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**CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS**

Standing Committee
22nd meeting

Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2002

Specific File

**Illegal Killing and Trapping of Birds
in Cyprus**

Report by the NGOs

**BirdLife International in cooperation with the Cyprus Ornithological Society and the Cyprus
Conservation Foundation**

Secretariat Memorandum
Prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Natural and Cultural Heritage

I Introduction

At the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee, a paper submitted by the Cyprus Conservation Foundation in co-operation with the Cyprus Ornithological Society and BirdLife International (T-PVS (2001) 63) outlined the problem of bird trapping in the Republic of Cyprus and the British Sovereign Base Areas. Additional papers on this matter were tabled by the Cypriot Government (T-PVS (2001) 69) and the Secretariat (T-PVS(2001) 49).

A further paper providing an update for the spring of 2002 has already been submitted by the NGOs to this 22nd meeting of the Standing Committee (T-PVS/Files (2002) 9). This current paper provides the findings of work undertaken during the autumn of 2002 to assess the level of bird trapping in Cyprus.

II Background

The trapping of small migrant birds in Cyprus is a long-standing problem which in 1986 was estimated by the International Council for Bird Preservation to account for 2.2 million birds. More recent estimates provided by the Cyprus Ornithological Society for the years 2000 and 2001 suggest that this had risen to more than 12.6 million migratory birds caught each year (see Appendix II).

The failure of the responsible authorities to enforce the relevant legislation has been cited as one reason for this increase. Noting that Cyprus and the United Kingdom have recently taken initiatives to enforce the legislation, a survey was undertaken in 2002 by BirdLife International to re-assess the situation.

III BirdLife International survey of trapping during the autumn migration period 2002

Methods From 25 August to 1 November 2002, two BirdLife International observers undertook a sample survey of the two largest and most important bird trapping areas identified by NGOs in T-PVS (2001) 63. These study areas - the Famagusta District and Ayios Theodoros - are designated as areas 1 and 2 in Appendix III. The Cyprus Ornithological Society estimated that in the year 2000 these two areas accounted for 56% of the total illegal trapping in Cyprus (see Appendix II).

A number of one km squares were selected at random within the two study areas and then surveyed for evidence of bird trapping. The survey covered 14% of the two areas, and the results were extrapolated to provide overall trapping figures for the areas as shown in the map at Appendix III.

It is essential to note that these figures, without doubt, substantially underestimate the true scale of trapping in 2002, for the following reasons:

- due to the publicity covering the presence of the BirdLife observers and the increased enforcement activity, in autumn 2002 many nets were only in place for the hour before dawn (in contrast to the practice in previous years when nets were blatantly left in place throughout the day). For various reasons, including their personal safety, the BirdLife observers did not undertake surveys at this time of day and thus a considerable proportion of the activity in 2002 will have gone unrecorded
- in the sample 1 km squares nets and net corridors were undoubtedly missed when set within fenced compounds to which access was not possible; to prevent access, many fences

were hastily erected by trappers around orchards

- net corridors within plantations are not readily apparent unless the nets are actually in use
- figures only include birds trapped in nets, not lime sticks; in 2000 lime sticks were estimated to account for 1.5 million birds in the Famagusta area alone (see Appendix II); furthermore, in 2002, in response to the increased enforcement activity, many hunters switched to using lime sticks instead of nets because the sticks are less easy to detect and they believe their use is more 'justifiable' because they are 'traditional' (despite still being illegal)
- the total area of trapping in Famagusta District is apparently significantly greater than that suggested by the boundary marked for area 1 in Appendix III. A series of random checks at areas of suitable vegetation to the north of this area found evidence of trapping at 80% of the sites selected
- the trappers themselves publicly admitted (as reported on 11 September 2002 on the front page of *Phileleftheros*, the highest circulation Greek language newspaper in Cyprus) that due to the crack-down in 2002 they were losing 300-500 Cyprus pounds per day from the sale of ambelopoulia (the trapped birds sold as a gastronomic delicacy). As trappers earn about one pound per bird trapped and the autumn trapping season lasts some 60 days, at least 18,000 birds are being caught per trapper per autumn. So how many trappers are there? The *Cyprus Weekly* of 27 Sept to 3 Oct reported that the trappers had surrendered 8000 ballot books in protest at the clamp-down on their activities. Thus, even if the average catch per trapper is only, say, 3000 birds, and if we take 8000 as the total number trappers (when, in fact, not all trappers are likely to have handed in their ballot books) some 24 million birds may be trapped each autumn. And this total does not include the non-commercial species that are trapped in the nets and discarded
- these figures refer only to the autumn migration; they do not include the many birds that are trapped during spring migration and in the winter.

