



BirdLife Cyprus

# **ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES 2020**







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# WHO WE ARE

BirdLife Cyprus is a registered, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to conserve wild birds, their habitats and wider biodiversity, and maintain a healthy environment in which people on the island can prosper alongside nature, in Cyprus, through research, monitoring, lobbying and conservation and awareness-raising actions.

It was formed in 2003 through the merger of two Cyprus Ornithological Societies, and now has offices in Strakka, Nicosia.



## Our Vision

An island with healthy ecosystems, where people actively safeguard nature for a sustainable future.

## Our Mission

Protecting the wild birds of Cyprus, their habitats, and wider biodiversity through monitoring, conservation and education actions, and by developing people's appreciation of nature.



BirdLife Cyprus is the official partner of **BirdLife International** in Cyprus. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership and is widely recognised as the world leader in bird conservation, with 121 BirdLife Partners worldwide – one per country or territory – and growing. The BirdLife Partnership works locally to deliver high impact and long-term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.

## Systematic Species Monitoring

The COVID-19 pandemic posed some unique challenges to our systematic bird monitoring work, as the measures put in place to tackle the spread of the virus, including a full lockdown and strict curfews, coincided with the height of the breeding season. Fortunately, the necessary permits were acquired and thanks to the commitment and professionalism shown by our team of volunteer bird recorders, most of the bird population monitoring programmes were able to continue during 2020.

Forty volunteers were involved in counts for common breeding birds, nocturnal bird surveys, waterbirds, migrating raptors and other soaring birds, European Rollers and Griffon Vultures. More than 500 surveys were carried out at more than 200 different sites/locations. For the first time in 2020, the mid-winter International Waterbird Census was carried out in partnership with wetlands across the island.

Unfortunately, the nocturnal species monitoring surveys suffered from poor coverage due to the curfews that were in place during the spring months, while the reduced number of volunteers able to visit from abroad meant that the migratory bird surveys were reduced in scope and focused on the Akrotiri Peninsula IBA only. Finally, although it was not possible to carry out the annual spring Griffon Vulture census, more intensive nest monitoring was achieved under the LIFE with Vultures project.

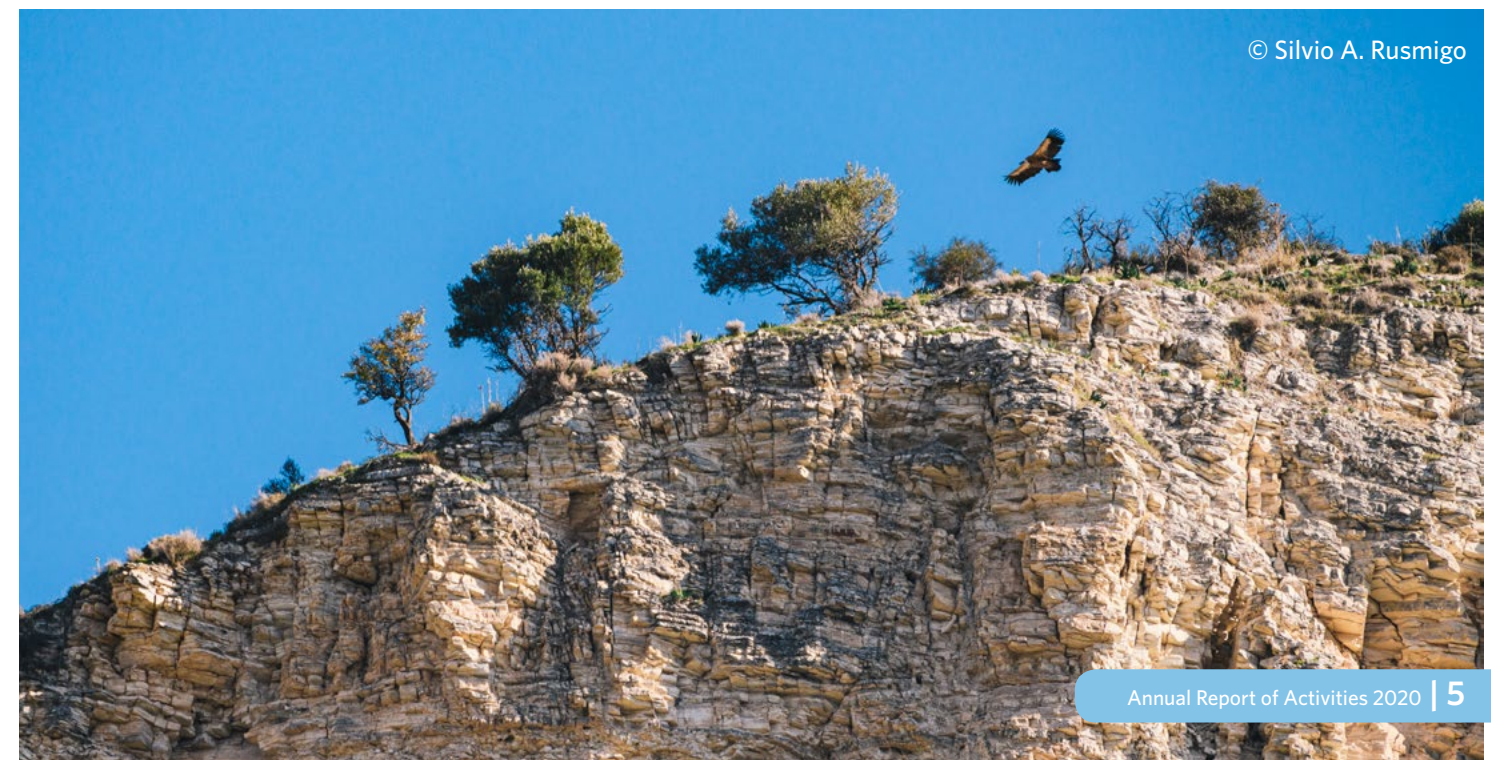
The 2020 monitoring effort was funded through a service contract to the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment for production of the Farmland Bird Indicator and Common Bird Indicator for 2019 – 2020, as well as through BirdLife Cyprus' own funds.

