

MBCC
Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus

Zero tolerance of illegal killing of wild birds



Cyprus Annual Report 2016

Political U-turns

NGO's hard fights for birds

Revaluation of Cape Greco

Bee-eaters need help



Cover:

Every year hundreds of forgotten limesticks are left in the bushes, with dead birds hanging on them, to be found later as mummified victims. This represents a gruesome and contemptuous display of a complete lack of value for the unnecessary death of so many birds.

Autumn MBCC camp report 2016

Two-faced government on Cyprus

Over the years that MBCC Migratory Birds Conservation in Cyprus has been involved in the fight against illegal bird trapping in the South-East Peninsula with Cape Greco, political attitudes vis-à-vis wildlife crime in Cyprus have veered several times from benign indifference to signs of improvement, to stagnation—and back again to the original starting point of virtual collusion.

The wildlife criminals as a body are determined to continue trapping; calculating landowners weigh up their chances of getting away with it in the courts; the general population is largely indifferent; the judiciary face mountains of EU procedural documents; meanwhile the island's politicians perform regular U-turns and sometimes go so far as to side openly with the criminal interests of the *Ambelopoulia* trade.

And once again a U-turn appears to have taken place on the political stage on Cyprus. In a year's time a new President of the Republic of Cyprus will be elected. At a meeting with the Minister for Justice in September, the local police chiefs were told to put an end to the illegal trapping of birds with limesticks, nets and decoys once and for all. The Minister expected these illegal practices to be eliminated in the country within a short a time as possible.

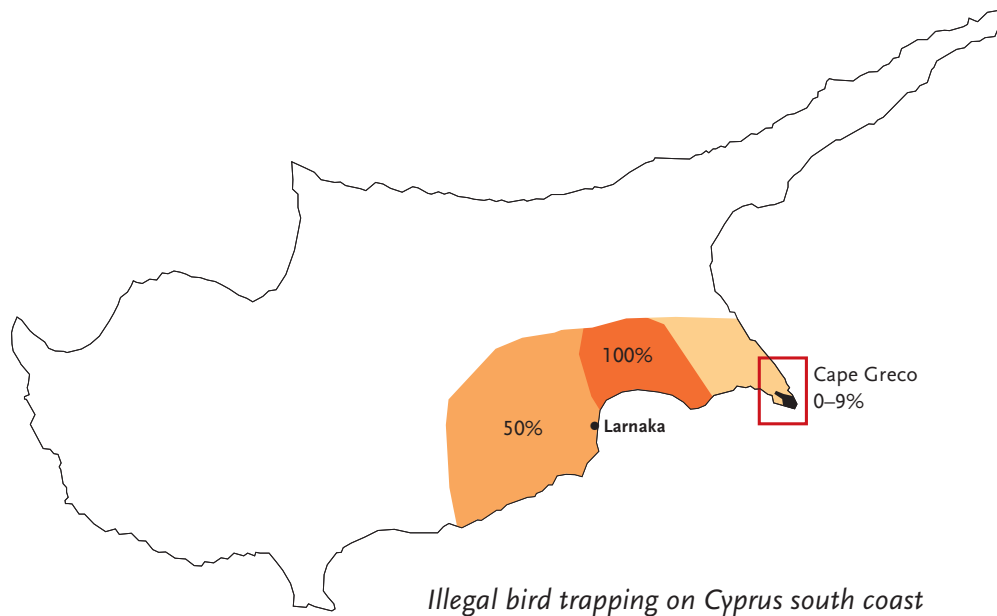
It could not be expected that such a surprising about-turn, contrary to the year-long policy of tacit support for this so-called tradition, would instantly convert the poachers away from their extremely lucrative "hobby". However, instead of increasing the resources of the police to deal with the problem, the only specially-trained and effective anti-poaching police unit (APU) based in Nicosia is being gradually withdrawn from the task, leaving behind a great vacuum. Nobody, not least the responsible Minister for Justice, appears to be really interested in the maintenance of an efficient anti-poaching police infrastructure. The government's words are not backed up by deeds.

No tolerance of the illegal killing of wild birds in the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs)

Members of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) have reported on their astonishing haul of 70 mist nets and countless decoy devices that they, at considerable personal risk, dismantled in September 2016 at Cape Pyla in the British SBA. Their final tally at the end of their Cyprus bird protection camp in October this year was an amazing 4,112 limesticks, 151 mist nets, 110 decoy devices and 29 poachers apprehended.

