

## INTRODUCTION

RAFOS carried out an ornithological survey in Cyprus in the spring of 1995 when there was a six-week survey to the Akámas Peninsula<sup>1</sup>, and this was followed up in the spring of '97 with a further expedition to the same area<sup>2</sup>. In mid 2006 RY proposed to the Committee that the Society should return to Cyprus in the spring of 2008 for a six-week survey based on BirdLife Cyprus' requirements. The proposal was agreed at the 2006 AGM.

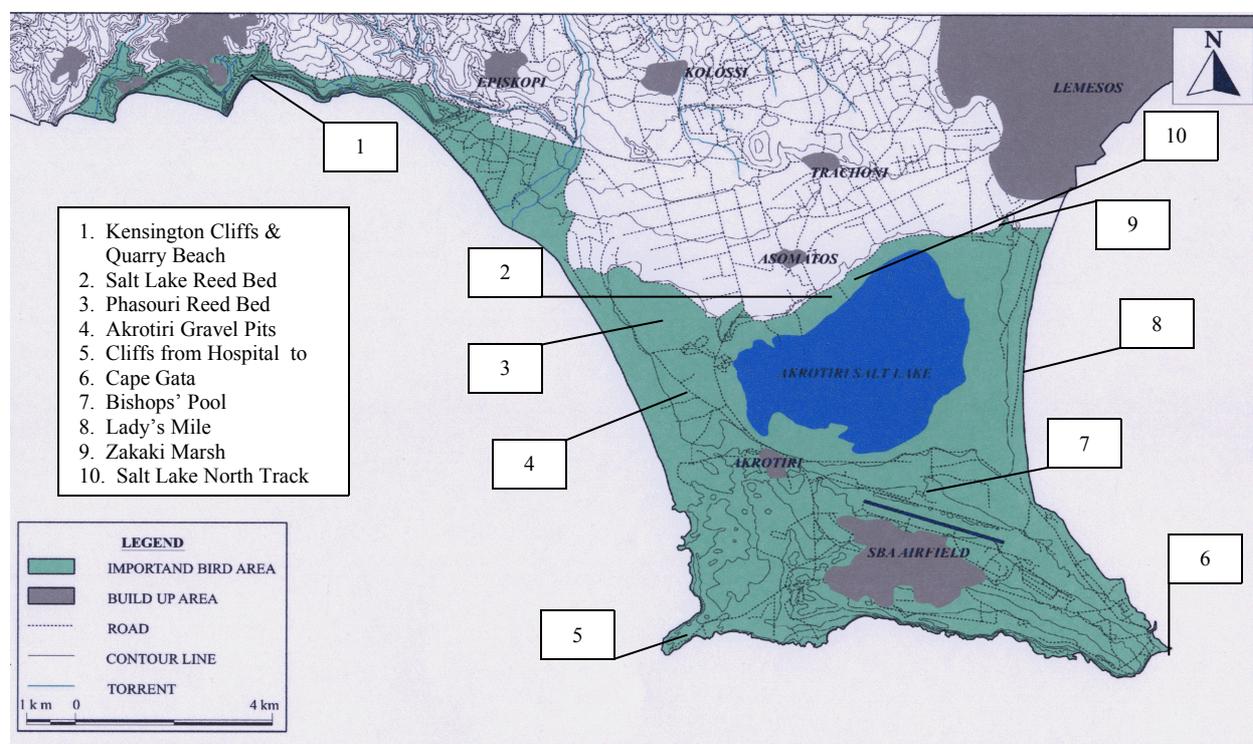
BirdLife Cyprus had identified the Akrotiri Peninsula as an area that had not been well covered by its members and it was agreed that we would concentrate our effort there. The Peninsula is wholly within the Western Sovereign Base Area (WSBA) in Cyprus, and when contacted, the SBA Authority (SBAA) was very enthusiastic and supportive of the project. So it was that between 7 Apr and 20 May 08, 32 RAFOS Members took part in ExCypSurv08.

## AIM

The primary aim of the Expedition was to gather meaningful and verified data on the birds, their habitat, feeding and breeding habits within selected sites on the Akrotiri Peninsula to assist BirdLife Cyprus and the SBA Environment Office in devising a practical and sustainable conservation management plan for the area. Birdlife Cyprus had specified two species of particular interest, **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* and **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* for which the wetland areas would be monitored for signs of breeding activity. To this task was added **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora* in the WSBA.

The secondary aim was to continue with a raptor survey in the vicinity of the major aerial arrays on the Salt Lake on behalf of the SBAA Environment Office. This work was to supplement a survey conducted by Mr John Cromarty in September 2007.

## SURVEY SITES



Map 1 – Location of Main Survey Sites

<sup>1</sup> RAFOS Journal No 25: Akámas Cyprus – A report of bird migration – Spring 1995, Brimmell, Couzens, Frost et al.

<sup>2</sup> RAFOS Journal 27: Cyprus Supplement, Brimmell, Couzens, Etheridge and Stagg.

The main observation sites, shown on the map above, were the wetlands at Phasouri Reed-bed (Site 3), Zakaki Marsh (9) and Bishops' Pool (7) at all of which systematic monitoring was carried out. The remaining sites were visited regularly and casual/roving records were kept. The ringers established ringing sites in the Bishops' Pool area (7), at Phasouri Reed-bed (3), on the track round the northern side of the Salt Lake (10) and near the old Akrotiri village church just on the edge of the Gravel Pits (4).

## **METHODOLOGY**

At the 3 major sites, Phasouri Reed-bed, Bishops' Pool and Zakaki Marsh monitoring took place from 0700 -1100 and again at the first two sites from 1500 -1800 almost every day. Zakaki Marsh was monitored only in the morning because by afternoon observers would be looking directly into the sun. The other areas were monitored on a more ad hoc basis. The recording period for observers at the 3 major sites was 30 minutes, at the other sites a Casual Record Reporting Form was used, noting all birds seen. (Examples of the monitoring forms used are available in the full report on our website.) Call-over was held at 1300 daily, the period of normal bird inactivity, when records from that morning and the previous afternoon were put directly into the database, which accorded with the BirdLife Cyprus format.

## **WEATHER**

Throughout the survey Cyprus was in the grip of a serious drought. The last decent winter rain and snow had been during the winter of 2004/05 and the 07/08 winter had been particularly dry. Most of the reservoirs were extremely low; Kouris Dam at about 9% full and Asprokremnos at only about 6% being the worst. When we arrived, in early April, much of the Island looked like it usually does in mid-May and by the time we left it was looking like late June. Indeed, shortly after our arrival, the Republic of Cyprus Government introduced water restrictions for the main cities of Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol. However, despite the drought, all the main observation sites held quite a lot of water at the start of the survey; this was to change markedly by the end.

Daily temperatures were typical for the time of year; April gave daytime highs of around 20-25°C with nights around 10°C; progressing into May the daytime temperatures rose to 25-28°C and the nights around 15-20°C. However, the winds were a problem on most days. Westerlies are the prevailing winds in the spring, but this year they were stronger and more constant than normal (33 days out of 41). This made birding difficult on some days and the ringers had particular problems with high winds. Most days were bright and sunny and rain was almost non-existent.

## **AKROTIRI EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT CENTRE**

The centre had been established in Akrotiri Village by the SBA Administration, and became the HQ for the survey. The Centre Manager, Thomas Hadjikyriakou and his staff were very hospitable and helpful; we were allowed to use the centre whenever we wished and we held meetings there and used their IT facilities.

Thomas and his team work tirelessly to inform and instruct the people of the local area in the meaning and practicality of conservation, and their work with the children and schools of Limassol has been particularly valuable.

## **TIME SPENT AT EACH SITE**

An approximate breakdown of hours spent in observation at each site is shown below. The figure represents the hours that were spent at each site and are not man-hours. The figures do not include the time our ringing teams were on site.

Phasouri Reed-bed	116
Zakaki Marsh	96

Bishops Pool area	87 (Inc Bishops' Pool East area)
Episkopi	45 (Inc HV, the Golf Course and all Cliffs)
Lady's Mile	24 (Football stadium to track over Salt Lake)
Akrotiri Cliffs	22 (Cape Gata to Cape Zevgari)
Akrotiri Gravel Pits and Church	20
ASL North track	12
Tower Survey	60

## SITE ANALYSIS

All the material in this section of the report has been derived from the observations, logged at the time, of participants in RAFOS ExCypSurv08 between 2<sup>nd</sup> April and 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008, or from informed discussion with SBA personnel, local organisations and other visitors. For some sites the situation changed between May 08 and May 09 when RY paid a short visit to Cyprus. These changes are given at the end of each site analysis.

