

# News story: UK steps up efforts to stop bird trapping in Cyprus

The trapping of songbirds is a widespread practice in Cyprus, but British Forces Cyprus (BFC) have worked tirelessly alongside the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and environmental organisation Birdlife Cyprus to reduce the horrific practice.

An annual report released in March showed that in 2016, 888,000 songbird deaths were recorded, but by the following year there were 260,000 – a drop of 76 per cent. Armed Forces Minister Mark Lancaster travelled to Cyprus to learn more.

Minister for Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

The work being done by our Armed Forces and Sovereign Base Area Police has made a significant difference to the survival of these magnificent birds in Cyprus, and I applaud them for it. We will continue to do everything we can to protect them.

Earlier this month, to further decrease bird trapping, the Sovereign Base Area Administration hosted the RSPB and Birdlife Cyprus and have agreed a collaborative strategy for tackling bird crime in the forthcoming migration season.

A key aspect to stopping bird trapping is the removal of invasive acacia trees, planted by trappers, and the illegal irrigation used to promote its growth. The trees are used to lure birds into fine mist nets before they are killed to make the local dish ambelopoulia. Since 2014 the equivalent area of 45 football pitches of acacia has been removed and over 60km of irrigation pipes destroyed.



Irrigation pipes removed by British troops. Crown copyright.



British forces load irrigation pipes into a vehicle. Crown copyright.

The implementation of hidden surveillance cameras and the acquisition of a Sovereign Base Area Police drone, as well as increased patrols, have also

helped bring bird deaths down significantly.

During a visit to the Sovereign Base Areas earlier in June, Head of International Policy Programmes for the RSPB Andrew Callender said:

It is great to have the opportunity to see at first-hand what the MOD are doing in preparation for the forthcoming migration season and we look forward to working even closer together in combatting bird crime this year.

The Minister's visit also presented an opportunity for defence ties between the UK and Cyprus to be reaffirmed, as Mr Lancaster signed a renewed defence co-operation agreement.

This agreement brings the two nations closer together in a number of areas including: maritime and air security, counter-terrorism, cyber and intelligence.

Minister for Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

The UK and Cyprus have a deep shared history and common values, including as members of the Commonwealth, which is why I'm delighted that we have agreed to continue working closer together than ever before.

While on the island, the Minister took the opportunity to visit British troops who are involved in a number of missions.

Among these are personnel based at RAF Akrotiri, who have bravely led the UK's air strikes that have helped to decimate the presence of Daesh in Syria and Iraq.

He also visited the 1st Battalion the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, who are currently deployed in Cyprus, and British soldiers who are involved in the UN Peacekeeping mission on the island.



Mark Lancaster meets troops based in Cyprus. Crown copyright.