

Wildlife crime in Cyprus

Scale and efforts to control it



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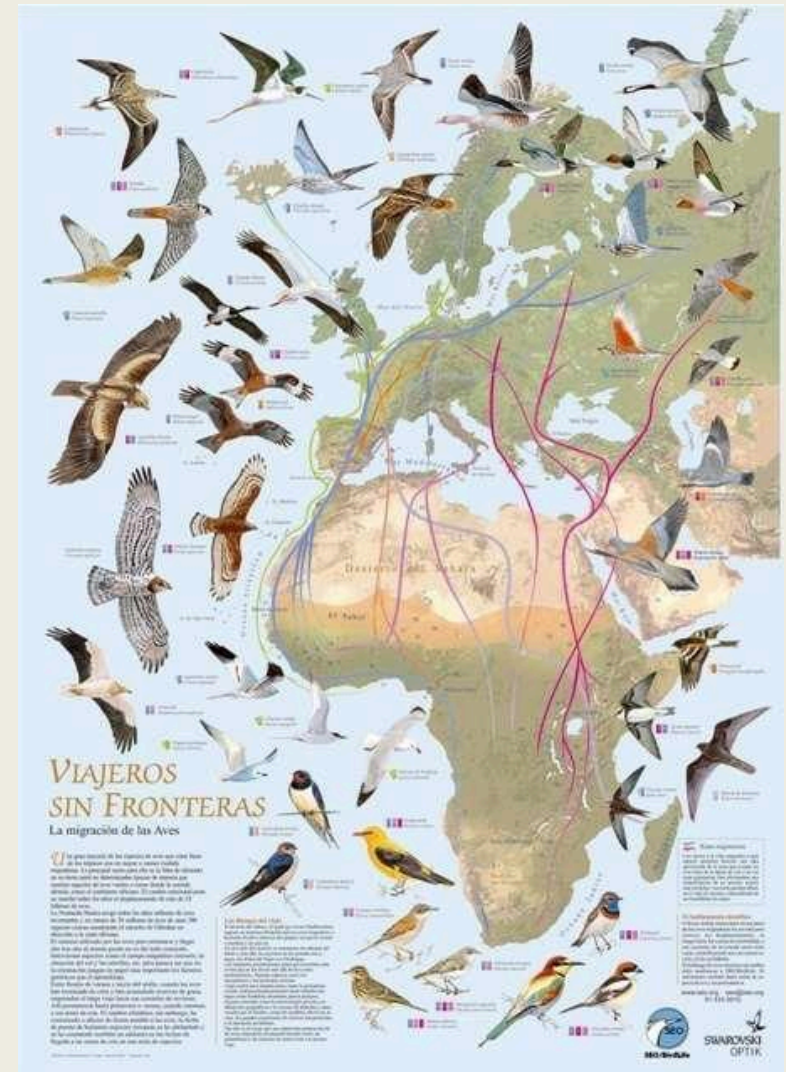
Cyprus is located in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, with an area of about 9250 km², making it the third largest island in the Mediterranean. The island's biodiversity is rich, as it hosts more than 1865 plant species (131 endemic) and more than 400 bird species (including 2 endemic species and 4 endemic subspecies). It is one of the world's Endemic Bird Areas.



N.KASSINIS CY GFS NOV 25 2018



Around 30% of the bird species of the island are known to have bred there at least once, but the majority of the birds recorded are migratory species, stopping over during their migration between Europe and Africa in the spring and the autumn. Many of these migratory species are of European and global importance and are protected under national and international legislation.



Wildlife crime in Cyprus can be divided into the following categories:



1. Large-scale trapping of migratory/wintering passerines.
2. Illegal poisoning of wildlife in order to reduce livestock depredation and game mortality directed to foxes and stray dogs. Killing of non-target species such as Griffon vultures and other protected raptors.
3. Poaching of game species and shooting of protected species.
4. Poaching of the endemic Cyprus mouflon.
5. Live-trapping of songbirds to be sold in pet shops as pets.
6. Nestrobbing of large raptors

Large-scale trapping and killing of migratory and wintering passerines

Involves the illegal use of sound devices to attract birds and trapping those using mistnets and limesticks.

