



## UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus

Covering the autumn 2025 findings of BirdLife Cyprus' continuing monitoring programme for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and providing an overview of the latest developments regarding the problem

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## Περίληψη

Τα αποτελέσματα του προγράμματος συστηματικής παρακολούθησης για την περίοδο παγίδευσης φθινοπώρου 2025 έδειξαν ότι η παγίδευση με δίχτυα αυξήθηκε κατά 4% σε σύγκριση με πέρσι. Συνολικά, η χρήση δικτύων για το φθινόπωρο 2025 ήταν κατά 86% 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.

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 2025 υπήρχαν 7.857 μέτρα ενεργών διαδρομών με δίχτυα εντός της περιοχής έρευνας. Με αυτά τα δεδομένα, εκτιμάται ότι μπορεί να θανατώθηκαν περίπου 726.000 πουλιά εντός της περιοχής έρευνας.

Σε επίπεδο δικαιοδοσίας, φαίνεται να υπήρξε μείωση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα, εντός της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας και αύξηση στις περιοχές των Βρετανικών Βάσεων Δεκέλειας, σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2024. Από το 2002, ενώ υπήρξαν ορισμένες σημαντικές διακυμάνσεις στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα, η συνολική μακροπρόθεσμη τάση παρουσιάζει απότομη μείωση.

Συνολικά, η παγίδευση με δίχτυα εντός των περιοχών των Βρετανικών Βάσεων Δεκέλειας το φθινόπωρο 2025 παρουσίασε εμφανή αύξηση 55% σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2024. Θεωρούμε ότι αυτή η αύξηση οφείλεται σε μεγάλο βαθμό στην αναδιοργάνωση της ομάδας πάταξης λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας των Βρετανικών Βάσεων και των επιχειρησιακών καθηκόντων της, η οποία άλλαξε τη στρατηγική προληπτικής δράσης με νυχτερινές περιπολίες για όλη την περίοδο της παγίδευσης σε μια πιο κατασταλτική προσέγγιση, επικεντρωμένη στη διοργάνωση ενεδρών σε συγκεκριμένες τοποθεσίες μετά από τη συλλογή πληροφοριών. Η αλλαγή της στρατηγικής είχε ως στόχο την εξοικονόμηση πόρων των αστυνομικών των Βρετανικών Βάσεων για να μπορούν να επωμιστούν περαιτέρω επιχειρησιακά καθήκοντα πέραν της λαθροθηρίας και της παράνομης παγίδευσης. Ωστόσο, οι παγιδευτές μάλλον εκμεταλλεύτηκαν τη μειωμένη αστυνομική παρουσία στο πεδίο, με αποτέλεσμα να καταγραφούν αυξημένα επίπεδα παγίδευσης, ακόμη και στο Κάβο Πύλα, μια διαβόητη περιοχή παγίδευσης, στην οποία, λόγω της προηγούμενης αποτελεσματικής διωκτικής δράσης, δεν είχε καταγραφεί καμία δραστηριότητα παγίδευσης από το 2019. Το BirdLife Cyprus αναγνωρίζει τις μακροχρόνιες προσπάθειες επιβολής του νόμου από την Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων, αλλά θεωρεί ότι θα πρέπει να επανέλθει η προληπτική στρατηγική περιπολιών και επιχειρήσεων. Η στρατηγική αυτή έχει αποδειχθεί ιδιαίτερα αποτελεσματική στην πράξη την τελευταία δεκαετία, οδηγώντας σε σημαντική μείωση των επιπέδων παγίδευσης στις Βρετανικές Βάσεις Δεκέλειας.

Όσον αφορά τα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με δίχτυα στην Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία, το φθινόπωρο 2025 υπήρξε μείωση 47%, σε σύγκριση με το φθινόπωρο του 2024. Την τελευταία δεκαετία το BirdLife Cyprus και η Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) έχουν καταγγείλει στις αρχές αρκετές φορές τους συγκεκριμένους παγιδευτές, χωρίς όμως την αντίστοιχη αποτελεσματική διωκτική δράση εναντίον τους. Προς τα τέλη Σεπτεμβρίου 2025, οι Βρετανοί περιβαλλοντικοί ακτιβιστές Chris Packham και Megan McCubbin συνεργάστηκαν με την Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) για να

αποκαλύψουν μια οργανωμένη ομάδα παγιδευτών σε περιοχή της επαρχίας Λάρνακας, η οποία είχε καταγγεληθεί επανειλημμένα στις αρχές εδώ και πολλά χρόνια. Μετά από χρόνια ελάχιστης διωκτικής δράσης, η εκτεταμένη δημοσιότητα έπαιξε καθοριστικό ρόλο στην κινητοποίηση των αρχών. Πραγματοποιήθηκαν οχτώ στοχευμένες επιχειρήσεις ενάντια συγκεκριμένων μεγάλων οργανωμένων κυκλωμάτων παγίδευσης. Οι ενέργειες αυτές οδήγησαν στην επιβολή προστίμων πέραν των €157.000 και αποτελούν ένα σημαντικό βήμα καταπολέμησης αυτών των οργανωμένων παγιδευτών με δίχτυα, τα οποία πολλές φορές εμπλέκονται και με άλλα σοβαρά αδικήματα, όπως η διακίνηση ναρκωτικών και όπλων. Το διεθνές ρεπορτάζ ανέδειξε τις μακροχρόνιες αδυναμίες στην επιβολή της νομοθεσίας και λειτούργησε ως μοχλός πίεσης για την κινητοποίηση της Κυπριακής Κυβέρνησης και των αρμόδιων αρχών, ώστε να αναλάβουν πιο ενεργό ρόλο στην αντιμετώπιση της οργανωμένης παγίδευσης πουλιών. Παράλληλα, κατέδειξε ότι η αποτελεσματική εφαρμογή της νομοθεσίας είναι εφικτή όταν υπάρχει η απαραίτητη πολιτική βούληση. Το BirdLife Cyprus αναγνωρίζει τις προσπάθειες της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας και Πανίδας και της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου και ευελπιστούμε ότι οι πρόσφατες επιχειρήσεις μηδενικής ανοχής θα αποτελέσουν ορόσημο και θα συνεχίσουν και το 2026.

Παρόλα αυτά, για ακόμη μια χρονιά η παγίδευση με ξόβεργα παραμένει σε υψηλά επίπεδα. Αυτά τα ευρήματα υποστηρίζονται τόσο από τα στοιχεία που αφορούν προσπάθειες δίωξης της Υπηρεσίας Θήρας και Πανίδας όσο και από τα ευρήματα της CABS. Ενώ το ύψος του εξώδικου πρόστιμου για το αδίκημα της παράνομης παγίδευσης με δίχτυα είναι αποτρεπτικό σε μεγάλο βαθμό, αφού ξεκινά από 2000 ευρώ, στην περίπτωση της παράνομης παγίδευσης με ξόβεργα, το πρόστιμο ξεκινά από μόλις 200 ευρώ, κάτι που δεν είναι ούτε τιμωρητικό ούτε αποτρεπτικό. Πιστεύουμε ότι είναι αυτός ο κυριότερος λόγος που δεν έχει υπάρξει ουσιαστική μείωση στα επίπεδα παγίδευσης με ξόβεργα.

