and results of the two surveys are not directly comparable, but they both provide invaluable

⁷ BirdLife Cyprus organised a workshop with title 'Methodology of surveying illegal bird trapping in Cyprus' in July 2015. 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 1,286 metres of active net rides detected within the survey area, 112 metres were in the Republic of Cyprus (from the 37 squares surveyed), 1,098 metres were in the SBAs (from the 20 squares surveyed) and 76 metres were in 3 '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).

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.

field data and are supportive and complementary to each other, provided the differences in methodology are taken into account.

Figure 2 shows the trapping activity levels since 2002 across a sample size of 129 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. In keeping with our standard methodology, a stratified random sample of 60 of the 129 squares was surveyed in Autumn 2017.

It is important to highlight that the additional squares surveyed have slightly expanded the total square coverage to 129 (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 slightly for the previous autumn seasons (i.e. for Autumn 2016 and earlier).

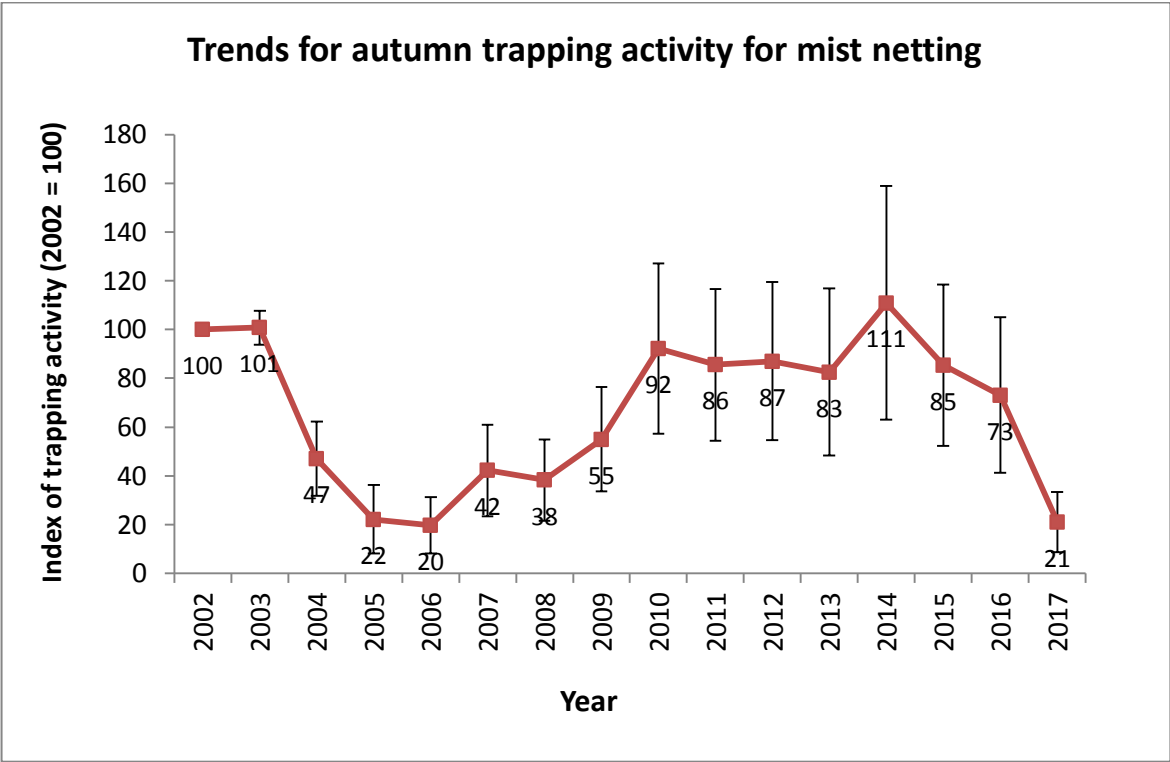


Figure 2 Trends for autumn bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets for the survey area

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

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

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Significance
All squares	1.015	0.0135	0.026	Stable

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 1.015 calculated above indicates an overall increase of around 1.5% per year in mist netting activity.

Mist netting activity for autumn 2017 is **79% lower for autumn 2017 compared to the baseline year of 2002**: index value is 21 for autumn 2017. As shown in the graph above, this trapping activity for last autumn was one of the lowest since the start of the surveillance programme, matching the low levels of a decade ago, a very encouraging outcome. **However it must be noted that the statistical significance for the overall trend is ‘Stable’, which suggests that these low trapping levels need to continue and be maintained before a significant long term decrease is achieved.**

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 129 squares surveyed at various seasons during the surveillance programme includes 80 squares within the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), 41 within the Eastern Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA) and 8 squares that cover areas in both jurisdictions (referred to as ‘Joint’ squares, including also areas that cover the SBA and UN buffer). For autumn 2017, the breakdown of the squares randomly selected and surveyed at a jurisdiction level were as follows:

- 37 squares within the Republic of Cyprus,
- 20 squares within the Dhekelia SBA, and
- 3 ‘Joint’ squares.

For the analysis shown in Figure 3 the 8 ‘Joint’ squares that are part of the total sample of 129 squares have not been included.

