

Cyprus:

Spring Migration on Aphrodite's Isle Sun 25th Mar-Sun 1 Apr 2012



Above: *Demoiselle Cranes* on Akrotiri Plain, Cyprus tour, March 2012 © Robin Chittenden/www.robinchittenden.co.uk

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Robin Chittenden

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Robin Chittenden

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Spring in Cyprus was slightly later than normal and migration was only just underway when we arrived. Despite this some fabulous birds and Orchids were seen. This year's tour will be remembered for the two Pallid Harriers, at least eleven Great Spotted Cuckoos, a fall of Warblers, which included Cyprus, Rüppell's, Spectacled, Eastern Subalpine and Eastern Orphean Warblers, two flocks with a total of thirty-two Purple Herons, several Cyprus Wheatears, a couple of male Eastern Black-eared Wheatears, eight Spur-winged Plovers, four Cretzschmar's Buntings, a Little Crake and perhaps best of all three Demoiselle Cranes.

Paphos Headland

We explored this World Heritage Site a few times during our stay and each time it was slightly different. The best birds were: several Isabelline Wheatears, perched next to Northern Wheatears for comparison, two beautiful Eastern Black-eared Wheatears, a male Eastern Subalpine Warbler perched right by us, a very close male Rüppell's Warbler, a striking male Black Redstart, a newly arrived Cuckoo, ten Night Herons, eleven Purple Herons, Osprey, several Red-rumped Swallows, two Ortolan Buntings, two Tawny Pipits and four gorgeous glowing Cretzschmar's Buntings. The two on the last day were particularly confiding.

Akrotiri area

With sunlight perfectly behind us we scanned though a gap in the reeds at the Zakaki Pool and there were four Spur-winged Plover mixed in with Green Sandpipers on the exposed mud. Scanning the reed edges a Water-rail popped out and was joined by a female Little Crake, both in same field of view. A Hen Harrier patrolled the saltings. Along the shallow pools by Lady's Mile were several Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers and four flighty Little Stints with Dunlin. Bishop's Pool had a scattering of Little Grebes.

Checking the Orchid site on the south side of the salt lake we delighted at the gorgeousness of the Cyprus endemic Cyprus/Kotschy's Bee-orchid, as well as Yellow Bee-orchid and Fragrant Bug Orchid. A scan of Akrotiri Salt Lake revealed around three hundred Greater Flamingos, some performing, their heads up display.

The Phasouri reed bed seemed just to have Coot feeding in the open but careful scrutiny revealed a Squacco Heron and a posy of waders, including three Wood Sandpipers, several Common Snipe and a handful of Ruff and Green Sandpipers.

Searching the area of Akrotiri Plain all seemed quite quiet with just an Isabelline Wheatear. But then as we stopped to take another scan there, quite unbelievably, were three Demoiselle Cranes right by the track. With some cautious driving, and using the bus as a hide, we were able to pass by them and get some fabulous views, without them becoming too concerned.

Kensington Cliffs

On the way back to Paphos we dropped in at Kensington Cliffs where there were a handful of distant Mediterranean Shags. Perhaps more interesting were the endemic Cyprus Gladioli. A brief stop at Aphrodite's birth place produced our first Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Warbler of the trip as well as two Red-rumped Swallows, which looked like they had just arrived. An immature Long-legged Buzzard was spotted low overhead near Kouklia.

Dhiarizos Valley

On the way up to the Troodos Mountains we came across four Great Spotted Cuckoos that perched beautifully for all to see. A Black Francolin began singing and we soon saw a pair in flight. Higher up a closer Cyprus Wheatear and a total of four Long-legged Buzzards were encountered plus the endemic Cyprus Rock-cress.

Troodos

The Troodos Mountains were still covered with several feet of snow. Happily the sun still felt warm. A short stroll at these higher altitudes produced an immature Crossbill, a couple of Short-toed Treecreepers, several smoky Coal Tits and a few Jays, all of which were of the Cypriot race. The Short-toed Treecreeper is known as Dorothy's Short-toed Treecreeper. Also high up in above the snow were a couple more Cyprus Wheatears.

