



## UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the autumn 2024 findings of BirdLife Cyprus' continuing monitoring programme for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and providing an overview of the latest developments regarding the problem

Report put together by Tassos Shialis, Campaigns Coordinator, BirdLife Cyprus & Markos Charalambides, Campaigns & Monitoring Officer, BirdLife Cyprus

Date: February 2025

# Contents

<b>Περίληψη</b> .....	3
Summary.....	7
1. Overview of bird trapping in Cyprus.....	10
2. Surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus .....	12
3. Results .....	14
Survey results and data analysis.....	14
<i>Field survey data</i> .....	14
<i>Trends in autumn mist netting activity</i> .....	15
Enforcement.....	21
<i>Overview of enforcement for Autumn 2024</i> .....	21
<i>Enforcement on the ground – on-the-spot fines in the Republic, seven years later</i> .....	28
Social and political attitudes .....	30
<i>Developments in the Republic of Cyprus</i> .....	30
<i>Developments in the Eastern (Dhekelia) Sovereign Base Area</i> .....	31
4. Discussion & Recommendations .....	32
Bibliography.....	35
Appendix 1.....	36
Appendix 2.....	40
Appendix 3.....	41
Appendix 4.....	42

## Περίληψη

Τα αποτελέσματα του προγράμματος συστηματικής παρακολούθησης για την περίοδο παγίδευσης φθινοπώρου 2024 έδειξαν ότι η παγίδευση με δίχτυα παρέμεινε στα ίδια επίπεδα με πέρσι. Σε επίπεδο δικαιοδοσίας, φαίνεται να υπήρξε αύξηση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας και μείωση στις περιοχές των Βρετανικών Βάσεων (SBA), σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2023. Από το 2002, ενώ υπήρξαν ορισμένες σημαντικές διακυμάνσεις στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα, η συνολική μακροπρόθεσμη τάση παρουσιάζει απότομη μείωση.

Το συστηματικό πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του BirdLife Cyprus καλύπτει μια περιοχή έρευνας η οποία περιλαμβάνει δύο επικράτειες: την Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία και τις Βρετανικές Βάσεις (SBA) Δεκέλειας. Συγκεκριμένα, καλύπτει τις περιοχές Λάρνακας - Αμμοχώστου και Αγίου Θεοδώρου – Μαρωνίου. Με βάση την ανάλυση των στοιχείων της έρευνας, εκτιμούμε ότι κατά τη διάρκεια του φθινοπώρου του 2024 υπήρχαν 6514 μέτρα ενεργών διαδρομών με δίχτυα εντός της περιοχής έρευνας. Με αυτά τα δεδομένα, εκτιμάται ότι μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν περίπου 620.000 πουλιά εντός της περιοχής έρευνας.

Συνολικά, η χρήση δικτύων για το φθινόπωρο 2024 ήταν κατά 87% χαμηλότερη σε σύγκριση με τα επίπεδα του 2002 (όταν ξεκίνησε το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του BirdLife Cyprus), εντός της περιοχής έρευνας, σύμφωνα με την ανάλυση που έγινε στο πρόγραμμα TRIM.

Συνολικά, η παγίδευση με δίχτυα εντός των περιοχών των Βρετανικών Βάσεων το φθινόπωρο 2024 παρουσίασε εμφανή μείωση 22% σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2023. Θεωρούμε ότι η μείωση που καταγράφηκε οφείλεται στους αυξημένους αστυνομικούς πόρους που η Διοίκηση και η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων είχαν διαθέσει στον Ουλαμό Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας τους, για το 2024, σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2023 όταν οι πόροι ήταν περιορισμένοι. Αυτή είναι μια ξεκάθαρη ένδειξη ότι η διάθεση πόρων και η ενδυνάμωση του Ουλαμού Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων αποδίδει και πρέπει να στελεχώνεται επαρκώς με αστυνομικούς ώστε να συνεχίσει να είναι αποτρεπτική και αποτελεσματική δύναμη στο πεδίο. Αυτό είναι πολύ σημαντικό για να αποφευχθεί οποιαδήποτε οπισθοδρόμηση της επιτυχίας που επιτεύχθηκε τα τελευταία χρόνια εντός της δικαιοδοσίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, όπου έχουν καταγραφεί χαμηλά επίπεδα παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών. Το BirdLife Cyprus αναγνωρίζει την πολιτική μηδενικής ανοχής της Διοίκησης και της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για την αντιμετώπιση της παγίδευσης πουλιών εντός της δικαιοδοσίας τους και θεωρεί ότι η συνεργασία που αναπτύχθηκε μεταξύ της αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων και των περιβαλλοντικών ΜΚΟ είναι ένα καλό παράδειγμα για το πώς μπορεί το έγκλημα κατά της άγριας ζωής να αντιμετωπιστεί αποτελεσματικά.

Όσο αφορά τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα στην Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία, το φθινόπωρο 2024 σημείωσαν αύξηση 76%, σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2023, καταγράφοντας τα πιο υψηλά επίπεδα παράνομης παγίδευσης από το 2014, μια πολύ ανησυχητική εξέλιξη. Παρά τις προσπάθειες της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας και Πανίδας οι οποίες αναγνωρίζονται καθώς επιτεύχθηκε ένας σημαντικός αριθμός καταγγελιών, υπάρχει αύξηση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης. Πιστεύουμε ότι αυτή η αύξηση οφείλεται σε αυξημένη δραστηριότητα οργανωμένων παγιδευτών, εναντίον των οποίων δεν υπήρξε αποτελεσματική πάταξη από τις διωκτικές αρχές - την Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας και τον Ουλαμό Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου. Με την αποκατάσταση του Ουλαμού Πάταξης

Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου τον Ιούνιο του 2023, αναμέναμε και μας είχε υποσχεθεί ότι αυτές οι ομάδες οργανωμένων παγιδευτών θα είχαν αντιμετωπιστεί αποτελεσματικά από τον Ουλαμό. Ωστόσο, όπως και το φθινόπωρο του 2023, τα επίπεδα διωκτικής δράσης ήταν αρκετά απογοητευτικά. Η Αστυνομία Κύπρου, σε συνεργασία με την Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας, πρέπει να αντιμετωπίσει αποτελεσματικά τους οργανωμένους αυτούς παγιδευτές, με μηδενική ανοχή και με τη λήψη αποτρεπτικών μέτρων, σε συνεργασία με τις περιβαλλοντικές ΜΚΟ. Η συνεργασία που αναπτύχθηκε τα τελευταία χρόνια μεταξύ των αρχών των Βρετανικών Βάσεων και των ΜΚΟ αποτελεί πραγματική απόδειξη της προόδου που μπορεί να επιτευχθεί, εάν εργαστούμε συλλογικά και από κοινού.

Για ακόμη μια χρονιά η παγίδευση με ξόβεργα παραμένει σε υψηλά επίπεδα. Αυτά τα ευρήματα υποστηρίζονται τόσο από τα στοιχεία της Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) όσο και από αυτά της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας και Πανίδας. Ενώ τα πρόστιμα για την παγίδευση με δίχτυα μπορεί να είναι αποτελεσματικά και αποτρεπτικά, όταν επιβάλλονται, αφού ξεκινούν από 2000 ευρώ, χαλαρώσεις στον «Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πτηνών και Θηραμάτων» νόμο είχαν ως αποτέλεσμα μη τιμωρητικά και μη αποτρεπτικά πρόστιμα για παγίδευση με ξόβεργα, τα οποία ξεκινούν από 200 ευρώ μόνο.

### **Το BirdLife Cyprus καλεί την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση να εφαρμόσει τις ακόλουθες συστάσεις:**

- 1) **Νομοθεσία:** Η Κυπριακή Βουλή να επανεξετάσει τις τροποποιήσεις του νόμου «Περί Προστασίας και Διαχείρισης Αγρίων Πτηνών και Θηραμάτων» και να επαναφέρει το πρόστιμο για τα αδικήματα κατοχής και χρήσης ξοβέργων και του κυνηγιού των 14 προστατευόμενων, μη θηρεύσιμων ειδών από τα 200 στα 2000 ευρώ. Σε περίπτωση μη κατάργησης των χαμηλότερων αυτών προστίμων, η Κύπρος θα είναι αντιμέτωπη με την πιθανότητα έναρξης της διαδικασίας επί παραβάσει από την Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή.
- 2) **Διωκτική Δράση:**
  - Ο Ουλαμός Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου να αναλάβει ενεργό ρόλο στην καταπολέμηση του εγκλήματος κατά την άγρια ζωή και ιδιαίτερα όσο αφορά τους οργανωμένους παγιδευτές.
  - Να υπάρξει ουσιαστική συνεργασία του Ουλαμού Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας και της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας και Πανίδας για αποτελεσματική διωκτική δράση ενάντια στους μεγάλους, οργανωμένους παγιδευτές.
  - Οι Κυπριακές Αρχές πρέπει να αυξήσουν την πάταξη κατά των εστιατορίων που σερβίρουν παράνομα αμπελοπούλια (για αντιμετώπιση της ζήτησης).
- 3) **Συνεργασία με ΜΚΟ:** Οι αρμόδιες αρχές της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας να ενισχύσουν τη συνεργασία με περιβαλλοντικές ΜΚΟ, υιοθετώντας παρόμοια προσέγγιση με αυτή της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, προκειμένου να καταστεί πιο αποτελεσματική η πάταξη στο πεδίο.
- 4) **Δικαστικό σώμα:** Να γίνει ενημέρωση στο δικαστικό σώμα (δικαστές, κατήγορους) σχετικά με την εξώδικη ρύθμιση και ότι η παράνομη παγίδευση πουλιών αποτελεί σοβαρό έγκλημα κατά της άγριας ζωής, προκειμένου να αντιμετωπιστεί η μεγάλη διαφορά που παρατηρείται μεταξύ των εξώδικων που εκδίδονται και των δικαστικών ποινών που τελικά επιβάλλονται. Θεωρούμε

ότι η Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας, ως αρμόδια αρχή για την εφαρμογή της νομοθεσίας για τα πουλιά, είναι η πιο κατάλληλη για την υλοποίηση αυτής της δράσης.

