

# Cyprus at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

20 - 27 December 2017



African mantis by Sheila Doel



Clouded Yellow by Vivien Yule



*Ophrys omegaifera* subsp *israelitica* by Andy Bunten



Green Toad by Sheila Doel

Tour report compiled by Andy Bunten  
Images courtesy of Sheila Doel, Vivien Yule and Andy Bunten



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Tour participants: Yiannis Christofides & Andy Bunten (leaders) and Theodoros Theodorou (Doros) (driver) with a group of sixteen Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Wednesday 20th December

The group gradually caught up with each other in various parts of the departure lounge at Gatwick airport before boarding our flight to Paphos. The plane was a little late taking off but seemed to make up time. We were through Paphos airport customs by 2.45pm and then met up with our guide Yiannis and our driver Doros.

We had gone from a grey and cold London to lovely warm sunshine in Cyprus, and we still had a few hours of daylight left so we headed to Mandria Beach. Almost immediately we were treated to a wonderful female Hen Harrier which floated along a nearby hedge line, gradually coming closer to us and giving great views. A Common Kestrel was perched on a blue metal container and we saw the first of the many European Stonechats we were to experience in the following week. Also there were Black Redstarts, lots of Eurasian Skylarks, and Meadow Pipits were flitting around on the coastal tideline.

Yiannis was quickly finding plants. The alien Bermuda Buttercup (*Oxalis pes-caprae*) attracted attention but more welcome were the various natives that his eagle eye was picking up. Here was Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), a member of the Borage family in Narrow-leaved Bugloss (*Echium angustifolium*), leaves of the perennial Sea Daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) and those of Winged Sea Lavender (*Limonium sinuatum*). Not to be outdone, Lepidoptera were flying in the lovely sunshine and we saw Painted Lady, Small White and the lovely red and black speckled moth Crimson Speckled Footman.

Next it was off to Paphos sewage works to see what might be present. A White Wagtail and a Grey Wagtail were wagging along on the concrete and a Eurasian Teal lurked in the water near the edge of the works, but it was the roosting Spur-winged Lapwings that were lined up along the concrete that really took our attention. These lovely birds are vagrants to Western Europe so it was a real pleasure to get such good views of them, not to mention to see so many. A police car carefully checked us out as it drove past what was obviously considered a somewhat eccentric group, before we left in the gathering gloom to drive back to the hotel.

We had only gone a few hundred yards before excited calls from the back of the bus pointed out a row of egrets in a tree line. We braked quickly but, as our eyes got used to the dusk, we found it was actually a row of white plastic bags!

We arrived at the hotel just a few minutes later and after a wash and brush up, met for a drink and to sort out our first day's sightings. Then it was just a short walk to the local tavern for some Greek salad, fish and apple cake before heading back to our hotel for some welcome sleep.

## Day 2

Thursday 21st December

It was another beautiful day and, after breakfast, we boarded our small coach and headed off – via a bakery to buy our lunch for later - on the short drive to the Tomb of the Kings which, as Yiannis explained to us as we travelled along, has nothing to do with the burial of kings as such but instead with the ruling classes of the area.

It is, none the less, a very impressive site with its coastal location and imposing burial monuments. It was built in the 3rd century BC, serving the newly created settlement of Nea Paphos.

As we entered the site Sardinian Warblers called from inside leafy bushes, while a Great Tit on the tree tops and a White Wagtail scuttling along the ground were more obliging in giving us views. To the accompaniment of these calling birds, we delighted in the array of beautiful flowering Crown Anemones (*Anemone coronaria*) and abundant Persian Sowbread (*Cyclamen persicum*), while Large White and Clouded Yellow butterflies danced past us in the sun.

We turned our attention to more woody plants, with lots of Joint-Pine (*Ephedra fragilis*) with their fleshy red berries, and many other conifers as well including Italian Cyprus (*Cupressus sempervirens*) and Calabrian Pine (*Pinus brutia*). We saw the Turpentine Bush (*Pistacia terebinthus*) which, as well as being an early source of turpentine, is used on Cyprus in baking with the fruits added to make a special village bread.