Asprokremnos pools

Asprokremnos pools were not actually pools this year. With plentiful precipitation over the winter they were more of a raging torrent. We still found a male Cyprus Warbler and a distant Little Owl was pointed out to us.

Akamas & Baths of Aphrodite

The area around Baths of Aphrodite caravan site at the base of the Akamas Peninsula was a very peaceful relaxed stroll. The number of species of passerine migrants was limited: Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps, White Wagtails and a Hoopoe. All of which seemed fresh in. Offshore four very distant Slender-billed Gulls and an even more distant Little Egret were on the move. An area of rocky flower meadow was a picture with a colourful array of Turban Buttercup, the 'non-hyacinth' *Bellevalia trifoliata* (also known as Purple Roman Squill or Turkish Bellevalia) and Persian Sowbread. Also enjoyed were several basking Starred Agamas and three Budak's Snake-eyed Skinks were seen as they scuttled through the grass.

Smiyies Chapel

Two Little Owls were right by the road and at the picnic site a Serin and Cyprus Wheatear were singing. The lovely Bee type Orchids were confusing but with close inspection were found to include Levantine Ophrys (*Ophrys levantina*) and Umbilicate Woodcock Orchid (*Ophrys umbilicata*). A few Syrian Orchids (*Orchis [morio] syriaca*) were found nearby.

Evretou Reservoir

The walk by the Evretou Reservoir produced even more Orchids with swathes of Naked Man Orchids with a few Giants thrown in. The bee orchids were tricky. Photographs revealed Carmel Bee Orchid (*Ophrys attica*), Woodcock Orchid species (*Ophrys flavomarginata*) and Bee Orchid species (*Orchis morio*). Three Great Spotted Cuckoos flew low overhead then headed off across the reservoir, squawking.

Anarita Park

We had a fantastic time in this area. At the start two Tawny Pipits were seen by a track and then two to three Pallid Harriers, including one male passed by us. Four or possibly as many as six Great Spotted Cuckoos were seen, including a pair, which we watched feeding on the ground as they threw back hairy moth caterpillars. An area of scrub was spectacularly productive with a peachy male Spectacled Warbler, one or two male Rüppell's Warblers, two or three Cyprus Warblers, an Eastern Orphean Warbler, a male Subalpine Warbler all of which showed well and very close. Several Paphos Blues and Swallowtails fluttered about.

Nata

Following yet another Long-legged Buzzard soaring over the hills we descended into the valley and found at least eighteen roosting Stone Curlews. Several Lax-flowered Orchids were admired. Should the Green Toad be mentioned?

Mandria

This area always looks promising for short turf migrants. We saw about five Short-toed Larks, a sandy Isabelline Wheatear and a few Wheatears, including a very striking male Wheatear of the southern form *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica*. Nearby at the mouth of the Xeros Potamus we felt pretty observant spotting ten Purple Herons hiding among the reeds. The flock later lifted into the air and revealed a total of twenty-one Purple Herons. What was presumably the same flock was seen a little later, as it passed our hotel, heading north-west. Also at the river was a selection of waders including four Spur-winged Plovers, Greenshank, three Ruff (each with different coloured legs: orange, yellow and grey) and a Common Sandpiper.

Cape Drepanum

With a rather stiff on shore breeze the Cape was somewhat devoid of migrants: an Isabelline Wheatear and two Hoopoes were the only offerings. Avakas Gorge was slightly better with two Cyprus Wheatears and a Rüppell's Warbler. An early Eastern Frestoon and the rather eye-catching Cyprus Gladioli were some compensation.

On the last night we spent a very enjoyable evening in the company of George and Deborah, our ground agents in Cyprus, who escorted us to a local village taverna for a traditional meze meal. And at the last gasp twenty Glossy Ibises flew over the airport as we were queued up to board the plane!.

Thanks to Thoros for his most considerate driving. He seemed to know instinctively when to hang back in the bus so as not to disturb the birds when we walked on ahead. Thanks also to Brigid Campbell for identifying so many of the plants in Cyprus and then for producing a very useful selected plant list.

