



Field Report:
Winter 2014/2015
Bird Protection Camp,
Republic of Cyprus,
21 January – 1 February 2015



Bonn / Bielefeld, Germany: Thursday, 26 March 2015



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Winter 2014/2015 Bird Protection Camp

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Cover photo: Releasing a song thrush from mist net (Bostjan Debersek / CABS & SPA)

Place and date of publication:

Bonn / Bielefeld, Germany – Thursday, 26 March 2015

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1 SUMMARY

In January 2015, the *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS - Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. in German and Επιτροπή Ενάντια στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών στα Ελληνικά)* and the *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA – Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt in German and Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας in Greek)* conducted a *Bird Protection Camp (BPC)* for the first time in winter season in Cyprus. The camp started on 21st of January and ended on 1st of February.

During the camp we observed a large scale of illegal bird trapping with 49 active trapping sites found in 10 days.

Following the methodology settled in previous BPCs, field work was conducted in cooperation with all the competent authorities and law enforcement agencies in Cyprus. This winter we worked together with the Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) of the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the Cyprus Police and the Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) of the Operations and Crime Unit (OCU) of the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) Police. The cooperation with the APS and the APU was efficient. **During 7 joint operational days, 30 trapping sites were visited with the escort of police patrols and 16 of them were found active. Overall, 57 mist nets and 10 decoys have been seized and 3 persons have been prosecuted for illegal bird trapping.**

Due to massive trapping activity and the shortness of our first BPC in winter, we ran out of time to visit all active trapping sites and details about 8 of these sites were handed over to the competent law enforcement agencies to be investigated shortly.

The cooperation with the APS of the Cyprus Police and the APU of the British ESBA Police was adequate. During joint fieldwork we visited most of the trapping sites reported by us and the safety of our volunteers was well ensured during these visits.

But we are not satisfied with the results of the police units regarding the arrests made during joint operational days. The APS of the Cyprus Police performed much better in this aspect and made 3 prosecutions, while the APU of the British ESBA Police did not make any arrests during joint fieldwork with us.

2 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the first Winter BPC was organised by CABS and SPA. It lasted from 21 January to 1 February to cover part of the winter bird trapping season.

Until 2015, CABS and SPA conducted BPCs in spring and autumn bird migration time to prevent mass scale of trapping and killing of migratory birds passing through Cyprus. In the last few years, we gathered a lot data about trapping outside migration time, especially in winter time. Based on the information, we decided to organise a short BPC in January to get an overview of the situation.

In winter time, from November until February, main targeted species for trapping is song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*).

3 WINTER 2014/2015 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP METHODOLOGY

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

A total of 8 people from Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Slovenia participated in the camp. All of these had previously participated in a CABS' camps in Cyprus and had good knowledge of the area.

3.2 WORKING SCHEDULE AND AREAS

The first days of the BPC, from 21st until 26th, were dedicated to the independent investigation work on the field to gather data about active trapping sites. From 26th until 31st of January we organised joint field operations with the APS



of the Cyprus Police to investigate illegal bird trapping in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and joint field operations with the APU of the British ESBA Police to investigate illegal bird trapping in the territory of the British ESBA in Dhekelia.

In the first few days of our winter camp, we visited trapping areas on the west side of Cyprus: namely, the areas of Lythrodontas, Potamia, Kakopetria and Galata in Nicosia district, as well as the areas of Polis Chrysochous and Kouklia in Paphos district (Figure 1). One more day of independent work was also dedicated on Larnaca district.

Last week, with the support of law enforcement units, 6 days were dedicated to investigation work in Famagusta district and British ESBA of Dhekelia and 1 day was spent in Larnaca district.

