Western Turkey – Wildlife & History

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd - 29th April 2023



White-throated Robin



Finsch's Wheatear



Spur-thighed Tortoise



Tragopogon sp

Tour report by Andy Smith, photos but Kate Lessells



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn

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Tour participants: Andy Smith, Sureyya Isfendiyaroglu & Tolga Kanik (leaders) with 15 Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Saturday 22nd April

The group arrived on time at Izmir airport in the evening and after clearing formalities and meeting up with local guides Tolga and Sureyya, were driven to the nearby town of Selcuk. Here we enjoyed a late dinner at restaurant before checking in to our very comfortable hotel and turning in for the night.

Day 2

Sunday 23rd April

Cool and overcast at first with some spots of rain, becoming warm and sunny with scattered cloud and a gentle breeze from late morning.

After a sumptuous breakfast, we set off through Selcuk noting the many White Storks attending their nests on the streetlamps and rooftops. Our destination was the Dilek National Park where we spent the morning. A group of Wild Boar with a dozen or more tiny humbug piglets in the scrub along the entrance track made for a good start before our first stop at a beach where we enjoyed lovely views of a big feeding raft of Yelkouan Shearwaters. They were just offshore, and we estimated around 1,000 in all: quite a sight! A close search revealed a couple of larger Scopoli's Shearwaters amongst them and there were also a number Shags of the slender-billed Mediterranean form scattered across the water. We followed this with a walk through the woods along the shore. There were no passerine migrants in evidence, but we encountered a range of common woodland birds plus several singing Subalpine Warblers, a superb Hoopoe which we all saw really well, and Swallowtail and Clouded Yellow butterflies. Returning to Selcuk for a quick lunch in a street restaurant we then proceeded to Ephesus where Tolga gave us a very informative guided tour of the site. Everyone was suitably impressed by the scale and atmosphere of the place, and we noted some good birds along the way including a pair of Short-toed Eagles, several Jays, two Eastern Blackeared Wheatears and a few Red-rumped Swallows.

From here we went down to an area of marshes in the nearby river valley where we found a wealth of wetland birds including a flock of Greater Flamingos, several Black-winged Stilts, a few Spur-winged Plovers, dozens of Glossy Ibis, over 30 Ruddy Shelducks, some Pygmy Cormorants and a Squacco Heron. A splendid and confiding male Red-backed Shrike perched in a patch of Giant Fennel made for a lovely sight and as we watched it we found a Mole Cricket out and about on the bare ground at our feet – a very impressive little beast!

We finished the day at the ruins of the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven ancient Wonders of the World. One tall ionic pillar remains standing, these days topped by a White Stork's nest. We soaked up the atmosphere here, found a Caspian Terrapin and enjoyed some good views of singing Olivaceous Warblers. A good end to a full and rich day.

Day 3

Monday 24th April

Sunny, warm and breezy.

Leaving Selcuk after breakfast we drove south again to another part of the Dilek National Park, this time on the south side of the peninsula and overlooking the Meandros river delta. We spent the full morning here primarily

walking along a quiet road between the fields and marshes of the delta on one side of us and the rocky, scrubby hills of the hinterland on the other. In this rich mosaic of habitats, we encountered lots of interesting wildlife. Highlights included a Long-legged Buzzard, some distant Dalmatian Pelicans, a fishing Caspian Tern, a passing flock of Bee-eaters, both Masked and Woodchat Shrikes, a large female Spur-thighed Tortoise and a few stunning Spoon-tailed Lacewings.

We ate our lunch at a taverna overlooking the shore with Curlews and Whimbrels foraging on the sandflats nearby, then headed on to the ancient Greek site of Priene. Perched up on a hill overlooking the delta, with lots of welcome shade trees and much less busy than Ephesus, Priene was a serene and beautiful place to spend some time. Tolga gave another expert guided tour, client John, a classical academic, declaimed in ancient Greek in the amphitheatre (very nice!) and we noted lots of engaging Starred Agamas, an Eastern Festoon and a couple of Rock Nuthatches. From Priene we drove on inland towards Lake Bafa and our accommodation for the next couple of nights. A service station stop en-route brought us some excellent views of several Alpine Swifts low overhead and on the last stages of our journey through a lovely area of agricultural land and scrubby hills along the lake shore we stopped for a pair of Short-toed Eagles. Enjoying these two we lucked into a couple of male Red-footed Falcons passing high overhead, their remiges flashing silver in the sun, and then an adult White-tailed Eagle which lumbered past us at tree-top height carrying a heavy prey item. Hastily taken photographs revealed that the prey was a Great-Crested Grebe – not something we'd expected. An exciting few minutes!

