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AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

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Illegal trapping, killing and trade of birds in Cyprus

REPORT BY NGO

*Document prepared by:
BirdLife International (represented by BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB – BirdLife in the UK)
and Terra Cypria*

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UPDATE TO THE BUREAU OF THE BERN CONVENTION STANDING COMMITTEE ON ILLEGAL TRAPPING, KILLING AND TRADE OF BIRDS IN CYPRUS

**Report by BirdLife International (represented by BirdLife Cyprus and the RSPB –
BirdLife in the UK) and Terra Cypria.**

*With reference to Recommendation No. 90 (2001) on the Catching, killing or trading of
protected birds in Cyprus (appended below)*

The situation on the ground in the Autumn of 2009 looks very bad, first results from the ongoing BirdLife monitoring project show. The Spring 09 migration season seemed to provide some grounds for hope - with a reduction in mist netting activity compared to the spring of 08. But now that the main, Autumn trapping season has arrived, the trappers are back in force, particularly with limesticks.

Levels of limestick use detected in the main trapping areas during the four-week period August 31st to September 25th were almost double (83% increase) those detected in the Autumn of 08. BirdLife also found greatly increased evidence of limestick manufacture in September 09, often on a big scale. In mid-September, following a BirdLife tip-off, a Larnaca area villager was arrested with almost 1,000 limesticks in his garden “workshop”. The day after his arrest, the man was back making limesticks in his garden - indicating a strong market for his illegal produce. This points to a growing tolerance of limestick use, which, though illegal and highly damaging, is still perceived as “traditional” by a large sector of Cyprus society.

Mist netting levels in the first part of the Autumn 09 season were slightly higher than in the Autumns of 08 and 07. It should be noted here that netting levels in the Autumns of 07 and 08 were the highest recorded for five years – representing a serious reverse in the enforcement effort. Mist net use is taking place on a massive scale in the Pyla Range area, within the British Sovereign Base area (SBA). Up to three years ago, trapping had been minimised within the SBAs, but now seems to be making an unwelcome comeback. In the Republic areas, detection of trapping activity (with nets or limesticks) is increasingly hampered by the fact that trappers are now mostly active within enclosures (which BirdLife observers do not enter). This could be leading to an underestimation of trapping levels in some areas.

Enforcement efforts by the Cyprus Game Fund, the new Cyprus Police anti-poaching unit and the SBA Police continue, often in the face of violent reactions from the trappers. The SBA Police distributed anti-trapping information leaflets (prepared by BirdLife Cyprus and the Game Fund) to communities in the Eastern SBA this September. But limited resources mean all three authorities are seriously stretched. Political decisions are urgently needed both within the UK and Cyprus governments to throw more manpower into anti-trapping enforcement. UK government plans to use British Army personnel (under SBA Police supervision) to clear trapping paraphernalia (poles, pole bases, carpeting, etc) from the Pyla Range area in early October are a very welcome decisive action.

The Cyprus government needs to seriously and decisively tackle the problem of restaurants serving trapped birds as expensive *ambelopoulia* delicacies. This illegal practice – which has become more widespread and open over the last 3 years – provides the financial incentive for trappers.

The Standing Committee has an important role to play in maintaining political pressure on the Cyprus and UK governments over this persistent and intractable problem. We are at a crucial juncture in the battle to end the trapping, with the enforcement gains associated with the Island’s accession to the EU (an 80% reduction in trapping levels) now in serious danger of being reversed. Hundreds of thousands of migrant (and other) birds – including many threatened species - are still being killed by Cyprus trappers each year.