The “catch” is usually served illegally in restaurants to be served as delicacy to affluent city people, or utilized for personal use.





Indiscriminate method of killing
>200 bird spp. recorded
“by-catch” includes owls, falcons, even eagles..



Trapping on Cyprus map

- Trapping is widespread and affects almost all of the Mediterranean countries, but the eastern part of Cyprus is probably one of the most intensively trapped area for migratory birds in the region.
- Cyprus provides an important stopover point for an estimated 150 million migrant birds of more than 200 species, as a number of migration flyways converge over the island. The seasonal trapping of migrant passerines in Cyprus has been carried out for centuries (since the 16th century according to some sources) and is therefore regarded by many within the local community ***as a traditional practice.***
- Once largely a seasonal food for the local peasants, blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* (termed locally as “ambelopoulia”) are still in high demand, providing a robust local illegal market.



The illegal taking of wild birds and especially Palaearctic-African migrants has been recognized as a serious pan-European problem with clear conservation implications. A range of international legal instruments and frameworks have thus been adopted to monitor and conserve wild bird populations.



Wildlife Poisoning

Illegal poisoning of wildlife in order to reduce livestock depredation and game mortality directed to foxes and stray dogs. Killing of non-target species such as Griffon vultures (GV) and other protected raptors.

Broadcast use of poisoned baits led to the extinction of the Black Vulture and the sharp decline of the GV and the Raven as breeding birds.



- From 2003-2018, 21 Griffon Vultures were found dead 12 of which were poisoned, 3 shot and 6 of unknown causes.
- 6 of the dead GV were birds brought to Cyprus from Crete to reinforce the local population during project GYPAS carried out under the 'Cross Border Cooperation Program Greece-Cyprus 2007- 2013' co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and national funds of Greece and Cyprus



Poisoned songbirds at a water spring, summer 2007



Species of conservation concern that were found poisoned:

- Bonelli's eagles
- Long-legged Buzzards
- Goshawks
- Harrier spp.
- Common Buzzards
- Black Kites



Poisoning is a serious threat to wildlife in Cyprus and even though it was more severe in the past (1980s-1990s) there is a long distance to cover in order to be at low levels.

Poaching of the endemic Cyprus mouflon, usually using shotguns, but also snares and leg-hold traps.



Cyprus mouflon is protected by both national and EU legislations

- Poaching of mouflon is carried out so to sell meat in black market and restaurants that they will serve it to “special” customers.
- Mouflon have expanded their range in mountains neighboring Pafos forest, their stronghold, where they are largely protected.
- There is an increase in mouflon shooting during hunting season when some hunters take advantage of the small game permit to access areas where mouflon are...



Cause of mortality for a total of 99 animals brought to the Veterinary Services, Cyprus during the period 2011-2015 for necropsy:

1. Disease-related mortality 30%
2. Predation 25%
- 3. Poaching 16%**
4. Collision with vehicles 13%
5. Accidents, snake bites, unknown 16%



% mortality from radio-tagged mouflon

Cause of death for 31 Cyprus mouflon live-trapped and radio-tagged in the period 2002-2007, was predation (32%) and poaching (19%).



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Poaching of game species involving illegal hunting with:

- the use of traps,
- hunting in wildlife conservation areas (no hunting areas),
- hunting during closed season,
- during the night hours,
- using tape recorders when hunting song thrush, etc.



Shooting of protected species

This is done during hunting season, especially in coastal areas during fall migration period.

- **Common birds shot:**

- Bee-eaters
- Honey Buzzard
- Common Buzzard
- Harrier spp.
- Small falcons
- Herons/egrets



but sometimes Bonelli's eagles

Illegal shooting of raptors was more of a serious issue in the past decades and has declined significantly in the last decade, mostly due to hunter education, hunter peer pressure and stricter fines.

Live- live trapping of songbirds (mostly of the genus *Carduelis*) to be sold in pet shops as pets.

Species, besides finches sought after, were also the Calandra Lark (mostly in the past), Black-headed Bunting, Song thrush, Blackbird.

Other species live-trapped and kept in cages are Turtle dove and woodpigeon.



This has been effectively controlled with checks and fines in Pet-shops for illegal possession of such protected species.

