



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT SOUTHERN CYPRUS 26TH MARCH – 2ND APRIL 2018

www.oriolebirding.com

oriolebirding@gmail.com

[twitter](#) 

MONDAY 26TH MARCH – Moderate Easterly breeze and hazy sunshine, 20C

Our flight departed London Gatwick roughly on time today for the 4.5hr run down to Paphos, where we landed around 1420 local time. The airport transition was painless, and we were soon making the short transfer to our hotel nearby in the beautiful Dhiarizos Valley. After a welcome drink and check in, we took half an hour or so to sort out our gear ready for our first birding session of the trip at Mandria. As we were putting our stuff into the vehicles, we enjoyed some of the lovely male **Spanish Sparrows** which were busy nest building in the garden. Mandria is an excellent area of agricultural fields and stony open ground by the coast is a haven for pipits, larks and wagtails, and we weren't disappointed in our short visit this afternoon. We pulled up alongside a field full of **Yellow Wagtails**, which were feeding close to the road in fantastic afternoon light. **Black-headed Wagtail** was most numerous, but we could see several other options were also present and so opted to park up and take a look with the scopes. The light was really lovely, and we could enjoy the throaty, rasping calls of the *feldegg* amid the sweeter tones of one or two **Blue-headed Wagtails**, race *flava*. Careful scanning also picked out one or two birds with dark heads and white supercilia, most likely intergrades of some kind, often referred to as *dombrowskii*. We also saw a fine male **Grey-headed Wagtail** race *thunbergi* – a lot to take in! The views of the birds were really superb, and several of them ended up working their way towards us and right out onto the road. The same field held a brace of Northern Wheatears, and we had the 'zip-zip' of **Zitting Cisticola** for company.



Isabelline Wheatear – a common migrant during the first half of the tour

Moving down to the coast, we followed the track east and carefully checked the stony fields just up from the shore. A flock of **Short-toed Larks** wheeled in and vanished among the pebbles, and a sandy **Isabelline Wheatear** sat typically pear-shaped on the top of the low scrub. We needed to get out again! Great scope views of at least half a dozen **Isabelline Wheatears** were enjoyed in this area, and

the **Short-toed Lark** flock actually numbered about 25 birds, maybe more. The highlight of the afternoon was provided by a stonking male **Pallid Harrier** which swept through and sent them all skyward, before doubling back and hunting the mustard field in front of us. Again the light was magnificent – what a bird! Three **Tawny Pipits** were then picked out among the stony ground between this and the next field, where a couple of Crested Larks were also seen. A **Mediterranean Shag** of the race *desmarestii* was off the beach, and we also noted a few hirundines and Sardinian Warbler to round off a very exciting start to the trip.

TUESDAY 27TH MARCH – *Sunny and warm with light NW winds, 24C*

We headed down into the Dhiarizos valley behind the hotel this morning for a pre-breakfast walk, and were surprised at how cold it was! The birds thought so too and with a brisk north wind it was pretty quiet. We did have our first **Cyprus Pied Wheatear** of the trip though, with a male and female seen, and picked up Blackcap and Sardinian Warbler in the scrub. After breakfast, our destination would be Paphos Headland, and great location for newly arrived migrant birds only twenty minutes from our accommodation. We started on the coastal cycle track, and the area was absolutely heaving with **Yellow Wagtails**! There were two flocks here of over three hundred birds each, and occasionally they would all merge together into one whirling mass, settling on the bushes and low vegetation in droves. As we slowly walked along the track at the top of the beach, we could constantly observe stunning **Black-headed** and **Blue-headed Wagtails** at close range. The birds were predominantly these two races, but we did also have a nice example of *superciliaris* too.



Red-throated Pipit – one of many seen along the coast at Paphos this morning

The highlight though was at least a dozen **Red-throated Pipits**, ranging from scruffy, streaky birds to full breeding plumage with terracotta red bibs. It was great to hear their high pitched drawn out calls each time they moved ahead of us too. They were surprisingly confiding at times, allowing careful approach to within a couple of metres – awesome birds! Crested Larks were also common here, and we picked up both **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Hoopoe** coming in off the sea. A flock of **Garganey** heading north offshore, we more distant. The first **Isabelline Wheatear** of the day was seen as we began to head back along the cycle track, and we marvelled again at the swirls of wagtails over the grassland of the lighthouse area.