25th March

Paphos Headland

26th March

Paphos Headland

Tombs of the Kings

27th March

Zakaki Pool

Lady's Mile

Bishop's Pool

Akrotiri Salt Lake

Phasouri reedbed

Akrotiri Plain

Kensington Cliffs

Aphrodite's birth place

28th March

Dhiarizos valley

Troodos

Pano Platres

Asprokremnos pools

29th March
Baths of Aphrodite
Smiyies Chapel
Evretou Reservoir

30th March
Paphos Headland
Anarita Park
Nata
Mandria beach
mouth of the Xeros Potamos

31st March
Cape Drepanum
Avakas Gorge
Paphos Headland

1st April
Paphos Headland

Systematic List of Species Recorded

Chukar *Alectoris chukar* : a few seen or heard here and there
Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* : two heard and seen Dhiarizos valley
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* : five Phasouri reedbed and two mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* : twenty plus Bishop's Pool
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* : circa 300 Akrotiri Salt Lake
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* : twenty over Paphos airport.
Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* : six flew past Paphos Headland 30th and another pitched in there 1st.
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* : three Zakaki Pool, five over Mandria, one mouth of the Xeros Potamos and singles heading north-west past our hotel, Paphos Headland 31st and Avakas Gorge.
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* : eleven past Paphos Headland 30th and twenty-one at the mouth of the Xeros Potamos and later the same day flew past our Paphos hotel.
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* : six Zakaki Pool area, one Acheleia, one of Baths of Aphrodite and three north-west past Paphos Headland 1st.
Shag *Leucocarbo aristotelis desmarestii* : six Kensington Cliffs, one Mandria beach, two Cape Drepanum and one by our hotel 1st.
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* : common.
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* : one north-west past Paphos Headland 30th.
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* : one Phasouri reedbed, one Mandria beach and one Paphos Headland 30th.
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* : one by Zakaki pool.
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* : two or three Anarita Park.
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* : one Anarita Park.
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* : one Akrotiri Plain and one Mandria.
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* : one Kouklia, four en route Troodos and one Nata.
Little Crake *Porzana parva* : a female Zakaki Pool
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* : several Zakaki Pool and Bishop's Pool.
Coot *Fulica atra* : several Bishop's Pool and Phasouri reedbed.
Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* : three Akrotiri Plain.
Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* : eighteen Nata Ford.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* : six Zakaki Pool and one mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus* : four Zakaki Pool and four mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* : eight Lady's Mile.
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* : six Lady's Mile.
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* : ten Phasouri reedbed.
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* : one mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* : several Zakaki Pool and a couple Phasouri reedbed.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* : three Phasouri reedbed.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* : one beach by Tombs of the Kings and one mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* : two Kefalos beach.
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* : four Lady's Mile.
Dunlin *Calidris alpina* : several Lady's Mile.
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* : forty plus Akrotiri Salt Lake a few Phasouri reedbed, one Lakkia and three mouth of the Xeros Potamos.
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* : the 'common' Gull.
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* : thirty plus over Paphos Headland 31st.
Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* : four flying north-east off Baths of Aphrodite.
Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* : two flying north-west off Paphos Headland.
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* : seen everyday with potentially 'real' Rock Doves seen on islands off Baths of Aphrodite, Cape Drepanum and at Avakas Gorge.
Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* : common.
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* : common.
Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* : four Dhiarizos valley, three Evretou Reservoir and four to six Anarita Park.
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* : one Anarita Park and one Paphos Headland 31st.
Little Owl *Athene noctua* : one Asprokremnos Dam and two Neo Chorio.
Common Swift *Apus apus* : common
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* : two Troodos.
Hoopoe *Upupa epops* : one, twos and threes at various sites.
Jay *Garrulus glandarius glaszneri* : six Mount Olympus.
Magpie *Pica pica* : common.
Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula* : common.
Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* : common.
Coal Tit *Pariparus ater cypristes* : several Troodos and Mount Olympus.
Great Tit *Parus major* : common.
Swallow *Hirundo rustica* : common.
House Martin *Delichon urbicum* : common.
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* : two Aphrodite's birth place, three Dhiarizos valley and up to six Paphos Headland.
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* : one Paphos Headland 26th and two there 1st and six Mandria.
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* : common.
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* : common.
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* : common.
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* : one heard Zakaki Pool.
Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* : a few Zakaki Pool.
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* : a few here and there and ten Anarita Park.
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* : small numbers here and there.
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* : small numbers here and there.
Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris* : one Anarita Park and one Paphos Headland 26th.
Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* : one Anarita Park.