The SBA police report for September, published in newspaper articles, with details of up to 400 confiscated mist nets, 90 decoy devices and 170 loudspeakers, clearly demonstrates the chaotic conditions that still exist on Cape Pyla and the British Dhekelia base area, as well as the sudden new will by the British to pursue a policy of no tolerance for the illegal bird trappers.

It is to be hoped that the positive announcements by the British authorities is the signal for future large scale campaigns against illegal trapping, and not just a short term political reaction to the public pressure to which they have been submitted recently.



The scale of bird trapping is at present unevenly distributed along the southern coastline of Cyprus. Whereas illegal bird trapping has drastically decreased over the past 20 years in the former hunting and trapping strongholds of the Paralimni area and the south-eastern peninsula of Cape Greco (bird trapping has ceased completely in the Cape Greco Natura 2000 SPA), it is still rampant to the west along the south coast in the British Dhekelia SBA with Cape Pyla, and farther westwards towards Larnaca.

Nowhere on Cyprus has Illegal bird trapping died out completely, except in the Cape Greco Natura 2000 SPA.

Although many of the old bird trappers have died, they are replaced by younger trappers who stubbornly believe in the maintenance of the old tradition.

The practice will only be eliminated completely when the Bern Convention and the EU condemn the “right” to kill wild birds under the terms of the Tunis Action Plan (recognising that “tradition” creates difficulty (cf.comment on “beneficiary”): *“The species are the beneficiary of wildlife conservation legislation and thus(...) changes in human behaviour towards wildlife may have to occur”*.

This is a positive orientation, suggesting that animal species must not necessarily be subject to cruel human traditions, but that human interests should have to comply with the dignity and protection of animals.

The NGOs, which have for years been at the forefront of the hard-fought campaign against illegal bird trapping, are patiently waiting for the Bern Convention and the EU to finally put the sore point of “tradition” firmly on the agenda with the Cypriot Government and put a stop to the decline in the migrant bird populations before it is too late.

It is difficult to understand why the right to live for the migrating feathered guests from foreign lands is denied, when for human beings this right is unquestionable. There must be a policy of zero tolerance in order to protect the right to live for these wild birds.

The South-East Peninsula with Cape Greco

Since 1993 we have been in the field of the 2,750 hectares of the South-East Peninsula during every migration season investigating one trapping site after another and where necessary involving the police and getting trappers arrested.

Over the years, every known trapping site has been observed and visited countless times, to the point where in many cases bird catchers gave up their activities for fear of arrest and prosecution.

By concentrating on the same area we have been able to guarantee a constant presence and continual, focused intervention, instead of dissipating our forces throughout the whole island. That approach has paid off handsomely: the entire 2,750 ha area, notorious for bird catching and infested with bird killers in the 1990s, has seen levels of trapping fall to below 10% of previous rates in the 24 years of our activity—a unique, stand-out success along the south coast of Cyprus. Only a handful of diehard orchard owners have remained active as trappers.

Despite these achievements, the area cannot be left unsupervised, at least so long as the current government continues to waver in its condemnation of wildlife crime, holding out false hopes to the trapping lobby. Many of the local population would still catch wild birds illegally if they thought they could get away with it, and indeed some do seize any opportunity to set out a few lime sticks or a mist net. Clandestine lime stick factories are still occasionally discovered.

Although information about the scale of illegal bird trapping on Cyprus and the published statistics are contradictory, a new phenomenon was observed this autumn. The different responsible protagonists in the matter of illegal bird trapping, the Cyprus Government and the British SBA authorities, have outbid one another with their public utterances to finally tackle the problem and put an end to it once and for all.

A gratifying development



Poster 1991

The enhancement of the Natura 2000 SPA Cape Greco

A commendable new nature centre is now located on the road to Cape Greco as advertisement for the Natura 2000 bird protection area. The centre is directly beneath the bird migration bottleneck where, unlike wetlands reserves, the birds are observed from a tower—here the spectacle of migration takes place above the observers head.