## Monitoring the Griffon Vulture population

During the winter Griffon Vulture census, three territorial pairs were identified at the vulture stronghold of Episkopi Cliffs IBA. In the following months, two more pairs were identified in Xeros Valley IBA, at the sites of historic vulture colonies. Unfortunately, it was not possible to carry out the spring census, but regular nest monitoring was carried out as part of the LIFE with Vultures project. A total of 26 nest monitoring surveys were completed during the entire breeding season.

Of the five territorial pairs identified, four continued to nest and of those, two managed to fledge chicks. A few weeks after flying from the nest, one of the young birds was found grounded and exhausted a few kilometres away. The Game and Fauna Service rehabilitated the bird, which made a full recovery and was later transferred to an acclimatization aviary before being released carrying a GPS transmitter. The individual was named "Kostis", after Constantinos Antoniou, the vet who treated the bird.

During 2020, the remains of two vultures were found, one of which was a marked individual brought to Cyprus from Crete as part of Project GYPAS. In both cases, the remains were at an advanced stage of decomposition so was not possible to further investigate the cause of death of these birds.





## Bird Recording

The BirdLife Cyprus Bird Recorder, Jane Stylianou, received more than 58,000 reports from local and visiting birders, volunteers, survey workers and BirdLife Cyprus Council members and staff. The COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted local movements and visits from overseas birders, reduced the number of reports compared to recent years, but when conditions permitted, local birders were very active. During the lockdown of March to May 2020, many interesting records from local gardens were received, which included Common Redstarts, Eurasian Wrynecks, Semi-collared Flycatchers and even a Savi's Warbler from a garden in Nicosia.

Despite the restrictions, three new species await acceptance by the Cyprus Rare Birds Committee onto the Cyprus list – Oriental Skylark, Arabian Lark and Blue Tit. Of particular interest was the small influx of at least four and maybe up to seven Black-winged Kite during November and December.

The BirdLife Cyprus Google Group and the BirdLine continued to update local and visiting birders on the latest sightings during the year. The sightings received by the Recorder were collated and published in the Monthly Checklist throughout 2020.



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## Safe Haven Project

Our work in shaping the Safe Haven for Birds at Frenaros continued in 2020. In the spring we hired a contractor to go to the site and cut the weeds around the trees and bushes we had planted in November 2019.