On the small rocks and little cliffs we saw reptiles too: a Snake-eyed Lizard almost invisible as it froze among the anemones and Friar's Cowl (*Arisarum vulgare*), and a Starred Agama that vanished into a crack in the rocks in a split second.

As we wandered around in the glorious sunshine we heard, then saw, a couple of Crested Larks, more ubiquitous Sardinian Warblers and, equally as common, Stonechats. Plants included Sea Squill (*Drimia maritima*) and Deciduous or Royal Oak (*Quercus infectoria*), an important plant in Cyprus and one we would encounter on most of our trips. Thorny Burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*), which we referred to as 'chicken wire' plant, was scattered around looking very formidable with its mass of spikes, and we found Capitata Thyme (*Thymus capitatus*) bushes lying prostrate against the prevailing wind. Down by the dunes we found a tiny Schreiber's Spiny-footed Lizard lurking half under a bush, the leaves of *Centaurea aegialophila*, a sand shore species, and those of *Medicago maritima*, another seashore loving plant.

Finally we wandered a little further along by the coast and the edge of the fascinating tombs, finding Meadow Pipits and Goldfinches, plants such as *Noaea mucronata*, a spiky plant with dainty purple bracts, and a wonderful Mandrake (*Mandragora officinalis*) with small purple flowers. As we left the Tomb of the Kings site we were treated to two wonderful reptiles, a large Starred Agama and, near it, a Troodos Wall Lizard – a Cyprus endemic.

We headed off the short distance to the Paphos Archaeological Site, home of the Paphos Mosaics, where many of us had our lunch. We learned that these beautiful and rare Roman mosaics were discovered by accident when the land was being ploughed in 1962. Over 40 mosaics have now been unearthed, containing many interesting geometrical patterns, usually surrounding a central mythological scene. The mosaics, most of which date from around the 3rd century AD, are situated in four main areas which we gently wandered around in the sun.

Around the site there were our usual friends of Black Redstart, Stonechat, Crested Lark and Eurasian Skylarks, plus our first small flock of 15 Common Starlings and our first Corn Buntings with their distinctive jangling calls. Heading past the amphitheatre, a group of eight or so Woodlarks was encountered opposite a rather fine Indian Bead Tree (*Melia azedarach*). A little further on we saw our first Spanish Sparrows sitting out on a bush which also contained some 'chacking' Sardinian warblers.

We left the site and some of us then walked past the group of cafes and bars to the coast and along the footpath. We were aiming for a group of European Golden Plovers which we'd noticed while in the archaeological site. En route to them we had more Corn Bunting sightings, flocks of Skylarks and some very close Meadow Pipits. We counted around 60 Golden Plovers, searched, unsuccessfully, for a possible Sand Plover, but did find a couple of Yellow-legged Gulls and two Little Egrets. On our way back we were really fortunate to see two Red-throated Pipits just close to us next to the path. However, as wonderful as all these sightings were, Yiannis insisted that the best find had been *Taraxacum aphrogenes*, an endemic dandelion growing in the rocks by the sea – definitely one for the connoisseur!

The day was still giving however as, on our walk back to the coach, we saw an Octopus swimming - we assumed hunting - just a few metres away from the harbour edge. We watched it mesmerised for a good twenty minutes as it swam, hid and changed shape and colour, all before our eyes. Keeping our fingers crossed that this intelligent mollusc species was not going to be on the menu that evening, we headed back to our hotel for the usual routine of a wash and change, a check of the day's sightings and off to the tavern for meal.

## Day 3

## Friday 22nd December

The day dawned warm but a little murkier than recently because, we heard, of Sahara dust which was blowing across from Africa. The bus was a little later this morning and this gave Yiannis an excellent opportunity to tell us about the Carob tree – a fine specimen of which was growing just next to our hotel. Together with the Olive tree, the distribution of the Carob defines the extent of the Mediterranean region. Carob syrup is known as Cyprus's black gold and is used in toffee, sugar, syrup etc. The seeds of the Carob were used as a standard unit of weight and from their Arabic name *carrat* we derive the term carat to measure the purity of gold and unit of mass for gemstones.