Nest robbing for large raptors

Cases of nest robbing have been reported and prosecuted , in areas where people have taken chicks of Bonelli's eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Goshawk and Peregrine falcon and kept them:

1. for falconry purposes,
2. or displayed them in unlicensed private zoos and / or
3. sell them in the black market.



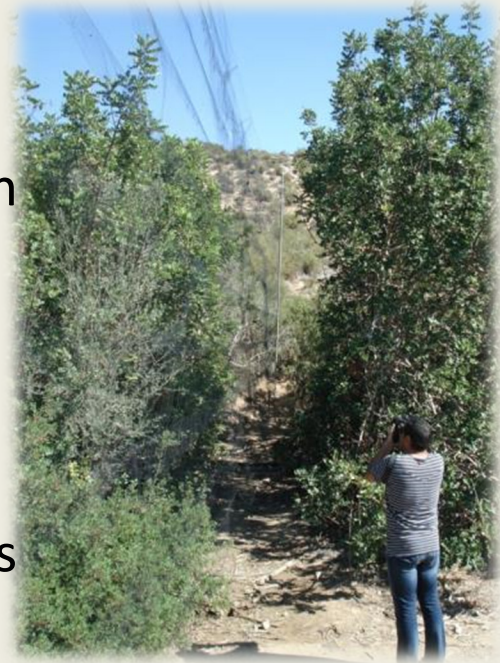
This is relatively rare in Cyprus as there is no tradition of such activity as falconry.

There is vigilance on the matter given close monitoring of large raptor nests and past cases where GFS has prosecuted people illegally possessing such large raptors or trying to sell them. The magnitude of such illegal activity is small.