Day 4 Tuesday 25th April

Sunny in the morning, sunny with scattered cloud in the afternoon. Warm and breezy.

This morning we walked from the hotel around the village of Kapikiri which encompasses the ruins of Heraklea, another once important ancient site. It was a lovely walk through beautiful surroundings and along the way we saw Rock Nuthatches, Sombre Tits, Masked Shrikes and Red-rumped Swallows. Starred Agamas put in further appearances bobbing on prominent rocks and we found two more Spur-thighed Tortoises. We finished up along the lakeshore and enjoyed good views of Ruddy Shelducks, Pygmy Cormorants, Dalmatian Pelicans, a Little Ringed Plover and a singing Olivaceous Warbler.

With a little time before lunch, we drove a short way along the lakeshore and explored further, finding some migrant Whinchats, a fleeting Nightingale, a smart Field Cricket and a range of butterflies including Brown Argus and Scarce Swallowtail. Lunch was at a restaurant by the shore on the far side of the lake where we had our best views yet of Dalmatian Pelicans and watched a Dice Snake swimming in the shallows.

Post lunch we proceeded up into the scrubby hills to the south of the lake where we hoped to find Ruppell's Warblers. Sure enough, at our first stop in suitable looking habitat we found at least three singing males and with a little patience succeeded in getting good views of one despite the brisk wind – a very handsome little fellow. Here too was a smart male Red-backed Shrike and even better, two surprise Great Spotted Cuckoos, dramatic as ever cackling their way around the hillside. We finished the afternoon with a pleasant stroll through flower-rich olive groves back by the lakeshore and got back to the hotel in good time to relax a little before dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 26th April

Overcast, cool and breezy with some light rain in the late morning and early afternoon.

Leaving Kapikiri shortly after breakfast we made a first impromptu stop, prompted by a Golden Oriole flashing across the road, by the graveyard on the edge of Bafa town. As ever, stopping for a bird inevitably leads to other things and in a few minutes searching (in vain) for the Oriole we saw a migrant Wood Warbler, a family of Sombre Tits, a Eurasian Nuthatch and a Persian Squirrel.

Our next stop was on the far side of Bafa Golu in an area of scrubby hills overlooking marshes and fields. A productive hour and a half here produced over 230 Dalmatian Pelicans (in three flocks, roosting out on ploughed fields), three Black Storks, about 20 Great Egrets, a distant Gull-billed Tern and some lovely views of Bee-eaters and Common Terns. In one large field a flock of over a thousand Mediterranean Gulls were following a couple of tractors busy ploughing and as we stopped to enjoy the spectacle our attention was drawn to a flock of eight Red-throated Pipits feeding around an extensive puddle just in front of us – a lovely bonus!

Continuing on we stopped for coffee (at a Starbucks!) somewhere along the way and then for lunch at a roadside diner in Atca. After this we continued to Pamukkale and Heirapolis, noting a Roller en-route. Heirapolis is an amazing place that shouldn't be rushed and we spent a good three hours here walking the length of the site and enjoying another excellent interpretive talk from Tolga. It proved to be an exciting site for birds too and in the course of our walk we had great views of Finsch's and Black-eared Wheatears, Masked and Woodchat Shrikes, Cirl and Ortolan Buntings, Rock Nuthatch, Blue Rock Thrush, European Serin, Long-legged Buzzard and a good deal more. At the end of it all, tired but satisfied, we drove the short distance back into Pamukkale and our hotel for the next couple of nights.

Day 6

Thursday 27th April

Overcast, cool and showery at first, becoming sunny with scattered cloud. Breezy.