In December 2020, we organized a small event to replace any trees and bushes that had not made it since the November 2019 planting effort. The event was attended by several members of staff as well as representatives of the now defunct "Environmental Bridges" NGO, which also donated money towards the Safe Haven Project. So far, we have planted around 360 trees and bushes on site.

Moreover, we installed several nest boxes for small birds such as Great tits, as well as larger nest boxes for Kestrels and Hoopoes. As well as this, several bird feeders and camera traps were placed on site, which captured birds feeding as well as mammals such as foxes, cats, and rats using the site.

A vision document was also prepared for the area, which was presented to the Council and which will be utilized for fundraising.

Finally, we had several meetings with a landscape architect and experts in permaculture and water management for the development of a plan to create an ideal mix of small habitats inside our plot. We hope this will help attract migratory birds to our Safe Haven and away from trapping sites with mistnets and limesticks.



© Ben Porter

## Campaign against illegal bird trapping

In autumn 2020, we noted a 94% reduction in mistnet trapping compared to 2002 levels within the survey area, which covers the Larnaka and Famagusta districts. We recorded the lowest overall levels of mist-netting recorded since 2002 when the systematic survey started. However, this reduction in mist net use was accompanied by an observed increase in trapping with limesticks. We estimated that around 295,000 birds could have been killed in autumn 2020. In November 2020, after much pressure from BirdLife Cyprus, the Cyprus police successfully raided the trapping site of a large and well-known, organized trapper in the Larnaka district. This resulted in three poachers being issued fines of around 4,000 euros each.

Despite the tremendous progress made on the ground regarding trapping with mist nets, sadly the Cyprus Parliament voted an amendment to the Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species law, in December 2020. This amendment reduced the fines for shooting or trapping with limesticks up to 50 birds from €2000 to a €200. This concerns 14 species of bird that are most associated with the ambelopoulia dish. Evidently, such low fines for protected species are non-deterrent and this is a clear relaxation of the law. BirdLife Cyprus launched an online petition calling for the annulment of this relaxation, which had gathered over 13,000 signatures. We are exploring various options on how to fight this outrageous relaxation, including a handover of these signatures to parliament.

Moreover, we noted several incidents of illegal hunting/shooting taking place in 2020. Shockingly the illegal shooting of raptors was documented throughout the hunting season, with the shooting of a Goshawk, a Long-Legged Buzzard and many others being reported to BirdLife Cyprus by members of the public. Finally, in September 2020, our field team uncovered large-scale illegal shooting of tens of bee-eaters, at Lake Soros in Meneou, a well-known hunting blackspot that has been regularly reported to the Game and Fauna Service.

## Bird Ringing

BirdLife Cyprus continued running the Cyprus ringing scheme, which is registered with EURING. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ringing activities were limited compared to other years. Activities took place in different locations throughout the island such as Troodos, Neo Chorio, Cape Greco, Kouklia, Kiti dam and Akrotiri Peninsula. During the year, 760 birds of 55 different species were ringed, and 17 were re-trapped i.e. birds that were ringed on other occasions and were re-caught.

There were also two recovery birds in 2020, these are birds ringed in other countries. The birds came from: i) Belarus (a Ringed plover which was seen in Larnaka wetlands) and ii) UK [a Lesser whitethroat which was found dead (trapped in illegal limesticks) in Vavla village, Larnaka].



