

Crisis in Cyprus: Illegal bird trapping reaches disastrous levels

Title

BirdLife Cyprus has released its newest report on illegal bird trapping with data gathered between 31 August and 8 November 2010, showing a dramatic rise in such activity. In this, its ninth year of systematic data gathering in the field by a trained team of surveyors, BirdLife Cyprus found a 75% increase in mist net use and an 89% increase in limestick setting compared to 2009 levels. While trapping levels remain lower than in the 1990s, they have been on an alarming upward trend for four years which points toward an impending ecological disaster. Trappers mainly target migrant Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* and other songbirds to sell to local restaurants as 'ambelopoulia', a delicacy of pickled or steamed songbirds. In addition to target species, many 'non-target' species known to fall victim to the indiscriminate traps set include owls, flycatchers and endemics such as the Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* and Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca*. The total estimated toll in the Famagusta and Larnaca districts is around 1.4 million birds. Bird trapping has been illegal in Cyprus for over 30 years and thus the current data, representing a nine-year high in activity, denotes a failure on the part of both Cyprus and the UK. As EU Member States, they have obligations under the EU Birds Directive to protect birds and particularly migratory species, which include many of those trapped. Cyprus police have undertaken enforcement action against ambelopoulia-serving restaurants which provide the economic impetus for much trapping activity, however these efforts have not been popular locally. Clear condemnation from MPs and other key public figures could go a long way towards shifting public attitude on this topic, ensuring a future for Cyprus' rich avian biodiversity. <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/>
