### Threats to the Biodiversity of Cyprus

**Habitat destruction**
Habitats are under threat from uncontrolled development which results not just in the loss of biodiversity but increases pollution and human disturbance.

**Illegal trapping and hunting**
BirdLife Cyprus is working with the authorities to eliminate these activities.

**Climate change**
It seems likely that this may cause the disappearance of species confined to the mountains of Cyprus.

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**Mediteraves Project**
Funded by the Leonardo da Vinci (Lifelong Learning Programme) of the European Commission, the Mediteraves project (International Project of Ornithological Tourism) combines the ideas behind the conservation and management of Natura 2000 areas and the requirements and expectations of birding tourists. The result is an online management tool to train and inform those in the tourism industry on how to operate in an environmentally sustainable way and advise their clients of their responsibilities towards the areas they visit and the birds that inhabit them. It builds on the Iberaves project developed by SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and the Spanish partner SEO/BirdLife. BirdLife Cyprus, BirdLife International, the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS), SPEA and SEO are the participating partners for Mediteraves which will also develop a smartphone application to be used by visiting birdwatchers.

**BirdLife Cyprus**
BirdLife Cyprus was formed in 2003 and today is the most active non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works to conserve wild birds, their habitats and the wider biodiversity in Cyprus. It is the national partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of nature conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries worldwide. BirdLife Cyprus adopts a multi-pronged approach to tackling the threats facing birds and their sites – research, monitoring, lobbying, awareness raising, campaigns and education.

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**Birdwatching in Cyprus**

With the support of the Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Union.
Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea - approximately, 9250km² in area. Cyprus has two mountain ranges, Troodos and Pentadactylos, which generally run east to west and are broadly separated by the Mesaoria plain. The coasts are mainly rocky with some sandy beaches, and the island has a small tidal range. There are only a few streams that flow all year in Troodos. There are two main Salt Lakes - one on the Akrotiri peninsula and the other in Larnaca. They usually hold water in the winter and the actual amount is dependent on rainfall. Other seasonal shallow freshwater lakes or marshes may form, while the extensive Cyprus dam programme has increased the area of freshwater lakes, although with no real benefits for biodiversity.

Cyprus has a rich variety of fauna and flora, including plants, trees, shrubs, mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects. It is also home to several unique plants and trees found only on the island including the endemic Golden Oak Quercus alnifolia, as well as endemic birds, insects, and mammals, such as the Cyprus moufflon, mouse and hedgehog.

Natura 2000 network
Cyprus designated thirty Special Protection Areas for the species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), which applies to Cyprus since it became an EU member in 2004. These include forested areas such as the Troodos and Paphos Forests, Machairas and Tzionia and the Madari/Papoutsa hilltops; wetland sites such as the Larnaca Salt Lake, Akhna Dam and Oroklini Lake; coastal sites such as the Akamas Peninsula and Cape Aspro and Greco; and other important sites such as the Saramas and Ezousa Valleys, the Ezousa, Xeros and Diarizos rivers’ estuaries, and Pentasxoinos valley.

Habitats of Cyprus

From the coast, across the Mesaoria plain and up to the highest peak of Troodos, Mount Olympos, Cyprus has a wide variety of habitats, each with a diversity of flora and fauna. Here are the main habitat types:

- Open sea and coastal zone.
- Steep cliffs along the southern coast from Episkopi to Petra tou Romiou.
- Sandy beaches especially along the south east coast of the island- elsewhere there are beaches with a mixture of sand, pebble and rocks.
- Seasonal wetlands such as Akrotiri and Larnaca Salt Lakes, Oroklini and Paralimni Lake.
- Man-made reservoirs and dams such as those at Akhna and Asprokremmos.
- Seasonal river estuaries with reed beds and pools that occur after winter rains on the Ezousas, Diarizos and Xeros rivers.
- Scrubland covered in maquis and low juniper found in areas of Akamas and Cape Greco.
- Vineyards and mountain terraces.
- Pine forests such as those at the higher altitudes of Troodos and in the Paphos forest.
- Inland cliffs and gorges at Episkopi, Paphos and in Akamas.
- Traditional, low intensity agriculture areas with cereals, olive trees and carobs.
- Forested valleys such as the Cedar Valley and Diarizos valley.

Biodiversity of Cyprus

The position of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean places it on one of the major migration routes and makes it a stop-off point for many species which pass each year from Europe/Asia to Africa via the Nile Delta. This means that of the nearly 400 birds recorded in Cyprus, most are passage migrants. About 30 species are resident and approximately 40 are migrant breeders.

The number of birds passing over during the spring and autumn migration is impressive, with millions moving through the island. Around 90 species come to Cyprus for the winter, the most famous being the thousands of Greater Flamingo.

Several birds occur in Cyprus on the edge of their European range, such as the breeding Black Francolin and Spur-winged Lapwing, and the overwintering Finsch’s Wheatear. Several new additions to the breeding list rely on wetland habitats e.g. Glossy Ibis, Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck.

Although near to the mainland, Cyprus has a high degree of endemism of both flora and avifauna. There are two endemic species of bird. The Cyprus Wheatear is a migrant breeder. The Cyprus Warbler is the other and the Scops Owl, Coal Tit, Jay and Short-toed Treecreeper are endemic sub-species.
Cyprus has many different sites to visit, each with a variety of different species and each being important at different times of the year. A selection of the most important is given here:

1. Paralimni Lake – one of the seasonal Salt Lakes of Cyprus, in those years when it holds water it attracts Greater Flamingo. Heron species use the reed-fringed pools that form around the edges of the lake, as do various waders and crakes. Lesser Kestrel and species of marsh tern hunt over the area as they pass through on spring migration. Spur-winged Lapwing and Kentish Plover breed here and recent rarities include Caspian Plover and White-tailed Lapwing, as well as Bufflehead’s Crane.