Yellow Wagtail of the race *superciliaris*, Paphos Headland 27th March

The mosaics would be our next stop, so that we could explore the headland more thoroughly for any grounded migrants. Another **Red-rumped Swallow** moved over with Common Swifts as we headed up the steps, and soon we were enjoying close views of the first of many Sardinian Warblers. Once again, there were unbelievable numbers of **Black-headed Wagtails** here, carpeting the track ahead of us and flying up from the grass like flocks of sparrows! A Green Sandpiper called as it flew over us, and then a nice surprise came in the form of a **Short-eared Owl** floating in over the headland. We saw this bird four or five times during the morning, circling over and looking for somewhere to drop in. In the centre of the archeological site, we found a male **Eastern Subalpine Warbler** and spent some time observing the subtleties of a female **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**. The male soon appeared, and was a lot more dazzling! Jason saw a Common Quail which the rest of us missed, and another **Hoopoe** flew in off the sea and up across the head. Reaching the lighthouse, we found the male **Black-eared Wheatear** again and had some better views, before we were stopped in our tracks by a single call of a Bee-eater. It didn't sound quite right for European, and we were already thinking Blue-cheeked before we saw it. The views, however, were not conclusive as it was a distant black silhouette in the sky and it didn't call again. We decided to lunch here, scanning over the sea, in the vain hope it might double back and pass over again, as diurnal migrants often do here. Just as we were finishing lunch, we heard the bird call again and this time we were sure it was a **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** – a more rippling and less melodic call than European. The bird wheeled into view much closer and passed the

lighthouse in decent light, showing its uniform green upperparts and dusty orange underwings. We had some scope views of it on and off over the next hour, though it would disappear for long periods before returning. Heading out along the northern edge of the site, we found a male **Cretzchmar's Bunting** skulking in a small grassy field, and picked up a few Lesser Whitethroats. We arrived back at the car park about 2pm, in the heat of day, and decided it was time to head somewhere shady for a coffee!

Stopping at Mandria, we had a coffee stop before heading back to the main road and along to Asprokremnos Dam. The normal way in was blocked due to soft wet mud left over from recent flooding, but we found another track in from the east side and parked up just below the dam. Our main target here was **Cyprus Warbler**, and we had no trouble locating a pair among the bushes on the hillside. With patience, we pieced together some excellent views of both the female and the male, who was busy nest building and so frequently returning to the same perches. A **Chukar** was also seen here, and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk flew over. With the warbler nicely in the bag, we decided to end the day as we had done yesterday, with a drive round the coastal fields at Mandria. This proved to be a good choice, as we pulled up at the small parking area by the coast to find a lovely Cyprus Pied Wheatear. Another British birder then told us that there was a Richard's Pipit in the adjacent field, and we quickly located the bird feeding among **Isabelline Wheatear** and a flock of **Short-toed Larks**. We could see its lightly streaked breast, boldly streaked crown and mantle, pale lores and dark malar patch ruling out the similar **Tawny Pipit**. The bird soon flew though, and we thought that would be the last we saw of it. Half an hour later, a large pipit flew back in – a pale, sandy **Tawny Pipit**. We then realised that it was now with the Richard's Pipit again and we watched the two birds side by side for comparison. The Richard's flew, passing right overhead, but alarm bells began to ring as the bird delivered a series of clipped, 'chup chup' notes more reminiscent of **Blyth's Pipit**!



Blyth's Pipit at Mandria – the 3rd record for Cyprus

We saw where the bird landed, and quickly relocated it and concentrated on some better views. We could now take in the compact structure, with relatively short tail and short bill. We watched the

bird carefully as it moved around feeding, constantly pumping its tail, until it eventually perched on a rock revealing its hind claw – it was notably short, another pro-feature for Blyth's. We knew we had to get a sound recording, and so having had good views and secured some photos, we opted to flush it with the recorder running in order to capture its flight call again. As last time, it delivered a short 'schreep' on take off followed by a series of five 'chup' notes as it bounded off – quite unlike the typical drawn out sparrow like 'schreep' of Richard's Pipit. This would represent an extremely rare record, so we are keen to examine the sonogram of the calls and images carefully and of course hope that it remains for other people to search for it tomorrow.

*Footnote – the images and sound recording proved beyond doubt that this was indeed a Blyth's Pipit, the 3rd record for Cyprus.