### ZAKAKI MARSH

Site Description. Zakaki Marsh is a pond deep enough for diving ducks. It measure approximately 100m × 75m and has a fringe of 5m tall reeds on 3 sides, the reed-bed width being 5-15m; around this fringe dabbling ducks feed in the shallower water. The fourth side is the current Zakaki - Lady's Mile link road, which offers the only viewpoints, but an intermittent narrow reed fringe gives some shelter. The present geography of the reserve makes no provision for waders or herons that feed in the open, there being no shallows of any size. Those species that inhabit reed-beds (small herons, rails) have ample cover. The source of the pond's water is presumed to be part run-off, part seepage through clayey soils from slightly higher elevations and part waste-water. A sluice has been installed, connected by a culvert under the road (see Water levels below). The Marsh itself lies almost entirely within the WSBA.



Zakaki Marsh

*Photo: Dick Yates*

### Risks and threats to the Marsh

Zakaki Marsh is very vulnerable due to the factors discussed in the following paragraphs and of all the reserves and valuable bird areas covered in this report we consider it to be the most at risk.

Unauthorised semi-trailer parking lot and frequency of traffic movements. We understand that because of an intractable dispute between two transport workers' unions and the Limassol Port Authority, not all articulated container trucks may be driven directly into and out of the Port and as a consequence a very large unauthorised container and truck parking lot has developed outside the Port Authority boundary. This parking lot is mostly within the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), the local jurisdiction presumably being Limassol City Council. A rough count suggested that up to 500 trucks/trailers are illegally parked within the RoC. The southern edge of this section of the parking lot abuts on to Zakaki Marsh and at this point there is evidence of infill encroachment of the Marsh from bulldozed clearances and the addition of hardcore. We met no-one who had any knowledge of planning permission having been sought or obtained for this section.



The observation point at Zakaki Marsh

*Photo: Dick Yates*

Overspill from this parking lot occupies several sites to the south of the Limassol Port boundary wall within the SBA. On our last visit, 16 May 08, trucks/trailers were parked on the roadside overlooking Zakaki Marsh, round the sluice, in areas that have been cleared along the road towards Lady's Mile, around the small football ground and in the dead-end extension of Lady's Mile to the north. Some of the cleared areas have encroached upon former small areas of wetland associated with the Marsh. We understand that the SBA authorities have never been approached or given permission for this truck/trailer parking. A rough count suggested that some 50 trailers are illegally parked within the SBA.

Clearly, the need for container freight to be delivered to, and collected from the Port generates a large number of daily movements by the prime movers to and from the unauthorised parking areas. A very rough count of movements into and out of the entrance of the section of the parking lot within the RoC gave a maximum of 180 movements per hour, dependent upon the number of ships loading or discharging cargo.

The traffic related to the trailers in the SBA generated a rough count of a maximum rate of movements of 95 per hour, but minimum rates could be much lower. However, all these movements require the prime movers, whether collecting or delivering container trailers, to drive over the culvert along the narrow link road towards Lady's Mile and to return by the same route.

*Situation in May 2009. The dispute appeared to have been settled and the number of trucks and trailers being parked had greatly reduced; but there were still some 20 assorted prime movers and trailers, not necessarily paired, parked in various locations around the area. Nothing had been done to the road or to try and clean up the area. However, some of the reeds had been cleared from in front of the viewing area and although this gives a much better outlook over the Marsh, it ensures that birds will tend to remain at the back of the marsh or will fail to use it as a roost. Restoration of some of the reeds in front of the viewing area should be given the highest priority in accordance with standard reserve management principles.*

Road Specification. The Limassol Port Authority boundary is marked by a 2m high concrete wall. Within the RoC the road surface for 150m south of the entrance to the unauthorised parking lot was designed only for light traffic; this same road continues south for another 500m to the small football ground, where it becomes a graded road. At no point was this road designed to withstand the impact of 44-tonne heavy vehicles, nor was it ever intended to be wide enough to permit heavy vehicles to pass each other.

Road surface and quality. The road surface has been very badly damaged by the relentless impact of heavy vehicles. It is badly cracked, but the main problem is that the ballasting, adequate for light traffic, has been compacted and probably spread by heavy vehicles. This will have affected subsurface water seepage patterns, but the long-term repair and replacement costs will be high. The recently built culvert from the Marsh to the sluice already appears to have been damaged and may soon need replacing.

Road traffic accidents. The risk of road traffic accidents is high (one accident and a number of near misses took place while we were there) for a number of reasons. Firstly, although the majority of the truck drivers observed were polite and careful, a significant minority were not, often reaching speeds in excess of 80km/h on that narrow road. Secondly, the only viewpoint over the Marsh is on the roadside on a narrow gravel strip less than 2m wide – anywhere wider has a trailer parked on it – and on occasions there have been up to 30 people watching the birds while traffic thunders past. A few drivers have tried to intimidate us by driving aggressively, swerving away only at the last second, or blasting their horns. Thirdly, access to every section of the unauthorised parking lot is unregulated, and amid the dust clouds, from the parking lot, there is a severe risk that passing traffic will hit a truck. Fourthly, the condition of the road is so poor that tyre grip is badly affected. Lastly, many young drivers in their cars pass the parking lot at high speed.

Disturbance of the Marsh by illegal shooting. We neither saw nor heard any shooting at Zakaki Marsh, either in the RoC or in the SBA, however, it takes little time to find and collect a significant quantity of spent shotgun cartridges. We did see one man with a starting pistol training his dogs to become accustomed to gunshot noises. The SBA has not allowed any concessions on shooting, but vigilance remains the keyword. Currently, there is no easy way for birdwatchers coming to Cyprus to contact either RoC or SBA authorities when they witness or suspect illegal shooting, but we have a suggestion (see Recommendations) as to how this might be improved.

Netting and limesticks. We saw no evidence of netting or the use of limesticks at Zakaki, but there were a few locations just off the track to the north of Akrotiri Salt Lake where narrow 'rides' had been cut into the reeds or the bushes, all of them old. An elderly Cypriot birdwatcher told us he had torn down nets in past years. However, one reason for the lack of netting activity in April and May might have been the hundreds of bee-hives along this track, the bee-keepers taking advantage of the Mimosa and Eucalyptus blossoming; taking bees out of a mist-net is a tricky and painful business.

Pollution. Because this is an unauthorised parking lot, we doubt if any precautions have been taken to contain diesel spillage, a routine EC mandatory requirement. The risk of pollution of the Marsh is therefore high, but there is also a risk of the illegal disposal of contaminated fuel and other petroleum products. In any case, most of the surface area of these parking lots has been made 'waterproof' by deliberate absorption of diesel fuel into the surface. Its removal, as required under EC law, will be costly because a full decontamination process is required.

Fly-tipping. Casual disposal of waste of any kind is a problem in many countries, and although it appears less prevalent in Cyprus than in previous decades, it nevertheless is a persistent and continuing problem. Dumping domestic waste usually involves furniture or fittings and is unsightly, but fly-tipping of contractor's waste often has serious H&S implications. Around Zakaki Marsh, fly-tipping occurs at any location, but mostly along the track that lies north of the Marsh, and mostly close to it. Much waste has been dumped along the maze of tracks to the

south of the Marsh, and sometimes quite openly, but the individual amounts generally seem small. Fly-tipping may cause the loss of saltmarsh plants, especially those related to the samphires, but the major loss results from new tracks being created by 4WD vehicles. Again, there is no obvious way for visitors to Cyprus to contact the authorities when they see fly-tipping of any kind (see Recommendations).

