

Cyprus

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Tour Report

9th – 16th March 2023

Led by Yiannis Christofides

March 9th. Yiannis collected the guests from Paphos and drove to Paphos airport to pick up the last members of the party. We then drove the short distance to a nearby beach where we had the first introduction to the flora of Cyprus, in this case plants that grow by the shore. We saw *Medicago marina*, *Lotus edulis*, *Limonium sinuatum*, *Matthiola tricuspidata*, *Paronychia argentea*, *Moraea sisyrinchium*, *Glebionis coronarium*, *Sinapis alba*, *Trifolium argutum* and *Echium angustifolium*. Crested larks were calling. Hooded crows, Jackdaws and Yellow-legged gulls were seen. After this we drove to first hotel, situated in the Akamas peninsula.

March 10th. Sunny and warm. After picking up our picnic we drove to the Baths of Aphrodite. We could hear Frankolin and Chucar calling. We walked through the gardens seeing *Asphodelus fistulosus*, *Cistus salviifolius*, *C. parviflorus*, *C. creticus*, *C. ladanifer*, *Myrtus communis*, *Phagnalon ruperstre*, *Ptilostemon chamaepeuce*, *Arbutus andracne* and *Bosea cypria*. We walked towards the pool, seeing *Allium neapolitanum*, *Vicia hybrida*, *Anogramma leptophylla* and *Adiantum capillus-veneris*. We then joined the main coastal track seeing *Prasium majus*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Juniperus phoenicea*, many *Ranunculus asiaticus* on the slopes growing with *Cyclamen persicum* and *Salvia fruticosa*. Many butterflies were on the wing, including Paphos blue, Cleopatra and Orange tip. We continued along the track seeing *Physanthyliis tetraphylla*, *Bellevalia nivalis* and *Selaginella denticulata*.

We returned to our vehicle and drove to an area near our hotel. We soon found the first orchids, *Orchis italica* and *Orchis punctulata*. Festoon and Paphos blue butterflies were on the wing and were well seen. We walked along the track, seeing *Himantoglossum robertianum*, *Ophrys flavomarginata* and *Ophrys morio*. Other plants seen included *Calycotome villosa* and *Gladiolus italicus*. To explore a different habitat we moved to a rocky beach, and found *Taraxacum aphrogenes*, *Moraea sisyrinchium*, *Anthemis rigida* and *Ornithogalum pedicellare*. We then visited the coastal slopes below our hotel, finding *Trifolium tomentosum*, *Scorpiurus muricatus* and *Hymenolobus circinatus*. At the end we had good views of two Chucar as they flew away.

March 11th. Our destination today was the Paphos forest. We set off towards Lysos, making stops along the way and taking note of the changing scenery and habitats. Our first stop was near Peristerona where we looked for raptors, finding only kestrel. A violet carpenter bee was visiting the asphodel inflorescence. *Ptilostemon chamaepeuce* had a few flowers while *Ferula communis* was in full flower. Other plants seen here included the endemic *Helianthemum obtusifolium*, *Allium neapolitanum*, *Allium trifoliatum*, *Ranunculus paludosus*, *Ajuga chamaepitys*, *Erodium gruinum* and red *Anemone coronaria*. Clouded yellow, Cleopatra, Orange tip and many Eastern Festoon were on the wing. At subsequent stops we saw a field covered with *Calendula arvensis*. Plants seen here and at subsequent stops included *Geranium dissectum*, *Trifolium pilulare*, *Orchis troodi*, *Lithodora hispidula*, *Phlomis cypria*, *Senecio leucanthemifolius*, *Andrachne telephioides*, *Tuberaria gutata*, *Astragalus lusitanicus*, the endemic *Thymus integer* and *Turritis laxa*. We had by now reached

Stavros tis Psokas where we saw the Moufflon and had our picnic. Afterwards we drove higher to see the endemics *Cedrus brevifolia*, *Quercus alnifolia* and *Arabis purpurea*, before taking the return road to our hotel.

March 12th. We drove the short distance to Smygies, an area of pine forest in the Akamas. The geology is similar to the Troodos, with igneous rocks. On the serpentines of the area we found our first plants, *Centaurea veneris*, *Alyssum akamasicum* and *Thymus integer*. We then walked down the main track looking for orchids and other plants, finding *Ophrys levantina*, *Anacamptis syriaca*, *Serapias orientalis*, *Dactylorhiza romana* and *Bellevallia nivalis*. We continued our walk, seeing *Neotinea maculata*, *Ophrys elegans*, *Ophrys lapethica*, *Ophrys cinereophila*, *Ophrys sicula* and *Ophrys israelitica*. *Gagea graeca* was just coming out. Orange tip, Cleopatra were on the wing, and we had good views of serin. We also *Orchis sezikiana*, *Onosma fruticosa* and *Polygala monspeliaca*.