WEDNESDAY 28TH MARCH – *Overcast with moderate south-west winds, 18C*

Another cracking days birding today saw us head east towards the Akrotiri peninsula. En route, we called in at Melanda beach to check the area for grounded migrants, and to get a general feel for if anything was happening. This is a lovely unspoilt part of the coastline, and we meandered down through vines and olives to the beach bar there and then went on foot to explore the fields and scrub by the coastal track. A fine male **Cyprus Pied Wheatear** showed well, and a male **Woodchat Shrike** was perching up on the bushes around the adjacent field margins. We could hear **Black Francolin** calling, so continued up the track in order to get a bit more height to scan for it. The stubble field by the shore here was full of about fifty Yellow Wagtails, including *feldegg*, *thunbergi* and *flava*. Along the top edge of the field, we had a good view down along the edge of a barley crop and now we could see the male **Black Francolin**, standing in the open. Some people managed a quick view through the scope before it disappeared. The cistus scrub on the hillside here hosted another pair of **Cyprus Warblers**, and we had particularly good views of the female, noting the dark chevrons on the underside reminiscent of the pattern seen on the male. Offshore, a small group of **Garganey** bustled by close inshore, and we had more great views of the **Woodchat Shrike** again on the walk back.



Desert Wheatear at Melanda Beach – a scarce passage migrant

We were almost back at the vans, when we spotted a wheatear on the beach – they are all worth checking in Cyprus, and this one turned out to be a superb female **Desert Wheatear**! We moved

down onto the beach, knowing it would probably let us get close, and sure enough we had the bird running around at really close range. Our rather excellent start to the day was compounded when a superb ringtail **Pallid Harrier** drifted along the ridge ahead of us as we left the area, hanging on the breeze and hunting as it moved along a small escarpment.

Reaching the Akrotiri peninsula, we took the road along by Phassouri reedbeds and stopped by the new hide. A **Squacco Heron** was seen well here, along with a few new trip birds such as Common Coot and Little Grebe. A fine drake **Garganey** was sleeping among the reeds, and a **Water Pipit** flew over calling and dropped in. Despite a fair bit of water here though, there weren't too many birds, so we continued on. Some of the group had a good view of a calling male **Black Francolin** perched on some hay bales here, but it had slinked away again by the time the rest of us reached it. A really productive stop by the roadside further on overlooking some flooded grassland produced nine **Glossy Ibis** and a wealth of Little Egrets and Ruffs. Among these, we found singles of Green Sandpiper, **Wood Sandpiper**, Common Greenshank and Little-ringed Plover, plus a really interesting female eastern type **White Wagtail** with black eyestripe [see footnote]. The **Black Francolin** gave himself up to, returning to the top of the same pile of straw and calling in the open, and two **Red-throated Pipits** dropped in with a **Water Pipit** for company!

Akrotiri gravel pits were our lunch stop, and it was quite windy and cool here. Nevertheless a walk south to the old pits and back along the beach proved productive, with a flock of five confiding **Tawny Pipits** in the dunes and our first **Whinchat** of the trip. **Isabelline Wheatear** was also frequent here, and offshore, a flock of fifty or so **Garganey** flew by. We retraced our route back out towards the tarmac road, noting another **Black Francolin**, Hoopoe and a couple of Serins, before we reached the margins of the salt lake visible distantly to the east. **Greater Flamingo** could be seen here, with around three hundred present, including the amazing looking partial melanistic bird with all black body but pink head! Nearby at the chapel of St George, we found a calling **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**, and on the outskirts of the town nearby, a female **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Tawny Pipit from Akrotiri today

The day was wearing on as we rounded the south end of the salt lake and headed north along Lady's Mile. The lagoons here were disappointing, being too full with water, but we did have nice views of a

few **Kentish Plovers**. At the north end, we spotted a **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** on some wires, and stopped to scope the bird distantly. Once we were set up, we realised there were in fact six birds – we had to get some closer views! Fortunately a track ran around the far side of the lagoons and took us right up to them, and they were not bothered by us at all. We spent a glorious half hour watching them sally out for insects over our heads, returning each time to the wires and calling. What absolutely brilliant birds! A flock of **Short-toed Larks** and two **Red-throated Pipits** were relegated to the ‘also’ category! As we drove back out along the track, a Sylvia warbler flew past the vehicles and into a tamarisk – a stonking male **Ruppell’s Warbler**! We bailed out and got some ace views of this most wanted warbler, and also bagged a Common Kingfisher to boot! It was [very belated!] coffee time in the nearby Oasis bar, before our final birding of the day at Zakaki. This once excellent spot is now totally overgrown, but we found both Sedge and Reed Warblers, an assortment of Yellow Wagtails, Cetti’s Warbler, a few Lesser Whitethroats and best of all, a pair of **Penduline Tits**. These lovely birds were collecting nest material from the fluffy flower heads of a tamarisk, and gave some really decent views – a nice end to a very productive day!