In addition, the scale of trapping in 2002 was much reduced due to the well-publicised and increased enforcement activity and the BirdLife International presence.

Results

- Approximately 66% of all acacia groves, plantations (citrus or other) and planted compounds generally within the selected 1 km squares, which were suitable for the use of mist nets to trap birds and to which the observers had access, had signs of trapping activity; much of this related to previous seasons, and was noted as such.
- The total length of net corridors (old and current) in the two study areas during 2002 was calculated as at least 50,521 metres (over 50 km). If each mist net is taken as 12 metres in length this accounts for 4,210 individual nets.
- It is estimated that if all the net corridors in the two study areas had been used throughout the autumn period, at least 5,052,000 birds would have been caught (4,210 nets x 20 birds per day x 60 days).
- The length of active nets/net corridors in use in the two study areas during 2002 was calculated as 5,415 metres or approximately 451 individual nets.
- The total number of birds trapped in mist nets in the two study areas alone in autumn 2002 was calculated as at least 541,500 birds (451 nets x 20 birds per day x 60 days), **but this believed to be an unrealistically low estimate due to the reasons given above.**

- A total of 314 lime sticks were found in 28.3% of the 1 km squares in the study areas; extrapolated for the entire study area (314/0.142) this gives 2211 sticks in use in the Famagusta and Ayios Theodoros areas or a minimum of 66330 birds caught (0.5 birds per day x 2211 lime sticks x 60 days). **This is also thought to be a low estimate.**
- Over 1000 lime sticks were located (within and without the sample squares), only two of which were of the traditional variety, **all the rest being a more effective modern type incorporating long-lasting synthetic glues and dyes.**
- A total of 46 species of birds was recorded caught in nets or on lime sticks (see Appendix I).
- *Sylvia atricapilla* accounted for over 80% of the birds recorded caught in nets or on lime sticks.
- *Oenanthe cypriaca* and *Sylvia melanothorax* both endemic to Cyprus and identified as having an unfavourable conservation status in Europe were observed caught in nets or on lime sticks.

IV Enforcement action during autumn 2002

BirdLife observers were able to accompany officers of the Cyprus Game Fund Service and the UK Sovereign Base Area Police on a number of regular patrols. The seizure of numerous nets, lime sticks and bird trapping equipment and the arrest of trappers by both authorities was witnessed. The enforcement agencies of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, for the first time, undertook an action against restaurants. This was widely reported in the local media: “Almost five thousand ambelopoulia were seized by the Game Service in a series of surprise raids across the Larnaca district, which also saw nine people arrested, police said yesterday” *Cyprus Mail 18 October*. This is the tip of the iceberg and the enforcement authority deserve great credit for successfully undertaking this action, despite significant public condemnation.

It should be noted that BirdLife observers had intended to visit a number of restaurants to observe the sale and consumption of ambelopoulia. This was deemed to place them at some personal risk, so the activity was not undertaken.

Most of the nets and all of the bird calling devices seized by the authorities had been manufactured in Italy. Although the importation of mist nets into Cyprus is illegal (unless specifically authorised for scientific use) enforcement of this ban is very difficult, due to the ease with which such nets can be concealed. The most effective way to discourage the import and use of nets is likely to be through the imposition of truly deterrent fines on persons found guilty of the sale, possession or use of illegal nets.