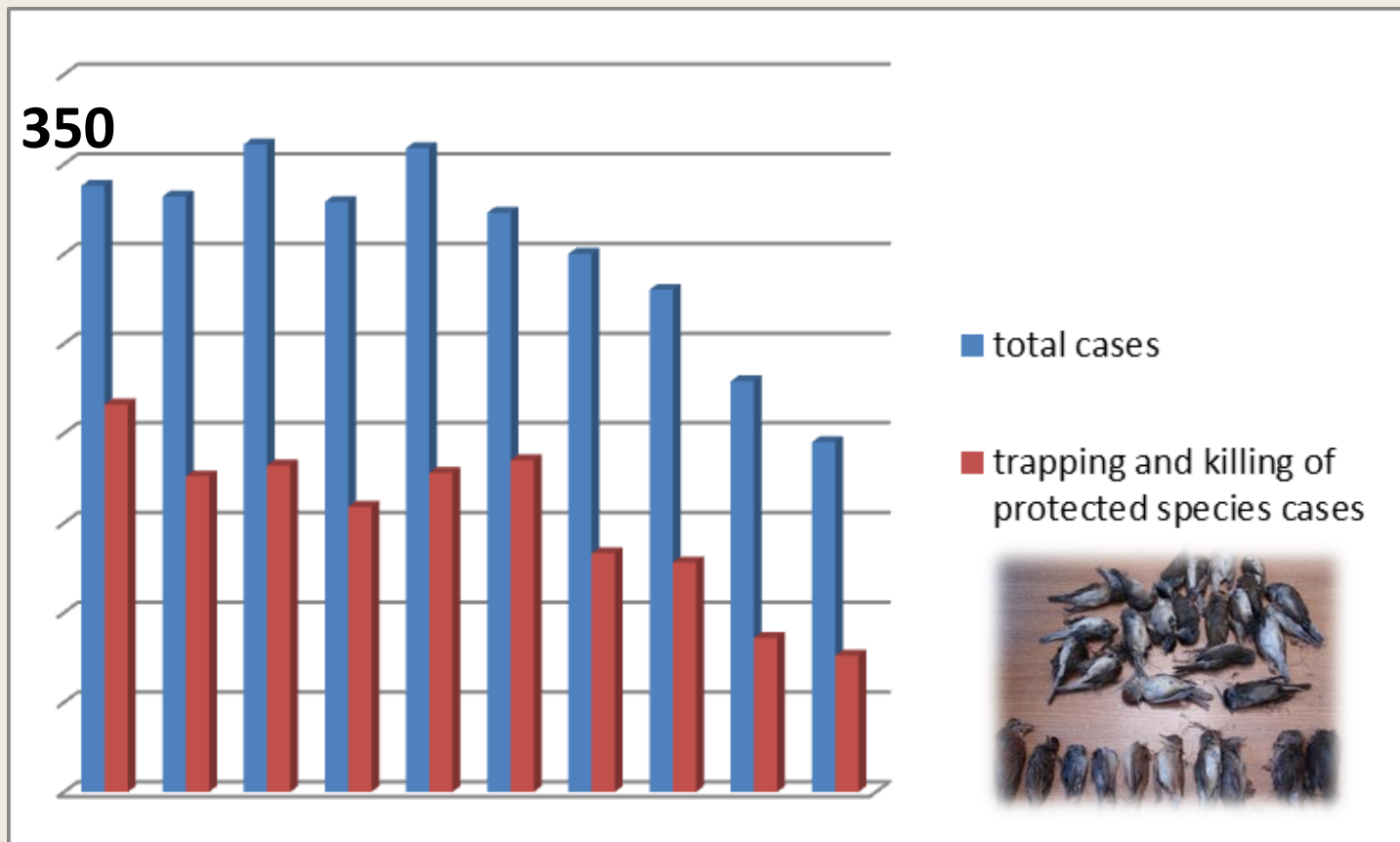


Wildlife crime prevention and control efforts

- Prevention and control of poaching through 24/7 patrolling by GFS
- Organized campaigns against illegal trapping of migratory birds through targeted patrols in cooperation with CYPOL
- Protection of Cyprus mouflon from poachers through patrolling and relevant management practices in the Pafos forest (controlling access of secondary forest tracks)
- Protection of wildlife conservation areas from poachers and hunting control during hunting period
- Hunter education (mandatory for new hunters and wildlife law violators)
- Awareness raising on issues such as poisoning/illegal shooting/biodiversity/wildlife conservation/respect of wildlife/ ***promote non-consumptive values of wildlife***



Total number of cases and relevant trapping and killing of protected species prosecuted by GFS, 2007-2016



Use of trail cameras in sensitive areas of criminal activity to monitor movements



New advances: Wildlife forensics

Particularly for poaching cases involving the Cyprus mouflon: at least 10 cases over the last decade have been resolved.

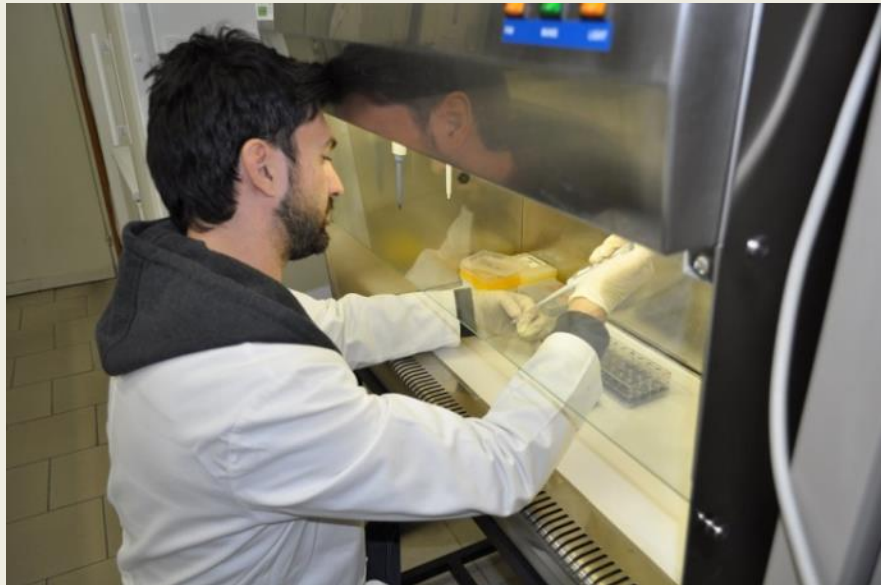
Analysis of evidence: boot, jeans, wood.

Analysis of meat found in freezers and prove in court that is from protected mouflon.



“DNA barcoding for birds” (2012-2015).

