

# RESULTS OF CABS & SPA WINTER 2019-2020 BIRD PROTECTION CAMP IN CYPRUS



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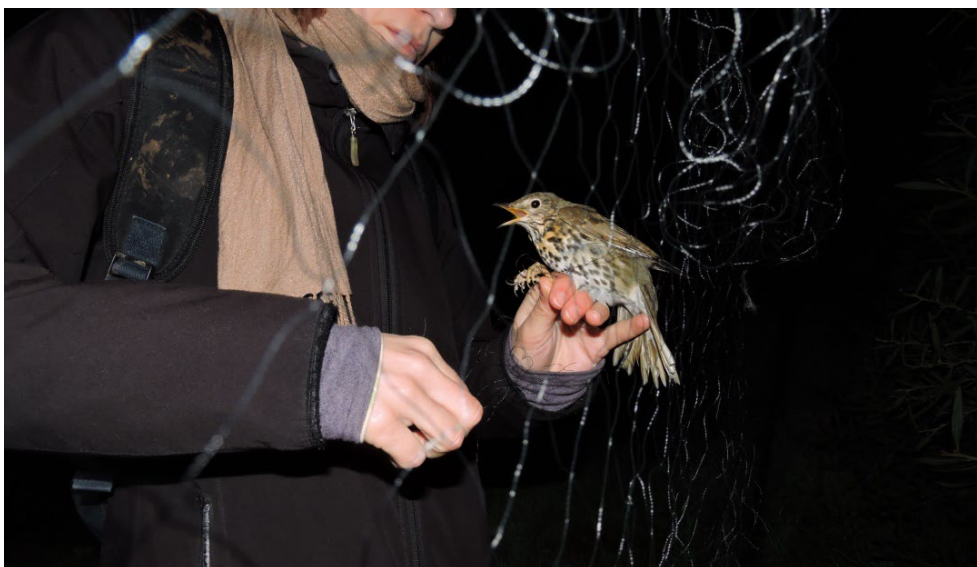
Cover photo: Barn owl rescued from a net, December 2019 (Photo: CABS)

## **1 CAMP DURATION, MONITORED AREAS AND PARTICIPANTS**

Every year since 2014, Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) and Foundation Pro Biodiversity - Stiftung Pro Artenvielfalt (SPA), organise winter bird protection camps in Cyprus to prevent massive slaughter of birds, overwintering in Cyprus. First years the winter camps were short, small number of activists participated at them and only a small part of Cyprus was monitored during the camps. Over the years the winter camps gradually become bigger. This winter the camp was longest ever. It started on the 1st of December 2019 and ended on the 16th of February 2020, running for a total of 78 days.

13 activists from 5 different countries participated at the camp. They came from Cyprus, Great Britain, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland. 8 participants already participated at bird protection camps in Cyprus, while 5 of them participated for the first time.

Like in previous winters, CABS & SPA activists monitored bird trapping and illegal hunting in the south-eastern part of Cyprus: Famagusta District and Larnaca District within Republic of Cyprus and the British Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA). They also made few field investigations in the northern part of Cyprus, in the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and in the Paphos District of Republic of Cyprus, on the western side of the island.



Picture 1: Activist rescuing song thrush from net found in Vrysoulles, January 2020 (Photo: CABS)



## 2 OVERALL RESULTS OF THE CAMP

Activists, participating at CABS & SPA Winter 2019-2020 Bird Protection Camp in Cyprus, searched for bird trapping and illegal bird hunting sites day and night and upon finding them, they reported them to the enforcement officers on duty for immediate actions to stop illegal bird killings on them. With the help from officers from Game and Fauna Service, Cyprus Police and SBA Police, we have achieved the following overall results of the camp:

### BIRD TRAPPING

37 active trapping sites found  
299 limesticks seized  
21 mist nets seized  
10 electronic callers seized  
92 net poles removed  
3 prosecutions for bird trapping made  
77 birds released from traps



Picture 2: Birds caught on limesticks in Ayios Nikolaos, February 2020 (Photo: CABS)

## ILLEGAL BIRD HUNTING

60 illegal hunting sites found

15 electronic callers seized

11 prosecutions for illegal hunting made



Picture 3: Hunters and caller, used for hunting, December 2019 (Photo: CABS)

### 2.1 COMPARISON OF RESULTS MADE AGAINST BIRD TRAPPING AT WINTER BIRD PROTECTION CAMPS 2017-2018 TO 2019-2020

Table 1: Comparison of results made against bird trapping at winter bird protection camps 2017-2018 to 2019-2020

