

Directorate General Environment Unit B.2
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Gwatt, March 24, 2006

**Bird Shooting and trapping on the South Coast (Famagusta District) in Cyprus
in autumn and winter 2005/6**

Dear Mr Hanley

On November 11, 2005 Birdlife Cyprus and Terra Cypria (CCF) informed the Standing Committee of the Berne Convention in Strasbourg in their annual report that since 2002 no progress has been made in the fight to stop liming and netting of birds. There may even be an increase of bird killing. The trade in birds has not been reduced. Birdlife Cyprus estimates that one million birds are still eaten by Cyprus inhabitants annually. This information coincides with our own observations of bird trapping in 2003-2005.

Since 2002 the shooting of birds has been excluded from Birdlife Cyprus reports. Shooting is indeed a different field; nevertheless it should be taken into consideration, since bird shooting in Cyprus is equally indiscriminate, with regard to targeted species, as bird liming and netting. In 2003 the open season for shooting birds was extended to include the whole of September (a month of migration), previously a close season month before accession. November to end February remains part of the open season.

In our (witnessed) observations and opinion, shooters kill many more birds indiscriminately than bird trappers. Cyprus hosts millions of migratory birds in winter, but I believe most of these will never return to their homelands. Indeed the number of protected birds shot outweighs by far the number of birds trapped.

The total number of birds indiscriminately shot may be ten to twenty times more than the estimated number of victims limed and netted.

This means Cypriots eat and export more than 10 million birds in a year. There must be an enormous trade in these "delicacies".

Any gains in bird life from a reduction in bird trapping since 2002 have unfortunately been more than offset by the uncontrolled and indiscriminate daily massacres perpetrated by shooters.

Experiences with hunting on the south eastern peninsula with Cape Greco
September to January 2005/ 2006

September

Most hunters were shooting birds in areas which were closed for hunting.

The annual hunting map and hunting instructions in newspapers inform shooters beforehand which areas are open for hunting. Panels put up by game wardens inform where hunters must observe game reserves.

Despite this, shooters were hunting uncontrolled where ever they decided to find the most birds. The prohibition panels were often turned in the wrong direction or lying on the ground; certainly they did not protect the birds from shooting.

In early September when we asked the Game Fund why hunters were shooting in places where the hunting map prohibited shooting, we were supported by the Game Fund that shooting was taking place in game reserve areas and told that the Game Fund would take steps to prevent this. There was a patrol to one of those places and the poachers (with shot protected birds in their possession) were arrested. Rumours said the hunters had attacked the game wardens. The hunters were informed by the game wardens that I was the cause of the probably unusual patrol. The same day I was insulted by young hunters.

Patrols against offenders were stopped and the hunters continued unrestricted and uncontrolled shooting throughout September.

On Sunday morning at 4.45 loud shooting began and seemingly went on for ever. This happened next to residential areas.

The small lake which was a game reserve zone was so heavily hunted that the shooters made a massacre of the 50 turtle doves roosting in the trees, together with all the other birds.

We witnessed the shooting of Bee-eaters, Golden Orioles, Little egrets, Swallows, Kestrels, Jackdaws and many small bird species.

We witnessed shooting of birds from moving cars. Some vehicles raced in a circuit, shooting from both sides of the car windows into trees and bushes: clearly an illegal practice.

In the evening of the first winter hunting day, on 30 October 05, after endless day-long shooting, I saw a hunter in his uniform driving to his holiday house in Protaras. He then unloaded his prey from his four wheel drive car. There were four to six big high plastic sacks which he put in rows, touching them and examining them carefully. It was not difficult to guess the contents of the plastic bags as large dead birds. But the amount of prey clearly went beyond the permitted individual limit of 5 Chukar and one Black Francolin.

November

The thousands of Chukar partridge which are reared in summer are killed by shooters within two to three days. There is thus nothing left for legal winter hunting from November till the end of February.

The price of the birds has doubled. This fact will animate Cyprus hunters to shoot as many birds as they can.

On 9 November I went to the Ayii Saranda and from there walked up to the highest point, the Phanos. The amount of birds I met in this area was overwhelming, a spring-time abundance: all kinds of Thrushes, many Warblers, Redstarts, Black redstarts, Chiffchaffs, a thousand Chaffinches, Robins, Bluethroats, Stonechats and many more. I realised that this huge mass of birds had arrived as winter visitors to Cyprus.

But when I realised that this place, packed with birds, was exactly the same spot I had visited the previous February, when not a single bird could be seen or heard in a radius of many kilometres, I was shocked.

January 2006

On 26 January I again walked up to the Phanos. The new, bulldozed dirt road was littered with cartridges, although these had never been found there before. For years I have had grave doubts and suspicions over **who authorises the bulldozing of so many dirt roads** in this otherwise undisturbed habitat, thus dividing and scattering it in small squares. This enables shooters to drive across all the habitat, shooting out of the windows of their cars into the small squares of scrub and make migratory birds into easy prey.

This time I no longer found the many joyful birds, the chaffinches, Bluethroats, etc. I heard a few warblers sending out warnings from their bushes. A Crested Lark was singing on the hill, and that was it.

I walked along the slope. It was quiet, very quiet. Behind me I heard a few shots.

The deadly calm without any birds in these areas is a catastrophe.

The same day I drove up to Ayios Antonius to see the bird situation in Sotira Forest.

When I stopped at the church I heard hunters shooting next to the picnic place. I estimated there were four men shooting, while a cassette recorder was loudly playing bird calls: an illegal practice. The Game Fund and game wardens failed to answer my emergency call.

The hunters themselves know there is no game left on the island. Cypriot hunters say: "What they call hunting in Cyprus isn't hunting, as there is no game left. Or do you really want to call the shooting of millions of protected birds hunting? Years ago we had Grey Partridge. Then we could go and hunt a partridge from time to time. But this time has long gone."

Recommendations:

1. It's obvious for all parties that liming and netting and indiscriminate shooting of protected birds hasn't decreased since 2002. The bird massacres continue, despite the hopes raised in 2002 that indiscriminate bird killing could be reduced, if not discontinued in Cyprus, especially after the agreement by the government and the hunting association.
2. The determination of the Game Fund to abolish bird trapping and shooting of protected birds seems to have declined since 2002. The reasons may lie in the conflict of interest inherent in an institution which has a brief to guarantee biodiversity, but must also respond to the hunters' agenda.
3. The Game Fund is entangled in complications with the hunters, who blame the Game Fund for wasting their money and not doing enough to provide game for the hunters. The hunters are demanding the closure of the Game Fund.
4. The Game Fund is embroiled in the (financial) interests of the hunting lobby.
5. A reorganisation of the Game Fund is inevitable if we want to break the standstill and see any further progress in future.
2006 should end unsuccessful 3-year experiment with the present body of the Game Fund – a hunters' institution – as enforcement authority.
6. We must also consider the 34 bird species which are officially game birds.
The hunters will never be able to know all 34 birds, distinguishing them in the air, in trees, on the ground, in different light. A list of allowed game birds should be compiled for different areas, so that local hunters need only be able to recognise some 10 – 15 species. Without a list of game species that is genuinely workable in the field, the hunters – even if the current mentality of shooting anything that moves can gradually be overcome – will still be unable to shoot birds in a discriminate way.

Yours sincerely

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