#### **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 συνεχίσει τις στοχευμένες επιχειρήσεις κατά των μεγάλων οργανωμένων παγιδευτών, σε συνεργασία με την Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας, εφαρμόζοντας με έμπρακτο τρόπο το Μνημόνιο Συνεργασίας που υπέγραψαν οι δύο αρχές στις αρχές Ιουλίου 2023.
  - Ο Ουλαμός Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας της Αστυνομίας Κύπρου και η Υπηρεσία Θήρας και Πανίδας, σε συνεργασία με την Νομική Υπηρεσία να εξετάσουν εναλλακτικές ποινές για όσους δεν πληρώνουν τα πρόστιμά τους, παρόμοιες με αυτές της Αστυνομίας των Βάσεων, όπως κατάσχεση οχημάτων και απώλεια ενοικιαζόμενης γης.
  - 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 τις 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 και την Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να εφαρμόσει τις ακόλουθες συστάσεις:**

**1) Διωκτική Δράση:**

- Η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να επαναφέρει την επιχειρησιακή προσέγγιση προληπτικής δράσης (νυχτερινές περιπολίες) που εφάρμοσε στο παρελθόν, καθώς αυτή αποτελεί μια πιο αποτελεσματική μέθοδο αντιμετώπισης του προβλήματος της παράνομης παγίδευσης.
- Η Αστυνομία των Βρετανικών Βάσεων να διατηρήσει επαρκώς στελεχωμένο τον Ουλαμό Πάταξης Λαθροθηρίας, ούτως ώστε να παραμένει αποτρεπτικός και αποτελεσματικός, 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 στο πεδίο, καθώς και την εφαρμογή και την αναθεώρηση του σχεδίου δράσης που έχουν σε ισχύ 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 την κατάργηση των χαμηλότερων προστίμων για την παράνομη παγίδευση και θήρευση μεταναστευτικών πουλιών. Αυτό θα στείλει ένα σαφές μήνυμα στην Κυπριακή Κυβέρνηση και στην Κυπριακή Βουλή ότι τυχόν διατάξεις που έχουν οδηγήσει σε χαμηλότερο καθεστώς προστασίας και που δύναται να έχουν αρνητικό αντίκτυπο στη διατήρηση των μεταναστευτικών πουλιών δεν επιτρέπονται και δεν είναι αποδεκτές 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 εισαγωγής ως αδίκημα της «παρενόχλησης» της νόμιμης κυνηγετικής δραστηριότητας καθώς και της εκπαίδευσης κυνηγετικών σκύλων κατά τους μήνες της αναπαραγωγικής περιόδου 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.

## Summary

The results of the systematic monitoring programme for the autumn 2025 trapping season show that trapping with mist nets increased by 4% compared to autumn 2024. Overall, mist-netting activity for autumn 2025 was 86% lower compared to the 2002 (baseline) levels within the survey area, based on analysis using the TRIM model.

The BirdLife Cyprus systematic monitoring programme is based upon a survey coverage that encompasses two jurisdictional areas: The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBA). It specifically covers the Larnaca - Famagusta and the Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas. Based on analysis of the survey data, we estimate that about 7,857m of mist net rides were active within the survey area during the autumn of 2025. Based on trapping activity recorded, it is estimated that just over 726,000 birds may have been killed within the survey area.

Within the two jurisdictions, there was an apparent decrease in mist net trapping in the RoC and an apparent increase in the ESBA compared to autumn 2024. 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.

Overall, mist-net trapping within the ESBA areas during autumn 2025 showed an apparent increase of 55% compared to autumn 2024. We believe this increase is largely due to the reorganisation of the Sovereign Base Area Police (SBA) anti-poaching unit and its operational duties, which shifted from a proactive strategy of night patrols throughout the trapping season to a more reactive approach focused on carrying out ambushes at specific locations following intelligence gathering. This operational change was aimed at saving police resources in order for the officers to be given additional operational duties and cases unrelated to bird trapping and poaching. However, trappers seemingly exploited the reduced police presence in the field, resulting in increased levels of trapping, including at Cape Pyla, a notorious trapping area that had recorded no trapping activity since 2019 due to previously effective enforcement. BirdLife Cyprus acknowledges the long-term enforcement efforts of the SBA Police, but believes that the proactive strategy of patrols and operations should be reinstated. This strategy has proven highly effective in practice in the last decade, leading to a significant reduction in trapping levels within the Eastern Sovereign Base Area.

Trapping activity levels with mist nets within the Republic of Cyprus areas for autumn 2025 showed an apparent decrease of 47% compared to autumn 2024. During the last decade, BirdLife Cyprus and Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) have reported major organised trappers, on multiple occasions, without the corresponding effective enforcement action being taken against them. Towards the end of September 2025, UK environmental campaigners Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin's worked with the CABS to expose a group of organised trappers at a site in the Larnaca district which has been repeatedly reported to the authorities for many years. After many years of very limited enforcement effort, the high-profile media coverage played a pivotal role in mobilising the authorities. Eight targeted raids took place against specific major organized trapping operations during autumn 2025. These actions resulted in fines exceeding €157,000 and represent a significant step in tackling these organized trapping networks, which are often also involved in other serious crimes such as drug and arms trafficking. The international coverage of the issue, highlighted longstanding weaknesses in enforcement and a lever of pressure on the Cypriot government and relevant authorities. It encouraged

a more active response against organised bird trapping and demonstrated that effective enforcement is possible when the necessary political will is in place. BirdLife Cyprus recognizes the efforts of the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police and we hope that the recent zero-tolerance operations will mark a turning point and will continue into 2026.

For yet another season, limestick trapping activity has remained at relatively high levels. These findings are supported by the enforcement statistics data of the Game and Fauna Service and findings of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS). While fines for mist netting can be effective and act as a deterrent to a large degree, as they start from 2000 euros upwards, in the case of illegal trapping with limesticks, fines start at a mere 200 euros, which is neither punitive nor deterrent. BirdLife Cyprus believes this to be the main reason why there has not been a substantial reduction in levels of limestick use.

**BirdLife Cyprus calls upon the Cyprus Government 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 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 should continue targeted operations against large-scale organised trappers, in cooperation with the Game and Fauna Service, implementing in practice the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the two authorities in July 2023.
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit and Game and Fauna Service, in cooperation with the Legal Service to look into alternate punishments for those who do not pay their fines, similarly to SBA police with vehicle confiscations and loss of leases on rented land.
  - 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 and Police to implement the following recommendations:**

**1) Enforcement:**

- The SBA Police to return to their previous, preventative approach (nighttime patrols), as that has proven to be a more effective method of tackling the illegal trapping issue.
- 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 their action plan.

**At the same time, BirdLife Cyprus calls on the European Commission** to step up their pressure on 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 a proposal to include as an offence the ‘disturbance’ of legal hunting activity, as well as the widespread permitting of training of hunting dogs 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.