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Duration (days)	63	75	78
No. of participants	14	13	13
No. of known trapping sites checked	133	187	176
No. of active trapping sites found	79	101	37
No. of seized limesticks	636	824	299
No. of seized mist nets	213	138	21
No. of seized electronic callers	58	62	10
No of. birds rescued from traps	673	620	77
No. of prosecutions	6	6	3



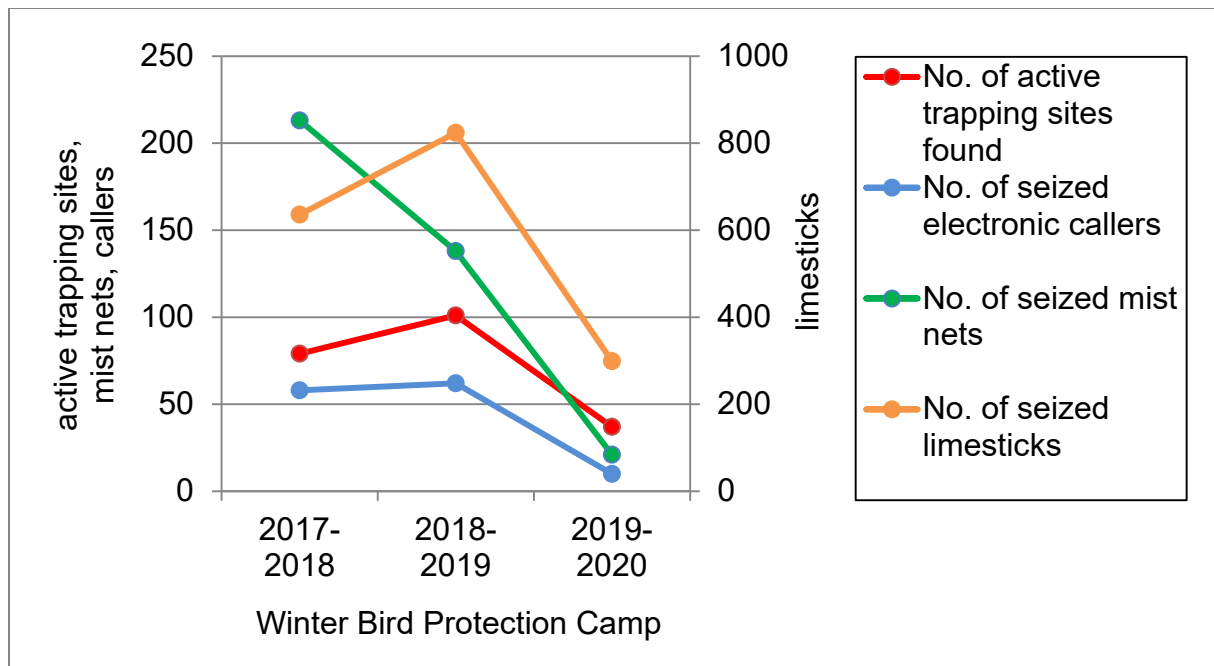


Figure 1: Comparison of results made against bird trapping at winter bird protection camps 2017-2018 to 2019-2020

We have some good news: winter bird trapping in the south-eastern Cyprus has decreased substantially in one year. Last winter we found 101 active trapping sites and this winter only 37. That is a 63 % decrease !

The decrease can be partially explained with the above average temperatures, recorded this winter in the continental Europe. Because of the mild temperatures in the Europe, fewer birds migrated to their wintering grounds in the south. One of the important wintering grounds for birds is also Cyprus. With fewer birds overwintering in Cyprus, trappers could catch less and consequently, they were trapping less as in the previous winters.

Fewer birds, overwintering in Cyprus, can't be the main reason for the significant decrease of winter trapping. During the fieldwork we have regularly observed many song thrushes and other overwintering birds and trappers had a chance to catch them. As we didn't find any signs of trapping on the most of the trapping sites, found to be active regularly in the previous winters, we can conclude that trappers were afraid to trap even on a smaller scale and have abandoned trapping completely this winter. And why most of the trappers didn't risk to trap this winter ?

I believe that our continuous presence in the field and our anti-poaching results this winter plus the results of previous bird protection camps in Cyprus, had the biggest role in the decrease of winter trapping. To be sure about the main reasons for the

decrease, let's check what has changed in the fight against bird trapping in south-eastern Cyprus in the last few years. The main changes were:

- CABS & SPA teams have increased the length of field operations during trapping seasons
- CABS & SPA teams have increased the number of poaching cases reported to the enforcement agencies
- joint operations between CABS & SPA teams and enforcement agencies have improved tactically, resulting in the increase of cases ending with prosecutions of trappers
- the fines for bird trapping became higher
- SBA Police improved their work against bird trapping in the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA)

The changes in the last few years have put an additional pressure on the trappers in Cyprus. Trappers are now facing a big risk of being caught, prosecuted and getting a big fine for trapping. It seems that most of them are not willing to take that risk and have decided to not trap at all this winter.



