

BIRD TRAPPING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS: ANNUAL REPORT 2016



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SUMMARY

In 2016, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), Foundation Pro Biodiversity (Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt (SPA)) and BirdLife Cyprus members investigated trapping activity in the southeastern part of the Republic of Cyprus. Field investigations were conducted in the Famagusta and Larnaca Districts and covered the 3 main trapping seasons, which are winter, spring and autumn. Together these investigations lasted for 115 days and revealed 366 active trapping sites. Within them 5,637 limesticks and 215 mist nets were found. It is estimated that over 500,000 birds could have been killed on these trapping sites.

The Cyprus Police and Game and Fauna Service officers made 100 prosecutions against illegal trapping in the Republic of Cyprus during 2016. 13 prosecutions were made in winter, 12 were made in spring and the majority of them, 75, were made during the autumn trapping season. Almost half of the prosecutions (48) resulted from cases reported by CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members.

The trend in trapping activity for the period 2014–2016 was assessed based on the percentage of active trapping sites found during field investigations. Results show an increase in trapping activity in the Republic of Cyprus between 2015 and 2016.

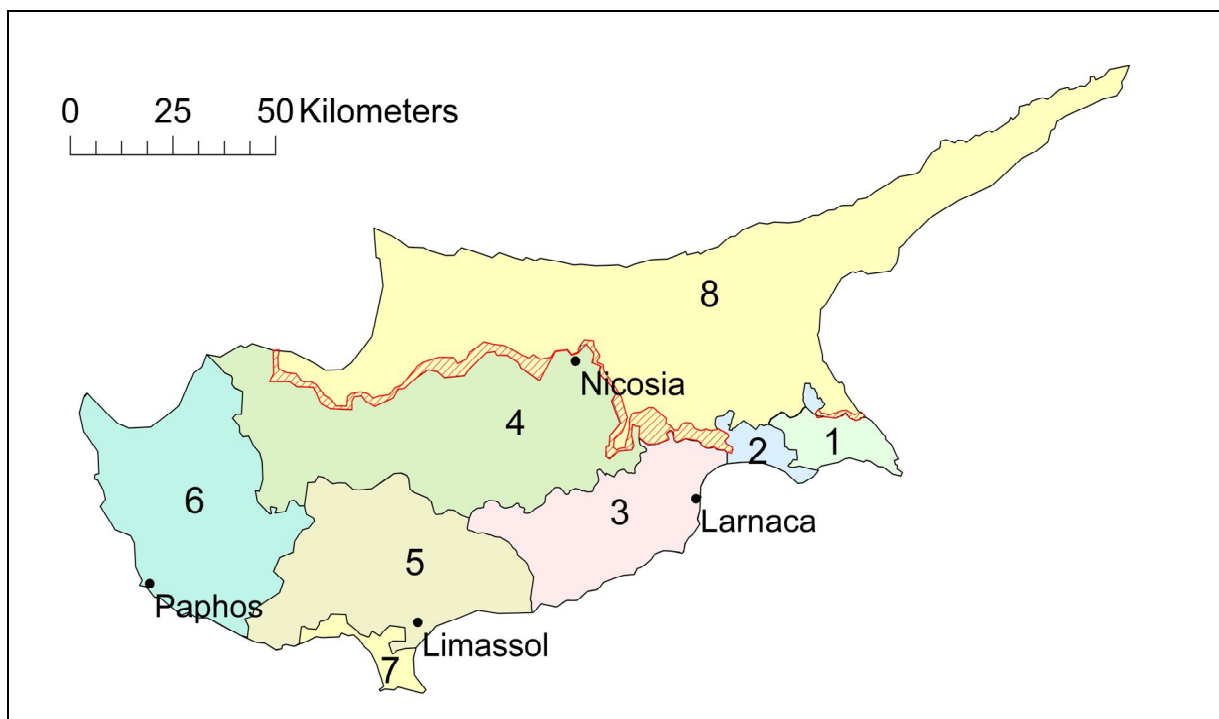
Almost half (44.4%) of trapping sites where trappers had been prosecuted for bird trapping before 2016, were found active again in 2016.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report compiles the results of field investigations and enforcement actions taken against bird trapping in the Republic of Cyprus in 2016. Field investigations were carried out by members of CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus and enforcement actions were taken by the police officers of Cyprus Police and game wardens from Game and Fauna Service.