Footnote – following research, we have confirmed that the interesting White Wagtail at Phassouri reedbeds was in fact the second record of the East Siberian White Wagtail, ssp. *Ocularis* for the Western Palearctic. An incredibly rare bird and a spectacular record for Cyprus!



The black eyestripe and extensive white in the coverts set this bird apart from the rest!

THURSDAY 29TH MARCH – *Cloudy with a fresh North-east wind, heavy rain showers, 17C*

We thought it would be impossible to top the last two days of epic birding, but we were wrong! With heavy overnight rain and a stiff wind blowing off the sea, we headed to Paphos headland this morning with some anticipation! As we made our way up the steps into the mosaics, an absolutely fabulous male **Pallid Harrier** drifted right past us, flushing up flocks of Yellow Wagtails – it was going to be a good morning! We saw the harrier again several times, as it seemed to prefer to linger around the headland in hunting mode, rather than continuing on its way with the inclement weather. Around the mosaics, we found the odd Northern and **Isabelline Wheatear**, while probably the same female **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** was in the central part of the ruins. Otherwise though, the area was rather quieter than expected, with no warblers seen other than the resident Sardinian Warblers. As we neared the lighthouse, we could see a small group of birders down by the amphitheatre, and they began waving us over – they had something good! We reached them as quick as we could and were soon staring at a beautiful male **Rock Thrush** – what a bird!



Rock Thrush at Paphos headland – one of the highlights of the trip

It was rather confiding too, perching on the boulders by the path preening, and occasionally dropping down to feed on the grass. At one point, we had it in the same view as a **Black-eared Wheatear** and a male **Whinchat**! After having our fill, we headed along to the inland side and found a male **Woodchat Shrike** sitting quietly in the open. There were a few Blackcaps and Lesser Whitethroats in the bushes, but no sign of a reported 'flock' of Wood Warblers seen by another birder. Looping round and back out up the grove of big wattle trees, we did find a few Willow Warblers but nothing more.

With showers forecast throughout the day, we decided to head north for lunch in the hope that migrant birds could be held up on the coast around the Baths of Aphrodite. We stopped on the way at Smiyies picnic site, and lunched in the company of nesting **European Serins**, and a gorgeous singing male **Cyprus Pied Wheatear**. We met another group of birders who had just come from the caravan site at the baths, and reported a Collared Flycatcher there and plenty of common migrants, so we made haste! Arriving at the main car park, a big shower had passed over and it was now sunny and warm – perfect for checking the sheltered grove of eucalyptus towards the caravan park. We peered down into the gully, and almost right away a *ficedula* flycatcher appeared briefly in front of us before shooting off down towards the sea. We couldn't relocate it at first, but returning to check the original spot again we found it back on the same bushes. Expecting the reported Collared, we were surprised

and a little excited to see it had a black nape and grabbed the scopes for a better look. A prominent white primary covert patch reaching towards the wing edge, white tipped median coverts, semi-collar and extensive white reaching around the tips of the tail feathers meant only one thing – it was a male **Semi-collared Flycatcher**! The bird performed wonderfully in the sunshine, allowing for good scope views all round and photos. A **Wood Warbler** appeared briefly in the same group of trees, and a **Wryneck** popped up in a carob tree behind us – we needed to check the rest of the caravan park! Wandering around slowly, we found the place to be dripping in birds.



Collared [left] and Semi-collared Flycatchers, Baths of Aphrodite 29th March

Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap and **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** were common, another beautiful **Wood Warbler** showed well and **Tree Pipits** were coming up from the grass in small groups. Another black and white flycatcher popped out in front of us – a male **Collared Flycatcher**! What a great comparison! In trying to relocate it, we found it in the company of a second bird, but they were really flighty and we struggled to get everyone decent views. We moved a little bit further down towards the cliff, and flushed another **Wryneck** which perched nicely in an olive tree for us. When we looked through the scope, we realised there was a second one sitting next to it! One dropped to the ground, and fed next to an **Isabelline Wheatear** and Common Whitethroat, while a third male **Collared Flycatcher** flicked up and perched on a washing line – this was nuts! We literally didn't know where to look! Stepping forward, five **Tree Pipits** exploded out of the grass and the **Collared Flycatcher** count ended on five birds minimum plus another bird which was either Pied or Semi-collared, but which wouldn't quite give itself up. All the time we were watching these birds, **Red-rumped Swallows** were flying low overhead and at one point, fifteen **Alpine Swifts** appeared over the mountain and swooped low over us and over the sea. We saw a **Pallid Swift** too, looking perfectly sandy in the perfect light against the blue sky. Our final bird here was a male **Common Redstart**, which posed nicely for us as we headed back to the car park. The **Semi-collared Flycatcher** was still present too, and perched for one more scope view. A coffee overlooking the Med followed by a very nice celebratory ice cream before we made the hour long trip back to base.