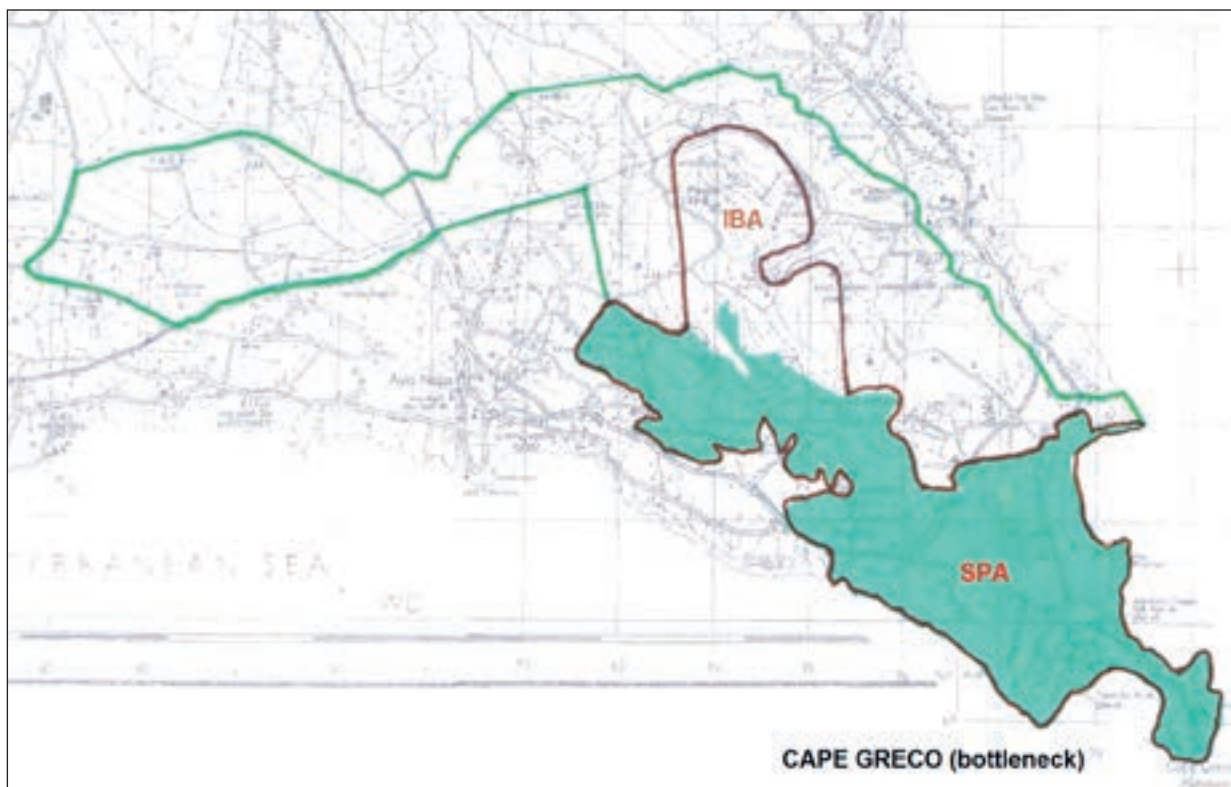
Common Cranes circle in order to find thermals for their flight across the sea.

In the 1990s this area was covered with countless trapping sites, and hordes of trappers killed the migrating birds over a large area.

“At Cape Greco alone ca 3600–9000 birds were killed each morning in late September and equally high numbers were said to be taken from August into October” (C.O.S. 1957 Bulletin 3) lit.P.Flint.

The entire Natura 2000 Cape Greco SPA is now free of illegal bird trapping!

It now appears that the posters advertising the Natura 2000 reserve can be displayed without being destroyed or defaced by hunters. A promising development.



Around the core zone, the Cape Greco migration bottleneck provides exceptionally valuable and important habitats for migrant birds.

A further hunting area within the SPA was declared free from hunting this year and, enhanced by a nice drystone wall and other measures to promote biodiversity, returned to nature.





An important habitat for shrike species.

The Cyprus forest department is taking the enhancement of the buffer zone seriously.

The conservation of natural habitats outside the limits of the protected areas is being promoted outside the Cape Greco bottleneck and protects them against damaging tourist developments (e.g. tracks for quads)

The endangered Bee-eaters



The conservation of natural habitats outside protected areas does not however extend to the Panagia Church area. Although it is within the Cape Greco buffer zone, the Bee-eater is persecuted here in a bloody manner.



In autumn 2016, the Bee-eaters were once again targets for hunters in the Panagia area. The 70 beehives are set out to attract the birds into the hail of lead from the hunters guns. As previously, decoy devices with Bee-eater calls are used, and in these areas the ground is littered with cartridge cases.