1.1 REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Officially the Republic of Cyprus encompasses the entire island of Cyprus except the two Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs), Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) and Western Sovereign Base Area (WSBA), that are British Overseas Territories under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom (Picture 1). The northern part of the country, known as Northern Cyprus, has been under the control of Turkey since 1974 when it was self-proclaimed as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. However, this Republic is only recognised by Turkey and is not recognised internationally. The United Nations (UN) has established a buffer zone along the border between the Republic of Cyprus and Northern Cyprus.



Picture 1: The island of Cyprus and the distribution of its land among different governing bodies. 1- Famagusta District (Republic of Cyprus), 2-Eastern Sovereign Base Area (United Kingdom), 3-Larnaca District (Republic of Cyprus), 4-Nicosia District (Republic

of Cyprus), 5-Limassol District (Republic of Cyprus), 6-Paphos District (Republic of Cyprus), 7-Western Sovereign Base Area (United Kingdom), 8-Northern Cyprus (area under turkish control), Area marked with red color- buffer zone (United Nations)

While bird trapping occurs across several areas of the island, it is most prolific in three areas. First is the UK Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA). The second and third are districts within the Republic of Cyprus—Famagusta District and Larnaca District.

2 FIELD INVESTIGATION METHODS

2.1 COMMITTEE AGAINST BIRD SLAUGHTER (CABS) AND FOUNDATION PRO BIODIVERSITY (SPA) FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

CABS and SPA organised 3 Bird Protection Camps (BPCs) in the Republic of Cyprus in 2016. These were the Winter 2015–2016 BPC (Rutigliano et al. 2016b), Spring 2016 BPC (Rutigliano et al. 2016c) and Autumn 2016 BPC (Rutigliano and Debersek 2017). A total of 53 people participated at BPCs in 2016 and they monitored trapping activity for 112 days (Table 1). Participants of the Camps monitored trapping areas in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts and reported illegal activities to the authorities. BPCs were organised in close cooperation with enforcement agencies to ensure that enforcement actions against poachers were taken immediately at reported locations.

Table 1: Duration and number of participants of Committee Against Bird Slaughter and Foundation Pro Biodiversity Bird Protection Camps in 2016.

Bird Protection Camp	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
Duration of the Camp (days)	22	43	47	112
No. of participants	8	17	28	53

During monitoring of bird trapping, priority is given to investigations of locations with the highest probability of finding trapping activity on them. This probability is estimated by consulting data collected at Bird Protection Camps in previous years. Trapping sites are visited during the time of day when traps are most likely to be set.

This method is employed in order to maximise the detection of active trapping sites and to carry out immediate actions to stop detected trapping activity with the help of enforcement agencies.

Active trapping sites are defined as those with set traps, which can either be limesticks or mist nets. Furthermore, trapping sites without set traps but with signs of recent trapping activity are also considered as active: feathers on the ground at trapping locations or remnants of glue on branches indicate that the location was recently active. Finally, trapping sites with electronic bird callers playing at them, even if there are no traps set out at the time of visiting, are considered as active. These callers are sometimes used solely in the night to attract birds to the trapping site and the trappers set the traps at them in the early morning.

2.2 BIRDLIFE CYPRUS FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

BirdLife Cyprus has been systematically monitoring bird trapping activity in Cyprus since 2002. Each spring, autumn and winter they visit randomly selected 1 km² sample squares during the daytime in the southeastern part of Cyprus, in the Famagusta and Larnaca Districts within the Republic of Cyprus and in the UK ESBA. These sample squares have been stratified to ensure a representative coverage of areas under SBA administration and the Republic of Cyprus (Shialis 2016).

In 2016, BirdLife Cyprus members carried out field surveys of bird trapping for a total of 43 days (Table 2).

Table 2: Duration of BirdLife Cyprus bird trapping field investigations in 2016 (Shialis, written communication).