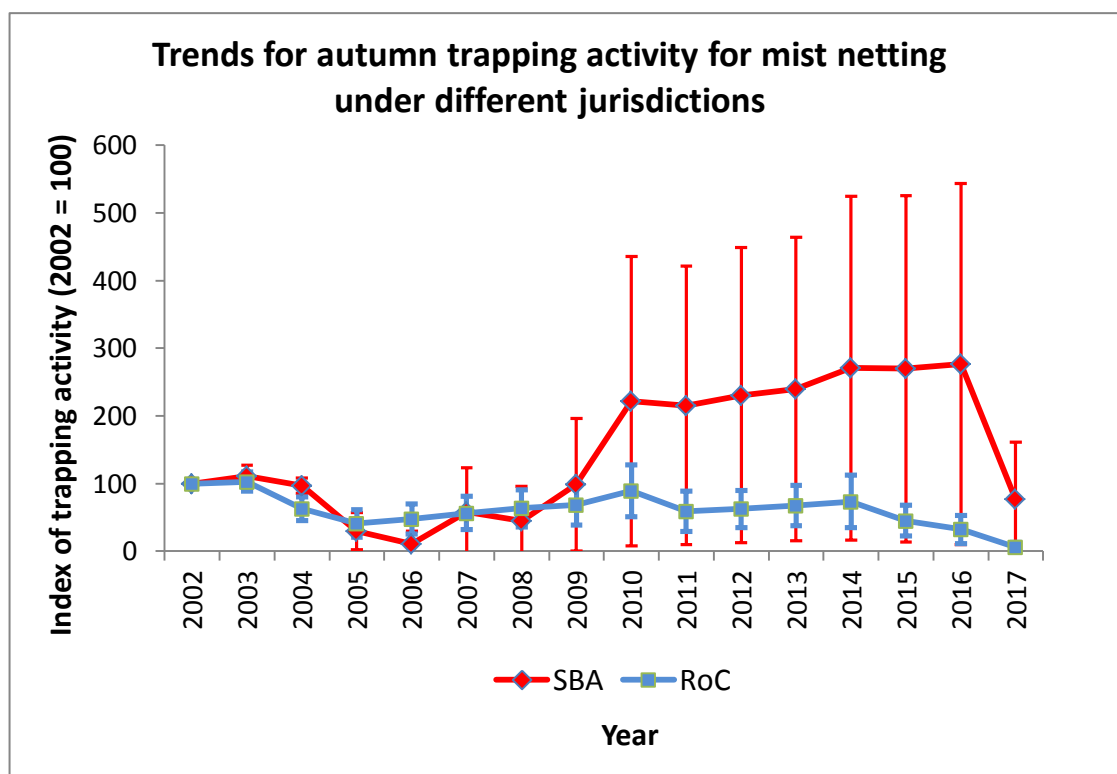


Figure 3 Trends for trapping activity for mist netting within the Republic of Cyprus and within the UK Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area – see Appendix 3 for index values.

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

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Significance
RoC squares	0.924	0.0184	0.036	Moderate decline ($p < 0.01$)
SBA squares	1.1135	0.0354	0.069	Moderate increase ($p < 0.01$)

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

- **For the Republic areas, autumn 2017 mist netting activity (index value 6) was 82% lower compared to autumn 2016 (index value 32). In comparison to 2002 the levels were lower by 94% for autumn 2017, matching the lowest mist netting levels recorded since the start of the surveillance programme, a very encouraging outcome. However it must be noted that the statistical significance for the trend is ‘Moderate decline’, which suggests that these low trapping levels need to continue before the decline would become significant.**
 - For the 37 squares covered within the Republic, the range of counts was from 0 to 58 metres of active net rides, while no trapping at all was recorded in 34 squares. The average within the Republic was 3 metres of active net rides per square surveyed ($112 / 37$ squares surveyed within the Republic = 3).
- **For the SBA areas, autumn 2017 mist netting activity showed a positive and encouraging decrease of 72% compared to the record breaking levels recorded in autumn 2016 (index values of 77 and 277 for autumns 2017 and 2016 respectively). In comparison to 2002 the**

levels were 33% lower for autumn 2017, reversing the upward trapping trend recorded since 2009. It is noted that the lowest mist netting activity for the SBAs was recorded in 2006 (index value of 11).

- 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 2017), the large number of zero counts (13 out of the 20 squares surveyed recorded no trapping activity at all) and the wide range of counts (from 0 to 421 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 in a few years' time.
- **It is highlighted that this decrease in mist netting activity in the SBAs is primarily due to the reduced trapping activity recorded in the trapping hotspot of Cape Pyla.** For comparison, in autumn 2016 the field data from 2 squares surveyed in Cape Pyla recorded a total of 1,999 metres of active net rides, whereas in autumn 2017 the field data of 2 squares surveyed in the same area recorded a total of 675 metres of active net rides.
- The two highest counts for mist netting activity were recorded in squares located in the Cape Pyla area, with 421 and 254 (675 in total) metres of active net rides. These values are much higher than the average per square, 55 metres of active net rides per square (1,098 metres / 20 squares surveyed within the SBAs = 55), highlighting that Cape Pyla still remains a hotspot for mist netting activity and a key area for targeted enforcement action.

Overall it is clear that mist netting activity decreased significantly within the Dhekelia SBA during autumn 2017, following the dramatic increase observed since 2009 and reaching record breaking levels in autumn 2016. Trapping levels still remain high compared to the Republic, however the reduction in trapping activity, particularly in the mist netting hotspot of Cape Pyla and its peripheral areas, is very positive. From the statistical analysis of TRIM the significance of trapping activity levels is assessed as 'Moderate increase' – this highlights that the reversal and decrease in trapping activity between autumns 2016 and 2017 needs to be maintained for a number of years in order to be statistically significant and to have a sustained long term decrease.

As for the Republic, the mist netting activity for autumn 2017 was the lowest recorded since the start of the surveillance programme in 2002, a very encouraging outcome and the statistical significance for the trend is 'Moderate decline'. However, the adopted law amendment changes in June 2017 (read more details in section *Social and political attitudes*) need to be closely monitored to avoid any backtracking on these positive results. Moreover, the Republic remains a hotspot for limestick use as confirmed by the survey data of other environmental NGOs (CABS, February 2018 "Autumn 2017 report" – in publication), and all the restaurants serving *ambelopoulia*, are found exclusively in the Republic, and still constitute the main economic incentive for organised trappers. Therefore, the Cyprus authorities have a major role to play in clamping down on the supply – demand business chain.