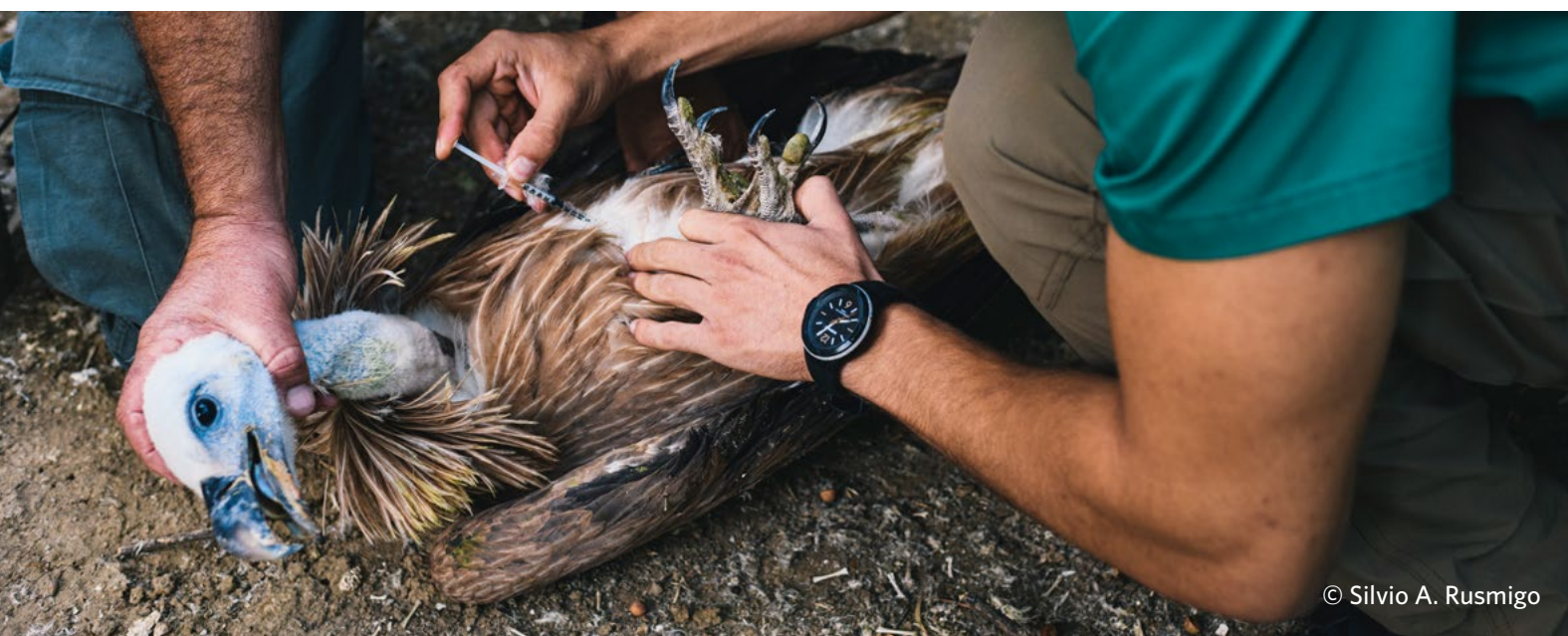
## Saving the Griffon Vulture: the achievements of the LIFE with Vultures project

In 2020, the LIFE with Vultures project team managed to complete key studies that reveal significant information for the conservation of the species and the issue of poison bait use.

A Population Viability Analysis, conducted by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), highlighted the risk of extinction of the Cyprus Griffon Vulture population and the impact of poisoning. According to this study, the Griffon Vulture population is set to go extinct in the next 15 years if no conservation measures are taken. Encouragingly though we can help the population recover, if poisoning incidents are reduced to less than one poisoning incident every 10 years, while to ensure the species' long-term survival in Cyprus, we also need to reinforce the current population with individuals brought from elsewhere. Another study that was done as part of the project evaluates the ecosystem services of the species for Cyprus and shows that a healthy Griffon Vulture population has the potential for creating recreational services in the form of ecotourism, particularly for birdwatchers and photographers, thus generating revenue for the island.

Moreover, the project has been working closely with key stakeholders (the Veterinary Services, the State General Laboratory, the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police) on anti-poison efforts such as trainings and preparing standard procedures to increase capacity for managing poisoning incidents in Cyprus.

Within 2020, the project team also produced a Veterinary Protocol for saving poisoned Griffon Vultures, identified high-risk powerlines for collisions that will be marked within 2021 and it equipped four Griffon Vultures with GPS tags, allowing greater insight to the birds' movements. A great tool in our hands for the fight against poison is currently being prepared – the project's dog heroes, which were born in early October 2020. Their training will be completed in late 2021 and their work will be to detect poison baits and poisoned wild animals in the Cypriot countryside.



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Based on the surveys conducted in 2020, the Griffon Vulture population remains stable with 19-20 individuals and with two successful fledglings. The project team's great motivation and the successful fledging of two chicks in 2020 fill us with hope for the future of this emblematic species!