All incidents of bird trapping witnessed by the BirdLife observers were reported to the relevant enforcement authorities. The response of the enforcement agencies was in most instances commendable. However, in the Famagusta District there was a reluctance by local police to obtain search warrants when necessary and local officers apparently experienced divided loyalties on occasions when working in their own community.

Enforcement action was made more difficult by the tactics employed by the trappers. For example, trappers hastily erected fences around many orchards to provide a legal barrier to law enforcement, in that a search warrant would be required to enter such fenced areas.

A representative of the bird trappers was reported in Cypriot newspapers to have said that there will be a return to normal levels of trapping once the accession of Cyprus to the European Union has been secured. “The Larnaca District 'Committee for the Struggle' to lift a government ban on the illegal trapping of ambelopoulia yesterday announced it would no longer pursue the issue until after Cyprus' EU accession. But its members also warned they'd be back on the day we join the EU”. *Cyprus Mail 3 October*.

V Conclusions

The results of the work undertaken in autumn 2002 indicate that:

1. The level of trapping in 2002 was reduced in all the main areas compared to that in previous years. The estimate derived from this survey for numbers of birds (5,052,000) trapped in nets in the two study areas (Famagusta District and Ayios Theodoros) in previous years accords remarkably well with the estimate given by the Cyprus Ornithological Society for the year 2000 (see Appendix II and III). The estimate of the number of birds trapped in nets in the two study areas in 2002 is more than half a million birds (some two-thirds of a million birds trapped if lime sticks are included). However, for the reasons outlined in section III above, the above figures for 2002 are likely to be substantial under-estimates, and thus the real reduction in trapping levels was significantly less than the figures might imply at first sight.
2. The reduction in extent of trapping was deemed to be the result of increased enforcement activity by both the Cyprus Game Fund Service and the British Sovereign Base Area Police, assisted by the presence of the BirdLife International observers and the widespread media coverage of this issue.
3. The increased level of enforcement was stimulated by the proactive stance of the new Minister of the Interior and senior officials of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, who publicly asserted their determination to stop the illegal trapping, killing and sale of birds. Other factors included the Bern Convention's on-the-spot visit in January, and the presence of BirdLife International observers during the autumn.
4. **The level of trapping is still unacceptably high**, with unknown implications for migrant populations of birds and potentially damaging implications for important endemic Cyprus species.
5. While the improvement in the enforcement situation in 2002 was commendable, there is every likelihood that the problem will resurface **unless the pressure is kept on after accession**. Continued enforcement action by the responsible authorities in the Republic of Cyprus and in the UK Sovereign Base Areas is essential to underpin existing gains and to confront the alleged threat of bird trappers returning to their old ways once Cyprus is a Member of the European Union.
6. For its part, BirdLife International, in cooperation with the Cyprus Ornithological Society and the Cyprus Conservation Foundation, plans to continue its campaign against bird trapping in Cyprus as a follow-up to its successful project in autumn 2002.

VI Further action recommended

The Standing Committee is invited:

- i) **to compliment the Governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom on taking active measures to enforce the legislation concerning illegal bird trapping**
- ii) **to encourage the Governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom to continue to implement Recommendation No. 90 (2001) on the catching and killing or trading of protected birds in Cyprus, through active enforcement of legislation by their responsible agencies,**
- iii) **to encourage the Government of the Republic of Cyprus , in particular, to take further action to prevent the import of nets and other trapping equipment, and particularly bird calling devices, into Cyprus**

iv) to encourage the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, in cooperation with the appropriate NGOs, to influence public opinion in Cyprus so that it becomes unacceptable to trap, kill, sell and/or consume protected species of birds as culinary delicacies.

v) to request the Governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom to develop and adopt, during 2003, a long term action plan spelling out the practical steps they intend to take to eradicate the trapping and trading of birds in the run up to accession and beyond

vi) to support the efforts of BirdLife International to monitor the situation on the ground again next year and to report back to the Standing Committee at its 23rd meeting

vii) to request the Governments of the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom to provide a further report on their implementation of Recommendation No. 90 (2001) on the catching, killing or trading of protected birds in Cyprus, and their progress on implementing the actions listed in sub-paras (ii) to (v) above, to the 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee. At that meeting the question should again be addressed as to whether a file should be opened on this issue.