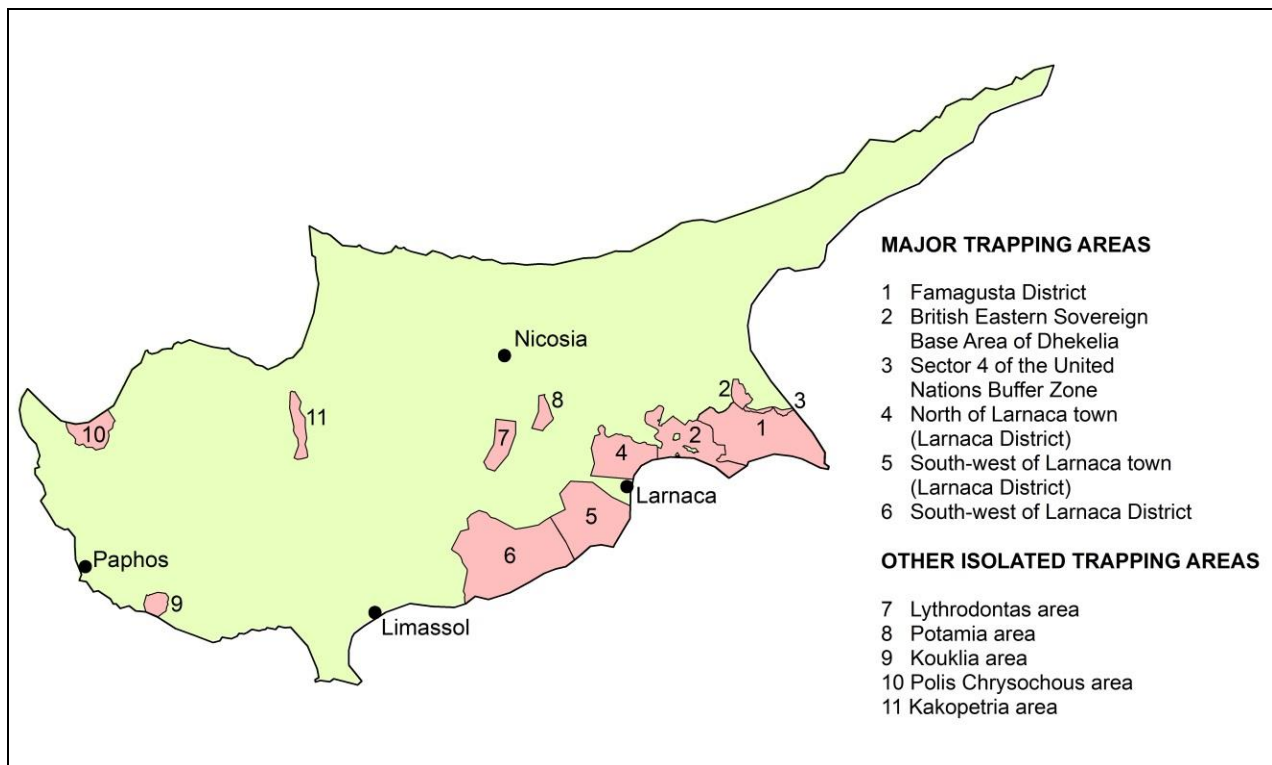


Figure 1: Trapping areas in Cyprus

4 RESULTS OF WINTER 2014/2015 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP

4.1 MONITORING OF TRAPPING SITES

Over the past seven years, from spring 2008 to winter 2015, CABS and SPA, together with the other environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are monitoring illegal bird trapping in the field, namely BirdLife Cyprus and Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus (MBCC), located and listed 1008 trapping sites:

- 791 are found in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus,
- 195 are found in the territory of the British ESBA and
- 22 are found in the Sector 4 of the United Nations Buffer Zone.

During the entire period of the winter camp, including both the independent investigation and the joint patrolling with the APS and the APU, CABS teams monitored 78 trapping sites. Of the 78 sites checked, 49 sites were found active i.e. with traps or with signs of recent trapping, such as feathers on the ground. Considering the camp duration of 10 days, we found on average 4.9 active trapping sites per day.

At the 49 active trapping sites, at least 151 mist nets were observed; some trapping sites were fenced and only the mist nets that were visible from outside were counted. Some of the visited trapping sites were reported to us by Birdlife Cyprus. These were located during the monitoring survey of BirdLife Cyprus in winter 2014-2015. If we

combine active trapping sites found by us and BirdLife Cyprus, we arrive at a total figure of 63 active trapping sites with 183 mist nets detected [1].

Out of 49 active trapping sites, 26 sites were new, with no records of trapping in the past, and 23 sites were known to us, as we already found traps or signs of trapping on them in previous seasons.

Old trapping sites were known to us mainly from autumn trapping season. On these sites trappers continue to trap even after autumn trapping season is finished, but because migrating species like blackcaps (ambelopoulia) are absent in winter, they trap song thrushes (tzikles), which arrive to Cyprus for wintering. High percentage of new trapping sites (59 % of all active sites) can be explained with the preference of some trappers to trap only or mostly in winter. Such sites are not listed in our database yet, as this was our first BPC conducted in winter time.

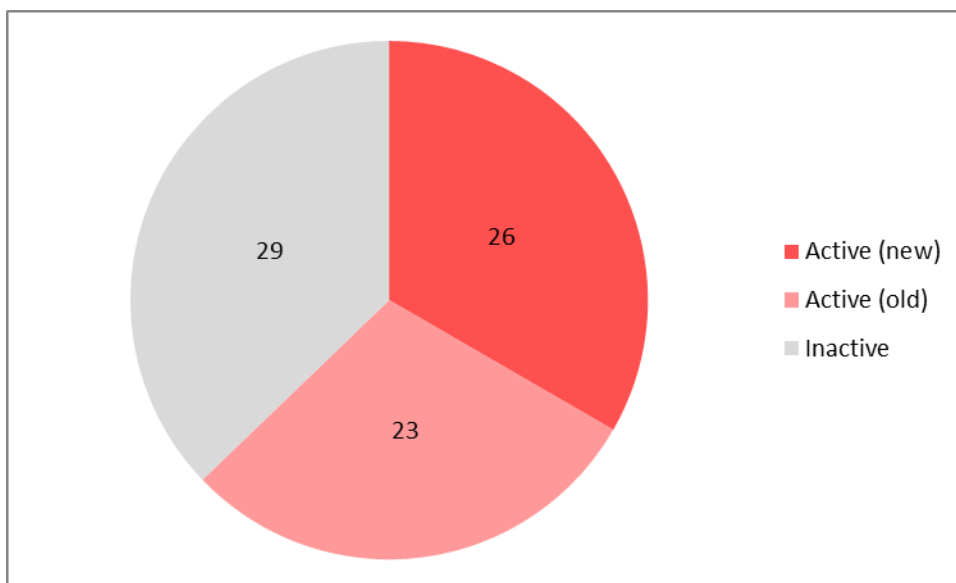


Figure 2: Activity of trapping sites monitored during Winter 2015 BPC

4.2 JOINT OPERATIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Between 26th until 31st of January, CABS members worked in cooperation with the APS officers from Cyprus Police for 4 nights with the results presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Detailed results of the joint APS / CABS operations