We boarded the bus to start our trip to the Akrotiri area and during the drive Yiannis gave us a fascinating talk about the geology of the island and the special significance of the Troodos Mountain with its undisturbed ophiolite sequence. We heard how these mountains slowly rose from the sea due to the collision of the African and European tectonic plates, a process that eventually formed the island of Cyprus. The slowing and near-cessation of this process left the rock formations virtually intact, while subsequent erosion uncovered the magma chamber underneath the mountain, allowing a viewing of intact rocks and petrified pillow lava formed millions of years ago; an excellent example of ophiolite stratigraphy. We learned too about the wealth of Cyprus's botany – over 1700 plants compared with the UK's 1500. And finally we learned how to shop with speed and efficiency for our lunch pastries so we could get out and see this wonderful natural life!

At our first stop at Zakiki Marsh there was a tower hide on the edge of tall Common Reeds (*Phragmites australis*) where, despite it being a little blowy, we saw a nice Western Marsh Harrier quartering over the vegetation followed by a 'ringtail' Hen Harrier doing the same. Four Greater Flamingoes flew rapidly past and away from us while various birds called from the edge of the marsh: Cetti's Warbler, Coot and Moorhen. Here there were also some saltmarsh plants including *Sueda vera* and a *Salicornia* species.

Far more impressive than all of these was the sight of Yiannis in tears of joy as his excellent Flora of Cyprus was finally born. The first ever consignment of his book had just come into the docks and his sister and a friend had

brought them straight to him so he could be the first to see the finished article. It was really quite emotional for all of us!

Regaining our composure, we moved a little nearer to a group of birds gathered on a mud flat. Here we found a large number of gulls loafing on the mud. Most were Black-headed Gulls but interspersed among them were a number of larger gulls. Some of these were the Yellow-legged Gulls, commonly found in Cyprus, but we were searching for a rarer winter visitor – Armenian Gull. After some careful use of the telescope we picked out a few gulls with their distinctive black band round the beak and white tip. Success! Sheila's sharp eyes also pointed out two Sandwich Terns hunkered down amongst the gulls. Behind us another area of mud contained slightly more distinctive birds – five juvenile Greater Flamingoes.

We drove further down Mile Beach in search of coffee but, although thwarted, we did find more birds; this time adult Greater Flamingoes in smart pink plumage and a group of waders including Dunlin, Little Stint and five nice Kentish Plovers. Plants here included salt-resistant species like Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and a member of the Caltrop family (*Zygophyllum album*), a classically fleshy looking species.

It was nearing lunch time so we drove the short distance round to Bishop's Pool, passing through an impressively gated fence on our way. The pool proved to be incredibly productive with a large number of ducks and grebes: three Black-necked Grebes, over 20 Little Grebes, around 80 Eurasian Teal, three wonderful Ferruginous Ducks, some splendid Pintails and Northern Shovelers. The birding continued during lunch with a Long-legged Buzzard found perching on a telegraph pole and obligingly sitting still to be well and truly 'scoped'. The surrounding bushes held various smaller birds actively moving around too: Cetti's Warbler with their loud explosive call, and a number of Common Chiffchaffs. Carefully turning a piece of corrugated metal revealed a Snake-eyed Skink which made good its escape, and a wonderful Green Toad which Yiannis lovingly cradled in his arms to enable some photographs to be taken.

We left this wonderful site and drove along the southern edge of the huge salt pans to find some gravel pits, in which we searched for various reported birds. Most had flown but we did get excellent views of three Black-necked Grebes.

With the light starting to fade a little we drove to Akrotiri Marsh, but there seemed to be little in the pools, though a few Western Cattle Egrets were in among the cattle on the strip of grazing land, so we didn't alight from the coach and instead headed to Kensington Cliffs. Here we had a walk along the path at the cliff edge looking, unsuccessfully, for any Griffon Vultures. It seems that the re-introduced birds have not yet learned about the presence of these cliffs and are not as regular here as they were formerly. We did hear Chukar calling from among the bushes, which included Phoenician Juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*), but none appeared in our sight.