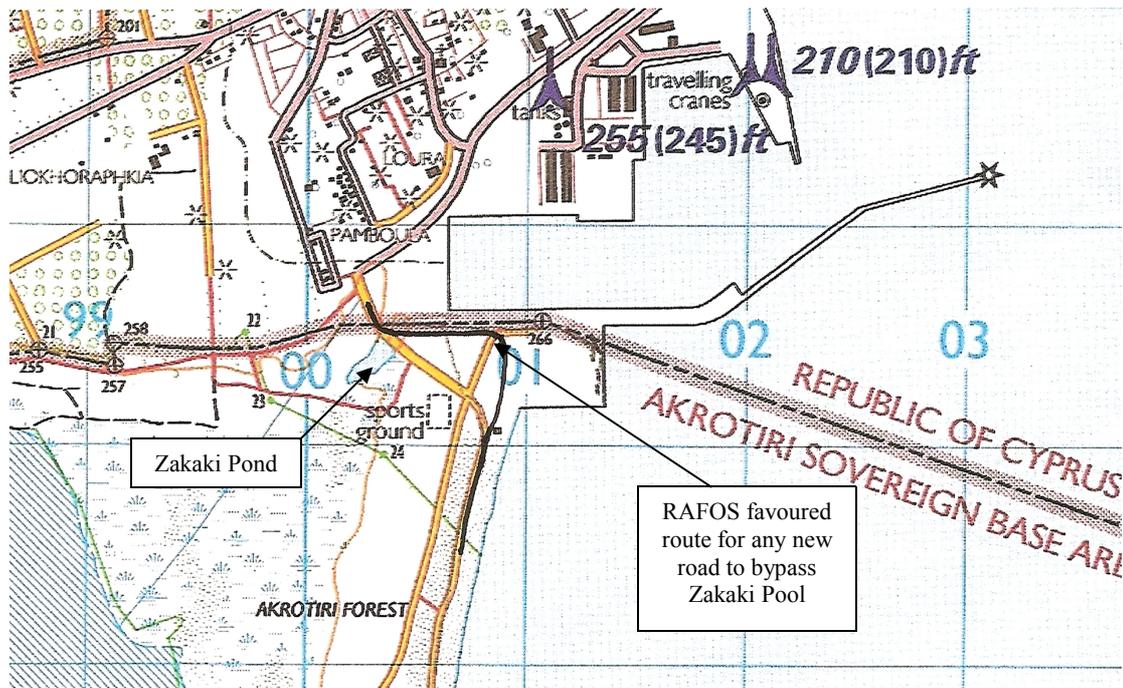
Liability and the lack of a disaster plan. The viewing area for the Marsh is on SBA territory, but it is close to RoC territory. Because the unauthorised parking lots covers both SBA and RoC land, then if a fatal accident occurs and pollution results, the assignment of liability could, under current H&S policy, be assigned to individuals deemed responsible for a lack of a disaster plan. The political ramifications are likely to be considerable. The questions of liability and the lack of a disaster plan are the two aspects to which we see the SBA as most vulnerable.

### The future

Water levels. If the sluice were fitted with an adjustable gate the maximum water level could be raised in winter by about 15cm, which would be suitable for ducks, Coot and Moorhen. There remains only one tiny pond in the salt-marsh area adjacent to the sluice and in the past there were several in the area of the unauthorised parking lot just north of the Marsh itself. It would be straightforward to excavate more small ponds close to the present tiny pond and to connect them to the main Marsh by pipes, so that the water levels remained constant. Another location for such ponds is adjacent to the south side of the Marsh. These, and any shallows created within the Marsh, would be a simple and inexpensive way of creating useful habitat during migration periods for waders and herons, thus extending the usefulness of the Marsh as a stopover site. It should also help attract birdwatchers in other than the migration seasons.

Future development of adjacent area. Undoubtedly there are plans to improve the capacity and handling at Limassol Port. We have heard that there is also a proposal to surface the link road from Zakaki through Lady's Mile all the way to Akrotiri Village along the line of the current track past Bishops' Pool. With regard to Zakaki Marsh and to the conservation value of areas along that track, there are a number of points that need to be brought into the debate at an early stage. Firstly, under EC law, any developments that may affect areas of conservation value require an Independent Environmental Assessment (IEA). Zakaki Marsh is certainly an area of conservation value, as is the entire Akrotiri Salt Lake (ASL) and its ecology; we would suggest that the saline 'ponds' along Lady's Mile form a valuable subset of ASL habitats, as does the salt-marsh plant zone, the flat sands between the end of Lady's Mile and the eastern end of the track past Bishops' Pool, and the ephemeral ponds to the south of that track between Bishops' Pool and Akrotiri. To help minimise the impact of any proposed new surfaced road, we suggest that the route from Zakaki town, instead of following the route of the current road past Zakaki Marsh, should turn sharp left and follow the line of the Limassol Port Area concrete wall. (See Map 2 below) This way, it would join up with the current cul-de-sac at the north end of Lady's Mile, which would allow simpler means of protecting the Marsh and the saline 'ponds' along Lady's Mile. Furthermore, the current road could be closed off after the football ground, thus reducing the chances of accident and pollution on SBA territory. Furthermore, by building a road parallel to the concrete wall, it allows the possibility of an entrance to the Port being constructed at the north end of Lady's Mile.

*In May 09 it was noted that the track from Sylvana's Restaurant to the Monastery of the Cats already had a bitumen surface. Completion of this road from the port, past the beach side restaurants along Lady's Mile and across the southern end of the Salt Lake would certainly improve access from Akrotiri Village and the Base to Limassol and, if done correctly, help to preserve the habitats of the area. (See Map 4)*



Map 2

Access. We think it would be a mistake to improve access for birdwatchers through the surrounding reed-beds. Zakaki is not large enough to allow additional viewing points within its area, but a high-level hide (we recommend obtaining suitable designs from RSPB International or BirdLife International) to the south overlooking the tall reeds would be worthwhile if it allowed one of the suggested shallow areas to be viewed. Viewing from the roadside should remain, and would be safer in the short term if speed bumps are installed and in the long term if the proposed new road alignment follows the Port's concrete wall.

### Recommendations

We have several recommendations.

- We presume that under RoC Law, there are well-established precedents for the recovery of costs for damage from unauthorised actions from those who are responsible for the damage. If restoration of the unauthorised parking area were to be paid for in part by the hauliers, the trade unions involved in the dispute and the Port Authorities, it would help minimise the costs to the local RoC authorities and to the SBAA. (Note: We think it would be straightforward for the Cyprus Police and the SBA Police to utilise and enhance their meticulous records of the hauliers involved.)
- The risk of accident on the road beside Zakaki Marsh would be greatly reduced if bolt-on road-wide speed bumps were introduced; one 80-100m towards the main parking lot at the boundary between the SBA and the RoC, one adjacent to the southern end of the sluice and one 80-100m from there towards Lady's Mile.
- The appropriate telephone numbers in the SBA and in the RoC Police to report shooting, fly-tipping (including illegal disposal of chemicals) and instances of mist-netting and the use of limesticks should be published widely, both in Cyprus and in European holiday brochures and natural history magazines.
- We suggest that the management of Zakaki Marsh could be improved in a few inexpensive and straightforward ways:

1. Manual control of water levels in the Marsh could be achievable by the adaptation of the sluice to accommodate an adjustable board, especially valuable for wintering ducks.
2. The creation of one or two areas of shallows towards the back (western end) of Zakaki Marsh, which would attract waders and herons during the migration.

The creation of several small shallow ponds adjacent to the Marsh or to the sluice similarly would attract waders; it would be important that the water levels related to the level in the main Marsh.

### **PHASOURI REED-BED**

Site Description. This RAMSAR site, the only one in Cyprus, is visited by many birdwatchers every year and is a very important site for resident and migrant birds. It is probably the best known of Cyprus' birdwatching sites.



