



Committee Against
Bird Slaughter - CABS
Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V.

Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt®
Foundation Pro Biodiversity

BIRD TRAPPING IN THE ESBA: ANNUAL REPORT 2015



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Cover photo taken from article: Worst year for the Bases by Jean Christou, Cyprus Mail, March 2015

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	3
2	BRITISH SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS ON CYPRUS.....	3
3	MONITORING OF BIRD TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN THE ESBA	4
3.1	CABS & SPA field investigations in 2015.....	4
3.2	Birdlife Cyprus trapping activity surveillance programme in 2015	5
3.3	Results of the study assessing the scope and scale of illegal bird killings in Mediterranean	7
4	ENFORCEMENT AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING.....	7
4.1	Summary of SBA Police enforcement actions in 2015	7
4.2	Enforcement actions for cases reported by Birdlife Cyprus in 2015	8
4.3	Results of joint field operations of CABS & SPA teams and SBA Police in 2015.....	8
5	SBA ADMINISTRATION MEASURES AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING	9
5.1	Bird Trapping Action Plan	9
5.2	Designation of Special Areas of Conservation	9
5.3	Acacia removal in Cape Pyla	9
6	CONCLUSIONS	12
	REFERENCES	13

1 INTRODUCTION

This report compiles the available informations about field investigations and counteractions against illegal bird trapping in the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area on Cyprus in year 2015.

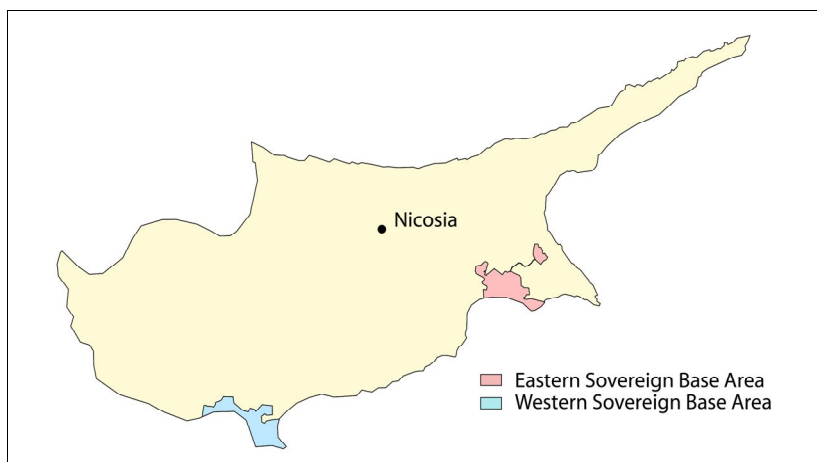
2 BRITISH SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS ON CYPRUS

Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia or the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA), as it is also called, is one of two British Overseas Territories on the island of Cyprus. As the name suggests, it is situated on the eastern side of the island, while the other one, the Sovereign Base Area of Akrotiri or the Western Sovereign Base Area, lies in the west. The areas, which include British military bases and installations, as well as other land, were established in 1960, when Cyprus achieved independence from the British Empire.

Although the SBA boundaries were drawn to exclude civilian population centres, the coup in 1974 and other developments over the years led to influx of civilians into the SBAs and approximately 7000 Cypriots now live within the SBAs. In addition, 7800 UK residents, mostly military personnel and their families, work or live on the Bases (House of Commons 2008).

Both Sovereign Base Areas are run as military bases and they report to the British Ministry of Defense in London rather than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Nevertheless, they are governed as British Overseas Territory and the leader, who is also the commander of the British Forces Cyprus, has executive and legislative powers comparable to those of a governor in a civilian overseas territory. The commander is the Administrator of the SBAs, leading a civilian administration that manages the SBAs.

The combined size of SBAs is 254 km². 20 percent of the land is owned by the UK Ministry of Defence, 20 percent by the Crown and 60 percent is privately owned and used for intensive farming (Lansford 2015). The size of ESBA alone is 131 km².