Enforcement

Overview of enforcement for autumn 2017

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

- Game & Fauna Service, the responsible body for the implementation of the Birds Directive, has about 85 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 September, however it was unfortunately reduced to 4 officers during October (read section *Social and political attitudes*), 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 - 2017.

Table 3 Summary of illegal bird trapping statistics of the competent authorities for the months of August, September and October for years 2011 - 2017

	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	2017	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
No of trappers arrested	57	70	78	64	54	35	19	23	22	22	30	17	29	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	28	36	13
No of mist nets¹	204	311	287	235	230	195	39	361	275	227	184	181	496	154	N/A	116	N/A	116	121	164	37
No of limesticks¹	2,550	5,372	3,830	1,577	1,740	1,291	521	290	314	516	256	234	295	259	N/A	4,799	N/A	3,950	3,359	1,915	811

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 for 2017 provided from Game & Fauna Larnaca & Famagusta district officer via email (18th December 2017).

Note 3: Data for 2017 available on SBA Administration website [here](#) (last update of statistics 4th January 2018).

Note 4: Data for 2017 provided from Sergeant of Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit (20th February 2018).

- Game & Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta district: The enforcement data for autumn 2017 show the lowest number of cases and trappers arrested since 2011 for this agency, which could be explained and is in agreement with the findings of BirdLife Cyprus i.e. the low mist netting activity levels recorded for Autumn 2017 within the Republic of Cyprus (see Figure 3). 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 and are still used extensively (CABS, February 2018). 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 for autumn 2017 show the lowest number of cases and trappers arrested since 2011 for this agency (only 6 persons were arrested during August to October 2017). The positive reduction in mist netting activity levels recorded for Autumn 2017 within the Dhekelia SBA (see Figure 3) could explain this lower number of arrests. Furthermore a more strategic and tactical approach has been adopted from the SBA Police and Administration in 2017, involving a series of measures to deter and to disrupt illegal bird trapping activity such as the buying and use of a high quality drone, the increase of resources for the Unit, the removal of irrigation paraphernalia in Cape Pyla area and the continuation of covert surveillance of trapping activity in collaboration with RSPB Investigations team.
 - In particular, the reduction in trapping activity with mist nets in Cape Pyla trapping hotspot was very noticeable. For comparison during autumn 2016 in the 2 squares surveyed within Cape Pyla area just over 100 rides for setting up mist nets were recorded, summing up to 2km of active net rides; during autumn 2017 in the same area 33 rides were recorded, summing up to 675 metres of active net rides. This decrease in Cape Pyla, the worst trapping hotspot within Dhekelia SBA for many years, is due to the focus that the SBA Police and Administration has placed on tackling the industrial scale of mist netting taking place in this area. This includes the covert surveillance work with RSPB Investigations team that we believe has played a major role in this reduction, in conjunction with the deterrent court sentencing handed out by the Dhekelia SBA court (read details in section *Social and political attitudes*).
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit: The enforcement data for autumn 2017 show the lowest number of cases and trappers arrested since 2012 for this agency, which could be explained partly as a result of the low mist netting activity levels recorded for Autumn 2017 within the Republic of Cyprus (see Figure 3). Unfortunately, the resources of this agency were reduced to only 4 officers (the 3 most experienced officers were removed from the unit at the end of September) and during October this unit remained practically under-resourced, without replacing the officers, and its performance dropping sharply as expected (read also CABS, February 2018 report).

Illegal bird trapping with mist nets was reduced during autumn 2017, based on the survey data from BirdLife Cyprus, an encouraging outcome. Similarly, the results from enforcement action indicate fewer arrests / prosecutions and less confiscated mist nets and limesticks compared to previous autumn periods, which would agree to an extent with the reduced trapping activity recorded. However, illegal bird trapping is still a widespread problem, both with limesticks and mist nets, and enforcement agencies still need to be strengthened in order to achieve a long term halt to this

wildlife bird crime in Cyprus. The reduction of resources of the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit during the autumn trapping period, a unit that had developed into one of the most effective and deterrent units in Cyprus, was unjustifiable and is very worrying; this unit has played a key role against wildlife crime in Cyprus in their last few years, with considerable enforcement action on the ground, and that must be supported and maintained.

Illegal bird trapping has become a demand-driven wildlife crime driven, with the trading of trapped birds in lawbreaking restaurants being the key economic driver for organised trappers, who, as is generally acknowledged, make thousands of euros of illegal profit every year. These restaurants selling *ambelopoulia* are exclusively within the Republic. From data provided from the Cyprus Police increased enforcement action against such restaurants took place in 2017, positive progress in comparison to the very limited enforcement action of previous years (see Table 4).

Table 4 Summary of restaurant checks and prosecutions in Cyprus

	2010 ¹	2011 ¹	2012 ¹	2013 ¹	2014 ²	2015 ³	2016 ^{3,4}	2017 ⁴
Restaurant checks	20	31	18	7	14	8	12	21
Restaurant prosecutions	13	15	8	3	1	1	1	7

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).

Note 3: Data source: Reply letter from Game Service dated 11/8/2017.

Note 4: Data source: Letter from Cyprus Police headquarters dated 25th January 2018.

Restaurant check breakdown: Nicosia – 10, Limassol – 3, Larnaca – 8, Famagusta – none, Paphos – none

Restaurant prosecution breakdown: Nicosia – 5, Limassol – 1, Larnaca – 1, Famagusta – none, Paphos – none

BirdLife Cyprus believes that the situation regarding restaurant illegally serving protected species will worsen, after the approval of the amendment in June 2017 by the Cyprus Parliament to permit hunters to bring precooked game to be eaten in restaurants (read details in *Social and political attitudes*). BirdLife Cyprus considers this new provision represents a serious loophole in the legislation, as it will be very difficult for responsible officers to check whether the cooked birds being consumed are game species, and, if they are, whether they have been killed by legal means, hence making the combatting of illegal sale and consumption very difficult.