Monitoring of trapping sites	
All trapping sites	18
Active trapping sites	11
Trapping sites with prosecutions	3
Trapping sites with confiscation	8
Seized trapping paraphernalia	
Mist nets	39
CD, USB and MP3 players	7
Car batteries	4
Loud speakers	9
Cable (m)	120
Metal poles	54

In the same period, from January 26 to January 31, 3 days were reserved for joint fieldwork with APU from ESBA.



Table 2: Detailed results of the joint APU / CABS operations

Monitoring of trapping sites	
All trapping sites	13
Active trapping sites	5
Trapping sites with prosecutions	0
Trapping sites with confiscation	5
Seized trapping paraphernalia	
Mist nets	18
CD, USB and MP3 players	4
Car batteries	1
Loud speakers	1

We were unable to visit all active trapping sites until the end of BPC, on 1st of February. Details about 8 trapping sites, active but not checked yet, were handed over to the competent law enforcement agencies to be investigated shortly after the camp.

As Table 1 & 2 show, most investigations of active trapping sites ended with confiscation of trapping paraphernalia. Only 3 prosecutions were filed against trapping, all of them during joint field work with the Cyprus Police APS.

While we had some success regarding arrests during our cooperation with the Cyprus Police APS, there were no prosecutions made during our joint fieldwork with the APU of the British ESBA Police. With them we visited 5 active trapping sites and only confiscations of trapping paraphernalia were made. In terms of prosecutions, this implies a success rate of 27% (3 out of 11 cases) for the Cyprus Police APS and 0% (0 out of 5 cases) for the APU of the British ESBA Police.



Picture 1: Removal of mist net found during joint operation with APU (Photo: Bostjan Debersek / CABS & SPA)

In two cases there was the opportunity to prosecute trappers in the territory of the British ESBA:

- In the first case, on Tuesday, 27/01/2015, in Cape Pyla, at around 05:30 a.m., a trapper was sitting in his car beside the active trapping site, but the British ESBA Police patrol did not manage to prevent him from escaping and only managed to dismantle 4 mist nets and 1 electronic decoy;
- In the second case, on Friday, 30/01/2015, in Ayios Nikolaos, at around 05:00, although the trapping site was fenced, the British ESBA Police officers decided not to file any complaint against the owner of the plot, despite the fact that they have located and dismantled 3 mist nets and 1 electronic decoy within the fenced orchard.

We also observed a rather imprecise knowledge of the territory, since the APU patrol didn't approach three trapping sites, located within the British ESBA, alleging they were not sure whether or not they were within their jurisdiction. Despite CABS volunteers had a tablet with a digital map and GPS position, the sites were not approached on that occasion, but on the next day after confirming that they were located within the territory of the British ESBA. As a result, no prosecution or confiscation took place.

4.3 COMPARISON OF WINTER TRAPPING ACTIVITY WITH OTHER TRAPPING SEASONS

As this was our first Bird Protection Camp organised in winter time, we don't have results from previous winter seasons for comparison. Therefore we made comparison with other two trapping seasons, spring and autumn, to evaluate the scale of winter trapping activity.

Table 3: Comparison of trapping activity with spring and autumn trapping seasons

Bird Protection Camp	Spring 2014	Autumn 2014	Winter 2014/ 2015
Duration of Bird Protection Camp (days)	23	28	10
No. of active trapping sites found	102	137	49
No. of active trapping sites found per day	4.4	4.9	4.9

In table 3 we compared active trapping sites discovered per day this winter with the results of two previous BPCs, organised by CABS and SPA, in spring 2014 and autumn 2014. With almost 5 active trapping sites discovered each day, the average number of trapping sites is slightly higher in comparison with last spring and the same in comparison with last autumn.

Results indicate large scale of illegal bird trapping in winter time in Cyprus.

4.4 REACTIVATION OF THE TRAPPING SITES WITH PROSECUTIONS IN THE PAST

In previous seasons we often observed reactivation of the trapping sites, where trappers have been prosecuted for trapping in the past. One or even more prosecutions are often not sufficient to hinder people from trapping. They will continue trapping, if their trapping sites are not systematically monitored and trappers repeatedly caught and prosecuted.

Therefore we studied reactivation of trapping sites with prosecutions in past. In the study we included trapping sites found active by Birdlife Cyprus this winter.

Table 4: Reactivation of trapping sites prosecuted in previous seasons

	BPC Winter 2014/2015
No. of sites prosecuted in the past (checked)	10
No. of sites found active this winter (reactivated)	10
Percentage of reactivated sites	100%

Result of the study are quite surprising. Each and every one of the sites, where trappers were already prosecuted at least once in the past, was active again. This indicates no or very little effect of prosecution on the trapping activity. Similar results were also observed in previous years for other trapping seasons [2].