Survey	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
Duration (days)	5	16	22	43

The survey team visits sample squares and records trapping activity, both with regards to mist netting and limesticks. However, BirdLife Cyprus focuses on mist netting activity, with limesticks recorded only if they are found while searching for mist netting activity. This strategy is adopted due to limited resources available for field investigations.

Mist netting activity is measured in terms of the total length of active netrides. Locations included in this total include all those where mist nets are found, or where feathers are found on the ground (Shialis 2016).

In addition to active mist netting sites, sites where pole bases and/or poles for nets are found on the ground near netrides are recorded. These sites are defined as prepared sites as they are ready to be set up for bird trapping, but no evidence of recent activity is detected, e.g. fresh feathers or tape lures. Although prepared sites are able to be

activated at any time, if no signs of recent activity are detected during the monitoring, these sites are counted as inactive.

3 RESULTS OF BIRD TRAPPING FIELD INVESTIGATIONS IN 2016

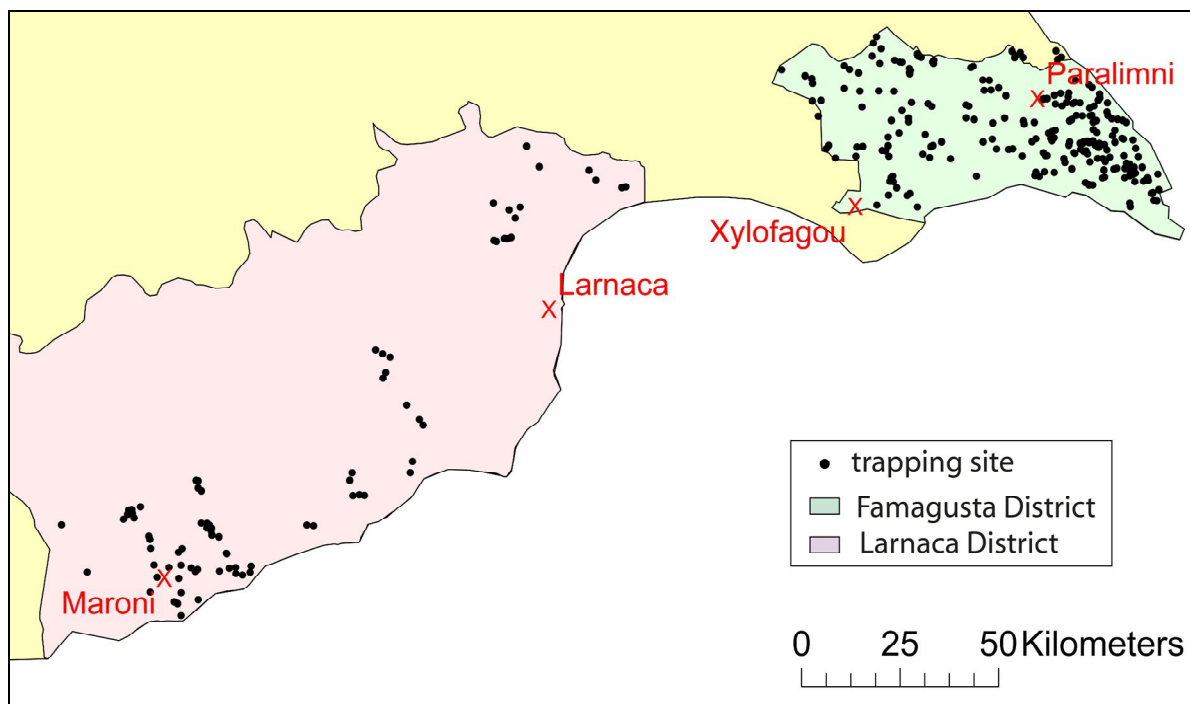
3.1 ACTIVITY OF TRAPPING SITES

CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members checked 823 known trapping sites in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts in 2016 and of those, 366 were found to be active. 64 active sites were found in winter, 115 in spring and 187 in autumn (Table 3, Picture 3).

Table 3: Results of field investigations in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts in 2016. CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity; BL = BirdLife Cyprus.