Appendix I - List of birds trapped (by net and lime sticks) in autumn 2002 as observed by BirdLife International observers.

| Species | N.of ind. Caught | N.of ind. Released | N. of birds dead | Conservation Status |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | 2515+ | 155 | 2360+ | B |
| <i>Phylloscopus throchilus</i> | 151+ | 22 | 129 | B |
| <i>Passer domesticus</i> | 116 | 5 | 111 | |
| <i>Sylvia borin</i> | 103+ | 15 | 88 | B |
| <i>Sylvia curruca</i> | 47+ | 19 | 28 | B |
| <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | 33 | | 33 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i> | 24 | 6 | 18 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Lanius collurio</i> | 21 | 9 | 12 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Hippolais pallida elaeica</i> | 13+ | 1 | 12 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Sylvia (hortensis) crassirostris</i> | 13 | 2 | 11 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Otus scops</i> | 11 | 5 | 6 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Lanius nubicus</i> | 11 | 1 | 10 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> | 11 | | 11 | |
| <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus (+ fuscus)</i> | 10 | 5 | 5 | B |
| <i>Asio otus</i> | 9 | | 9 | B |
| <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | 6 | | 6 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | 6 | 3 | 3 | B |
| <i>Streptopelia turtur</i> | 6 | | 6 | |
| <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i> | 5 | 4 | 1 | B |
| <i>Carduelis chloris</i> | 5 | 2 | 3 | B |
| <i>Oriolus oriolus</i> | 5 | 1 | 4 | B |
| <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | 5 | 2 | 3 | B |
| <i>Parus major aphroditeae</i> | 3 | 3 | | B |
| <i>Luscinia luscinia</i> | 3 | 3 | | B |
| <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i> | 3 | | 3 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Jynx torquilla</i> | 3 | | 3 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> | 3 | 1 | 2 | B |
| <i>Upupa epops</i> | 3 | | 3 | B |
| <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | 3 | | 3 | B |
| <i>Turdus merula</i> | 2 | | 2 | |
| <i>Sylvia melanothorax</i> | 2 | | 2 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Lanius minor</i> | 2 | | 2 | SPEC2, B |
| <i>Cuculus canorus</i> | 2 | | 2 | |
| <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | 2 | | 2 | |
| <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | 2 | | 2 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Locustella luscinioides</i> | 1 | 1 | | B |
| <i>Cettia cetti</i> | 1 | 1 | | B |
| <i>Tyto alba</i> | 1 | | 1 | SPEC3, B, |
| <i>Glareola cristata</i> | 1 | | 1 | |
| <i>Alectoris chukar</i> | 1 | | 1 | |
| <i>Francolinus francolinus</i> | 1 | | 1 | |
| <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> | 1 | | 1 | B |
| <i>Oenanthe cyprica</i> | 1 | | 1 | SPEC 2, B |
| <i>Merops apiaster</i> | 1 | | 1 | SPEC3, B |
| <i>Emberiza caesia/hortulana</i> | 3 | | 3 | B |
| <i>Phylloscopus sp.</i> | Some | | | |
| TOT. | 3072+ | 350 | 2722 | |

Conservation status:

B = included in the Bern Convention Appendix II

Spec 2 = Concentrated in Europe and with an unfavourable Conservation Status *

Spec 3 = Not concentrated in Europe but with an Unfavourable Conservation Status*

* Tucker, G.M. and Heath, M.F. (1994) *Birds in Europe: their conservation status*. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K.

