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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Bern Convention Group of Experts
on Conservation of Birds**

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**Groupe d'experts de la Convention de Berne
sur la Conservation des Oiseaux**

Tunis (31 May 2013)

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**REPORT
ON RUDDY DUCK OBSERVATIONS
IN CYPRUS**

*Document submitted
for BirdLife International by Martin Hellicar (BirdLife Cyprus)*

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Observations:

1. 20th – 30th December 2011 – 1st record for Cyprus

A single *Oxyura jamaicensis* in non-breeding plumage was seen at Meneou Pools (part of the Larnaca Salt Lakes IBA – a 2,150 ha wetland just outside Larnaca town, on the SE coast of Cyprus) on December 20th by Jane Stylianou and Fillippos Georgiades. The bird was subsequently seen by a number of other observers over an 11-day period and was also photographed. This was the first record of the species for Cyprus.

The bird was not targeted for elimination, but the relevant government authority – the Game & Fauna Service – have been alerted to the danger posed by the species (especially to the Turkish breeding population of White-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*) and have drawn up an ‘action plan’ for elimination of *O.jamaicensis* should another sighting occur.

2. 25th May 2012 – 2nd record for Cyprus

A single *Oxyura jamaicensis* in non-breeding plumage was seen at the Famagusta wetlands (a candidate IBA site) in occupied north Cyprus (a 450 ha wetland on the W edge of Famagusta town, on the E coast of Cyprus). The bird was seen by a visiting UK birder and reported to the Turkish Cypriot Bird protection Society (KUSJOR), who alerted BirdLife Cyprus to the sighting.

Because BirdLife Cyprus cannot work in the occupied areas, we acted as go-between for KUSJOR with the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) to secure a letter from the RSPB explaining (for the Turkish Cypriot authorities) why it was important for the Ruddy duck to be eliminated. The letter was prepared by the RSPB and KUSJOR took it to relevant authorities in the occupied areas, but in the event the Ruddy duck was not sighted again at the Famagusta wetlands after May 25th, rendering the matter academic for the time being.

Background:

It is worth noting here that there have been some sightings of White-headed duck *O.leucocephala* in Cyprus in recent winters, with birds most likely originating from breeding grounds in Turkey. Therefore, the risk of an individual *O.jamaicensis* interacting with a *O.leucocephala* does exist. *O.leucocephala* has been recorded (mostly single individuals) at Larnaca salt lakes in 2000, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2011 and at Mia Milia Sewage Works (a candidate IBA in the occupied north – a 600 ha site just W of Nicosia, on the island’s central plain) in 2008, 2009 and 2011. There are also older and less regular records of the species from Akrotiri salt lakes. *O.leucocephala* is a qualifying species for both the Larnaca salt lakes and Mia Milia sewage works IBAs (pending approval by BirdLife).

There are seven wetland IBAs in Cyprus (though some of them are at present only ‘candidate’ IBAs at present because they were only identified as IBAs under the 2012 revision of the Cyprus IBA inventory, which is awaiting approval by BirdLife – expected this year). Larnaca salt lakes is one of the most important waterbird sites in Cyprus, and an IBA site and a very well-watched site. Both the Famagusta wetlands and Mia Milia sewage works are candidate IBAs but are not nearly so well watched as the Larnaca salt lakes site.

All key wetlands in Cyprus, including all sites mentioned here, are however systematically checked under the BirdLife Cyprus ***Wetlands Monitoring programme*** , which has been running since 2005. All wetland sites are checked at least five times a year: January (winter), March (migration), May (breeding), September (late summer refuge), November (migration). 'Top' sites such as Larnaca salt lakes are covered every month of the year.

As far as is known there are no Ruddy ducks in private collections in Cyprus. Though import of the species is officially banned, controls by customs are not always entirely effective.