Project partners: Game & Fauna Service, Birdlife Cyprus, University of Cyprus and University of Pisa (zoology unit/ lab)



DNA sequencing
was completed
for 62 out of the
75 bird species



In 2017 Game and Wild bird Law amended

The legislation for the Conservation of game and wild birds (Law 152.1 of 2003), transposing the EU Birds Directive was further amended in 2017, with heavy monetary on-the-spot fines being given for each wildlife violation.

Since its application in summer 2017, 242 such fines were issued for a total amount €793,593. Fifty-three percent of these fines have been paid, 15% are outstanding and 32% are being contested in court.

This legislative change led to a significant decrease in trapping activity.

A vertical strip of small, square thumbnail images representing different news stories. The thumbnails show various scenes: people at events, landscapes, and group photos.



Efforts to reduce bird trapping bear fruit but must continue

06 March 2018, BirdLife Cyprus Press release

“A striking reduction in bird trapping was achieved in Cyprus in autumn 2017, thanks to effective enforcement, combined with newly deterrent sentencing and operations targeting trapping areas.

More and continued action is called for to ensure this positive step is turned into a permanent end to large-scale trapping.

Monitoring data for autumn 2017 showed a 79% decrease in trapping with illegal mist nets compared to 2002 and a sharp drop compared to autumn 2016.

The enforcement efforts of the SBA Police, the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit are fully acknowledged.

Despite the fall in mist netting in the main autumn killing season, it is still estimated that up to 610,000 birds could have been killed across Cyprus in autumn 2017 and recent problematic relaxations of the Cyprus hunting legislation relating to limestick use and the consumption of game in restaurants remain.

The SBA Administration needs to move forward with the development of an eradication plan for invasive acacia planted for trapping purposes on the Cape Pyla bird killing hot spot.”

Spring 2017 trapping levels reduced 98% compared to spring 2007

Illegal bird trapping activity with the use of mist nets and limesticks continued during spring 2017, as shown by the survey data from the systematic surveillance programme of BirdLife Cyprus. **The overall spring pattern in recent years has shown a significant decrease in illegal bird trapping activity levels compared to the past – 2017 recorded the lowest levels of spring bird trapping activity, with a decrease of 98% compared to spring 2007.**

Nonetheless, even with these relatively low levels, it is estimated that for spring 2017 nearly 20,000 birds could have been killed within the survey area based on BirdLife Cyprus' field data.

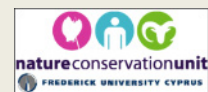
How to reduce wildlife crime ...

- Issues such as poaching and illegal wildlife trade are multidimensional and driven by complex social, cultural and economic factors
- Need for a more holistic approach to be adopted—that aims to engage local communities to participate in the protection or sustainable management of wildlife populations.
- engagement of local communities is needed -in the case of trapping- where it occurs the most.
- Deal with poisoning issues by cooperating with farmers in controlling foxes legally and help competent authorities remove stray dogs from the countryside. Apply innovative projects to deal with poisoning effectively.



Project LIFE 4 BIRDS

- Targeted actions in reducing access to roads and increase patrolling in 3 SPAs in the eastern part of Cyprus where trapping was intensive.
- Visits to primary schools of the region and presenting relevant project actions to children, guided field trips to these NATURA 2000 sites with schools.
- TV spots on threats due to trapping and sites' conservation importance broadcasted and relevant material produced and distributed.
- Media coverage of project related to reducing trapping efforts and SPAs conservation importance was given.



To summarize:

Wildlife crime comes in many forms and negatively affects biodiversity and our natural heritage.

A total of 3046 cases involving wildlife law violations were prosecuted in the decade 2007-2016, 1519 of which or 49% involved bird trapping and/or killing of protected species.

The 2017 amended wildlife law ***effectively reduced trapping of migratory birds at a significant level.***

According to BirdLife Cyprus' UPDATE on illegal bird trapping activity in Cyprus:

“Monitoring data for autumn 2017 showed a 79% decrease in trapping with illegal mist nets compared to 2002 and a sharp drop compared to autumn 2016”.

There is still a need for more holistic approach that needs to be adopted in order to involve local communities in areas of high poaching intensity in the protection and sustainable management of wildlife resources.

Efforts need to be continuous and never loose momentum...



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Thank you for your attention!