Picture 1: Sovereign Base Areas on the island of Cyprus

3 MONITORING OF BIRD TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN THE ESBA

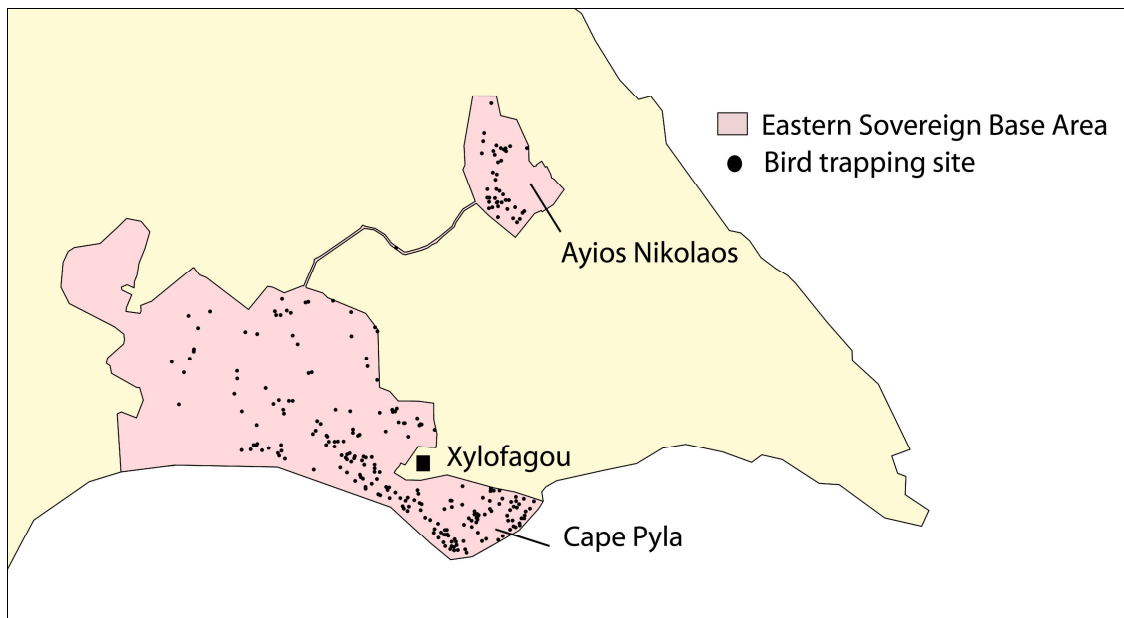
3.1 CABS & SPA FIELD INVESTIGATIONS IN 2015

Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt (SPA) volunteers started monitoring trapping activity in the ESBA in 2009, when we organised first Bird Protection Camp (BPC) in Cyprus. In the following years, we focused on investigations in the Republic of Cyprus and spent only few days per year to investigate and report trapping activity in the ESBA. In 2015, we investigated trapping activity in ESBA at all 3 Bird Protection Camps organised that year. Our investigations revealed high trapping activity scattered in the whole territory of the ESBA.

Table 1: Monitoring of trapping activity in 2015

Bird protection Camp	Winter 2014/2015	Spring 2015	Autumn 2015	Total 2015
No. of sites checked	13	15	36	64
No. of active trapping sites found	5	5	34	44
Percentage of active trapping sites	38.5	33.3	94.4	68.8

Locations of all trapping sites, found until the end of 2015 by our volunteers and by Birdlife Cyprus, are shown on the picture 2. Total number of discovered trapping sites is 262.



Picture 2: Bird trapping sites found by CABS & SPA and Birdlife Cyprus in the ESBA

As it can be seen on the picture, highest densities of trapping sites are in Cape Pyla and Ayios Nikolaos, two main hotspots for bird trapping in ESBA.

3.2 BIRDLIFE CYPRUS TRAPPING ACTIVITY SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME IN 2015

Birdlife Cyprus is systematically monitoring bird trapping activity in Cyprus since 2002. Each spring, autumn and winter they visit randomly selected sample squares (the size of each is 1 km²) during daytime in the southeastern part of Cyprus, both in Republic of Cyprus and in Eastern Sovereign Base Area. They focus on trapping with mist nets and they count the number of active net-rides to estimate the trapping activity. Limesticks are recorded, if they are found while searching for mist nets (Shialis 2016).