# 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 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>4</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*'.

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<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.') and Article 15 ('prohibition of the use of light projectors, traps, luring methods, limesticks and flushing of birds).

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

<sup>3</sup> Data source: Game and Fauna Service Facebook post (12th July 2023) regarding the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police.

<sup>4</sup> The study can be found [here](#).

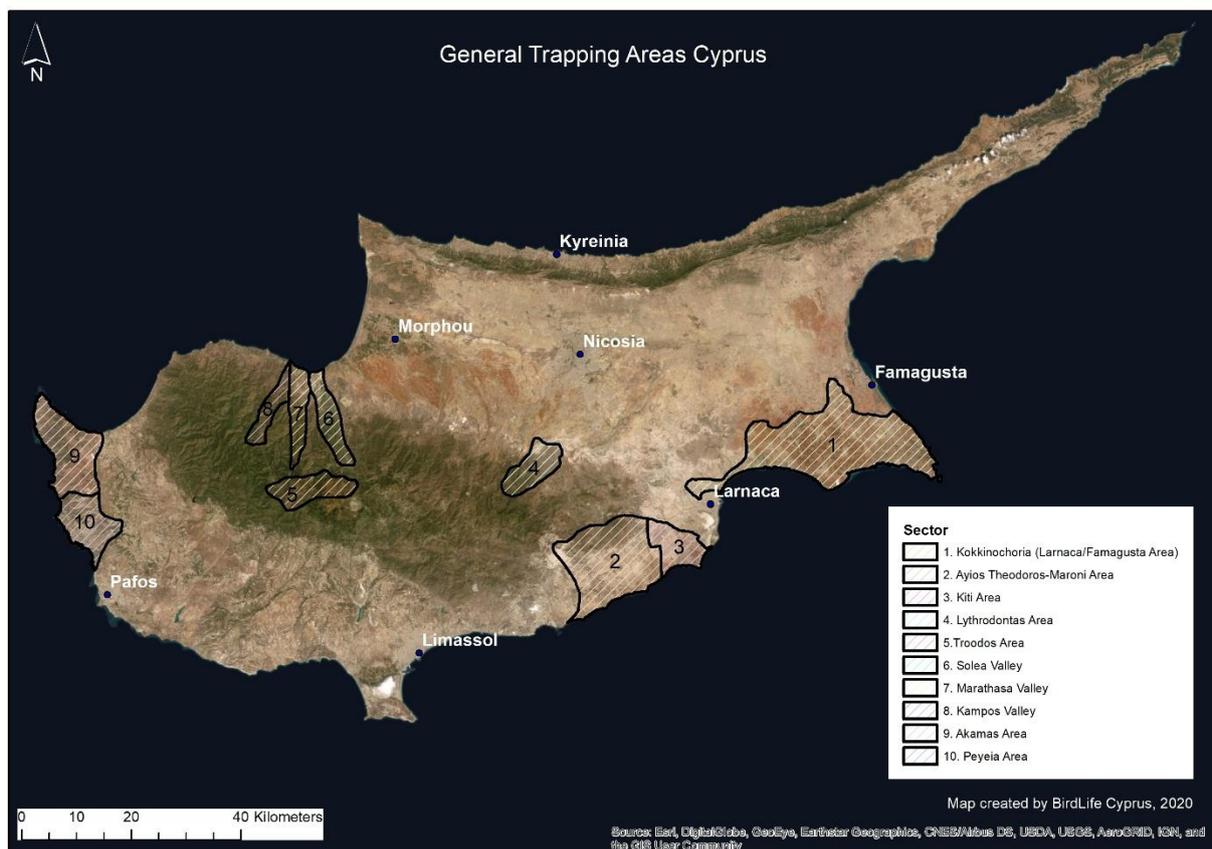
These calling devices can often be heard easily from hundreds of metres away from trapping sites during the night, highlighting the extensive use of these lures and their intensity within the trapping areas.

This report presents the latest survey results for the 2025 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, the SBA Police, and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit. 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 2025 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 2025 is presented in Appendix 2. In total, the field team recorded 61 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 1,164 metres of net rides used for mist netting. 13 mist nets were found *in situ* (either classified as Active Set Nets or Active Unset Nets<sup>5</sup>). **The total length of active mist net rides within the 405 km<sup>2</sup> survey area (Larnaca - Famagusta and Ayios Theodoros – Maroni areas) can be extrapolated to 7,857 m (1,164m x 405/ 60)<sup>6</sup> (see Appendix 2).**

BirdLife Cyprus detected 92 limesticks within the selected survey squares for autumn 2025, while opportunistic checks outside the selected survey squares detected an additional site used for limestick trapping with 28 limesticks set and 3 dead birds (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 months of September and October 2025, the Committee Against Bird Slaughter and Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt (CABS/SPA Foundation), together with enforcement agencies, seized a total of 1,501 limesticks, along with 97 mist nets<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that the CABS anti-trapping autumn camp continues until the end of November, and they detected additional illegal trapping activity in that time. 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.

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<sup>5</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>6</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 2025. 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>7</sup> Information provided from CABS on 6/1/26. For more information, and results from the full CABS autumn camp follow this [link](#).

Based on the data gathered in the field this autumn, BirdLife Cyprus estimates that **just over 726,000 birds could have been illegally killed within the survey area and just over 968,000 birds could have been killed across Cyprus**<sup>8</sup> (read Appendix 3 for more details on the estimation methodology).

If one were to split the potential death toll estimate (726,000 birds) between jurisdictions within the survey area, based on the trapping activity detected, then just over 342,000 birds would be the potential number killed in the Republic and just over 256,000 birds the potential number killed in the Eastern SBA<sup>9</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 2025. The metres of net rides that are recorded as active<sup>10</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>11</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 for Ornithology assessment report on the monitoring methodology of BirdLife Cyprus<sup>12</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.

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<sup>8</sup> The estimate does not include any illegal bird trapping possibly taking place in the Turkish occupied parts of Cyprus.

<sup>9</sup> From the 1164 metres of active net rides detected within the survey area, 489 metres were in the Republic of Cyprus (from the 39 squares surveyed), 675 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 6 above).

<sup>10</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>11</sup> This is a linear trend model using the stepwise approach and with all years selected as changepoints.

<sup>12</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.

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.