**Το BirdLife Cyprus και η RSPB (BirdLife στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο) καλούν τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να εφαρμόσει τις ακόλουθες συστάσεις:**

1) Επιβολή του νόμου:

- Η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να διατηρήσει επαρκώς στελεχωμένη τον Ουλαμός Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας τους, ούτως ώστε να παραμένει αποτρεπτική και αποτελεσματική, διατηρώντας έτσι τα χαμηλά επίπεδα παγίδευσης που καταγράφονται τα τελευταία χρόνια

2) Συνεργασία με ΜΚΟ:

- Η Διοίκηση και η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να συνεχίσει τη συνεργασία με τις περιβαλλοντικές ΜΚΟ, καθώς και την εφαρμογή και την αναθεώρηση του σχεδίου δράσης της για την παράνομη παγίδευση και λαθροθηρία.

**Συνάμα, το BirdLife Cyprus καλεί την Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή** να συνεχίσει να ασκεί τη δέουσα πίεση προς την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση για κατάργηση των χαμηλότερων προστίμων για την παράνομη παγίδευση και θήρευση μεταναστευτικών πουλιών. Αυτό θα έστελνε ένα σαφές μήνυμα στην Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση και στην Κυπριακή Βουλή ότι τυχόν διατάξεις που θα οδηγούσαν σε χαμηλότερο καθεστώς προστασίας και θα είχαν αρνητικό αντίκτυπο στη διατήρηση των μεταναστευτικών πουλιών δεν επιτρέπονται και δεν γίνονται ανεκτές από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση. Οποιαδήποτε δράση τώρα θα μπορούσε ενδεχομένως να σταματήσει την περαιτέρω χαλάρωση του νόμου στο μέλλον, ιδιαίτερα καθώς υπάρχει αυξημένη πίεση από κυνηγετικές οργανώσεις για περαιτέρω χαλαρώσεις, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της απαγόρευσης των ακτιβιστών να «ενοχλούν» τη κυνηγετική δραστηριότητα και την εκπαίδευση κυνηγετικών σκύλων κατά τους μήνες αναπαραγωγής των πουλιών.

Η αναφορά χωρίζεται στα ακόλουθα κεφάλαια:

- Το κεφάλαιο 1 παρουσιάζει μια σύνοψη της παγίδευσης πουλιών στην Κύπρο, δίνει μια ιστορική αναδρομή αυτής της δραστηριότητας, κάνει αναφορά στην εθνική νομοθεσία όσον αφορά την προστασία των πουλιών και παρουσιάζει την τρέχουσα κατάσταση,
- Το κεφάλαιο 2 παρουσιάζει το πρόγραμμα παρακολούθησης του BirdLife Cyprus,
- Το κεφάλαιο 3 παρουσιάζει τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας πεδίου και την ανάλυση από το πρόγραμμα TRIM, τα στοιχεία από τις προσπάθειες των αρμοδίων αρχών για πάταξη και το πολιτικό και κοινωνικό κλίμα που επικρατεί,
- Στο κεφάλαιο 4 γίνεται μια σύνοψη της κατάστασης της παράνομης παγίδευσης πουλιών, ενώ επίσης γίνονται συστάσεις προς την Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση και τη Διοίκηση των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, καθώς επίσης και προς την Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή.

Είμαστε ιδιαίτερα ευγνώμονες στους χρηματοδότες μας, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της NABU (BirdLife στη Γερμανία) για την κάλυψη των λειτουργικών εξόδων για την έρευνα πεδίου (έξοδα μετακινήσεων)

και όλα τα έξοδα των εθελοντών, της RSPB (BirdLife στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο) για την κάλυψη των σχετικών εργασιών και του BirdLife Europe για την μακροχρόνια υποστήριξη της εκστρατείας μας ενάντια στην παράνομη παγίδευση πουλιών. Το BirdLife Cyprus είναι ευγνώμων για τη συνεχή, μακροχρόνια υποστήριξή τους.

## Summary

The results of the systematic monitoring programme for the autumn 2024 trapping season show that trapping with mist nets remained at the same levels as last year. On a jurisdiction level, there was an apparent increase in trapping in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and an apparent decrease in the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBA) compared to autumn 2023. Since 2002, whilst there have been some significant variations in trapping intensity, the overall long-term trend for trapping levels with mist nets shows a steep decline.

The BirdLife Cyprus systematic monitoring programme is based upon a survey coverage that encompasses two jurisdictional areas: The Republic of Cyprus and the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBA). It specifically covers the Larnaka - Famagusta and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas. Based on analysis of the survey data, we estimate that about 6,514m of mist net rides were active within the survey area during the autumn of 2024. Based on trapping activity recorded, it is estimated that nearly 620,000 birds may have been killed within the survey area.

Overall, mist-netting activity for autumn 2024 was 87% lower compared to the 2002 (baseline) levels within the survey area, based on analysis using the TRIM model.

Overall, mist net trapping within the ESBA areas for autumn 2024 showed an apparent decrease of 22% compared to autumn 2023. We consider that the decrease recorded was due to the increased police resources that the SBA Administration and Police allocated to their Anti-Poaching Unit for this season, compared to autumn 2023 when resources were more limited. This is a clear indication that the availability of resources and the strengthening of the SBA Anti-Poaching Unit has results and needs to be adequately staffed with officers for it to remain to be a deterrent and effective force on the ground. This is key to avoid any setback of the conservation success achieved in recent years within the SBA jurisdiction, where low levels of bird trapping activity have been recorded. BirdLife Cyprus applauds the zero-tolerance approach of the SBA Administration and Police to tackle bird trapping within their jurisdiction, and considers that the collaborative partnership approach developed between the SBA Police and environmental NGOs is a case study example of how wildlife crime can be addressed effectively.

With regards to trapping activity levels with mist nets within the Republic of Cyprus areas for autumn 2024, they showed an apparent increase of 76% compared to autumn 2023 and were the highest levels recorded since 2014 - a very concerning result. Despite the enforcement efforts of the Game and Fauna Service, which are acknowledged and they resulted in a high number of prosecutions overall, an increase in trapping levels was recorded. We believe that an increase in organized trapping groups, in combination with the lack of effective enforcement against these large-scale organized trappers by the Game and Fauna Service, and Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, has resulted in this increase in mist net trapping within the Republic of Cyprus. With the re-instatement of the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit in June 2023, we had anticipated and were assured that these organized trapping groups would be effectively tackled by this unit. However, similarly to Autumn 2023, enforcement action from this unit in 2024 has been very disappointing. The Cyprus Police, in collaboration with the Game and Fauna Service, need to effectively tackle these trapping groups, with zero-tolerance and with the adoption of deterrent measures on the ground, in collaboration with the environmental NGOs. The partnership approach that has been developed in recent years between the SBA authorities and the NGOs is a

testament to the positive progress that can be achieved on the ground, if we work collaboratively and jointly.

For yet another season limestick trapping activity has remained at relatively high levels. These findings are also supported by Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) survey data and the Game and Fauna Service enforcement statistics data. While fines for mist netting can be effective and act as a deterrent when enforced, as they start from 2000 euros upwards, relaxations in the "*Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species law*" have seen fines for limestick trapping become non-punitive and lose their value as a deterrent, as they now start from only 200 euros.

**BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Government of Cyprus to implement the following recommendations:**

- 1) **Legislative:** The Cyprus Parliament to reverse amendments to the law "*Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species*" and to restore the fine for the offences of possession and use of limesticks and hunting of 14 protected, non-game species from 200 euros for up to 50 birds to 2000 euros for one bird. Unless this happens, Cyprus will be faced with the possibility of infringement proceedings from the European Commission.
- 2) **Enforcement:**
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit to take an active role in the fight against wildlife crime, and especially against large scale, organised trappers.
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit and the Game and Fauna Service need to establish a close collaboration in order to have an effective enforcement action against the large scale, organized trappers.
  - The Cyprus authorities need to undertake increased and consistent enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants serving illegal ambelopoulia "delicacies" (to address demand).
- 3) **Cooperation with NGOs:** The Cyprus competent authorities to strengthen the collaboration with environmental NGOs on the ground, adopting a similar approach to that taken by the SBA Police, in order to make enforcement action more effective.
- 4) **Judiciary:** Training to be provided to the Judiciary and Prosecutors regarding the on-the-spot fine system and the seriousness of trapping as a wildlife crime, in order to address the large discrepancy observed between on-the-spot fines issued and court sentences handed out. We consider that the Game and Fauna Service, as the responsible authority for the implementation of the Birds legislation, is best placed to carry out this training.

**BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB calls upon the SBA Administration to implement the following recommendations:**

- 1) **Enforcement:** The SBA Police to maintain a well-resourced Anti-Poaching Unit, in order to continue to be a deterrent and effective unit, thus maintaining the low trapping levels recorded in recent years.
- 2) **Cooperation with NGOs:** The SBA Administration and Police to continue with the collaborative partnership approach adopted with environmental NGOs and the implementation and review of its Action Plan.



**At the same time, BirdLife Cyprus calls on the European Commission** to continue to pressure the Cypriot Government for the abolition of the lower fines for illegal trapping and hunting of migratory birds. This would send a clear message to the Cyprus Government and the national Parliament that any provisions that have led to a lower protection status and negatively impacted the conservation of migratory wild birds would not be permitted and tolerated by the European Union. Action now would potentially stop further relaxations to the law in the future, particularly as there is increasing pressure from hunting lobbies for further relaxations including the forbidding of activists to 'disturb' hunting activity and the widespread permitting of training of hunting dog during the breeding months.

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, refers to the national legislation regarding bird protection and presents the current situation,
- Section 2 describes the historical outline of the surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus,
- Section 3 presents the survey data from the monitoring programme and the analysis from the TRIM software, summarises the enforcement data of the competent authorities and gives an outline of the political and social attitudes regarding this issue,
- 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.

We are particularly thankful to our funders, including NABU (BirdLife in Germany) for covering the running costs for the field work (transfer expenses) and all the volunteer costs, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) for covering relevant salaries and to BirdLife Europe for their long term support to our illegal bird trapping campaign. BirdLife Cyprus is grateful for their continued, long-term support.

# 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 '*Protection and Development of Game and Wild Birds Law of 1974 (39/1974)*' was introduced<sup>1</sup>. 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 autumn in Cyprus). With Cyprus joining the EU, the 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. However, trapping as practiced in Cyprus today bears no relation to historical 'tradition'.

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 at least 158 bird species have been found trapped in mist nets or on limesticks, of which 90 are listed as conservation priority species under the EU Birds Directive and/or by BirdLife International<sup>2</sup>. This is a clear indication of the non-selective nature of these methods. Thanks to the high price of the banned *ambelopoulia* 'delicacy', this illegal activity of bird trapping 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 and Fauna Service have recently estimated this illegal business to be valued in the order of 10 million Euros per year<sup>3</sup>.

Apart from the extensive use of non-selective methods for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, trappers nowadays use illegal electronic calling devices that imitate the calls of migratory birds (song playback). These calling devices are normally operated during night-time, luring the birds into the trapping sites and hence increasing the illegal catch. An academic study undertaken in Cyprus has shown that the use of electronic calling devices is highly effective in luring birds towards trapping sites (Sebastianelli M. *et al*, 2020<sup>3</sup>). The findings of this study showed that playback not only increased the number of individuals of target species captured by around 11 times, but also significantly increased bycatch. The study authors concluded that: '*Our findings thus show that in contrast to popular belief that tape lures are a selective trapping method, they also lead to increased captures of non-target species, which can include species of conservation concern*'.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.')

<sup>2</sup> BirdLife Cyprus 'List of birds recorded trapped in mist nets and on limesticks' found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> The study can be found [here](#).

These calling devices can often be heard easily from hundreds of metres away from trapping sites during the night, highlighting the extensive use of these lures and their intensity within the trapping areas.

This report presents the latest survey results for the 2024 autumn season, when trappers target migratory birds, and especially Blackcaps and other songbirds. Trapped birds are either served as expensive *ambelopoulia* 'delicacies' in local restaurants or are sold and 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 in Cyprus of BirdLife International. 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 Game and Fauna Service (GFS) and Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Police at the start of the programme. The surveillance programme has been reviewed over the years, with the last one undertaken in 2015. Figure 1 shows the main areas of bird trapping; 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 (each 1 km<sup>2</sup>) 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 across the SBA Administration and the Republic of Cyprus. For more details on the methodology see Appendix 1.

The project is undertaken in close co-operation with the Game and Fauna Service and the SBA Police. Despite efforts to collaborate more closely with the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, since its reinstatement in June 2023, unfortunately this has not been possible. 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 its inception in 2002 and for covering relevant salaries of staff members. Furthermore, BirdLife Cyprus would like to thank NABU (BirdLife in Germany) for their financial support from 2013 onwards and for covering the running costs and volunteer costs of the surveillance programme. These BirdLife partners as well as BirdLife Europe have been supporting our illegal bird trapping campaign over a number of years, both via funding opportunities and by raising international awareness regarding this issue. BirdLife Cyprus is grateful for their continued, long-term support.

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. 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 (Panneloek & van Strien, 2005). If observations are missing, TRIM estimates the missing values on the basis of changes observed on plots that were monitored.

In other words, TRIM enables us to use the data from all the trapping survey squares ever surveyed under the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme during the autumn period, in total 208 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 [here](#)) 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 2024 was carried out in September and October 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, the Game and Fauna Service, or the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, depending on the location of the findings.

A summary of the survey data for autumn 2024 is presented in Appendix 2. In total, the field team recorded 47 active net rides (these are cleared “runs” in acacia plantations or other habitats e.g. orchards, olive groves, either holding nets or where there was clear evidence of preparation for the setting and/or use of nets), which sum up to a total length of 965 metres of net rides used for mist netting. Nine mist nets were found *in situ* (either classified as Active Set Nets or Active Unset Nets<sup>4</sup>). **The total length of active mist net rides within the 405 km<sup>2</sup> survey area (Larnaka - Famagusta and Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas) can be extrapolated to 6514 m (965m x 405/ 60)<sup>5</sup>.** Opportunistic checks outside the selected survey squares detected an additional site which appeared to be used for limestick trapping, as evidence of fresh glue and feathers was found (see Appendix 2).

BirdLife Cyprus detected 145 limesticks within the selected survey squares for autumn 2024 (see Appendix 2). However, as already explained, BirdLife Cyprus does not focus its field survey effort on the detection of limesticks, as other organisations do. For example, during the autumn 2024 survey by the Committee Against Bird Slaughter and Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt (CABS/SPA Foundation), a total of 1,141 limesticks, along with 74 mist nets and 45 electronic bird callers, were detected and/or seized<sup>6</sup>. It is important to highlight that the majority of the limesticks detected by CABS were in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, indicating that limestick use is still widespread and remains a significant problem that the enforcement agencies need to address effectively and with zero-tolerance.

Based on the data gathered in the field this autumn, BirdLife Cyprus estimates that **just under 620,000 birds could have been illegally killed within the survey area and just over 825,000 birds could have been killed across Cyprus**<sup>7</sup> (read Appendix 3 for more details on the estimation methodology).

If one were to split the potential death toll estimate (620,000 birds) between jurisdictions within the survey area, based on the trapping activity detected, then just under 520,000 birds would be the

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> There are 405, 1 km<sup>2</sup> 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 2024. Out of these 405, 1 km<sup>2</sup> squares, 291 squares are found in the Republic areas, 83 are found in the Dhekelia SBA and 31 squares are in “Joint” areas. Those areas are either joint between SBA and Republic, SBA and buffer zone, or SBA, Republic, and Buffer zone.

<sup>6</sup> Information received via message from CABS on 7/1/24

<sup>7</sup> The estimate does not include any illegal bird trapping possibly taking place in the Turkish occupied parts of Cyprus.

potential number killed in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and almost 92,000 birds the potential number killed in the Dhekelia SBA<sup>8</sup> (the 'joint' squares i.e. where the two jurisdictions overlap, are not included 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 estimate higher, especially in the Republic. 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 (see Appendix 3).

### ***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 2024. The metres of net rides that are recorded as active<sup>9</sup> for bird trapping with mist nets within each survey square are used as the response variable, with autocorrelation and over dispersion accounted for as well. The TRIM changepoint model is used with a changepoint in every year, which returns the same result as a fully time-dependent model<sup>10</sup> (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 British Trust Ornithology (BTO) assessment report on the monitoring methodology of BirdLife Cyprus<sup>11</sup> 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 CABS, which are targeted at known trapping areas and are not controlled and consistent regarding the survey effort. Therefore, the findings and results of the two surveys are not directly comparable. However, both methods provide invaluable field data and are supportive and complementary to each other, provided the differences in methodology are considered.

