

Protected Areas and Natural Habitats

"Natura 2000" Network

Inclusion of the Akamas peninsula in the Network. The Akamas peninsula is of great ecological interest and the need for its inclusion in the 'Natura 2000' network was noted both from the European Union, in connection with the weaknesses of the Cyprus catalogue of proposed Special Protection Zones (SPZ), as well as the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, according to which all member states are obliged to protect the population of wild flora and fauna and to give special attention to vulnerable species and species under the threat of extinction. The Council of Ministers approved on 21.12.2005, the provisions of the Management Scheme for the Akamas peninsula, the objective of which is the protection and management of the area. Also, the Council approved on 4.10.2007, the establishment of the Management Committee, which will be responsible for the supervision of the implementation of the Management Scheme and the related projects. However, these actions were not implemented as the determination of the final borders of the protected area was opposed by the affected Local Communities.

The Scientific Committee, which was set up in accordance with the Law for the Protection and Management of Nature and Wild Life, concluded the final borders of the protected area and on 17.7.2009, the Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment declared it as a SCI, and a proposal for its inclusion in the 'Natura 2000' Network will be forwarded to the Commission.

Development of golf courses. During the preliminary examination of the applications for the issue of a licence for the development of golf courses by the Department of Water Development, it was ascertained that, at least in three cases, part of the land proposed for development is part of the “Natura 2000” Network, a fact specifically prohibited by the relevant decision of the Council of Ministers. The Environment Service requested the exclusion of these areas from the development of the golf courses and we have been informed that most of the applicants complied with this requirement.

Protection of the Cyprus water snake. As it was stated in our previous Report, following a charge filed against the Republic of Cyprus, the Commission of the European Communities issued, on 21.3.2007, a letter of formal notice for the non-compliance with Directive 92/43, on the conservation of the natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, concerning the conservation and protection of the endemic Cyprus water snake (*Natrix natrix cyprica*). According to the above letter, the Cyprus Authorities had not included the area of the Paralimni lake in the national list of the proposed sites of community interest (SCI) and tolerate activities which are harmful for the species and destroy its habitat in this area, as well as in the Xyliatos dam.

In the reply given by the Republic of Cyprus, it is stated, inter alia, that all the necessary arrangements are planned to be completed by the end of 2007, so that the Paralimni lake area is proposed for inclusion in the "Natura 2000". Subsequently, the European Commission, having taken into consideration the above reply of Cyprus, issued a reasoned opinion on 5.6.2008, according to article 296 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, due to the

violation of Directive 92/43, for the reasons stated above and requested the Republic of Cyprus to take the required measures for compliance, within two months. The Republic requested an extension until 9.11.2008 in order to complete the necessary actions needed for compliance with the Commission's observations and noted the measures taken to improve the conditions that prevailed in the habitats of the species.

On 16.1.2009, the Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, declared the largest part of the Paralimni lake as a SCI and informed us that a proposal, for the inclusion of the above area to the 'Natura 2000' Network was to be forwarded to the Commission.

We noted that, regarding the part of the lake that has not been included in the area that was declared as SCI, an application was filed for the segregation of 304 building plots of land in the area. The Environment Service assured us that the area declared as SCI would be sufficient for the protection of the area as a habitat of *natrix natrix* *Cypriaca* and the proposed development of the remaining part of the lake would not affect the species as it is located at least 550 meters from the nearest ponds where the water snakes live.

Dumping of waste in the protected area of Larnaca salt lakes. The Larnaca salt lakes are included in the 'Natura 2000' Network and their ecosystem is one of the most important habitats in Cyprus. In April 2009, the Environment Service was informed that the company that undertook the chemical cleaning of the Larnaca airport air conditioning system, dumped the waste that resulted from the cleaning in the area of the salt lakes.

After investigation of the matter the Environment Service reached the conclusion that the company has violated the Law for the Control of Water Pollution, indicating that almost all samples taken from the salt lakes showed toxic content.

The case was forwarded to the Attorney General who instigated legal proceedings against the company.