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 2025 (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 2025, the breakdown of the squares randomly selected and surveyed at a jurisdiction level were as follows:

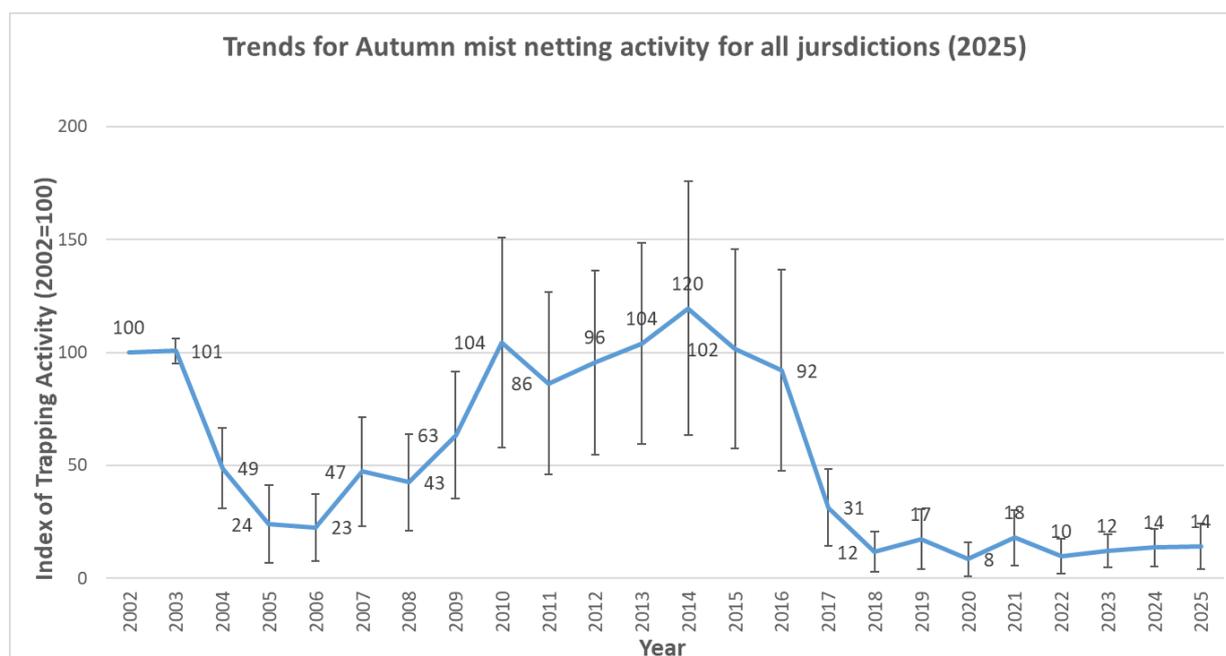
- 39 squares within the Republic of Cyprus,
- 20 squares within the Dhekelia SBA, and
- 1 'joint' square.

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>13</sup>, the index values may vary slightly for the previous autumn seasons (i.e. for autumn 2024 and earlier).

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<sup>13</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 2002-2025 based on Figure 2**

	Multiplicative trend <sup>14</sup>	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Trend direction
All squares	0.9217	0.0107	0.020972	Steep Decline

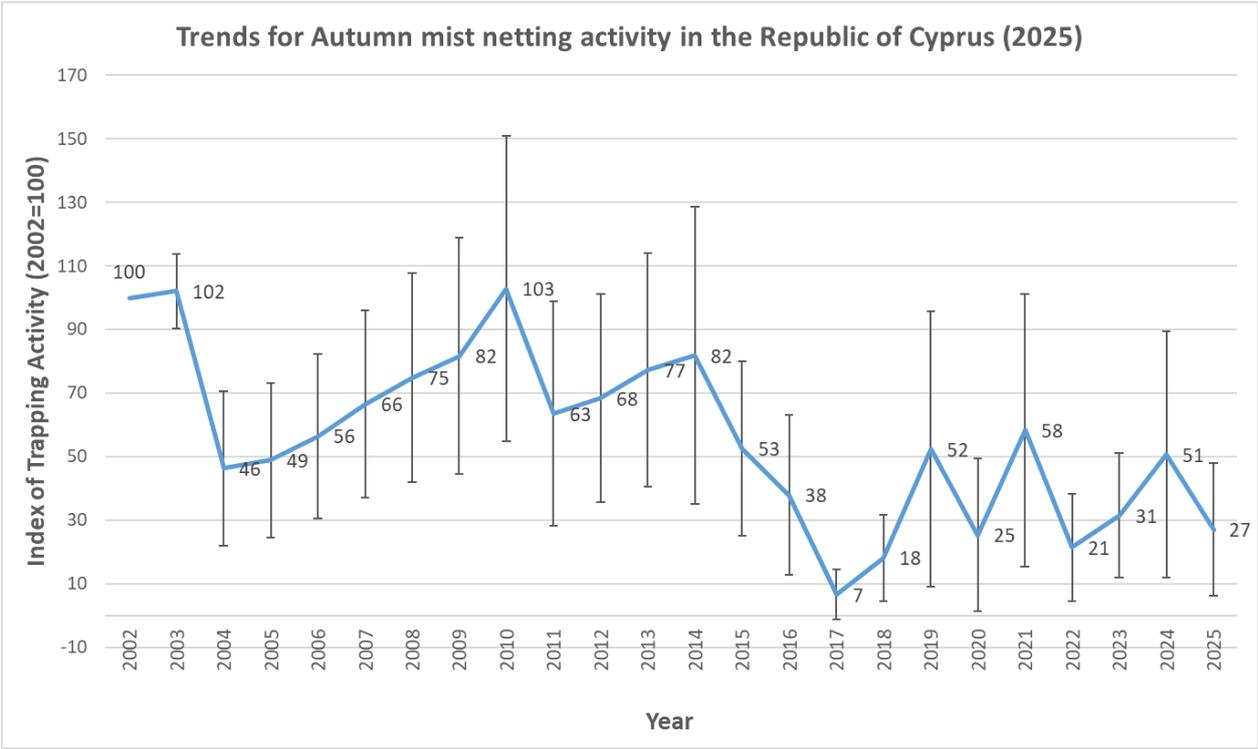
Mist netting activity for autumn 2025 appears to be 86% lower compared to the baseline year of 2002 (index value is 14 for autumn 2025) and the overall trend is a statistically significant ‘Steep Decline’. Compared to autumn 2024, mist netting appears to be at very similar levels for autumn 2025, with a small increase of 4% (13.6 in 2024, 14.1 in 2025).

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.