FRIDAY 30TH MARCH – *Sunny spells and a moderate westerly wind, 16C*

A quieter day today and our longest day of travel as we headed east to the area around Larnaca. First stop was the area of bushes and scrub below Kiti dam, a good area for migrant passerines in the right conditions. We arrived to find a number of Common Swifts feeding low in the stiff breeze, and a single **Pallid Swift** was among them. The reservoir here has been dry for years, but in the dusty basin we saw two **Hoopoe**, and a female **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**. A raucous call alerted us to the presence of two **Great-spotted Cuckoos**, and we saw them briefly chasing each other into the dense area of trees below the dam. Taking a walk around to the far side, a ringtail **Pallid Harrier** cruised over the barley fields, as we tried to find an angle where we might be able to refind the cuckoos again. We could hear them calling again among the taller eucalyptus, but they wouldn't show themselves. We decided the best tactic was just to wander quietly round among the scrub and hope we chanced on one perched, and in doing so we had superb views of a migrant **Wood Warbler**, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat and **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler**. Eventually a **Great-spotted Cuckoo** gave itself up and perched out on an open branch for everyone to get a long scope view – amazingly one of three different birds present at this small site, testament to the good numbers of Common Magpie also present!

Just a short drive away, we reached the airport lagoons on the south-west side of Larnaca, and pulled over to give them a scan for waterbirds. We found singles of **Black-winged Stilt** and **Glossy Ibis**, plus a small group of **Greater Flamingo**, but otherwise the first couple of lagoons were pretty quiet. The tower hide overlooking the two water treatment ponds was much more productive, and we ended up staying here for a while and having lunch. A male **Spectacled Warbler** showed really nicely along the entrance track, and though he was too quick for scope views, the light was excellent and the bird was pretty close, so binocular views were decent enough! We could hear our first **Spur-winged Plovers** calling as we approached the hide, and saw them mobbing the local Hooded Crows. There were probably up to a dozen present here, and clearly breeding, so we had lots more good views of them. From the hide, two **Ferruginous Ducks** looked superb in the sunshine, in company with a full breeding plumage **Black-necked Grebe**. We saw two more of the latter, a mixed flock of Shoveler, Common Teal and **Garganey**, two Green Sandpipers, two Ruff and a nice mixed flock of Yellow and White Wagtails. A productive spot, despite its unprepossessing location with aeroplanes thundering down Larnaca runway just the other side of the fence! Nearby Spiro's Pool was disappointing, hosting only a few **Kentish Plovers**, but we did get decent views [in the scope this time!] of another male **Spectacled Warbler** and some of the group saw a male **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear**.

Next we headed back to the motorway and round to the east side of Larnaca, to visit the excellent Oroklini Marsh. From the main tower hide, we enjoyed the bustling **Cattle Egret** colony, and close views of **Greater Flamingoes**. The water levels were pretty high, but there were still lots of **Black-winged Stilts**, singles of Common Redshank and Common Snipe, five more **Ferruginous Ducks** and a drake **Red Crested Pochard**. We also added a single female Pintail to the list, and a pair of superb **Garganey** were in nice light, feeding in the shallows close to the hide. **Spur-winged Plovers** had colonised here too, with several individuals seen in this area, and a party of five **Glossy Ibis** circled a few times before dropping into the marsh out of view. After a coffee stop, we visited the second hide, and had more of the same plus a Steppe Buzzard, and three more **Red Crested Pochards** including two very smart drakes. With the afternoon wearing on, we decided to start making our way back to base from here, with one brief stop on the way. This was at Episkopi, to scan the chalk cliffs for Griffon Vulture which are often found here. We didn't see any, but did have a nice fly by from two **Alpine Swifts** instead. A more challenging day, but still with some nice highlights thrown in. Just before dinner, as it was getting dark, we enjoyed superb views of the local **Cyprus Scop's Owl** in the big carob tree by the parking area.