We then moved to a different area, below the village of Droushia with a different habitat, now finding *Bellevallia trifoliata*, *Vicia cypria* and *Pisum fulvum*. We had our picnic at a little pond watching Cyprus marsh frogs. A pair of Greater spotted cuckoos were well seen, as well as Sardinian and Chetti's warblers. A rock of reef limestone provided a different habitat with *Sedum cyprium*, *Galium canum* and *Ceterach officinarum*. Finally *Osyris alba*, a rare plant was found.

March 13th. Transfer day to Paphos. Rain in the early morning, clearing up after breakfast. We drove to Paphos where we left our luggage at the hotel and headed for Episkopi where we visited the Episkopi environmental centre and looked at the exhibits of the flora and fauna of the Ezousa valley. We went round the gardens, noting *Phlomis cypria*, *Phlomis lunarifolia* and the endemic *Euphorbia veneris*. We drove the short distance below the huge monolith and looked for peregrines, which appeared to be out for the day. We saw *Verbascum levanticum*, *Umbilicus ruperstris* and *Polypodium cambricum* growing in the cracks of the limestone rock. We continued our journey stopping for *Crupina crupinastrum* and *Notobasis syriaca*. Corn buntings, Stonechat and finally Finch's Wheatear were seen. Also excellent views of Long-legged Buzzard. We continued stopping for *Adonis* sp. *Scabiosa prolifera*, *Trifolium angustifolium* and *Tordylium aegyptiacum*. At Agia Varvara pools we saw three Green Sandpipers, Barn Swallows and House Martins. Greenfinch was also seen.

March 14th. Today we travelled up the Diarizos valley making stops. Our first stop was to venture into some promising fields. Here we found many orchids such as *Ophrys flavomarginata*, *Ophrys sicula*, *Ophrys umbilicata*, *Ophrys morio* and masses of *Orchis italica*. Other plants included *Salvia verbenaca*, *Convolvulus coloesyriacus*, *Ornithogalum divergens* and *Aristolochia parviflora*, the food plant of the Eastern Festoon. Indeed there were many flying about and we managed good photographs. Other butterflies seen included Large and Small Whites and several Speckled Woods. At another field higher up we saw *Anemone coronaria*, *Ranunculus asiaticus*, many *Orchis italica* again and good plants of *Ophrys umbilicata*, *Ophrys israelitica* and one of *Ophrys iricolor*. The rain that had been threatening finally descended on us and we had to retreat. We drove to Omodos, had our picnic and waited until the rain finally stopped. We then drove on and had good views of probably the first Cyprus Wheatears that had arrived on the island. Another stop produced fresh *Orchis sezikiana*, *Himantoglossum robertianum* and *Arabis purpurea*. We continued our journey stopping to see *Silene laevigata* and *Reseda lutea*. We then begun to retrace our steps down the valley when on a slope we spotted about two dozen *Ophrys alasiatica*. With them was the only good specimen of *Anacamptis collina* we had seen on the trip. We continued towards Paphos, stopping at Asprokremmos reservoir, where we were very lucky to see several chukar basking in the evening light. We had good views of Sardinian warblers and a juvenile Red-backed Shrike. Other birds for the day included Goldfinch, Serin and Chaffinch.

March 15th. Our destination today was the Akrotiri salt lake and marsh. We made our first stop at Kensington cliffs where we found *Fagonia cretica* and *Erodium crassifolium* in good flower. A blue Orthetrum dragonfly was also seen. We continued to the Salt lake where we were lucky to see Greater Flamingoes at close range. We also had good views of 3 Greater Egrets and a Little Egret. We then explored the scrub and found *Helianthemum stipulatum*, *Silene colorata*, *Anthemis tricolor* and *Ifloga spicata*. We searched an area for orchids, finding only *Ophrys levantina*, *Serapias aphrodite* and *Serapias levantina*. A plant of *Cytinus hypocistis* was spotted. We continued to the marsh where we saw *Euphorbia pubescens*, Cattle egrets, Mallard, House Martins, 2 Kentish Plovers, Northern Wheatear, a Marsh Harrier sitting on the ground and 2 Spur-winged lapwings. A small flock of sparrows proved to be Spanish Sparrows and we also saw a group of Serin. We made one more stop at Mandria beach, finding a Kestrel on the ground. We returned to Paphos for our final night of the holiday.

March 16th. Departure day for return trip to London