

# Kythnos

## Wildlife at Leisure

### A Greentours Itinerary

#### Day 1

##### Fly to Athens, transfer to Lavrio port, ferry to Kythnos

An early morning flight takes us to Athens Airport from where we've a forty minute journey to the port of Lavrio where we'll catch our ferry to the island of Kythnos. The ferry takes two hours to reach the island and passes through waters where the Myrtoan and Aegean Seas merge. Yelkouan Shearwaters skim past as we search the blue waters for Dolphins. Common Dolphins are a frequent sight in these waters and we might see Bottle-nosed Dolphins, and even Striped Dolphins are found here too. Manta Rays migrate through the straits in spring and we've a reasonable chance of seeing these majestic creatures. As the sun lowers in the sky we'll draw into the harbour where our local naturalist David Koutsogiannopoulos will be waiting to meet us and accompany us to the nearby hotel in Hora, the island's capital. Capital it might be, however with only six hundred inhabitants its really only a village!

#### Day 2

##### Kastro Orias & Loutra

Our first full day on the island takes us to Kastro Orias, a Byzantine castle over-run by the Turks in the middle of the 1500s. A beautiful half kilometre track takes us to the castle which is spectacularly sited on a headland above the sea. The castle site contains many rare plants such as the endangered *Campanula reiseri*, the endemic catchfly *Silene cynthia* and the golden henbane *Hyoscyamus aureus*. The castle is a staging post for many birds of prey on their migration to the north in spring. Likely species include Eleonora's Falcon and Common Kestrel. We'll also likely see Hoopoe and Alpine Swift. The strikingly lime-hued Balkan Green Lizard suddenly erupts from cover, rather reminiscent of the way Jesus Christ Lizards suddenly throw themselves across the waters of the Neotropics. The endemic *thermiensis* race of Erhard's Wall Lizard is found here too.

In the afternoon we'll visit Maroulas, probably the oldest human settlement in the Cycladic Islands dating from some 10,000 years ago in the Mesolithic era. The sea has risen in those years to cover some of the settlement but parts are still visible. Around the corner in Loutra, there are natural hot springs to enjoy and which are reputed to provide medical cures.

### Day 3

#### Boat trip around the island

After transferring to the port town of Merichas we'll take a boat around the 100 kilometre coastline of Kythnos to view the sea birds on the cliffs. These are particularly good at the northern end of the island. Likely sightings in spring are Cory's Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater, the Mediterranean *desmarestii* race of Shag, Yellow-legged Gull and hopefully Audouin's Gull.

Further around the island on the east side, near to Loutra, there are a number of sea caves. This is one of the few places anywhere in the Mediterranean where the endangered Monk Seal still thrives and we've a very good chance of coming across them.

### Day 4

#### The estuaries of Apokrousi and Episkopi

In the west of the island are the two popular summer beaches of Apokrousi and Episkopi. In spring these host many migratory birds in the wetlands behind the beaches. Typical at this season are Little Egret, Night Heron, Black-winged Stilts, and various shanks and sandpipers. The estuaries are also resting points for some rarer species such as Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and others. Small-flowered Tamarisk can make quite a show here and on the edges of the marshy ground we'll find *Lotus cytisoides* and *Muscari commutatum*. Migrant passerines can be many and varied with various warblers and wheatears dropping in and if we are lucky perhaps something rare like a Wryneck might be seen. Early season butterflies include the Cleopatra and the gorgeous Southern Festoon.

In the afternoon, we head to the south of the island to see orchids on the hillsides. For instance above Flambouria beach there are many bee orchids including the lovely *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, *Ophrys lutea* and *Ophrys tenthredinifera*. We'll head to Aghios Dimitrios, the southernmost beach on the island, and here other orchids will be apparent. The Pink Butterfly Orchid has its island stronghold here and we'll also see the lovely *Anacamptis fragrans*, plentiful *Serapias bergonii*, and the little Bumble-Bee Orchid. *Narcissus tazetta* decorates rocks close to the shore and the afternoon light will bring the beautiful *Moraea sisyrinchium* into full bloom. Amongst commoner butterflies that will already be out here is the Zebra Blue. As the afternoon wanes Chukar call from rocky pinnacles and we'll likely see various birds of prey arriving and looking for somewhere for the night, these including Short-toed Eagle, Marsh Harrier and Lesser Kestrel. Long-legged Buzzards are resident in the rocky escarpments above us.

## Day 5

### Birds and flowers around the villages. Katafiki Cave

The two main villages of Hora and Dryopida are traditional and mostly consist of narrow streets between white-washed houses. Hora lies on a plateau at around 150m and is good for farming, both for crops and animals. Around Hora there is an abundance of nature. It is quite a flowery place with various orchids as well species like *Silene nocturna*, *Phelipanche mutelii*, the low-growing star-of-bethlehem *Ornithogalum collinum* and the delicate *Nigella damascena*. Birdlife in this very tranquil place includes Little Owl, Turtle Dove, Crested Lark, Black-eared Wheatear, Sardinian Warbler and Subalpine Warbler.

Dryopida is slightly higher at 200 metres and is hidden in a valley, originally aimed at thwarting pirates from raiding. Apart from lovely gardens, the village boasts the Katafiki cave which has stalagmites and stalactites. The cave was used as a hiding place in times of threat and more recently was mined for its iron ore. It houses bats and some endemic insects.

In the villages at night there are moths such as the giant peacock moth.

## Day 6

### Kakovolo Mountain

Today we'll head for the highest mountain on the island, Kakovolo which reaches 355m above sea level. This relatively inaccessible area still has forest that would have been the typical habitat here in prehistoric times. There's some fine old 'hunchback' specimens of the Valonia Oak and the gnarly twisted *Juniperus macrocarpa* has to be seen to be believed. Under the trees we'll find one of the island's floral gems, *Fritillaria tuntasia*. This fritillary is closely related and indeed is probably only a form of *Fritillaria obliqua* from the nearby mainland. Whatever its taxonomy, both the mainland form and the island form are extremely restricted in range. *Tuntasia* is only known from some isolated spots on Kythnos and the neighbouring Serifos. Like its mainland counterpart its main claim to fame, part from its rarity, is that it is almost black.

Another endemic is the rare Naxos stock, *Malcolmia naxensis*. The large (for a bee orchid!) bluish blooms of *Ophrys iricolor* will be a welcome sight and there's also Four-spotted Orchid here and the unusual green and black Widow Iris. Over towards the sea in this remote part of the island, the cliffs are home to the rare Bonelli's Eagle.

## **Day 7**

### **Return to Athens, flight home**

We take the ferry back to Lavrio, watching out again for dolphins and seabirds.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at [enquiries@greentours.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@greentours.co.uk).

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