The LIFE with Vultures project, with a 1.3 million euro budget, is co-funded by the EU's LIFE programme and will be completed in 2023. Project partners are BirdLife Cyprus as the coordinating beneficiary, the Game and Fauna Service, Terra Cypria – The Cyprus Conservation Foundation and the Vulture Conservation Foundation. The Tasso Leventis Conservation Foundation is providing crucial co-funding for this 4-year project. Find out more on the project's website [www.lifewithvultures.eu](http://www.lifewithvultures.eu).

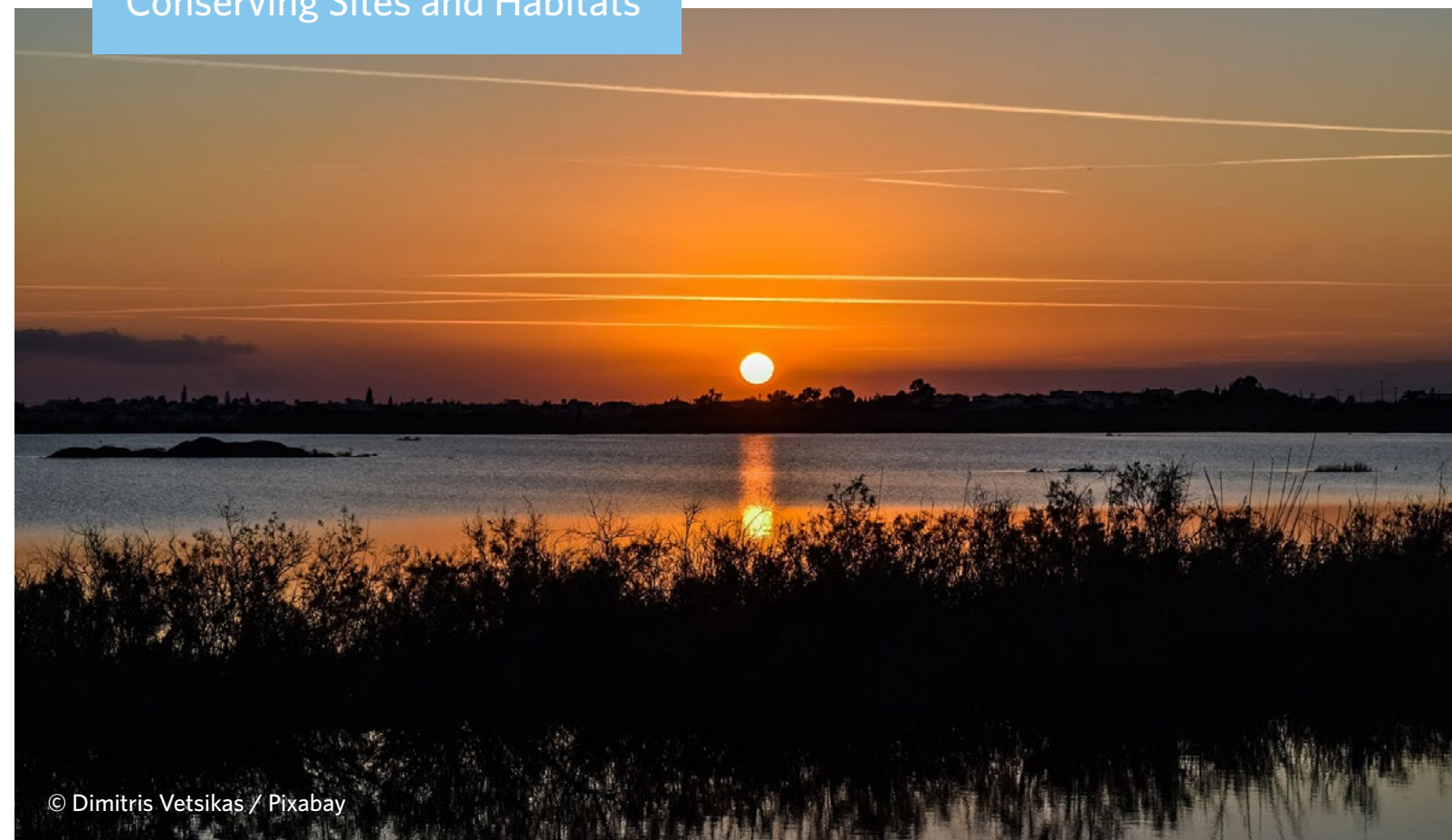
Project partners:



With funding by:



## Conserving Sites and Habitats



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## Site protection

In 2020 we continued our work trying to secure the designation, protection, sympathetic management, monitoring, promotion, restoration and adequate funding for the most important natural sites in Cyprus for the benefit of birds, wider biodiversity and people.