After breakfast we set off in the bus again around the city of Denizli to the Acigol salt lake. A couple of short stops on the wide open steppe by the vast dry salt flats of the lakebed produced singing Calandra, Short-toed and Crested Larks, displaying Isabelline Wheatears, a Short-toed Eagle and a surprise Egyptian Vulture. As the weather improved, we continued around the lake to a craggy maquis and pine covered escarpment. Here, at the interface between the scrubby slope and the farmland leading down to the salt flats we had a grand old time. It was a beautiful place, and the birding was sensational. Highlights included White-throated Robin, Red-fronted Serin, Cretzschmar's and Ortolan Buntings, Black-eared Wheatear, Orphean and Ruppell's Warblers, Masked Shrike and Spanish Sparrow – not bad!

We ate lunch at a diner at Gokoek then continued on across some fine rolling steppe country with occasional Long-legged Buzzards and Short-toed Eagles to Isikli Golu, a large freshwater lake. Along the shallow shore here we enjoyed a glorious avian spectacle. A veritable throng of birds included masses of Whiskered Terns, a flock of Spoonbills, 20 or more Squacco Herons, dozens of Coots and Great-crested Grebes, several Black-necked Grebes and a good scattering of Black-winged Stilts. Further scrutiny produced various other bits and pieces including a few Slender-billed Gulls, a Collared Pratincole, a Marsh and two Wood Sandpipers and a couple of Little Stints.

Meanwhile, Marsh Harriers quartered over distant reedbeds and the airspace over the lake was full of Barn Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins. It was a lot to take in! A short walk through the willows and poplars that lined the shore added to the bonanza with Collared and Spotted Flycatchers, a fleeting Common Nightingale, a Red-backed Shrike and two diminutive Penduline Tits. Thoroughly satisfied we made our way back to the bus and so to Pamukkale, our hotel and dinner.

Day 7 Friday 28th April

Sunny and mild with scattered cloud low down; foggy, cold and windy high up.

We departed form Pamukkale shortly after breakfast just as a large flock of hot air balloons made their sedate progress across the clear blue sky. We drove for an hour or so, climbing in the latter stages through some lovely scenery, up to the village of Babadag on the slopes of the mountain of the same name. We made a first stop just beyond the village where gardens and orchards met montane pine forest. Eurasian Nuthatch, Green Woodpecker, Chiffchaff and Chaffinch were all audible as we got out of the bus and almost immediately we found our top target, Krüper's Nuthatch. There were a pair of them and they showed very well for everyone, foraging their way through the flowers and cones on the pines around us. We were hardly done with these delightful little fellows when a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker appeared close at hand and then we noticed a Goshawk soaring over the forest above us – pretty good!

Driving on up to the top of the mountain ridge, well above the treeline, we found ourselves in thick cloud and facing a bitter wind. The trees were covered with an impressive coating of ice but this was no place for us so we dropped back down a little. A small break in the clouds allowed the hardy few to explore for a while and we found a pair of Northern Wheatears a couple of Mistle Thrushes and two Tawny Pipits. Dropping down further, back into welcome sunshine, we concluded the morning with a walk down the road through some very nice pine forest where we saw several Jays, another Krüper's Nuthatch and a Balkan Green Lizard and heard a Golden Oriole fluting away from somewhere deep amongst the trees.

We drove back down through Babadag, ate lunch at a restaurant in Geyre and then continued through the afternoon to Selcuk. We arrived back at our familiar hotel in time to settle in and enjoy a bit of free time before dinner. Some went to the castle, others to the museum and some just chilled at the hotel. Leastways, a good time was had by all and we reconvened a little later for a last dinner together.

Day 8 Saturday 29th April

Sunny in the morning, sunny with scattered cloud in the afternoon. Warm but with a cool breeze.

After breakfast we took our leave and headed back down to the Little Meandros river delta. We made a series of short stops during the course of the morning. At one, amongst olive groves overlooking a couple of lakes we saw a Turtle Dove and a distant Marsh Harrier and, with a little stone turning, found a series of rather menacing Scolopendra centipedes. At another, a viewpoint overlooking the delta, we enjoyed the wonderful flower rich grassland at our feet, saw a distant Purple Heron and watched a male Woodchat Shrike feed his mate then chase off a rival male. Finally, at a spot that we had visited at the end of our first day, looking out over an area of open

water with scattered Tamarisks, we saw Black-winged Stilts, Ruffs, Spur-winged Plovers, Ferruginous Ducks, another Purple Heron and eight superb White-winged Terns.