Picture 3: Active net-ride with unset mist net (Photo: CABS)

In 2015 they carried out surveys in winter (January and February), spring (April, May) and in autumn (September, October). Part of the surveys were conducted in Republic of Cyprus and part in the ESBA. The results of survey in ESBA are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Results of Birdlife Cyprus trapping surveys within ESBA in 2015 (Shialis 2015, Shialis 2016, Shialis 2016b)

	No. of surveyed squares	Active net-rides found (m)	Active net-rides in whole ESBA (extrapolated)	Estimated no. of killed birds
Winter 2014/2015	n/a	423	n/a	n/a
Spring 2015	19	0	0	0
Autumn 2015	21	3127	9679	880 000

1- during winter 2014/2015 survey only individual locations were visited without surveying entire squares. Because of this, extrapolation and estimation of killed birds was not possible (Shialis 2015)

2- estimated number of killed birds assumes following: 20 birds are caught per 12 metre net per day; 0.5 birds are caught per limestick per day; nets are used for 60 days in both spring and autumn season

Most of illegal bird killing on Cyprus takes place during autumn migration. This is also true for the ESBA. In autumn 2015, 3127 meters of active net-rides were detected in ESBA. When this number is extrapolated to the whole territory of ESBA, estimated 9679 meters of net-rides were active within ESBA in autumn 2015.

Considering the average length of mist net (12 metres), we can estimate that 807 mist nets were used for trapping in ESBA in 2015. Coincidentally, 880 000 birds could have been killed in ESBA in 2015.

Birdlife Cyprus is also evaluating the trend of trapping activity with comparing results of surveys from different years. Trapping trend within ESBA is shown in Figure 1.

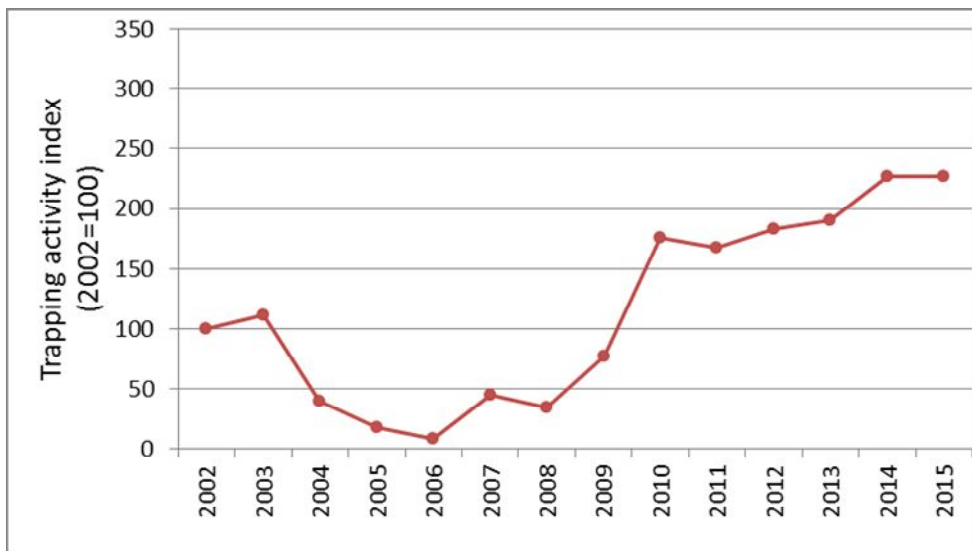


Figure 1: Autumn trapping activity trend within the UK ESBA between 2002-2015 (Shialis 2016b)

It is clear from figure 1 that trapping activity in the ESBA has increased dramatically since 2006 and for the last 2 years record breaking levels have been recorded.

3.3 RESULTS OF THE STUDY ASSESSING THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF ILLEGAL BIRD KILLINGS IN MEDITERRANEAN

Recently, a study called Preliminary assessment of the scope and scale of illegal killing and taking of birds in the Mediterranean was published in Bird Conservation International. The study estimates that in Cyprus, 2.3 million and in the whole Mediterranean, 23.5 millions birds are illegally killed each year (Brochet et al. 2016).

According to the study, 574 000 birds are illegally trapped and killed every year in the ESBA. This places ESBA on the 4th place among the single locations with largest number of killed birds in the Mediterranean (table 3).