4.5 COMPARISON OF WINTER TRAPPING ACTIVITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS AND THE BRITISH EASTERN SOVEREIGN BASE AREA

Including the results of the monitoring survey conducted by Birdlife Cyprus in winter 2014/2015, last winter 32 active trapping sites were found within the territory of the British ESBA and 31 in the Republic of Cyprus, in both Famagusta (25 sites) and Larnaca (6 sites) districts. 94 mist nets were observed in the territory of the British ESBA and 89 in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, of which 23 were in Larnaca district and 66 in Famagusta district.

Considering that the territory of the British ESBA covers an area of about 81 square km, whereas the two districts of Larnaca and Famagusta cover some 1,100 square km (200 in Famagusta and around 900 in Larnaca), we observe that the British ESBA had on average an active trapping site each 2.5 square km, whereas the Republic of Cyprus had an active trapping site each 35 square km. Consequently, there was a mist net each 0.8 square km in the territory of the British ESBA, whereas in Famagusta district there was a mist net each 3 square km and Larnaca district had one mist net each 39 square km.

Therefore, the density of mist nets was significantly higher in the British ESBA, lower in Famagusta district and at its lowest in Larnaca district in the Republic of Cyprus. **Density of trapping sites and single mist nets in the British ESBA was three times larger than in the Republic of Cyprus**, the average number of mist nets per trapping site was also higher in the British ESBA than in any other part of the island. In conclusion, the British ESBA turned to be again by far the most important trapping hotspot, followed by the Famagusta and Larnaca districts in the Republic of Cyprus. Table 5 shows these figures, while figure 3 presents them in graphic format.

Table 5: Density of trapping sites and net occurrence in ESBA, Famagusta and Larnaca district in winter

Major trapping areas	Active trapping sites	Number of observed nets	Area in square Km	Square Km per trapping site	Square Km per net
British ESBA	32	94	81	2.5	0.8
Famagusta district	25	66	200	8	3
Larnaca district	6	23	900	150	39

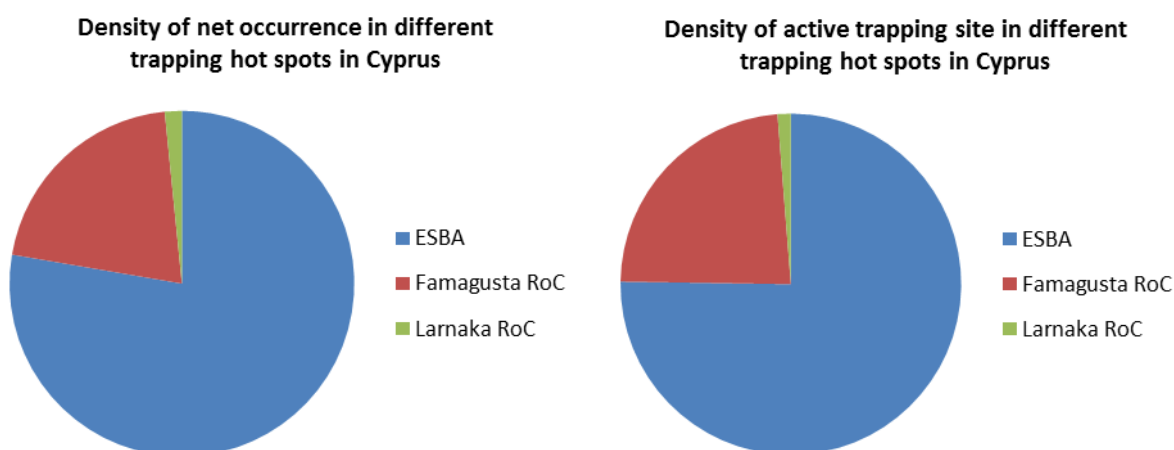


Figure 3: Comparison of density of trapping sites and net occurrence in the British ESBA and Famagusta and Larnaca districts in the Republic of Cyprus in winter 2014/2015



5 LEGAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

5.1 THE LEGAL ASPECT

As we repeatedly stated in previous reports, even prosecutions might not be sufficient to hinder people from trapping. People can continue trapping, if their trapping sites are not systematically monitored after prosecution and/or if fines and penalties for offenses are too low. Repeated offenses should be treated with fines and penalties that are sufficiently higher and deterrent compared to those imposed on the first conviction [3].

The investigation and prosecution work of the competent law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus is unfortunately undermined by the Courts, which tend to impose extremely low fines and penalties on songbird poachers, often the minimum permissible fine. The perception by many Cypriots with respect to illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of wild birds is not that of a severe environmental crime and ecological atrocity, but a so-called “*traditional hunting practice*”, which is unjustly persecuted. The same perception seems to be shared by the Judges and Prosecutors, mainly in Famagusta district.