From here we drove north along the coast, stopping for lunch at a restaurant in the seaside town of Urkmez. Post lunch we drove inland a little and up into the hills to a "Nature Centre" in the village of Orhanli. Here we heard about the various local conservation projects that the centre is involved with and enjoyed a last bit of Turkish birding. Highlights included a pair of Sombre Tits carrying food to a nest in a hole in an old Olive tree, several singing Sardinian Warblers, a Spotted Flycatcher, a male Golden Oriole (Yes!) and, best of all, a pair of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers. Great sightings right to the end!

An hour or so later we were back at Izmir airport and checking in for our evening flight back to the UK. Everything went smoothly and we arrived at Gatwick on time several hours later. It had been a great week!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

	April 2023								
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna					100			
Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea	30	15	20	6			15	
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	2				2		5	
Ferruginous Duck	Aythya nyroca	1						4	
Chukar Partridge	Alectoris chukar					h			
Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba		8						
Common Swift	Apus apus	25	3		50	20	5	3	
Pallid Swift	Apus pallidus							3	
Great Spotted Cuckoo	Clamator glandarius			2					
Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus		1h		1				
(Feral) Rock Dove	Columba livia	2	6			2		2	
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	7					3	10	
European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur		10		4			1	
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	20	20	20	30	25	15	15	
Laughing Dove	Spilopelia senegalensis		5				1	1	
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus				1				
Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	10	10	30		100		10	
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis						2		
Black-necked Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis					10			
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus			10		30			
Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus	40	30			50			
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	20		1		20		30	
Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta					50			
Spur-winged Lapwing	Vanellus spinosus	4			1	3		4	
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius			1					
Eurasian Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus		6						
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata		4						
Ruff	Calidris pugnax	2						100	
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	7						1	
Little Stint	Calidris minuta					2			
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos		2	3	1	1			
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus		1h						
Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis					1			
Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	10				2			
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	1h						1	
Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola					1			
Slender-billed Gull	Chroicocephalus genei					50			
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus					3			
Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii	1							
Mediterranean Gull	Ichthyaetus melanocephalus		h	4	###			250	
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	20	30	25	20			10	
Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica				1				

		April 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia		1						
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo		30	25	10	3			
Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida					100' s		1	
White-winged Tern	Chlidonias leucopterus							8	
Yelkouan Shearwater	Puffinus yelkouan	750							
Scopoli's Shearwater	Calonectris diomedea	2							
Black Stork	Ciconia nigra	2			3	2			
White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	20	25	2	6	12	15	6	
Pygmy Cormorant	Microcarbo pygmaeus	8	20	50	100	2		4	
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	20	15	100	100	10		20	
European Shag	Gulosus aristotelis	10							
Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	50				2			
Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia					30			
Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax					1			
Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides	1			1	20		3	
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		10	8	15	10			
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea							2	
Great Egret	Ardea alba	1			15	2		2	
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	8	7	8	12	5		8	
Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis		2	10	20				
Dalmatian Pelican	Pelecanus crispus		20	12	220			1	
Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus					1			
Short-toed Snake Eagle	Circaetus gallicus	2	3		2	3	2		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus	1							
Northern Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis						2		
Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	1	1	1	2	7	2	3	
White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla		1	1					
Long-legged Buzzard	Buteo rufinus		2		2	7	2	1	
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	2					1	1	
Tawny Owl	Tyto alba		1h						
Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops	1	3		1	2		1	
European Roller	Coracias garrulus		1		1				
European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster		25	h	20				
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocoptes medius							2	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Dryobates minor						1		
Syrian Woodpecker	Dendrocopos syriacus	2			2	2	1h	1h	
European Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis						1h		
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	1	1			3	2		
Red-footed Falcon	Falco vespertinus		2						
Red-backed Shrike	Lanius collurio	1	1	1		1			
Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator		4	1	2	3		3	
Masked Shrike	Lanius nubicus		1	4	2	3		1	
Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus				1		1h	1	
Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius	12	2	10	5		6	10	
Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	4	6	3	4	30	15	5	

