

# 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. Bottle-nosed Dolphins are a frequent sight in these waters and occasionally Common Dolphins and even Striped Dolphins are seen on this route. 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

#### Flambouria Beach & Apokrousi Bay

The two main villages of Hora and Dryopida are little changed by the modern world 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 as *Silene nocturna*, *Phelipanche mutellii*, 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.

This morning we'll head out beyond Dryopida along a ridge before descending to Flambouria beach. The ridgeline is followed by migrating birds, especially raptors, with Common Buzzard especially numerous. We'll likely see others too – among those regularly recorded here are Bonelli's Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Marsh Harrier and Lesser Kestrel. Orchids thrive on the hillsides. Above Flambouria beach there are many bee orchids including the lovely *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, *Ophrys iricolor*, *Ophrys lutea* (the form here is sometimes given as a separate species *Ophrys cynthia*) and *Ophrys tenthredinifera*. We'll head to Aghios Dimitrios, the southernmost beach on the island, and here other orchids will be apparent. 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 we picnic on the beach we'll note plentiful *Matthiola tricuspidata* blooming behind the strandline.

In the west of the island is the popular summer beach of Apokrousi. In spring many migratory birds visit the wetland behind the beach. Typical at this season are Little Egret, Night Heron, Black-winged Stilt, 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 cycladicum*. We'll see a population of *Anacamptis collina* and also another area has much lovely lime and black *Iris tuberosa*. Amongst plenty of Scarlet Pimpernel and Sea Medick is the red star thistle *Centaurea laconica lineariloba*. 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 village at night there are moths such as the giant peacock moth.

### **Day 3**

#### **Kastro Orias & Loutra**

Today we'll visit 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* (it's a little early for both these though sometimes they are in flower at this date) and the golden henbane *Hyoscyamus aureus*. Other fine plants include the endemic *Muscari pulchellum clepsydroides*, *Silene pentelicum*, *Silene sedoides*, *Brassica cretica aegaea*, *Echium arenarium*, *Papaver nigrotinctum* and delicate *Gagea graeca*. 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 may also 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. Fields above Loutra are particularly flowery with *Moraea sisyrinchium*, *Ophrys bilunulata punctulata* and *Ophrys omegaifera* amongst many others.

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. We'll see *Romulea bulbocodium* close by and then on the way back to Hora a trip highlight – a field with lots of lovely almost black *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.

After a lunch on land at Loutra we'll visit Agia Irini where the endemic subspecies of Gerhard's Wall Lizard (*Podarcis erhardii thermiensis*) can be found as well as flowers such as *Silene sartorii*, *Hypocoum procumbens* and *Anthemis rigida*.

After plenty of time to freshen up back at the hotel we'll visit Merichas' taverna for a fine fish dinner.

## **Day 4**

### **Boat trip around the island**

From the port 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, Yellow-legged Gull and hopefully Audouin's Gull. There are colonies of Rock Pigeons and the Mediterranean *desmarestii* race of Shag on these wild shores. 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 chance of coming across them.

Our return ferry journey to the mainland gives us another chance to look for dolphins, rays and seabirds.

## **Day 5 & 6**

### **Euboea: from Dirfi to Xerovouni, Kymi, Dystos Wetland, Manikiatis Gorge and Ochi Mountain**

Euboea provides a fine counterpoint to Kythnos. The second largest Greek Island behind Crete yet Euboea's delights lay largely below the radar even to the many tourists flocking to nearby Athens. Mountain and sea is what the brochures say and it is certainly true that the island has many wonderful coves and beaches and it is also wild and mountainous with wonderful olive groves and forests. Dimfi is the highest mountain at an impressive 1743m, and at higher levels we may still find *Crocus nivalis* and hopefully the first blooms of little yellow *Fritillaria euboeica*. Euboea has a quite exceptional flora. We'll focus particularly on finding Fritillarias. The stunning almost black *Fritillaria obliqua* subspecies *obliqua* is sure to be a highlight and amongst rocky outcrops we'll spot the yellow-tipped mahogany bells of *Fritillaria ehrhartii* blooming amongst yellow *Iris attica*, blue *Iris hellenica*, *Ornithogalum atticum* and rare *Aubrieta scyria*. Notable orchids include *Neotinea lactea*, *Ophrys aesculapii*, *Ophrys mammosa*, *Ophrys speculum* and the lovely *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*. Woodlands have *Corydalis cava*, the pink primrose *Primula rubra* and the local endemic *Paeonia mascula hellenica*. Lower down shrubby *Globularia alypum* puts on a show with the yellow wands of *Asphodeline lutea* emerging from Cistus-covered slopes. Here are pink *Crepis rubra*, the weird *Biarum rhopalospadix*, *Aristolochia elongata* and the gorgeous flared bells of *Campanula celsii*. Emerging from limestone boulders are yellow *Asphodeline lutea*,

lilac *Aubrieta deltoidea* and shrubs of the delightful *Daphne mezereum*. Closer to the coast we'll find *Narcissus tazetta*, blue *Iris unguicularis* and the distinctive black and pale lime-green *Iris tuberosa*. Festoons and other spring butterflies are already on the wing and there's plenty of migrant birds passing through, in short, Euboea is fabulous spot for the naturalist in early spring!

## Day 7

### Attica: Ymmitos Mountain & Schinias Bay National Park

Amongst the scented garrigue on Ymmitos Mountain we'll find lots of *Cistus creticus* and *Cistus salviifolius* attracting early season butterflies. Cirl Buntings and Subalpine Warblers flit amongst the tall wands of *Asphodelus ramosus*. Again there are plentiful orchids, here is the turn of lovely *Ophrys iricolor*, *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, *Ophrys umbilicata* and *Orchis pauciflora* to keep our cameras busy. Pink wands of *Gladiolus illyricus* emerge from rocky ground where the delightful pink *Crepis rubra* is common.

The seven square kilometres of Schinias Bay National Park has been known since ancient times as "Marathon Marsh", or simply the "Great Marsh". On its beach the Persian forces landed in order to attack Athens, and on the adjacent plain the famous battle of Marathon took place 2500 years ago. Compared to Greece's major wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention Sites) it is not an extensive marsh, but it is the largest in this part of the Attika Peninsula. In the Stone Pine Forest behind the wetland Scop's Owls, freshly arrived from the south, are often to be found resting up in the trees. Stone Pine Forests are often very open and thus the ground layer flowery – here we can see *Himantoglossum robertianum*, *Ophrys aesculapii*, *Ophrys mammosa*, *Ophrys oestifera* and the lovely *Ophrys spruneri*. We'll see a variety of wetland birds during the day with Slender-billed Gull, Ferruginous Duck, Black-tailed Godwit and Black-winged Stilt all likely.

## Day 8

### Vravrona wetland & Artemis temple & Departure from Athens

This morning we'll head to Lavrio where the breeding White Stork may just have arrived. There's plenty of good flowers here such as *Moraea mediterranea*, *Matthiola fruticulosa*, *Ophrys attica* and lovely *Iris attica*.

We'll spend the rest of the morning at Vravrona. This wetland is home to the famous Artemis Temple. There's a number of rare plants found on the site and we'll also see birds such as Penduline Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Zitting Cisticola and Little Owl. Migrant waders are a feature with Whimbrel, Green and Wood Sandpipers likely and there's a good chance of Garganey.

Its right close to the airport so we'll have a just a short journey to catch our afternoon flight from Athens Airport

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