Everyone enjoyed brilliant views of the Cyprus Scops

SATURDAY 31ST MARCH – *A warm day in light winds and sunshine, 22C*

We headed down to Mandria this morning after breakfast, a productive site for migrants which had been very kind to us on the trip so far. We weren't to be disappointed, as virtually the first bird we saw on the beach as we headed along the coastal track, was an absolutely stonking 2cy male **Greater Sand Plover**! The light was phenomenal, and the bird clearly just resting after its long sea crossing, so we were able to happily get out and scope it down to about thirty metres range. What a cracking bird! In the field behind, things were a little quieter than in previous visits, but we still saw five **Tawny Pipits**, eight **Short-toed Larks**, a couple of Northern Wheatears and an obliging **Zitting Cisticola**. Offshore, we had really nice views of both adult and second year **Mediterranean Shag** of the race *desmarestii* – the adult sporting and all yellow bill and the youngster and extensive white breast and belly.



Greater Sand Plover, Mandria 31st March

Moving on, we checked the Paphos sewage works area but the fields were very quiet apart from a single Spur-winged Plover. So we continued to Asprokremnos Dam, to check the small pine copse for passerine migrants. Initially it seemed quiet, but actually by wandering quietly around we notched up a fair few birds – two **Eastern Bonelli's Warblers** including one very showy bird in song, two Willow Warblers, Common Chiffchaff, **Hoopoe**, two Tree Pipits and a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk. It was actually really warm here in the sun now too, so time to top up with sun cream before moving on to our lunch stop at Nata ford. This proved to be an excellent location, with a pair of **Little-ringed Plovers** and Common Snipe close to the bridge, and a **Water Pipit** buzzing about. Black Francolin was calling throughout our lunch stop, and a pair of **Red-rumped Swallows** were prospecting the bridge for nesting. Another migrant **Woodchat Shrike** was seen, plus a male Spanish Sparrow, and singles of Keeled Skimmer, Scarlet Darter and Lesser Fiery-copper added non avian interest. The money shot came as we were pulling away though, as a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** came cruising in low across the river! We bundled out of the vans to watch these impressive raptors circle right in front of us, before one plunged dramatically into the field where the francolin had been calling! It didn't make a kill, and the two birds continued to soar above us before drifting slowly away to the west – unbelievable!

For the afternoon, we wound our way up through the foothills to the Troodos Mountains, towards the village of Troodos itself which sits around at around 1600 metres. On the way, we had two sightings of **Long-legged Buzzards** – the first a brief view of three birds tussling above a ridge beside the road, and the second a closer and much longer view of a pair soaring quite close by. We still hoped we might get some more prolonged views at some point, but for now this was more than acceptable. It was pleasant and sunny despite the altitude, and after a welcome coffee we set about searching for the endemic subspecies present here. The **Cyprus Coal Tit** *cypriotes* gave itself up with ease, being common around the main car park, and the Cypriot race of **Eurasian Jay** *glaszneri* was also easy to observe in the pine trees close by. Taking a wander around the area, we also found the distinctive race of **Short-toed Treecreeper** *dorothaeae* – much paler and frostier, and with a different song – and had a couple of flyover **Common Crossbills** of the race *guillemardi*. Having seen all the

endemic subspecies, we decided that with a weary group, we would make our way back down the mountain to base – it had been quite a tiring day!

SUNDAY 1ST APRIL – *Hot and sunny under blue skies, no wind, 25C*

We learnt today what a big effect the weather has on migration, if we didn't already know! A hot day with clear skies meant total clear out of migrant birds and virtually no visible migration to speak of at all – quite a contrast! We were fortunately in the good position of being able to relax a bit today anyway, since we had succeeded with most of our targets and really only had a couple of spots to check out which we had not yet visited, on the coast north of Paphos. Heading through the town and up towards Cape Drepanum, we made an impromptu roadside stop in the suburbs as a **Laughing Dove** flew right across the road in front of us! We made a U-turn, and found two pairs singing, mating and nest building at the edge of some houses – quite unexpected! It seems their northward spread from Africa has seen them gradually colonise Cyprus in the last few years, and they are now a regular occurrence. Down on the cape, it was already really hot, but we scoped a **Peregrine** sitting among the Yellow-legged Gull colony on Yeronissos Island, and found a surprise **Little Stint** feeding around a muddy puddle behind the beach. There were a few Yellow Wagtails about, two **Red-rumped Swallows**, and a few Bath White and Swallowtail butterflies. Nearby along the coastal track towards Avakas Gorge, we struggled to see anything of note, though a **Mediterranean Shag** was on the rocks and a single **Steppe Buzzard** drifted north.