We took part in more than 25 meetings of the committee for Environmental Impact Assessment in collaboration with NGO Terra Cypria, and of the committee for the Appropriate Assessment, which examined the impacts of proposed projects specifically on different Natura 2000 sites. Overall, we provided positions for more than 60 projects all over Cyprus, including nine within or near Natura 2000 sites. Although the year included some disappointments, some noteworthy projects assessed in 2020 include a solar park in Diarizos Valley, a solar park near Paramali River, and a spa resort in Meneou near the Larnaka Salt Lakes, all of which were rejected by the competent authorities based on the assessment of the impact they would have on protected areas and species.

Our long-term position that strategic planning is required for placing solar parks in the countryside, which we repeated numerous times in 2020, was finally heard by the competent authorities, which stalled the approval of new developments until the issue is strategically assessed. Wetlands have generally been at the forefront of our campaign for sites and habitats, including Paralimni Lake and attempts to drain it during the breeding season. We were also involved with issues at Larnaka Salt Lakes, including incidents of illegal shooting, lead contamination and the (resulting) death of Flamingos.

Akrotiri Peninsula has however been our main focus and top priority, both because of its value for biodiversity and due to the multiple development threats it is facing. We presented detailed views and positions to the competent authorities and other bodies for the development projects threatening Akrotiri, including the draft Policy Statement for new Planning Zones in the area. We also launched a campaign to raise public awareness about the area, its importance and the threats it is facing and invited people to speak out for Akrotiri, expressing their concerns to the British Base Administration. We will continue calling for the protection of Akrotiri in 2021.



## The LIFE IP Physis project

Since the start of the 10-year LIFE IP Physis in 2019, BirdLife Cyprus has been conducting fieldwork on a regular basis in two important Natura 2000 wetlands, Paralimni Lake and Larnaka Salt Lakes, in order to fill in a knowledge gap about some bird species and their habitats.

BirdLife Cyprus also subcontracted a private laboratory to carry out lead sediment collection and analysis at both these lakes. These results together with other water quality and topography data are vital to our aim, which is to come up with targeted management actions for these important natural sites.

In addition to these actions, our project team prepared a proposal for agri-environment schemes to be promoted to and hopefully adopted by the relevant Ministry. These suggestions include measures such as the reduction of insecticide and rodenticide use, fallows and delayed harvests for cereals. All of the above will benefit priority bird species, which are included in the Annex I of the European Birds Directive 2009/147 / EC, and for which the Republic of Cyprus has designated Natura 2000 sites. Examples of such species are the European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) and the Cretzschmar's Bunting (*Emberiza caesia*).



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## Continuation of the Barn Owl project

In 2020, together with the Game and Fauna Service, the Department of Forests, the Department of Agriculture and the Veterinary Services, we managed to raise the number of Barn Owl nest boxes installed across Cyprus to 600.

Moreover, we finalized the National Action Plan for reducing rodenticide use by using the Barn Owl as a natural rat control agent, working with experts from Israel, Greece and Switzerland. This document was presented to the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, Dr. Kostas Kadis, who is very keen on the project idea and proposed to include a relevant budget within his Ministry for the next year, so that the project continues.

Finally, BirdLife Cyprus monitored 74 nest boxes while maintaining contact with farmers involved in the project and local communities. This is crucial in our efforts to keep communities and farmers engaged with the project and highlight the importance of reducing rodenticide use.

This project is funded by the Tasso Leventis Conservation Foundation.