---

<sup>8</sup> From the 965 metres of active net rides detected within the survey area, 665 metres were in the Republic of Cyprus (from the 39 squares surveyed), 300 metres were in the SBAs (from the 20 squares surveyed), zero meters were in joint squares between the Republic and SBA areas. 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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.

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

Figure 2 shows the trapping activity levels since 2002 across a sample size of 208 squares within the survey area, with standard error margins. In keeping with our standard methodology, a stratified random sample of 60 of the 208 squares was surveyed in autumn 2024 (while ensuring balanced coverage between RoC and SBA areas).

The sample of 208 squares surveyed in various years during the surveillance programme includes 132 squares within the RoC, 62 within the SBA and 14 squares that cover areas in both jurisdictions (referred to as 'joint' squares, including also areas that cover the SBA and UN buffer). For autumn 2024, the breakdown of the squares randomly selected and surveyed at a jurisdiction level were as follows:

- 39 squares within the Republic of Cyprus,
- 20 squares within the Dhekelia SBA, and
- 1 'joint' square.

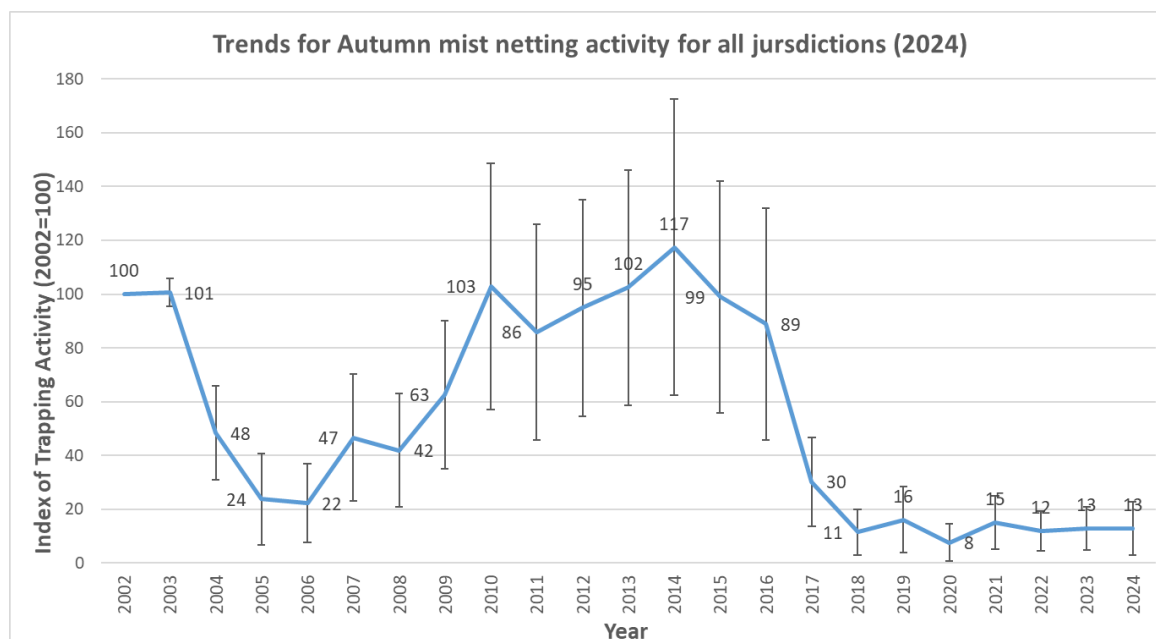
It is important to highlight that the additional squares surveyed have slightly expanded the total square coverage sample (208 in 2024; 186 in 2022 and 2023; 185 in 2021, 2020 and 2019; 157 squares in 2018; 129 squares in 2017 and 104 squares in previous years), hence the TRIM program has imputed missing 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 reports<sup>12</sup>, the index values may vary slightly for the previous autumn seasons (i.e. for autumn 2023 and earlier).

---

<sup>12</sup> Earlier BirdLife Cyprus trapping reports can be found [here](#).



**Figure 2. Trends for autumn bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets, for all jurisdictions in the survey area**



**Table 1. Statistics for trend for autumn trapping levels 2002-2024 based on Figure 2**

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Trend direction
<b>All squares</b>	0.9216	0.0115	0.02354	Steep Decline

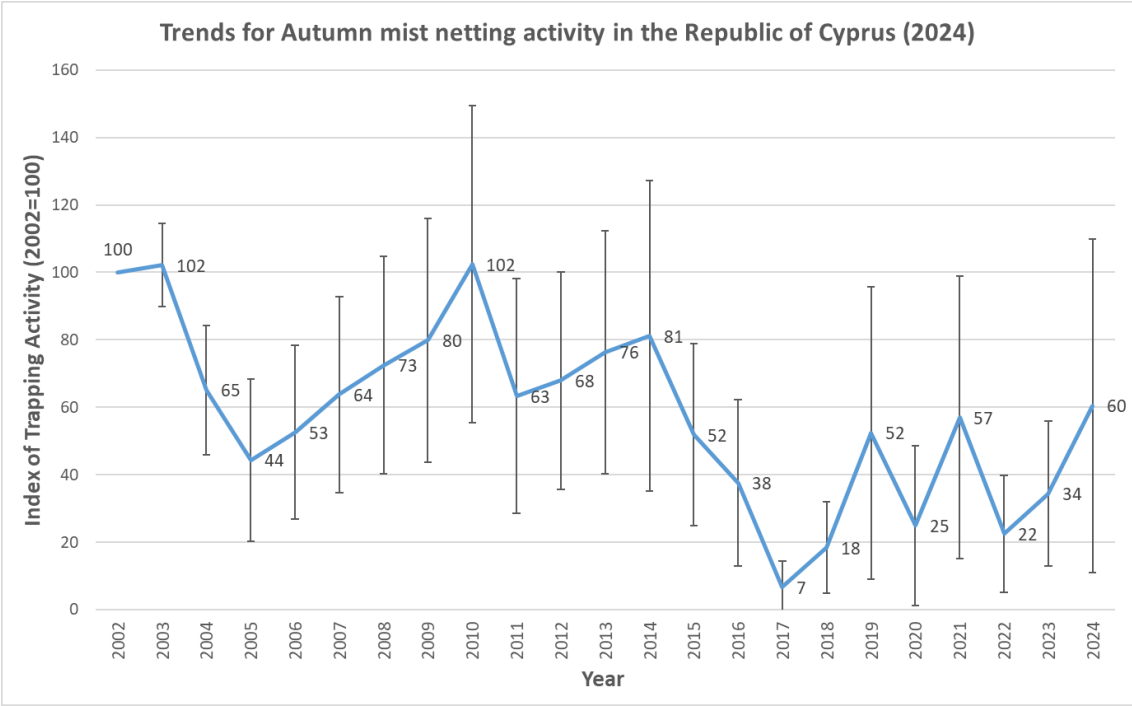
Note 1: The multiplicative trend reflects the changes in terms of the average percentage change per year i.e. if the trend is equal to 1 then there is no change. Hence, value 0.9216 calculated above indicates an overall decrease in mist netting activity of around 8% per year.

Mist netting activity for autumn 2024 appears to be 87% lower compared to the baseline year of 2002 (index value is 13 for autumn 2024). The overall trend is a statistically significant ‘Steep Decline’. Compared to autumn 2023, trapping appears to be at the same levels for autumn 2024 (index values both 13).

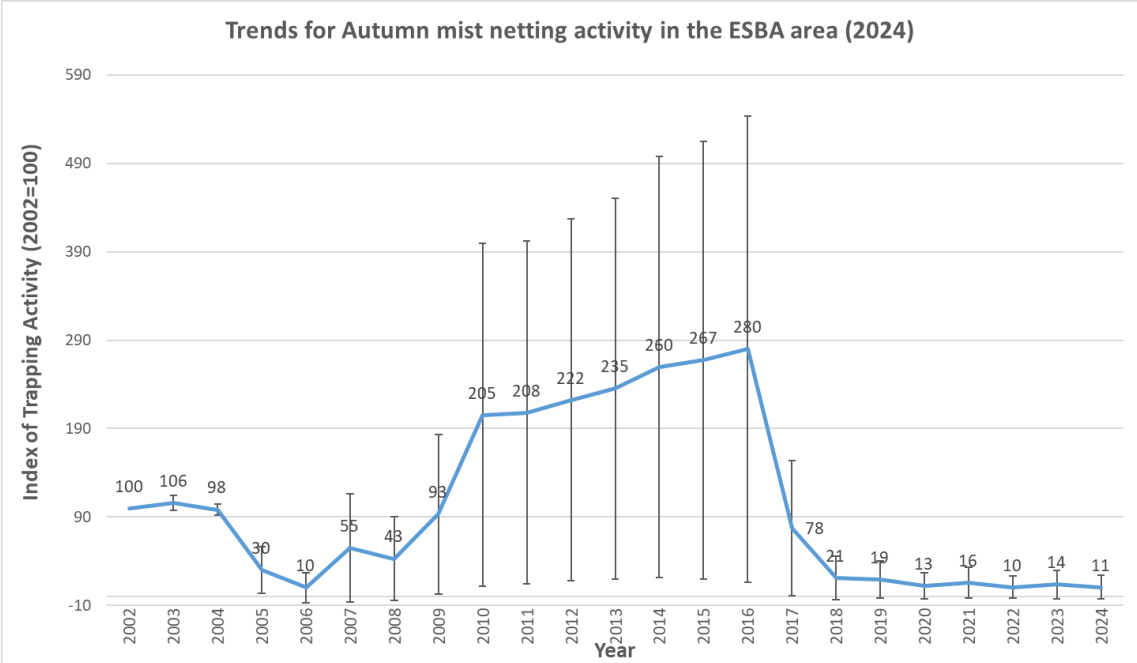
Figure 3 summarises autumn mist netting activity in the Republic of Cyprus applying the same ‘Linear trend model using the stepwise approach’ in the TRIM program – with all years initially selected as changepoints in the TRIM analysis.