Feedback from competent authorities to BirdLife Cyprus reports

Table 5 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.

Table 5 Summary of trapping reports provided to competent authorities from BirdLife Cyprus during Autumns 2012-2017

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta						SBA Anti-Poaching Police Unit						Cyprus Police Anti- Poaching Unit					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of reports	50	43	33 ⁴	23	21	8	52	38	40	51	34	26	none	3	13 ⁴	12 ⁶	8	none
Arrests	17 (34%)	19 (44%)	8 ⁴ (24%)	11 (48%) ⁵	10 (48%)	N/F	9 (17%)	8 (21%)	6 (15%)	4 (8%)	5 (15%)	0 (0%)	N/R	1 (33%)	2 (15%) ⁴	1 (8%)	2 (25%)	N/R
Confiscations¹	10 (20%)	8 (19%)	11 (33%)	None	1 (5%)	N/F	22 (42%)	18 (47%)	5 (15%)	10 (20%)	14 (41%)	3 (12%)	N/R	N/A	N/A	2 (17%)	0 (0%)	N/R
Clearance² / Nothing³	23 (46%)	16 (37%)	14 (42%)	12 (52%)	10 (48%)	N/F	21 (40%)	12 (32%)	29 (70%)	37 (72%)	15 (44%)	23 (88%)	N/R	N/A	N/A	9 (75%)	6 (75%)	N/R

N/R – Not relevant; N/A – Not available; N/F – No feedback provided

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.

With regards to the Game and Fauna Service, 8 locations were reported to this agency but unfortunately no feedback was provided to BirdLife Cyprus regarding the outcome of any enforcement action. It is assumed that no action was taken by the Game and Fauna Service to investigate the BirdLife Cyprus reports.

With regards to the Dhekelia SBA Police Anti-poaching Unit, 26 locations were reported to this agency. The results based on the feedback provided from the SBA Police included no arrests, 3 confiscations and the remaining 23 locations were either cleared of trapping paraphernalia or nothing happened. The response time of the SBA Police unit (based on the feedback provided) ranged from 1 to 30 days – the average was 18 days, which we believe needs to be improved.

As for the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit, BirdLife Cyprus did not report any trapping locations to this agency for autumn 2017. At the end of September the officers of this unit were reduced from 7 to 4, essentially making this unit ineffective on the ground and its resources overstretched – this is also evident from Table 3 if one compares 2017 enforcement results compared to previous years.

New reality of enforcement on the ground – on-the-spot fine provision

A major change with regards to enforcement on the ground was the voting by the Cyprus Parliament of an amendment to the 'Protection and Management of wild birds and game species Law of 152/2003' law, regulating all offences as on-the-spot fines (as opposed to court prosecution). This amendment law was passed at the end June 2017. BirdLife Cyprus expressed its opposition regarding the change to regulate all offences as on-the-spot fines, having serious reservations over how game wardens and police officers would be able to impose on-the-spot fines without risking their personal safety – read relevant article [here](#) published early July 2017.

In mid- August the first deterrent on-the-spot fine was issued to a poacher / trapper, exceeding 20,000 euros, which BirdLife Cyprus welcomed in an [announcement](#) mentioning that '*...we would be delighted to be proved wrong..., if deterrent fines continue to be imposed...*'. During the period July to December 2017, a total of 89 on-the-spot fines were issued (69 by the Game and Fauna Service, 20 by the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit), summing up to a total of 267,000 euros of which about 60% has reportedly been paid by the offenders¹². Some of the highest fines imposed, including the 20,000 euro penalty in mid-August, have not been paid and relevant court cases have been initiated – the outcome of these appeals and how the court will handle them is uncertain and will certainly set a precedent for the on-the-spot approach to penalties.

We believe that these high fines have had an impact and contributed significantly to the overall decline observed in illegal bird trapping with the use of mist nets. **However, enforcement agencies need to persist in issuing deterrent on-the-spot fines to law breakers, if illegal, non-selective trapping is to be stopped in Cyprus.** As has happened previously, prior to and just after Cyprus joining the EU a significant decrease in bird trapping was reported due to increased enforcement on the

¹² Data source: Minutes from 7th meeting of adhoc committee under the LIFEFORBIRDS project that took place on 14th December 2017

ground, resulting from behind-the-scenes pressure from the EU. However, a few years later the 'zero tolerance' approach was no longer applied and trapping levels increased dramatically (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, as BirdLife Cyprus had feared, 3 incident attacks on game wardens / police officers took place over the last few months, which according to media reports have been linked to poaching and illegal bird trapping networks exacting retribution from the imposition of high fines:

- On 13 June 2017, a grenade attack took place at the Dhekelia SBA Police station – relevant article [here](#),
- On 25 September 2017, an explosive device exploded outside the home of a game warden at Skarinou village (Larnaca district) – relevant article (in Greek) [here](#),
- On 1 February 2018, four cars and a prefabricated house in an agricultural plot, all belonging to a Forestry Department employee and his family, were set alight and completely destroyed in the Larnaca district – relevant article [here](#).

The incidents highlight that illegal bird-trapping and poaching is a multi-million-euro business and the perpetrators aggressively defend their illicit earnings, adopting intimidation and terror tactics both towards the law enforcement agencies but also towards environmental organisations. And this is why enforcement agencies, both in the Cyprus Republic and UK SBAs, whose efforts to fight against this wildlife crime are acknowledged by BirdLife Cyprus, need to be strengthened and supported to continue to enforce the law to its full extent.

Despite the very high fines for mist netting activity stipulated in the new amendment, the fines for the possession and use of limesticks are much lower, at ONLY 200 euros for the possession of up to 72 limesticks (1% of the maximum penalty of 20,000 euros stipulated in the relevant legislation). The original proposal was for 10% i.e. 2,000 euros. However, during the discussions at the Environment Committee of the Cyprus Parliament this was sadly watered down. BirdLife Cyprus believes this was due to pressure from pro-trapping lobby groups. We believe that this very low fine for limestick possession and use is non-deterrent and is effectively a message of decriminalisation of this non-selective method, creating a loophole in the legislation for limestick trappers to continue this illegal practice.