It should be noted that the penalties can in theory be severe. According to the “*Law N.51(I)/2003 on the Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species*”, offences related to the illegal trapping, killing, possessing of and / or trading in of wild birds can be punished with very strict penalties of up to 17,000 Euros fine and / or 3 years imprisonment. However, according to data gathered by the GF, the average fines imposed by the Courts in the Republic of Cyprus is €833 Euros: specifically, the average fine imposed by the Courts in Larnaca district is €1210 Euros and in Famagusta district is €508 Euros. Moreover, the penalty of imprisonment, particularly in relation to big and professional trappers with criminal records, who are making thousands of Euros per year by supplying the black market of restaurants, kazanti and butchers, is never imposed. In addition, the fines imposed on restaurateurs serving or butchers selling ambelopoulia comes nowhere near the profits they make through the illegal trade in protected wild birds.

CABS and SPA believe that although the legislation of the Republic of Cyprus foresees sufficiently strict penalties, the competent judicial authorities must undertake all necessary initiatives to sensitise judges and prosecutors, in order to facilitate the imposition of higher fines and deterrent penalties on songbird poaching. Furthermore, the competent judicial authorities must critically review the scale of penalties imposed for songbird poaching and implement more rigidly existing national legislation to assist in stamping out this serious environmental criminal activity and ensure that environmental justice is meted out. This could be promoted through training seminars for judges and prosecutors, co-organised by the Ornithological Committee of the Directorate General of the Environment (DG-ENVI) of the European Commission, the Secretariat of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), the European Centre for Judges and Lawyers (ECJL) and the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE), in cooperation with the Law Office of the Republic of Cyprus, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order (MJPO), the Ministry of Interior (Moi), the Cyprus Bar Association (CBA), as well as the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) Administration and Courts of Justice [4].

As the “*Recommendation No.155 (2011) on the Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade of Wild Birds*” states in relation to the institutional aspects of the problem, the competent authorities should: “*strengthen the capacity, human resources, competencies and the level of cooperation between the relevant enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as to make the best use of available budgetary resources to effectively prevent and punish wildlife / bird crimes where internal judicial processes allow, and encourage the creation of special units of judges and prosecutors, provided with specialist training on combating wildlife / bird crime, and ensure all relevant cases are assigned to them*” [5].

5.2 THE POLITICAL ASPECT

Republic of Cyprus: On January 15, CABS and SPA sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Cyprus Police Headquarters, the ERU and the APS, in order to inform them about the schedule of our winter 2014/2015 BPC and request the operational support of the Cyprus Police APS. Indeed, within a week the Ministry of Justice and Public Order confirmed to us that we would have once again daily escort by the APS [6]. Just after the end of our winter camp, on February 6, we sent another letter to the competent authorities and law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus in order to express our gratitude for the operational support of the APS and inform them about the overall results of our joint monitoring patrols during our BPC [7].



Despite these positive developments on behalf of the MJPO, unfortunately the MoI have not submitted until now to the Council of Ministers the proposal for the adoption and implementation of the '*Strategic Action Plan (STAP) for Combating Illegal Bird Trapping in Cyprus*', in violation to the recommendations made by the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudswoman) [8], the DG-ENVI of the European Commission [9], the Bern Convention Secretariat and the Council of Europe [10].

At this point, it has to be noted that "BirdLife Cyprus sent the STAP document for adoption to all the key stakeholders at the end of April 2014, but to this date there has been no official answer. Hence the lack of political will is still evident" [11]. As BirdLife Cyprus aptly puts it in its latest monitoring report at the beginning of March 2015, "if Nicosia and London are serious about tackling this problem at its root, then it is necessary to adopt and to start implementing this strategy against illegal bird trapping, which has been stagnant since May 2014 awaiting an official reply from the Republic of Cyprus competent authorities", while the British SBAs Administration "has already adopted the STAP Final document" [12].

After the publication of BirdLife Cyprus monitoring report of illegal bird trapping in autumn 2014, the MoI and the GF returned to the discussion on the STAP and went so far to present a whole new proposal with totally unacceptable provisions. In more detail, in a meeting held on March 18, with the participation of the Minister of Interior, the Head of the GF and representatives of BirdLife Cyprus, the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus presented a new version of the STAP, which excluded the medium-term (2017-18) and long-term (2019-2020) stages of the strategic action planning, and recommended their replacement with a so-called "alternative planning".

Following BirdLife Cyprus – which already asked from the Minister of Interior to withdraw this proposal before submitting the STAP for approval by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus – CABS and SPA are also rejecting this proposal for the following reasons:

1. The so-called "alternative planning" not only is not based on the adoption and implementation of the basic principle of a 'zero tolerance' policy against illegal trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds, as this was agreed by all stakeholders through the adoption of 'Larnaca Declaration' in 2011, but in contrast it introduces the provision of "derogation / exception" for the legalization of ambelopoulia hunting with "selective methods". Thus, it actually proposes a substantial loosening of the existing and relatively strict national legislation, which sends exactly the opposite message.
2. This "alternative planning" is not referring at all to the legal dimension of the problem and most importantly to the need of imposing stricter and more deterrent fines and penalties by the Courts, as these are foreseen by the existing national legislation.
3. Regarding the social dimension of the problem, the "alternative planning" does not include a realistic timeframe of changing attitudes to the consumption of ambelopoulia and thus condemns the STAP to failure, without even giving it a substantial chance of success.
4. By recommending the legalization of ambelopoulia hunting, this "alternative planning" is not tackling the problem at its roots and specifically the economic motive, which is behind the demand and supply stages of the bird crime chain.
5. The "alternative planning" is based on the "derogation" from the provisions of the existing national legislation, EU directive and international conventions without the approved opinion of the Attorney General and the Law Service of the Republic of Cyprus, as well as the DG-ENVI of the European Commission and the Bern Convention Secretariat of the Council of Europe.
6. Even worse than that is the fact that this "alternative planning" is recommending a "derogation" for the reason of "tradition", without taking into consideration that according to the Article 12 of the 'Law on the Protection and Management of Wild Birds and Game Species', as well as the Article 8 of the 'EU Birds Directive' and the Article 9 of the 'Bern Convention', a "derogation" cannot be granted for such a reason.
7. Furthermore, according to the Article 13 of the 'EU Birds Directive' a "derogation" cannot lead to deterioration in the present situation as regards the conservation of protected species of birds. Based on the facts that both