Figure 4 summarises autumn mist netting activity in the SBA applying the same ‘Linear trend model using the stepwise approach’ in the TRIM program. Note, however, that for the SBA analysis, TRIM would not run with the year 2003 as a changepoint.

**Figure 3. Trends for trapping activity for autumn mist netting within the Republic of Cyprus**



**Figure 4. Trends for trapping activity for autumn mist netting within the ESBA area**



**Table 2. Statistics for trends for autumn trapping activity levels 2002-2024 based on Figure 3 and Figure 4**

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Trend direction
RoC squares	0.9514	0.0111	0.021756	Moderate Decline
SBA squares	0.9261	0.0209	0.040964	Moderate Decline

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

- **For the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) areas, autumn 2024 mist netting activity (index value 60) showed an apparent increase of 76% compared to autumn 2023 (index value 34). In comparison to 2002, the autumn 2024 levels were 40% lower.**
  - For the 39 squares covered within the RoC, the average within the RoC was 17 metres of active net rides per square surveyed (665/ 39 squares surveyed within the Republic = 17). The range of counts was from 0 to 125 metres of active net rides, while no mist net trapping at all was recorded in 30 squares.
  - For the period 2002-2024, the trend direction for the Republic is assessed as “Moderate Decline” (see Figure 3 and Table 2).
- **For the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBA), autumn 2024 mist netting activity (index value 11) showed an apparent decrease of 22% compared to 2023 (index value of 14). In comparison to 2002, the autumn 2024 levels were 89% lower.**
  - For the 20 squares covered within the SBA areas in 2024, the average within the SBA areas was 15 metres of active net rides per square surveyed (300 / 20 squares surveyed within the SBA areas = 15). The range of counts was from 0 to 75 metres of active net rides, while no mist net trapping at all was recorded in 14 squares.
  - For the period 2002-2024, the trend direction for the SBA areas is assessed as “Moderate Decline” (see Figure 4 and Table 2).

As seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the standard error bars for the SBA and RoC trends are noticeably wide for some years, suggesting there may be no statistically significant difference between those years. This is due to the following factors: the large number of zero counts, and the addition of new squares, which were never before surveyed within the survey area.

Overall, across all jurisdictions, mist net trapping remained at the same levels in autumn 2024 compared to autumn 2023.

Despite the overall trapping levels remaining the same, there were significant changes at a jurisdictional level. Within the ESBA, during autumn 2024 there was an apparent reduction of 22% compared to autumn 2023, which we believe it is due to the strengthening of the SBA police Anti-poaching unit with police officers. After an apparent increase in mist-net trapping noted in Autumn 2023, BirdLife Cyprus expressed concerns regarding the understaffed Anti-poaching unit. In response, the SBA Police strengthened the Anti-poaching Unit bringing in an additional nine officers for Autumn 2024, compared

to one officer for Autumn 2023. Despite noting a reduction in mist-net trapping, there was evidence that trappers within the SBA areas had changed their tactics, and had begun trapping birds in the afternoon hours, rather than at night-time / early morning hours, most likely to avoid SBA Police patrols. This is something that needs to be taken into consideration for the upcoming autumn 2025 trapping season.

Within the RoC jurisdiction, during autumn 2024 an apparent increase of 76% compared to 2023 was noted. Similarly, to last year, a large number of the active trapping locations found in autumn 2024 were known to be operated by large scale, organised trappers. We believe a serious, and continuing, lack of enforcement on these large-scale organised trappers, both from the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, has led to this increase. Additionally, 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.

**Overall, illegal bird trapping with mist nets within the survey area remained the same during autumn 2024 compared to autumn 2023, based on the survey data from BirdLife Cyprus. The enforcement efforts of both the SBA Police and the Game and Fauna Service are fully acknowledged. In particular, autumn 2024 highlighted the significance of maintaining sufficient resources for competent authorities to undertake effective and deterrent enforcement on the ground. Any reduction in staff resources endangers reversing the positive progress made, as we have experienced within the SBA jurisdiction during autumn 2023.**

**What has been particularly disappointing is the lack of engagement by the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit against illegal bird trapping and wildlife crime in general. Despite its re-instatement in June 2023 (four years after it was unjustifiably dismantled), and the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Game and Fauna Service to work together on poaching and bird trapping issues on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023, the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit has not taken an active role in this. There needs to be a serious step up from this unit, particularly in regards to prosecuting the large-scale, organised trappers, if the Cyprus government is serious about reversing the increase in bird trapping recorded within its jurisdiction.**

## **Enforcement**

### Overview of enforcement for Autumn 2024

There are three competent authorities responsible for enforcement against illegal bird trapping in Cyprus. For areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), these are the Game and Fauna Service, Ministry of Interior, and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit (reinstated in June 2023 after being dismantled in November 2019), Ministry of Justice and Public Order. The SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit is responsible for enforcement against illegal bird trapping in areas within the UK Sovereign Base Areas.

The resources of the above-mentioned enforcement bodies are as follows:

- Game and Fauna Service, the competent authority for the implementation of the Birds Directive and the equivalent bird national legislation, has around 210 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 53 game wardens.
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit was comprised of 10 officers for the entirety of the Autumn 2024 trapping season.
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit was re-instated in June 2023 after a Ministerial Council decision was taken on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023 (Decision no 94895)<sup>13</sup>. The decision was for this to be comprised of 13 officers, dealing with poaching and trapping issues.

Table 3 summarizes the enforcement data of the Game and Fauna Service and SBA Police regarding illegal bird trapping for the months of August, September and October, the main period for bird trapping in Cyprus, for years 2011-2024, while Table 4 shows the enforcement data for the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ministerial Council Decision dated 8/6/2023 for the re-instatement of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit found [here](#).

**Table 3 Summary of illegal bird trapping statistics from the Game and Fauna Service and SBA Police for the months of August, September and October for years 2011-2024**

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta district <sup>2</sup>														Dhekelia SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit <sup>3</sup>													
Years	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
No of trappers arrested / cases	57	70	78	64	54	35	19	21	25	26	57	48	41	40	23	22	22	30	17	29	6	12	8	4	9	10	3	7
No of mist nets <sup>1</sup>	204	311	287	235	230	195	39	34	21	34	83	52	58	68	361	275	227	184	181	496	154	51	20	13	26	16	22	22
No of limesticks <sup>1</sup>	2,550	5,372	3,830	1,577	1,740	1,291	521	1,186	903	1,876	1,883	1,554	1,873	1,392	290	314	516	256	234	295	259	116	97	29	105	36	95	9

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 2024 provided from Game and Fauna Larnaca & Famagusta district officer via email (8<sup>th</sup> January 2025)

Note 3: Data for 2024 provided from SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit sergeant after official email (9<sup>th</sup> January 2025).

**Table 4 Summary of illegal bird trapping statistics of the Cyprus Police APU for the months of August, September and October for years 2011 – 2019, and 2023-2024.**

	Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit													
Years	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 <sup>2</sup>	2024 <sup>3</sup>
No of trappers arrested / cases	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	28	36	13	4	N/A				1	1
No of mist nets <sup>1</sup>	N/A	116	N/A	116	121	164	37	5	N/A				6	2
No of limesticks <sup>1</sup>	N/A	4,799	N/A	3,950	3,359	1,915	811	213	N/A				N/A	N/A

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: Information obtained from a news article showing the enforcement efforts of the unit in 2023. Article available [here](#). Number of trappers arrested is not complete, as this data was not provided in the news article, and was instead gathered from feedback from sites reported to the unit by BirdLife Cyprus.

Note 3: Data provided by Cyprus Police via email on 17/2/25

This Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit was dismantled without proper justification in November 2019. Hence there is a gap of four years in the data. The unit was then re-instated in June 2023, in keeping with a pre-election promise made by the new President, Nikos Christodoulides.

- Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta district: The enforcement data for autumn 2024 show comparable levels of arrests (40) compared to autumn 2023 (41).
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit – Dhekelia Sovereign Base: The enforcement data for autumn 2024 show that seven people were arrested for trapping, compared to three during autumn 2023. This increased enforcement effort comes after the strengthening of the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit before the start of the autumn 2024 trapping period.
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit: The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit was re-instated in June 2023; For Autumn 2024, enforcement action in relation to illegal bird trapping cases was extremely low, with only arrest taking place.

Illegal bird trapping has become a demand-driven wildlife crime, with the trading of trapped birds for home consumption and at lawbreaking restaurants, being the key economic driver for organised trappers, who, as is generally acknowledged, make thousands of euros of illegal profit every year. The restaurants selling *ambelopoulia* are almost exclusively located within the Republic, whereas home consumption occurs throughout Cyprus. While it's difficult to conduct checks at individual homes, the Game and Fauna Service is responsible for checking potential lawbreaking restaurants. Data provided from the Game and Fauna Service indicate that restaurant checks in 2024 were similar in number to Autumn 2023, with one prosecution occurring (see Table 5). BirdLife Cyprus believes that more enforcement is needed on restaurants, in order to stop this illegal demand-supply profitable business.

**Table 5 Summary of restaurant checks and prosecutions in Cyprus**

	2010 <sup>1</sup>	2011 <sup>1</sup>	2012 <sup>1</sup>	2013 <sup>1</sup>	2014 <sup>2</sup>	2015 <sup>3</sup>	2016 <sup>3,4</sup>	2017 <sup>4</sup>	2018 <sup>5</sup>	2019 <sup>6</sup>	2020 <sup>7</sup>	2021 <sup>8</sup>	2022 <sup>9</sup>	2023 <sup>10</sup>	2024 <sup>11</sup>
<b>Restaurant checks</b>	20	31	18	7	14	8	12	21	20	7	10	5	6	4	4
<b>Restaurant prosecutions</b>	13	15	8	3	1	1	1	7	5	0	1	1	0	2	1

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

([http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/index\\_new/index\\_new?OpenForm](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 available [here](#).

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

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

Note 5: Data source: Letters from both GFS headquarters and Cyprus police Headquarters (Information received on 11/1/19 and 11/2/19 respectively)

Note 6: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (13/1/20).

Note 7: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (12/1/21).

Note 8: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (24/1/22)

Note 9: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (2/1/23)

Note 10: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (25/1/24)

Note 11: Data source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (17/1/24)



### Feedback from competent authorities to BirdLife Cyprus reports

Table 6 and Table 7 summarise the number of reports for trapping activity that BirdLife Cyprus submitted 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.

In total, BirdLife Cyprus reported 25 locations to Game and Fauna Service. Arrests took place related to eight of the locations reported by BirdLife Cyprus, either just before the site was found to be active, or sometime after. Confiscations took place at 12 locations, some of which as part the aforementioned arrests. Checks were conducted at a further 12 locations, with no action taking place.

With regards to the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, attempts were made to report one notorious trapping location to this agency. However, BirdLife Cyprus was referred to report the location to the Game and Fauna Service instead, and that Cyprus Police would be in touch with the Game Service to organise a joint operation. Later on, BirdLife Cyprus was informed that the location was raided solely by the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit, where two nets were confiscated and one man was charged with possession of trapping paraphernalia.

With regards to the Dhekelia SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit, nine trapping locations were reported to this agency. Prosecution took place at one location, while mist nets were confiscated at another location. The remaining seven locations were surveilled, with clearance of poles and pole bases taking place at one site.

**Table 6 Summary of trapping reports provided to competent authorities from BirdLife Cyprus during autumns 2012-2024**

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta													SBA Anti-Poaching Police Unit												
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Number of reports<sup>1</sup></b>	50	43	33	23	21	8	17	11	17 <sup>8</sup>	23 <sup>12</sup>	16	25	25	52	38	40	51	34	26	12	14	9	18	6	21	9
<b>Arrests<sup>2</sup></b>	17	19	8	11	10	N/F <sup>5</sup>	N/F	N/F	N/F	N/F	7	11	8 <sup>13</sup>	9	8	6	4	5	0	7 <sup>6</sup>	0	2 <sup>7</sup>	3 <sup>9</sup>	0	1	1
<b>Confiscations<sup>3</sup></b>	10	8	11	None	1	N/F	N/F	2	2	2	7	0	12 <sup>13</sup>	22	18	5	10	14	3	2	6	4	4 <sup>10</sup>	3	1	1
<b>Clearance<sup>4</sup> / Nothing Found<sup>5</sup></b>	23	16	14	12	10	N/F	N/F	N/F	N/F	N/F	9	14	12	21	12	29	37	15	23	8	8	6	14 <sup>11</sup>	3	19	7

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

Note 1: Reports may also include reports from members of the public that were sent to the competent authority via BLCY.

Note 2: Arrests represent individual people and not specific sites. E.g. If 4 people are arrested at one trapping site that will count as 4 arrests.

Note 3: Confiscations of mist nets, limesticks and/or calling devices

Note 4: Clearance refers to collection of trapping paraphernalia such as pole bases, poles, loudspeakers, wires etc.

Note 5: ‘Nothing found’ 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 6: 7 people were arrested due to video evidence collected at 2 different trapping locations.

Note 7: 2 people were prosecuted for trapping at the same location

Note 8: No official feedback was provided. However, 2 locations were reported on the spot to Game wardens who responded to the reports and provided feedback to BirdLife Cyprus directly.

Note 9: All three people were arrested at the same location

Note 10: In total 9 mist nets and 13 limesticks were confiscated at 4 separate locations.

Note 11: Clearance occurred at two locations. Cameras were placed at four locations. The other locations were placed under observation with no results

Note 12: No official feedback was provided. However, 2 locations were reported on the spot to Game wardens who responded to the reports and provided feedback to BirdLife Cyprus directly.

Note 13: At many of the locations where arrests occurred, confiscations also occurred.

**Table 7 Summary of trapping reports provided to the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit by BirdLife Cyprus during autumns 2012-2019, and 2023-2024**

Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit										
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2023	2024
<b>Number of reports<sup>1</sup></b>	none	3	13 <sup>5</sup>	12 <sup>6</sup>	8	none	7	2 <sup>7</sup>	1	0 <sup>8</sup>
<b>Arrests<sup>2</sup></b>	N/R	1	2 <sup>5</sup>	1	2	N/R	2	2	1	0
<b>Confiscations<sup>3</sup></b>	N/R	N/A	N/A	2	0	N/R	3	0	0	0
<b>Clearance/Nothing found<sup>4</sup></b>	N/R	N/A	N/A	9	6	N/R	2	0	0	0

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

Note 1: Reports may also include reports from members of the public that were sent to the competent authority via BLCY.

Note 2: Arrests represent individual people and not specific sites. E.g. If 4 people are arrested at one trapping site that will count as 4 arrests.

Note 3: Confiscations of mist nets, limesticks and/or calling devices

Note 4: Clearance refers to collection of trapping paraphernalia such as pole bases, poles, loudspeakers, wires etc.

Note 5: 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 and Fauna Service and is used to calculate the % value for the Cyprus Police.

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.

Note 7: Both reports involved the same site.

Note 8: One active location was reported to the Cyprus Police APU, but it was not accepted by the authority and BirdLife was referred to report it to the GFS.

### Enforcement on the ground – on-the-spot fines in the Republic, seven years later

In July 2017, an amendment to the “*Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species Law 152/2003*” regulated all bird trapping and poaching offences as on-the-spot fines (as opposed to court prosecution). At the time, BirdLife Cyprus expressed its opposition to this amendment, having serious reservations over how game wardens and police officers would be able to impose on-the-spot fines without risking their personal safety. Since then, the Cyprus enforcement agencies, and particularly the Game and Fauna Service, have been issuing high fines, implementing the on-the-spot fine provisions adopted in July 2017.

However, in December 2020, the law was amended again. Fines for trapping with limesticks or shooting birds from a list of 14 specific species, was reduced from 2000 euro for one bird to 200 euro for up to 50 birds. It should also be noted that the SBA administration, did not adopt this change to the law and kept fines for shooting and trapping these 14 species at the original fine of 2000 euro for one bird.

With regards to limestick trapping activity, it has remained at high levels. These findings are supported by both the CABS survey data and the Game and Fauna Service enforcement statistics data. We believe this to be a setback regarding the conservation and protection of migratory birds in Cyprus, as explained in the following sections, and something which has sent a message of decriminalisation of limestick trapping and of shooting of migratory songbirds.