The hunters usually arrive after 17:00 hrs, at the time when the Bee-eaters are searching for a tree to roost and therefore fly very low. It is very clear that there are few Quails or other legal game in the area, but that it is frequented by numerous Bee-eaters. It is not really a legal hunting area and it will hopefully be closed down for hunting in the near future.

MBCC Spring Report 2016

4. April Arrival in Protaras for the 2016 spring camp.

5. April The usual initial visit to the Paralimni police. Drive through the National Park and Cape Greco areas, with the fields in bloom with spring vegetation. The fields are however already quite brown and very dry. The cereals are underdeveloped and small. The winter seems to have brought little rain, which is a catastrophe for Cyprus.

Daily observation tours in the Nature reserves of Cape Greco and the south-eastern peninsula.

6. April Departure at 03.30. We drive through our complete protected area and keep a look out for decoy calling devices. Not a single caller is heard. We return home at 5.30 a.m. We were more successful in finding traps during the daily foot patrols in our area.

At 10.00 it is time to start for the Phanos hill. We searched the old trapping places for mist net poles and find three. The trappers have removed some themselves.

We find **22 limesticks** on the bushes used previously by the deceased olive grove owner. After his death, the bushes remained free of traps for a long time and no birds were caught. It appears that a successor has set out limesticks with a terrible glue that is a stiff, non-elastic, rubbery mass that adheres gruesomely to the birds. Fortunately only **3 birds** are hanging from the limesticks. The birds can be pulled or cut off from the limesticks only with a great deal of effort. Cleaning them of glue at the time was impossible. The Lesser Whitethroat, which had lost very many flight and tail feathers, died shortly afterwards. The remaining two, a Willow Warbler and a male Blackcap, appeared to have only been stuck to the limesticks for a short time and their general condition and plumage were good. After resting overnight, they were released the following morning.

After midday the next day we went to Phanos Hill again. We searched farther to the right of the bushes from the day before and found the bushes along the whole slope full of limesticks, all coated in the same disgusting lime. It is seemed certain therefore that this was the work of the same trapper. We were surprised by the **vast number of 87 limesticks, with a large number of trapped birds**, which could only have been lured by a decoy caller set out in the early morning. We had to work fast, as the trapper could return at any moment. We called the Paralimni police for help. The awful sticky lime hindered us working quickly. We had no choice but to place individual birds, together with part of the limestick, in our cotton bird sacks (the first time we were forced to do this). The large number of birds proved too much for us, they were all incapable of flight with clumps and strands of water-resistant glue in their plumage and on their feet. The police arrived to support us but the process, even with two police patrols, took too long. Far too long for the limed birds.

Back in our accommodation, we discovered that 18 birds were already dead. Two were released and we attempted to free a further seven from the lime. This proved extremely difficult, as the lime was clearly **not a natural, water-soluble mixture, but rather a chemical water-resistant substance**. The stringy rubber was almost impossible to bend. The trapper had an unusually sharp knife ready at his trapping site to cut the lime. He knew exactly what a substance he was using.



We hoped that one Cuckoo, two Ortolan Buntings, one Whitethroat and two female Blackcaps would survive. However, we were to be disappointed—there was no end to the tragedy. Most of the birds had hung on the limesticks for several hours, since the early morning (after 8 hours they are doomed).

The six survivors were also not a picture of normal convalescence and recovery. They exhibited very odd symptoms after the first night such as continual hypothermia and no real signs of revival. Slowly, one bird after the other died, untypically and for no apparent reason. Migratory birds usually display strong resistance and rapid recovery, and flutter lively about the cage after a couple of hours. These six birds were different. Although their plumage appeared to be in good condition, they appeared to be ill. Every single death was an inexplicable drama for me. I observed the Ortolan Bunting with ruffled feathers and it looked suddenly much smaller than it actually was, it shivered and appeared to be in pain. We were unable to establish the cause.

After all my many years of experience with the reactions and behaviour of birds, I concluded that **they were victims of a poisonous substance in the glue.**

The Cuckoo, the largest bird, managed to recover. The painful sprained and bloody right wing healed within a week. It flew again. Nonetheless, it was unable to grip with its claws, as the nerves in its feet were not functioning. Its condition improved only after ten days in captivity. As the bird realised that it was capable of flight its frustration was so great that we decided to release it and hope, despite the weak grip of its claws, that it would come to terms with its handicap in natural surroundings. It flew off, slithered about on the leaves, but achieved a good take-off and flew away. I am convinced that it survived.