Table 3: The 5 locations at which the largest estimated numbers of birds are killed/taken illegally each year in the Mediterranean (Brochet et al. 2016)

Location, country	Mean estimated no. of illegally killed birds/year
1. Famagusta District, Cyprus	689 000
2. Menbey Tishreen Dam, Syria	679 000
3. Manzala, Egypt	593 000
4. Eastern Sovereign Base Area	574 000
5. Akkar, Lebanon	503 000

4 ENFORCEMENT AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING

4.1 SUMMARY OF SBA POLICE ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS IN 2015

Competent authority, responsible for enforcement against illegal bird trapping in Sovereign Base Areas is the SBA Police. They have a unit specialised to counter bird trapping and illegal killing of wild birds and other animals, called Anti-Poaching Unit (APU). Table 4 shows the enforcement results achieved by the APU in the period 2011-2015.

Table 4: Results of the APU enforcement actions against poaching/bird trapping for years 2011-2015 (SBA Intelligence Analyst, written communication)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of cases	233	244	235	289	188
No. of prosecutions	46	43	37	52	26
No. of prosecutions for bird trapping	39	31	31	41	24
No. of seized mist nets	628	645	682	634	416

1- without months January, February and March

2-including the prosecutions for illegal killing of other wild animals

The results for the 2015 are worrying, as only 24 prosecutions for bird trapping were made, lowest in the last five years. This is just 11.2 % of all detected cases. Also, the number of seized mist nets in 2015 dropped considerably. In the period 2011-2014, each year more than 600 mist nets were seized, while in 2015 only 416 were seized.

4.2 ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS FOR CASES REPORTED BY BIRDLIFE CYPRUS IN 2015

Table 5: Summary of enforcement actions for cases reported by Birdlife Cyprus to SBA Police within ESBA in 2015 (Shialis 2015, Shialis 2016, Shialis 2016b)

	Winter 2014/2015 survey	Spring 2015 survey	Autumn 2015 survey	Total 2015
No. of reported cases	11	10	51	72
No. of cases investigated by APU	6	10	n/a	16
Prosecutions	n/a	0	4	4
Confiscations ¹	n/a	3	10	13
Clearances ²	n/a	6	16	22
Nothing found	n/a	1	n/a	1

1- Confiscations of mist nets, limesticks and/or calling devices

2- Clearance refers to collection of trapping paraphernalia such as pole bases, poles, loudspeakers, wires etc.

4.3 RESULTS OF JOINT FIELD OPERATIONS OF CABS & SPA TEAMS AND SBA POLICE IN 2015

To ensure enforcement actions against illegal trapping activities detected during field investigations in ESBA, CABS & SPA teams are cooperating with SBA Police. We conduct joint field operations with Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) during Bird Protection Camps.

In 2015, we carried out joint field operations with APU at all 3 Bird Protection Camps organised that year; winter 2014/2015 BPC, Spring 2015 BPC and Autumn 2015 BPC (table 6).

Table 6: Results of joint field operations between CABS & SPA and APU in ESBA in 2015 (Rutigliano et al. 2015, Rutigliano et al. 2015b, Rutigliano and Debersek 2016)

	Winter 2014/2015 BPC	Spring 2015 BPC	Autumn 2015 BPC	Total for 2015
No. of joint operational days	3	7	7	17
No. of cases reported by CABS & SPA teams	5	5	44	54
No. of cases investigated by APU	5	5	36	46
Prosecutions	0	2	12	14
Confiscations	5	3	16	24

Nothing found	0	0	8	8
Not visited	0	0	8	8
Total no. of seized mist nets	18	12	29	59
Total no. of seized limesticks	0	158	24	182

Most important result of joint operations are prosecutions made for illegal trapping. Audacious level of illegal bird trapping in ESBA can only be hindered, when trappers are caught and trialed for their illegal activities. 14 out of 24 prosecutions, filed for bird trapping in 2015 in ESBA, are result of joint field operations of our teams and APU, proving the importance of cooperation between CABS & SPA and SBA Police.

5 SBA ADMINISTRATION MEASURES AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING

SBA Administration (SBAA) is actively involved in countering bird trapping in SBAs. In 2015, they have prepared several documents and carried out various actions in efforts to reduce bird trapping. Here are the main measures against bird trapping carried out by SBAA:

- publication of Bird Trapping Action Plan
- publication of statistics covering results of anti-poaching actions of SBA Police
- designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within SBAs
- acacia removal in Cape Pyla

5.1 BIRD TRAPPING ACTION PLAN

In 2015, SBA Administration prepared and published Bird Trapping Action Plan (SBA Administration 2015). Bird Trapping Action Plan (BTAP) is divide in three parts. First part of the BTAP covers the legislation and enforcement actions against bird trapping. Second part covers the situation and future actions in Cape Pyla, main hotspot for bird trapping in ESBA. Last part of the Plan is dedicated to the strategies regarding environmental education and media & community outreach.