So it was time to drive back to our hotel. On the way two raptors flew across the bows of the coach – Hen Harrier and a very rapid Eurasian Sparrowhawk – before we arrived back in time for our usual rituals of freshening up, settling our list and heading to the tavern for our evening meal.

## Day 4

## Saturday 23rd December

Today was our transfer day and time to say farewell to our very friendly Paphos Hotel. The weather was still somewhat murky due to the Sahara dust and a little cooler than it had been previously. We stopped quickly at an excellent bakery for lunch provisions and then headed off north-east to the Environment Centre at Episkopi. This was an excellent centre and clearly the result of a huge amount of work focussed around conserving and interpreting the ecology of the Natura 2000 site, Ezousa Valley. We spent a happy hour here going through the exhibitions and being lead round the former school garden by Yiannis discussing the various plants that were neatly laid out and labelled.

Away from Episkopi we stopped at a large rock face in the hope of finding a Wallcreeper. Although we were unsuccessful, Pami found a Peregrine Falcon and Yiannis soon another one, perched in a prominent gash in the rock face. Wonderful views! And some good plants were in the vicinity too as we found Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*), *Verbascum levanticum* and Rusty-back Fern (*Asplenium ceterach*).

By around 11.30am we were into the Anarita valley area where we hoped we may find a few bird species. Initially we looked on the tops of rock piles for Little Owl but had no joy, though our usual quota of Stonechats perched up on top of bushes. We left the coach and walked a short distance, scouring the hills and humps for our key quarry species – Finsch's Wheatear. For some while we had no joy but then Pami saw what we were looking for and we all gathered around for pretty good views of this rather shy and wary bird – some even getting views through the telescope of this very handsome black and white wheatear.

We could hear a Chukar calling. While gazing around looking for it we caught sight of one, and then two big raptors soaring over a ridge. Two Bonelli's Eagles! We spent a good 15 minutes or so watching these wonderful birds circling around in the sky. The light was excellent and the white belly of the birds very evident. One very obligingly flew round with the hillside behind it so we could clearly see the whitish mantle. Plants weren't being ignored of course and the hunting botanists found *Ranunculus bullatus*, the beautiful purple flowered *Romulea tempskyana* and the endemic *Hyacinthella millingenii*.

Lunchtime was upon us so we drove to the Asprokremmos Dam, to settle amongst the rocks and vegetation to consume it. Along the line of the bottom of the dam were many beehives and as they'd just been visited by two well-protected bee-keepers, we felt the bees may still be quite lively and best avoided. A Kestrel was quartering the ground and Tom saw a Chukar take off and whizz round the side of a cliff but, try as might, we couldn't locate it again. We did, though, find a few Black Redstarts and Sardinian Warblers which we tried hard to make into Cyprus Warbler but to no avail. There were various plants in flower too including Arabian Fumana (*Fumana arabica*), *Genista fasselata (sphacelata)* and Spiny Broom (*Calicotome (Calycotome) villosa*). There was also Castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) the source, of course, of the castor oil we all know and love, but also of Ricin – an altogether more deadly product. As we left the dam area, Doros found a small group of Chukar trotting along a field track and we all got views of them.

We drove back to the edge of Paphos to re-connect with our trailer and bags, and then headed north in the direction of Polis. On the way we saw more raptors: a nice female Hen Harrier and excellent views of two Long-legged Buzzards hanging in the air and clearly showing their very pale tails. We also past many field edge *Quercus infectoria*, a tree which would have been the dominant cover of the island in the past.

We stopped near Tera and walked along a lane where we saw the Mount Atlas Mastic Tree (*Pistachia atlantica*), Storax (*Styrex officinalis*) plus the beautiful, endemic, Cypriot Sowbread (*Cyclamen cyprium*) and Maiden's Bower (*Clematis cirrhosa*), both in flower. Then it was on to our new hotel, wonderfully situated right on the coast.