The experience of the lamed nerves of the Cuckoo's talons (the vet's diagnosis) was new to me. The bird had hung on the limestick, as hundreds of others before it, none of which has exhibited lamed nerves. Even badly sprained birds' legs normally recover in the course of a single night.

Only one year earlier the so-called 'Friends of the Limesticks' (or illegal Association of Traditional and Sustainable Hunting Methods) and the Mayor of Paralimni had maintained at the TV that chemical glue was not used for bird trapping. **Nevertheless, on 6 and 7 April 2016, we found unmistakably waterproof (water-repellent) birdlime containing a chemical substance on 110 limesticks.** The chemical element was so poisonous that it killed the smaller birds trapped on the limesticks.

Just imagine the consequences if the birds trapped on the limesticks are poisoned.

In many cases, the trappers appear to prepare and mix the lime themselves. There seem to be no hygiene regulations for trapping of *Ambelopoulia*, which then end up on the plates of human beings.

Year after year, we find plastic sacks of rat and mouse poison adjacent to the trapping sites. It seems that the will to poison wildlife is very high on Cyprus. The victims are cats, dogs, rats, foxes, vultures and migratory birds. They appear to have been poisoned by substances that are banned in the EU, such as Carbofuran. It is high time that the state finally intervenes to end these criminal actions.

Proper bird care demands a good deal of experience and knowledge

Volunteers can expect not only hard work in the field, but also to learn the care of injured birds. It is demanding. Many ornithologists can identify bird species and are knowledgeable about them; on the other hand, they have little knowledge about their care or of birds in general. That is, what a healthy bird is capable of, and how restricted an injured bird is in its actions. The inexperienced volunteers generally, and wrongly, base their actions on their own subjective behaviour and experience (projection).

Throw a healthy fish into water and it swims away immediately in its familiar element—water. It would never sink to the bottom. Birds behave in the air like fish in water. They are so familiar with the air, their natural element, that a healthy (wild) bird will immediately fly away from where it is being held. Fit birds are incredibly agile air acrobats.

Birds caught on limesticks suffer very severe injuries:

- The trapped birds often tear many of their own feathers out in an attempt to free themselves from the lime.
- The loss of flight feathers prevent them from flying.
- A lost tail is not so important. Birds can still fly without one.
- A broken wing is a death sentence for small birds. An immediate operation is possible, but the nearest capable vet is in the capital Nicosia.
- Legs and feet are delicate and must be handled with extreme care.
- Larger birds have a much better chance of recovery as their injuries heal easier.
- Birds have a rapidly healing and very fit body.

7. April Departure at 05.30 for the Sotira reservoirs. From above we observe the road and the distant surroundings behind the chicken farm. No vehicles arrive so that we assume that no driver came to trap. Times have changed greatly. The worst area for trapping has quietened down a great deal. Above the reservoirs, a lone man flees from us. He is clearly a new small fish up here in the trapping scene.

We wander through the large Sotira forest. The only sounds are of birds singing. The dreaded trapping area has become very quiet. Even the farming area (with its watered trapping site) beside and above Sotira forest is quiet and there is no sign of active trapping.*

8. April Departure 05.30 for Cambos. On the drive there, we were greeted on the motorway by fog patches that soon enveloped us in thick fog. In our patrol area, the fog was like a wall so that we could hardly make out the olive groves. The owner of the weekend house was already there. The trees, bushes and grass were dripping wet so that it was unlikely that limesticks had been set out. The fog remained. We decided to look elsewhere above Mazera. The old and large trapping site appeared abandoned and unused.

Little damage done by hunting in the 2015/15 winter season

It seems that only few of the usual winter guests such as thrushes visited Cyprus to spend the winter. Circles close to the hunting community complained about a scarcity of huntable birds. The Game Fund spoke about a large decrease in the number of hunters. Of the 50,000 hunters in the Republic, only 10,000 applied for a licence in the winter season 2015/16.

On Phanos, we were able to establish that hunting in winter must have been greatly restricted. We found only three hidden ground supports for net poles—the trappers themselves had removed a few others. We looked for last winter's very active trapping site above Mazera (Agia Napa), where we had destroyed ten car tyre pole supports, cleared up the whole area and blocked the net lines. It was delightful to see that the site had not been used at all in winter 2015/16. The swathes cut in the trees for net lines had grown together and were hardly visible any more. Our large clearance work the previous year had paid off. Many thanks again to the industrious volunteers.