Social and political attitudes

Overview for year 2017

The issue of illegal bird trapping was covered very extensively by the media during 2017 (see Appendix 5), with developments taking place both in the Republic (e.g. the passing of the law amendment at the Cyprus Parliament in June 2017 and high on-the-spot fines, protests by hunting and pro-trapping groups, reduction of the Cyprus Police APU during October from 7 to 4 officers, attacks to game warden and forest employee) and in the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Areas (e.g. issuing of deterrent court fines, continuation of covert surveillance, use of drone to detect bird trapping activity, grenade attack incident). Well-known anti-illegal bird killing campaigner Chris Packham and his film crew visited Cyprus in late September / early October 2017 for the second consecutive autumn, following up on the illegal bird trapping activity with a focus on the situation in the Dhekelia SBA area – see relevant

video clip on Packham's website 'Cyprus. Massacre on Migration 2017' [here](#), where BirdLife Cyprus was also interviewed.

Developments in the Republic of Cyprus

One of the major developments during 2017 relating to the Republic of Cyprus was the approval of the highly controversial amendment 'The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species (Amendment) Law of 2016' by the Cyprus Parliament, which was passed with a shocking 36 votes for and only 4 against on 30 June 2017, after nearly a year of discussion at the Environment Committee of the Cyprus Parliamentary (relevant article [here](#)). BirdLife Cyprus, together with other environmental NGOs, opposed to this law amendment from the beginning, as it was introducing a series of relaxations and loopholes relating to hunting and illegal bird trapping, including the following (relevant article [here](#)):

- **On-the-spot fine regulation for all offences** – the environmental NGOs had serious concerns over its practical implementation on the ground by the law enforcement agencies,
- **Possession and use of limesticks** - trappers caught with up to 72 limesticks would be liable to a fine of ONLY 200 euros, a penalty that is neither deterrent nor punishment. We consider this provision an indirect message of decriminalisation of limesticks to the supporters of this illegal practice, and
- **Game consumption in restaurants** - hunters to be permitted to take their pre-cooked game to restaurants and to consume it there. We consider that this provision would effectively 'legalise' the offer of game and protected birds species in restaurants, as it will be impossible for law enforcement agencies to check whether the cooked birds being consumed are a game species, as well as to check whether game has been killed by legal means or with the use of non-selective methods.

Regarding the on-the-spot fine regulation BirdLife Cyprus had expressed its opposition and had serious reservations over how law enforcement agents would be able to impose on-the-spot fines without risking their personal safety. However, during the period July to December 2017 a total of 89 on-the-spot fines were issued (69 by the Game and Fauna Service, 20 by the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit), some in the order of thousands of euros. This is very encouraging, however **enforcement agencies need to persist in issuing deterrent on-the-spot fines to law breakers, if illegal, non-selective trapping is to be stopped in Cyprus**. Furthermore the 3 separate incident attacks on law enforcement agents highlight that illegal bird-trapping and poaching is a multi-million-euro business and the perpetrators aggressively defend their illicit earnings, adopting intimidation and terror tactics, and stress the need to further strengthen and support agencies in order to continue to enforce the law to its full extent (read details in section *New reality of enforcement on the ground – on-the-spot fine provision*).

Furthermore a series of other developments that have followed after the voting of the new amendment law highlight that not only there is a lack of political will from the Cyprus government to address effectively illegal bird trapping, but there is tolerance and understanding at satisfying the demands of the pro trapping lobby:

- At the end of September 2017 three of its most experienced police officers within the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit were removed, hence reducing its resources from 7 to 4 officers for the remaining of the autumn trapping season – this move practically made the unit ineffective in terms of enforcement on the ground,
- Two protests / demonstrations were held by hunting and pro trapping lobby groups in Famagusta district, one on 20th September 2017 in Liopetri village and the second on 18th October 2017 in Paralimni. The second in particular was attended by a few thousand people, and amongst the demands and issues raised the following were included: legalisation of hunting with limesticks, the restructuring of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit, the very high on-the-spot fines that are being issued resulting from the new amendment law, the termination of activists' action in Cyprus, the creation of list of bird species, including the blackcap, that would be permitted to hunt etc. Relevant media coverage of the Paralimni protest available [here](#) (in Greek) and [here](#) (in English),
- Following the Paralimni protest a delegation from the hunting and pro trapping groups had a meeting with the Cyprus President on the 27th October 2017 to present to him their demands (media video clip [here](#) in Greek) – accordingly to the media coverage the Cyprus President showed understanding to the majority of the issues raised in that meeting.
- On the 8th November a law proposal was discussed at the Environment Committee of the Cyprus Parliament, in closed session, after being prepared by the Game and Fauna Service and submitted and signed by all the Members of the specific committee. In this proposal a series of new provisions for further relaxations to the bird protection law were being proposed, which were satisfying the demands of the hunting community and the pro trapping lobby resulting from the Paralimni protest (relevant article [here](#)). This disastrous law proposal has been put on hold for now, to be discussed after the presidential elections (which were held end January 2018).
- Sadly three of the five main presidential candidates pledged their support for the legalisation of bird trapping with limesticks, when they were asked in mid-November by a local newspaper (relevant article [here](#)). It is noted that the recently re-elected President Nikos Anastasiades was one of the candidates that pledged his support to the legalisation of bird trapping, something that he had also done in the previous elections of 2013¹³.