We settled in and then met to go through our burgeoning list of sightings, before indulging an immense and delicious buffet supper.

## Day 5

## Sunday 24th December

We'd had some rain overnight and it was a cooler morning when we met up to have an early morning stroll. Outside the hotel Sardinian Warbler and Greenfinch called, but as we walked to the road a more exotic set of calls was heard – a flock of Guinea Fowl scuttling around in nearby fields. A flock of some six Serins was nice to see, and a twittering charm of over 40 Goldfinches was delightful as they flew from one set of seed heads to another. Best of all were a group of four Chukar hiding at the back of a field.

After a delicious breakfast we met again to head uphill to Pafos Forest, but before we did so Yiannis found a very large pregnant African Mantis which had been hiding in the bushes right outside the hotel. This was a very impressive and recognisable due to the distinctive white spot on the wings.

We did our normal bakery stop but this time had the added bonus of seeing a huge Royal Oak (*Quercus infectoria*) opposite the bakery. Signs said it was 170 years old, but many of us suspected it could be older than that.

We were trying hard to find a Francolin so made a detour onto the rural roads at Pelathousa to travel through suitable habitat. We saw Magpies, Serin and a lovely Long-legged Buzzard hanging in the wind over a hill top but, sadly, no Francolins.

Our next stop was the Peristerona Gorge where we saw Wild Olive (*Olea europaea*), *Rhamnus oleoides*, and Kermes Oak (*Quercus coccifera*). Gazing over the dramatic gorge we could hear Common Chiffchaff calling from the bushes and the occasional Chukar from further away. Then some birds of prey appeared over the opposite ridge and we were treated to another pair of wonderful Bonelli's Eagles, and with them a Long-legged Buzzard. We'd been very lucky!

In answer to a few questions, Yiannis gave us a fascinating brief account of some of the early history of Cyprus and its links with Richard the Lionheart. We continued climbing until we reached around 500 metres at Kopes. Here a couple were mushrooming as Yiannis told us a little more about the amazing geology of the island before we headed off for a walk in the dappled sunshine. We admired the lovely Eastern Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus andrachne*) with its delicate deer's velvet-like bark, and also admired Yiannis's enthusiasm for the slightly less imposing *Asperula cypria* – another endemic though. Yet another Cypriot speciality in the area was *Thymus integer*, a plant particularly found where this igneous rock was weathering.

One of the birds we were trying to see was the Cypriot subspecies of Coal Tit. We'd heard some tits calling but were mainly seeing Great Tits until at last, a few Coal Tits appeared. They definitely looked darker than the ones we were used to and darted about in the branches of the conifers.

It was nearing lunchtime as we continued our drive uphill, passing some classic sheeted dyke complex geology until we reached the Stavros Forestry Station. It had become quite cool (eight degrees) by now so while some bravely sat outside for their lunch, others found a small café with a roaring log fire where the owner was quite happy for sandwiches to be eaten as long as coffee was bought. Not an issue and it didn't take long before we were all snuggly inside eating our lunch and the lovely local pastries and chocolate that Yiannis had bought for us. Botany never sleeps of course and through the window we saw yet another endemic. This time a Cyprus Cedar (*Cedrus brevifolia*); one of only four cedar species in the world.

We dragged ourselves away from the warmth of the café and had a walk around a nearby trail that went round an enclosure where there were a number of Mouflon. These sheep were thought to have been introduced to Cyprus some 8000 years ago. They have naturalised and are now recognised as an endemic subspecies. Around the trail we found Golden Oak (*Quercus alnifolia*), *Teucrium kotschyannum* and more Cypriot Sowbread (*Cyclamen cyprium*).

A shower of hail drove us back to our coach and we moved back down the hill to the Evretou Dam. Here we had a short walk along the reservoir dam wall where we found two Long-legged Buzzards and searching the cliff edge, we could see something that seemed like a nest. This was confirmed a little later when one of the buzzards circled round, landed in the nest and started re-organising the sticks in the nest. A little early, we thought, for a bird which normally starts nesting from the end of March.