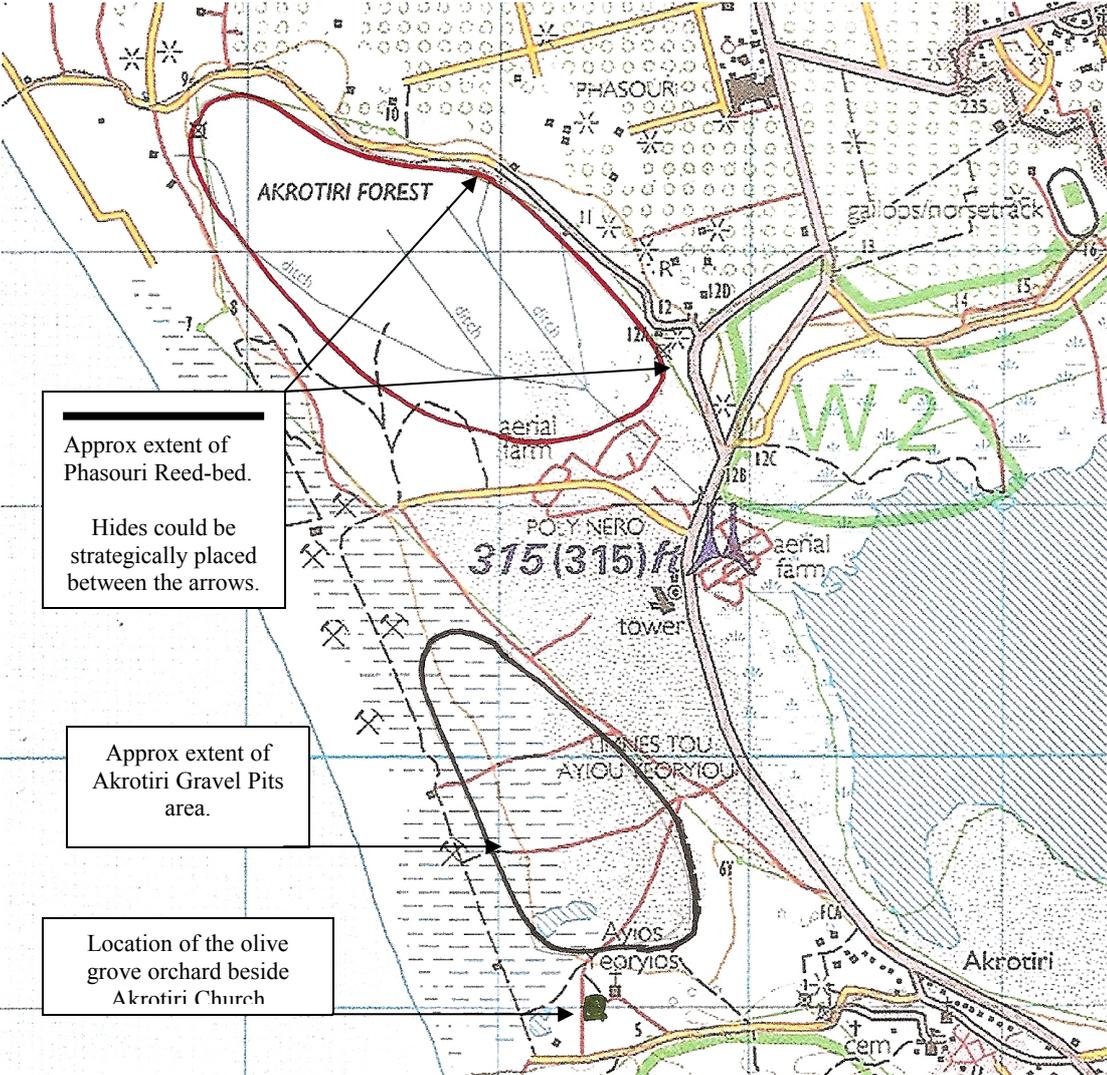
Phasouri Reed-bed at the start of ExCypSurv 08

*Photo: Dick Yates*

Water levels. There are two aspects to water level management in the reed-bed; one is water supply and the other is water control and retention. Water supply is dependent on wet winters and wet springs, neither of which have occurred in 2007 and 2008, and on how much water is releasable from agricultural areas, through which the supply must come. Local perceptions of water priorities tend towards crops first and last, but these views are far from universal. Cattle grazing is essential for the marsh, but the graziers are not necessarily also fruit growers or wheat farmers. However, it would seem that cattle grazing is now less profitable for smallholders, because fewer cattle graze, and in a much smaller area – this may relate to the reed-bed drying out in previous years. Similarly, the reed-cutters are not all from the immediate locality and do not co-ordinate their work. The first priority should be to ascertain who are, or should be, the legitimate graziers and reed-cutters and to persuade them to support each other. The recent two-year drought has reduced the available income for many citrus growers, irrigation water being in short supply, and many have turned to early wheat, which they cut in April and May. Although wheat also demands water, it needs less than the citrus groves, and at a time of year (winter) when local rainfall, though much reduced, can still assist in bringing a crop to maturity; obtaining irrigation water in winter is easier, even in drought years. These changes will all affect what water, if any, is releasable to the reed-bed. Water level control in the reed-bed is effected by management of sluices that are sited at the best locations. At present, there is no coherent policy on sluice positioning, management and operation, but very recently a specialist survey of the reed-bed's microtopography was carried out.

However, any implementation of water level management will need to have the support of the graziers and reed-cutters, or the sluices may well be opened, closed, or even sabotaged by

those who feel that their use is unfair. In spring 2008, there was a reasonable amount of water in the reed-bed, considering the duration of the drought, roughly 50% of maximum at a guess. However, from the first week in April to the end of the third week in May, water levels dropped about 30cm, far more than expected from evaporation alone; there was very little open water left. The drainage channel from the reed-bed at the point it goes under the main Kolossi-Akrotiri road still held the same level of water on 20 May it had on 2 April, which suggests either an absence of any sluice control (there may be sluices, but it is not clear who is responsible for setting the levels) or an unauthorised interference with them to divert water into a few fields. We noted that a small area of groves south of the access road to the reed-bed, quite near the main road, remained suspiciously green.



Map 3. Phasouri Reedbed, Akrotiri Gravel Pits and Ayios Georgios Church



Reed-cutter in action 15 Apr 08

Photo: Ian Grier

### Reed-cutting.

It would be a mistake for reed-bed managers to assume that the areas of reeds they want cutting necessarily would contain the reeds at the successional stage that the reed-cutters prefer. This subject will require careful handling to keep the support of the reed cutters and may require a budget to compensate the reed-

cutters for loss of income; in other words, they may have to be paid to cut reeds that they cannot use or at a time that does not give them the reeds they would prefer. There is a precedent in the UK – owners of smallholdings in the Scottish islands were paid to cut their hay fields from the centre outwards, thus allowing Corncrakes *Crex crex* to escape outwards, and somewhat later in the growing season than would be optimal for the best crop. We think the basket-making in Akrotiri village is now largely a tourist souvenir industry, but it may not be marketed in the most effective way. Also, there may be merit in researching other ways to exploit the reed crop at local level.

Grazing. It is quite clear from our travels elsewhere in Cyprus that cattle farming is mostly a larger-scale process than at smallholder level. Smallholders tether their cattle and shift them daily to level out the impact. The reed-bed will need cattle to graze over a much greater area than is done at present, but that area, we would surmise, would not attract any larger-scale cattle farmers unless they had access to the whole reed-bed. Furthermore, we surmise that the larger scale farmers mostly use phosphate-rich commercial cattle feed for their herds, which are often kept in sheds. We also suspect that such cattle are kept healthy by heavy use of antibiotics. It is therefore likely that their dung is unsuitable for the reed-bed on both antibiotic and phosphate counts. The reed-bed management plan requires a policy that continues the traditional method of tethering cattle.

Local Farming. Until fairly recently, local farming adjacent to the reed-beds to the north and east (to the south and west lie arid, semi-barren areas where gravel extraction has been practised) comprised citrus groves, vineyards, some vegetables and some cereal crops for domestic consumption, all in small fields, some of which were protected by planted narrow fringes of the tall reeds as effective windbreaks. Many of the citrus groves have now been grubbed out or have fallen into decline; the reasons are twofold – a glut of citrus on the world market and the persistent drought. However, a world shortage of wheat (partly due to a switch to biofuel crops) has presented the opportunity of growing wheat through the Cyprus winter. The ripened wheat at present fetches premium prices on the world market. So far, the fields have remained small, fortunately, and much of the island's topography would work against enlargement. The wheat fields probably take the same order of magnitude of irrigated water as do citrus fields, but they do so much earlier in winter when the limited rain actually falls, and when evaporation rates are low. This could explain the availability of water to the reed-beds in early spring 2008.

Risks and threats. Although the lack of water annually is a threat to the reed-bed, this subject is a long-term management issue, dealt with in preceding paragraphs. However, there are specific threats to the reed-bed and its inhabitants.

Shooting. Currently, all shooting on the SBA is illegal. A recent relaxation by the RoC government to allow shooting of Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* has not been emulated by the SBA. The risk of shooters cynically killing European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* 'by mistake' is too high. All across the extensive gravel pits area between the reed-bed and Akrotiri village, expended shotgun cartridges are easy to find, even in the isolated churchyard. Not all are recently fired, but fresh cartridges were found even on the grazing land. The SBA Police seem to have reduced the incidence of illegal shooting, but it would be of great help if any visitor to Cyprus had the knowledge before arriving of telephone numbers to contact if illegal shooting (or fly-tipping – see below) is suspected.

Fly-tipping. All across the extensive gravel pits area lies evidence of fly-tipping, but we acknowledge that it was much worse in previous decades. Nevertheless, directly west of the reed-bed, off the track that passes to their rear, there is a dump that seems to be regularly visited by fly-tippers. Indeed, we photographed a truck and an accompanying car (and their registration plates) and passed the digital evidence to the SBA Police. The illegal disposal of dangerous chemicals (pesticide residues, dioxins, worn tyres) or of materials that degenerate into hazardous waste (asbestos products, petroleum products) is a prevalent problem and one that represents a serious risk of contamination of the reed-bed.