Season	Winter 2015–2016		Spring 2016		Autumn 2016		Total
Organisation	CABS/SPA	BL	CABS/SPA	BL	CABS/SPA	BL	
No. of checked sites ¹	65	n/a	373	6	359	20	823
No. of active sites found	58	6	113	2	172	15	366

¹No. of checked sites by BirdLife Cyprus includes only active trapping sites and prepared mist netting sites.



Picture 3: Distribution of trapping sites found active in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts in 2016 by the Committee Against Bird Slaughter, Foundation Pro Biodiversity and BirdLife Cyprus.

3.2 TRAPPING PARAPHERNALIA

In 2016 CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members found set traps on 232 out of 366 active sites and signs of recent trapping were detected on the remaining 128 sites. At the sites with set traps, altogether 5,637 limesticks and 215 nets were found. Found trapping paraphernalia is presented by season in Table 4, which shows that in autumn trapping activity is highest in almost every respect. Highest number of nets was found in winter, however it is easier to locate nets in winter as in most cases nets are set out all night together with sound lures, while in autumn in many cases sound lures are used solely in the night time and nets are set out only for short period in the early morning.

Table 4: Trapping paraphernalia found in 2016 by the Committee Against Bird Slaughter, Foundation Pro Biodiversity and BirdLife Cyprus.

Season	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of sites found active	64	115	187	366
No. of sites found with set traps	43	59	130	232
No. of sites with limesticks	6	55	91	152
No. of sites with nets	36	4	36	76
No. of sites with limesticks and nets	1	0	3	4
No. of sites with decoys	38	7	51	96
No. of limesticks found	407	1290	3940	5637
Average No. of limesticks per site	58.1	23.5	41.9	37.1
No. of nets found	117	4	94	215
Average No. of nets per site	3.2	1.0	2.4	2.8

3.3 BIRDS FOUND IN TRAPS

In 2016, CABS and SPA members found trapped birds at 92 trapping sites. Together with enforcement officers, they rescued 748 birds, while 55 birds were found dead (Table 5). Trapped birds belonged to 34 different bird species. Blackcaps were the most frequently trapped species in spring and autumn (Table 6), however data indicates that many other bird species, including rare and threatened ones, get trapped and killed in significant numbers.

Table 5: Number of birds found in traps by season in 2016 by the Committee Against Bird Slaughter and Foundation Pro Biodiversity.

Bird Protection Camp	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of trapping sites with birds found in traps	16	33	43	92
No. of rescued birds from traps	98	99	551	748
No. of dead birds found in traps	0	53	2	55
No. of all birds found in traps	98	152	553	803
No. of bird species rescued from traps	0	26	17	34

Table 6: List of bird species with highest number of individuals rescued from traps by the Committee Against Bird Slaughter and Foundation Pro Biodiversity members in spring and autumn 2016. Species are ordered by the most commonly encountered individuals in autumn. Rank indicates the most common species encountered in that season (with 1 being most common and 5 being least). Only identified birds are included. Data from Winter 2015-2016 BPC is not included as bird species for birds found in traps were not recorded during this BPC.

Bird Protection Camp	Spring 2016			Autumn 2016		
Species	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Blackcap	40	67.8	1	57	54.8	1
Spanish sparrow	0	0.0		12	11.5	2
Willow warbler	1	1.7		10	9.6	3
Chiffchaff	0	0.0		6	5.8	4
Common Redstart	0	0.0		5	4.8	5
Lesser whitethroat	5	8.5	2	4	3.8	
Garden warbler	4	6.8	3	3	2.9	
Robin	0	0.0		2	1.9	
House sparrow	2	3.4	5	1	1.0	
Wood warbler	3	5.1	4	0	0.0	
Common Nightingale	2	3.4	5	0	0.0	
No. of identified birds rescued from traps	59			104		

3.4 ESTIMATED NUMBER OF KILLED BIRDS ON ACTIVE TRAPPING SITES

In 2016, 366 active trapping sites were found in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts. In order to estimate the number of birds that could have been killed on them, we considered that these trapping sites were active every day in each season.