BirdLife Cyprus believes that in the last year there has been a huge setback at the political level to address the issue of illegal bird trapping from the Cyprus government. On the one hand, deterrent on-the-spot fines have been issued in the second half of 2017, following the voting of the new amendment law, an encouraging start. The efforts of the enforcement agencies are fully acknowledged. These efforts need to continue and to be strengthened, especially after the attack incidents that have occurred in the last few months, if illegal bird trapping is to be stopped. On the other hand, the developments of the last few months are very worrying, creating loopholes in the legislation and passing the general message of decriminalisation of bird trapping, particularly for limesticks with the introduction of non-deterrent fines for their possession and use. This was even more evident during a TV interview of the Cyprus Minister of Environment Mr Nicos Kouyialis on the 20th October 2017, following the visit of European Commissioner Mr Karmenu Vella on the 16th October 2017, when the Minister mentioned that the issue of illegal bird trapping will be discussed

¹³ Data source: Politis newspaper, 14th October 2012 article title 'The 10 taboos of the presidential elections'.

from start with the European Commission in order to find a solution to this issue. However the official statements of Commissioner Vella on this issue (read interview [here](#)) were very different to what the Cyprus Minister had implied during that interview, who said that ‘...*Trapping with limesticks...is simply illegal... A number of Member States face the challenge of ensuring that the hunting of birds is sustainable. Several already made the transition to adapt their practices and it is important that we do not allow double standards...*’.

Finally BirdLife Cyprus believes that the other major law amendment change, the possibility of game consumption in restaurants, will reverse any positive progress that has been achieved in terms of the decrease of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus during autumn 2017. We call upon the Cyprus Government and the Cyprus Parliament to withdraw this possibility for game consumption in restaurants, as well as the provision for very low fines for limestick possession and use, from the relevant legislation for “The Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species Law”. We also consider that these provisions are in breach of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and are very likely to cause “headaches” with the European Commission, including the referral of Cyprus Government to the European Court of Justice as has already happened with France and Malta for similar breaches of the Birds Directive.

Developments in the Eastern (Dhekelia) Sovereign Base Area

In the last few years the increased commitment of the SBA Administration to stopping industrial scale trapping within the Dhekelia SBA had been apparent. These measures have been part of a strategy / action plan to stop illegal bird trapping and has been drawn jointly between the SBA Administration and the SBA Police. During 2017 a series of new measures were implemented as part of the anti-trapping action plan including, amongst others, the increase of bail levels for offenders, exclusion orders for convicted trappers, the buying of a drone to use for detecting trapping activity, an increase of police resources within the SBA Police anti-trapping unit and the removal of irrigation paraphernalia in Cape Pyla – a relevant interview from SBA Police Chief Constable to Chris Packham outlining these measures available [here](#).

Furthermore covert surveillance work has continued for a second consecutive year with the collaboration between the SBA Police and the RSPB Investigations team. During autumn 2016, with the use of covert cameras, 7 trapping locations in the core trapping hotspot of Cape Pyla were monitored and 19 individuals were caught on camera undertaking illegal bird trapping with mist nets. All 7 cases have now been concluded, and in some cases deterrent court fines were handed out by the SBA Dhekelia court, including fines of up to 6,600 euros and 3,200 Euros and a 20 month jail sentence suspended for 3 years for two individuals – details of the court sentences for these 7 cases found [here](#). The impact of these court sentences was evident during the autumn 2017 trapping season, since none of the seven locations covertly surveyed with hidden cameras during autumn 2016 were active in autumn 2017, a clear indication that trappers have been deterred from reactivating these trapping sites. Encouragingly, many other traditional trapping sites were also inactive in the hard core trapping area of Cape Pyla. Both BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB believe that the covert surveillance program and the much higher court sentences that followed, in conjunction with all the above-mentioned measures, have contributed significantly to the reduction of trapping activity with mist nets observed during autumn 2017 within the Dhekelia SBA areas (see Figure 3).

This reduction in trapping activity within the Dhekelia SBA is welcomed and encouraging, following the record breaking trapping activity levels recorded during autumn 2016. However it is unfortunate that there was no continuation to the efforts on acacia removal from Cape Pyla during 2017. The hiatus in this vital effort followed the October 2016 protests from the local community against acacia cutting. BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB believe that any medium to long term halting of industrial scale trapping with mist nets within the Dhekelia SBA will only be achieved with the continuation of the acacia removal programme, which has been put on hold since then. BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB believe that, with the very low trapping activity detected during autumn 2017 in Cape Pyla, coupled with signs of abandonment of some acacia patches previously used for mist netting in that area, is the ideal window of opportunity for the SBA Administration to restart the acacia removal programme in 2018. Moreover the habitat restoration of Cape Pyla is a responsibility deriving from the designation of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (read more details [here](#)), which took place in December 2015.

The RSPB has undertaken an independent assessment of the non-native acacia within the SAC. This compared the amount acacia considered suitable for bird trapping in autumn 2015 (prior to the start of the clearance work) with that present in April 2017. This report has been recently provided to the SBA authorities for review. They have acknowledged receipt of the report and confirmed their desire to work with the RSPB and BirdLife Cyprus to establish the precise situation with the remaining acacia. Going forward, it is hoped this information can help with the development of a habitat management plan to ensure the permanent eradication of invasive acacia in the SAC.

4. Discussion & Recommendations

Autumn 2017 showed a decrease in trapping levels with mist nets, which is a very welcome development, but in no way can it be assumed that the problem of illegal bird trapping has been solved as similar reductions have been recorded in the past. Prior to and just after Cyprus joining the European Union (EU) a significant decrease in bird trapping was recorded due to increased enforcement effort on the ground, resulting, at the time, from behind-the-scenes pressure from the EU to tackle this problem. However, a few years later the zero tolerance approach was no longer applied, and subsequently trapping levels increased dramatically. It is therefore vital that the positive results of 2017 be built upon and 'nailed down' through ongoing enforcement action at all levels, to ensure no slide back to higher trapping levels.