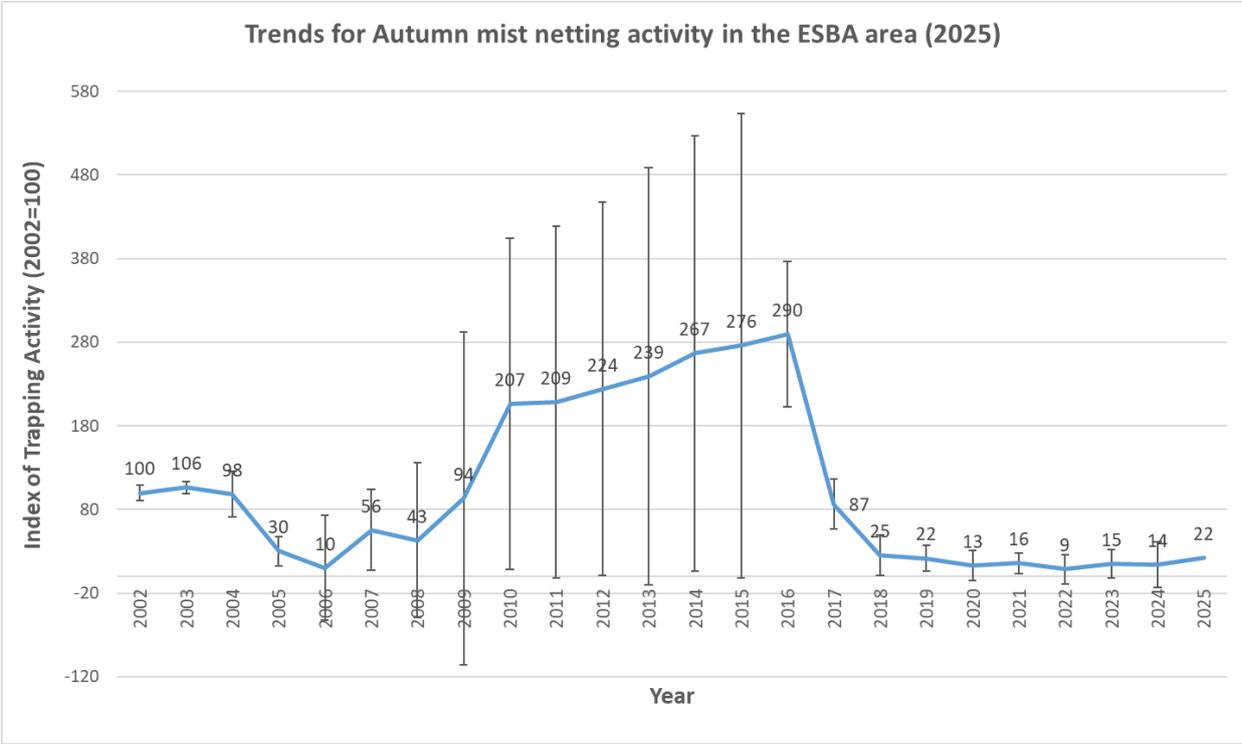
Figure 4 summarises autumn mist netting activity in the SBA applying the same ‘Linear trend model using the stepwise approach’ in the TRIM program. Note, however, that for the SBA analysis, TRIM would not run with the year 2003 as a changepoint.

<sup>14</sup> 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 0.9217 calculated above indicates an overall decrease in mist netting activity of around 8% per year.

**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 2002-2025 based on Figure 3 and Figure 4**

	Multiplicative trend	Standard error	95% confidence interval	Trend direction
RoC squares	0.9498	0.0106	0.020776	Moderate Decline
SBA squares	0.9290	0.0194	0.038024	Moderate Decline

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

- **For the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) areas, autumn 2025 mist netting activity (index value 27) showed an apparent decrease of 47% compared to autumn 2024 (index value 51). In comparison to 2002, the autumn 2025 levels were 73% lower.**
  - For the 39 squares covered within the Republic, the average within the Republic was 13 metres of active net rides per square surveyed (489/39 squares surveyed within the Republic = 13). The range of counts was from 0 to 160 metres of active net rides, while no mist net trapping at all was recorded in 31 squares.
  - For the period 2002-2025, the trend direction for the Republic is assessed as “Moderate Decline” (see Table 2).
- **For the Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (ESBAs), autumn 2025 mist netting activity (index value 22) showed an apparent increase of 55% compared to 2024 (index value of 14). In comparison to 2002, the autumn 2025 levels were 78% lower.**
  - For the 20 squares covered within the ESBAs in 2025, the average within the ESBAs was 34 metres of active net rides per square surveyed (675/20 squares surveyed within the SBA areas = 34). The range of counts was from 0 to 240 metres of active net rides, while no mist net trapping at all was recorded in 12 squares.
  - For the period 2002-2025, the trend direction for the SBA areas is assessed as “Moderate Decline” (see Table 2)

As seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the standard error bars for the ESBA 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 increased by 4% in autumn 2025 compared to autumn 2024.

Within the ESBA, during autumn 2025 there was an apparent increase of 55% compared to autumn 2024, which we believe it is due to the SBA Police changing their enforcement tactics in regards to tackling illegal bird trapping. More specifically, the SBA Police stopped night patrolling and shifted their operational tactics from prevention to reaction based, focusing primarily on organising ambushes at specific trapping sites based on intelligence gathered. The absence of nighttime patrolling and police

field presence, compared to previous years, was quickly noticed by trappers, which subsequently led to an increase in bird trapping levels during the past autumn. Birdlife Cyprus expressed concerns of this change in SBA police operational tactics at the very start of the trapping season, warning of an increase in trapping levels within their jurisdiction. Enforcement efforts by the SBA police were very slightly increased during the autumn trapping season, however this was not sufficient to avoid the increased trapping levels as recorded during the joint field monitoring undertaken between BirdLife Cyprus and the SBA Police. BirdLife Cyprus believes that the SBA Police needs to reinstate its previous operational enforcement tactics, including night patrolling, in order to have a deterrent presence within its jurisdiction.

Within the RoC jurisdiction, during autumn 2025 an apparent decrease of 47% compared to 2024 was noted. Similarly, to the previous two years, a series of active trapping locations found in autumn 2025 were known to be operated by large scale, organised trappers, particularly in the Larnaca district. At the end of September, naturalists and presenters Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin, together with CABS, organised a field and communication campaign against one of the most notorious trapping sites in Cyprus, including the live streaming of illegal bird trapping on site, exposing the lack of effective enforcement action by the authorities, particularly by the Cyprus Police. Their livestream, over the course of several days, generated a lot of traction and exposure of this issue, both in international and national media, with BirdLife Cyprus giving various TV and radio interviews on the issue. It appears that the pressure exerted from the exposure of this issue eventually led to the Cyprus Police taking a more active enforcement role in clamping down on large-scale trappers. This was a highly significant step, with Cyprus Police adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach against these organised trappers, whom have been operating with impunity for over a decade. We hope that deterrent enforcement action from the Cyprus Police against large scale trappers will continue into the Autumn 2026, with the cooperation of the Game and Fauna Service. The necessary political will needs to be maintained to allow the enforcement authorities to undertake their work. 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 increased by 4% during autumn 2025 compared to autumn 2024, based on the survey data from BirdLife Cyprus. The enforcement efforts of the SBA Police, the Game and Fauna Service, and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit are fully acknowledged. In particular, Autumn 2025 showcased that Cyprus authorities, when motivated, are fully capable, equipped and trained to clamp down on large scale, organised trappers, adopting a zero tolerance towards this wildlife crime. At the same time, it highlighted the importance of maintaining well-staffed Anti-Poaching Units, and continuing preventative patrols, particularly in the case of the SBA Police.**

## **Enforcement**

### Overview of enforcement for Autumn 2025

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. 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 five officers for the entirety of the Autumn 2025 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>15</sup>. The unit is comprised of 8 officers, but can be reinforced with more officers as and when needed, depending on the operation.

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 2011-2025. Table 4 shows the enforcement data for the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit.

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<sup>15</sup> Ministerial Council Decision dated 8/6/2023 for the re-instatement of the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching Unit found [http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/FA9B58D683D24C83C2258A7B00241F5D/\\$file/94.895.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/FA9B58D683D24C83C2258A7B00241F5D/$file/94.895.pdf?OpenElement).