Netting and limesticks. We saw no evidence of netting or the use of limesticks at Phasouri; just off the track south of the car park at the eastern end of the reed-bed, some narrow 'rides' had been cut into the reeds or the bushes, none appearing recent.

Access. The present access to the north side of the reedbed should serve as the model for access in the reed-bed management plan. As areas of reed encroachment into open water are cleared, the access pattern remains unchanged. However, consideration should be given for restricting access by birdwatchers and the general public to a certain distance from the high-water shoreline by means of a fence; only those with business inside that area should be allowed entry – e.g. graziers, reed-cutters, researchers and reed-management teams. We see no need for others to have access into the reed-bed, but we see no case for restrictions to the dry land behind the reed-bed. We did not visit the south-eastern part of the reedbed, and so issues in that area will need to be identified.

There should be a bird hide at this superb site. At present, the only area of open water likely to form, if sufficient water is available, is opposite the main access to the extant grazing land. Reed encroachment along this north side of the reed-bed has covered 10-20m of what once was mostly shallow open water. Indeed, there once was a small hide reachable by a narrow boardwalk at the easternmost end; its main advantage was that it faced west and so overlooked an area where the viewing light remained good until late afternoon. Therefore, the only location suitable at present for a bird hide is at the area of open water, and although this would face south, it needs to be an elevated hide, perhaps 2m above the ground. The hide should be constructed with side fencing that would prevent birdwatchers from going nearer, to help minimise and regulate disturbance, but should have gates allowing the graziers access. Signage would be needed to explain the 'barrier', which may need to extend some considerable distance.

Recommendations. We recommend the following:

- A water-allocation agreement monitored openly by an independent body is essential to the success of any reed-bed management plan; this will require the involvement of farmers, graziers and reed-cutters.
- The maintenance of appropriate water-levels in the reedbed is crucial; the management of water-levels must therefore be responsive and monitored closely, especially in times of water shortage. The recent survey of the reedbed microtopography doubtless will highlight the measures needed.
- The graziers' and reed-cutters' interests should be of prime importance in the reed-bed management plan, and these should be established to all parties' satisfaction before any finalisation of the plan.
- There is a need for an elevated bird hide. This should be built to meet well-established requirements available from RSPB International and BirdLife International.

- An access plan is required; its implementation should safeguard the graziers and reed-cutters, but minimise access by the general public.
- That the appropriate telephone numbers in the SBAs and in the Republic of Cyprus to report shooting, fly-tipping (including illegal disposal of chemicals) and instances of mist-netting and the use of limesticks be published widely, both in Cyprus and in European holiday brochures and natural history magazines.

*Situation in May 2009.* There was still very little water in the reed-bed even after the good rains of early 2009. However, the reeds had grown unchecked for the last 12 months and, hence there was virtually no open water visible. On the 2 occasions RY visited bird counts were very low, partially through lack of birds (little water) and partially because of greatly reduced visibility. This important site is crying out for effective environmental management.

### **AYIOS GEORGIOS CHURCH, AKROTIRI VILLAGE AND THE GRAVEL PITS**

Site description. The site comprises a small walled churchyard round the tiny old church, a small fenced former olive grove (known as ‘the orchard’) opposite the church entrance, low scrub to the east and north and scattered to dense bushes to the west. It lies some 600m to the northeast of Akrotiri village at the end of a surfaced road where the flat gravelled plain begins (colloquially known as ‘Akrotiri Gravel Pits’)(See Map 3). The plain in spring normally acts as a stopover for wheatears, but the sustained aridity since 2006 made the majority of the plain inimical even to them; a few were encountered around the church. The ringers had reasonable success at the site throughout the 6-week period; overall, numbers were low, but the lack of water on the plain (normally dozens of ephemeral pools remain in May after the winter rains) meant that the site was but a minor oasis where insects could be found. The only water was in a small trough for the goat herds, but we never saw birds using it. The goats may graze the ‘orchard’ from time to time, but the gaps in the fencing need mending.

#### Risks and threats

Fly-tipping. It would appear from the constituents of the waste that most of it in the area of the church is deposited by the villagers. Because of the care that many people visiting the church take in looking after it, and because the village itself is remarkably free of fly-tipped material, we think that a concerted campaign based on the villager’s pride could reduce the waste disposal problem at least in the vicinity of the church.

Vehicular access. Although the surfaced road ends at the church, the route is one of the principal accesses to the plain from the village. Cyprus now has many 4WD vehicles; the plain is a magnet for owners who want to play at ‘cross-country’ driving – indeed, an area towards the sea is clearly used as a circuit. The first impression is that the church site could be damaged by the numbers of vehicles using the plain, but it appears that they bypass it to reach more challenging areas.

#### Recommendation

- The villagers, through their Council leader, should be encouraged to extend their control of waste dumping to include the church site and the route to it.
- A means be found whereby the ‘orchard’ fencing is restored to the satisfaction of all involved parties.

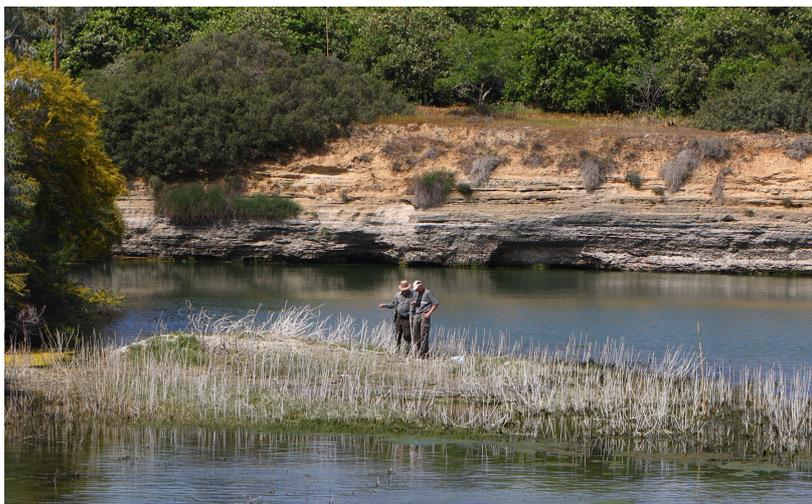
*Situation in May 2009.* The fence round the orchard had been mended and the whole area was now inaccessible. However, it is possible to see most of the bird activity in the orchard from outside the new fence. I was informed by a local birder (unverified) that the owner had become fed up with the attention the orchard was getting and was actively discouraging birdwatchers.

## **BISHOPS' POOL**

Site description. This site is on private land, which the signage indicates is owned by the Bishops of Limassol and Larnaca, adjacent to the Akrotiri airfield, and within the SBA. The whole area lies between the inner and outer security fences of the military airfield. It centres on a large wastewater pool cut into the rock, and when full, may be over 5m deep. There are two information boards (in Greek) that show various adjacent nature trails, but access officially is limited to key-holders, which rather restricts access by people who would wish to use it. The pool itself lies in the middle of an extensive farmed area of citrus groves and vegetable and cereal fields, but many fields have rows of windbreak trees. Migrant birds are attracted to this area by the presence of water and the availability of roosts in bushes and trees. The eastern section is mature scrubland and maquis; in the easternmost part, there is an area of old maquis, but this may be under threat from the only resident goat farm. The numbers of waders visiting the pool itself depends on the water levels; at high levels, there are only a few very small areas of shallow water, but at lower levels, a bank of silt deposited by the only un-piped source provides adequate shallows for several hundred birds. The pool takes treated waste water from the adjacent sewage farm, which as it settles creates conditions suitable for dense mats of algae to form, allowing even the largest waders to 'walk on water'.

There are two bird hides, one looking south and the other west; and although these have been built by craftsmen, their design was achieved without any input from birdwatchers. Consequently, the windows are fixed and do not open inwards, and so cannot be cleaned. Furthermore, the windows lie below external canopies, thus preventing any view of the sky, where so many birds appear. Some 200m east of the pool, there is a large, newly-built environmental centre, which appeared unoccupied during our visit. All posters and displays are in Greek. The whole site has vast potential as a bird area, but access is a concern for the airfield (military security), the farmers (the keyholder system minimises the risk of theft) and the landowners (the bishoprics and the newly-built Monastery of the Cats). However, the state of the fencing between the monastery and the rest of the site allows pedestrian access to the slightly determined.

Bishops' Pool is a good site for ringing birds because of the limited access by the public and because nets can be rigged in sheltered locations even when it is moderately windy.