BirdLife Cyprus believes that the positive results of autumn 2017 are the result of effective enforcement on the ground, backed up by much more deterrent sentencing for offenders and operations targeting trapping habitat (acacia plantations) in key trapping hot-spots. These efforts must continue if the corner is to be truly turned on the trapping issue. BirdLife Cyprus will at the same time continue its efforts to build support for an end to trapping, including a continuation of the NGO's growing focus on awareness-raising and education.

Recommendations

In conclusion, BirdLife Cyprus stresses the following actions and measures as priorities that need to take place in 2018 and calls upon decision makers to prioritise their undertaking:

- the Cyprus Government to **strengthen and to support the competent authorities**, including the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit, in order to continue to enforce the law to its full extent and **to continue issuing deterrent on-the-spot fines**, as well as **increased and consistent enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants** serving illegal *ambelopoulia* "delicacies" (to address demand),
- the Cyprus Parliament to revisit the amendment to the "Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species" law voted in June 2017, in order to **withdraw the possibility for game consumption in restaurants, as well as the provision for very low fines for limestick possession and use**. BirdLife Cyprus considers that these provisions are in breach of the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).
- the Cyprus Government to immediately start the **implementation of the 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 enhanced enforcement efforts (including cooperation with the RSPB Investigations team) and restart its **acacia removal programme in Cape Pyla**, while continuing with the removal of the associated irrigation systems and moving to draw up a **habitat management plan for the long-term eradication of invasive acacia on the Cape**.

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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 4: Prepared (P) net ride



Figure 5: Active No Net ride (ANN) with poles, bases, feathers & signs of trampling in an olive grove



Figure 6: Active Unset Net present (AUN) in an olive grove



Figure 7: 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 2017

Confidential information – provided upon request

Appendix 3

Estimation of numbers of birds caught during autumn 2017

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)

$$= [(800+18+79) / (12) \times (20) \times (301/60) \times (60)]$$

= **449,995** birds 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)

$$= 56 \times 0.5 \times (301/60) \times 60$$

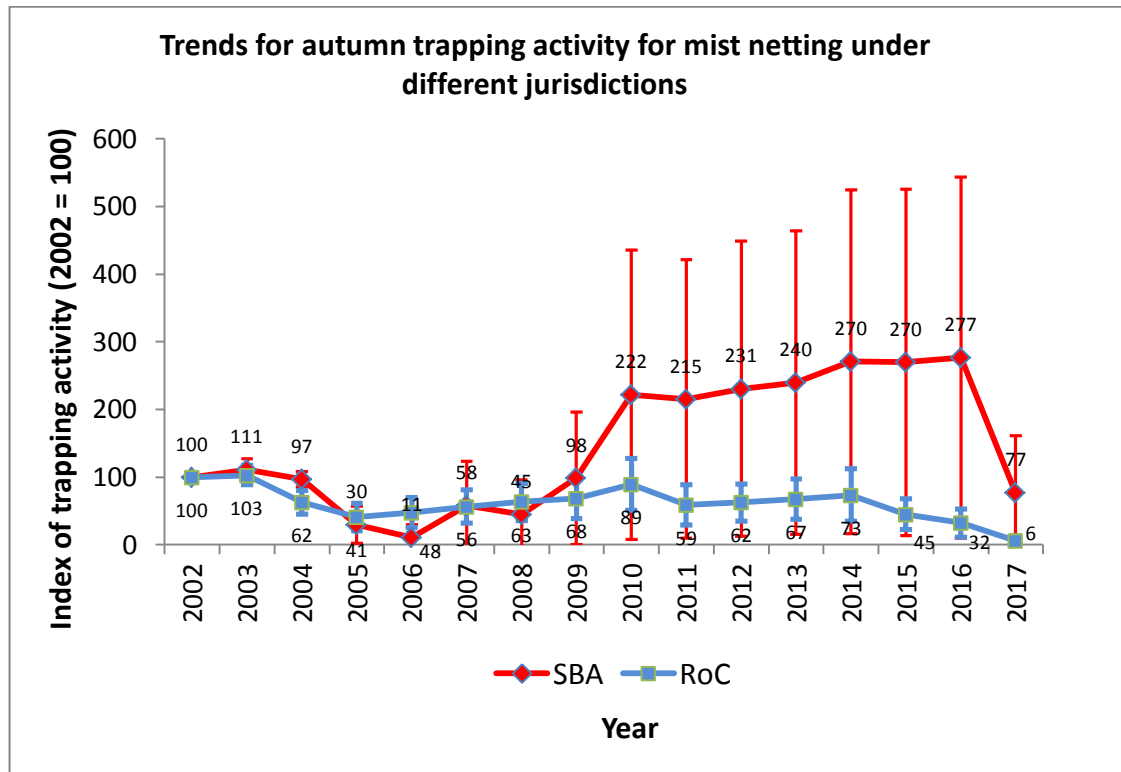
= **8,428** birds caught within the survey area on **limesticks**

In total 458,423 birds could have been killed in mist nets and on limesticks within the survey area during autumn 2017. Assuming that the survey area accounts for 75% of the trapping activity in Cyprus, the bird death toll across Cyprus is:

$$= 458,423 / 75\%$$

= **611,231 birds could have been killed in nets and on limesticks across all Cyprus during autumn 2017.**

Jurisdiction analysis for trapping activity for mist netting – index values presented (see Figure 3)



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 (Panneelock & 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? (Panneelock & 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 2017