Another issue is that, as seen from the on-the-spot fine data provided to BirdLife Cyprus for the period of July 2017 to December 2024 by the Game and Fauna Service, it seems that the higher the fine, the less chance there is of it being paid by the offender. Table 8 below shows that just over 61% of the fines handed out so far have been paid (662 from 1,094), however the money these fines equate to (€1,329,802) only add up to around 35% of the total money from all the fines (€3,695,993). It appears that fines of approximately 4,700 euros and higher are usually not paid (based on averages), with offenders being led to the courts for prosecution. It is important to highlight that unpaid fines led to court (417 in number) equate to a noticeable 53% of all fines issued in terms of the total money.

BirdLife Cyprus has expressed concerns about the lack of information regarding the court sentencing and specifically the rulings made by judges regarding unpaid fines. The data in Table 7 shows some indicative values of fines under different circumstances, provided by the Game and Fauna Service, and confirms BirdLife Cyprus’ original fears that once an on-the- fine is not paid and goes to court, the offenders are routinely handed out lower fines. Although there is still an improvement compared to the much lower fines given out by courts prior to 2017, this significant difference between the unpaid on-the-spot fines (on average 4,700 euros) and the court sentences (on average 1,400 euros) is highly concerning.

On-the-spot fines have been effective in reducing mist netting, particularly in the first few years when this new system with higher fines was introduced, acting as a good deterrent for small scale trappers. However, the last few years we have noted an increase in mist net trapping within the RoC. We attribute this to an increase in organised trapping groups, which operate on a larger scale and appear to be undeterred by the fines. If caught, in some cases these organised trappers will just pay the fine and continue their trapping activity, or they don’t pay the fine at all, go to court, and are given a much lower

fine as shown by the data provided by the Game and Fauna Service (see Table 9). As a result, this autumn we recorded an increase in organised trapping with small gangs of trappers running multiple trapping sites, particularly in the Larnaca District.

**Table 8. Breakdown of on the spot fines handed out from July 2017 until the end of December 2024**

	No. of Fines	Amount in Euro
Fines that have been paid	662	€ 1,329,802
Fines still pending payment	15	
Fines that haven't been paid and will/have gone to court	417	€ 1,960,608
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	1,094	€ 3,695,993

**Table 9. Average fines under different circumstances**

Average fine given by courts prior to 2017 law amendment (€)	Average size of on-the-spot fine which is not paid and thus taken to court (€)	Average fine issued by courts to people who did not pay their on-the-spot fine (€) <sup>14</sup>
780	4,701	1,400

<sup>14</sup> Information provided from Game and Fauna Service official during telephone conversation on 17/1/2025

## ***Social and political attitudes***

### ***Developments in the Republic of Cyprus***

In July 2017, when the “*Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species*” Law (152/2003) was amended and on-the-spot fines were introduced, we saw the on-the-spot fines for limestick trapping specifically, reduced from €2000 to €200. In December 2020, a further amendment in the same law was passed by the Cyprus Parliament. This change saw the fines for the killing of up to 50 birds from a list of 14 protected<sup>15</sup>, non-game species, being reduced to €200 whether with the use of limesticks or by shooting. Previously, the fine for killing even a single bird from this list was set at €2000. Moreover, these specific species are the target species for trappers and poachers for the *ambelopoulia* dish.

These two relaxations to the law represent a major step backwards regarding bird conservation in Cyprus, as they have created a subcategory of ‘less protected’ bird species. The absurdity of this law change is even more evident when one realizes that the fines for offences in relation to game species have been kept high and deterrent, at €2000. We consider that the creation of this ‘less protected’ category is a major setback for bird protection in Cyprus. Several species on this list are very similar to species not on the list, particularly warblers, making this change in the law non-enforceable in the field, as identifying these species can be difficult. These law changes in recent years, has sent a message of decriminalisation of trapping with limesticks. Levels of limestick use over the last few years, including Autumn 2024, appear to have remained at a high level. This is indicative of the non-punitive and non-deterrent nature of the 2020 law change. These high levels of limestick trapping are supported by the enforcement data provided to us by Game and Fauna Service as well as information from CABS.

The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit was re-instated in June 2023 to tackle the increase in poaching and trapping (Decision no 94895), following a Ministerial Council decision<sup>16</sup>. This was a pre-election promise of the newly elected president of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides. BirdLife Cyprus had been calling for the re-instatement of the unit since 2019 when it was dismantled, without real cause or reason. After its re-instatement, a [Memorandum of Cooperation](#) was signed on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 between the Cyprus Police and the Game and Fauna Service, to work together on poaching and bird trapping issues. Enforcement from this unit in autumn 2023 was disappointing to say the least, and it seems that this minimal enforcement continued into autumn 2024. We had hoped that the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit would deal mainly with large scale organised trappers however, both ourselves and CABS noted an increase in organised trappers in autumn 2023 and autumn 2024. Various small gangs of trappers have taken on trapping as a quick and easy source of income, particularly in the Larnaca district. These gangs are not afraid to use violence to ensure that they are not caught, something which CABS experienced this autumn. On one occasion their vehicle was shot at by trappers as they were running away from trappers at a trapping site ([link](#)). This we believe is the main cause of the increase in mist-net trapping within the Republic of Cyprus areas.

---

<sup>15</sup> The 14 species in question are: Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*), European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*), Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*), Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), Eurasian Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), Cetti’s Warbler (*Cettia cetti*), Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*).

<sup>16</sup> Ministerial Council Decision dated 8/6/2023 for the re-instatement of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit found [here](#).

the Movement of United Cypriot Hunters has been exerting a lot of pressure in recent months, in the form of lobbying, that culminated in a demonstration that was held outside the presidential palace on the 11th of January 2025. Their key demands included making the so-called 'disturbance of hunters by activists' an offence and to be permitted to take out their hunting dogs for training during the breeding period (March to June), without any restrictions. Both of these demands are highly worrying, the former because 'disturbance of hunters by activists' has been a narrative developed by hunters in recent years that in reality were reported for carrying out illegal activities. This narrative has unfortunately been gaining ground and the Game and Fauna Service has included it in a law amendment that is yet to be discussed at the Parliament. The latter, the permitting of widespread training of hunting dogs during the breeding months, this would be a serious disturbance to a number of breeding birds in Cyprus and would be a violation of the Birds Directive provisions.

### *Developments in the Eastern (Dhekelia) Sovereign Base Area*

The SBA Police and Administration have continued to apply the partnership approach adopted in 2016, strengthening their collaboration with NGOs. The joint field monitoring with BirdLife Cyprus continued, as did collaboration with CABS.

The autumn 2023 season was a pertinent example of what can happen when resources are removed/redirected away from bird trapping too soon. An increase was noted and BirdLife Cyprus expressed concerns regarding this increase. Following our concerns, prior to the autumn 2024 trapping season, the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit was re-enforced with officers, increasing it in size to ten officers. As a result, there was a reduction in mist-net trapping in autumn 2024, due to more effective enforcement and resources focussed on the issue. That being said, towards the end of the autumn trapping season, some trappers changed their tactics and began trapping in the afternoon hours, in order to avoid the SBA police patrols. This is something that needs to be addressed for the autumn 2025 trapping season. We would expect that SBA Police will keep the Anti-Poaching Unit well-staffed in order to maintain the significant progress made in recent years and to avoid any setbacks to this conservation success.

## 4. Discussion & Recommendations

Overall trapping in 2024 remained at the same levels as in 2023, that being at 87% lower compared to 2002, within the survey area, which covers the worst trapping areas of Cyprus (see Figure 2).

With regards to the Eastern Sovereign Base Area, trapping in autumn 2024 appeared to decrease by around 22% compared to autumn 2023, a welcomed result, especially after the increase noted in autumn 2023. Over the long-term, mist netting levels for autumn 2024 showed a decrease of 89% compared to autumn 2002. After the increase noted last year, we had expressed our concerns to the SBA police regarding the lack of officers in the Anti-Poaching Unit. Our concerns were considered, and prior to the autumn 2024 trapping season, the SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit was bolstered taking the total to ten, compared to just one experienced officer in autumn 2023. Enforcement action on the ground was more effective and the ability to conduct patrols on a daily basis acted as a deterrent to illegal trapping from happening in the first place. Additionally, it shows that the partnership developed in recent years between the SBAs and environmental NGOs is truly effective, both on the ground and in communicating and addressing any concerns raised. This approach and associated measures must be continued into 2025 and beyond, to ensure the success of 2024 is maintained.

In the Republic of Cyprus, there was an apparent increase in trapping with mist nets by 76% during autumn 2024, compared to autumn 2023 (see Figure 3). Overall, mist netting levels for autumn 2024 showed a decrease of 40% compared to autumn 2002. These are the highest trapping levels recorded in the Republic of Cyprus since 2014. BirdLife Cyprus acknowledges the enforcement effort of the Game and Fauna Service wardens. However, BirdLife Cyprus continues to emphasize the need for more effective enforcement against large, organized trappers, who are still trapping with impunity, for the most part, and against restaurants offering *ambelopoulia*.