Bishops' Pool and the silt bank

*Photo: Ian Grier*

Water supply. We do not know the details of how water input and output are controlled or allocated. We assume that the water economy measures practised by the personnel on the airbase have reduced the input to the sewage works, but the output, as organised by the farm workers for irrigation, seemed independent of input to such an extent that the water level fell by some 1.5m between early April and the third week in May, the initial level being about 2.5m below the overspill.



Algae mat in the opposite corner from the silt bank *Photo: Ian Grier*  
(The hides are hidden by the trees to the right and left of the mat of algae)

Farming. The farm appears to be at least partly a cooperative, at least in terms of water distribution and spraying the crops. All preparation takes place in or near run-down buildings with no obvious designated handling or disposal areas. The key-holder system probably prevents ad hoc liming or netting of birds (to sell for *ambelopoulia*), but of course would allow a keyholder to do so with little fear of discovery. We found several illegal mist-nets in the first few visits. The farmers appear to have narrow profit margins and work long hours.

#### Risks and Threats.

Storage and Disposal of Agrichemicals. Although the preparation and mixing areas are probably in the farm building complex, which is below the level of the water in the pool, spillages could occur when the prepared chemicals are transported past the pool. The tracks around the pool are less than 5m from the pit edge. Assuming that chemicals are always correctly prepared and handled, there is still a strong likelihood that through normal application, they will leach into the pool. Despite the spraying, insects abound, and so small passerines may ingest chemicals from prey caught locally. We have no knowledge of the farm's policy on obtaining appropriate and currently-approved agrichemicals, nor of their policy on disposal of old, out-of-date or surplus chemicals. However, there are several piles of old chemicals, probably originally packed in powder form in bags, lying about the place. These time-expired chemicals had solidified in their rotting cardboard sacks to the consistency of concrete.

Shooting. Although any illegal shooting is probably limited to those that the farm workers know, it could easily be masked by the noises from the multiple bird scarers. Consequently, the birds may become accustomed to gunshot noises and be more easily shot when guns replace the scarers.

Netting. The use of limesticks is more prevalent in the east of the island; none were found at any location in the Akrotiri peninsula, but nets were found not only at Bishops' Pool, but also on the road to Pissouri, where they were spotted from the main road. There is no publicised method of reporting illegal nets to the authorities; because we were working on the WSBA, we had found out for ourselves the telephone number to ring. Doubtless there is a similar number in the RoC. Vigilance is needed to keep attempts to use nets on the SBA to a minimum.

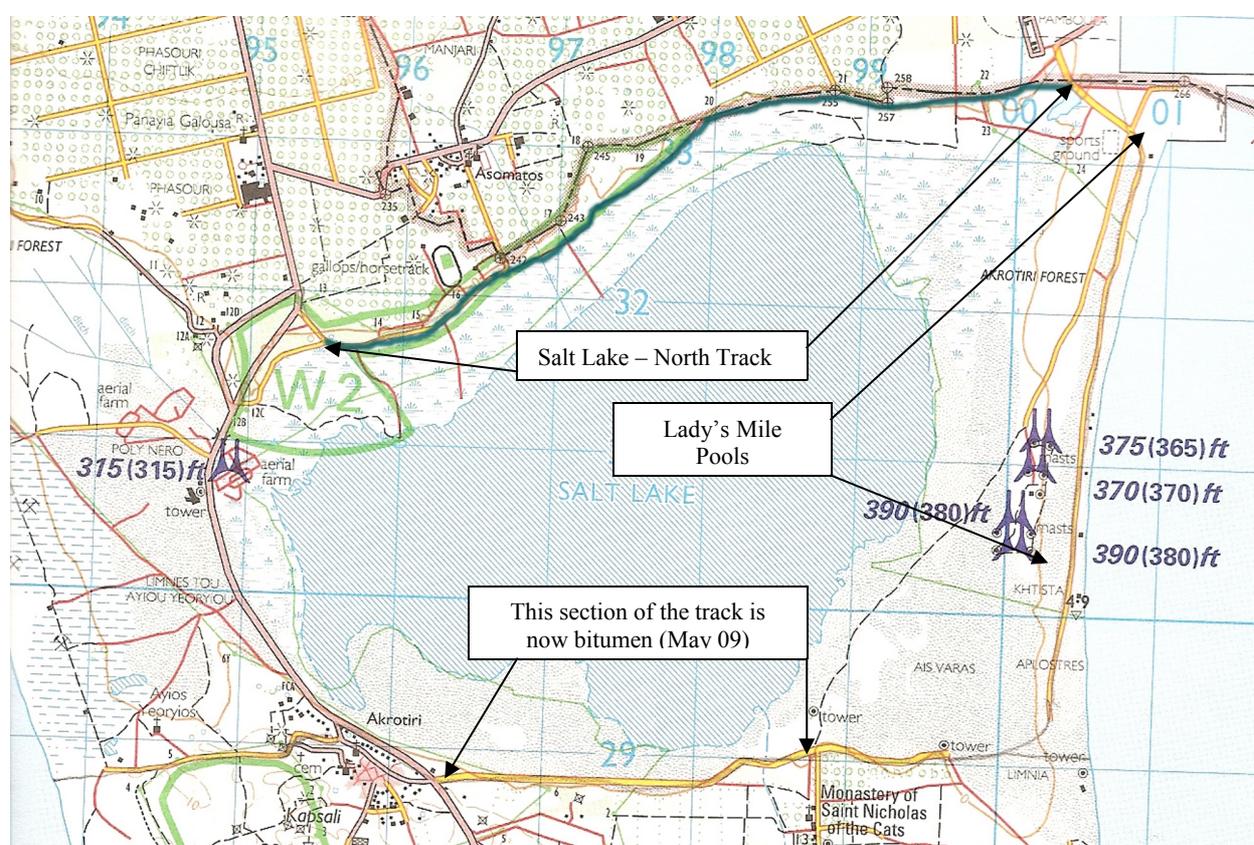
Recommendations. It is difficult to make specific recommendations about a site that is private land. Clearly, any recommendations we may make cannot be implemented without the agreement of all parties, but our general recommendations are:

- The useful display boards would be appreciated by visitors to Cyprus if the text was also available in English.
- That a scheme be devised whereby visitors can gain entry.

- That the preparation, handling and disposal of agrichemicals be logged systematically and supervised.
- That the appropriate telephone numbers in the SBAs and in the RoC to report shooting, fly-tipping (including illegal disposal of chemicals) and instances of mist-netting and the use of limesticks be published widely, both in Cyprus and in European holiday brochures and natural history magazines.

## LADY'S MILE

Site description. Lady's Mile (also known by RAFOS as 'Zakaki Pools' since the 1970s) is known to the general public as a track paralleling the sea along the eastern edge of the Akrotiri peninsula; between the track and the sea are numerous accesses to the beach and a string of cafés and restaurants. Parallel to this track, but some 150m further inland, is a raised, pebbly area of scrub; this area slopes gradually towards the Akrotiri Salt Lake, but between it and the track lie several very shallow saline basins over a distance of some 2km from the Port of Limassol boundary.



Map 4. Lady's Mile and the Track along the Northern Boundary of the Salt Lake

These basins, roughly rectangular in shape, have a flat or slightly rippled surface, and towards their edges an irregular border of salt-marsh plants, mostly samphires, has formed. In wet years, these basins are deep enough for ducks and gulls in the middle, but they can attract thousands of waders during the migration periods. In years of lower rainfall, the basins still attract large numbers of birds, but then the drier open spaces serve as relatively safe roosts. In very dry periods, such as in 2007 and 2008, the basins still serve as a vital haven for small waders and for the locally breeding Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* population; the maximum count in May 08 was 60, including several fully fledged young, but it is certain that many more remained hidden in the saltbush. The basins produce brine in concentrations ideal for brine-loving organisms to thrive, thus producing a rich food source for birds. The hydrology of the basins is complex: several days of hot sun and strong winds appear to dry out much of the water, but then the levels rise again. Although some assume that high tides affect the basins, the tidal rise and fall in this part of the Mediterranean is vary small. Seepage from

slightly higher elevations is probably responsible for the appearance of water at unexpected times, but the flow becomes ever more saline en route; Zakaki Marsh is probably the main source. It would be worth exploring if there is a relationship between the observed level at Zakaki marsh and the slight changes in water levels in the basins in dry periods; there is likely to be several days' delay in this relationship, but probably in lockstep pattern.