More precipitation encouraged us back into the coach and then back a little earlier than normal to our hotel, where the usual list compilation was followed by the usual delicious buffet supper.

## Day 6

## Monday 25th December

Christmas Day dawned beautifully with blue sky and lovely sun. We went down to a lovely breakfast where we were met by 'Santa' Yiannis who, complete with Santa hat, very kindly gave everyone a copy of his fascinating and excellent Orchids of Cyprus book.

Our driver, Doros, was deservedly enjoying Christmas with his family, so our trip today was going to be on foot. We met outside the hotel in the lovely sunshine and across the sea we could see the snow-topped mountains of Turkey. We walked south from the hotel and up a gentle rise in the low hills to the accompaniment of our usual Sardinian Warblers and House Sparrows. A low persistent warbling from the depth of a bush caused us to halt for some time. Try as we might though, we couldn't get a glimpse of our mystery singer – a warbler that got away. Further along the road was the much more distinctive explosive call of a Cetti's Warbler, and the characteristic calls of a couple of Crested Larks flying across the fields.

We headed over a very heavy clay field with each step seeming to pick up another kilogram of mud on our boots, in search of an orchid which used to be common here until the whole area was subjected to ploughing and spaying! Fortunately some had escaped this treatment and Yiannis finally unearthed a nice specimen of a flowering Fan-lipped Orchid (*Anacamptis (Orchis) collina*) nestling in a hedgerow.

In a clearing a little further on we had more Clouded Yellow butterflies speeding past, a Painted Lady too, our usual Stonechats on top of bushes, and a buzzard hanging in the air – much as Long-legged Buzzards do. However it soon became evident that this was a Common Buzzard – perhaps it had been watching Long-legged

Buzzards! In the centre of the clearing was a really fine male Carob tree with prominent anthers, while Chiffchaffs called from nearby bushes and Goldfinches flitting around. Yiannis was finding various different plants too. Lovely red flowered *Romulea tempskyana*, Common Stork's Bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) and more of the lovely Crown Anemone (*Anemone coronaria*) that we first encountered at the beginning of our holiday. Insects made an appearance too in the shape of an absolutely tiny pale fawn Praying Mantis.

We got to the rock pool area where we found a number of lizards – both Snake-eyed Lizards and the endemic Troodos Wall Lizard; a good opportunity to compare the differences between the two. We found a wild Olive tree (*Olea europaea*) and in the water of one of the pools, nice flowering specimens of *Ranunculus peltatus*, before we selected some nice comfy rocks to sit on and have our lunch. After lunch we found a Sage-leaved Cistus (*Cistus salvifolius*) and Narrow-leaved Cistus (*Cistus monspeliensis*) but we failed, despite our best efforts, to find the Cetti's Warbler that was persistently singing in a patch of low bushes.

On the seashore we found, and tasted, Spiny Chicory (*Cichorium spinosum*) as well as Sea Heath (*Frankenia hirsuta*) and a few *Limonium* species. Another African Mantis and an old mantis egg case were found before we headed back to the hotel, splitting up as we went; some going along the road, some along the beach and some heading back into an old orchard to look for birds and butterflies. In the old orchard there were quite a few small birds including singing Blackcap, Black Redstart, Greenfinch and Robin, as well as a number of Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow butterflies, and a huge Centipede lurking under a log. On the way back to the hotel we found a lovely flock of 14 Woodlarks flitting down from a bush to feed on the ground.

Then it was back to the hotel for yet another delicious evening meal and the end of a near-perfect Christmas Day.

## Day 7

Tuesday 26th December

It was yet another beautiful day and, after another lovely breakfast, we met up with Doros and travelled the short distance to the botanic gardens and the Baths of Aphrodite.

The botanic gardens were very enjoyable with lots of indigenous and endemic plants on show. There was a bed of Garrigue specialities including the endemic *Teucrium micropodioides* and Sage-leaved Rock Rose (*Cistus salvifolius*). Greek Sage (*Salvia fruticosa*) was in flower and *Salvia dominica* was also present with yet another endemic – Cyprus Ironwort (*Sideritis cypria*).

