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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
23rd meeting

Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2003

Specific File

**Military Antenna on the British base of Akrotiri
(Cyprus)**

Report by the NGO
Cyprus Conservation Foundation

Secretariat Memorandum
Prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Natural and Cultural Heritage

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 CYPRUS CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Partners of: European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), Planta Europa, Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP)

**MILITARY ANTENNA ON THE BRITISH BASE OF AKROTIRI, CYPRUS
 THREATENS AKROTIRI WETLAND**

**A report by the Cyprus Conservation Foundation in cooperation
 with BirdLife Cyprus.**

1. Background

On the 1st of July 2002 the British Sovereign Bases in Cyprus started the installation at Akrotiri of a new, very high and wide mega-antenna, known as Pluto II. The area required for the installation is 13ha and the selected site is located in one of the most important ecosystems in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean: the Akrotiri Wetland, a unique ecosystem of fresh and salt-water habitats.

This type of aerial is known as a "curtain array antenna" and its dimensions are width 196m and height 100m.

The new antenna will be installed, in an existing 'forest' of lower antennae created by the British Bases on the west side of the salt lake. It has to be noted that the existing antennae, and even more so the planned additional one, are situated in a crucial and sensitive area of the wetland complex, providing the hydrological link between fresh water marshes and the Akrotiri salt lake, as well as being located on a specific habitat for species of particular concern.

The wetland ecosystem

- has been included in the List of Important Bird Areas of Europe by Birdlife International (Important Bird Areas of Europe, Priority sites for conservation: Southern Europe, page 152-153).
- is one of the sites proposed by Cyprus for inclusion in the Natura 2000 Network
- is proposed for designation as a Nature Reserve by the Cyprus Government.
- qualifies for listing as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, Criteria 1, 2, 3 and 6.
- Supports a significant number of rare, endangered, vulnerable, endemic, or important flora and fauna species
- supports more than 1% of the Eastern Mediterranean's internationally important wintering population of Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)
- Support over 116 bird species listed in Appendix A of the Berne Convention, with important numbers of wintering and visiting populations of such species as the Greater Flamingo, Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), Red footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*).
- supports over 32 bird species listed in the Annex I of the European Birds Directive, including Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*), Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), Crane (*Grus grus*), Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Spur-winged Plover (*Hoplopterus spinosus*), Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*), Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), Rudy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*), White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonora*).
- supports 27 habitat types listed in the Annex I of the European Habitats Directive
- supports 2 habitat types listed in the Annex II of the European Habitats Directive
- hosts an outstanding assemblage of migratory birds.
- Of the 368 bird species recorded in Cyprus 238 species have been recorded in the area.
- hosts about 50% of the African wintering population of the Demoiselle Crane.

Thus the ecological importance of the area is established and indisputable, but due to the political status of the area (Military Sovereign Bases) the Cyprus Government has not designated the Akrotiri Wetland for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (ratified April 2001). The British Authorities, have now informed the Ramsar Bureau of

their intention to extend the Ramsar Convention to the Bases, but their proposal excludes the antenna 'forest'. See comparative maps below showing the area proposed by the Cyprus Government for protection and that proposed by the Bases.

2. Current situation

The British Authorities started installation of the Antenna **before** the completion of an environmental and health impact assessment undertaken in cooperation with the Cyprus Government. From previous observations it is known that the existing antennae to the west of the Akrotiri road have caused mortality among water fowl, which has been exacerbated by the construction of a higher antenna, Pluto I (50m). Therefore, one can hypothesise that the construction of Pluto II will have even greater impact, specially since its location is on the corridor between the salt lake and the fresh water marshes, which are expected to attract considerably more avifauna as from this year since more water has been released into the area. In an effort to mitigate disturbance the British Authorities translocated species from the area in question. Mr Karl Fuller, who co-ordinated an international panel auditing the translocation on behalf of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (Lincoln, UK), has gone on record as stating that the area of translocation **is** being disturbed (Sunday Mail 24.8.030) by the installations.

3. Contravention of the Berne Convention

The UK Government has extended the competence of the Bern Convention to cover its Bases in Cyprus. The continued presence of the antennae and their planned increase contravenes articles 4.2 and 4.3 of the Bern Convention:

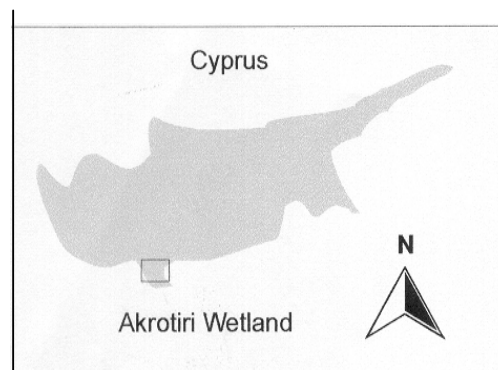
"Article 4.2 The Contracting Parties in their planning and development policies shall have regard to the conservation requirements of the areas protected under the preceding paragraph, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas.