### Risks and threats

Vehicular access. There are many tracks on the pebbly rise to the west of the basins, one leading to the Eastern Aerial Farm (EAF). Consequently there are linking tracks to the rise from Lady's Mile to the south, there is one near the middle, and the link road from Zakaki town to Lady's Mile becomes a track across the basins 300m from the north end. There are also many unauthorised tracks across the basins, some with evidence of having to be towed out after a vehicle had become bogged down. The authorities have tried to limit unauthorised access across the basins by creating a small ditch and ridge along the basins on the main track through Lady's Mile, but this is no deterrent to 4WD cowboys, who also use the pebbly ridge and its hinterland to play at cross-country driving. Furthermore, the northern straight section of the track from the EAF is used occasionally by rally cars for practice. Moreover, there is increasing encroachment from bulldozed earth to form parking places, particularly opposite one restaurant. We seriously doubt if any application was made for permission to do so.

Fly-tipping. Between the basins and the Salt Lake proper, there is much evidence of continuing fly-tipping. Contamination risks from domestic and commercial unauthorised disposal of fluids and harmful material are high. The intensity of this activity has created a huge network of tracks, most of them unnecessary. This is a fragile and scarce environment in the eastern Mediterranean, an important breeding site for Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*, a summer breeder in Cyprus.

Shooting, netting and limesticks. We saw and heard no shooting, but in the saltbush it is easy to find expended shotgun cartridges. The vegetation being in general so low, the site is unsuitable for covert netting or use of limesticks.

Future development. If the road from Zakaki town via Lady's Mile across to Akrotiri should be built, then there is the opportunity to include the building of a wall or obstacle high enough to prevent 4WD vehicles crossing the basins at unauthorised points. The existing crossings could be maintained.

Model aircraft flying. This activity takes place about 0.8km south of the basins. We watched it on several occasions, but we cannot see this poses any threat or represents a disturbance to the birds using the basins.

### Recommendations

In some ways, the seemingly barren basins along Lady's Mile comprise the most interesting and scarce habitat on the Akrotiri peninsula, and perhaps in Cyprus. Consequently, it deserves more active protection and continuous monitoring than any other. Our recommendations are:

- Unauthorised crossing of the basins should be stopped; the construction of protective ditches should continue. These should take hardened form if the road through Lady's Mile is surfaced.
- All fly-tipped material should be removed – the amounts are the worst in the Akrotiri peninsula.
- SBA and RoC authorities should aim at deterring further 'off-road' driving across the saltbush and any illegal shooting.
- Provided the model aircraft flying continues within its present radius, it poses no risk and should continue.

## **AKROTIRI SALT LAKE - TRACK ALONG NORTHERN EDGE**

Site description. This site is overlooked by many birders and ornithologists, perhaps because at first sight it does not seem promising, much of it bordering or transiting the northernmost reedbed. It stretches for some 5km from its western end, which lies on the opposite side of the road from, but near the turn-off to, the access road to Phasouri Reed-bed, to Zakaki in the east. However, it is convenient to include at the eastern end the Eucalyptus and Pine woodland, home to Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* and European Serin *Serinus serinus*; the northern limit of the woodland is the Cyprus Forestry Nursery (See Map 4). Patches of woodland occur to the north side of the track; these contain also Tamarisk and Mimosas (*Acacia*). All this woodland has been planted since the early 1950s (WRP Bourne pers comm), mostly with introduced tree species. Nevertheless, many woodland edges have a dense understorey that would provide cover for migrant passerines; they certainly contain a healthy breeding population of Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*. That the woodlands have been occupied by insectivorous bird species suggests that the local insect community has adapted to the introductions. Where the track is bordered by reed-bed, many migrant species may appear wherever there is water – it appears that one or two springs exist near the track about two-thirds of the distance from the western end. Here, we recorded Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Corncrake *Crex crex* and Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. The ringing party ringed many Eurasian Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* and several Great Reed Warblers *A. arundinaceus*. The western end also has a strip of woodland, but the trees, mostly in plantations, are younger than at the eastern end. The woodland along the track is particularly important in autumn, for it serves as a roost for migrant raptors. The track is prone to impassibility after sustained rainfall or a rise in the level of the Salt Lake, because although it is iron-hard in the dry season, it turns to deep mud in the wet.

### Risks and threats

Fly-tipping. Much domestic waste has been dumped at the eastern end, adjacent to the unauthorised container-trailer park. However, the entire track has discarded material along its length. Despite SBA police efforts, the problem continues.

Vehicular access. Relatively few vehicles drove from one end to the other in our time there. This may not be the case at holiday weekends. There are many tracks that reach the main track from the north, from the agricultural area; some cross towards the salt-marsh and the lake bed. We suspect these are used by unauthorised shooters. The bee-keepers place the hives along the track to take advantage of the earlier-flowering plants, especially the Mimosas. Usually in late April or early May, they move the hives inland above the 200m contour where flowering comes up to 3 weeks later, then finally above 600m. The main threat from vehicular access lies in the cutting of new routes, but if the location becomes well-known, volume may become a problem.

Shooting, netting and limesticks. Spent but recent shotgun cartridges were fairly easily found, either along the track or towards the lake. We suspect the targets were twofold: European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*, targeted by hard-pressed bee-keepers, and European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, a 'traditional' shooter's target in spring. Both species are migrants, but a few may breed locally. Some old 'rides' appeared to have been cut for nets, but were overgrown. No evidence was found of the use of limesticks.

### Recommendations

- Regular 'patch' work along this track and through the wooded areas is needed to establish bird species' usage throughout the year.
- The site should be better publicised amongst visiting birders, but access will be difficult during wet periods.

## AKROTIRI PENINSULA AND OTHER SEA CLIFFS IN THE WSBA

Site description. The Akrotiri Peninsula cliffs form the southernmost limit of not only the peninsula, but also of Cyprus itself. Running on an essentially east-west axis, they lie entirely within the air base secure area, and so are not accessible to casual visitors.



Akrotiri Sea Cliffs  
*Photo: Dick Knight*

The cliffs, from 20 to 90 metres high, comprise mainly soft limestone-related rock in a mixture of creamy-yellow and pink, and so have worn into cavity-riddled faces in many places. The hardest sections comprise near-vertical cliffs and the softest almost like scree, but bound together by the concretion of the smallest particles brought together by run-off. There is a plethora of archaeological sites on the peninsula, especially along the cliff-tops and under

overhangs, where Palaeolithic cultures had excavated burial chambers in the solid rock. A track negotiable by 4WD vehicles runs along the cliff-tops, mostly 50m from the edge. Such cliffs are ideal habitat for Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*; the Akrotiri cliffs are a major stronghold of this species, which exhibits two unusual characteristics for a raptor – it hunts co-operatively and it breeds in late summer and early autumn to feed its young on small migrant passerines on their outward migration from their breeding grounds to the north. The first Eleonora's Falcons arrive in Cyprus from their Madagascar wintering grounds in mid-April, but the main body does not arrive until mid-May. A count on 13 May revealed 40 birds; considerable effort was made to avoid double-counting of this most mobile and aerobatic of birds, but it is very probable that at least 60 were present, for it is impossible to see all the cavities where birds might be perching – these perches ranged from near sea level to the cliff tops. Sometimes birds would remain perched for hours, but others would wander inland considerable distance from the cliffs. Apart from display flights by the more dominant birds, it was too early for any sign of courting behaviour. The Akrotiri cliffs, like other sea-cliffs, are also home to a few pairs of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (at medium and high level), European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* (low level) and Rock Dove/Feral pigeon *Columba livia*/*C. livia* forma *domestica* (all levels) and isolated pairs of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*.

### Similar cliffs within the WSBA

The cliffs at, from east to west, Curium, Quarry Beach and Kensington, are higher and of harder composition than those at Akrotiri, but are also home to Eleonora's Falcon, respective count maxima being 10, 14 and 22, representing 15, 21 and 29 probably present. Adjoining the cliff at Curium is a popular swimming beach with several cafés, but the cliff itself forms a promontory into the sea. Quarry Beach, as its name implies, has long been used for the extraction of stone for building, but its access track requires 4WD, the beach being narrow and little suited for swimming, although a few boats use the tiny harbour. At both ends of the beach, the cliffs form promontories. Kensington Cliffs have no shoreline or beach, dropping sheer into the sea. The above-mentioned species are also present at all these cliffs, although European Shag probably does not breed except occasionally. Eurasian Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* still visit Kensington cliffs from time to time.