**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 2011-2025**

	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	2025	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
No of trappers arrested / cases	57	70	78	64	54	35	19	21	25	26	57	48	41	40	61	23	22	22	30	17	29	6	12	8	4	9	10	3	7	2
No of mist nets <sup>1</sup>	204	311	287	235	230	195	39	34	21	34	83	52	58	68	117	361	275	227	184	181	496	154	51	20	13	26	16	22	22	27
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	1,589	290	314	516	256	234	295	259	116	97	29	105	36	95	9	23

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 2025 provided from Game and Fauna Larnaca & Famagusta district officer via email (14<sup>th</sup> January 2026)

Note 3: Data for 2025 provided from SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit sergeant via email (22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026).

**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 2023-2025**

	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>	2025 <sup>4</sup>
No of trappers arrested / cases	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	28	36	13	4	N/A				1	1	14 <sup>5</sup>
No of mist nets <sup>1</sup>	N/A	116	N/A	116	121	164	37	5	N/A				6	2	61
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	0

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

Note 4: Data provided by Cyprus Police via email on 12/2/25 as well as collated from news articles throughout Autumn 2025

Note 5: Number of trappers arrested was not clear in the information provided by Cyprus police, so that number is based on official police press releases as well as an assumption that at least one person was arrested during each police operation.

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 2025 show a large increase in arrests (61) compared to autumn 2024 (40).
- SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit – Dhekelia Sovereign Base: The enforcement data for autumn 2025 show that two people were arrested for trapping, compared to seven during autumn 2024. This reduction in prosecutions is a result of the change in enforcement strategy by SBA police, ahead of the autumn 2025 trapping season.
- Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit: The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit was re-instated in June 2023. From the enforcement data provided it is apparent that during autumn 2025 this unit and the Cyprus Police took a more proactive role in tackling illegal bird trapping, particularly at large scale trapping sites, with fourteen trappers being arrested.

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 2025 were similar in number to Autumn 2024, however, with no prosecutions taking place (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<sup>16</sup>**

	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>	2025 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Restaurant checks</b>	20	31	18	7	14	8	12	21	20	7	10	5	6	4	4	5
<b>Restaurant prosecutions</b>	13	15	8	3	1	1	1	7	5	0	1	1	0	2	1	0

<sup>16</sup> Data Source: Email sent to BirdLife Cyprus by Game and Fauna Service official (16/1/26)

### Feedback from competent authorities to BirdLife Cyprus reports

Table 6 summarises the number of reports for findings of 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 24 locations to the Game and Fauna Service. Arrests took place related to two of the locations reported by BirdLife Cyprus, either just before the site was found to be active, or sometime after. Confiscations took place at eight locations, some of which as part of the aforementioned arrests. Checks were conducted at a further 14 locations, with no further action taking place, whereas at one location, a joint operation with the Cyprus Police Anti-poaching unit led to the arrest of one individual.

With regards to the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit, after pressure on them from both BirdLife Cyprus and CABS, due to Chris Packham's campaign, they were able to conduct eight raids on known large scale trapping sites, and multiple arrests and confiscations were made. See Table 10 below for more information regarding those raids.

With regards to the Eastern SBA Police Anti-Poaching Unit, 15 trapping locations were reported to this agency. Arrests took place at two locations, with one of the suspects successfully being prosecuted. Confiscations of trapping equipment (nets/limesticks) took place at four locations. The remaining ten locations were surveilled, with no further developments taking place

**Table 6 Summary of trapping reports provided to competent authorities from BirdLife Cyprus during autumns 2012-2025**

	Game and Fauna Service – Larnaca & Famagusta														SBA Anti-Poaching Police Unit													
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
<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	24	52	38	40	51	34	26	12	14	9	18	6	21	9	15
<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>	3	9	8	6	4	5	0	7 <sup>6</sup>	0	2 <sup>7</sup>	3 <sup>9</sup>	0	1	1	2
<b>Confiscations<sup>3</sup></b>	10	8	11	None	1	N/F	N/F	2	2	2	7	0	12 <sup>13</sup>	7	22	18	5	10	14	3	2	6	4	4 <sup>10</sup>	3	1	1	4
<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	12	21	12	29	37	15	23	8	8	6	14 <sup>11</sup>	3	19	7	10

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 2023-2025**

Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit											
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2023	2024	2025
<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>	3
<b>Arrests<sup>2</sup></b>	N/R	1	2 <sup>5</sup>	1	2	N/R	2	2	1	0	2
<b>Confiscations<sup>3</sup></b>	N/R	N/A	N/A	2	0	N/R	3	0	0	0	3
<b>Clearance/Nothing found<sup>4</sup></b>	N/R	N/A	N/A	9	6	N/R	2	0	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, eight 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 Game and Fauna Service enforcement statistics data and the CABS survey data. We believe this to be a setback regarding the conservation and protection of migratory birds in Cyprus, as explained in the previous 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 2025 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 60% of the fines handed out so far have been paid (763 from 1,262), however the money these fines equate to (€1,515,826) only add up to around 34% of the total money from all the fines (€4,442,942). It appears that fines of approximately 5,000 euros and higher are usually not paid (based on averages), with offenders being sent to the courts for prosecution. It is important to highlight that unpaid fines which were led to court (480 in number) equate to a noticeable 54% 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-spot 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 5,000 euros) and the court sentences (on average 1,600 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. Over the last few years however, we noted 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 of this, 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 2025<sup>17</sup>**

	No. of Fines	Amount in Euro
Fines that have been paid	763	1,515,826
Fines still pending payment	19 <sup>1</sup>	
Fines that haven't been paid and will/have gone to court	480	2,394,684
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	1,262	4,442,942

Note 1. There is no monetary value listed for fines still pending payment because offenders may receive “discounts” if they pay within a specified time period. Since that period has not yet expired, the final amount may be lower if payment is made early.

**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>18</sup>
780	4,989	1,600

<sup>17</sup> Information received from Game and Fauna Service official on 16/1/26

<sup>18</sup> Information provided from Game and Fauna Service official during telephone conversation on 28/1/2026

## ***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>19</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 2025, 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.

At the end of September, journalist, naturalist, and television presenter Chris Packham, together with Megan McCubbin, visited Cyprus for approximately five days, joining CABS to expose the ineffectiveness of the Cyprus Government—particularly the enforcement agencies, namely the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police—in tackling large-scale, organised bird trapping. During their visit, they live-streamed the illegal killing of birds at one of the most notorious trapping sites on the island, located in the Larnaca district, publicly calling on the authorities to clamp down on this illegal activity. On multiple occasions, they faced verbal threats and physical intimidation from trappers, who continued their illegal activities largely unaffected by the presence of activists. On one occasion, a trapper, considered to be one of the main operators in the area, agreed to an interview with Chris Packham. During this interview, he openly admitted to bird trapping, discussed the number of birds he had caught, and demonstrated a clear disregard for the law and a lack of fear of enforcement authorities. See Appendix 5 for videos of the interactions with the bird trappers. This exposure drew much attention on social media and coverage on national and international media, with BirdLife Cyprus giving various TV and radio interviews on the issue. See Appendix 5 for links to TV and radio interviews. Eventually, the Cyprus Police raided three large scale, organised trapping sites in the Larnaca district, carrying out eight separate raids in collaboration with the Game and Fauna Service, resulting in the issuing of fines totalling over

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<sup>19</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*).