BirdLife Cyprus is disappointed to see that for the second autumn season in a row, the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, which was re-instated in June 2023, had minimal enforcement action in regards to large scale organised bird trappers, and bird trapping in general. BirdLife Cyprus had been lobbying for the unit's re-instatement since 2019, when it was unjustifiably dismantled, as we believe that this unit can play a key role in tackling these organised trapping group. We expect the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit to finally take a more active role in tackling wildlife crime after more than one and half year of its re-instatement, including against illegal bird trapping of migratory birds with a focus on the large and organised trapping groups, who are often involved in organised crime as well.

As well as this, limestick trapping has remained at high levels, for yet another year, after an increase first noted in 2020. We strongly believe that the increased use of limesticks, that has been maintained in recent years, is attributed to the relaxations to the "Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species law" which have happened in 2017 and 2020.

Moreover, the Movement of United Cypriot Hunters has been exerting a lot of pressure in recent months, in the form of lobbying, that culminated in a demonstration that was held outside the presidential palace on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2025. Their key demands included making the so-called 'disturbance of hunters by activists' an offence and to be permitted to take out their hunting dogs for training during the breeding period (March to June), without any restrictions. Both of these demands



are highly worrying, the former because 'disturbance of hunters by activists' has been a narrative developed by hunters in recent years that in reality were reported for carrying out illegal activities. This narrative has unfortunately been gaining ground and the Game and Fauna Service has included it in a law amendment that is yet to be discussed at the Parliament. The latter, the permitting of widespread training of hunting dogs during the breeding months, this would be a serious disturbance to a number of breeding birds in Cyprus and would be a violation of the Birds Directive provisions.

## Recommendations

**BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Government of Cyprus to implement the following recommendations:**

- 1) **Legislative:** The Cyprus Parliament to reverse amendments to the law "Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species" and to restore the fine for the offenses of possession and use of limesticks and hunting of 14 protected, non-game species from 200 for up to 50 birds to 2000 euros for one bird. Unless this happens, Cyprus will be faced with the possibility of infringement proceedings from the European Commission.
- 2) **Enforcement:**
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit to take an active role in the fight against wildlife crime, and especially against large scale, organised trappers.
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit and the Game and Fauna Service need to establish a close collaboration in order to have an effective enforcement action against the large scale, organized trappers.
  - The Cyprus authorities need to undertake increased and consistent enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants serving illegal ambelopoulia "delicacies" (to address demand).
- 3) **Cooperation with NGOs:** The Cyprus competent authorities to strengthen the collaboration with environmental NGOs on the ground, adopting a similar approach to that taken by the SBA Police, in order to make enforcement action more effective.
- 4) **Judiciary:** Training to be provided to the Judiciary and Prosecutors regarding the on-the-spot fine system and the seriousness of trapping as a wildlife crime, in order to address the large discrepancy observed between on-the-spot fines issued and court sentences handed out. We consider that the Game and Fauna Service, as the responsible authority for the implementation of the Birds legislation, is best placed to carry out this training.

**BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB calls upon the SBA Administration to implement the following recommendations:**

- 1) **Enforcement:** The SBA Police to maintain a well-staffed anti-trapping unit, in order to continue to be a deterrent and effective unit, thus maintaining the low trapping levels recorded in recent years.
- 2) **Cooperation with NGOs:** The SBA Administration and Police to continue with the collaborative partnership approach adopted with environmental NGOs and the implementation and review of its action plan.

**At the same time, BirdLife Cyprus calls on the European Commission** to continue to pressure the Cypriot Government for the abolition of the lower fines for illegal trapping and hunting of migratory birds. This would send a clear message to the Cyprus Government and the national Parliament that any provisions that have led to a lower protection status and would negatively impact the conservation of migratory wild birds would not be permitted and tolerated by the European Union. Action now would potentially stop further relaxations to the law in the future, particularly as there is increasing pressure from hunting lobbies for further relaxations including the forbidding of activists to 'disturb' hunting activity and the widespread permitting of training of hunting dog during the breeding months.

## Bibliography

- BirdLife Cyprus (February 2024). '*UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus – Autumn 2023 trapping report*'. Available [here](#).
- BirdLife International (March 2016). Scientific paper published on Bird Conservation International journal with title '*Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean*'. Authors: Brochet AL *et al*. Available [here](#).
- Sebastianelli, M., Moysi, M., Savva, G. and Kirschel, A. 2020. Tape Lures Swell Bycatch On A Mediterranean Island Harbouring Illegal Bird Trapping. p.2. Article available [here](#).
- Magnin G. 1987. 'An account of illegal catching and shooting of birds in Cyprus during 1986'.
- Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus – MBCC. 2014. 'Zero tolerance of illegal killing of wild birds. Cyprus Annual report 2014. Bee-eaters need help'.
- Mukhin A, Chernetsov N, Kishkinev D. 2008. 'Acoustic information as a distant cue for habitat recognition by nocturnally migrating passerines during landfall'. Behavioural Ecology 19: 716-723.
- Pannekoek, J. & van Strien, A. 2005. 'TRIM 3 Manual (TRENDS & INDICES FOR MONITORING DATA)'. Statistics Netherlands.
- Savva, G.A. 2016. 'The effect of playback of *Sylvia atricapilla* and *S. melanocephala* songs in attracting conspecific and heterospecific individuals'. MSc Thesis, University of Cyprus.
- Scientific paper preparation in progress. Schaub M, Schwilch R, Jenni L. 1999. 'Does tape-luring of migrating Eurasian reed warblers increase number of recruits or capture probability?' The Auk 116(4): 1047-1053.

## 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> for Famagusta/Eastern Larnaca area and 111 km<sup>2</sup> for Ayios Theodoros – Maroni area, bringing the total survey area to 406 km<sup>2</sup>. This was done after preliminary surveys in autumn 2006 found evidence of extensive trapping on the margins of the original (261 km<sup>2</sup>) 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 km<sup>2</sup> squares of the expanded survey area, 301 have been classified as ‘possible bird trapping area’ squares.

In 2017, the Ayios Nikolaos Area of the ESBA was added into the survey after reports from CABS of extensive trapping taking place in this area. An additional 18 squares were added to the survey area bringing the new total to 405 squares adding up to 310 square kilometres.

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 5: Prepared (P) net ride**



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



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



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

### Limesticks

While the main effort of the observers is to locate evidence of mist netting, all evidence of limestick activity is also recorded. Limesticks are much harder to locate in the field than mist nets and are often set in a different habitat to mist nets. In addition, incidental evidence for limestick use is hard to detect (though trees pruned to hold limesticks are readily identifiable). It is impractical to search entire 1 km<sup>2</sup> 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 2024

*Confidential information – provided upon request*



## Appendix 3

### Estimation of numbers of birds caught during autumn 2024

It is important to note 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 for the death toll estimation), following the recommendation included in the BTO assessment report (July 2015) to revise slightly the calculation.

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
- 405 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 considered 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)

$$= [(693+0+181) / (12) \times (20) \times (405/60) \times (60)]$$

$$= \mathbf{589,950} \text{ birds could have been caught within the survey area in } \mathbf{mist \text{ nets}}.$$

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)

$$= 145 \times 0.5 \times (405/60) \times 60$$

$$= \mathbf{29,363} \text{ birds caught within the survey area on } \mathbf{limesticks}$$

**In total 619,313 birds** could have been killed in mist nets and on limesticks within the survey area during autumn 2024. Assuming that the survey area accounts for 75% of the trapping activity in Cyprus, the bird death toll in Cyprus is:

$$= 619,313 / 75\%$$

$$= \mathbf{825,750} \text{ birds could have been killed in nets and on limesticks across all Cyprus during autumn 2024.}$$

**Note:** these death toll estimates do not take into consideration any illegal bird trapping taking place into the Turkish occupied part of Cyprus.

## Appendix 4

### TRIM model description

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

In other words, TRIM enables us to use the data from all the trapping survey squares ever surveyed under the BirdLife Cyprus surveillance programme during the autumn period, in total 104 squares, even though these squares were not all covered each autumn season. The programme 'fills in' missing values for squares that were not covered in a particular year on the basis of the general trend derived from the data as a whole. The TRIM software (freely available from [here](#)) is very widely used for analysis of field data from ecological or biological studies. It works as an index, setting the first year of a time series of data the value of 100 (in this case year 2002) and showing up or down changes in subsequent years relative to this value of 100. TRIM program allows the user to select various models to undertake the analysis: a) Model 1: No time-effects, b) Model 2: Linear (switching) trend, and c) Model 3: Effects for each time-point. **For the analysis presented in this report BirdLife Cyprus has selected Model 2, following the advice of RSPB senior conservation scientist Mr Simon Wotton.** Below is an explanation of why.

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

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

**BirdLife Cyprus has used the 'Linear trend model by using the stepwise procedure and with all years selected as changepoints' for the trend analysis presented in this report, following the recommendation of RSPB senior conservation scientist Mr Simon Wotton.** The linear trend model can be run without any changepoints selected. Thereby it imputes missing counts based on the trend over the whole period studied. Be careful in using the model without any changepoints; the resulting indices might be unrealistic (this is the key point why this approach was not recommended and all years were selected as changepoints).