8. April Afternoon Departure at 13.00 for Profitis Ilias. We parked our car and walked in the direction of the power transformer. On the way through the waste disposal site one of the volunteers heard a decoy device. Through our binoculars, we were able to make out bushes with limesticks. As we suspected that the local residents were bird trappers we went on further to the farm above the transformer, contacting the police on the way. The volunteers went on downwards to the rubbish dump and hid near the active trapping site. The police appeared quickly on the scene. At 15.30, we drove to the trapping site. The bushes used for trapping had clearly been abandoned and did not belong to the nearby residents.

*Bird trapping sites are abandoned

We found 34 limesticks with 7 birds in good condition, most of them Blackcaps, in the bushes. We soon set them free. Two further older trapping sites on the nearby cliffs had clearly been unused for some time.

9. April 05.30 departure for Limos's house. We observe the fenced-in garden on the Konnos road. The owner does not turn up for trapping and we see not a single vehicle. Only the Hello man is present on his farm, but he has no decoy devices running.

The sky clouds over and it looks like rain. We drive home for breakfast. We leave again after 09.30 to conduct a full search of Phanos for signs of trapping. We find nothing except three freshly trimmed bushes.

In the afternoon, we go birdwatching.

10. April Departure at 05.30. We drive to the Archangelo Gavriil farm. All is quiet and there is no sign of life at either the farm or the weekend houses. We observe further but it remains quiet. We drive to the 6th power mast. We first inspect the isolated trapping tree. There is not the slightest sign of activity. Even the previously very active hunting site appears untouched, with no sign of any winter activity. Suddenly we hear a decoy device in the distance. We march across the fields towards the sound. It leads us to Kokkines (Agia Napa). Through binoculars, we see bushes with limesticks. We see a nearby house but are unable to approach it across the fields. We follow the tracks to Kokkines village and look for exact location of the blue house. We call the Agia Napa police. They arrive 20 minutes later but refuse to let us all accompany them. I go alone with the police to find the way. The route was relatively simple, but the complicated police officer did not want to stop where I indicated. He drove around in a large circle repeatedly, as if he wanted to warn the owner. Finally he stopped at the target house. The other volunteers had arrived by this time so we ran to the bushes behind the house and find **30 limesticks and the decoy device, but no birds**. The volunteers said later that they had seen birds through their binoculars. It is more than probable that the police officer wanted to warn the trapper of his arrival by driving around in circles, especially as there was a vehicle parked close to the house. There are bird trappers in the local police force.

In the afternoon, we went to Oroklini, a small but very beautiful Natura 2000 bird reserve. The ponds are full of life, with a lot of herons, a number of different water birds and waders. The volunteers did some bird watching while I drove to the airport to meet the new volunteer Sarah.

11. April Very strong wind and rain are forecast so we leave later at 07.00.

We drive to the sewage farm and walk down to Chris's small wood.

It is untouched since autumn—no bird trapping.

The watchdogs are present in the large fenced-in garden so the owner is clearly planning to trap. We find no mire signs of trapping near the red house. The Mespina (loquat) fruit is ripe but there are no limesticks. That is very pleasing.

At Midday we drive to Cambos. There are 10 limesticks in the furthest corner of the olive grove. We leave them where they are as rain is forecast.

12. April Rain is forecast. We depart at 07.00 for Lukas's old trapping site. We walk past the winter hunting site where the hunters were again active. There is a lot of rubbish, including cartridge cases, near the bushes, but no pole supports for nets. We also find *6 not very fresh limesticks and bushes that have been trimmed about 14 days ago.*

Lukas has radically cleared and cleaned up his old trapping site and the bushes are already green. Cartridge cases disclose that he has hunted there in winter.

Rain is threatening so we break off our observations.

There are however no signs of active bird trapping.

13. April It is raining. We have breakfast and drive to Agia Napa to have a look around the tourist resort.

In the afternoon we visit the old trapping sites on the main Protaras road and the weekend houses below.

The trees and bushes are looking well but fortunately there are nowhere signs of bird trapping anymore.