Picture 4: Sardinian warbler caught on limestick, found by CABS & SPA activists in February 2020 (Photo: CABS)

## 2.2 COMPARISON OF RESULTS MADE AGAINST ILLEGAL HUNTING AT WINTER BIRD PROTECTION CAMPS 2017-2018 TO 2019-2020

Table 2: Comparison of results made against illegal hunting at winter bird protection camps 2017-2018 to 2019-2020

Winter Bird Protection Camp	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
No. of illegal hunting sites found	25	19	60
No. of seized electronic callers	7	1	15
No. of prosecutions	2	0	11

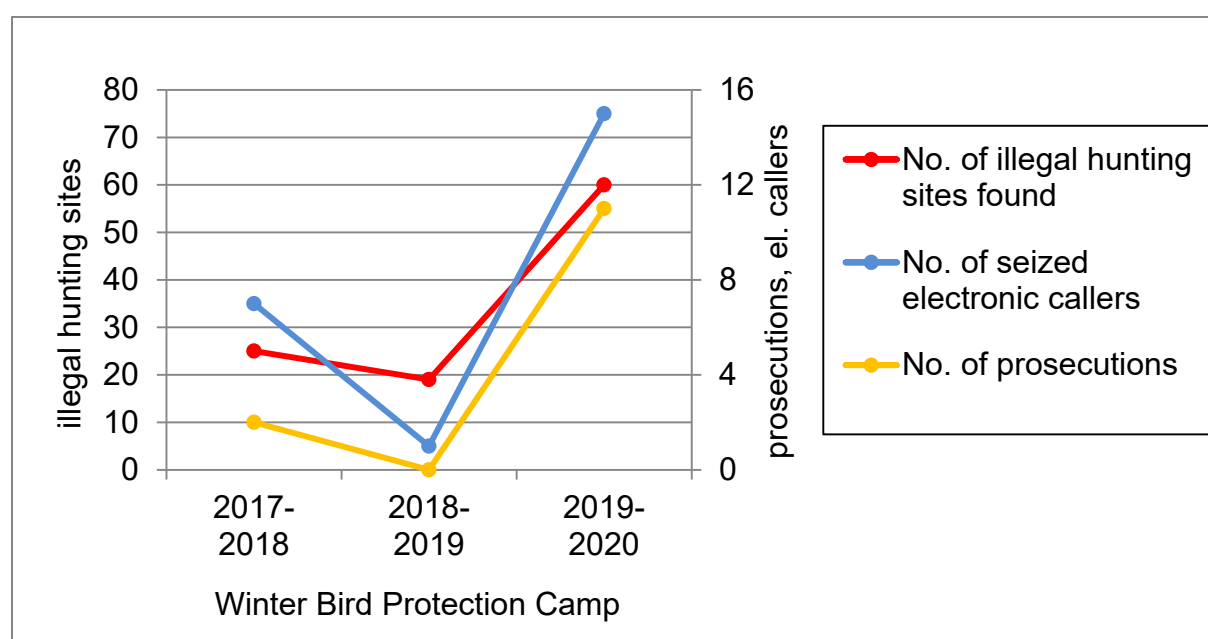


Figure 2: Comparison of results made against illegal hunting at winter bird protection camps 2017-2018 to 2019-2020

Table 2 and figure 2 give an impression that winter illegal hunting is on the rise in Cyprus, but this is not the case. The extent of illegal hunting, observed at winter bird protection camps, was always massive, but CABS & SPA teams simply didn't have the time to make extensive investigations and actions against it in the previous years.

As there was much less trapping activity detected this winter in comparison with the previous winters, CABS & SPA teams could do more investigations of illegal hunting and consequently, together with enforcement agencies, take more actions against it.

### **3 DEADLINESS OF THE ELECTRONIC CALLERS FOR SONG THRUSHES IN CYPRUS**

Most common method of illegal hunting in winter time is the use of electronic callers, which repeatedly play song thrush and skylark calls to attract these birds in front of guns. Electronic callers are very effective in attracting birds and their use allows hunters to kill much more birds as they could without using them. Recent study from Cyprus revealed that electronic callers, used for trapping with mist nets, increase a capture rate of targeted bird species by 6-8 times (Sebastianelli et al. 2020).

Although it is illegal to use electronic callers for hunting, they are massively used in Cyprus because there is a lack of enforcement actions against their use. According to our field observations, we estimate that approximately half of hunters in the south-eastern Cyprus used electronic callers for hunting this winter. Therefore we estimate that between several hundred and several thousand callers were attracting birds in front of the guns daily just in the south-east Cyprus.