- politis –Χαμπουλλάς χωρίς λόγια και με αμπελοπούλι στο ποτήρι <http://politis.com.cy/article/champoulas-choris-logia-ke-me-ampelopouli-sto-potiri> 01/02/2017
- in-cyprus –Bases remove illegal acacia to stop bird trapping <http://in-cyprus.com/bases-remove-illegal-acacia-to-stop-bird-trapping/> 01/02/2017
- cyprus-mail –Anti-trapping activists attacked poachers <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/02/01/anti-bird-trapping-activists-attacked-poachers/> 01/02/2017
- dialogos –Κομισιόν : Πρόκληση για την Κύπρο, η εφαρμογή της περιβαλλοντικής πολιτικής <http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/komision-proklisi-gia-tin-kipro-i-efarmogi-tis-perivallontikis-politikis-tis-ee/#.WJmH59J97IU> 06/02/2017
- in-cyprus –UNFICYP warn hunters against hunting in buffer zone <http://in-cyprus.com/unficyp-warn-hunters-against-hunting-in-buffer-zone/> 24/02/2017
- ant1iwo Κατασχέθηκαν 16κιλα ναρκωτικά <http://www.ant1iwo.com/news/cyprus/article/263652/sto-dikastirio-32hronos-gia-upotheseis-narkotikon-aerovolou-meson-pagideusis-ptinon/> 25/02/2017
- in-cyprus –Dhekelia bases police arrest 78 for bird trapping <http://in-cyprus.com/dhekelia-bases-police-arrest-78-for-bird-trapping/> 04/04/2017
- dialogos – Αλλάζει ο νόμος για την μαζική θήρευση άγριων πτηνών και θηραμάτων <http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/allazi-o-nomos-gia-ti-maziki-thirefsi-agrion-ptinon-ke-thiramaton/#.WT5BTZKGPIU> 09/06/2017
- sigmalive –Βάσεις Δεκέλειας: Σε εξέλιξη η έρευνα σχετικά με την έκρηξη <http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/437372/vaseis-dekeleias-se-ekseliksi-i-erevna-sxetika-me-tin-ekriksi> 13/06/2017
- in-cyprus –MPs attempting to push ambelopoulia hunting law <http://in-cyprus.com/mps-attempting-to-push-ambelopoulia-hunting-law/> 15/06/2017
- cyprus-mail – Objections controversial song bird bill <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/06/15/objections-controversial-song-bird-bill/> 15/06/2017
- famagusta-gazette –Hidden cams catch bird trappers poaching in Cyprus <http://famagusta-gazette.com/hidden-cams-catch-bird-trappers-poaching-in-cyprus-p40834-69.htm> 19/06/2017
- cyprus-mail –Controversial bill aims tackle bird trapping <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/06/28/controversial-bill-aims-tackle-bird-trapping/> 28/06/2017
- in-cyprus –Mps set to discuss controversial hunting law on Friday <http://in-cyprus.com/mps-set-to-discuss-controversial-hunting-law-on-friday/> 29/06/2017
- cyprus-mail –House votes controversial bird trapping bill law <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/06/30/house-votes-controversial-bird-trapping-bill-law/> 30/06/2017
- cyprus-mail –Cyprus warned over new bird trapping law <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/07/03/cyprus-warned-new-bird-trapping-law/> 03/07/2017
- cyprus-mail –Bases remove irrigation pipes used bird trappers <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/07/27/bases-remove-irrigation-pipes-used-bird-trappers/> 27/07/2017
- in-cyprus – Larnaca man faces 20 000 euros fine for poaching <http://in-cyprus.com/larnaca-man-faces-e20000-fine-for-poaching/> 10/08/2017
- philenews – Πυροβόλησε στον αέρα για να διώξει τους ακτιβιστές της CABS <http://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/430451/pyrobolise-ston-aera-ga-na-dioxei-aktibistes-tis-cabs> 15/09/2017

- dialogos - Παραδίδουν τα εκλογικά τους βιβλιάρια οι κυνηγοί στο Λιοπέτρι <http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/paradidoun-ta-eklogika-tous-vivliaria-i-kinigi-liopetriou/#.WcDE9vMjHIU> 18/09/2017
- cyprus-mail – Cypriot hunters “ being hunted” by the law, left ‘helpless and unprotected’, they say <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/09/20/cypriot-hunters-hunted-law-left-helpless-unprotected-say/> 20/09/2017
- sigmalive – Κοντραμπάντο υποκόσμου η MMAΔ στην λαθροθηρία <http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/460259/kontrampanto-ypokosmou-mmad-sti-lathrothiria> 08/10/2017
- dialogos –Έντονη ανησυχία του Πτηνολογικού Συνδέσμου για μελών MMAΔ με υπόκοσμο στην λαθροθηρία <http://dialogos.com.cy/blog/entoni-anisichia-ptinologikou-sindesmou-gia-diaploki-melon-mmad-me-ipokosmo-sti-lathrothiria/#.Wecoq4-CzIU> 12/10/2017
- alphanews – Στην Κύπρο ο Επίτροπος Περιβάλλοντος της ΕΕ για επίσημη επίσκεψη <http://alphanews.live/politics/sten-kypro-o-epitropos-periballontos-tes-ee-gia-episeme-episkepse> 16/10/2017
- alphanews – Δυναμική εκδήλωση των οργανωμένων κυνηγών απόψε στο Παραλίμνι <http://alphanews.live/cyprus/dynamike-ekdelose-ton-organomenon-kynegon-apopse-sto-paralimni-binteo> 18/10/2017
- kathimerini – Μεγάλη διαμαρτυρία κυνηγών στο Παραλίμνι <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/gr/kypros/megali-diamartyria-kynigwn-sto-paralimni> 18/10/2017
- politis - Η βουλή ξηλώνει τον νόμο για το κυνήγι <http://politis.com.cy/article/i-vouli-xiloni-ton-nomo-gia-to-kinigi> 06/11/2017
- cyprus-mail – Parliament set to water down strict new hunting law <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/11/10/parliament-set-water-strict-new-hunting-law/> 10/11/2017
- reporter – Νέες καταγγελίες για την διαφθορά στην MMAΔ <http://www.reporter.com.cy/police/article/272653/nees-katangelies-ga-ti-diafthora-stin-mmad-o-lags-me-ta-kremmydakia-kai-to-binteo> 21/11/2017