In the evening, before bed, we decide to see if the trees of the first next to the rubbish dump are being used for trapping. We do not expect to find any limesticks this evening. I leave the volunteers near the stubble field and remind them to use the same route back in case of emergency. The farmer is still in his yard near the house. I wait for him to leave as soon as it is completely dark. In the darkness, I go down to the trapping trees and inspect them briefly. I have hardly finished when I hear a vehicle on the other side of the farm driving at high speed in a semi-circle as far as the stubble field and back again on my side and then return to repeat the circuit. The vehicle makes a turn at the approximate location of the volunteers. I do not know what has happened. I leave the lower part of the farm and walk in the dark through the bushes behind the only house. The farmer has discovered our vehicle and it is surrounded. I had forgotten to bring my mobile phone with me and cannot join up with the volunteers. I wait a long time for their return. The police arrive at our vehicle after some 30 minutes. After calling for them a long time, the volunteers finally appear.

The owner had enough time to alarm his trapper friends and call for their support. That is the tactic the trappers employ to protect their illegal activities. More than 20, mostly strong young men, and a few older trappers now arrive at our vehicle. I could not believe otherwise than that the complete illegal “Association of Traditional and Sustainable Hunting Methods”, the so-called Friends of the Limesticks from Paralimni had gathered here. The situation was highly charged. They accused us of releasing cage birds, although we had not entered the property.

Police officer George had the situation in hand. It showed however how dangerous and heated the trapping scene has become. The trappers still believe that it is their right and tradition to trap wild birds, and they are supported in this by the Party in government.

The new situation requires us to adapt. I can only employ more experienced volunteers, as the German CABS have done for some time.

14. April At first we had to repair a tyre. We then inspected the old trapping site beneath the Paramount Hotel. The fenced-in olive grove showed no signs of trapping. I discovered a track however, leading from the small gate in the fence to the many bushes on the building site next to the Paramount. We must look at this track again in autumn.

In the afternoon we had a wash-up of the events of the previous evening. We then went shopping for the remaining days of the camp.

Before bed, we drove to the Archangelo Gavriil farm. We heard voices from the farm and then from neighbouring weekend houses. It sounded like a party. I left the volunteers behind on the path and went alone in the dark to ascertain if the small gate in the fence by the greenhouse was locked. To my surprise it was wide open. That ended our nightly observation. The farm needs to be inspected for limesticks during the day.

15. April In the morning there was again thick fog. I walked up to the Restaurant Spartiatis and listened for decoy devices. All was quiet. The fat man’s field is untouched and it seems he no longer visits his land, even to hunt in winter. The beehives also appear to be no longer attended.

Gratifyingly, bird trapping appears to be more and more restricted.

Cleaning up the Cape Greco National Forest Park

We inspect the two illegal dumping sites in the Cape Greco Natura 2000 reserve that must disappear soonest. The national forest authority and the responsible Game Fund officer for Cape Greco appear to pass the buck for the task of cleaning up the area.

We fill 40 45 l sacks with the old rubbish and agree to deliver them to the Game Fund officer on 18 April. We are pleased with our efforts.

The Game Fund officers called us at 09.00. In the National Forest we helped them to load the 40 rubbish sacks onto a pick-up. All were very pleased about the cleaning up **and the bird reserve is once again fresh and clean.**

Since the events on the evening of 13 April on the farm, things had become too much for two of my volunteers so I let them leave for home.

15. April Late morning. Sarah and I were left as a group of two. We drove to Cambos but found no limesticks near the olive grove. On the way to the weekend house however, we found **6 older limesticks with 4 Lesser Whitethroats that had been dead for some time.** I suspect that the owner of the olive grove had set out these limesticks some time ago in order to determine when we would arrive at Cyprus and find them.

At 15.00 we drove to Phanos and inspected all the remaining sites that we had not visited up until now.

We also made a stop at the old trapping site near the sewage pump (lark slope). The trees and bushes on this slope are now so neglected that they can no longer be used for trapping.

Another pleasing development—we can confidently strike this site from our list.

16. April Departure at 07.00 for Lukas. He has no decoy devices running during the morning. (Bostian from CABS reported however that the devices have been activated at night).

We drive again to the Cambos olive grove. We discover **2 limesticks with 2 Blackcaps.** The birds are soon flying free. I am positive that there is a decoy device hidden somewhere here, which is turned off after a short burst of song, and then runs again later. We are unable to find it.