trapping with non-selective methods and hunting with selective methods of ambelopoulia have been prohibited in the Republic of Cyprus in 1974 and 1988 respectively, such a “derogation” cannot be granted.

8. Apart from the relative national legislation, EU directive and international conventions, according to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice, as this is foreseen by the Judgement of 9 December 2004 in the Case C-79/03 against the Kingdom of Spain, an EU member state cannot ask for a “derogation” for the reason of “tradition”.
9. The proposed “alternative planning” comes in direct contradiction with all the recommendations made by the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Cyprus, the DG-ENVI of the European Commission and the Bern Convention Secretariat of the Council of Europe, regarding the adoption and implementation of a STAP for combating illegal bird trapping in Cyprus.
10. This “alternative planning” was presented during the meeting held between the representatives of the Mol, the GF and BirdLife Cyprus, without being proposed and discussed at any stage of the public consultation process and most importantly during the relative workshops organized by BirdLife Cyprus, in April and November 2013, in which all the competent authorities, law enforcement agencies and civil society organisations have participated.
11. According to the competent authorities and law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Cyprus – and most importantly the GF itself – presently there is a lack of the appropriate and sufficient financial and human resources to monitor and combat illegal bird trapping, killing and trade. In this framework, it is questionable how these competent authorities and law enforcement agencies will ensure the necessary and adequate resources for practically monitoring “ambelopoulia hunting with selected methods”.

Overall, as BirdLife Cyprus correctly notes, the “alternative planning” proposed by the Mol and the GF is not based on any scientific (conservation and protection of ambelopoulia and other wild birds, as well as a comprehensive and grounded documentation), **legal** (legality of the measure and compatibility with national and international legislation), **social** (democratic legitimization in the context of a comprehensive dialogue and public consultation), **political** (commitment for the adoption and implementation of a ‘zero tolerance’ policy against illegal bird trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds) **and operational** (realistic implementation and most importantly the appropriate monitoring of all requirements) **ground** ^[13].

CABS and SPA consider the so-called “alternative planning” that is proposed by the Mol and the GF as a clear manifestation of the lack of political will to effectively, comprehensively and permanently combating illegal, non-selective and large-scale trapping, killing and trade of protected wild birds in Cyprus. As we have stated and analysed in our previous field reports, despite the introduction of national legislation, the harmonisation with EU Directives and the ratification of international conventions, the history of law enforcement efforts in the Republic of Cyprus is characterized by long periods of “laissez faire” activities, interrupted by seasonal raids, followed by protests from the poachers’ lobby and restoration of the tolerance by the competent authorities ^[14].

British Eastern Sovereign Base Area: CABS welcome the increase of bird trappers’ prosecutions in 2014 compared to previous years. Between April 2014 and March 2015, the APU of the British ESBA Police had 42 cases of prosecution, which is by far more than the 28 prosecutions it had in the period between April 2013 and March 2014. In more detail, between November 2014 and February 2015, there was a significant increase of bird trappers’ prosecutions (11 arrests, of which 2 in November and 5 in December 2014, as well as 4 in January 2015) in comparison with the period between November 2013 and February 2014 (6 arrests, of which 3 in November and 1 December 2013, as well as 2 in January 2014).

In addition, the British ESBA Police conducted much more clearance operations of trapping paraphernalia in winter 2014/2015 in comparison with winter 2013/2014. Specifically, in winter 2014/2015, the APU of the British ESBA Police conducted 9 clearance operations (1 in November and 2 in December 2014, as well as 5 in January and 1 in February 2015), while in winter 2013/2014 it has conducted only 1 (in November 2013) ^[15]. Moreover, in terms of confiscations, the British ESBA Police confiscated 381 mist nets and 30 limesticks between November 2014 and February 2015 in comparison 458 and 94 limesticks between November 2013 and February 2014. However, if we compare these recent positive results with the professional, large-scale and well-organised bird trapping in the British ESBA, unfortunately these are still far from sufficient to combat illegal bird trapping.