## Risks and threats

Disturbance. Up to a thousand people a day in hundreds of vehicles may flock to Curium Beach during the holiday season, but there is no access to the cliffs where Eleonora's Falcon breeds. The species does not appear to be directly affected by the presence of people, soaring and diving close to them; possibly the lack of disturbance is due to Curium Beach being accessed by only one road. Disturbance of Eleonora's Falcon at Quarry Beach is unlikely; even if water sports took place near Kensington Cliffs, they would be unaffected there, too, but that would not be the case for any visiting Griffons. Access to the cliff faces at Akrotiri is forbidden except at authorised archaeological sites. The few vehicles that use the track pose no threat, nor do any aircraft except for the occasional spring practice by the Red Arrows, but even then, the count totals rose steadily, suggesting that any disturbance was temporary. The Red Arrows return to UK long before Eleonora's Falcon begins to breed.

Other threats. There is no pollution risk to the cliffs at any of these sites, and at present no risk of development. There is a potential risk from shooting at Curium and Quarry Beach, but at the former it could not be covert along the shore and at the latter any shots would be heard in the military housing on the cliff tops.

## Recommendation

The sole recommendation is that formal protection status for these four sea-cliff sites, at present in the WSBA, be established so that in the event of the WSBA being returned to the Republic of Cyprus, the protection of these sites would be enshrined in EC law.

## **WESTERN AERIAL FARM COMPLEX**

Site description. The Western Aerial Farm (WAF) complex comprises two parts on opposite sides of the main Akrotiri-Kolossi road, approximately 1.5 - 2km north of Akrotiri village. The section to the east of the road is completely enclosed by a fence. The site to the west of the road has one section (northern section) completely enclosed by a fence; in the other section (southern section), all aerials are enclosed individually by fences. The eastern section has extensive grass and low shrub growth within the fence. This area is the territory of a dominant male Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*. At least two females live in this area. Two other male Black Francolins engage in calling duels with the dominant male. Although they have been heard within opposite ends of the western section, they do not appear to use the western section as the core of their territories.

The western section's southern part lies wholly in the gravel plain known as 'Akrotiri Gravel Pits', but the northern section at its northern end includes sizeable grassy areas, kept relatively green by seepage from the drainage channel from the Phasouri Reed-bed about 1km to the northwest. This channel cuts through the northern section into a small reed-bed between the section and the main road. In dry periods, such as was experienced in 2006-2008, this is the only nearby source of water. Overall, birds were generally few, those that did appear often would disappear to roost in the channel. Any medium or large birds seen (e.g. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*) tended to avoid the aerials. Apart from close to the drainage channel and inside the eastern section, seed availability was very low and insect density almost negligible. The most skilled exploiters of the available seeds and insects were the resident House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* colony. On the gravel plain, although insect density was low in the open, it appeared higher under the saltbush or low shrubs, thus comprising an adequate food source for lizards, which the resident Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* pair had no difficulty in locating. Following wet winters, in spring birds are likely to be far more numerous and intent upon exploiting the food sources within the WAF complex. Birds also tend to be more numerous in autumn than in spring, and so may then occur within the complex more often.

RAFOS was asked to conduct a survey of all birds, paying particular attention to raptors, flying

through or in the vicinity of the aerial complex. Particular attention was focussed on the 2 large aerial arrays in the fenced compound to the east of the road. No birds observed during the 100+ man-hours of observations had any difficulty in avoiding the aerials. At night, the largest arrays are floodlit; we saw no evidence of the local Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* scavenging corpses in the early morning. They hunted lizards and small mammals (judging by the few observations of them carrying prey) and may take chicks of ground-nesting birds. RAFOS has been asked to conduct a further survey of these facilities during the autumn migration in 2010.

### Risks and threats

Collision with aerials. After a wet winter or in autumn, when birds are more numerous, the collision risk may be higher, but that requires evidence over a number of seasons before any assessment of significance of risk may be made.

### **BIRDS**

But what about the birds we studied? Our first conclusion, and this was borne out by BirdLife Cyprus reports and in meetings with many other birders, was that although the variety of species was normal, overall bird numbers were well down on previous years. The reasons can only be conjectured, but the drought probably contributed significantly. Perhaps some birds just kept going north and gave Cyprus a miss this year. Possibly the strong westerly winds blew a large number of migrants towards the eastern Mediterranean coast, which would provide a more secure route; perhaps there were fewer birds coming out of Africa for some reason – but we shan't know until more reports come in from around the region.

Now to our main target species: first, Ferruginous Duck - MB's assessment that any breeding attempt at Phasouri probably failed due to dropping water levels was borne out by BirdLife Cyprus in their Autumn 2008 magazine. There were no sightings of the species at Phasouri after we left and indeed our only sighting after 25 Apr was of 2 males on 13 May. However, at Zakaki, MB assessed that 2-3 females could have been on nests; and, as incubation mostly occurs in May, the young would not have fledged until June. This was borne out by Thomas Hadjikyriakou, Manager of the Akrotiri Environmental Centre, who reported a family group at the marsh on 23 July. The water finally dried out at Zakaki in mid July and the birds disappeared and were not relocated that summer.

Next, Black-winged Stilt: this species was in evidence at Phasouri almost daily with the maximum presence, 24, recorded on 22 April; and although courtship and attempted mating were observed, there was no evidence of breeding. It may have been disturbance by reed cutters that put the birds off. They were also recorded regularly at Zakaki and Bishops' Pool in smaller numbers, but again there was no evidence of breeding.

Finally, Eleonora's Falcon: the first sighting was of 2 birds at Cape Gata on 13 Apr. We had visited the area on 11 Apr and there were no sightings so we are confident that the first arrival was late on 11 Apr on 12 Apr. Numbers built up slowly and a maximum count of 69 was gained on 13 May, split between the Akrotiri Cliffs and the Curium, Quarry Beach and Kensington Cliffs. These birds do not start breeding until July so that they can take advantage of the autumn migration passage. At the time of writing I am unaware of any figures to denote breeding success for 2008.

### **CONCLUSION**

ExCypSurv08 was a successful expedition with over 2,500 birds ringed and over 4,000 recorded. All the sites surveyed are, to a greater or lesser extent, valuable wildlife habitats and we hope that the constructive recommendations made in this paper will assist in guiding the management and development of the sites as conservation areas. Finally, we cannot stress enough the need to involve the local people in the development and implementation of any management plans as, in the final analysis, they will be the custodians of these habitats.

## [Update on Cyprus Wetlands Oct 2013](#)

RY visited Phasouri Reed-bed, Zakaki Marsh, Lady's Mile pools and The Bishops' Pool in October 2013.

Phasouri Reed-bed. The reeds had continued to grow unchecked and very little open water was visible. In some places the reeds had grown right up to the road reducing the grassy areas used by migrating Wagtails, Pipits and waders. In addition, the number of farmers grazing cows on the adjoining grass had diminished and this had added to the unhindered growth of the reeds. I visited the Akrotiri Environmental Centre, still in its old building, and spoke to Thomas, the Environmental Officer. He advised me that farmers were being encouraged to graze cattle there but the uptake was low. Finally, reed cutting had decreased over the last few years as the making of baskets etc was no longer a very profitable local industry. Environmental management of this RAMSAR site continues to be an urgent requirement.

Lady's Mile Pools. The expansion of the car parking areas outside the 4 restaurants along Lady's Mile continues unhindered. These parking areas are now making significant inroads into the pools and there is a danger that the pools will be separated by these parking areas. There was an unconfirmed rumour that the restaurant owners wanted to have the whole Lady's Mile road pools and the parking areas were located on the seaward side of the road.

Zakaki Marsh. As I reported at the 2013 AGM the Limassol Authorities, in conjunction with the SBAA, are undertaking a large storm water drainage project for the east end of the city of Limassol. This has entailed laying a huge pipeline running from Zakaki village, past the port and between the marsh and what we call the sluice. Work was well underway when I visited in Oct and the project is not due to be completed until later this year. I was assured that there was an agreed plan to return the marsh to a wetland site, much enhanced and with suitably located bird hides. However, I was not able to see a copy of this plan or the agreement. We live in hope!

Bishops' Pool. I managed to gain access to Bishops' Pool but with difficulty. The gate up to the pool is now permanently locked and the users of the land are very reluctant to allow access. Apparently, there had been significant acts of theft from the farm buildings and the users gained permission from the owners to keep the gates shut. It is possible to gain access through the Monastery of the Cats, but only when their gate is open. I was regarded by the farmers with suspicion when I went in. This has to be a matter of concern as the farmland in the area is a known site for illegal bird trapping and hunting. The Pool itself is unchanged, it had plenty of water and a good quantity and variety of birds, so that is a plus.