The estimated length of the winter, spring and autumn trapping seasons are 60 days for autumn and spring and 90 days for winter. Winter trapping takes place in the 120 day period from the beginning of November to the end of February. However, given the considerable fluctuation in winter thrush migration through Cyprus, we prefer to conservatively estimate that trapping takes place for 90 days in winter. We estimate that in autumn, which is the worst trapping season, 20 birds are caught per net per day and

0.5 birds are caught per limestick per day. We scaled down this catch estimate by 50% for the spring and winter trapping seasons due to the less intensive bird migrations in these two seasons.

Considering all these factors, in total 518,599 birds could have been killed on the trapping sites found active in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts in 2016 (Table 7). As we investigated only a small part of the whole territory of the Republic of Cyprus, more precisely only part of 2 out of 6 districts in the whole Republic, the true number of killed birds for the whole Republic of Cyprus must be much higher than estimated here.

Table 7: Estimated number of killed birds on trapping sites found active in Famagusta and Larnaca Districts in 2016.

Season	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of active sites found ¹	64	115	187	366
Estimated no. of sites using nets	54.2	7.7	50.7	113
Average no. of nets used per site ²	3.2	1	2.4	
Estimated no. of nets used on active sites	173.5	7.7	121.6	303
Estimated no. of sites using limesticks	10.3	106.3	128.1	245
Average no. of limesticks used on active sites ²	58.1	23.5	41.9	
Estimated no. of limesticks used on active sites	595.9	2497.4	5367.4	8461
Estimated no. of killed birds ³	169,530	42,098	306,971	518,599

¹Calculated from active trapping sites found in 2016 with set traps.

^{2,3}Estimated No. of killed birds per season = (estimated number of nets used on active sites per season) * (length of trapping season) * (number of birds trapped per net per day) + estimated number of limesticks used per season * (length of trapping season) * (number of birds trapped per limestick per day)

4 RESULTS OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING IN 2016

The competent authorities responsible for enforcement against illegal bird trapping in the Republic of Cyprus are game wardens from the Game and Fauna Service and the Cyprus Police officers. The Cyprus Police has a special unit dedicated to counter bird trapping and illegal killing of wild birds and other animals: the Anti-Poaching Squad (APS). Occasionally and upon request, police officers from local police stations will also investigate illegal bird trapping cases.

According to the available information, all competent authorities responsible for the enforcement against illegal bird trapping in the Republic of Cyprus made 100 prosecutions for illegal trapping in 2016 (Table 8, Table 9). Almost half of all prosecutions, 48, were made for cases reported by CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus.

Table 8: Summary of all enforcement actions taken against bird trapping in 2016. APS = Anti-Poaching Unit; CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity.

	Cyprus Police APS	Game and Fauna Service	Cyprus Police local units	All units
No. of cases with prosecution reported by CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members ^{1,2}	34	11	3 ³	48
No. of all cases with prosecution ^{1,2}	48	49	3 ³	100
No. of seized mist nets ^{1,2}	293	195	0 ³	488
No. of seized limesticks ^{1,2}	2511	1291	271 ³	4073

¹Rutigliano et al. (2016b), Rutigliano et al. (2016c), Rutigliano and Debersek (2017).

²Shialis (2016c), Shialis (2017), Shialis (2017b).

³Data are only for cases reported by CABS and SPA members.

Table 9: All enforcement actions taken against trapping in 2016 per trapping season. APS = Anti-Poaching Unit; CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity; BL Cyprus = BirdLife Cyprus.

Season	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
Cyprus Police APS ^{1,2}	2 ⁴	10 ⁴	36	48
Local police units ¹	0 ⁴	2 ⁴	1 ⁴	3
Game and Fauna Service ³	13	1	35	49
All enforcement units	15	13	72	100

¹Rutigliano et al. (2016b), Rutigliano et al. (2016c), Rutigliano and Debersek (2017).

²Shialis (2016c), Shialis (2017), Shialis (2017b).

³Game and Fauna Service (written communication).

⁴Data are only for cases reported by CABS and SPA members.

4.1 ENFORCEMENT RESULTS OF THE CYPRUS POLICE ANTI-POACHING SQUAD

The Anti-Poaching Squad (APS) is part of the Cyprus Police Emergency Response Unit. They have 8 officers and are specialised in acting against all kinds of poaching offences, including bird trapping.