The use of callers leads to massive slaughter of overwintering birds. Game and Fauna Service publishes the hunting bags of huntable bird species after every hunting season. For the hunting season 2018-2019 (the hunting season for song thrush was from 27.10. 2018 to 28.02. 2019) they estimate that 2,6 million song thrushes were killed by hunters in Cyprus (Game and Fauna Service 2019). If we consider the widespread use of callers to hunt song thrushes, we can estimate that large proportion of the shot song thrushes was killed illegally.

### **4 OBSTACLES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE USE OF ELECTRONIC CALLERS FOR HUNTING IN REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

This winter CABS & SPA teams have carried out, for the first time, extensive and systematic investigations and actions against illegal use of electronic callers for hunting in the south-eastern part of Cyprus. Most of the investigations were made in the Republic of Cyprus, where the use of callers is most common.

In the early mornings, when hunting activity is most intensive, CABS & SPA teams were searching and reporting the hunters, using electronic callers, to the authorities. In total we have observed 79 cases of illegal hunting and reported 66 of them (found at 60 hunting sites) to the game wardens from Game and Fauna Service (GFS). Only 11 cases (16,7%) ended with prosecution of hunters. At the remaining 55 cases,



game wardens failed to catch and prosecute hunters for use of callers. What went wrong ? Below is the list of the obstacles, we have encountered during our fight against the illegal hunting.

#### 4.1 OBSTACLE A: GAME WARDENS WERE NOT AVAILABLE FOR INVESTIGATIONS

For 29 (out of 66) cases of illegal hunting, reported to game wardens this winter, we were not able to get enforcement officers to investigate reported cases. They were either too far away or they were busy with other duties and they didn't respond to our request for investigation. Common reason for their unavailability was the distance: wardens were somewhere far away in Larnaca District and our reported cases were in Famagusta District. It would take wardens a lot of time to come and investigate our cases and very likely illegal hunting would stop by the time they would arrive.

#### 4.2 OBSTACLE B: GAME WARDENS ARRIVED TOO LATE

For 16 cases of illegal hunting, reported this winter, game wardens arrived too late to the location of illegal hunting activity as the activity already stopped at the time of their arrival. Response time of wardens for cases, reported by us, varied a lot this winter; for some cases they needed only 5-15 minutes to arrive and for some cases 1-2 hours.

Illegal hunting with callers usually took place only for a short period of time and the quick response by wardens was needed to prevent it. Similar as with obstacle A, common reason for wardens arriving too late, was the distance: wardens were in Larnaca District at the time of our call and the reported case was in Famagusta District. For such cases response time was long and often the patrol arrived too late to the reported location.

#### 4.3 OBSTACLE C: HUNTERS MANAGED TO SWITCH OFF AND GET RID OF THE CALLERS, WHEN THEY SAW WARDENS APPROACHING

For 11 cases of illegal hunting, reported to game wardens this winter, wardens failed to catch hunters, because the hunters saw them approaching and they managed either to hide or to disable the caller, before wardens reached them. Most commonly they threw away the USB key or SD card of the caller. USB key (or SD card)

contained the recorded calls of song thrush and without it the rest of the caller was not functional. If wardens didn't find and confiscate all the parts of the caller, including the USB key (SD card), they always decided to let go the hunters without punishment, even if they heard the caller, while approaching the hunting site.

#### **4.4 JUMPING OVER ALL OBSTACLES**

At only 11 (out of 66) cases of illegal hunting, reported this winter, we managed, together with game wardens, to jump over all obstacles and catch the hunters using callers. Wardens were available at the time of our call (jumping over obstacle A), they responded quickly and arrived at the reported location, when illegal hunting was still in progress (jumping over obstacle B) and they managed to get close to the hunters without being seen, preventing them to switch off and to get rid of the callers (jumping over obstacle C). Hunters, caught for using electronic callers, were taken to the police station, where they received fixed penalty for their offence.

### **5 THE SAFEST WINTER FOR BIRDS IN CYPRUS SINCE DECADES**

Although we were a bit frustrated for not being able to catch more hunters with callers as we did, I want to end this report in a positive way. For sure the big decrease of trapping and our first, large scale operation against hunting with callers saved many, many birds this winter.

Unlike previous years, when the sound of callers was the dominant sound of the nights, the nights this winter were surprisingly quiet. If we heard a sound in the night, it was usually not the sound of a caller, but much more enjoyable sound of the calls made by stone curlews. Also the number and the loudness of the callers, used in the mornings by hunters, significantly decreased from the beginning until the end of the camp because of our actions.

Number of illegally killed birds this winter in Cyprus was probably the lowest in the last few decades. Thank you, the participants of the camp, for making the difference.

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