Heading inland, we wanted to check a **Long-legged Buzzard** territory near Kathikas. Stopping in a convenient layby to scan the gorge, we found one of the adults soaring high above, its bright white tail base flashing in the sun. We drove further up to a closer vantage point, and made use of the verandah of the café there overlooking the gorge. A second, darker adult appeared, and we had good scope views as it drifted in and began soaring low down in the valley. Sardinian Warblers were all around here, and we had a nice sighting of **Cyprus Pied Wheatear** too. It was time to find a lunch stop next, and we had in mind to explore the area known as Anarita park to look for open country birds. Lunch was in the warm sunshine with plenty of butterflies around, but not many birds other than a pair of Corn Buntings feeding young. A superb young male **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** of the white-throated form was seen as we headed back out of the valley though, and then we found a group of kestrels hunting along the grassy ridge above us. Any 'flock' of kestrels is always most likely to be the gregarious **Lesser Kestrel** moving through, and sure enough we could see the birds were notably pale below with 'dusky' tips to their underwings. We stopped to scope them, and enjoyed really lovely views of up to nine **Lesser Kestrels**, hovering together and diving into the long grass for insects. We were gradually able to piece together their subtle plumage characteristics and structural differences – a really nice way to end the afternoon. We returned to the hotel early, so everyone could chill out, do some packing, and take a swim if they wanted to.

Pre-dinner, we met up again and took a walk down into the dry valley of the Dhiarizos River below the hotel. This turned out to be really productive, with the warm evening sunshine still catching the valley sides and virtually no wind making for delightful viewing conditions. By the side of the track, we disturbed a bulky, long looking passerine – it was a migrant **Savi's Warbler**, rooting around in a clump of fennel. We encouraged it up into the open with a little playback, so everyone could get a clear view – a really nice surprise. A male **Collared Flycatcher** had been found here by one of the group a bit earlier, and sure enough the bird was still present – it flicked out into view on a bare branch, while we were watching the Savi's! At the bottom of the track where it meets with the river valley, a soft 'check' call sounded a bit like an Olivaceous Warbler. The culprit eventually popped into view, revealing itself to in fact be an 'acro' – a **Marsh Warbler**! It was hard to see much detail in the dense vegetation, but the yellowish washed underparts seemed a good fit for the species and in any case, the call was diagnostic. A **Whinchat** was perched up nearby, and in the gulley itself a lovely female Eastern Black-eared Wheatear was seen. With a few **Cetti's Warblers** thrown in, it was not a bad haul for an hours stroll!



Woodchat Shrike – a lovely male seen on the headland this morning

We took a short pre-breakfast walk this morning since it was our last day, to see if we could dig out any more good migrants on our patch! It was cold in the early morning breeze before the sun had got up over the hillside, and so bird activity was fairly low. A **Cetti's Warbler** showed in the scrub as we headed down the track, and a **Steppe Buzzard** flew past and along the valley, presumably having just left a roost on the cliffs there. A male Marsh Harrier was also seen, but in terms of passerine migrants there seemed to have been a clear out from yesterday evening. After breakfast we loaded up the vans and made our way to Paphos – we would have about three hours for birding the mosaics area one more time, before heading to the airport at lunchtime for the return flight.

Among the archeological ruins, we noticed an increase in both Northern Wheatear and **Hoopoe**, with at least a dozen of the latter seen around the site including several small groups. One in particular showed really well, digging in the earth on the track just in front of us, and tossing back beetle larvae in typical fashion. One of our obvious 'dips' on the tour so far had been **Stone Curlew**, and so we were really pleased to pick one up presumably arriving off the sea. It circled the headland three times, passing us quite close in lovely light, before dropping out of sight onto a grassy ridge. Several **Short-toed Larks** were noted flying over, mainly as singles, and one dropped onto the deck and allowed some nice scope views. An **Isabelline Wheatear** was our first for several days, and while watching this a **Wryneck** hopped up into view on top of a pile of rocks. We had some really excellent views of this bird among the boulders and flushes of spring flowers, before the mosaics area got really busy with tourists and it went to ground. **Common Nightingales** had been really scarce on the trip so far, but it was evident that a few had arrived overnight – we noted the guttural croaking of perhaps three or four birds as we wandered round, and had one flit across the path. By the main buildings, a **Common Cuckoo** flew in and landed in a small tamarisk – always nice to see the first one of the spring! A cracking male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear was also noted, before we got to work on the thorny bushes for Sylvia warblers! Again there was an obvious increase today, and we saw several Blackcaps and Lesser Whitethroats, maybe two **Eastern Subalpine Warblers**, and a superb male **Ruppell's Warbler** which, after seeing large numbers last year, was only our second of the trip this time around.

The rest of the loop back to the main entrance was uneventful, and we left the site about 1130 to head back along to Mandria.