In 2016 the APS made 49 prosecutions against illegal bird trapping (Table 10), similar to their results from previous years (Figure 1). Of these prosecutions in 2016, 32 were made for cases reported by CABS and SPA members and 2 prosecutions were made for cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus.

Table 10: Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad enforcement actions against bird trapping in 2016. APS = Anti-Poaching Unit; CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity; BL Cyprus = BirdLife Cyprus.

Season	Winter 2015-2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	18	20	73	111
No. of prosecutions for cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	2	10	20	32
No. of cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	2	4	8	14

No. of prosecutions for cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	0	0	2	2
No. of all prosecutions ^{1,2}	2 ³	10 ³	36	48
Seized mist nets ^{1,2}	88 ³	41 ³	164	293
Seized limesticks ^{1,2}	37 ³	559 ³	1915	2511

¹Rutigliano et al. (2016b), Rutigliano et al. (2016c), Rutigliano and Debersek (2017)

²Shialis (2016c), Shialis (2017), Shialis (2017b)

³Data are only for cases reported by CABS and SPA members

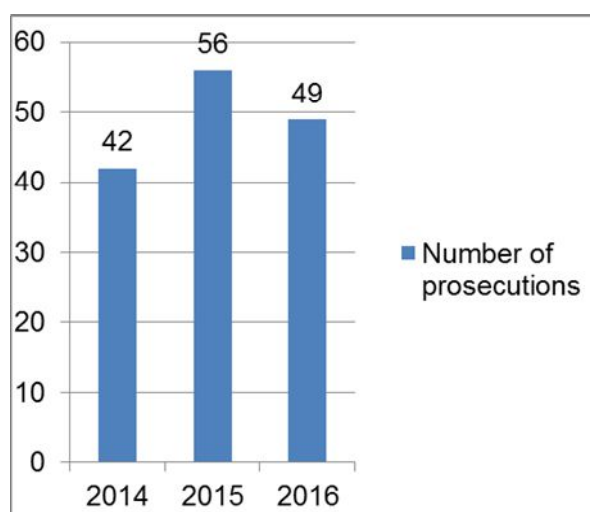


Figure 1: Total number of prosecutions for bird trapping made by the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Squad from 2014 to 2016 (Rutigliano et al. 2014; Rutigliano et al. 2015; Rutigliano et al. 2015b; Rutigliano and Debersek 2016b; Rutigliano and Debersek 2016c; Shialis 2017b).

4.2 ENFORCEMENT RESULTS OF THE GAME AND FAUNA SERVICE

The Game and Fauna Service is the body responsible for the implementation of the Birds Directive. It has about 90 game wardens in total. In Famagusta and Larnaca Districts around 20 game wardens are on duty (Shialis, 2016b).

Game wardens made 49 prosecutions for bird trapping in 2016; 11 prosecutions resulted from cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus members (10) and CABS and SPA members (1) (Table 11). Despite the massive levels of trapping detected, the number of prosecutions for bird trapping in 2016 was the lowest since 2001, when records began (Figure 2).

Table 11: Game and Fauna Service enforcement actions against bird trapping in 2016.
CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity.

	Winter 2015-2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	0	0	3	3
No. of prosecutions for cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	0	0	1	1
No. of cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	7	7	21	35
No. of prosecutions for cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	n/a	n/a	10	10
No. of all prosecutions ³	13	1	35	49
Seized mist nets ²	n/a	n/a	195	195
Seized limesticks ²	n/a	n/a	1291	1291

¹Rutigliano et al. (2016b), Rutigliano et al. (2016c), Rutigliano and Debersek (2017).

²Shialis (2016c), Shialis (2017), Shialis (2017b).

³Game and Fauna Service (written communication).