2. Cape Greco – the south east promontory of the island, the Cape is especially good for bird watching during the migration periods. Migrating raptors such as Honey Buzzard, Black Kite and Pallid Harrier pass over the area and heron species fly along the coast. Many passerines rest in the low vegetation – warblers, flycatchers, shrikes – and the area has a good reputation for rarities such as White-throated Robin and Red-breast Flycatcher.

3. Akhna Dam – one of the largest artificial wetlands on the island, the water levels of this dam vary but it is probably better for birds when low water levels lead to the formation of pools. Heron species, waders and terms occur here and it is a good site for Bluethroat and Moustached Warbler in the winter.

4. Onolaxi Marsh – this small brackish marshy area, which holds seasonal rain, is the subject of a LIFE+ project which will ensure it remains one of the best areas for breeding Spur-winged Lapwing and Black-winged Stilt in Cyprus. Red-crested Pochard also breed here. Large flocks of ducks use the lake in winter and it is a regular site for wintering gulls and waders.

5. Larnaca Salt Lake – this large Salt Lake has large pools and areas of Salicornia vegetation on both sides of the lake. It is best known for its wintering Greater Flamingo, it also has wintering wildfowl, gulls and waders as well as terns, waders and pratincoles on migration. Surrounding wooded areas are good for migrant passerines, and larks, pipits and Black Francolin occur in nearby fields.

6. Akrotiri Salt Lake – another seasonal Salt Lake that can hold thousands of Greater Flamingo when the water levels are right. As well as wildfowl and waders, the area is well known for its autumn raptor migration when hundreds of Honey Buzzards and many harriers and eagle species pass through daily, and Red-footed Falcon are regularly seen. At the end of August, groups of Demoselous Crane occasionally roost on the lake overnight and leave on the thermals early in the day.

7. Phasouri Reed Beds – a freshwater area close to Akrotiri Salt Lake, these reed beds are good for heron species, waders and raptors. Ferruginous Duck breed for the first time in Cyprus at this site in 2005 and continue to do so. It is a good place for Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Pratincole in the spring, and raptors pass over here in autumn.

8. Kensington Cliffs – one of the few remaining places on the island to find the drastically depleted population of Griffon Vulture, the area also has breeding Cyprus Warbler; while Eleonora’s Falcon breed on the cliffs. Blue Rock Thrush is a winter visitor, and occasionally an elusive over-wintering Wallcreeper may be spotted.

9. Paphos Plain – Mandra is the best known site in this area. The cultivated fields attract larks in winter and on migration, as well as different wheatears and pipits. Chukar and Black Francolin are resident. Raptor migration can be seen here in both spring and autumn, and the beach attracts resting wader migrants such as Greater Sand Plover. Unusual species can use the area, and recently a ‘Speckled’ Grey Shrike and the eastern race of the Black Redstart were long-staying vagrants.

10. Asprokremmos Dam – This is a large man-made reservoir and the varied habitat types around its dam wall, shores and head mean it is used by a variety of species. As well as the usual waterbirds, Cyprus Warbler breeds here and Finch’s Wheat Ear spend the winter at the abandoned village of Phinikas. Roller and Stone Curlew visit the Nata area, and Long-legged Buzzard and Bonelli’s Eagle hunt around the dam. The wooded section of the amenity area near the dam wall is good for migrant passerines.

11. Paphos Headland – one of the most well-known birdwatching sites in Cyprus. The headland includes an archaeological site as well as grassy and wooded areas. Warblers, buntings, pipits, wagtails and shrikes use these during spring and autumn, and rarities are regular. In winter the headland’s rocky shore has waders which regularly include Greater Sand Plover.

12. Cape Drepanum – this westerly headland is at the start of the Akamas National Park and has many of the same species as Paphos Headland. Herons and egrets migrate along the coast.

13. Evretou Dam – another man-made reservoir that attracts waders and herons to its shallow end. Crag Martin can be seen here in the winter and Bonelli’s Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard hunt over the location. The surrounding hillsides are good for breeding Cyprus Warbler and Cyprus Wheatear, as well as Roller.

14. Akamas Peninsula – a large area in the north western corner of Cyprus, the area is good for breeding Roller, Black-headed Bunting, Hoopoe, Cretzschmar’s Bunting and Masked Shrike. The most accessible areas for birdwatching are behind the village of Neo Chorio and past the Baths of Aphrodite. In late summer flocks of migrating herons, egrets and ducks can be seen offshore at Latsi, and migrating Demoselous Crane sometimes pass through the valley inland from Pila.

15. Troodos – covered with Aleppo and Black Pine this area is home to all the Cypriot endemic sub-species – Coal Tit, Jay, Short-toed Treecreeper and Scops Owl. It also has breeding Cyprus Wheatear, Red Crossbill, Pallid Swift and Masked Shrike.

16. Paphos Forest – a large forested area on the western side of the Troodos range, it has many of the species found in Troodos, and is a good site to see Bonelli’s Eagle and Goshawk.

Birdwatching in Cyprus

Birdwatching is a hobby that is increasing in popularity worldwide. Cyprus is a popular destination for birdwatchers from northern Europe who often enjoy combining a holiday in the mountains or on the beaches with days spent birding. It is a form of eco-tourism that can be shared with general nature tourism and walking holidays. Many birdwatchers are interested in photography as well.

The most important birdwatching sites in Cyprus are easily accessible and most visitors bring their own binoculars and field guide. Time and patience will enable the visitor to track down the variety of birds that use the island and enjoy them in their natural surroundings.