Appendix II

Birds Killed in Cyprus in 2000 & 2001

Estimated by the Cyprus Ornithological Society

A. Famagusta Area: Low Average: 5,1 million in Autumn.

Liming: 50000 lime sticks x ½ bird x 60 days = 1,5 million.

Netting: 3000 nets x 20 birds x 60 days= 3,6 million.

B. Agios Theodoros: Low Average: 2,0 million in Autumn.

C. Other Areas: Low average 2,0 million.

Total Cyprus

1. **Autumn catch by mist nets and lime sticks:** 9,1 million birds (ie low average totals of A + B + C above)

2. **Winter catch by lime sticks and mist nets** mainly thrushes, finches, robins, etc: 2.0 million.
Spring catch by lime sticks and mist nets: 1.5 million.

Total annual number of birds caught by lime sticks and mist nets in Cyprus: 9,1 +2,0 +1.5= 12,6

4 **Autumn trapping of Spanish sparrows in big traps at Marathasa, Solea and the north valleys of Akamas:** up to 150,000 pa.

5 **Shooting by small-gauge shot-guns:** 1 million pa.

6 **Shooting of Thrushes:** 25,000 hunters x 25 outings x 4 birds= 2,5 million (low average). NB for every bird caught at least another one is lost or wounded and dies later on. This is a known fact especially in areas of thick vegetation.

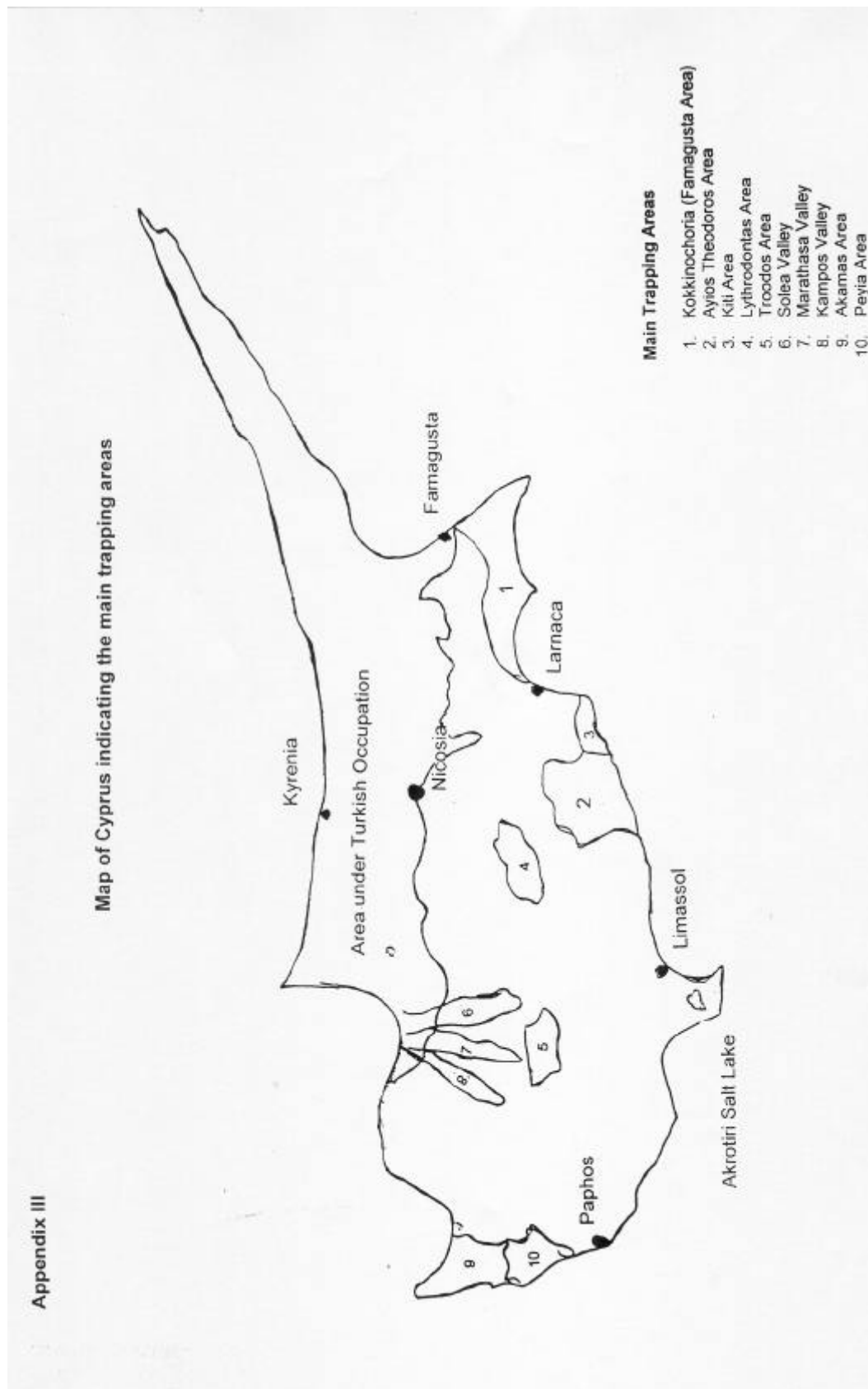
7 **Other birds shot:** Chukar, Black Francolin, Turtle Dove, Wood Pigeon, Quail, Skylark, Crested Lark, Waterbirds, etc: 1,2 million.