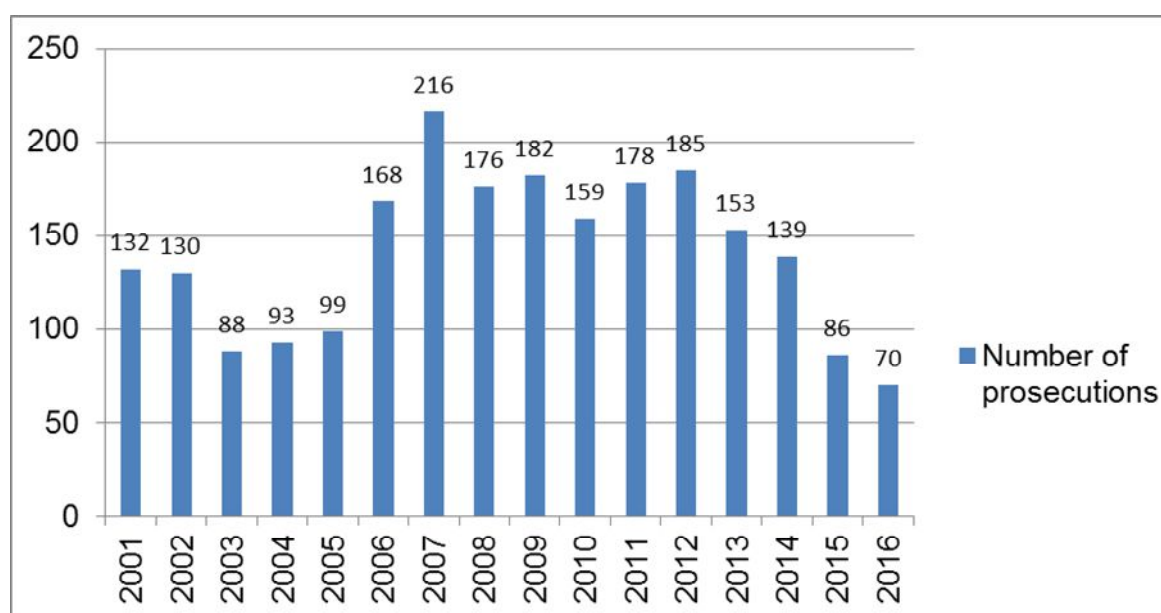


Figure 2: Total number of prosecutions for bird trapping made by game wardens in the Republic of Cyprus (2001–2016). The number of prosecutions per year are for the period 1st March–28th February (Game and Fauna Service, written communication).

4.3 ENFORCEMENT RESULTS OF LOCAL POLICE STATIONS

Police officers at the local police stations in Cyprus have the power to enforce the laws regarding illegal trapping, but they have other priorities and leave investigations of illegal bird killing to APS officers and game wardens. They investigate bird trapping cases only if they are reported directly to them.

Table 12: Local police station enforcement actions taken against bird trapping in 2016. CABS = Committee Against Bird Slaughter; SPA = Foundation Pro Biodiversity.

	Winter 2015-2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	0	5	4	9
No. of prosecutions for cases reported by CABS and SPA ¹	0	2	1	3
No. of cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	0	0	0	0
No. of prosecutions for cases reported by BirdLife Cyprus ²	0	0	0	0
No. of all prosecutions ¹	0 ³	2 ³	1 ³	3 ³
Seized mist nets ¹	0 ³	0 ³	0 ³	0 ³
Seized limesticks ¹	0 ³	56 ³	215 ³	271 ³

¹Rutigliano et al. (2016b), Rutigliano et al. (2016c), Rutigliano and Debersek (2017).

²Shialis (2016c), Shialis (2017), Shialis (2017b).

³Data are only for cases reported by CABS and SPA members.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 BIRD TRAPPING TRENDS 2014–2016

To evaluate whether bird trapping activity is increasing or decreasing, we compared the percentage of active trapping sites found between 2014 and 2016 (Table 13, Figure 3). These results reveal that trapping activity is staying on the similar level between 2014 and 2016: in 2016 it was slightly higher than in 2015 and slightly lower than in 2014.

Table 13: Results of bird trapping field investigations conducted by Committee Against Bird Slaughter, Foundation Pro Biodiversity and BirdLife Cyprus members between 2014 and 2016.