€157,000. The raids also revealed links between these trappers and organised crime, as drugs and weapons were also confiscated. During one of the raids at a trapper’s residence the Cyprus authorities confiscated nearly 1000 dead birds packaged and ready for sale, highlighting the scale of this ecological issue and how lucrative a business it can be. See Appendix 5 for press releases regarding the raids conducted by the Cyprus Police.

Table 10, below, provides a detailed breakdown of the items seized during these raids and the fines issued by Cyprus authorities.

**Table 10. Raids carried out against large scale trappers<sup>20</sup>**

	Date of Raid	Mistnets	Calling Devices	Birds Found		Fines handed out (€)
				Dead	Alive	
<b>Trapper 1</b>	23/9/25	2				2,500
	26/9/25	10	4	63	343	26,000
	5/10/25	3	4	1	6	8,500
<b>Trapper 2</b>	3/10/25	16	4	1103	147	47,000
	12/10/25	8	1	87	83	20,000
	25/10/25	11	2	7	26	23,000
	2/11/25	11	1	41	121	27,000
<b>Trapper 3</b>	11/10/25		1	165		3,600
<b>Totals</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1467</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>157,600</b>

During Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin’s visit to Cyprus, the Movement of United Cypriot Hunters was highly vocal on social media, portraying the activists almost as foreign invaders who were disturbing legal hunters and were in Cyprus to tarnish the country’s reputation as a tourism destination, in an effort to downplay the extent and scale of illegal bird trapping as a serious wildlife crime on migratory birds. However, the confiscations from the raids by the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit on large-scale trappers have revealed that illegal bird trapping is in fact a serious wildlife crime and organised trappers make thousands of euros each year by illegally selling songbirds for domestic consumption.

*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, which is greatly acknowledged.

The autumn 2024 season saw a reduction in illegal bird trapping within the ESBA areas, due to an increase in size of the SBA police Anti-Poaching unit and hence an increase in enforcement operations. However, coming into the autumn 2025 trapping season, SBA Police decided to change their enforcement tactics with regards to tackling illegal bird trapping. More specifically, the SBA Police stopped night patrolling and shifted their operational tactics from prevention to reaction based, focusing primarily on organising ambushes at specific trapping sites based on intelligence gathered. The

<sup>20</sup> Data acquired from Game and Fauna Service official via telephone call in November 2025

absence of nighttime patrolling and police field presence, compared to previous years, was quickly noticed by trappers, which subsequently led to a marked increase in trapping levels within the ESBA areas compared to autumn 2024 (see Figure 4). It is clear that the new tactics adopted by SBA Police are not effective and are no longer deterrent and the SBA Police should reinstate the previous preventative night patrols 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 autumn 2025 increased by 4% compared to autumn 2024, within the survey area, which covers the worst trapping areas of Cyprus (see Figure 2).

With regards to the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), trapping in autumn 2025 appeared to increase by around 55% compared to autumn 2024, a concerning result, especially after the decrease noted in autumn 2024. Overall, the long-term mist netting levels for autumn 2025 showed a decrease of 78% compared to autumn 2002. Following the positive progress made last year, we were disappointed to learn that the SBA Police were planning to change their tactics regarding bird trapping. More specifically, the SBA Police stopped night patrolling and shifted their operational tactics from prevention to reaction based, focusing primarily on organising ambushes at specific trapping sites based on intelligence gathered. The absence of nighttime patrolling and police field presence, compared to previous years, was quickly noticed by trappers, which subsequently led to an increase in bird trapping levels during the past autumn. Birdlife Cyprus expressed concerns of this change in SBA police operational tactics at the very start of the trapping season, warning of an increase in trapping levels within their jurisdiction. Enforcement efforts by the SBA police were slightly increased during the autumn trapping season, however this was not sufficient to avoid the increase in trapping levels recorded from the joint field monitoring undertaken between BirdLife Cyprus and the SBA Police. For 2026, we hope to see SBA Police return to their prevention-based tactics, with a fully staffed Anti-Poaching Unit, in order to avoid having a further setback to the excellent progress made over the last decade.

In the Republic of Cyprus, there was an apparent decrease in trapping with mist nets by 47% during autumn 2025, compared to autumn 2024 (see Figure 3). Overall, mist netting levels for autumn 2025 showed a decrease of 73% compared to autumn 2002. Birdlife Cyprus acknowledges the enforcement efforts of the Game and Fauna Service wardens and the Cyprus Police on the major trapping sites, but we would also like to emphasize the need for more effective enforcement against restaurants offering *ambelopoulia*.

BirdLife Cyprus is pleased to note that the Cyprus Police made a more determined effort this autumn to tackle large-scale bird trapping, targeting three of the largest organised trapping operations in the Larnaca district. A series of raids resulted in fines totalling over €157,000, marking significant progress in stopping these organised criminals. Many of the individuals involved in large-scale bird trapping are also linked to other serious crimes, as demonstrated by the confiscation of drugs and weapons during these police operations. BirdLife Cyprus and CABS have been reporting these specific trappers for over a decade, hence it was particularly encouraging to see decisive enforcement action taken against them. We expect the Cyprus Police and particularly their Anti-Poaching Unit, to continue their active enforcement role into 2026, in collaboration with the Game and Fauna Service, as sustained pressure from the authorities is essential to bring an end to these organised trappers who make thousands of euros from the illegal selling of songbirds. The authorities must now follow up with the cases to ensure that if the fines remain unpaid, alternate punishments are given to the offenders, such as is done in the SBA areas, with confiscations of vehicles and forfeiture of rented land.

A visit to Cyprus by naturalist and television presenter Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin at the end of September played a key role in prompting action by the Cyprus Police against the organised, large

scale bird trappers. They live-streamed incidents of illegal bird killing at one of the most notorious trapping sites in Cyprus, exposing the failure of the competent authorities to effectively address this organised criminal activity. Their actions generated a lot of traction and exposure of this issue, both in international and national media, with BirdLife Cyprus giving various TV and radio interviews on the issue. It appears that the pressure exerted from the exposure of this issue eventually led to the Cyprus Police taking a more active enforcement role in clamping down large-scale trappers.

On the other hand, 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, can be attributed to the relaxations to the “Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species law” which have happened in 2017 and 2020 the latter of which saw fines for limestick trapping offences reduced from 2000 euro to 200 euro.

During Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin’s visit to Cyprus, the Movement of United Cypriot Hunters was highly vocal on social media, portraying the activists almost as foreign invaders who were disturbing legal hunters and were in Cyprus to tarnish the country’s reputation as a tourism destination, in an effort to downplay the extent and scale of illegal bird trapping as a serious wildlife crime on migratory birds. However, the confiscations from the raids by the Cyprus Police on large-scale trappers have revealed that illegal bird trapping is infact a serious wildlife crime and organised trappers make thousands of euros each year by illegally selling songbirds for domestic consumption.