5.2 DESIGNATION OF SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are areas designated under the EC Habitats Directive to give increased protection to certain wild animals, plants and habitats. In 2015, 5 areas in SBAs were formally designated as SACs. They are Akrotiri SAC, Episkopi SAC, Dhekelia SAC, Cape Pyla SAC and Ayios Nikolaos SAC (SBA Administration 2015b). Designation will contribute to the efforts to stop illegal bird trapping inside these areas.

5.3 ACACIA REMOVAL IN CAPE PYLA

Cape Pyla is the main hotspot for bird trapping in the ESBA. As it is relatively undeveloped and unpopulated area, it provides a suitable migration route for migrating birds. As it is without lights

in the night, it is further emphasised for migration, allowing birds to avoid the bright lights of the major populated areas of Lamaca on one side and Ayia Napa on another side.

Barren coastal landscape in Cape Pyla has been managed for decades by trappers, planting and irrigating acacia trees (*Acacia saligna*) to create suitable habitats for trapping migratory birds with mist nets. As a result, artificial green oases can be found everywhere in Cape Pyla and they act as a powerful magnet for passerines migrating over Cyprus. They are intersected with many well maintained net-rides, ready to be used for trapping with mist nets and have turned Cape Pyla into an area, where industrial scale trapping takes place.



Picture 4: Netrides visible in acacia plantation in Cape Pyla (Photo: British Forces Cyprus)

SBA Administration started with acacia removal in Cape Pyla in 2014. In December 2014, they removed first patch of plantations, measuring 17 acres. In 2015 they continued with eradication and in July 2015 removed further 22 acres of plantations.



Picture 5: Acacia removal in Cape Pyla until the end of 2015: 1-December 2014, 2- July 2015



Picture 6: Acacia removal in Cape Pyla on December 2014. Red line marks the area of removal, yellow points are the acacia plantations used for bird trapping.



Picture 7: Acacia removal in Cape Pyla on July 2015. Red line marks the area of removal; yellow points are the acacia plantations used for bird trapping.

Satellite images used for picture 6 and picture 7 are from 2013 and show the extent of acacia plantations before the removal.

There are 89 known trapping acacia plantations in Cape Pyla, revealed during field investigations by CABS and SPA teams and during Birdlife Cyprus trapping surveys. Only 2 out of 89 known trapping acacia plantations were partially destroyed during removal conducted by SBAA until the end of 2015 (picture 6 and 7). None of the known trapping plantations was completely eradicated.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Bird trapping is on the rise in the ESBA. Trapping activity, detected by Birdlife Cyprus in 2015, is highest ever recorded since 2002. For autumn 2015 is estimated, that around 800 mistnets were used to illegally catch birds. Considering the size of ESBA, 6.1 mist nets were used per one square kilometer of the Base. It is estimated, that 574 000 birds are trapped and killed each year in the ESBA. The extent of trapping places this British overseas territory among 5 single locations in the Mediterranean with largest number of illegally killed birds per year (Brochet et al. 2016).

The enforcement against bird trapping in ESBA is not in accordance to the massive extent of illegal trapping. In 2015, only 24 prosecutions for bird trapping were filed and 416 nets were seized by SBA Police in ESBA. Insufficient enforcement against trapping is allowing that trapping activity is steadily increasing in the last years and reaching the record high levels in the last two autumns, as revealed by the Birdlife Cyprus surveillance programme.

We are welcoming SBA Administration measures in 2015 to counter illegal trapping. Bird Trapping Action Plan, designation of Special Areas of Conservation within ESBA and acacia removal in Cape Pyla will help in the fight against bird trapping. However, we still wait for implementation of these measures on the ground. The removal of acacia, carried out until the end of 2015, had affected only 2 out of 89 known trapping plantations in Cape Pyla and even these 2 plantations were only partially eradicated. Much more decisive cuts into trapping plantations must be made in future to reduce industrial scale of illegal bird trapping in Cape Pyla.

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