After 13.00 we drive to Panagia Church and on to the higher ground near the Hello man farm. We walk up and pass a very smart new red car with two young men. We walk further along the pilgrim's track. We turn towards the farm and walk through the bushes. We discover a green ground net, but realise it is to protect against snakes. We are pleased that there are no more limesticks among the ripe Mespina bushes. All of a sudden the owner's car drives into the farm. I was luckily no longer on the property and was able to make my escape back to the car where Sarah was waiting for me. To my surprise however I now observed the red car on the hill next to the dogs kept in cages there. The dogs had whined since after 13.00 and were probably only now being fed. But surprisingly the 20-year-olds seemed to be very interested in us. We drove off and Sarah saw how they climbed onto the roof of the shed to observe us further. They had clearly informed the farmer. The situation with people here has indeed developed in an unfriendly way.

17. April It is foggy and damp. We drive once more to the six power masts and search the area but find no decoy devices. The area near the 6th mast probably belongs to Kokkines. We walk on to the shepherd's house. Things have changed greatly here. A new owner perhaps? A high new fence now surrounds the property, including the shepherd's house and the large orchard, where there had never been any trapping. This is a very positive development. *We can probably now strike also the old shepherd's area from our list of trapping sites.*

We visit my old friend Chris. He is working although it is Sunday. He complains that he is old and tired. He shows me limesticks from the previous autumn that he never used. The glue had hardened. He was an habitual trapper but, as many other of the older men, *no longer sets out limesticks.*

18. April Departure at 06.00 to the sewage farm. We walk to the large fenced-in garden and observe the vehicles arriving behind the road. We hear the boat owner's radio playing. He could be trapping, but on a small scale. We observe Chris's neighbour but no one is at home. *Trapping has declined enormously.*

After lunch we drive to Developer Giovanni's office. We search the area but find no signs of bird trapping. The married pair, owners of the house on the high cliff, appear no longer to live there. Nonetheless, I discover that birds are being trapped in a tree near the door of the house.

In the evening, the five CABS volunteers visit us and we exchange experiences. They report that many small-scale bird trappers are active.

19. April In the early morning we drove to the olive grove at Cambos. The owner has stopped setting limesticks and I heard no more decoy devices. We then drove to the farmer at Cambos and the shepherd. His garden is very well tended and his geese still gaggle, but I have not seen the old shepherd or heard his moped for more than a year. *Has trapping ceased here?*

We then visit the Archangelo Gavriil farm. The gate in the fence is open so I enter the garden. The Mespina fruit are ripe, in part overripe, but there are no limesticks. The garden of the weekend house is also well tended with no sign of trapping. The old boards for bird trapping are still however in the carob tree.

In the evening, we meet Ritsa for a farewell dinner and return her birdcages.

20. April Our departure day.

Finds of traps and birds during spring migration

- Decoy devices 2
- Limesticks 197
- Living birds 19
- Dead birds 22
- Ground net mountings 3

Migration in spring 2016

This year's spring was notable for the large number of Nightingales. During the whole of our stay, they migrated in flocks through Cape Greco and surroundings. The Hoopoe was also present in gratifying numbers during the migration season. We also heard regularly the call of the Cuckoo and later the song of the Golden Oriole from the treetops. Willow Warblers and Black Caps were trapped on many limesticks. In addition to the resident Common Kestrel, we observed other birds of prey, above all harrier species. We heard the first song of the Black-headed Bunting on 18 April.

The swarms of millions of birds in days long gone

When relating tales of former times, older Cypriots mention the millions of migratory birds that they saw passing over Cape Greco and its surroundings. These massive flocks are no more to be seen and the numbers of migrant birds are declining rapidly. Here and there, it is a pleasure to observe very large flocks on Bee-eaters. In the course of only 20 years, the decline in migrant birds is enormous—their numbers have more than halved.

You won't see and hear any arrival of nocturnal migrants on the south coast in autumn as witnessed by Bourne in 1959 who saw or more often heard small birds drop like stones from the sky at first light and immediately dive into cover.

The insects are gone

The depletion in the number of migrant birds passing through Cyprus should not come as a surprise as the long-distance migrants among them are insectivores. In many parts of Europe, more than 80% of the insects that these birds feed on have disappeared, particularly the larger insects (Study by TUMBRINCK, NABU Germany). Whenever considerable numbers of Cuckoos, Golden Orioles and Wrynecks pass over Cape Greco, thanks must go to the farming communities of the Balkan states and Russia. Bird trapping alone is not to blame for the decline in migrants.

It is difficult to understand why the right to live for the migrating feathered guests from foreign lands is denied, when for human beings this right is unquestionable.

Zero Tolerance of cruelty and killing of wild birds



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"Natura 2000 reserve" poster defaced by bird trappers.