Nevertheless, we believe that after a meeting, which was held in the British ESBA Police Station of Dhekelia on October 9 – with the participation of the Commander of the British ESBA Police, the Head of the APU of the British ESBA Police, the Campaigns Manager and the Illegal Bird Trapping Officer of BirdLife Cyprus, as well as CABS and SPA Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus [16] – there is common ground for a long-term, comprehensive and effective cooperation between the competent authorities and environmental NGOs. The fact that, between November and December 2014, the British ESBA Administration and Police removed some acacia groves in the firing range of Cape Pyla, increased bird trappers' prosecutions, kept comparative data on anti-poaching operations for the whole period between 2012-15, sent anti-poaching/anti-trapping statistics to all relevant stakeholders including environmental NGOs and demonstrated their willingness to provide police escort to CABS teams in the field on a more systematic base are considered to be small but steady steps in the right direction.

United Nations Buffer Zone: Lastly, CABS and SPA note that the United Nations Police (UNPOL) invited CABS and SPA Policy Advisor on Bird Poaching in Cyprus and BirdLife Cyprus Illegal Bird Trapping Officer for a third consecutive year – on March 13 – to the induction courses for new UNPOL officers, in order to present to them the context and parameters of songbird poaching in Cyprus and help them to combat this severe wildlife crime in the territory of the United Nations Buffer Zone (UNBZ). Partly as a result of these training courses, UNPOL officers are in a much better position to understand the problem of illegal bird trapping in Cyprus and take the appropriate action within the territory under their jurisdiction. This was evident this winter by the fact that the UNPOL, the Cyprus Police and the GF organized their first joint anti-trapping operation within the Sector 4 of the UNBZ, which resulted to the prosecution of a songbird poacher.

CABS and SPA believe that the Cyprus Police Academy should also include induction courses and training seminars on poaching and hunting issues, in order to adequately educate and train new police officers on combating illegal bird trapping and other forms of wildlife crime in Cyprus [17]. This could be done in cooperation with the *EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL)*, in the context of the current project on '*Contributing to the Elimination of Illegal Killing of Birds*' [18], as well as the *Environmental Crime Network (EnviCrimeNet)* of the *European Police (Europol)*, in the context of the '*Intelligence Project on Environmental Crime*' (IPEC) [19].

5.3 THE SOCIAL ASPECT

As we repeatedly stated in previous reports [20], changing attitudes to the consumption of ambelopoulia could go a long way towards curbing illegal bird trapping. However, there are currently no (and never have been) national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects aiming at changing attitudes on this issue. Apart from the efforts of environmental NGOs (CABS and SPA, BirdLife Cyprus, Cyprus Conservation Foundation Terra Cypria and Friends of the Earth Cyprus), the loudest voices heard in the public debate on the problem are politicians from the major trapping areas (in Larnaca and Famagusta districts), speaking out in support of this serious criminal activity and ecological atrocity.

In this framework, CABS and SPA urge the competent law enforcement agencies to release press statements on a weekly and monthly base during trapping seasons, as well as to publish systematic data on anti-poaching operations on a seasonal and annual base, as this is considered to be the first and most important step towards developing and encouraging national communication efforts and strategies to promote dialogue and foster a constructive debate between relevant stakeholders – most importantly the competent law enforcement agencies and environmental NGOs – and the wider public. In this context, the APS, the GF and the British ESBA Police should establish systematic monitoring and reporting systems for illegal activities using standardised methods for data collection, on a common reporting format. The publication of data on anti-poaching operations by the competent law enforcement agencies will also support a shift of culture towards shared values respectful of nature and promote active stewardship. At the same time, this measure will deter bird trappers, streamline law enforcement and raise public awareness on songbird poaching.

Furthermore, CABS and SPA urge the competent authorities to develop, adopt and implement national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects. Unfortunately, all competent authorities, including the MJPO, the Mol and the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment (MANRE), as well as Cyprus Federation of Hunting and Wildlife Conservation (CFHWC), generally display no interest in the prospect of changing public attitudes to ambelopoulia eating, and do little or nothing to promote all necessary public communication, awareness and education strategies needed to tackle the problem at its roots. CABS and SPA are ready and able, in terms of both knowledge and experience, to take on well-targeted national



communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects (including the publication of press releases, leaflets, posters and handbooks, as well as the production of advertisements, spots, documentaries and other audio-vision material), in order to change public attitudes on this issue and contribute, as far as they can, towards the elimination of the demand for protected wild birds for consumption, in cooperation with the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus. The Press and Information Office (PIO) of the Republic of Cyprus and the mass media (newspapers, radio and TV stations, news agencies, etc.) should be also engaged in these national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

During our first winter BPC we witnessed the large scale of illegal bird trapping in Larnaca and Famagusta districts in the Republic of Cyprus and the British ESBA of Dhekelia. In only 10 days, we discovered 49 active trapping sites. Trapping in winter time is massive and almost at the same level recorded in autumn season, which is considered as the most intensive season for illegal bird trapping in Cyprus.

This winter we organised joint field operations with two law enforcement agencies, the APS of the Cyprus police and the APU of the British ESBA Police. Because of the massive trapping activity detected, results of joint operations were productive. In total we seized 57 mist nets from 16 trapping sites.

Results are still far from perfect, considering the number of the prosecutions that were made. CABS volunteers visited 11 active trapping sites with the Cyprus Police APS and in 3 trapping sites prosecutions were made against trappers, while on the remaining 8 trapping sites the APS officers only confiscated trapping paraphernalia.