Total number of birds killed in Cyprus (legally and illegally): 17,5 million

Birds killed in the northern (occupied) part of Cyprus: 2,5 million

Total number of birds killed per annum on the island of Cyprus 20,0 million

Appendix 3



Appendix 4



Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Recommendation No. 90 (2001) on the catching, killing or trading of protected birds in Cyprus

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 30 November 2001)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention;

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild fauna and its natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Convention requires Parties to give particular emphasis to the conservation of endangered and vulnerable species, including endangered and vulnerable migratory species;

Recalling that Article 6 compels Parties to take the necessary and administrative measures to ensure the special protection of the wild fauna species specified in Appendix II, prohibiting in particular all forms of deliberate capture and keeping, and deliberate killing, as well as the possession and internal trade in these animals, alive or dead;

Recalling its Recommendation No. 5 (1986) on the prosecution of persons illegally catching, killing or trading in protected birds, which encouraged Parties to ensure the prosecution of persons illegally catching or killing birds or establishments commercialising live or protected birds;

Noting with satisfaction that since that recommendation was adopted by the Committee, many Parties took decisive measures to eradicate the illegal killing and trading of birds, resulting in a much more effective enforcement of the provisions of the Convention;

Noting with regret that, although Cyprus and the United Kingdom Sovereign Base Areas took some initiatives in that respect, enforcement of the legislation on killing and trading of protected birds is still poor, and sale and offering for sale of protected birds is still common,

Recommends Cyprus and the United Kingdom to:

1. fully implement without delay the obligations of Article 6 concerning protected birds;
2. put into practice, as a matter of urgency, the actions suggested in Recommendation No. 5 (1986) of the Standing Committee, paying particular attention to the following items:
 - ? increase of the penalties for these offences, so that they may become dissuasive;
 - ? increase of wardening in areas where birds are illegally caught;
 - ? regular and frequent control of restaurants selling protected birds, ensuring prosecution of owners;
 - ? prevention of importation of mistnets and prohibition of their possession without license, imposing heavy fines for their illegal possession and use;
 - ? strict control of illegal capture, killing, possession, trade, sale and offering for sale of protected birds;
3. launch a wide information campaign to the general public on the illegal catching, killing and trade of protected birds, as well as on the need to conserve birds and their habitats.