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## The Cyprus Bycatch Project

Due to efficient completion of phase one (2017-2020), the Cyprus Bycatch Project partners have the knowledge and stakeholder support with which to act with confidence in phase two (2020-2022). The second phase will finalise mitigation measure trials and inform and direct decision-makers to take action to reduce the bycatch of vulnerable species by 2022 and beyond. By 2022, we expect our strong partnership to continue to develop, both among ourselves and with Med-wide project partners, which will foster continued actions and capacity development in the long term.

Focused on and through Policy and Advocacy actions, we will continue to work on national policy with our authorities, to ensure that legal frameworks at least adequately address conservation of vulnerable marine species, based on the results of the Cyprus Bycatch Project. This will include working directly with authorities to help develop and pass legislation and demonstrate the implementation of policy. Communication campaigns and promotional outreach events will focus public opinion toward the results of phase one research, supporting the advocacy process.

The Cyprus Bycatch Project is funded by the MAVA Foundation through BirdLife International.



## Education and Events

Our education and events were unfortunately the most affected by the lockdown and social distancing measures. Nevertheless, during 2020, we managed to reach more than 600 students through school visits, hands-on workshops and birdwatching trips.

In an effort to adapt to the new reality that came with the pandemic, we organized two virtual birdwatching events, in April and December. We invited people to observe birds from their home or from nature sites and send us their observations on the same day. In total, 80 people participated in these two virtual events and prizes were given to those who observed the most birds.

When some restrictions were lifted and, while keeping to covid-19 protocols about events in outdoor spaces, we organized a storytelling performance at Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios Mansion in Nicosia to raise awareness about the endangered Griffon Vulture in Cyprus. The event was attended by 90 people.

We also organized an event for EurobirdWatch in October, at Athalassa National Forest Park. At the event, 60 people (split in two groups to maintain social distancing) celebrated autumn migration with us with a bird ringing demonstration and birdwatching activities. Seeing children holding a ringed bird in their hands and setting it free gives us hope about the future of birds and conservation in Cyprus!

This was also the year when we created a lot of new educational material for children, some of which is also included in our Junior and Family members' welcome pack. The second edition of our popular bird guide for children 'What's that bird?', presenting 86 bird species, came out in the end of 2020 and was also published in English as well as the original Greek. We also published our first ever magazine for children, 'Skalifourta Junior', a 20-page publication with lots of fun and creative activities and articles to discover birds and inspire respect for nature.

A set of education materials on the Griffon Vulture was developed with funding from the MAVA Foundation. The pack includes an activity book, a fun board game, a storybook, photo booths and memorabilia gifts for students. The material will be used at school outreach actions in Limassol and Paphos that will be organized under the LIFE with Vultures project. The aim is to raise awareness among children about the need to protect Griffon Vultures and inspire them to make a positive change in their communities.



© Ermina Emmanouel



© BirdLife Cyprus



© Emma Louise Photography

## Our presence online and in the media

In 2020, we issued a total of 21 Press Releases and gave over 20 interviews on Radio and TV. As a result of our media work, we had around 350 mentions in the media, online and print media included. Among the most popular topics were our reactions against the illegal shooting of bee-eaters and other migratory birds at Larnaka Salt Lakes, updates relating to our LIFE with Vultures project and reaction against a shameful law amendment that reduced fines for illegal bird killing.

Our social media followers have been growing steadily on our main social media platforms. Of note is the reach that our post on the illegal killing of bee-eaters at Larnaka Salt Lakes has had, which was seen by more than 120,000 people.

## Our publications

**Monthly Checklist:** During 2020, we published the Monthly Checklist with the latest bird records and with many articles on bird identification, species to see, which also of course included all the bird sightings of the previous month. This was sent electronically once a month, to all members.

**Quarterly Magazine "Cyprus Wheatear":** In 2020, we redesigned and revamped our members' magazine, Cyprus Wheatear, which is now issued twice a year, instead of four times. The magazine keeps our members updated with the latest news and informed about Cyprus birds.

**Electronic newsletter:** Our newsletter was sent to 3,000 newsletter subscribers every month.

**Cyprus Bird Report:** We produced the Cyprus Bird Report for 2019, which like every year, includes species charts and tables and a full Cyprus bird list.

**Birds of Cyprus Checklist:** The Birds of Cyprus Checklist for 2020 was also produced with tables of monthly sightings and yearly occurrences for 2014 - 2019.





