

If you visit Cyprus say no to *Ambelopoulia*

Title

BirdLife Europe encourages those visiting Cyprus during its 6-month EU presidency to enjoy the many traditional culinary delights the Mediterranean island has to offer, but with one important exception: *ambelopoulia* (trapped birds).

The issue at stake is not gastronomic but ecological, and relates to the source and content of this one dish. *Ambelopoulia* is the name given to a local 'delicacy' consisting of blackcap warblers and other songbirds illegally trapped in their thousands in Cyprus every year. The tiny birds are eaten whole, legs, beak and all. Local demand for these traditional but illegal 'delicacies' is the financial driving force behind what has become a mass annual slaughter of migratory birds, most of which come from mainland Europe.

The Cyprus EU Presidency begins on July 1st and runs till the end of 2012. As with any EU Presidency, visitors will flock to the host country to take part in a series of formal and informal meetings and conferences. It is a chance for Cyprus to show off its many delights and attractions. Cyprus has a plethora of customs due to its long history and tradition and numerous distinctive dishes for visitors to taste. The best place to do this is in one of the many traditional tavernas dotted around the island's attractive villages, where one could order a selection of Cyprus dishes such as koupepia, souvla, kolokasi,ourgouri, seftalies and makaronia tou founou to name a few. Or for the ultimate gastronomic experience in Cyprus and the best way to try all of these and more in one sitting, one should order 'mezedes', a selection of more than 20 vegetable and meat dishes, but make sure you are hungry as food will be plentiful.

Ambelopoulia, however, spell an ecological disaster of considerable proportions, hence the **BirdLife Europe warning to steer clear**. Non-selective methods such as mist nets and limesticks are used for trapping birds during the migration periods, mainly during the autumn but also in the spring. Trappers mainly target blackcaps but also other birds such as bee-eaters and shrikes. The list of trapped bird species is over 150 species long and includes 78 species listed as threatened by BirdLife International and the EU Birds Directive. Moreover, the widespread application of these non-selective methods contributes to large-scale killing of birds, with literally hundreds of thousands of birds being killed every year in Cyprus.

The illegal trapping 'outlawed by both the EU Birds Directive and the Cyprus bird protection law' is highly lucrative, with a plate of a dozen *ambelopoulia* selling for between €40 and €80 in law-breaking restaurants. The banned dish is usually served secretly, so it is unlikely that

foreign visitors will be presented with the trapped songbirds in a Cyprus tavern. But it is important for visitors to be aware of the darker side of Cypriot cuisine and steer well clear of it.

Cyprus is in the European spotlight and BirdLife Europe will be working hard together with its Cypriot colleagues in BirdLife Cyprus and the Cypriot authorities to consign bird trapping to past history, which is where it belongs.

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