		April 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Red-billed Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax				3				
Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	20	30	40	30		25	20	
Rook	Corvus frugilegus					6			
Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix	15	15	15	15	15	5	10	
Northern Raven	Corvus corax	1	1	1		5		1	
Coal Tit	Periparus ater		1h				1		
Sombre Tit	Poecile lugubris			6	5			2	
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	4			2			2	
Great Tit	Parus major	6	8	15	12	2	6	6	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	Remiz pendulinus					2			
Woodlark	Lullula arborea						2		
Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis					1			
Crested Lark	Galerida cristata		15	8	20	25	5	8	
Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla		1h			5			
Calandra Lark	Melanocorypha calandra					20			
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	5	5		5	50+		100	
								+	
Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris					1			
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	100'	100	50	50	100' s	50	25	
Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	100	50		50	100'	50	25	
Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	50	30	50	30	s 2	5	12	
							3		
Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	1+2 h	4h	3h	2h	2h		1h	
Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus	1				2			
Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix				1				
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita						2h		
Great Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus			3+2					
Eurasian Reed Warbler	A are control to a cirro cour		3+2	h 1+2				2h	
Eurasian Reed Warbier	Acrocephalus scirpaceus		3+2 h	1+∠ h				Zn	
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	Iduna pallida	2+3		5	2h				
Olive-tree Warbler	Hippolais olivetorum	h		1				1h	
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis		1	'				1h	
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	1	'			3		- '''	
Lesser Whitethroat		<u>'</u>		2		2			
	Curruca curruca								
Eastern Orphean Warbler	Curruca crassirostris		O.L.	0.0		1	OI-		
Rüppell's Warbler	Curruca ruppeli		3h	2+2 h		1	2h		
Sardinian Warbler	Curruca melanocephala		1h	1	2h			2+4	
Eastern Subalpine Warbler	Curruca cantillans	2+4						h	
•	Curruca caritillaris	h							
Common Whitethroat	Curruca communis		1		1h				
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	1h							
Krüper's Nuthatch	Sitta krueperi						5		
Western Rock Nuthatch	Sitta neumayer		2	3	2				
Eurasian Nuthatch	Sitta europaea				1		1		
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	1			1	5			

Common name		April 2023							
	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus				1		2		
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos						1		
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	10	15	5	10	2	10	5	
Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata				1	1		1	
European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	1+2 h							
Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos			1		1	1h		
White-throated Robin	Irania gutturalis					3			
European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca	1		1					
Collared Flycatcher	Ficedula albicollis					2			
Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius				2	1			
Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra	1	2	8	6				
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe	1					2		
Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe isabellina					5			
Eastern Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe melanoleuca	2	1		5	6		1	
Finsch's Wheatear	Oenanthe finschii				7				
Spanish Sparrow	Passer hispaniolensis	5	10	30	10	10			
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	20	20	50	50	50	30	40	
Black-headed Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava feldegg		1			2			
White Wagtail	Motacilla alba	3	3	4	4	1		1	
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea						2		
Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris						4		
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis				2				
Red-throated Pipit	Anthus cervinus				8				
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	12	4		2	2	5		
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	4			30	10	10		
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina					1			
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		15	15	20	15	10	5	
Red-fronted Serin	Serinus pusillus					2			
European Serin	Serinus serinus				1	5	2		
Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	1	5	5	15	15	h		
Ortolan Bunting	Emberiza hortulana				10	1			
Cretzschmar's Bunting	Emberiza caesia					4			
Cirl Bunting	Emberiza cirlus		1h	1h	2+1	1+1			

Mammals: Wild Boar, Persian Squirrel and Brown Hare.

Reptiles: Caspian Terrapin, Spur-thighed Tortoise, Starred Agama, Wall Lizard sp., Balkan Green Lizard and Dice Snake. Butterflies included: Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Eastern Festoon, Large White, Small White, Eastern Bath White, Clouded Yellow, Brown Argus, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown and Mallow Skipper.

Other notable Taxa: Mole Cricket, Field Cricket, Egyptian Grasshopper, Spoon-tailed Lacewing, Carpenter Bee, Common Hornet, Garden Chafer, Scolopendra Centipede and Roman Snail.