At the 'baths' themselves we found Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) and most exciting of all a small fern often known as Jersey Fern (*Anogramma leptophylla*): a rarity in the *Pteridophyta* as it is a fern whose sporophyte tends to have an annual life cycle. Birds were quite good in the gardens too with plenty of activity as Cetti's Warblers called, Robins sang and Chukars called. A Song thrush was a first for the trip and there were plenty of Common Chiffchaffs and Greenfinches.

We made our way from the baths and continued our gentle walk along the headland, where we heard more about the fascinating geology of the island and the origins of the Serpentine and Pillow Lava rocks. An island a little way offshore had a few Yellow-legged Gulls on it as well as some half obscured 'cormorants' which we studied for some while before deciding that some, at least, were European Shags. A group of seven Chukars flew down

the slope of the cliff, and Common Chiffchaff and Sardinian Warbler called from various bushes. There were odd tufts of Bunch-flowered Narcissus (*Narcissus tazetta*), *Hyacinthella millingenii*, an endemic, and *Muscari inconstictum*.

We all made our gradual ways back to the botanic gardens to meet Doros and the coach and drive to Neo Chorio for our lunch. On our way a snake, most likely a Whip Snake, slid rapidly across the road in front of us. We had a most magnificent meze-style meal in the local taverna with dishes coming thick and fast: coriander-marinated olives, pickled caper shoots and kohlrabi, grilled halloumi cheese, garlic flatbread, tomato and egg stir fry, and lentil bean stew (Fasolada).

After lunch we moved on to the Smiyes Ridge. Here, an outcrop of serpentine rock supported its own specialised flora. Soils derived from serpentine are toxic to many plants because of high levels of nickel, chromium and cobalt. Growth of many plants is also inhibited by low levels of potassium and phosphorus, and a low ratio of calcium/magnesium. Hence, here were to find a number of endemics including *Alyssum akamasicum*, *Centaurea veneris* and *Thymus integer*. We also found a nice endemic bee/fly orchid species (*Ophrys omegaiifera subsp. Israelitica*), and yet perhaps nicest of all a tiny little fern *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* (Least Adder's-tongue). Continuing our walk downhill we found three freshwater crabs –endemic of course – in a small pool.

Once back into the coach, we drove some way further downhill before some of us opted to walk the last part in the rapidly declining light. Then it was back to the hotel for our last night. We had our last wonderful evening meal and last species checklist.

## Day 8

## Wednesday 27th December

Our last day was again one of lovely sunshine and, after a final Cypriot breakfast, we had a little wander around the hotel gardens where we saw Blackbird, Goldfinch, a couple of Meadow Pipits and a very strange-looking bird which, in the end, we concluded must have been a melanistic House Sparrow.

We boarded the coach, but then had to debus as a flat battery meant Doros had to roll it back down the hill to jump start it - which he did in a way that suggested he'd done this before! We then headed off south towards Agios Georgios to have a walk around Mankini Beach. Here there were large numbers of Western Jackdaws and Hooded Crows and a very smart male Spanish Sparrow together with a few females. On the beach Yiannis found the endemic *Taraxacum aphrogenes*, *Cichorium spinosum* and Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*) while the birders of the group were looking at the offshore island where there were Shags and around 80 or more Yellow-legged Gulls. The characteristic 'zit-zit' call of a Zitting Cisticola was heard but we didn't catch sight of the bird until a little while later when Roger spotted it before it darted off again. Then, just as we were boarding the coach, Robin found a Blue Rock Thrush. Agonisingly it flew across the road before everyone saw it but we waited patiently and it re-appeared on top of a shed. Sadly our telescopes and tripods were packed away but we had reasonable binocular views.