# SUMMARY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020

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## Income (€) 2020

Contribution from A. P. Leventis Conservation Foundation	137.817
Income from projects	327.502
Income from services rendered	5.171
Income from workshops	721
Subscriptions from members	10.037
Subsidies	66.838
Other income	14.004

**Total 562.090**

## Expenditure (€)

Payroll cost	331.401
Office administration expenses	39.450
Other direct expenses	10.151
Project costs	117.988
Costs of services rendered	18.443
Third party services	22.304
Printing and publications	3.735
Transportation and travelling expenses	4.304
Obsolete and free stock	319
Diminution in value of shares	420
Finance cost	3.350
Purchase of bird rings	2.922

**Total (€) 544.636**

## Governance

### Annual General Meeting

Due to the pandemic, there was a delay in organizing the Annual General Meeting, which eventually took place online via the Zoom Platform, on 18 October 2020, with 28 members attending. During the AGM, there was a report on activities for 2019 and a presentation of the Audited Statements for 2019, and a presentation of the workplan and budget for 2020. These were approved by the members.

### Council

The BirdLife Cyprus Council met five times during 2020 and its members were as follows:

Melis Charalambides, Chairman  
 Dave Walker, Vice Chairman  
 Stavros Christodoulides, Secretary  
 Christakis Charalambides, Treasurer  
 Loria Phylakti, Social Secretary  
 Jane Stylianou, Bird Recorder  
 Constantinos Konis, Projects and Funding Officer

### Staff

The BirdLife Cyprus staff during 2020 were as follows:

Martin Hellicar, Director  
 Christina Ieronymidou, Monitoring and Research Coordinator  
 Melpo Apostolidou, Project Coordinator  
 Tassos Shialis, Campaigns Coordinator  
 Elena Markitani, Communications Officer  
 Christia Alexandrou, Education and Development Officer  
 Vasiliki Anastasi, Nature Policy Officer  
 Annie Papadopoulou, Seabirds Project Officer  
 Markos Charalambides, Campaigns & Monitoring Officer  
 Myria Achilleos, Accountant  
 Theodosia Theodorou, Conservation Projects Officer  
 Antaia Christou, Conservation Projects Officer  
 Romina Constantinou, Administration & Membership Officer



## Acknowledging our Donors and Supporters

A number of people have helped BirdLife Cyprus during the year through their voluntary work.

First and foremost the members of the Council with their hard work, offering their time and experience to BirdLife Cyprus. BirdLife Cyprus depends a lot on volunteers, who give their time and expertise generously, and participate in the numerous surveys BirdLife Cyprus organises. A big thank you is due to them.

The BirdLife Cyprus Recorder is also a volunteer. Jane Stylianou has worked tirelessly producing the Monthly Checklist, the Annual Checklist and the Annual Bird Report. A big thank you to her for her dedication and hard work.

The work carried out during 2020, could not have been carried out without the valuable and fundamental support from our donors.

### The following were the main BirdLife Cyprus donors during 2020:

- Our President Mr. Tassos Leventis whose funding comes through the Tasso Leventis Conservation Foundation and contributes to our core funding, but also to specific programmes such as the LIFE with Vultures and the Barn Owl projects. Mr Leventis is acknowledged also for his invaluable general support and guidance to BirdLife Cyprus.
- The RSPB (BirdLife in the UK)
- NABU (BirdLife in Germany)
- The EU's LIFE programme for funding LIFE Against Bird Crime and LIFE with Vultures projects
- The Erasmus+ programme for funding the Seeing the World through Nature project
- The MAVA Conservation Foundation, through BirdLife International for funding the Cyprus Bycatch Project, the SAFE FLYWAYS project, the Fighting Poison project, the Lead Shot in Cypriot Wetlands project, as well as funding actions for further capacity building for the organization
- The Oak Foundation for the project "Taking Flight - Further reducing the illegal trapping in Italy, Cyprus and Malta"
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment
- The A. G. Leventis Foundation for their annual donation
- Devon birds
- Mark Constantine
- Our members (in Cyprus and abroad) through the subscriptions. Our work would not have been possible without the support from our members who add strength to our voice and help us reach our vision. Heartfelt thanks go to them for their ongoing support.







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