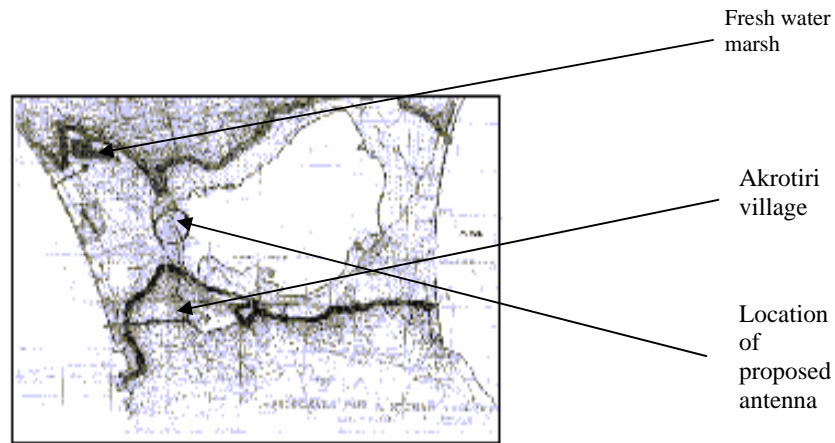
Article 4.3 The Contracting Parties undertake to give special attention to the protection of areas that are of importance for the migratory species specified in Appendices II and III and which are appropriately situated in relation to migration routes, as wintering, staging, feeding, breeding or moulting areas."

The whole issue is particularly relevant in the light of the findings on the impact of wind farms and electric power transmission lines on birds, and should be included in this year's agenda for the Standing Committee meeting.

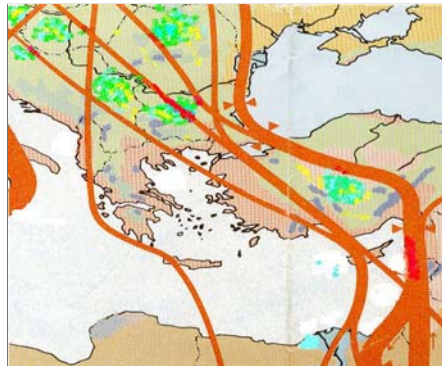
4. The Cyprus Conservation Foundation and the BirdLife Cyprus call on the Meeting to

- (a) express its concern,
- (b) take all appropriate measures to assess and monitor the situation
- (c) to request and study a copy of the impact assessment carried out by the IEMA.
- (d) To conduct an on-the-spot appraisal of the situation.

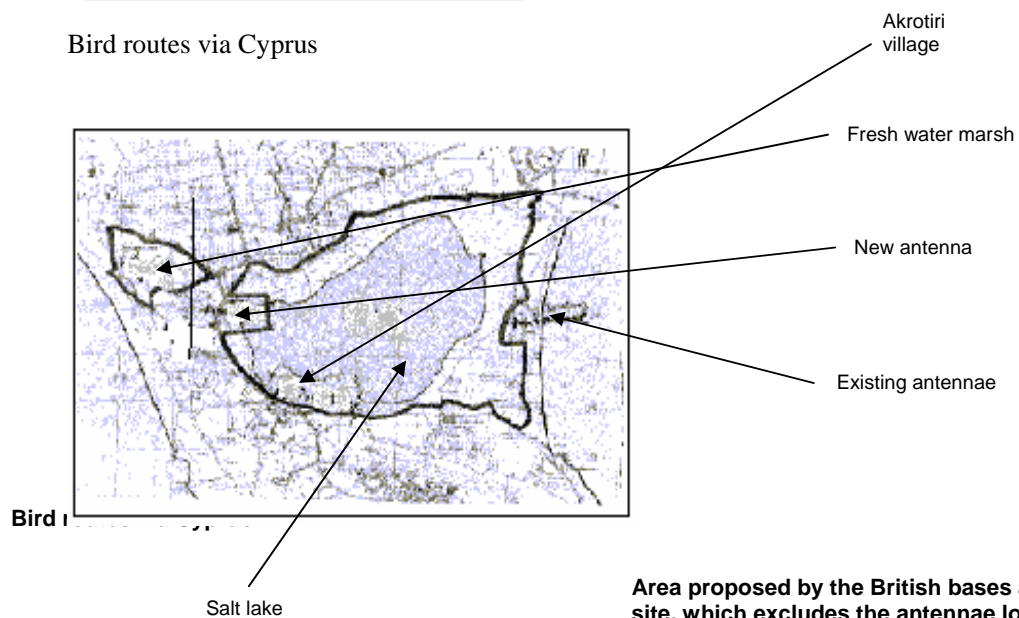




Area proposed by the Cyprus government as a nature reserve



Bird routes via Cyprus



Area proposed by the British bases as a Ramsar site, which excludes the antennae location