The results of our joint work with the APU of the British ESBA Police are even less successful regarding the prosecution of trappers. CABS volunteers visited 5 active trapping sites with the British ESBA Police APU and in all of these sites only confiscation of trapping paraphernalia was made.

In future, more effort must be made to arrest trappers red-handed in order to effectively and permanently combat illegal, non-selective and large-scale bird trapping, killing and trade in Cyprus. In most of the cases, songbird poachers have to be prosecuted more than once, to stop or at least decrease their trapping activity. This is evident from our study of the reactivation of prosecuted sites, both in autumn 2014 and winter 2014/2015. All the trapping sites that we visited this winter and where trappers were prosecuted in the past, were found active once again. Little or no effect of prosecutions on trapping activity was also observed in autumn 2014 [21]. Beside regular arrests of trappers, fines and penalties imposed by the Courts must be significantly increased in order to be deterrent.

Republic of Cyprus: CABS and SPA urge the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus to adopt and implement the recommendations made by the Ombudswoman [22], the DG-ENVI of the European Commission [23], the Bern Convention Secretariat and the Council of Europe [24]. In this framework, CABS and SPA are calling the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus to:

- Immediately adopt and implement the '*STAP for Combating Illegal Bird Trapping in Cyprus*'.
- Immediately withdraw any proposal that is not based on the principle of a 'zero tolerance' policy against illegal bird trapping, killing and trade, as well as any "alternative planning" based on the legalization of ambelopoulia hunting and the loosening of the existing national legislation.
- Increase the average fines and penalties imposed by the Courts in order to be deterrent.
- Increase the operational capacity of the APS, by doubling its staff. 2 independent patrols on daily base – meaning a total operational capacity of 14-16 experienced officers – are the absolute minimum required. These 14-16 APS officers must be specifically trained to work on combating songbird poaching and wildlife crime, while they should also constitute a long-term permanent staff of the APS.
- Require that all law enforcement agencies keep an average number of prosecutions every year to avoid huge fluctuations in the law enforcement efforts, mainly dependent on political will and administrative decisions rather than real change in trapping trends.



- Require that the competent law enforcement agencies – the APS and the GF – regularly publish their results, in order for third parts to evaluate their efforts.
- Develop national communication strategies, public awareness campaigns and environmental education projects for changing attitudes to the consumption of ambelopoulia and the ecological impact of illegal, non-selective and large-scale bird trapping, killing and trade.

British ESBA: CABS and SPA urge the British SBAs Administration and Police to implement more rigidly a ‘zero tolerance’ policy, following the recommendations of the ‘Larnaca Declaration’ [25] and the United Kingdom Police Partnership Against Wildlife Crime [26]. In more detail, CABS and SPA ask for:

- The overall eradication of invasive alien species and particularly the artificial acacia groves in the SAC of Cape Pyla.
- An increase of the operational capacity of the APU of the British ESBA Police with at least 4 independent patrols, responsible only for disrupting illegal bird trapping and prosecuting songbird poachers, on daily base.
- Require that the APU of the British ESBA Police keeps an average number of prosecutions every year to avoid huge fluctuations in the law enforcement efforts, mainly dependent on political will and administrative decisions rather than real change in trapping trends.
- Organize joint patrols and anti-trapping operations in the so-called ‘grey zones’ – the border areas between the territories of the British ESBA and the Republic of Cyprus – between the APU of the British ESBA Police, the GF and the Cyprus Police APS.
- Last but not least, conduct clearance operations once every couple of weeks between early-November and late-January, in Cape Pyla and Ayios Nikolaos.



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**Committee Against
Bird Slaughter**

The *Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)* – *Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V* in German and *Επιτροπή Εναντία στη Σφαγή των Πουλιών* in Greek – is an international activist and operational bird protection society, with its head office in Bonn in the Federal Republic of Germany. The society was founded in 1975 in Berlin and since then intervenes in particular where bird trappers, poachers and animal traders commit offences against current nature protection legislation in the European Union. The society is always concerned to harmonise its activities closely with the responsible police, forest or customs authorities. In addition, through initiatives at the parliamentary or judicial level, CABS attempt to achieve improvements in the policy and legal guidelines for wildlife, nature and species protection. Currently, the society has 485 members and 11,300 donors throughout the European Union.

CABS is a registered “*Society*” (Registration Number: VR 7095 – Date of Recognition as a Nature Protection Organization: 03.03.1989) by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany. Registration as a charity in the United Kingdom under new EU legislation is currently in progress.

Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS): www.komitee.de/en/homepage

Extending Our Frontiers – Birds Have No Boundaries!



The *Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA)* – *Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt* in German and *Ίδρυμα για την Προστασία της Βιοποικιλότητας* in Greek – concerns itself with the conservation of endangered wildlife species and species diversity. It defines its role as patrons of wildlife, with the statutory obligation to care for all aspects of the natural world in Germany and Europe.

SPA is an officially recognized “*Foundation*” (Date of Recognition: 26.11.2008) under the German civil law code and is registered with the German Tax authorities (Tax Registration Number: 305/5981/1222) and the Foundation Council of the State of North Rhine Westphalia, Germany.

Foundation Pro Biodiversity (SPA): www.stiftung-pro-artenvielfalt.org