A short drive to the top of the cliffs took us to an archaeological site that some explored while others looked around the nearby bushes. More Black Redstarts, male Spanish Sparrows, Crested Larks and Clouded Yellows were seen in this quite productive bit of scrubland. Our final leg then took us the airport with a buzzard, possibly Long-legged Buzzard, in the distance as we drove to our destination.

At the airport we bade a fond farewell to the excellent Yiannis and Doros who had looked after us so well, boarded our various flights and headed back to the UK and the New Year.

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Starred Agama by Vivien Yule



Crimson Speckled Footman by Vivien Yule

## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only; \* = endemic)

	Common name	Scientific name	December							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			4					
2	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			20+					
3	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			6					
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			4					
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			30+					
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1		80					
7	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			2					
8	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			3					
9	Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>			H	6	10		8	
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			20+					
11	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			5					
12	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			30					
13	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			4					
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			15					
15	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		2						
16	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>							3	1
17	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		3	2		1	1	3	
18	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>				2	2			
19	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1					
20	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			2					
21	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1		2	2				
22	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>			1	2	3			1
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			3			1	1	1
24	Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	25							
25	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		60+						
26	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			5					
27	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			5					
28	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			20+					
29	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		1						
30	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			20+					
31	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓					
32	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		2	6			4	8	80
33	Armenian Gull	<i>Larus armenicus</i>			5					
34	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>			2					
35	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia var. domestica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	30+	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	6
37	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	2	2	5	12	12	4	4	4
38	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2		1	2	2	1	3	4
39	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				2				
40	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			7	20	12		1	6
41	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				50+	60+			20+
42	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓
43	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>					4		H	
44	Great Tit	<i>Parus major aphrodite</i>		3		6	4	6	5	2
45	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		8				14		
46	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	30+	25				1		
47	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		8				2	2	4

	Common name	Scientific name	December							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
48	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H			H	H	H
49	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1	6		6	6	8	ü
50	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>								1
51	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						1	1	2
52	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	1	10	1	6	6	6	9	4
53	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		12	3		2			
54	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>								1
55	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>							1	
56	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		1		1	1	2	2	
57	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	2	8	8	4	3	6	2	1
58	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>								1
59	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	3	20	4	10	6	6	4	6
60	Finsch's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe finschii</i>				1				
61	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		12						2
63	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1						
64	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	2	6	6	1	2	2	1	2
65	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	4	15	6	6		6		4
66	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>		2						
67	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	1	6	1	6	10	10	5	2
68	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	1	6		H	6	6	6	4
69	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		6						
70	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	6	30		6	50	6	10	12
71	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>				1	6	1	1	
72	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		6						

### Butterflies

1	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		12		✓		✓	✓	✓
2	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓
3	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	1	✓		✓	✓	
4	African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>		✓						
5	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	4			✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓							

### Moths

1	Pine Processionary Moth	<i>Thaumetopoea pityocamp</i>			✓		✓			
2	Crimson Speckled Footman	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>	1							

### Crustacea

1	Cyprus Freshwater Crab*	<i>Potamius potamius</i>								3
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### Other Invertebrates

1	Red-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda germanica</i>						1		
2	Eastern Cone-headed Grasshopper	<i>Truxalis eximia</i>				✓		2		
3	Giant Centipede	<i>Scolopendra cingulatus</i>						1		
4	African Mantis	<i>Sphodromantis viridis</i>					1	1		

### Amphibians & Reptiles

1	Green Toad	<i>Bufo viridis</i>			1					
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	Common name	Scientific name	December								
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
2	Starred Agama	<i>Laudakia stellio</i>		6						1	
3	Snake-eyed Lizard	<i>Ophisops elegans</i>		1			1	3	1		
4	Schreiber's Spiny-footed Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus schreiberi</i>		1							
5	Troodos Wall Lizard*	<i>Phoenicolacerta troodica</i>		1				1	1		
6	Budak's Snake-eyed Skink	<i>Ablepharus budaki</i>			1						
7	Cyprus Whip Snake*	<i>Hierophis cypriensis</i>								1?	

## Fish

1	Wrasse sp			1							
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## Mammals

1	Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1							
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European Stonechat by Andy Buntten