[Eastern] Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillan albistriata* : single males Paphos Headland 2nd and Anarita Park.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* : common with fall of about ten Baths of Aphrodite.

Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli* : single males Anarita Park, Avakas Gorge and Paphos Headland 31st.

Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* : male Aphrodite's birth place, male Asprokremnos pools and two or three males Anarita Park.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* : heard Smiyies Chapel.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla dorothea* : One Troodos and another Pano Platres.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* : two Phasouri reedbed

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* : one and twos zipping by here and there.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula* : two Baths of Aphrodite and one Paphos Headland 31st.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* : only seen on Paphos Headland with a maximum of three 31st.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* : two Akrotiri Plain and up to five Paphos Headland.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* : up to ten Paphos Headland one Akrotiri Plain and one Cape Drepanum.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* : best count of twenty plus Paphos Headland 26th.

Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cypriaca* : one Aphrodite's birth place, five en route to and at Troodos, one Chorio Neo, one Smiyies Chapel, one near Nata and two Avakas Gorge.

Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca* : single males Paphos Headland 31st & 1st.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* : very common.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* : common with the maximum count of several hundred mouth of the Xeros Potamos.

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava* : one Paphos Headland 26th and three over there 30th.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* : common.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* : two Anarita Park and two Paphos Headland 31st.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* : common.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* : several Troodos and a couple Smiyies Chapel.

Serin *Serinus serinus* : three Pano Platres and one Smiyies Chapel.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* : common.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* : common.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* : fairly common.

Common Crossbill (endemic ssp) *Loxia curvirostra guillemardi* : one Mount Olympus.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* : common.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* : two Paphos Headland 31st

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia* : six Paphos Headland 26th and two there 1st.

MAMMALS

Brown/European Hare *Lepus europaeus* : one mouth of the Xeros Potamos.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Agama *Laudakia stellio cypriaca* : fairly common.

Troodos Rock Lizard *Lacerta leavis troodica*

Levant Water Frog *Rana bedriagae* : Only heard

BUTTERFLIES

[Common] Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* : fairly common.

Large White *Pieris brassicae* : fairly common.

Small White *Pieris rapae* : common.
Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines* : fairly common.
Eastern Dappled White *Euchloe ausonia* or **Eastern Bath White** *Pontia edusa* : a couple.
Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea* : fairly common.
Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra* : two.
Paphos Blue *Glaucopsyche paphos* : a few Anarita Park
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* : scarce.
Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* : fairly common.
Eastern Festoon *Allancastris cerisy* : one Avakas Gorge
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
Cyprus Meadow Brown *Maniola cypricola* : one Avakas Gorge

MOTHS

Pine Processionary Moth *Thaumetopoea pityocampa* : ‘nests’ only

PLANTS: Orchids

Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*
Syrian Orchid *Orchis [morio] syriaca*
Lax-flowered Tongue-orchid *Orchis laxiflora*
Fragrant Bug Orchid *Orchis [coriophora] fragrans*
Naked Man Orchid *Orchis italica*
[Small] Yellow Bee-orchid *Ophrys sicula* (syn. *O. lutea* subsp. *galilaea*)
Early Spider Orchid *Ophrys [sphegodes] mammosa*
Levantine Spider Orchid *Ophrys levantina*
Woodcock Orchid species *Ophrys flavomarginata*
Umbilicate Woodcock Orchid *Ophrys umbilicata*
[Mount] Carmel Bee-orchid *Ophrys attica*
Cyprus/Kotschy's Bee-orchid *Ophrys kotschyi*
Common Bee-orchid *Ophrys apifera*
Giant Orchid *Barlia robertiana*
Serapias *Serapias bergonii*
Serapias *Serapias vomeracea*