	2014	2015	2016
Total duration of field investigations (days)	77	82	112
No. of checked sites	500	535	823
No. of active sites found	238	223	366
Percentage of active trapping sites	47.6	41.7	44.5

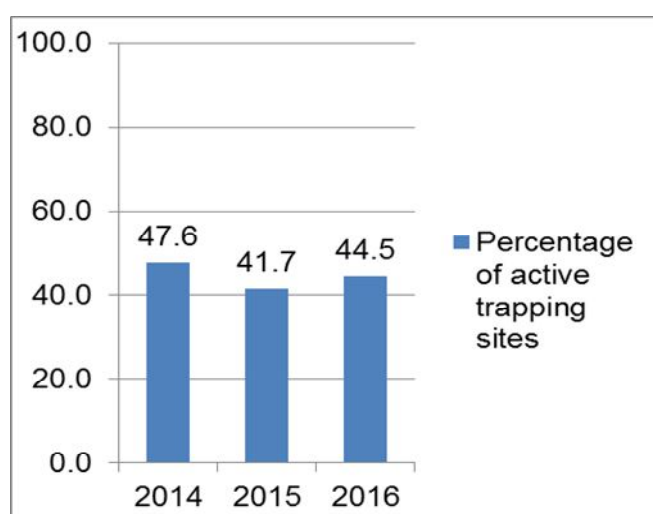


Figure 3: Percentages of active trapping sites found during field investigations by Committee Against Bird Slaughter, Foundation Pro Biodiversity and BirdLife Cyprus members between 2014 and 2016.

5.2 REACTIVATION OF TRAPPING SITES WITH PREVIOUS PROSECUTIONS

During field investigations in 2016, CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members checked 144 trapping sites where trappers were caught and prosecuted in previous years according to our records. On average, almost half (44.5%) of all sites with previous prosecutions were found to be reactivated again in 2016. Winter was by far the worst season in this regard, with almost three-quarters (70.6%) of trapping sites reactivated (Table 14).

Table 14: Reactivation of trapping sites in 2016 with prosecutions from previous years.

Bird protection Camp	Winter 2015–2016	Spring 2016	Autumn 2016	Total
No. of sites with previous prosecutions checked	17	64	63	144
No. of reactivated prosecuted sites	12	16	36	64
				Average
Percentage of reactivated prosecuted sites	70.6	25	57.1	44.4

The high percentage of reactivated sites found in 2016 shows that Cyprus Court actions and penalties against bird trapping are inadequate and have little deterrent effect on trapping. Illegal trapping proves to be a highly profitable activity, hence trappers persistently continue trapping at the same sites where they were previously caught and prosecuted.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The levels of illegal bird trapping in the Republic of Cyprus during 2016 were massive, extensive and inordinate. Sadly, this is much the same as in previous years. Field investigations, limited to an area covering only part of Larnaca and Famagusta Districts, revealed trapping activity on 366 sites. Therefore we can reason that there were, in fact, hundreds more trapping sites active across the whole Republic of Cyprus in 2016. Trapping remains out of control and the massive slaughter of protected wild birds in Cyprus continues.

We estimate that approximately 500,000 birds could have been killed on the trapping sites found active in Larnaca and Famagusta Districts in 2016. The death toll for the whole Republic of Cyprus is unknown, but it is without doubt much higher.

Enforcement units responsible for tackling illegal bird trapping made 100 prosecutions against illegal bird trapping in 2016. This is relatively low when compared with the number of active trapping sites found by CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus members in just two districts of the Republic of Cyprus (366). Furthermore, almost half of all prosecutions (48) resulted from cases reported by CABS, SPA and BirdLife Cyprus.

The frequency of site reactivation shows that the fines for illegal trapping are not deterring people from trapping. On average, almost half of all sites where trappers were prosecuted for bird trapping before 2016 were found again active in 2016.

Bird trapping remains a serious issue in the Republic of Cyprus. The number of prosecutions made against illegal trapping and the low fines imposed by the courts against prosecuted trappers are insufficient to stop or even decrease the intensity of this illegal activity. On the contrary, our field investigations revealed that bird trapping is on the rise in the Republic. Trapping activity, measured as a percentage of active sites found during field investigations, is higher in 2016 than it was in 2015.

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