## Recommendations

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

- 5) **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 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.
- 6) **Enforcement:**
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit should continue targeted operations against large-scale organised trappers, in cooperation with the Game and Fauna Service, implementing in practice the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the two authorities in July 2023.
  - The Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching unit and Game and Fauna Service, in cooperation with the Legal Service to look into alternate punishments for those who do not pay their fines, similarly to SBA police with vehicle confiscations and loss of rented land.
  - The Cyprus authorities need to undertake increased and consistent enforcement action against law-breaking restaurants serving illegal ambelopoulia “delicacies” (to address demand).
- 7) **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.
- 8) **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 and Police to implement the following recommendations:**

- 3) **Enforcement:**
  - The SBA Police to return to their previous, preventative approach (nighttime patrols), as that has proven to be a more effective method of tackling the illegal trapping issue.
  - 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.
- 4) **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 their action plan.

**At the same time, BirdLife Cyprus calls on the European Commission** to step up their pressure on the Cyprus 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 a proposal to include as an offence the 'disturbance' of legal hunting activity, as well as the widespread permitting of training of hunting dog during the breeding months.

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# Appendix 1

## Methodology of the trapping surveillance programme

### Survey area and sampling strategy

The surveillance project began in 2002 with the coverage of 60 sample squares (each 1x1 km) chosen at random from within a 261 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 2025

**Confidential information – provided upon approval of request**

## Appendix 3

### Estimation of numbers of birds caught during autumn 2025

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)

$$= [(798+0+250) / (12) \times (20) \times (405/60) \times (60)]$$

$$= \mathbf{707,400} \text{ birds could have been caught within the survey area in } \mathbf{mist \text{ nets}.}$$

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)

$$= 92 \times 0.5 \times (405/60) \times 60$$

$$= \mathbf{18,630} \text{ birds caught within the survey area on } \mathbf{limesticks}$$

**In total 726,030 birds** could have been killed in mist nets and on limesticks within the survey area during autumn 2025. Assuming that the survey area accounts for 75% of the trapping activity in Cyprus, the bird death toll in Cyprus is:

$$= 726,030 / 75\%$$

$$= \mathbf{968,040} \text{ birds could have been killed in nets and on limesticks across all Cyprus during autumn 2025.}$$

**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 (Pannehoek & 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? (Pannehoek & van Strien 2005)

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

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

## Appendix 5

Compilation of media coverage, including articles and TV/radio interviews, relating to Chris Packham's visit and the live broadcast from a notorious trapping site in Larnaca District in September 2025.

- 1) Video of verbal threats against CABS activists can be found here:  
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=wwXlfr&v=814272041048050&rdid=GUFpjFs5pUMy0Ar0>
- 2) Video of physical intimidation against CABS activists can be found here:  
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/796846036535139>
- 3) The interview of one of the trappers by Chris Packham can be found here:  
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=wwXlfr&v=1495620364791903&rdid=Io9iUxaGfPNv0dsb>
- 4) Official press releases by the Cyprus Police regarding raids conducted on large scale trapping operations in Larnaca District:
  - a. [https://www.philenews.com/kipros/koinonia/article/1628968/astinomia-aneleiti-katastoli-tis-lathrothirias-ampelopoulion-prostima-peran-ton-e60-000-se-dio/?fbclid=IwVERDUANQN\\_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHhTkk\\_VMld6bN-9hd8wg5XOOUMgRBVwJLSTtbXpRK2RhfsPEujDCK1Oh26Ha\\_aem\\_rQNhCKY797rYGelcY7V\\_ka#Echobox=1759720282](https://www.philenews.com/kipros/koinonia/article/1628968/astinomia-aneleiti-katastoli-tis-lathrothirias-ampelopoulion-prostima-peran-ton-e60-000-se-dio/?fbclid=IwVERDUANQN_5leHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHhTkk_VMld6bN-9hd8wg5XOOUMgRBVwJLSTtbXpRK2RhfsPEujDCK1Oh26Ha_aem_rQNhCKY797rYGelcY7V_ka#Echobox=1759720282)
  - b. <https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/48815>
  - c. <https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/48779>
  - d. [https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/48926?fbclid=IwdGRjcANYmWljbGNrA1iZWGV4dG4DYWVtAjExAAEeqBjpJSarLuUcQ7C-W55YQMTnyxFLDBOURhw88SEVAPIEhFs3xUDLvoYtoc\\_aem\\_Vrv9PlumwW5G1V6jB5nFQw](https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/48926?fbclid=IwdGRjcANYmWljbGNrA1iZWGV4dG4DYWVtAjExAAEeqBjpJSarLuUcQ7C-W55YQMTnyxFLDBOURhw88SEVAPIEhFs3xUDLvoYtoc_aem_Vrv9PlumwW5G1V6jB5nFQw)
  - e. [https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/49252?fbclid=IwdGRjcANplFhjbGNrA2mT-mV4dG4DYWVtAjExAAEeGN1z7TpZ1O6WC2dRuLYD-X9uXSLwwk0quEOox40\\_lbyOdTppq1s\\_5M6lga0\\_aem\\_h6D-V\\_iNTmSBIPu3hTY97A](https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/49252?fbclid=IwdGRjcANplFhjbGNrA2mT-mV4dG4DYWVtAjExAAEeGN1z7TpZ1O6WC2dRuLYD-X9uXSLwwk0quEOox40_lbyOdTppq1s_5M6lga0_aem_h6D-V_iNTmSBIPu3hTY97A)
  - f. <https://www.cypruspolice.com/archives/48904>
- 5) BirdLife Cyprus interviews regarding illegal bird trapping in Cyprus, the ineffectiveness of the Cyprus Police to tackle large scale trappers, and complaints by the United Cyprus Hunters
  - a. <https://dialogos.com.cy/birdlife-mideniki-drasi-toy-oylamoy-pataxis-lathrothirias-apolin-epanasystasi-toy/>
  - b. <https://www.mixcloud.com/Dialogos/24-09-25-%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%86%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7-%CF%80%CF%85%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B1/>
  - c. <https://soundcloud.com/politis1076/proini-epitheorisi-25-09-2025>
  - d. <https://www.sigmatv.com/shows/meshmeri-kai-kati/episodes/41690>
  - e. <https://www.ant1live.com/webtv/enimerosi/mera-mesimeri/epeisodio-26/09/2025>
  - f. <https://www.mixcloud.com/Dialogos/26-09-25-%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%86%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7-%CF%80%CF%85%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B1/>
  - g. <https://tv.rik.cy/show/eideseis-ton-8/episode/11073/>
  - h. <https://www.omegatv.com.cy/cgibin/hweb?-A=216407&-V=vod>
  - i. <https://www.mixcloud.com/Dialogos/09-10-25-%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%86%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7-%CF%80%CF%85%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B1/>