Wryneck among spring flowers – a lovely end to the trip on Paphos headland

This was our last coffee stop of the trip, before going to the airport, but it didn't pass without a couple of good birds. From the terrace of the café, we picked up a large raptor soaring over being mobbed by Hooded Crows – it was a young **Bonelli's Eagle**! A bit of a surprise! Walking back to the vehicles, a male **Laughing Dove** was singing from the wires in the village – clearly this species is becoming well established now on the island. From here we transferred the short distance to the airport, and dropped the vehicles, before taking the afternoon flight back to London.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Little Grebe
2. Black-necked Grebe
3. Mediterranean Shag [*desmarestii*]
4. Greater Flamingo
5. Squacco Heron
6. Cattle Egret
7. Little Egret
8. Grey Heron
9. Glossy Ibis
10. Common Teal
11. Garganey
12. Mallard
13. Northern Pintail
14. Northern Shoveler
15. Red Crested Pochard
16. Ferruginous Duck
17. Marsh Harrier
18. Pallid Harrier
19. Eurasian Sparrowhawk

20. Steppe Buzzard
21. Long-legged Buzzard
22. Bonelli's Eagle
23. Lesser Kestrel
24. Common Kestrel
25. Peregrine
26. Chukar
27. Black Francolin
28. Common Moorhen
29. Common Coot
30. Black-winged Stilt
31. Stone Curlew
32. Little-ringed Plover
33. Kentish Plover
34. Greater Sand Plover
35. Spur-winged Plover
36. Little Stint
37. Common Snipe
38. Common Redshank
39. Common Greenshank
40. Green Sandpiper
41. Wood Sandpiper
42. Yellow-legged Gull
43. Lesser Black-backed Gull [*fuscus*]
44. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
45. Woodpigeon
46. Collared Dove
47. Laughing Dove
48. Great-spotted Cuckoo
49. Common Cuckoo
50. Eurasian Scop's Owl [*cpyrius*]
51. Short-eared Owl
52. Common Swift
53. Pallid Swift
54. Alpine Swift
55. Common Kingfisher
56. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
57. Eurasian Hoopoe
58. Eurasian Wryneck
59. Greater Short-toed Lark
60. Crested Lark
61. Sand Martin
62. Barn Swallow
63. Red-rumped Swallow
64. House Martin
65. Tawny Pipit
66. Tree Pipit
67. Meadow Pipit
68. Water Pipit
69. Blyth's Pipit
70. Red-throated Pipit
71. Yellow Wagtail [*flava, thunbergi, feldegg, superciliaris, dombrowskii*]
72. White Wagtail [*alba, ocularis*]
73. Wren [H]
74. Common Nightingale

75. Common Redstart
76. Whinchat
77. Isabelline Wheatear
78. Northern Wheatear
79. Eastern Black-eared Wheatear
80. Desert Wheatear
81. Cyprus Pied Wheatear
82. Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush
83. Blackbird
84. Song Thrush
85. Cetti's Warbler
86. Zitting Cisticola
87. Savi's Warbler
88. Sedge Warbler
89. Marsh Warbler
90. European Reed Warbler
91. Spectacled Warbler
92. Eastern Subalpine Warbler
93. Sardinian Warbler
94. Cyprus Warbler
95. Ruppell's Warbler
96. Lesser Whitethroat
97. Common Whitethroat
98. Blackcap
99. Eastern Bonelli's Warbler
100. Wood Warbler
101. Willow Warbler
102. Common Chiffchaff
103. Collared Flycatcher
104. Semi-collared Flycatcher
105. Coal Tit [*cypriotes*]
106. Great Tit
107. Penduline Tit
108. Short-toed Treecreeper [*dorotheae*]
109. Woodchat Shrike
110. Eurasian Jay [*glaszneri*]
111. Common Magpie
112. Western Jackdaw [*soemmerringii*]
113. Hooded Crow
114. House Sparrow
115. Spanish Sparrow
116. Chaffinch
117. European Serin
118. European Greenfinch
119. European Goldfinch
120. Common Linnet
121. Common Crossbill [*guillemardii*]
122. Cretzschmar's Bunting
123. Corn Bunting

BUTTERFLIES

1. Swallowtail
2. Small White
3. Large White

4. Small Bath White
5. Clouded Yellow
6. Paphos Blue
7. Common Blue
8. Eastern Baton Blue
9. Small Copper
10. Lesser Fiery Copper
11. Painted Lady
12. Red Admiral
13. Pygmy Skipper
14. Lulworth Skipper
15. Cyprus Grayling

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